

Evelyn Fite Oral History - 2009

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As the 150th anniversary of the 1862 Homestead Act approaches, the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Socorro Field Office Cultural Resource Program is increasing emphasis on oral history collection, particularly as it relates to homesteading. This interview with Socorro resident Evelyn Fite is a part of that effort.

Evelyn Fite's oral history was collected on April 24, 2009. A second visit was made on June 29, 2009, to go through photos. Her comments on the photos were recorded, and a few questions were repeated that had been asked after the tape recorder had stopped on the first visit. Results of the two visits were combined and edited slightly for this document.



After years of struggle, a homestead claim eventually resulted in the development of a large ranch for Dean and Evelyn Fite. After the passage of the Taylor Grazing Act, a 640-acre homestead claim under the Stock Raising Homestead Act enabled the Fites to develop a large ranch by establishing a basewater and gaining leasing preference on adjacent public lands. They did without a lot in the early years, saving up to buy more private land as it became available. Early on, Evelyn wanted to build a house, but Dean told her “you can't make any money with a house.” So they bought more cattle, and eventually more land.



Childhood

Evelyn was born Evelyn Agnes Galonzowski in 1918 in Outlook, Saskatchewan, Canada. Her grandparents had moved there in 1904 from southern Russia. They were wheat farmers of German origin, and moved to Canada to farm wheat. At that time Evelyn's mother, Emma (nee Brown), was 9 years old. Emma married Herman Galonzowski and gave birth to Evelyn in Canada.



Evelyn: “My dad worked for the Canadian Pacific Railroad. So we never lived on a farm. ‘Til we came to California; we had a farm there, but it was a peach orchard farm. And we had chickens, sold freshly laid eggs. Then we sold that and went to Oregon and he worked in the lumber mills. Depression came along...lots of things changed. So he worked in the lumber mills there, and then we came to New Mexico. We were very young when all that took place”

After living in California and Oregon, the family moved to New Mexico in 1928. They moved to Santa Rita, a mining town near Silver City. The depression hit, and Evelyn’s father left her mother--left her with three children, no house, no car, no job, and no formal education.

Evelyn: “So we spent our life, our next 7 or 8 years, struggling to exist over there and trying to get enough money together to eat, you know. My mother worked taking care of a sick lady, and then she did housework for people - for teachers and for the mine bosses. There were several little mines around, and so there were different little areas around there. So we moved around and scratched out a living. Then later years we moved; she got a job at Rosedale.”

Evelyn’s mother ran the boarding house at Rosedale.

Evelyn: “And my sister and I were like 14, 15, 16 along those years. Nineteen thirty three-thirty four, something like that. And we worked in the dining room and we got

paid! We got a paycheck! So we had board, we had a little house to live in, and we had our board and room there. So from there things started getting a little bit better.”

Ervin, Evelyn’s brother, worked in the assay office for two years, making two dollars a day. He was the assistant to assayer Johnny Kinds, and when Kinds left, Ervin got the job.

Ervin: “But you had to weigh all those samples you know, and all little tiny balances, and just had little wires and counterbalances, very delicate stuff to weigh, and keep track of the gold and silver. Thirty-four, yeah, she first heard about it, asked him if they needed a cook up there. He said, ‘We sure do,’ so she jumped in the car with him and went to Rosedale and left us kids. And Lewis and I were still going to elementary school, and Evelyn stayed with us, kept us together. And summer of ’35 we all went to Rosedale, and all went to work. Boy, that was like....Christmas! ‘Cause before that we were living on a dollar a day, *sometimes*. My mother made a dollar a day, *if* she had a job.”

Evelyn: “Well she [Evelyn’s mother] cooked in the cookhouse for a couple a years and then they decided that her grocery bill was too high, so they let her go. So we went to Magdalena and opened a little restaurant, and then two months later they came and said: ‘you’ve gotta come back! All the miners are leaving--we can’t find a cook...’ If you don’t feed men, they don’t work. In mining camps and in cow camps it was important to FEED well. So she went back. And I had dropped out of high school, and I went back to school in Magdalena, and took two years of school in one year and graduated from high school, walked out the door and married Dean (Fite) and moved to the ranch.”

Education

Evelyn: “When we lived in Santa Rita and we were going to school they had company stores and company schools, and this was the Depression. And they had an excellent school. Because it was not a State school, and the company hired these teachers--and they had good teachers--and I didn’t even realize it. Until I went to high school in Hurley, that little tiny high school, and we had good teachers. Well I dropped out my third year and went to work, and then I went back to high school in Magdalena. It was appalling. It was pathetic. I took two years high school in one year, and I hardly ever had to study. ‘Cause I already knew all that stuff. Those poor kids had no education.... And of course, I was just lucky. I got to thinking I was pretty smart when I got to high school. And I was a valedictorian. And I was too busy lookin’ out the window for....when Dean was going to show up.”

Evelyn: “Mrs. Fite [Dean Fite’s mother] taught school at Rosedale, before Rosedale was Rosedale. There was just a....see it had been a mining town, and then it closed up, but there was a building there and she lived on a ranch not far from there, and had four children. And her husband worked for Mr. Reinhardt who was a millionaire from Oklahoma. And he needed somebody to run his ranch, so Mr. Fite had that job. And she [Mrs. Fite] had these four children and she taught school at Rosedale. She would take her Model T Ford and pick up her four.... She had three school-age (children) and one was

too young to go to school, so she'd leave her at another ranch house. She'd pick up *their* older kids and she'd have school in this little school house. And she would cook a pot of beans or make a beef stew, and they had a big wood stove and she'd put it up on top of that. And taught 'em to read and write and do their arithmetic."

