

Voices of Dixon: George Zellers

From the book
Voices of Dixon:
Oral Histories from the Embudo Valley
Interviews and Editing by Harvey Frauenglass
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George Zellers
(1940 -2007)
Proprietor, with wife Kathy of
Zellers General Store
Interviewed February 20, 2003

Early Years

Actually I was not born in Dixon. I would have been if my mother had not gone down to Albuquerque to visit her sister. And all of a sudden she decided she was going to have me there. So I was born in the Presbyterian Hospital in Albuquerque in October of 1940. Otherwise I would probably have been born in the old Presbyterian Mission Hospital in Dixon. I didn't have the pleasure of that. But I lived in Dixon from zero to eighteen. For kindergarten and the first six grades I went to the Mission School in Dixon. Then, because my dad had a job in Los Alamos, I went to school up there through high school. We carpooled, my dad and I and Alfredo Garcia, across the road, and Adolfo and Lebeo's mother-in-law and another lady; they were all working up there. Going to school in Los Alamos was probably one of the best things I ever did.

Los Alamos High School today is considered one of the top schools in the nation. It was probably even a little better academically in those days. High standards for the school were set by the government, which ran Los Alamos Lab and everything else in the town during the war. Teachers were better paid than in other New Mexico schools and they were brought in from other areas because of their special skills. So I got a Class A education in high school, even though being a high school kid I didn't fully appreciate it at the time. I was too busy raising Cain and chasing the girls and having a good old time. In those days we did drink beer and we did smoke cigarettes, but we didn't tear anything up, like they do nowadays. And drugs were nonexistent.

My dad and mom started the store in Dixon in 1937. Over the years the retail business took a toll on him. My mom was more easy-going, but he took everything to heart. Finally, he had what you might call a nervous breakdown. The doctor told him he would have to get out of the store; he would have to do something else. At that time, right after the war, Los Alamos was hiring and he applied and got a job. Lebeo Martinez was working for us then, so my mom and Lebeo ran the store. Of course, we came home every night and we were home on weekends, so my dad still had his hand in the business, but not every day. I think going to work at Los Alamos was good for him. I think he had the feeling that maybe he had been left behind, just sitting here in the store. He had had a football scholarship to go to college up in Colorado, where his family was from, but because of the hard time the family was having during the Depression, he couldn't accept the scholarship. He had to go to work. I think it always sort of bugged him that he couldn't go to college. At Los Alamos he got to work with educated people. He felt good about that. He did well up there.

He started out driving a dynamite truck they called it, hauling the old pieces of dynamite off to the dump. They used to make batches of dynamite and pour it into molds. These were made into explosive devices. He learned the formulas and was overseeing the production.

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Then he got into electroplating. He was involved in developing a high-speed camera. He thoroughly enjoyed his work. Actually, he was offered a job in Livermore, California, at the Livermore Lab. His boss was moving from Los Alamos to Livermore, and his boss wanted my dad to go with him. He decided that he wanted to stay in Dixon. But he continued working at the Lab and still enjoyed what he was doing.

He was a smart guy. Growing up most kids think their parents, especially their dads, are the dumbest things that ever walked; especially as a teenager. It took me until I was twenty-five or maybe a little earlier than that. Then one day it dawned on me how smart the man was, and how dumb I was. I told him that once and he looked at me and winked. He was a great guy. He was my hero.

How Mom and Dad Met

I graduated from high school, got married, and moved to Albuquerque. I don't know how many different jobs I worked at, flunky jobs. My mom and dad wanted to put me through college. I would go to the university for a semester and flunk out. I just didn't want to go. My mom's life ambition was to have her sons graduate from college. She was an educated lady. She was a schoolteacher in Montrose, Colorado. She taught Latin, Spanish, and French. My dad worked for a pig farmer at the time. He raised pigs, slaughtered them and salted them down and then delivered around Colorado. One day when he was delivering in Montrose he spied my mom. He told me, "Your mom was walking up and down the street eating piñons and tossing the shells into the street, thinking she was pretty cool." Well, she was quite a looker and he fell for her. It didn't work right away.

She said, "What, are you kidding me? Big, dumb pig farmer!" (Laughs) In those days the racial thing was there. My mom was Hispanic and my dad was Anglo. But the problem wasn't between them; it was the people around them. My dad's family had nothing against Hispanic people. They just didn't know them. They told him

when he started going with my mom to be careful what he was doing. He was getting himself into a different way of life. He told them not to worry about it. Well, sixty years later, (laughs) you know it worked.

