

OH-3097, GARY GRIFFIN, 4-30-2015, LANDER, WY IN FLIGHT

BARBARA: This is Barbara Bogart, I am in Lander, Wyoming.

GARY: No, no, no --

BARBARA: That's OK. I'll start all over again. I'll wait until you're ready. OK, starting all over. This is Barbara Bogart, I'm in Lander, Wyoming with Mr. Gary Griffin, and his wife, Jane Griffin; and we are going to talk about primarily Mr. Griffin's involvement with aviation in and around mostly Fremont County, I'm guessing. OK, alright. There, that should catch both of us. OK, say something.

GARY: Hello. (laughter)

JANE: Something.

BARBARA: Something, yeah. Alright, good. OK, well, before we talk about what you've got laid out here, if you don't mind, [00:01:00] tell me how you got interested in aviation to being with.

GARY: Well, it goes back to when I was three years old. We lived on a ranch out in Riverton, up on a hill, and my dad and Porter Chopping grew up together. So, he was a painter with the Chopping brothers. Well, they had an old wooded pusher, it was a new one then. And they were going to go hunt coyote.

BARBARA: And I don't know what a woody pusher is.

GARY: OK, it's -- the motor's out the back, and it's got a basket up in the front. Somebody sits there, somebody sits behind him and flies the airplane.

BARBARA: Oh my gosh!

GARY: Yeah, it was an old-timer, you know.

BARBARA: Oh my gosh, OK.

GARY: Wood and strings and -- Sam and Mutt flew out to our hou-- our ranch, and there was a lone tree out there, and they were going to land, and take my dad out, and they were going to go out and then shoot coyotes from the airplane. Well, this lone tree -- just so happened [00:02:00] there was a coyote running through the field, and they took in after him, and he headed for that tree. So, they, I guess they circled the tree once, and the coyote was still getting away from them, and he wasn't paying attention, and he hit the top of the tree, went over, and crashed, and it killed Sam.

BARBARA: Oh, my!

GARY: Well, we were sitting at the house watching it. And, so Dad took the vehicle, and he was out there right now. Mom and I and my brother and sister, we walked all the way out there, it was probably about a mile, I guess, less. And I looked at that airplane, standing on its nose,

wrecked, and I thought 'I'd like to buy that airplane, get it, and I could fix it up and fly it.' Now, that's my --

BARBARA: In your three years --

GARY: That was -- I was three years old. (laughter)

BARBARA: Wow, that made a big -- well, I can see why it would make an impression on you, but to have that kind of reaction, that crash.

GARY: Yeah, but to have that -- see a man killed, you know, and still be like 'I want to fly.' (laughter)

BARBARA: Wow. So, what was the next step?

GARY: [00:03:00] I got a birthday present when I was about 12, I guess, 10 or 12. And we went up to Cody, and it was the Fourth of July, and my dad said he'd buy me a ride in an airplane. See, he thought it was my birthday. So I got to ride in a Cessna 140, and the guy took off, and he said "are you a farm kid, you know?" And I said 'oh, yeah.' "You ever drive a tractor?" 'Oh, you bet.' And he said "well, take over, since you led a tractor." So I flew it around Cody for, I don't know, 15, 20 minutes, and then he landed it, of course. So that was the next one. Then, during World War II, they were training, they had a airfield just right at the end of our ranch. And they had guys come from Cody, and they would train. They'd be flying, [00:04:00] I don't know, three or four of them

little [tater tassels?] they were flying. And they would take off, and fly over the ranch, and stop, and do spins, you know, and all that. Then that guy, after the war, come in with the SNJ 6, a Navy plane, a Navy trainer, big one, with the radial engine and all. I used to watch him take off, you know, I'd ride the horse down, and when it was sitting there, nobody was running, I'd go down and play in it.

BARBARA: Oh my gosh.

GARY: Yeah. (laughter) But, it was finally grounded, and I don't know, they hauled it off somewhere, probably somebody to rebuild it. After that, I just always -- I went into model airplanes, and all the time flying them and building them, and I finally got tired of all the expense, flying and building, and still not being able to fly [00:05:00]. That's where this came in.

BARBARA: Oh, OK, now you're pointing to --

GARY: 1974, we went to Oshkosh, Wisconsin, to the air show. And they had a BD4, the shop, they had a plane there, demonstrator, and, bingo. We come home, I found one for sale out in Oregon, the guy had bought it. We went out to look at it, paid him \$6,000 for it. The propeller on here is a constant speed [propwood?], 2,500. The engine was worth over 6,000. We bought the whole thing for six. And

then it's a paint-by-number (laughter) paint-by-number --
build-by-number, [one way?]

BARBARA: So it came in pieces?

GARY: Yeah. Right, well the engine wasn't on it. We put it
on a trailer, and it was on the gear, no tail, no nothing.
I had pictures of it. The one picture here is after I had
worked on it quite a bit, [00:06:00] just to get it to that
point.

JANE: Put the skin on it.

GARY: Yeah. And all the -- I had to finish the main
gearbox.

BARBARA: Now, what was the frame made of?

GARY: It's all [aluminum?]. And it's bolts, and we put
rivets, [obvious?] to hold the skin on.

BARBARA: And where did you build it?

GARY: Right here, in the garage.

BARBARA: In the garage! Oh my gosh.

GARY: It holds four people, that's 180-horsepower engine,
fly at about -- well, they said they were getting just a
little over 200 miles an hour, ground speed to ground
speed, that means from ground to ground, so, it was
averaging a little over 200.

BARBARA: Wow. So what did you do with it?

GARY: U.S. Steel flew us down. And I still had parts, I ordered parts from [Beatty?], and he went belly-up. And just the wingtips was all I needed. [00:07:00] But U.S. Steel closed down, we had property that was still -- we had to pay for, we had a camper that we just bought, and a new pickup. So, I sold the guy to a -- the plane to a guy in California. Paid for everything, paid the house, the pickup, the camper, and, the plane went to California.

BARBARA: So, do you mean you never flew it?

GARY: I never got to. (laughter) All I ever did was taxi it around the yard out here. (laughter)

JANE: Do you want some water?

BARBARA: I would love some, thank you so much.

JANE: Do you want some water?

GARY: Water? Oh, I'm -- no, I'm --

BARBARA: But you had fun.