Evelyn: Well the reason I didn't continue [education], I had enough trouble getting through high school. Dean was sitting there with the motor running wanting to get married. So that's when I moved to the ranch, the next day after I finished high school. See, that's when I enrolled in ranching 101--and studied it for 67 years and never graduated. I had the college of hard knocks. I had a college of learning at the ranch. I guarantee you that was a whole different world. It was Depression times and people had a tough time. During the drought, you know, and then they drafted all the cowboys, and we had rationing and all that—gasoline rationing and tires.

Marriage, the Caboose, and Tokay



Evelyn: "That was before I got married, so I must have been 17 or 18—silly looking picture. You know a long time ago they came out and they tinted pictures. That was before they had color photographs, that's one of those."

Evelyn: "Well, I married Dean and moved to the ranch in 1937, and we lived in a caboose down on—his father had a homestead down there by the sandhill. Even in the little caboose I had a little radio. Mr. Fite won it in a punchboard in Datil, and it had a six volt battery, and we got a little wind charger and put it up on top of the caboose. And it would blow in the wind and charge that battery and I could have radio. That was my connection with the world. It was WONDERFUL!"

Evelyn: "To me, I wouldn't even consider, building, living, anywhere that there wasn't decent water. I lived with all that—not having water, it's AWFUL. It was just awful to do laundry. We caught cistern water, you bet. I drank cistern water. We had an old barn

when we lived at the caboose and that's all the drinking water we had, was what we caught off the roof of the barn. And we had a pit in the ground, caught it off the roof and it ran down into that concrete. Before I was married, Dean dug a hole and plastered it and covered it, caught rain water. And you had to be very careful with it. It didn't rain that much. But it was wonderful. But most of the ranchers in that country used cistern water 'cause the water's SO bad. But now they got water softeners and things like that. But still, the water on the ranch is terrible, except for that one well at the house and that well under the hill there on the highway. He has that good water. That's the only good water I know from there to El Paso. It's terrible water!"



Evelyn: “And there I am, look at that, funny little picture. You can see there's not a blade of grass. There's an old skinny cow standing there. That's where I lived. That's the caboose. I didn't know I had that picture. I didn't even know I had that picture. I was 19 years old in that picture.”



(cropped, enhanced and enlarged)

Evelyn: “And we lived in that caboose, and then we bought some more land and lived up above Tokay, and then we bought Tokay after the mines closed. We bought that land there.”



Dean got these huge catfish in El Paso. Evelyn worked for two days in that little caboose in July with the fire going, canning 200 jars of fish.

Evelyn: “There was a dried up waterhole and you could pick them up. You just couldn’t let anything go to waste. I was saying, the reason we did things like that - it was during the war, we were just coming out of the Depression, and nobody had any money. We didn’t have anything wasted.”



Painting of Evelyn

Evelyn: “Dean liked women with short hair. He’d say ‘wouldn’t she be pretty if she’d just cut that hair off?’”

Evelyn: “Well it (Tokay) had, you know—in the 1800s and the twenties, there were about 3,000 people lived out there. Because there was Tokay and Carthage and Farley, and they lived in those little canyons, and all mined coal. Then out on the open flat country were ranches. But Tokay was a big coal mining operation. And those mines were operated before we even became a state. And they were underground mines and small—and these Mexican men would have to go down and bend down to go in there and it was dangerous mining, ‘cause it was small veins and they had to tunnel down, way down in there. And it was the coal that they used for smelters. And there was a railroad up there and they hauled coal to El Paso to the smelter, and they used that coal in Socorro to heat the public buildings. All the public buildings, the courthouse and the schoolhouses and Tech were heated with that coal from Tokay. And it was real black, smoky. You’d see it run down the adobe walls. It was UGLY.”

Evelyn: “There was a company store and a school. There were several houses, rows of houses. And then under the hill they had a little—there’s just nothing but ruins there when I went there. But Tokay still had several houses there. And that long concrete house was a rooming house that we used mainly for storage and things, because it was just a concrete — 16 room with 16 windows and a chimney outlet in every fourth room. That’s the building that’s the bed and breakfast now. When I first heard about it they said it had bachelor guys, they had one room with one faucet in it, and that the end room they had a place where they could take baths. So I think it probably was a rooming house.”



Tokay, painting signed Audley Dean Nicols, Tokay, New Mexico, 1927

Evelyn: “This is the picture of it...it’s a painting that somebody did... And the people that ran that mine then was B.H. Kinney. And they had a brick plant in Albuquerque, and they hauled this coal to Albuquerque. They were still hauling coal to make bricks. Anyway, Tokay was pretty busy in the early—all the twenties and much of the thirties. And then in 1948, they were totally closed down and we bought the area. In 1948, we moved to Tokay. In 1948, we bought the old Kinney house. Mr. and Mrs. Kinney lived there and that’s where their children were born. They had four boys. They still have a Kinney brick plant in Albuquerque.”