Home in Dixon

They moved to Dixon because that's where her father, my grandfather, lived. In fact this was his house. His name was Eliseo Córdova. He was a Presbyterian minister, one of the ministers in our church here in Dixon. Then my dad decided he wanted to start a store. The first building he put up fell down. He put it up with frozen adobes. I guess the town people told him you couldn't do that, but he was pretty headstrong. Then they put up the present building (now library annex and community center). My grandfather financed the whole thing and got them started, back in the 1930s.

If your mom was from Dixon, how did she get to Colorado?

My mom went to Huron College, a Presbyterian school in South Dakota. Actually, on the whole Córdova side of the family, three brothers and three sisters, every one of them was college-educated. Every one also had to work their way through college, because Grandpa Córdova did not have the money to put them through. But he insisted that they go to college because he believed education was the most important thing. Mom used to tell us that while she was going to school at Huron College she would work up there during the summers and a couple of summers she didn't even come home. Mom enjoyed being up there. She wanted to do something with her life. She was a women's tennis champion in college. We had her trophy around for a long time, but I don't know what happened to it. As a matter of fact, we had her tennis racket. We used to laugh because the handle on the racket was so big, she had to hold it with two hands. In those days they didn't make rackets for women. The racket was oval, and that's what they're using now. We've got it—it's probably in the garage someplace. She was also a coach for the women's basketball team at Huron. So when my dad married her, I

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don't know if he knew what he was getting, but he got a go-getter. She knew what she wanted and she laid down the law.

They spent their honeymoon in Yellowstone National Park. And they stayed two years. He was a cook and she waited tables in the lodges. I've got tons of pictures of them up there, when they were young and having fun. Her brother Andy was up there with them. The stories my dad used to tell about the bears and the people, how they would bait the bears and the bears would take the food away from them, how you had to lock your doors at night or the bears would break into the kitchen--that should have been put in a book. That was when Yellowstone was becoming famous. Then they moved to Dixon.

Before they started the store, my grandfather hired my dad to take care of his cattle up in Tremontina by Las Vegas, which is now a ghost town. My dad grew up as a farmer. His mother died when he was young—of a tooth infection, believe it or not. I've read that if your tooth gets infected and you don't take care of it, the poison can seep up to your brain. My dad said, "Well, she died of that and I think we just wore her out." She had four boys and four girls. It was hard work having eight kids and running a farm. And then Hoover took the farm away, during the Hoover administration. At that time the kids were big enough and they all left.

Grandpa lived till about eighty-five. He used to come down from Colorado to visit when I was a kid. He was like my dad, a big guy. He'd sit in the back of the store and visit. And of course everybody loved him. My dad would come by and say something to me, like "Go out there and do this."

Then Granddad would fight with him and say, "Leave him alone! He's doing all right!" (Laughs) You know, a typical family squabble. I think I was about fifteen when Granddad died, up in Colorado. On my dad's side they're all dead now. My dad died at ninety-two. His last sister died not too long ago, at a hundred and one years old, Aunt Lola. At her hundredth birthday my dad was still alive, but he was bed-ridden and he didn't want to go.

Kathy and I drove up to Colorado for the party. Lola's mind was right there and she even got up and moved around. I came back and told my dad, "Your sister Lola's doing better than you are. Here you're lying in bed complaining about your feet hurting, and she's a hundred years old." I used to get after him; I was trying to get him to get up and walk. Eighty-five years he walked. Then all of sudden his legs started hurting. He was a big, heavy guy. And he just gave up. Well, Mom had died, too. That is really what took him down. When Mom left, that was it. And you could see it. Mom died right before we moved back here to take the store.

Social Life in Dixon

I remember Father Küppers. He used to come to the house a lot because he and my dad and Mr. Watts and Mr. Craig and Mr. Schafranka used to play cards. There were a lot of problems then between Catholics and Protestants, but that didn't keep Father Küppers away. Father Küppers was German. He gave my dad a pearl-handled knife that had every little tool, like what they call today a Swiss Army knife. My dad kept it for years and years and then gave it to me. I kept it for the longest time. And you know what? I lost it. I was sick. To this day I still think about that knife.

I remember Mr. Watts used to chew tobacco and he would bring an empty jar and put it on the floor beside him. Then he would pick it up and spit into it. He and his wife also used to play canasta with my mom and dad. He'd always say, "Lydi, do you mind if I bring my spittoon in?"

"I don't mind," she would answer; "just don't spit on the floor." (Laughs)

Mrs. Watts was Carl Berghofer's mom. Mr. Watts was the stepfather.

You know, when Kathy and I got married in the Seventies and we would come up and visit, we used to play canasta. My dad would say, "Okay, George, we're going to play against the women. But watch them, 'cause they cheat."