GARY: Oh, and the boys, all three of my sons, got an education on this airplane. Wayne, this little guy here, he's a mechanic now, he got his own shop. Paul is the airport manager at Regional. And Randy is an electrician that was on board -- Carl Vinson was the last one that carried it. [00:08:00] And he had security to the -- well, he even went to Miramar, and he was there, stationed there his last year, year and a half. But he had security that

was so high that nobody could -- he could go into a shop, nobody could be in there with any security less than what he had.

BARBARA: That is cool.

GARY: But, they gave me my chance to retire early, and he took it. (laughter) They didn't expect him to, but he did.

BARBARA: So, did you have a pilot's license when you were building airplanes?

GARY: I started in 1972. Oh, no, no, no, that's going back to 1957. (laughter) I started flying back then, I was working on my pilot's license.

BARBARA: And where were you living at the time?

GARY: Riverton.

BARBARA: And where did you take the lessons?

GARY: Up at the airport.

BARBARA: And who taught them?

GARY: [Jack Ruffing?], Freddy, he had [00:09:00] a plane that -- I don't know whether it was his or not. He finally wrecked it, and went out of business, but -- and then I flew for [Les Pike?]. I mean, he taught me lessons for a while. Then he got married, you know?

BARBARA: Oh, no more flying. (laughter) Did you ever finish your -- and get your license?

GARY: I never did.

BARBARA: Oh, OK.

GARY: Nope.

JANE: You didn't need a license with this.

GARY: Well, yes you do. I could -- I built it, I can fly it, and have an instructor in there with me, and he can -- until I get my hours, and then I'm on my own.

BARBARA: Now, would this -- is this a light, what they call a light aircraft, or --

GARY: Oh, no, no, no. This is [four plates?], 180 horsepower --

BARBARA: Yeah, it was that horsepower that [decides it?] --

GARY: Over 900-mile range, so it was -- yep, a [00:10:00] good aircraft.

BARBARA: Now, did [Beau?] tell me that you worked down at the airport in Riverton?

GARY: He does, I never did. My dad --

JANE: Your Uncle Kay had the --

GARY: Yeah, my uncle. He flew until he was 93. My dad was raised here in Riverton, and he saw the first airplane that came in to Riverton, up on the hill where the high school is now. They landed it up there. And that guy, I guess, was planning on flying produce from Casper, up to Riverton.

BARBARA: About what year would that have been, do you think?

GARY: Oh, back in the teens. (laughter) There should be some record of that, I got the picture of the plane and everything, and I was looking before noon, and I had -- I've got some aircraft pictures that I'd -- I was lucky to find this. (laughter)

BARBARA: [00:11:00] Well, I'm glad you did. Yeah, I've been surprised doing these interviews how early there were planes in Wyoming. My gosh, almost at the same time as cars.

GARY: Well, we lived here in [Landry?] in 1941. My dad was a car dealer here, working for -- hooked up with Porter Chopping. And I remember going to the airport. I had my first -- fourth birthday living in a house across the street. Anyway, we went up to the airport, and this beautiful orange -- it was a open cockpit, [two place?]. I found out later it was a [Seerman?], or [a Ryan?], rather. And the guy had just come in and landed, and we didn't stick around long enough to see him take off again. It had a Ranger engine in it, I don't know you've ever heard of a Ranger engine or not.

BARBARA: I don't think so.

GARY: Six cylinders, but they all hung straight down.

BARBARA: Oh my gosh.

GARY: [00:12:00] Quite different.

BARBARA: Is the airport in Riverton the only one in the county?

GARY: No, we've got a good one right up here.

BARBARA: We've got one here, OK.

JANE: There's no big --

GARY: There's over 50 airplanes stationed here. And mo--
they're all light, I mean, small craft. A lot of them are
homebuilt. You've got an interview with, what's his name?
-- oh yes, you do know him -- [Rowe's?] husband. Joanne --
oh, man.

JANE: Not [Larson?].

GARY: No.

BARBARA: Nelson?

GARY: Nelson!

BARBARA: I haven't been able to get a hold of him.

GARY: Well, he already built one or two of them at his home.

JANE: In his basement. (laughter)

BARBARA: Not with the wings on, I'm guessing, you couldn't get
it out that way.

GARY: You see this big round pipe right here? They called
that Bowling Ball Alley, but both wings [00:13:00] had that
-- they slide right into that, from both sides, you can
take it off, and trail it anywhere you need to go.

BARBARA: Right. Yeah, I've heard of people trailering, and --

GARY: Put the wings on, and it had a mechanism, and I was building that mechanism, attaches right on the back, and when you slide it off, then you can rotate the wing, and swing it around back, and lock it down to the tail. With fuel in it. That was the amazing part.

BARBARA: The fuel was in the wing?

GARY: Sure -- oh yeah. We had to have the tank in both wings.

BARBARA: Well, let's talk the Lander Airport for a minute. I don't have any idea when the airports were established. Do you have any idea about that one?

GARY: Oh, lord, not -- I don't really know that one.

JANE: I don't either.

GARY: It's been a long time. I mean, I knew it was here in the '40s. You know, I suppose they established it right after they got airplanes.

BARBARA: Yeah, it seems like at least there airstrips, or, you know, cleared-out places in fields [00:14:00] where people could land, but maybe airports evolved. Alright, so, after you got rid of this, then what?

GARY: I had to just sit back and relax. (laughter)

JANE: At the time, you worked for U.S. Steel. But before that, he was with oil -- with Maddox Oil Service, and didn't get much time.

GARY: I talked Bill Maddox into buying an airplane.

JANE: Yep, you did.

GARY: He got -- he flew me around. (laughter)

BARBARA: That's cool. Well, did -- and there a U.S. Steel facility here?

GARY: Ooh, a big one. Oh yes. It's the [Atlantic City?] ore mine up there.

JANE: Oh, of course. Yes, duh, OK. I get it now.

(laughter) I lived in Rock Springs for a while, and he used to come over, and [hear us talk?]. [Been through South Pass?] a long time too.

GARY: Well, I started there in 1964, and worked until it closed. Three months short of a full retirement.

[00:15:00] Early retirement. I get a retirement, but it ain't nothing.