Evelyn: “Anyhow, we moved to Tokay and had good, nice, soft, water. And I had trees, and I could have a garden, and I had chickens and a milk cow, and.... And we had a little more country, so we could buy more cattle and... We had to have more country so we could make a living. So that’s how we spent our lifetime, getting little pieces of land together and trying to create a big enough area to raise cattle. Then we leased the Fish and Wildlife for several years and we had lots of cattle on the river. But years later they fenced it, decided they didn’t want cattle down there. Then we had to cut down. And ultimately we lived there [Tokay] ‘til Dean died. It was twenty-two years ago. He was

buried twenty-two years ago the day before yesterday. But, he was born and raised in this country. Worked on ranches and did...they're an old family. They were here in the 1800s."

Evelyn told me that the Fite family came to Tularosa in the 1800s. Dean Fite's father was Walter Lafayette Fite and his mother was Edna Bruton. Edna was born in the New Mexico Territory in 1911. Dean's family moved from south Texas to the Tularosa area in the 1800s, and was originally from Tennessee.



Evelyn: "Both the Bruton family and the Fite side came from Texas, big families. And Jack Bruton lives out at Agustin, he's one of the descendants, he was Dean's cousin."

Evelyn: "They came on horseback and with wagons, brought cattle. They pioneered this country. I think it was after the Civil War, a lot of 'em moved out—all the turmoil. And they needed more country. And the Fites were kind of gypsies anyhow. They liked to see more country, and so did the Brutons. They were the kind of people who like to have big country, pioneers. Years later, Mr. Fite worked on ranches and raised his family. He was a GOOD cowboy. And he worked for wealthy ranchers that came in from the East and bought big ranches out here and didn't know anything about ranching. He worked for them. And that's where he raised his family. And the kids grew up, and he finally went over there and homesteaded the place and they had their own ranch. There was no Bureau of Land Management, and there were no fences, so it was all open range. And there were sheep ranchers, and people abusing the country, sheep would keep eating it up

and there were a lot of horses. And nobody ever sold an old cow—they just sold the calves—they weren't worth much. Old cows were—they didn't have anything to do with 'em. They just let 'em die, get old and die. But the cattle all ran together and they'd water—if it rained you know—all go to these water holes. And then whoever had cattle had to go there when that water dried, and get their cattle and bring them home. And if you didn't go get yours, somebody else would. So it was a real wide open country, and a lot of rustling of cattle and, a lot of action. And a very hard living. But our first problem was—when I married Dean in 1937 and we were having land trials—establishing boundaries, and over at the county seat you went and you got land awarded to you according to water you had developed. So it was...that was how they established boundaries. And if you were a good politician you...always was politics involved, always.”

The Bomb

I asked about the Trinity Site and the atomic bomb test.

Evelyn: “I wasn't home. I was in Nevada visiting. But my father-in-law was at the house. We lived in a little shack that was before we bought Tokay. And he was at the house and the light woke him up, but the sound didn't because it kind of went up and over. You know how sound goes. So where he was, he said he don't remember the sound, but the light—that bright light woke him up. But we were in Nevada and we heard about it. But we knew something was going on over there because there'd been lots of action, and a lot of cars going. They'd go to Logan there, and evacuated a bunch of ranchers and there was a big fight over the land you know. The government just came and took it. War time.”

Evelyn: “On the news it said—well it was all real top secret. People in town didn't really accept that, you know. We had all the big shots at Tech that worked with it, and they knew about it. They were there when it happened. But the average person didn't know about it, they'd just know there was something—there was a lot of action out there. Dean and I unloaded a bunch of cattle. We had a bunch of cattle down at Black Lake and we brought 'em up and we unloaded 'em at Lava, and Lava's just a switch down on well, it's where the Armendaris is now. And we unloaded those cattle there and they had built a road, just bladed it, from that switch down by Black Mesa—you know that area—all the way to Trinity Site. And we didn't know what it was, we had no idea. But we followed that bladed—they just knocked the cactus over, and the yuccas, and made it wide enough to bring that. You remember pictures of that big trailer with one tire right beside the other? And it had that big heavy iron thing in it? The tractors, they took it all the way across there to Trinity Site. And that's where they dropped that first atomic device. And they had bunkers over there where you could—cement bunkers—where they could get in, and they had telephone lines on poles about, I guess maybe ten feet high, or eight feet. They were not very high; you couldn't ride a horse under 'em.”

Evelyn: “It wasn't much of a crater. Everybody did—all the kids, all the boys around the ranch that rode horseback went over there to see what...course we wanted to see what

went on. We took those cattle across that bombing range, and it was top secret, and we crossed the highway twice and nobody saw us. And you can tell when cattle cross a road, you know they drag weeds and make tracks, and pee and potty...they never saw us. We'd see cars coming and we'd just be still, and they never looked to the right or the left, they just looked down the road."

Evelyn: "It [the crater] was just kind of a disturbance in the sand. It was a bunch of twisted iron, 'cause they had a tower and it, you know, blew it to pieces. And there were chunks of iron that blew off in the distance, big, big chunks, like that one down the park? But we had a piece at the ranch that Dean brought home and those kids all gathered that green glass you know, that melted, and had it in their pockets, and took it home, put it on the mantle. Now this supposed to have been radioactive and kill you and make you sterile...they all managed to raise families."