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And Mom would say, “Doc, don’t say that! We do not cheat. You’d think we were a bunch of cheaters around here.” And we would play, and they would cheat. Both of them would. Dad’s real name was Raleigh. Raleigh Elmo Zellers. He went by “Doc,” but he signed everything “R.E. Zellers.” He got that nickname as a kid, living on the farm. Out of all the eight children he was the one who took care of the animals. His sisters said that though he acts very straight-laced, he was very affectionate toward animals. When one of the animals got sick, he was the one who would stay up all night with it. So they called him “Doc” and that stuck with him all his life.

Doc Zellers

Dad told me that they wanted to put me through college, but I didn’t have to go if I didn’t want to. It was my mom who insisted: “You will go to college!” I’ve got almost three years of college, but I do have an associate degree in engineering that I had to go to another school for. I’m not saying that college isn’t the answer for a lot of kids, but I wasn’t ready for it. And I did well without it. And so did my dad. He did push me to go, but he always said he wasn’t going to force me.

I probably had the greatest childhood in the world. As big as my dad was, he never mistreated me. I should probably have been beaten, every day. Mom was more hot-tempered than he was. He would say, “Well, let’s go talk about it.” We’d walk around to where we planted the gardens, and he talked to me. I think for him that was the way of not having to spank me. And it worked. I know that there were things that I pulled that any other father would have probably lost his cool and pounded the heck out of the kid. I think he felt that violence was not the answer.

I saw him lose his temper twice in his life and it was not a pretty sight because of his size. A guy came into the store one day who owed us money. I was about fifteen or sixteen. He was a pretty good-sized guy himself. So my mom said, “Look, you owe us money and we keep asking you, and you don’t pay.” The guy started verbally

abusing my mother. My dad came from around the counter and hit him. It sounded like a gunshot. The guy fell to floor. And then my dad started dragging the guy to the back of the store. I don’t know what he was going to do to him. By this time Mom and myself and my brother were all hanging on to my dad trying to stop him. He was six-foot-three and two hundred and some pounds, and all muscle. Then he stopped and walked out of the store. Things bothered him in the store. I know Mom and Dad used to talk a lot about people who bought things at the store on credit and didn’t pay. Mom was more easy-going. Mom would say they had to take it easy, the people would pay. Eventually, everybody did pay, or they died. I think my dad felt that if somebody owed him, it was their thing to pay. That was the way he was raised, as a farmer. Even in the really hard years, you didn’t discount things. You didn’t borrow money and then say you weren’t going to pay it back. I think dealing with people like that is what really drove him to leave the store.

There was another time he lost his temper and I think what he did was well deserved. The Trailways bus used to stop at the store. This lady was standing out there waiting with her suitcase and little kids. She was going someplace, obviously to get away from her husband. He was in a pickup, yelling and screaming at her. He got out of the pickup—I guess he was drunk--and came over and started abusing his wife with the little kids standing there. My dad came out of the store and I saw that look on his face and I thought, “Oh no!” He went and grabbed the guy and slapped him a’side of the head, in front of all the people sitting in the bus watching. He hit the guy and the guy slammed up against the bus and fell down to his knees and my dad said, “You stay there.” Then he took the lady and the kids and helped them on to the bus and he said, “Ma’am, you go see your dad and mom and don’t come back here, ‘cause this guy’s gonna hurt you.” I guess he knew the guy. Then he grabbed the guy and drug him back to his truck and threw him in the truck. The guy was making noise but he was powerless; there was nothing he could do. “Don’t ever do that in front of me again,” my dad said.

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School Days

I went up to the sixth grade in the Mission School here. I remember all the teachers. All the guys here now who are my age all went there. When we were at school the public school was just getting started. There was just the Catholic School across the street and the Presbyterian Mission School. That was in the days when the Catholics and the Protestants didn't get along. Now you look back and ask what was that all about? (Laughs) It doesn't make sense. But it was great going to school at the Mission. The Mission teachers, just like the nuns in the parochial school, were all well-educated people, from back east and all over. And coming here to Dixon was a Presbyterian Mission adventure. We still call this the "Mission community," but we're trying to get away from that, get out of that way of thinking. In those days the Mission was the way it was. Today, some people resent it that the church thought we were so stupid here in Dixon and other places that we needed mission work. But we did need missions. We needed the hospital and the schools. There was no money. The people were poor. They had no way to build a hospital or a school and pay the staff. The state was so darned poor it could barely pay for itself. The church came in and provided these things.