BARBARA: Now, you and Mr. Nelson -- some other people, I'm assuming -- belong to a model airplane?

GARY: Well, I never did join their models --

BARBARA: OK. Experimental?

GARY: I belong to the EAA.

BARBARA: OK, and I remember Paul mentioning that, and that was one thing that I wanted to ask you about.

GARY: Yeah, I joined in 1974, when we went back to Oshkosh. And I've got every magazine that they have put out since then.

BARBARA: Now, tell me what an experiment -- pretend I know nothing, which is pretty much the truth. What is the definition of "experimental aircraft?"

GARY: Right there. One you build by yourself, without having a factory job. You had to do more than 51% of the construction. And if you had any aircraft that you built, you do 51% or more, and that's experimental.

BARBARA: [00:16:00] Now see, that was -- I thought experi-- I think of experimental as being "oh, let's make this up."
(laughter)

GARY: Yeah, no. You can go out and buy a brand-new tub, super tub, whatever, and change, whatever, change the motor size, and right there at that point, it becomes experimental.

BARBARA: That's interesting.

GARY: You have to have it certified from that point on, before you can go back in and have it as a regular certified aircraft. If you change it, it's experimental. And you have to have that posted in there. It's got to be a placard where you can see it, anybody going out, that can see it.

BARBARA: OK, and what's the certification process? That's FAA, I assume?

GARY: FAA can take years, and maybe you never get it. So, it's just whatever mood they're in, I guess. (laughter) I had to have N numbers [00:17:00] for this plane, and you gotta go through Oklahoma City, and register whatever aircraft it is, and you tell them what number you want. And if that number is available, you get it. I would up with N76 for that aircraft.

BARBARA: And why --

GARY: It was the year '76, so your N number is just your N number, N76. But, Paul checks on the aircraft N number registry. That number is still alive.

BARBARA: Really? So, the fellow you sold it to --

GARY: Either that, or it's just never been cancelled out.

BARBARA: That's interesting.

JANE: It was a doctor that you sold it to.

BARBARA: But you don't belong to the local organization then?

GARY: Nope. I did belong to the Civil Air Patrol for quite a while, while all my kids were growing up. I got them in it, and got them interested.

BARBARA: Talk to me about that a little bit, [00:18:00] because I remember when I was growing up, I grew up in Southern

California. You heard a lot about the Civil Air Patrol, but I don't know what it was, so can you explain that?

GARY: Mainly, around this area, it was just an education, you know, for the kids, and if anything ever happened, we were involved in any kind of a search and rescue, whatever was needed.

BARBARA: How many people were in it in this area, do you know?

GARY: I think at one time, we had 14 or 15 kids involved.

BARBARA: And how many adults then?

GARY: There was just one, two, three, four of us. The one guy that was in charge of the whole group, you know. I'd say well there -- he was the main instigator, I mean, he made sure that everything went according to [oil?].

BARBARA: [00:19:00] And was it based at -- I know nothing about it was organized. Based at the airport --

GARY: It was all out of Cheyenne, but our unit was right here in Lander.

BARBARA: OK, alright. And was there a connection to the FAA, or it was strictly a state --

GARY: No, it's civil air. And if they needed a plane or something, they called Cheyenne. The Civil Air Patrol had their own planes and everything, they'd bring them up.

BARBARA: Were you ever involved in any search and rescue operations?

GARY: Well, yes, and we were -- at the same time I was in Civil Air Patrol, I was in the radio club, search and rescue, and they did have an airplane crash from a show up here, and we were right up on the mountain, and we could see a silver spot shining, and we kept radioing -- we had -- our CB radios went to the radio here at another [00:20:00] CB at the airport, and he relayed message to the airport, and they were -- we were telling them where we seen this spot, then the airport would relay a message to the airplane, and we kept the pilot flying right over the top of him for, I don't know, hours. And, finally, the guy walked out.

BARBARA: That was a good thing.

JANE: That was on the air race.

GARY: Yep, Lander Jackpot air race.

BARBARA: I've heard of that.

GARY: Yeah, one guy, they took off, and ran out of power, just hit the snow, and flipped over, and slid in underneath the trees. The whole bottom of the airplane was white, sitting in snow. Talk about hard to see. (laughter) If the guy hadn't walked out, I don't think they'd found him until it thawed out.

BARBARA: Sure. It was in the winter?

GARY: [You know?], April, when you still have the snow.

JANE: Snow up there. In fact, it was April Fools' Day.

GARY: Yeah, it was. [00:21:00] Yeah, they had saw the people up there were saying "well, maybe that's an April Fools' joke." But it was no joke.

JANE: When he [offered?] "mayday, mayday."

GARY: One guy was killed. It was three guys in the plane.

BARBARA: Now, that's a cross-country race, right?

GARY: Yeah, from here to Jackpot, Nevada, and back.

BARBARA: Oh. But it's from Lander to Jackpot?

GARY: Yeah.

BARBARA: OK, that part I didn't know.

GARY: Oh yeah, they had it for years. I don't know if they still do it or not.

JANE: Not that that I'm aware of.

BARBARA: And a certain-sized plane?

GARY: Any plane. But they all had their own (inaudible). You had to fly that distance on a certain amount of fuel, in a certain amount of time. It was just a fun thing.

BARBARA: I was in Pinedale last fall when they -- the women's race came through, I forgot what they call it, but it's cross-country, and that's -- so the gals were landing and taking off, and the -- I was trying to interview the airport manager, and he was a little distracted, and the [00:22:00] (inaudible) other guys -- because, of course, it

was stormy, you know, there was weather, but, anyway. So, I didn't know that there was -- I'll have to do some research on that, it sounds interesting.

JANE: We were up to Pinedale when they had that -- the divider? Was it a race, or --

GARY: No, Dave Lowe was into gliders. He was a -- man, he was a test pilot for [Afton?], and then Call Air, and the (inaudible) special. He was well up in the aircraft and knowledge, and -- but anyway, we used to go up there and haul kids and Bill Carpenter around to where he was flying, and we went to Jackson and Pinedale, and then he got killed. Terrible.

BARBARA: Now, back to the Civil Air Patrol for a moment. What -- you said you were [00:23:00] trying to get the kids interested in aviation? What kinds of activities did you do?