Evelyn: "We weren't supposed to be over there. Yeah, there were pieces of it—some pieces big as this, melted, melted, sand, green. It was green. I went to Trinity Site, oh, about 4 or 5 years ago and, course everything's gone, and they've got all that fence around there and they have all that big brouhaha about it. And I saw this man on his hands and knees and he had a little piece of this, Trinitite they call it, and he was telling these people how very dangerous it was, and I just leaned over and watched him tell that story and I thought, oh well, don't believe it's all that lethal. Anyhow, it was quite a commotion. We had no IDEA what it was the beginning of...See they developed it at Los Alamos, and they kept saying on the radio that it was Los Alamos. Well we didn't know where Los Alamos was—it was kind of like a hidden city up there. I went up there sometimes after that, and you know, tight security to get in there and out of there."

Evelyn: "And anyhow, we brought our cattle and we were gonna put 'em over there, we'd run out of a place to put cattle so there was a big dirt tank over there with water, and Dean said—he always had these good ideas—so we were taking those cattle and we'd been driving for three days, and two days without water. The third day we penned 'em at his corral and Dean says, 'I'll go see what it looks like ahead,' so he rode on ahead and he came back. He said 'We gotta go back; we can't take 'em up there.' I wanted to kill him. I was so tired. We'd been sleeping on the ground; we didn't have anything to eat because we couldn't get to town to buy the groceries, and, UGH. So we finally got the cattle that we had, we turned 'em, and in two days we'd taken 'em to the old homestead, on December the 23rd. We kept 'em there 'til May and then we...there were too many cattle there for the area. We'd put 'em there with Mr. Fite's cattle. There were too many cattle so we gathered 'em and we took 'em to Colorado, and they did wonderful. The prices started going up, the cattle started getting more costly, and it rained in Colorado and we had these cattle. Mostly went on trains, shipped 'em from San Antonio. They had a shipping pen there. And then we made some money. The first money we'd ever really made, and I wanted to build a house. Dean said, 'Well you can't make any money with a house', so what he did was take that money and borrow a bunch more and bought a bunch more cattle and we took 'em back and put 'em on winter pasture up there. Then we got in a snowstorm that got this deep, higher than the second wire on a barbed wire fence, and we had cattle all over the country—no fences to hold 'em—going with the

storm. It was a wreck. Cold, Dean had no help, it was wartime, we had no cowboys. And we made money after all that, 'cause only way we did was the prices kept goin' up."

Magdalena

Evelyn: "Well Magdalena was, well it was a mining town, and a ranch town, and a frontier town—end of the railroad. Well they used to bring cattle in from all over. See, that was the closest shipping point. Holbrook was the next one—Arizona. So you had to take the cattle either from the Divide this way, or even beyond the Divide you had to bring 'em to Magdalena or take 'em to Holbrook. 'Cause there were no trucks hauling in those days, so they drove the cattle to the railroad point. And Magdalena was real exciting during shipping season, there'd be big herds of cattle out there, out on the hillsides, waiting their turn to get in the corrals and get on the train and get shipped. And there were bars—more bars than grocery stores, and four hotels. And Kelly was wide open. They were shipping ore out of there, and the mines closed down and the shipping started dwindling. When trucks came into being people quit, you know, driving cattle that far."

I asked Evelyn if she liked to dance.

Evelyn: "Well, I'll tell ya, I met my husband at a dance hall. They had an old dance hall, dairy, up by this side by Magdalena, and they would clear the barn out and have dances on Saturday nights, so we'd come from Rosedale. That's the only place we could come to dance, and people from all around, and that's where I met my first cowboys. And I met Dean there, and we called it the Cow Chip Ballroom. It's all just ruins [now]. Oh, it was wild. This one lady had a whorehouse out on the hillside and the cowboys would go out there, and Dean's dad was—it would make him so mad when the cowboys would go out there. He just thought that was terrible. He was kind of a—he was pretty straight-laced. I never even really knew where it was. It wasn't my time."

Evelyn: "There were a lot of homesteaders lived there, between here and Magdalena. People homesteaded that country in the '30s. And they homesteaded that country around Bingham at the same time. They came west where they drouthed [sic] out and everything—starved out. Moved, came there and tried to make it—there was no water, you know. The story of those homesteaders is pretty grim. Lola McWhorter can tell you, she's still here. She can tell you. Her parents homesteaded in Pie Town. She can sure tell you about it 'cause they—it was about as tough as it can get."

Bingham

Evelyn: "Well Bingham, it was just a filling station on the highway between Carrizozo and San Antonio—the OLD highway (380), not where it is now. And Harold Dean had a filling station there, and a few little groceries. And they had a schoolhouse. A few of those homesteaders were still there and they had kids, so they had two teachers. And they had two or three little rooms that... Well Dean's cousin taught school there and two of her nephews went to school there, and she'd take 'em up there and they'd stay during

the week and come home on weekends. The rest of 'em came every day because they lived closer. That's where we had our dances, at the schoolhouse. We'd fire up that gas lantern and get the food and the fiddle and the guitar and away we'd go, oh, about once every two or three months. But those dances, I had never been to a cowboy dance, so I had a fine time. The ladies would all pack lunches, bake cakes you know, and make sandwiches. And then they'd go—they had a little place where they fed the kids, and we had coffee. And we'd break dancing around twelve, one o'clock, and go eat cake and sandwiches, and everybody brought the kids too you know. Some of 'em stood out by the cars and drank, and got in fights and things, oh yes. And—but then we'd dance 'til daylight. Oh man. You'd be so pooped out it would take you three days to get over it.”

