Audrey Pullen

An interesting life that includes living at the base of Mt. Rushmore as her father carved the monument.

Chapter 01 – 1:08
Introduction

Announcer: Audrey (Anderson) Pullen is the daughter of a man who literally carved out his niche of fame on Mount Rushmore in South Dakota. From 1927 to 1941 the sculptor Gutzon Borglum and 400 workers sculpted the 60-foot carvings of U.S. Presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln.

Audrey lived at the base of Mount Rushmore while her father, Otto "Red" Anderson worked as one of Borglum's carvers. She says she lived a "typical childhood," often climbing the 500 steps leading to the monument to play on the mountain.

Over the years, Audrey became a nurse and enlisted in the U.S. Navy Nurse Corps. In 1945 while living in Denver, Colorado, she met and married Robert Pullen. The couple would settle in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, Robert's home town.

Audrey is a long-time Tahlequah resident, and she continued working as a nurse, living a normal American life, but the monument had a lasting effect on her. She says everyone should see it at least once.

Listen to Audrey Pullen's oral history interview as she takes you to Mt. Rushmore in South Dakota and her home in Tahlequah on *VoicesofOklahoma.com.*

Chapter 02 – 2:45
Coming to America

John Erling: Today's date is September 16, 2016. Would you state your full name, please?
Audrey Pullen: I'm Audrey Anderson Pullen.
JE: Your date of birth and your present age?
AP: December 9, 1922, and I'm ninety-three.

JE: Where are we recording this interview?

AP: In my house in Tahlequah.

JE: Where were you born?

AP: In Mellette, South Dakota.

JE: How did your family come to America?

AP: They came into Wisconsin. I think part of the family was born in Norway and part here, as far as I can tell.

JE: So some of your family in Norway, so you have Norwegian blood.

AP: Uh-huh (affirmative). Henry Anderson is my grandfather.

JE: Do you know approximately when they came, any years that they may have come?

AP: He was born in Wisconsin in 1866.

JE: Your grandfather was born in Wisconsin? But his parents came from Norway.

AP: Yes, Olaf and Karen.

JE: Olaf and Karen. Did they come through Ellis Island?

AP: I haven't found that out yet.

JE: Was your grandfather that homesteaded land? Is that true?

AP: With his brother, Andrew, yes.

JE: Were they very young when they did that?

AP: He was sixteen and they went out to South Dakota and they made it home in a riverbank. They dug out the riverbank and boarded it up. In the spring, the family came out, they got a house up and family came out.

JE: So they actually dug into the riverbank and lived there while they were establishing the land?

AP: Yes.

JE: These boys were awfully young, weren't they, that they could at sixteen—

AP: Well, Keith said they must have kicked them out of the nest early.

JE: Yes. But it's interesting that the government would allow sixteen-year-olds to homestead land.

AP: I think it is.

JE: That's pretty special, that these boys at that age, sixteen, and the other one was?

AP: I don't know how old Andrew was.

JE: Close in age, wasn't he?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: So they lived there, that dugout, I'll call it, for?

AP: Through the winter.

JE: Through the winter? Can you imagine? No electricity?

AP: No, nothing.

JE: Nothing. Do you know if they were building a house?
AP: They got a house up so the family could come.
JE: That's strong stock, isn't it?
AP: It's very strong, yes it is.
JE: Yeah.
Your father's name is?
AP: Otto Edward Anderson.
JE: And your mother's name?
AP: Dorothy Louise Hamilton Anderson.
JE: They met at an early age, did they?
AP: They did, she was eleven and he was thirteen.
JE: And where did they meet each other?
AP: In Mellette.
JE: In Mellette, South Dakota.
AP: Mellette, South Dakota. She'd come to visit her grandparents.
JE: Mellette, where is that in South Dakota?
AP: It's twenty miles south of Aberdeen.
JE: Your parents were married in what year?
AP: Nineteen twenty-one.
JE: And I must say, you are ninety-three years old.
AP: Yes.
JE: You don't look ninety-three.
AP: Thank you.
JE: You have a clear memory and you are able to recall dates and years. You're indeed a very fortunate person.