GARY: Anything from camping out to survival to running radios, aircraft knowledge, tearing engines down, building aircraft parts, and stuff like that. So, it was -- and then they had a very good course that they had to take. They had bookwork, and they had to fill out all of the problems, you know, every day. It was pretty thorough.

BARBARA: And then they got, like, a certificate, or something?

GARY: Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA: And then they could participate in it?

GARY: Oh yeah, the higher they got, the better, you know,
the further up the ladder they could go. A lot of fun.

BARBARA: And were all your boys in there too?

GARY: All three of them.

JANE: Three of them, yep.

GARY: If there was something going on, we were all involved.

BARBARA: [00:24:00] That's great. So, you said you -- when you
were three, you were on the family ranch in Riverton. And
then, the family moved to --

GARY: Lander.

BARBARA: Lander, OK.

GARY: At the beginning of the war, I'd shut the ranching
down, and my dad [order?] had a dealership here in Lander,
they sold a Plymouth. And so, Dad bought into that, sold
the ranch, and bought that, and we moved to Lander, and,
within a year, we were out of business, and we were in
Casper.

JANE: Then he was in Meeteetse.

GARY: And we moved to Meeteetse.

BARBARA: Oh my goodness, OK.

GARY: That's where I got to see all the airplanes, the
training for the pilots for the war.

BARBARA: Oh, um, [Cogie?].

GARY: Meeteetse

BARBARA: Of course.

GARY: Yeah, right out of Meeteetse. About five miles up the river.

BARBARA: That's cool.

GARY: Just a wide spot in the river, I guess it was the best spot to make another airport. (laughter)

JANE: We lived on the [Whitt?] ranch [00:25:00] up in Meeteetse.

GARY: If you ever go up the valley, there's a great huge rock, stands up above the buildings. That's where we lived for 11 years.

BARBARA: Oh, OK. Now, I've only been through Meeteetse on the highway, so I don't know --

GARY: You'd have to head through the pitchfork to see that.

BARBARA: And that's off to the west?

GARY: Yes.

BARBARA: From the highway --

GARY: Head towards the mountains.

JANE: Yeah, in the pitchfork (inaudible). Pretty place up there.

BARBARA: Is that one of the biggest, oldest ranches in the state?

GARY: They owned -- he owned the biggest share of the state. The basin, [Acorn?] Basin Valley. [He's from?] down the (inaudible) the level of (inaudible). He's [claimed?] it all. And then when the settlers come in, I guess there became trouble. And that's how (laughter) old -- tell me my brain's going bad -- [00:26:00] the bandit --

BARBARA: Not Butch?

GARY: Butch Cassidy. (laughter) Butch Cassidy hired him as a range rider, over there to run --

BARBARA: Oh, did he?

GARY: Yeah, until he got caught stealing horses. (laughter) I guess.

BARBARA: I know he was a -- he's been -- they traveled around quite a bit, well I know he was in the jail in Evanston for a while, so they claimed, and --

GARY: He was in the pen for a while.

BARBARA: In the pen, and didn't die in Columbia, and he was actually living in Lander (laughter), I remember all those stories.

JANE: Yes. Oh, all kinds of stuff.

BARBARA: So, you kept taking the magazine from the organization?

GARY: Oh, I still -- yeah, it comes every month. There's probably one laying right there.

JANE: Our family, our boys, and --

GARY: No, there's not one here.

JANE: They just -- they dearly love airplanes, yes.

GARY: Flying is my life. I love to fly, I'd rather fly than eat. [00:27:00] As you can tell, I really like eating.

(laughter)

BARBARA: But, if you never got your license.

GARY: Nope.

BARBARA: So, what -- you fly with other people, or --

GARY: Oh yeah. When I was hauling the mail from Riverton to Rollins and back, the Postmaster in Hudson had a Supercub. And, every time I could get up there on the weekend, we hopped in his cub and fly all over the country. I would [be about?] (inaudible). I really enjoy it.

JANE: And then our oldest son had -- he was in a air--

GARY: Flying Thermopolis.

JANE: Flying Thermopolis.

JANE: So, he had come over, and pick up -- take us for a ride.

BARBARA: What kind of plane did he have?

GARY: Cessna 172.

BARBARA: I'm supposed to talk to Dr. Howard Wilson tomorrow from Thermopolis. I don't know if you know that name or not.

GARY: The name is real familiar.

BARBARA: Yeah, he apparently --

GARY: I think he's got an airplane for sale.

BARBARA: That could be.

GARY: [00:28:00] I think that's one my son was telling me about.

BARBARA: Does your son still live in Thermopolis?

GARY: Yeah. He works up to Hamilton Dome.

BARBARA: So, what other opportunities do you still have to fly?

GARY: Oh, lord, other than with my son, I'm about run out.

(laughter)

JANE: Besides watching our sons --

GARY: Yeah, he wants to buy, yeah, a homebuilt type deal, and put it together, and fly it. Either that, or spend \$120,000 for one of these Supercubs out of Glendo or Glenrock, somewhere down in there. They're making it, it's a fiber -- all fiber.

BARBARA: Really?

GARY: Yeah. Composite, and it's built on its head frame.

Takes off in the length of the aircraft, and lands in the length of the aircraft.

BARBARA: Oh my goodness.

GARY: Yeah, that is one fat -- it's just one --

BARBARA: It sounds like a helicopter!

GARY: It has won all of the awards. Up in Alaska,
[00:29:00] they've got that short field, and takeoff and
landing contest. It won them. (laughter)

BARBARA: And you say that you think they're making them in
Glenrock?

GARY: Yeah, it's Randy. He was -- he stopped down there, I
think it is.

BARBARA: That would make sense, kind of close to Casper.

GARY: Yeah, it's down there.

BARBARA: That's interesting.

GARY: I believe it's Glenrock.

BARBARA: Hmmm, I'll have to find out about that.

JANE: Now he has fun watching our kids fly the remote
controls. Paul has the helicopters, and Randy has the
remote controls, and -- did Randy?

GARY: He got a whole -- that whole bunch of stuff, remote
control, in the box, but he's never done anything with it.
Some guy was selling out, so Randy bought it.

BARBARA: Well, you say you just love flying. So what do you
love about it?