Evelyn: “I guess Wrye, that boy, it's the son, how old is he? They were homesteaders that came in there and bought some land and stayed. The ones that stayed, they got enough land together to have a ranch. They had one boy, and he was Willie Wrye and I've forgotten what her name was. And that's probably the boy, and he'd be, oh, in his late sixties...”

I told Evelyn that Bill Wrye had told me that Highway 380, the old highway, was built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). He had told me that it went from Old Bingham west to what's Mark McKinley's place now, and then it kind of tied into modern 380. It went east from Bingham through Hoot Owl Canyon and across Iron Mine Ridge.

Evelyn: “Yeah, it went a little different route. When you leave San Antonio, after about six miles it left and then went up and went around through those hills. That's where it was when I went to the ranch. You can see signs of it. There's an old—where you turn in to the Fite Ranch, if you'll look off to the left, up a little canyon there, there used to be a quarry there, they quarried up that stone. See, the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp came in 1938.”

The CCC, Neighbors and Land Deals

Evelyn: “Nineteen thirty eight, they had a CCC camp at Tokay. Oh yeah. And Dean helped the man. They needed some water. Naturally, they had that terrible water. There was a halfway decent well there, but they needed a well. So they had this man drilling this well, and Dean had worked for a well driller so he was helping him drill this well. It's just east of the house. And they got some water. And they looked down, and they had a mirror, and they looked down and they saw this water coming out, so they put a cable and a stick of dynamite on it, blew it out, got a good stream of water. So then they went ahead and developed that water, for the CCC camp. And boy, that's why I wanted to buy Tokay. They [the CCC] did a lot of things. There's still evidence of what they did. They did a lot of erosion work out in those hills. Have you been through that road from where Tokay goes through and catches the road to Stallion? You go across the house and you can come out, you hit the paved road that goes to Stallion. Well see, I lived above on that road, in a little adobe house we bought from a man. Piece of ranch country, so we joined—our fence was right down there. And when Dean developed that well, it was wonderful. And it's up on a ridge, you would not think there'd be—you

know there's a great big canyon not far from there, and you'd think if that big stream of water was there it'd be in that canyon."

Evelyn: "The wind would blow. Oohhh. We had a screened— two adobe rooms, and Mr. Fernandez built it. He was an old Spaniard, and he worked in the coal mines, and he saved his money and he homesteaded that place. And he bought a cow, and then he'd save his money and he had a partner, Mr. Olguin. So they went partners and bought a little piece of land there, and they would— they accumulated some cattle. And he was a fine old gentleman, and Dean and I used to go see him. Spoke Castilian Spanish, had blue eyes. And he was such a gentleman, and he lived in those two adobe rooms and he'd—well we'd have to go by there with cattle when we'd bring 'em to town and finally he wanted to sell out. So Dean could buy *him* out, but he couldn't get his partner. He had to buy his partner out too. And I think he wanted \$2,500. Now that doesn't seem like much now, but back then that was. Land wasn't worth a lot of money, and see, mostly it's BLM land, all you're buying is that little piece of patented land that they're on. So Dean went to Albuquerque and got some—\$2,500 in five dollar bills and one dollar bills—a whole bag full of bills. And I figured, at that time he went up there and he bought a car. And he sent me home in that car and he was following me and I had that bag of money and I was so worried about it. I'd had to learn to drive when I went to the ranch, I hadn't driven a car. Anyhow, he took that little bag of money and he went down to this little adobe house on the river there at San Antonio and this old couple lived there. And, well they weren't old, but they'd, you know, worked hard all their life. And he had that money out on the floor, and they finally agreed they'd take that. He took that money, built the bar down here, the one that used to... It was off-limits to the CCC boys because they had—they had women in the back and everything and... He made more money on that bar than we ever made on that ranch. Trust me. Every time we'd drive by there Dean said 'look at that.' You know where the railroad track is? It was just across the track on the right. Yeah, I think they called it the 85. Not many people went in there, it was a little rowdy. Then later on it got so's it was okay. But they wouldn't let the CCC boys go there. Anyhow, they had 300 boys from Brooklyn and put 'em in that CCC camp. And they had never been off of pavement in their life. And they'd talk 'dese' and 'dem' and 'doze' and they were terrified. They just knew there were snakes gonna get 'em and coyotes were gonna get 'em and... They were an absolute delight. 'Cause they were totally different than anybody I'd ever been around. But they had instructors. They were our friends. They had an educational advisor—Mr., Mr., what was his name? Anyhow, he'd try to teach 'em how to type. CCC camps were wonderful. Saved so many boys' lives, taught 'em how to use their hands, and, a whole different world to them. And taught 'em how to write, and how to, you know, kind of like army life. And they learned to type, and they had three square meals a day. And they'd send \$22 home to their families, which saved their families' lives. I'm talkin' 'bout \$22. Doesn't seem like much now. People go down and sit in a restaurant now and spend \$22 without battin' an eyelash, but that was a lot of money then. And it would BUY something. Mr. Bulger was his name! Anyhow, they had hired men who badly needed jobs, to take care of these guys. To cook for 'em and teach 'em and take 'em out in the field to teach 'em how to work. And they'd stay, how long was it, two years? I've forgotten, but there were CCC camps all over the country. Oh, they built sidewalk and had a fountain, and

they had a recreation room, and they had a pool hall. Three hundred of 'em. And Mr. Bulger, he educated 'em. He was telling me the story, he was teaching 'em about you didn't steal and you know, some moral things in life."