Anyway, the education was good. The teachers were strict. I got more spankings at school than I did at home. (Laughs) And then I'd have to worry because the teachers would say, "We're gonna tell Doc. You go home, George. We're gonna tell Doc." I wasn't scared about them telling Doc. I was scared they were going to tell my mom. Everybody called her Lyd, for Lydia. If they said they were going to tell Doc and Lyd, that was it. My mom had the temper. She'd get the old broom out. She wouldn't slap your face. But she'd get the broom. And if she got a stick, you'd better watch out. Your butt would get whapped good. Of course I could outrun Mom. Mom was a little person. She never grew past five four. As I started to grow up I could outrun her. "Don't you run from me! I'm gonna tell

Doc when he gets home!"

I have a brother, Gene. Gene is three years older. He has that piece of land on the other side of the store. Gene grew up here, too. He went to Los Alamos High School for a couple of years and then he went to a military academy in Carlsbad, California. After that he went to Wooster College in Ohio, another Presbyterian college. I think he went to Wooster because a couple of my mom's brothers went there. He graduated from college and he never came back to Dixon. He moved to Albuquerque and he's been there ever since.

After Kathy and I moved to Albuquerque, we used to come up here practically every other weekend. That was before we had any kids. My mom and dad were avid rock hunters. We'd come up Friday night and Saturday morning we'd pack lunch and we'd be off. We'd walk up and down these crazy arroyos and up in the hills. Kathy still mentions those days all the time. Of course as they got older, they slowed down, but we had the greatest times. We went on vacation with them—up to Washington state to see Kathy's mom and dad, and out to California. Back when I was in the Navy at Pearl Harbor all of a sudden I got a letter from Dad saying, "We're going to see you in two weeks." What?

They came to Hawaii! That was one of the first vacations they had taken. I had leave and we drove around looking at everything. They had a good time and I've got tons of pictures. Of course my dad had all these Hawaiian women hanging on him. He was a good-looking guy. And he had a great personality. I don't think they were hittin' on him. He was the kind of person you could talk to and know you weren't gonna get in trouble. My mom would say, "Doc, leave the girls alone!" (Laughs)

"I'm not doing anything, Lyd! Look at me."

The girls would say, "Don't worry, Ma'am, he's a nice guy."

Navy Days

I went in 1962. I had just turned twenty-one. I told you I'd been married before. Well, when I was twenty, I had gotten divorced. And

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it didn't take long for Uncle Sam to get a letter to me and say "Please come down and see us." It was about the time of the Cuban crisis. Vietnam was just getting started. Our so-called advisors were over there doing their thing. So I went down to the draft board and asked whether I had to go in the Army, and they said I could join what I wanted. So I joined the Navy. Lebeo Martinez's brother, Izar Martinez, was an ex-Navy submarine guy, and he said if you're going to go into service of any kind, join the submarine service. So that's what I did and that's how I wound up in Hawaii. So for four years I was on a sub. And the last year I met Kathy. We were married in 1965 and I didn't get out until 1966 and we had been married a year.

I spent most of my service in Hawaii, except for boot camp and what they call Class A School for sonar in California. I was a sonar technician. Then I went to New London, Connecticut, for submarine school. Then they shipped me to Hawaii. So I probably spent a little under three years in Hawaii. That was an excellent time. To this day some of my friends still talk about it. You know when you're young and crazy, you don't worry about too many things. And what a great place Hawaii was to live that life. I always tease Kathy about that—"You came along and that ended my good times." (Laughs) I met her at a party one night. She was over there for about a month. She had gone with a girlfriend because it was so cold in Seattle. They lived in the YWCA. She applied for a job there. In those days young women didn't just go some place like they do now. They stayed at the YWCA and there were rules and regulations about what they could do. She was offered several jobs and settled on one. When I met her she was working at the Hawaiian Trust Company.

I was on the USS Halibut and other guys were on the USS Swordfish. We all had houses downtown at Waikiki. Ten or twelve guys would combine their money and rent an old house off base. These houses were old and dilapidated and run-down. We'd each pitch in about thirty-five or forty bucks a month. Whoever owned them was making money. One of the boathouses was having a party.

Kathy and her girl friend were invited. I'd been working on my car. It was all beat up, greasy and grungy. I didn't go back to our house, which was just down the block, to take a shower. I just went in to drink a beer. And I met her. I just fell for her right then. I asked her to dance and we danced. And then I asked her if she wanted to go out, and she said, "No." Her girlfriend said to Kathy that she wanted her to reconsider. She said all the guys that knew him said he was a really nice guy.

"If you just don't want to go out with him," her girl friend said, "that's fine. But you ought to reconsider. He's a really nice guy."

Later on I danced with her, and we talked, and I said, "Are you sure?"

She said, "Well, I guess I'll go out with you."

Three months later we wound up getting married. And we had a blast.