GARY: It's in your blood. That's all I can say. From the
time I that I first, you know, realized that I wanted to
fly, it's just there. [00:30:00] And to be able to get up
-- now, to get into an airline, you know, go across the

country, we've done that quite a bit, but that doesn't thrill me. I love to get in there and hang on to that control. Be in control of it.

JANE: And you call it "flying by the seat of your pants," or something like that.

GARY: Yeah, oh boy. I don't know if you'll ever get a sensation in your tailbone. Boy, I do. Anytime the airplane will make a dip or a rise, I can tell you, even if I got my eyes shut, it's -- I can feel it. They always said "you just fly by the seat of your pants," well, that's where it come from.

BARBARA: That's interesting. I had never thought about that. So, when you go up with your son, or friends, and they let you take the controls?

GARY: Oh yeah. True.

JANE: It's fun. He has fun.

BARBARA: But you don't -- you just -- it sounds like you're just flying [00:31:00] around the countryside, you're not going from one spot to another?

GARY: Oh no, nope, nope, nope. It's just [plain old?] flying, just out, looking around. We took off there one morning, and went to -- almost to Dubois, but the fire up there was so -- the smoke was so thick, we couldn't see to get that far, so we turned and went on up through

Washington Needles, and down around Meeteetse, and back over to Cody, and landed and went in, had breakfast, got back up and took off, went right up through the canyon out in Cody. Now that, that wind blows, that airplane just powered right on up through there, just slick as a whistle.

BARBARA: Wow, that's cool. And, so I got here -- someone describe as the hundred-dollar breakfast. (laughter)

GARY: Yep, there you go. Hundred-dollar hamburger, right there. (laughter)

JANE: Just that same kind of just flying around for the -- [into it?].

GARY: These guys up here, they'll all get together, and fly down to Riverton --

JANE: The airport.

GARY: -- or have breakfast, or they go down if the water's real low on the lake, [00:32:00] they go down and land alongside, in the sandbars along the lake, through their barbecue units out, you know, and have a nice party, and picnic, and when it's over, they all crawl back in their planes and come home.

BARBARA: He was talking about the guys who reminded --

GARY: The Lander Flying Club.

BARBARA: Were you ever a member of that?

GARY: No.

BARBARA: But you have to own a plane to be a member?

GARY: Well, yeah, you should.

BARBARA: And is that still going pretty strong?

GARY: Oh yeah. You bet.

BARBARA: You said there were about 50 planes out there?

GARY: And a lot of them are homebuilt.

BARBARA: Oh yeah, you just said that.

GARY: Yeah, there's a lot of them that have the little
factory planes, you know, the --

BARBARA: Most of the other people I talked to, a lot of them
have said that they think general aviation is really on the
wane. But it doesn't sound like that's true here, if you
have that many little planes here in Lander.

GARY: If you stopped at the BAA convention in Oshkosh, and
walk out on the [00:33:00] flight line, before it starts, a
day before the show starts, there was over 100,000 people
standing there. And it grew to 800,000 people, just to see
that air show. It lasts a week, and there's airplanes
there, that, like I said, I got pictures of airplanes that
I can take and show you for oh, probably three hours.

(laughter) And they're just the ones that interested me!

(laughter)

JANE: From Oshkosh. Very interesting.

GARY: Yeah, it's up and going.

BARBARA: That's interesting, because every -- as I say, the other folks I've talked to have said "it's getting too expensive--"

GARY: There. Right there.

JANE: Yeah, to fly.

GARY: Yeah, well, I give \$6,000 for this airplane. If you would buy one comparable to it, you'd pay 200, 250 thousand. And that engine, that -- it was 180 horse, [light combing?], brand new. [00:34:00] Right now, you can't even touch a used one for \$30,000. So, yeah, the price has gone up, and insurance is what's run it up.

BARBARA: The liability insurance, I'm sure, and of course, the fuel costs, and everything.

GARY: Yeah, we were looking at a little ultralight. Back then, they were [right winged?] with a snow machine engine on them, and it was \$4,000 then. It was a called a Mirage. Well, now, you can't even touch 'em for 30, 35,000. And there are still [right?] wings with a two frame.

(laughter)--

BARBARA: You might as well buy a nice car --

GARY: Snow machine engine on it, oh man --

BARBARA: -- and be done with it.

JANE: And there was only one person can fly it --

GARY: No, there was two.

JANE: -- could have two.

GARY: Yep. Lot of them are two plates.

BARBARA: Now, have you been flying with him? Do you go?

JANE: When I'm --

GARY: She's flown.

JANE: Yes, when our son comes over, [00:35:00] yes, I go with him.

GARY: You flew with Uncle Jay.

JANE: Yeah, and I went with Uncle Jay.

GARY: He was a World War -- he was in World War I in France, and he was a mechanic. But, he learned how to fly there.

BARBARA: And that was your uncle?

GARY: Yeah. Jay (inaudible) [cattle?] out in Riverton. He was my aunt's husband, my dad's sister. He flew until he was 93. Got up one morning, got out of bed, and started walking around the bed, and blacked out, fell down, he said "uh-oh, flying's over with." About ended it right there.

BARBARA: So, do you enjoy it as much as Gary does?

JANE: Oh, yes. Well, probably not as much, but I do enjoy it, yes.

BARBARA: Well, I admire you for that, because, even though I'm doing these interviews, I'm real interested, I'm --

GARY: We don't share that much with Lan--

BARBARA: [Don't care?] [00:36:00] (inaudible) in a little one,
I don't know that would be (inaudible).

JANE: Oh, yes, when you've grown up with the husband that
dearly loves airplanes, and three boys, and I -- I kept the
food and stuff going to them while they were building this
one, and --

GARY: Our middle son was always interested in helicopters.
Well, he went into the Army and became a chopper pilot.
That's the one that's the airport manager there in
Riverton.

BARBARA: Oh, Paul, yeah.

GARY: He was a chopper pilot. He was in Colorado Springs,
and some dignitaries, I mean, high brass, come in, and they
were flying into Denver for some kind of special meeting,
and they told Paul they wanted him to do the flying. And
he took them in, and this high-class brass, whoever it was,
he told Paul, he says he come -- he was on the radio, you
know, earphones -- and he said "now let me know when you're
on the ground," and Paul says "we've -- we're already on
the ground." (laughter) [00:37:00] He was that good.