The Government

I asked Evelyn if government programs, and the passage of Federal laws, had affected their operation.

Evelyn: "Well, to old timers and people that were raised in open country, they resented all that. But I've always recognized what land management means to this country, 'cause they were ruining it. They just destroyin' it. That area where we bought that ranch had been sheeped out and stuff, and I lived there. It was 50 years before that sand hill got enough grass, bushes on it and brush—50 years to make a showing. 'Cause that used to be a really bare sand hill. But gradually over the years, with land management...It's a fragile country. You cannot do that. I'm a land management fan. Some of it I think was kind of poorly handled, but it still was the right idea. Generally speaking it was a fine idea."

Evelyn: "Before that time, any time a calf or a cow got an open wound or something, the flies would lay eggs in there and there'd be worms in there, screw worms. Yeah, so you couldn't brand or dehorn. You branded early, or you waited until after it frosted, because if you didn't, well then they'd get screw worms. And on that river they could get screw worms, if they'd get scratched you know, and get a bloody place, and you had to ride all the time you know and watch for it. 'Cause it would kill cattle. They'd just eat the—see in the Civil War they used screw worms to clean out wounds. They'd have these flies to lay eggs on these wounds and they'd clean all the dead flesh out of it and they'd take the flies out and that wound would heal. But if you have it on an animal and they run out of dead flesh they keep on eating. So they developed this sterile fly program, which was WONDERFUL. See, you had screw worms all the way in Florida, all the way through the south, and Texas, and all the way to South America, and Mexico. Lost lots of cattle to screw worms. Couldn't have Hereford cattle at all. 'Cause they were too fragile. And they started dropping those sterile flies, pretty soon we had no more screw worms. Oh, it was a wonderful program. And uh, particularly for people who live in the south. And on that river, deer would get 'em and, anything that had a bloody spot would get screw worms and it would kill it. So, it took a few years. And every time after that, gradually, if you'd find an animal with screw worms, you'd put it—they'd give you a little bottle with an address on it, and you'd mail it in, and the location, and they'd come drop a few more of those sterile flies. And I haven't heard of screw worms in a long time. And SCS [Soil Conservation Service], we built dirt tanks, and did erosion work, and Dean bought a Caterpillar and helped some people, get rid of.... You know, when they were taking... which was not a good program I don't think—taking the cedar trees out, you know. I didn't care for that program [chaining]."

Travels

Evelyn's remarks on the trips she and Dean took:

Evelyn: "When we got where we could, we took a trip every spring somewhere, to China and to Japan and to Australia, to New Zealand and New Guinea and Fiji, and all the countries in South America and South Africa, and Europe three times, and Alaska a couple of times. We moved around. We saw a lot of country. Loved it. Take your Indian jewelry and your western clothes, they always remember you."



Evelyn: "That was in Thailand. They had a dance they did, and they picked one of the tourists out of the audience, and I was the one, and they threw me up in that blanket."



Evelyn: “We were in Cuba. They took this picture of me....these people had Brahma cattle. And we were at the fairgrounds, and Castro was making a speech, fifty years ago, and they were going to have a rodeo, but he talked so long they had to postpone the rodeo. And then the next year he took over the country. And those same people took a picture of me, did you see a picture of me somewhere there with a Brahma bull?”



Evelyn: “That was in Albuquerque and they came and got me, with the Brahma bulls, fifty years later.”

Around Town

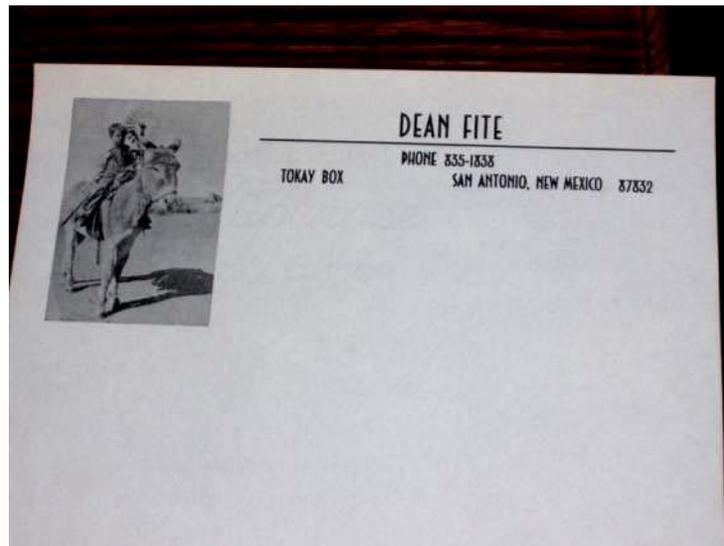
I asked Evelyn what she remembered of the ValVerde Hotel:

Evelyn: “That’s where I spent my honeymoon, in room 27. 1937. It was hot! And there was a bathroom down the hall. But ValVerde was the place where people stayed, ‘cause

it was the only place that had a dining room and a hotel, and had the pretty gardens in the front.”