Chapter 03 – 2:34
Stock Market Crash

John Erling: So then, your parents farmed in South Dakota?
Audrey Pullen: They did but by 1929 the bottom fell out. So Grandfather's aim was to have land for each child. And he got land for each child.
JE: Your father got land and his brother got land.
AP: Uh-huh (affirmative). And the girls did too.
JE: And the girls. But when you say the bottom fell out, what does that mean?

AP: In 1929, the stock market crashed and the banks failed. The banks took your money and then you couldn't pay your bills, so then they took your property. And then—

JE: Yeah.

AP: ...the drought set in. So all the sources of the income were—

JE: It all came together, didn't it?

AP: All came together.

JE: It was a long drought there in South Dakota, North Dakota, I supposed in that whole area.

AP: Yes.

JE: Then their land was taken away.

AP: Well, the boys had to go get jobs, and the girls kept theirs. But eventually, the boys lost theirs, the girls kept theirs.

JE: Because their husbands were able to work?

AP: Well, yes. Aunt Edna married into a German family. My husband said, "You have the blondest kinfolks I've ever seen."

And I said, "The Norwegians married the Swedes and so what did you expect?

JE: Yeah, as—

AP: They married the Germans, so...

JE: It's a very, very blond, it sure does. Right?

AP: It's a very, very blond. And Aunt Alice was the nurse. She was director of nurses in the Rapid City General Hospital and other things and she kept her land.

JE: The boys lost the land and so they had to go out and work.

AP: They had to go job hunting.

JE: Somewhere in here you're born.

AP: Nineteen twenty-two, the first year.

JE: In nineteen twenty-two, yeah. So they have a baby.

AP: I was seven years old when that happened, of course, when they lost everything.

JE: Do you remember having to leave the farm and all that?

AP: Yes.

JE: It had to be tough, it had to be emotionally—

AP: I always felt secure.

JE: Okay, so they didn't put the fear onto you.

AP: No they didn't, we just knew that we didn't ask for anything because we knew that they couldn't do it. And that was all that we did about that.

JE: Right.

AP: Yes.

JE: So your father—

AP: He went job hunting.

JE: What kind of work did he do?

AP: He took the train out to Rapid City, he'd heard there were jobs. He told me he had three gold dollars in his pocket. He went in the restaurant to have breakfast and he heard two men talking about needing two men to help build the studio for Gutzon Borglum.

He said, "I'm both of them." So he got the job. They wanted somebody to mix the mud. He said, "I never let them run out, I kept it mixed." (both laughing). Mother and I came on the train later.

Chapter 04 – 4:20
Mt. Rushmore

John Erling: This is where he begins his Mt. Rushmore experience. He just happened to walk into a restaurant, in what town?

Audrey Pullen: Keystone.

JE: In Keystone. And they were looking for somebody to build a building for the man who became very famous, Gutzon Borglum. And he, of course, was the sculpturer of Mt. Rushmore. So he went to work to build the building for Gutzon—

AP: He was mixing the plaster.

JE: For the building for Gutzon's studio.

AP: For his first studio, um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: When you came out—

AP: Mother and I came on the train.

JE: Where did you live?

AP: We spent the night in the rooming house and then they went house hunting and rented a little house from Mr. Marks. Mr. Marks was the little Jewish tailor.

Somebody recently asked me if we had pictures of him and we don't because she wanted to write a history and include him.

JE: Okay.

AP: So we had a little house.

JE: We're talking now about 19...?

AP: Twenty-nine.

JE: That you actually moved out there.

AP: In the summer of '29.

JE: Summer of '29.

AP: I was in the third grade.

JE: The house that you lived in, did that have electricity and what kind of heat?