JANE: He was real good.

BARBARA: See, you didn't tell me that story [on ourselves?].

GARY: Well, he went back to New Jersey, and was flying brass
into Washington, D.C. That was one of his last jobs.

BARBARA: When he was in the service?

GARY: Yeah. He was in Army.

BARBARA: We just talked about the airport, we think fast. He didn't share all that with me.

GARY: He got -- when he was down in Fort Rucker, he used to go up, and way above all the students, and then he'd sit there and watch them, record what they're doing, you know, and if somebody got messed up, then Paul, I guess it was his job to go out and straighten them out (laughter), on the radio, probably. He flew night, you know, nighttime, on their night goggles down there, while the students were learning.

JANE: He enjoys flying well into [uncertainty?].

GARY: I think he's had, twice, he had to put the chopper down in a field with the [00:38:00] trapped metal in one of the engines, and set her down. I never heard a thing. No, he's an excellent pilot.

BARBARA: He must be.

GARY: He took a -- I don't -- he never did finish his private license, so, he started here when he was just a kid.

JANE: And then they got married. (laughter)

GARY: No, he joined the service -- (laughter)

JANE: Oh yeah, he joined the service, and then got married, yep.

GARY: Well, I started out, I joined the Marines as an enlisted pilot. I had my beginner's permit, you know, and so I joined the Marines as a licensed pilot. I made it down to Denver, and flunked my physical. When I was 14, I went over to Meeteetse, I had a leg burn real bad. There was no skin over it, I scraped it with my heel, and it'll start bleeding. The doctors looked at me, says "you are deep [hurtin' in the servicin'?.]" I called him every name [00:39:00] I can think of, because I wanted to get in. At that time, it was \$250 an hour to fly a DC-3. And Frontier was flying DC-3's, and I wanted to get on as an airline pilot. Boy, that was my highest dream. And when he flunked me, and told me to go home, and the service and draft was gone, I didn't have to worry, I said "well, crud, I can get married." (laughter) So, we did.

JANE: With the whole skin graft, they said it --

GARY: Took a year and a half to heal it up, my leg. When I peeled the skin off, about that much of it come with the Band-Aid.

JANE: OK, but we're talking about airplanes -- (laughter)

GARY: Yeah, we're back -- let's go flying. You can take that off the tape.

BARBARA: Yeah, we can edit, don't worry about that part, yeah.

(laughter) That would have been cool to fly those DC-3s.

I've actually -- probably, when I was a kid, I was in one, and I've seen them --

GARY: Ooh, I got to ride in one, [00:40:00], but I never did get to fly one.

JANE: Do you like to fly big planes?

BARBARA: Not especially. (laughter)

GARY: Maybe in a job like this.

BARBARA: Oh, no, the subject is fascinating, it really is.

It's just not something that I want to experience. I have been in a -- one very small plane, I think it was this six passenger -- this was back in California, and my dad took me on a business trip. And that didn't bother me then, I was too young to be scared, you know, or to understand, but part of the problem is that I'm afraid of height, and so, sometimes, that gets to me.

GARY: When I was working for Maddox, I was working derricks. 137 foot up in the air, standing on a two-by-four, or, um, two to 12.

BARBARA: Makes my legs hurt just to hear about it. (laughter) It really does. [00:41:00] Oh my gosh. So, you train your boys up right.

GARY: Yep.

JANE: Yep, they dearly love airplanes.

GARY: They all got a good education. Electronics, Randy was into. Anything electronic. He was in the fire control for the Tomcats. On board the ship.

JANE: And Paul was the mechanic.

GARY: He took -- yeah, he took mechanics on the helicopters, and then his friend, he was riding along, you know, as a door gunner, and his buddy here said "come on, I'll teach you how to fly." And so, Paul, you know he became a warrant officer.

JANE: And Wayne mainly does --

GARY: He joined the Air Force to be a engine mechanic. And they --

JANE: Our youngest.

GARY: -- signed him up for the 30th of --

JANE: 31st, or, no the 29th of February --

GARY: -- no, no, no, the 30th. There is a 29th, yeah.

JANE: -- for members only. I know, but not on that year.

GARY: No, it was a 30th of February, they signed him up, and it was -- [00:42:00] -- they went through the NROTC, and JR, and assured him that he would have that position. Well, when they said "oh, well that date isn't -- it's not even a date, so we'll give you another one," and then Elaine says "can you assure me that I'll get that same?"

"No, no, you'll -- you're out of that," so he said "you're out of me." (laughter) He didn't go.

JANE: February.

BARBARA: That sounds like a real (inaudible).

JANE: So, he's a fantastic mechanic on automobiles.

GARY: If he does something that sticks to his automobile, he's the best one in town.

JANE: And he does lots of remote control flying.

BARBARA: Is there a field or a facility in town where they do the remote control flying?

JANE: A junior high.

GARY: Yeah, he goes all the way up to the junior high and flies his, and there's a fieldhouse parking ground out there where he used to fly.

JANE: Or else he goes out to Uncle Jay's.

GARY: And there's a flying field between here and Riverton that used to belong to my uncle.

JANE: Oh, really?

GARY: And he laid it out, and he's like "you look out there at the windsocks field, and about the [00:43:00] [pale?] outhouse.

BARBARA: OK. And, it -- can you see it from the highway?

GARY: It'll be on the left -- oh yeah, it's on the left of the road if you're going down --

BARBARA: Going back to Riverton?

GARY: Yep. That big flat, after you come out of the curves out of Hudson and end up on that hill, about halfway down that hill.

BARBARA: I will look for that tomorrow on my way to Thermopolis.

GARY: And the ranch that you see on that right, er, left side, that's the Griffin ranch, it belonged to my uncles. Still belongs to my cousins. But my uncle, they went out there and bladed him a strip, so he could takeoff and land with his airplanes.

JANE: Apparent that happened all over. Then someone was telling me about going south of Laramie (inaudible).

GARY: Yeah. And there's another one up South Pass. You go up on the hill from South Pass, it was put in there during World War II.

BARBARA: Oh, that makes sense.

GARY: Yeah. It was an emergency landing strip. [Planes would try slowing over?]