Albuquerque

After I got out of the Navy we came back to Albuquerque and went back to the University. Which was a mistake. I flunked out again. I met this guy and we decided it was more fun to drink beer at Okie Joe's than go to class. Kathy was working at Albuquerque National Bank. After a while Kathy said, "This is gonna have to stop. I'm not going to work while you drink beer all day. I'm just not going to do it."

I said, "Okay," and I dropped out of school and went to work. I worked building houses, building swimming pools. I was doing everything. I finally got into this two-year engineering school. It was called North American Technical Institute. It no longer exists. It was a two-year electronics program and you got an associate degree out of it. I had heard from guys who had gone there and they said it was fantastic. You come out of there and you get a job, plus you get this certificate, which you could take to the University and then do two more years and get an engineering degree.

Well, I told myself this was my last chance. So this guy and I who

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had flunked out of University of New Mexico went to the school. It was more structured than the University. And they said, "If you come here and complete the two years, we will guarantee you a job." And in those years they could. There was Sandia Labs, the telephone, the electric company, any of those places. I went two years and graduated and went to work for the phone company. And so did my friend Reggie. He's in Denver now, retired from the phone company.

But it was a hard school, let me tell you. There was homework. You flunk one test, you get to take it again. You flunk it again, and you're out. That's how rough they were. There were people beating on the doors to get in, especially GI's coming out of Vietnam. I never flunked anything. I got pretty good grades. I got out of there and Mountain Bell snapped me up. A lot of guys who graduated from that school went to work for the phone company. A lot of my old friends, all retired now like me. So that's how we got our lives started living in Albuquerque. We stayed there for fourteen years. Then I got a promotion. They made me an area manager in Gallup. We lived there for three and a half years and I was area manager for Gallup and Grants. I controlled the business offices and all the outside crews. It was more than I bargained for to begin with, but I got to doing it pretty good, and I enjoyed it.

Then that job ended. The phone company was automating everything and they got rid of the business offices. So the company moved us back to Albuquerque. During the year I was back there an opening came up for an engineer in the Phoenix office of Mountain Bell. They would move us and pay all costs connected with our house. We liked Albuquerque. We had a nice home and we were doing well. But I was adventurous. I was forty-two. So I said to Kathy, "Let's go to Phoenix." We did, and spent ten years there and enjoyed it. Our kids grew up there. Then, in '92, we moved back to Dixon. And that's when we took over the store.

What was it like for you to come back here after being away so

many years?

It was something we wanted to do. We had talked about it. We knew that Lebeo had wanted to sell. Being young and able enough, we decided to try it. My mom had died and my dad was getting old and he needed some help. So we thought we'd come up, take over the store, and be with him for the rest of his life. He thought that was a good idea. Two of our kids had already graduated from high school. One was going to stay in Arizona going to college. Tiffin was at USC and other places. Allison was still in high school. She was our main concern, but we put her in Menaul School in Albuquerque. At first she didn't want to do that, but then she got to like it and she graduated from there. I had to stay in Albuquerque for a couple of years, though, and I would come up on weekends. Kathy was basically running the store. I had two years to work until I could retire on a full pension, and that's what I wanted to do. The job I was doing covered both Arizona and New Mexico. It didn't really matter where I worked. The only thing was, the company wouldn't move me; I had to pay for that. So I was living in an apartment and Allison was living in the dorm at Menaul, but I would see her practically every day. So starting in '94 I was here full time.

Of course the store started going down, like so many ma and pa grocery stores. We found out we were not going to sell groceries like a big store. People were not going to buy from us because we were too expensive. So it was potato chips, cigarettes, soda pop, ice cream, bread, candy, and we had to make it run off that. We had two people working for us, Gilbert and Elaine, and we finally had to let one of them go. Elaine said she would go and Gilbert stayed. Pretty soon I was taking my retirement check and plowing it into the store to make ends meet. Then the gas thing came along. The EPA said we would have to upgrade our two pumps. We checked into the cost. A hundred thousand dollars. We would have to borrow that. We were selling three thousand gallons a week. That sounded like a lot. People said, "How much do you make?" I told them it was less than ten cents a gallon.

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That's three hundred dollars a week. But think about the overhead---the lights on the pumps, electricity to run the pumps. And what about when a pump breaks down? Gasoline is not a money-making situation. The guy in Velarde will tell you that. When I got out of the business, Mike got all our business and he sold gas like crazy and it still doesn't pay for him. He said if one of his electronic pumps goes bad, that's three or four hundred dollars in repairs. Alcohol is his big business.