Evelyn: “This is when we were in the parade in Socorro, and we won first prize. And that was my niece, and she rode a paint horse, rode bareback behind me—no, she rode behind Dean. It wasn’t safe to put her on behind me. But we won first prize! And first prize was a box of stationery, printed with his name on it. And I’ll show you... somewhere.....”



Evelyn: “This was a picture of Dean on a burro, and I had it put on the stationery.”



Evelyn: “This is a photo postcard. You know, a long time ago they had photographers on the street and you’d walk down the street and they’d take a picture of you? And when you came back by they’d sell it to you. The reason I kept that one, you see that old lady in the background? Well, my friend thought that was hilarious. That was in Albuquerque, a long, long time ago.”



Evelyn loved playing bridge. She still plays regularly.



Dean and Evelyn Fite won first prize at a costume party in 1949.



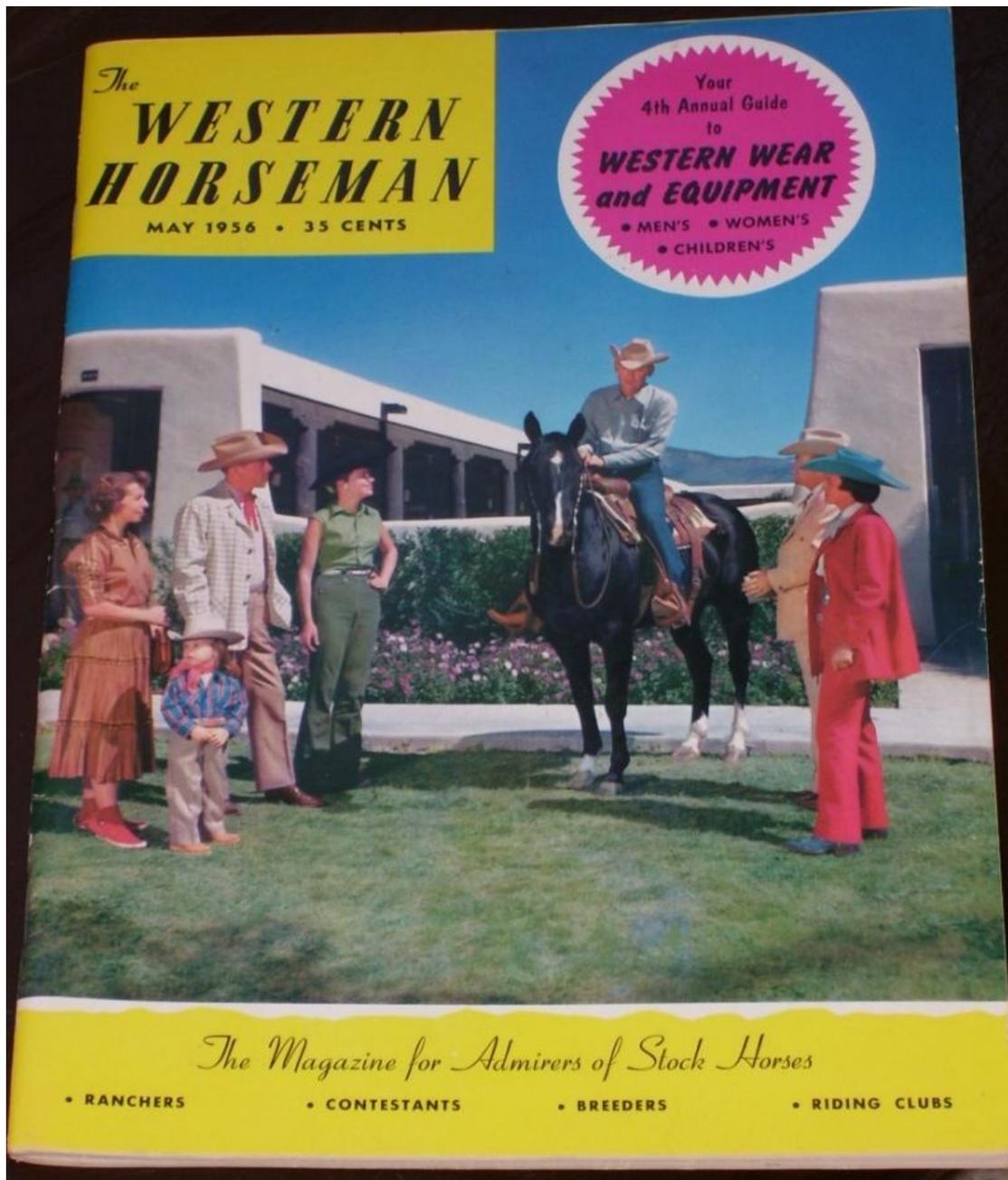
Evelyn talking to a friend at '49ers in Socorro

I asked Evelyn what kind of social events she and Dean went to:

Evelyn: “Rodeos. In the summertime you went to rodeos—went to the rodeo dance.”

I asked “Where, in Socorro?”

Evelyn: “It wasn’t much of a ranch town, Socorro. Magdalena was the ranch town. Socorro was a little farming community and they didn’t talk your language. They were farmers, you know, it was a whole different culture. When people say they have a ranch and it’s a little farm somewhere we look at ‘em askance and say, yeah?”