BARBARA: Of course, I've -- in my time [00:44:00] in Wyoming, I've spent a lot of time in the I-80 corridor, and there was the -- all of the fields associated with the airmail service in my 20's, and I've seen a couple of those, seen the ones south of Evanston, at least.

GARY: When we lived in Casper, it was 1940, '41. And I was four years old, had my fifth birthday after I got up to Meeteetse. But anyway, us kids would go out and lay in the sand, and it was right along railroad track. But, that airfield, all them planes were out there training, and we would ran in there one day, and this -- funniest airplane I've ever seen in my life. All it was was just a big long wing. And it had four motors, out the back of that wing. And it flew -- God, we watched it, you know, and I -- that's the last time I ever seen it. Here, about a year or two ago, they come out with this flying wing, that one bomber they've got. That's where it originated.

BARBARA: It must have, [00:45:00], because immediately, I saw that, this stealth you're talking about, that kind of V-shaped thing?

GARY: We were just laying there, and the whole -- we used to watch the 17's and the 24's and all of the fire planes, you know, going back and forth. But when that wing come out, that -- boy, that put a [crease?] in my memory.

BARBARA: I'll bet, I'll bet! Too bad you weren't lying there with your [brownies?], because (inaudible) take some pictures.

GARY: Yeah, get a picture of that one. But they had interviewed the pilots that were flying, you know, when

that -- when they were testing it, and most of them got killed. There was one guy that didn't get killed.

BARBARA: Oh, really? When they were trying to --

GARY: Yep, he -- luckily, he transferred off of them. They were so hard to control.

BARBARA: Well, sure, there was nothing to control.

GARY: Nope. But now, this Bill Carpenter, the friend that I flew model airplanes with, he builds one, you know? Flies it all over, he can do any kind of stunt you want to do with this thing. (laughter) No computers in it or nothing, just good old regular model airplane controls. [00:46:00] Of course, he built a lawnmower and flew it too.

(laughter)

BARBARA: I'd like to see that. So, but you don't do the model airplanes?

GARY: Hell, oh I've still got them hanging up in the garage, but I, I kind of gave up on them. She bought me a model helicopter for Christmas a couple of years ago. It's still in there. (laughter) I hate to wreck them.

JANE: Small one.

GARY: Yeah, it's about that big.

BARBARA: And -- are those the radio-controlled ones you're talking about?

GARY: Yeah, I used to do the string line, oh, I'd build a stunt plane. And it flew so fast, that I'd make about five or six rounds, and I'd get so dizzy, I'd fly [an airplane?]. (laughter) But, you know, straighten it out, take it home, and fix it up again, and take it out, and try it again, but --

BARBARA: Because, you were talking about, it was attached to you, and you're going around and around?

GARY: Yeah, you got two streams, up and down, that's all you got. But you kick the tail off, so that it holds out [00:47:00] tightly [in strength?]. (laughter) That was something else.

BARBARA: I don't know if that would be worse than trying to run alongside and keep up with it, and going around in a circle, but yeah --

GARY: Oh, you couldn't. I'll bet you they can do 150 miles an hour. Just (airplane noises)

BARBARA: So, that's the advantage of the radio, the remote control?

GARY: The radio stopped all that dizzy. (laughter) Yeah, I still got radio controlled stuff in there, airplane stuff. I've given everything I can give to the kids.

JANE: Well, they have more updated --

GARY: They got so much of their own -- yeah. Yeah, they got the good stuff.

BARBARA: Well, and now you've belonged to this experimental aircraft association for so long, and you've been reading the magazines for 40 years. What kinds of changes do you see from when you first started?

GARY: Just like everybody else, everything went from a decent price, for -- back then, a decent price was still expensive. [00:48:00] And now, it's raised, you know, to the point that I don't know how people do it. Even a Cessna, just to buy a Cessna, well, it isn't even 170, 172. It's smaller than that. But it's around 150, 175 thousand. And they sell -- I almost bought one for \$3,500 down in Riverton, a 170. And I, I had the money, had everything set up. He said "you gotta have in-- I went to the bank, and they said "you gotta have insurance." OK. And I run down to the insurance company, they said "well, it's going to cost you about \$150 a month for insurance," because I didn't have my dri-- my pilot's license.

JANE: Pilot's license, yeah.

BARBARA: And you can do your own repairs on --

GARY: Oh, yeah. When it's homebuilt, anything, you can do it, you can repair it. Everything.

JANE: You have to have it checked off, don't you?

GARY: No. You're the one that checks it off when you're a homebuilder.

BARBARA: So, you're [00:49:00] talking about these prices, are for planes that you build yourself?

GARY: Yeah. But still, they're expensive now.

BARBARA: Yeah, that's -- I'm finally getting that.

JANE: They come in kits.

GARY: I'm looking at one that I'd love to own. And you can get it for about \$30,000 for the kit. Then you gotta worry about getting the engine for it, and that's the only other, though. And the motors will run, oh, \$6,000 to \$20,000. But it will run on a 90, 100 horse, clear up to 125, I think. Holds two people, and it's not a cross-country airplane. And the one I'm looking at it's short-field landing and takeoff.

BARBARA: Well, what other [type?] besides the [00:50:00] cost of it, what other changes have you seen in design, or materials, or --

GARY: Yeah, there's a lot of change. The one Dan Nelson built is a Canard, it's got the wings in the back, and the little canard out front, and the motor's out back. That's one of the big changes. And the guy that designed that, Burt Rutan, Dick Rutan, they're building those rockets

going to the moon now. And it's all composite material.
They're not building metal stuff.

BARBARA: Oh, of course. Yeah, because that technology has
changed a lot.

GARY: It's changed yeah.

BARBARA: So it's composite materials.

GARY: They've gone from fiberglass to carbon fiber. That's
the big one. Yeah, you can get a Lancair, two or four
place, then you build it, and the body comes in two halves,
the wings [00:51:00] come in two halves, top and bottom,
and you put it together, and flew it all the way around.
Glue the wings, stick them all together, put it together
with all the -- everything you need in it, and it will fly,
oh, they use a, I don't know, 320s, you know, they're a
pretty good size engine. It will fly in the neighborhood
of 350 miles an hour. (laughter)

BARBARA: Oh my gosh! Be glued together!

GARY: And they're even going into turboprop engines in them.
That's about 150 thousand, 180 thousand, I suppose.