So with the upgrade cost and everything else, that's why we got out of the business. At first I missed it a little bit. But overall it was a good idea. (Earlier Kathy Zellers had said she didn't think they would live long enough to pay off the hundred thousand upgrade with the income from selling gasoline.)

Living in Dixon is great, but one of the kickers, and Kathy and I were talking about this the other day, was when we lost our daughter. (Allison died in an automobile accident a year ago. She was 22.) Kathy said, "It seemed like Dixon's lights went dim when that happened."

Other than that, we're still here. I have arthritis and the cold weather bothers me. We're living and we're not doing so bad, but things have dimmed slightly.

How many of the people you went to school with are still around?

There's Amos Atencio, I call him Andy. He goes to the Presbyterian Church. And Johnny Atencio, and Lebeo, but he's ten years older. To tell the truth, most of the guys I grew up with are gone from Dixon. They either moved away or they're dead. Andy went to work with Siete del Norte. Johnny Atencio worked at Los Alamos, and retired from there. Some have come back to retire. When we had the store, I would see some people, but I really lost connection. And I went to high school at Los Alamos. Many from here went to Menaul.

Dixon used to be mostly Hispanic. Then the Anglos started moving in. In any case like this there's going to be some kind of resentment. That's the way the world goes. You can read the Gospels

day and night, but the teachings don't work. And Christ knew it. But you've gotta try. When the resentments start, either they become deeper rifts or people get over it. Most of the older Hispanic people in Dixon have gotten over it. They got over it back in the days when my dad was here. Do you know that the racism is worse now than when he came here? And it should have been worse then because he was one of the few Anglos here. I don't know why it's worse now. You could go on and on about reasons, but it is. Kathy felt the racism when she came to the store. And I was amazed. But after I started watching, I could see it. There were people who would come in the store and didn't like her, and when they would get mad and start calling her gringa and everything else. I remember one day this young woman came in the store and Gilbert was working the counter and Kathy was standing there. The woman wanted gas. There were some people ahead of her, so she didn't get waited on right away. The people at the counter were Anglo—I don't remember who they were, but Gilbert and Kathy were both talking to them. The woman threw her money on the counter and said, "I see you're more interested in talking to the gringos than waiting on me!" and stomped out the door.

Kathy got to thinking about that more and more and pretty soon Kathy called her up on the phone. "What is your problem?" she asked.

"Well, you look to me like you guys just cater to the gringos. You moved up here and all you care about is the gringos. You don't care about the people in Dixon."

And Kathy said, "You know what? You think I'm racist? Let me tell you something. Number one, I'm married to a half-Hispanic guy. Number two, I have an Asian son and an Indian daughter. Now you tell me how racist I am. You tell me how racist I am." There was dead silence. Then Kathy said, "Don't ever call me racist."

The woman came back in the store a couple of times later and was sort of nice and apologized and said she had been in a bad mood. Kathy said, "Fine." We used to buy her tamales. And after that

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incident we still bought her tamales. But there were people who would come in the store and Kathy would loan them money for gas. She would see them later and say, "How about the five bucks you owe me?"

"Ah, you gringa," they would say.

On the acequia, when she was serving as a commissioner, she's been told, "You foreigners from back East, you come here and you think you're running the acequia." That's why she's getting off the Commission. She served five years as treasurer and she's had it. I won't say who they are, but people have called her names.

She said to me, "George, I don't need that. I'm not here to have people tell me I think I'm better than the Hispanics. That is not true. Crap, I'm married to you!" (Laughs)

I said, "Yeah, you got that one right." She said, "People are so stupid, but they hurt your feelings. They make you feel bad."

Yet our daughter Allison was a quarter Hispanic and she was proud of it! She would come home and say, "Thank you, Dad. I'm part Hispanic." She loved the culture. She loved the people. And they are good people and it is a good culture.

I said to her, "Mom can't think about it that way when people are calling her names." Kathy doesn't get that any more, but that bothered her, it really did. She wasn't used to that. Kathy is too straight a person. She doesn't judge people by race or anything else. If you're no good, you're no good. You can be white and no good. It doesn't matter. But Allison's the one who actually calmed us down about Dixon. And her loss is something we don't really get over.

That was in August of 2000. It's a little easier over time, but you never forget. It's a weight on your heart. It's there. God and the good people around you help you live through it. The Church has been a great support. Kathy just loved singing in the choir. She loves the people. One time she told Andy (Reverend McComb), "Pastor, you've got the greatest group of heathens in your choir." (Laughs)

"Well, don't say that out loud," he said.

"Oh, they don't care," she said. "They're here to sing. That's the

whole idea. You don't have to be a Presbyterian to sing in the choir."

But the people in the choir and the people in the church have helped us a lot.