Evelyn, far right, on the cover of Western Horseman

Evelyn: “That was on the cover of the Horseman’s magazine, that’s taken long—look at that hat! Look at the size of that hat! You can tell how long ago that was by that. The magazine is there somewhere with that cover on it. The state fair. ‘56. Good God! That was a beautiful hand-made gabardine suit. There was a lady that lived in Lovington and she was a friend of my friend Fern, and she’d get this beautiful gabardine at this store in Lubbock, and we’d pick out our colors and she’d make—they were beautifully made suits.”

Meanwhile Back At The Ranch...



Evelyn: “We were branding! And there’s my sweet old dog, Kaiser. That’s about 1938 and the neighbors, Betty and Margaret, and myself.”

Evelyn: “That’s Dean. I remember that shirt, and he has Kaiser by him. He caught those coyotes. It was about 1942. Before the war you could sell those skins for a little bit of money. I hated that. I hated him killin’ the coyotes. We had a place... You know where that spaceport is going? Well that’s where it was. We were on that ranch where they’re building the spaceport. And that’s a good place to build that spaceport, because it isn’t worth a damn for anything else.”



Evelyn: “That’s me sitting there. I don’t know what kind of a hairdo I had. And I don’t even know why I got in that picture. I hated those hides. That whole procedure was miserable as far as I was concerned.”



Evelyn: “And this is Clifford. The kid had wet pants, you can see there. And uh, Dogie. He’s a kid who worked for us, a little waif. Dean picked him up on the railroad tracks. He was hitchhiking. This was in 1941 or 1942. He couldn’t read or write, and they took him in the Army. Dogie Weaver! And we’d get letters from him, and Dean said ‘I don’t know how they took him, ‘cause he couldn’t read or write.’ And we’d get letters, and they’d all be different handwriting, so he had people write for him. And anyway, he was so sweet. Poor little waif walkin’ out that railroad track.”

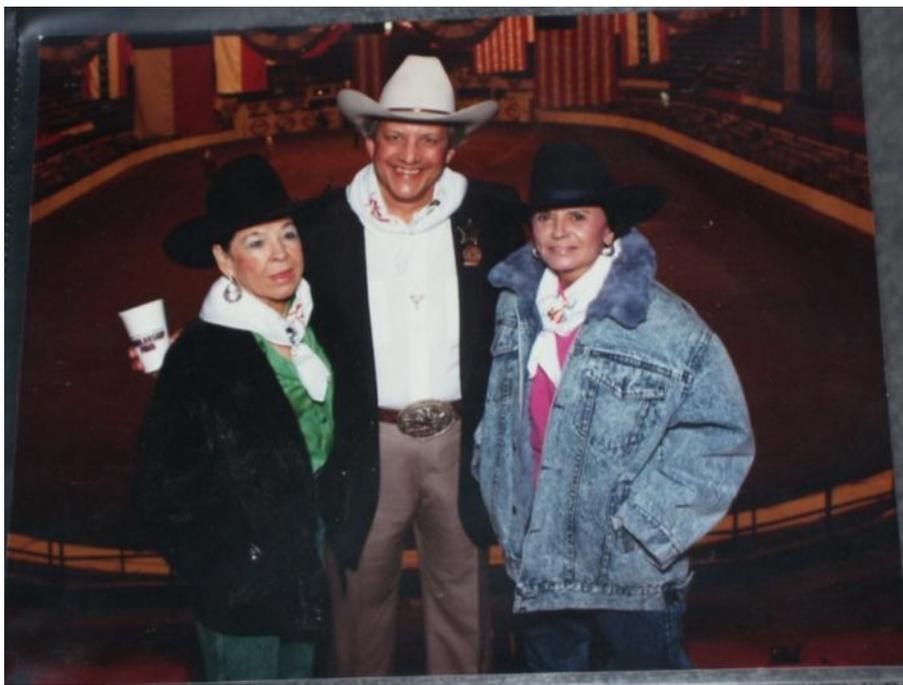


Evelyn: “It brings back old memories, what you’re doing. That’s always good. We were cookin’ breakfast for a bunch of people...He doesn’t even have his shirttail in. That was the house at Tokay, when we first moved in, before it was remodeled.”



Evelyn: “That looks like Dean [right]. He’s showing off. He always acted silly when you were trying to take a picture. And this is his uncle. That was a long time ago. I look pretty young there.”

Friends



Evelyn: “That’s Fern and I, and somebody, at a Fort Worth stock show.”



Evelyn: "I'm sitting here with her again."



I asked Evelyn if she meant the Fern Sawyer of rodeo fame.

Evelyn: “Well, yeah! She was World Champion All-Around Cowgirl. And she was about 3 or 4 years older than me. She died here....I really miss her.”



Evelyn: “She lived in Lovington and she was raised at crossroads. This is she and I. We’d been judging a queen contest up there. And after she quit rodeoin’ she did a lot of judging, cutting horses. She was a champion cutting horse person.”



Evelyn: “And there’s Fern in one of her getups. She had all kinds of beautiful clothes. She rode in Madison Square Garden! In the thirties.”



Fern, Evelyn (and friends) with their favorite custom boot maker, Paul Bond, of Nogales, AZ



Some of Evelyn's custom-made boots



Detail of Evelyn's custom boots, complete with her name and initials.