AP: It had a kerosene stove and they had electricity part time, from the other work that was going on.

JE: Part time you had electricity?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative), it went out at ten o'clock. Then you turned the lamp on, if you stayed up.

JE: So you read by candlelight, maybe.

AP: No, we had kerosene lamps

JE: Did they have grocery stores there or food you could buy readily?

AP: They did, uh-huh (affirmative). They had Howie's Grocery Store, Lyndo's Grocery Store too.

JE: Tell us about your dad. He went by the nickname Red, didn't he?

AP: He was Rusty in Eastern South Dakota and he was Red in Western South Dakota. (both laughing)

JE: So should I call him Rusty or Red?

AP: Well, he was Red Anderson for a long time.

JE: Okay. He, then, after that building for Borglum, Borglum invited him to work on the mountain.

AP: They had a bunkhouse, which later became a bunkhouse restaurant. And they had a place to sleep and eat. Then he hired him from that.

JE: All right, and what his job, what was Red's job on the mountain?

AP: He was a carver.

JE: A carver?

AP: Uh-huh (affirmative).

JE: And do you know what a carver did?

AP: He sent you back down the mountain in a boson's seat on the end of a cable, carrying your jackhammer, which he said was like carrying a hog. And there you did your work. The pointers marked your place and you did the drilling.

Then he had a call boy and he hoisted you up and down from the hoist house.

JE: So he was not dangling but he was in the air on this swing.

AP: Umm (thoughtful sound), it's a boson's seat on the end of a cable. Somebody said it was a rope but Mr. Borglum would never put them up there on a rope, he was on a cable.

JE: And he's holding this jackhammer.

AP: Jackhammer.

JE: That's got to be very heavy.

AP: It is, um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Dangling, so then they tell him where to drill into the mountain?

AP: Yes. The information comes up from the studio. He marks it out on a ratio of one to twelve, some knew what they were doing, where to do it.

JE: So they'd send up a paper that said, "Here, this is where you drill, this is where you drill." What was the drilling for?

AP: It was removing tons of rock.

JE: What they're drilling into is granite.

AP: It's granite.

JE: In the face of Mt. Rushmore. Gutzon Borglum was a Danish American.

AP: He was.

JE: His son Lincoln was part of this as well. Of course, they were working on the four presidents, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln. That's interesting how this idea even came about.

AP: I think he just was a man of great vision.

JE: As I understand it, it was a South Dakota historian, Doane Robinson.

AP: Yes. Doane, um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: He conceived the idea of carving the likeness of famous people into the Black Hills.

AP: Well, he thought it would be good for South Dakota to have a major attraction.

JE: And then—

AP: And they discussed who it should be and then they decided.

JE: Robinson wanted it to feature western heroes like Lewis and Clark and Red Cloud and Buffalo Bill Cody, but it was Mr. Borglum who said it should be more of a national focus.

AP: He was already a famous sculptor.

JE: Before he even started this, okay. So then that's how the four presidents came about.

Chapter 05 – 5:49
Gutzon Borglum

John Erling: How was this funded?

Audrey Pullen: Well, it was difficult to fund it but Mr. Borglum often went to Washington and they just said, "He's gone to Washington to get funds."

And they said, "Will he get them?"

And they said, "He always does."

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

AP: And he was at home with any kind of people anywhere, he got along with everybody.

JE: Well, do you remember as a child being around him or seeing him?

AP: Yes, we met him.

JE: Was he a nice person?

AP: Oh, we thought he was great. He was unique looking, he always wore knickers and a scarf and a Stetson.

JE: Oh, and a Stetson.

AP: I was dishwasher in the restaurant when we heard this big explosion that we weren't supposed to hear. And a big rock came down the steps and he ran out of studio without his scarf and his Stetson, to see if he was still all right. And he was still all right, you know.

JE: A big boulder came down?

AP: Uh-huh (affirmative). Something went wrong.