The Future of Dixon

I don't think Dixon will change that much. As long as there is a country, Dixon will be here. You might have a few more retired people move in. Land sales right now are at a standstill. But I think that will change and people will be buying and moving up here. Dixon as a community will last, but it will never become anything more than a bedroom community because there is no industry here. Los Alamos is still the biggest employer. There are a lot of retired Los Alamos Lab people in town. These are Hispanic people who grew up in Dixon and worked up there. You see them in the post office. They seem content to stay here.

And I don't see any industry moving up here. For one thing, there's no water, drinking water or irrigating water. What with the droughts we've been having, people aren't farming the way they used to. When I was growing up here, I'd say most of the people farmed. Not big farms, but chile patches, corn patches, and orchards. There's not that much anymore. Number one, it's too hard. I know the ladies who do the organic farming here. They used to come into the store and talk to Kathy about how hard they were working. And then they had to go to the Farmers Market to sell what they grew. And number two, there's the water problem. You may try to grow your own food, but then you lose the water. It's usually cheaper to go buy your food than to grow it. Like tomatoes, for instance.

I think the Dixon Studio Tour is one of the best-known tours in New Mexico. You talk about the Dixon community in Albuquerque and people ask about the studio tour. People know about it. And once they come to it, it's set in their minds. When the weather is fine, people love to come here. They think Dixon is Paradise (Laughs). And I've told Kathy that you can't find a prettier place to live, and she agreed. But other things also come into play.

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When Kathy was an acequia commissioner and (our daughter) Tiffin was mayordoma they found out one evening that someone was stealing the water. Water was really scarce that year. So they drove into this guy's yard and, sure enough, his field is flooded. He's stealing the water. Then they heard gun shots, ka-boom, ka-boom. The guy wasn't shooting at them. He's not that stupid. But he was shooting. So Kathy and Tiffin got back in the car and came home. She said, "That's it. I've been called names, and now they're taking shots." And she quit.

I told her that you would run into people like that wherever you lived. She said, "I know that. And maybe if I were younger it wouldn't matter so much." And that's true.

Looking Down the Road

As you get older, and get hit by things like the death of Allison, things get to you. And you're getting toward the end of life so you look at what happens in a different way. You're not going to be around that long. So things look a little different to you than they did when you were twenty. Then I was having a good old time. I didn't care about anything. All I remember are the warnings of my dad. Come summer he would wear a little scarf around his neck. He'd have cloths wrapped around his feet and his knees. I would ask him what was the matter?

"It's summer time."

"My arthritis is killing me."

"But it's summer!"

"You just wait," George. Just wait." And boy, do I know. So nights I wake up with my knees and my joints aching and I can't get out of bed. But I have to laugh now thinking about my dad. He said, "Some day you won't be a young buck anymore." (Laughs) But that guy was something. Even as he lay in bed dying he still had a sense of humor. But it was so sad to see him, who was always so full of life, just lying there. We took care of him. Kathy took care of his Medicare and his income tax, all of the paperwork. We took him to

the hospital whenever he needed to go for a checkup.

And we brought her dad down here, too. He had Alzheimer's. He was living on his farm in Washington state and Kathy got a call telling her that she had better go up there and get him. He was doing goofy things. He came down and we refurbished the old garage behind this house to make a little apartment for him. He had a little money and he said that was fine to use it to fix up a place for him as long as we would keep him here until he died. Well, we did, up to the very end when he got pneumonia and we had to take him to the hospital in Taos. That's where he died. He was pretty good when we first got him. Then he was in and out of reality. He used to sit in front of the store, sometimes. A grouchy old fart. Everett Timmons. I got along with him pretty well, better than when he was farming up there in Washington. He grew sugar beets and potatoes, in the Yakima valley. But finally he totally lost his mind.

Equal Employment Opportunity

In the mid-seventies Mountain Bell changed its management practices to comply with the new equal employment opportunity regulations. They started to hire more blacks and Hispanics and women. Mountain Bell was always good about hiring women because they needed operators. But they were never in management positions. They hired secretaries, but no women managers. At that time I had been with the company four or five years and I was promoted into management by my boss, Jack Grady. I had worked hard for that and I deserved the promotion. A couple of months later he said let's go have coffee. He was one of the best bosses I ever had. Nice guy. He said to me, "You know about this EEOC, don't you?"

"Oh, yeah."

And then he said, "You're one of those, aren't you?"

I said, "One of what?"

"Those chicken's." He was being funny and I knew it. His boy was married to an Hispanic, so he was not racist. It was just his way

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of saying things.

I went along with him. "Yeah, I'm half chickeno."

"You know I'm only teasing you, George, but we've got to talk about this. I've been called into the big boss's office and I have to declare you as a minority."