BARBARA: So people are building these all over the country?

GARY: People are -- there's one of those, right down here on
2nd St, the guys putting it together.

BARBARA: Oh really?

GARY: Yep. Lancair, yeah. Dick Rogers.

JANE: Did they still -- does BD still do that little jet,
BD5?

GARY: BD5? I don't know. They've gone in there to -- it's
another company [00:52:00] that's taken over. And, they do
build two place, four place, like the eight that we went
down and seen at one time. They're similar to that, but
they've changed the design on one of them.

BARBARA: Do you still go to airshows?

GARY: The last one we went to was '96? We haven't been
since then. Our kids went --

JANE: Our kids go once in a while.

GARY: They keep going.

JANE: Paul went.

GARY: We took Paul, that '96.

JANE: I know, but he went down with somebody else after
(inaudible).

GARY: Oh yeah, (inaudible), him and--

JANE: Bill?

GARY: Bill.

BARBARA: Do they have airshows here in Lander, or have they
ever?

GARY: Yeah. Oh, you bet, every year.

JANE: Yeah, and they fly and drop bags of flour to try to
hit a certain ar--

BARBARA: Oh, like a target?

GARY: Target.

JANE: Target, in [this backyard?].

BARBARA: Oh, that's cool.

JANE: Yep, they have their --

GARY: And that one year --

JANE: [00:53:00] You see, first part of May.

GARY: When Bob Hoover brought that P-51 in, yeah. That thing -- everybody said "well, he's supposed to be coming," you know. And you'd never hear them coming. (laughter) And then, about 450 mile an hour, and they'd get down low, and it's just (airplane noise) right on top of the airport. Wow! And they'd pull it up, and he goes clear out of sight. Just trying to slow him down.

BARBARA: Well, I --

GARY: I don't know what else we can tell you.

BARBARA: This has been great, this has been so much fun, it really has. I'm glad I finally got a chance to meet you, since we didn't get hooked up last time.

GARY: My dad, like I said, him and Porter Chopping, grew up together, they just lived across the river, the [Deadwind?] River. And Porter, in World War II, was an instructor, [00:54:00], a flight instructor for the pilots down there

in Casper. So, he's -- last time I flew with him, he had a Cessna 340. We went up --

JANE: Who, Porter?

GARY: Yeah. I think he'd sit there, and he would sit there, turn it around sideways, and he was taking it around a bank, and done a 360, and never lost a foot of altitude, sitting there, looking sideways, at the -- really not paying that much attention. But boy, he knew how to fly.

BARBARA: I guess so, oh my gosh. And, I'm not from Wyoming, or this part of Wyoming, so I don't -- I'm not familiar with the Chopping family name.

GARY: Well, Chopping Chevrolet is still going out of Riverton.

JANE: Well, now it's Fremont Motor now.

GARY: It's Fremont Motor, yeah.

BARBARA: Oh, OK, the huge dealership, yeah.

GARY: Yeah, they bought it. So the one that still carries Chopping is a [crash across phase?].

JANE: [00:55:00] (inaudible)

GARY: And him and my dad, they, they grew up together.

JANE: You live in Laramie, then?

BARBARA: I live in Laramie, I've been there about a year and a half.

GARY: Where did you come from?

JANE: California, she said.

GARY: Oh, over (inaudible)?

BARBARA: Many years ago. No, I moved to Wyoming in 1991. And I've lived in Rock Springs, and Cheyenne, and then Evanston for 13 years. Then I went into exile in Florida for four years, and when I came back, I decided to move to Laramie, because I knew people there, and I like it there, I like it a lot. Although people tell me "OK, you've in Evanston, Rock Springs, Laramie, Cheyenne, and now you have to move to [Rollins?], and now, I grow up alone, I'm sorry.

(laughter)

GARY: I lived there for a year. Just to sleep overnight, that's all I did.

JANE: Drive the mail truck.

GARY: Pull into [great?] depot off the railroad in the morning at three o'clock, and the post off at four o'clock, and then [drove all night?] to all get out [00:56:00] to get here by 8:00.

JANE: Yeah. That's (inaudible).

JANE: I'm sorry, my ice cubes are --

GARY: They bad?

JANE: No, they taste like that cabbage that I had in there.

BARBARA: Oh, I can't taste it.

GARY: You're lucky.

BARBARA: You must be more sensitive.

JANE: I smell it too. It's not bothering me at all.

BARBARA: Is your mailing address the same as the street address?

JANE: Six forty-five.

BARBARA: I'm making a copy, so that I can leave with you. And my understanding of the copyright law is, since both of us took part in the interview, then we both sign that log. And the zip code is 8253--

JANE: 82520.

BARBARA: Thank you.

GARY: I don't understand how she gets that pen to work from that left hand.

BARBARA: Practice.

JANE: Upside down. (laughter)

BARBARA: Practice.

GARY: My mom was left-handed.

BARBARA: I'm the only one in my family. [00:57:00]

JANE: Our grandson and daughter-in-law is left-handed, and she writes beautiful. I mean, Linda does a beautiful job writing. Paul's wife.

BARBARA: Yeah. Me, not so much. But, I think -- you know, I think he used a computer for so long, and you're not writing --

JANE: Do you know they don't even teach --

BARBARA: They don't teach cursive anymore.

GARY: Ain't that a something?

BARBARA: The kids can't read it.

GARY: They look it up, they don't even know what it says.

JANE: I know, that's frightening.

BARBARA: I know, I heard the people who work at the American Heritage Center in the archives, this -- for History Day, the teachers will bring the students in, and show them how to do research, and, you know, we got old manuscripts, and this (inaudible), bring this to the kids, can't read it.

JANE: Isn't that unreal?

GARY: Is there any way that I can get my wife to sign this for me?

JANE: No, you just do it.

BARBARA: No, [come here?], whatever's comfortable for you, doesn't matter.

GARY: How about an X?

JANE: Honey, you can sign.

GARY: [00:58:00] I can't even pick the pen up. What do you mean, I can sign?

BARBARA: I should show you where.

GARY: I see it.

BARBARA: Just initial it, that will be good enough.

GARY: OK.

JANE: Oh, you can sign it.

BARBARA: (inaudible)

JANE: It's a com--

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