I said, "Fine. But why?"

"Because you're half Latino."

"Well, that's true."

He said, "Which half?"

"From my waist down." (Laughs) And he broke up.

"That's not what I mean." (Laughs) "You know what I mean."

"Okay, okay. My mother. My mother is Spanish, my dad is Anglo."

He said, "I'm going to have to list you, among the employees that are mine, as a minority. Which is good for the group and good for me. I've met my goal." There were eight employees in his group. "But I needed to talk to you to ask if you mind."

I said, "Does it matter if I mind or not?"

"No. It doesn't matter. But I'm still asking you, do you mind? It's personal."

I said, "No, I don't mind. My mother was the college-educated one, she was the smart one. My dad was a great guy. But my mom had everything. Dad was just a good old farmer, basically. They're both good people."

"Okay, you're gonna be my token" ---and they used to chew on him whenever he said this—"my token Latino." We'd go to meetings—he always took me to meetings because I was his scheduler—and at the meetings this EEOC would come up, and he would say, "Everybody know George? He's my token."

I said, "Grady, shut up." But he kept on. "You guys don't have yours, but I've got mine." Any other would have gotten mad at him. But I couldn't get mad, because to me it was funny. I did say one thing. "What bothers me about this EEOC is that I don't want people to think that I was promoted because of this."

He said, "No, you were promoted before this hit (EEOC). And it's documented. You were promoted because I felt you had the qualifications, the smarts, the know-how and everything else to do what you were going to do. You were good for the group. I thought you were good management material. You can handle people, and that's what management is."

Hiring Practices Before EEOC

In the 1960's and 70's the two people in charge of hiring in the local office would hire Anglos over Hispanics or Indians or women. Women were hired for clerical positions, not management positions. This went on and on, though once in a while you could hear comments like, "Boy, they sure screwed up. There was a Spanish guy who went for a job and he had excellent qualifications and would have been a good employee, but they turned him down. They said they didn't have an opening, though they did." Then EEOC came along.

A black lady in Las Cruces who was working for the phone company down there wanted to work in Albuquerque because her husband, who was an assistant coach at New Mexico State in Las Cruces, was getting a job at UNM. She wanted to come up and be with him. She had just graduated from college and had good qualifications. But she was told there were no openings. So she took a job with the phone company in Denver, and commuted from Albuquerque. Then somebody in Denver asked her why she didn't get a job in Albuquerque. She told them what she had been told: there were no openings. The people in Denver then let the cat out of the bag; back in the time she was applying, there were plenty of openings in Albuquerque. So she filed a complaint. The company looked into it. They didn't actually fire the two employment people, but they forced them to retire early. According to my book, they should have been canned. It was a husband-and-wife team; can you believe that? But that's the way the world is. They did it in the South, they did it all over. And it was really sad.

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I knew Spanish people—they call them Hispanics now, good friends of mine who were promoted after EEOC but should have been promoted way before. There was a guy name Frank Gallegos who was an engineer and everybody thought the world of him, but he was never promoted. They promoted people over him. One day I told him, “Frank, go tell them you’re going to take them to court.”

He said, “Nah, I don’t want to do that.”

“But Frank, you’re not getting paid for what you’re doing. That’s what it boils down to.” Then one of his bosses took a look at his situation, and they promoted him and actually gave him back pay for the time he had been doing that level work. Which was the best thing in the world. So when I see discrimination nowadays, that really hurts. There’s not much lower you can get than putting down another human being—to let them know you think they’re less than you are.

America is a great country. We’ve got good people. We believe in the Constitution—most of us do. We’ve got good leaders and we’ve got some bad ones. But we’ve done well for ourselves. People have money in their pockets. Cars to drive. We’re better off than nine-tenths of the people in this world. So we go to other countries and they see that—how well-off we are. And terrorists say, “We’ve got nothing, and you people, you’ve got it all. And then you flaunt. Or you do something to hurt our country, our people.” That’s a very poor attitude they have, but that’s the way the terrorist think and this is the way a lot of countries think about America. We have flaunted our wealth in their faces.

Face the facts. I’ve got two automobiles, a nice house, retirement, and I live a pretty good life. Many people in this world don’t have that. Americans are blessed, and I thank God for America. We’re hard-working people, all of us. But we better watch what we’re doing and not flaunt our wealth and not be seen as putting other people down. We may not mean to put other people down, but we need to watch what we’re doing. We have to treat people everywhere equally and decently, no matter what we have (and they don’t have). That’s one of the things my mom and dad did teach me. Number one,

thank God for what you have. And number two, you share what you’ve got. That’s it. And they were right.