JE: And something went wrong.

AP: But it was still all there.

JE: It could have killed somebody.

AP: It could have spoiled the work too.

JE: Yes. How many years did this go on, your father working there?

AP: We went out in '29 and he left in '41, when Mr. Borglum died.

JE: Twelve, thirteen years he was there. And he was always in the air, this very dangerous job, on this swing?

AP: Well, he got promoted all along, and so he—

JE: Okay, what did he get promoted to?

AP: It—the carvers were at the top well before that and then they had drillers too.

JE: Okay, so it was a driller at first?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: And then the actual carving—

AP: It's called carvers, yes, uh-huh (affirmative).

JE: And I wonder kind of tools they used for carving.

AP: Well, they're very simple but they had something called the "bumper." After they needed to smooth out what the jackhammer had done.

He said he worked the most on Washington and it was the most finished. He worked some on all of the, quite a lot on Lincoln.

JE: We see pictures of them then, even in the nose or on the nose.

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: And in the eye of one of the presidents. But he worked the most on George Washington?

AP: Yes.

JE: It must have been difficult for them to do that kind of work.

AP: Well, people would say, "How does it feel when you look down there?"

And they all said, "We don't look down there." (both laughing)

You know, they were very close to each other and had a good sense of humor and played jokes on each other.

JE: How many men do you think it was working on it?

AP: There weren't very many. Dad just called them a handful.

JE: So it could have been twelve, fifteen men that were doing the actual work?

AP: Some of them would stay a day and then some would stay longer.

JE: Okay. Nobody lost their lives, did they, by an accident?

AP: No, my dad had an accident. The hoist man, he leaned back to straighten his back against this cable and he let it go slack. And so Dad went sailing out and back again. He just had time to cover his face with is arms.

JE: But he still was attached to that swing?

AP: He was attached to the cable on his boson's chair.

JE: And so he was loose then, swinging for a while.

AP: Uh-huh (affirmative). He swung out and swung back.

JE: Wow, that was a nervous time. Your mother probably was quite nervous about the work he was doing?

AP: Well, I think she was nervous anyway (laughs) but she might as well just accept what he was going to. So...

JE: Isn't it true that your mother and other wives would climb to the top of the mountain?

AP: We all did.

JE: You did that too?

AP: We kids, we went up there, yes.

JE: To bring them lunch?

AP: No, he carried his lunch.

JE: So you just went up there to visit?

AP: We just played up there.

JE: Up in the mountain?

AP: Uh-huh (affirmative).

JE: Not around the presidents' faces?

AP: Yeah, we just played up there

JE: Did you really?

AP: It had about five hundred steps so you could just climb the steps. But Ed Hayes had the tram. They called it "the bucket," and you could ride up, he'd let you ride up in the bucket too, which gives you a really good view.

JE: Okay. So did you actually play in and around the faces of the presidents?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: You played on George Washington's face? No, you couldn't have done that.

AP: No, we didn't go over the front, we were just on top.

JE: On the top?

AP: Right.

JE: So then on the back side of this, this is just a flat back, isn't it?

AP: No, it's more interesting back there than you'd think. We went back there too. You could climb down, go across, climb up and come back.

JE: So then you're playing again was on top of these faces? And then you could come back down again. So they built steps up there, obviously, for you to go up there.

AP: Well, first they just had some very rugged steps and they had a ladder. And then they build these steps. Then they got the tram and you could ride up.

JE: Did people come to gather to watch this? Were there a lot of people who were watching what was being constructed?

AP: Well, at first they would say, "What does your father do?"

And I would say that he's a Mt. Rushmore carver. And they had no idea what that meant. It wasn't a household word like now.

JE: Yeah, well, they couldn't believe—

AP: No.

JE: ...or know what was happening.

AP: Uh-uh (negative). And some said, "Oh, that's a waste of money."

JE: So there were those who were for it and against it.

AP: Well, just sort of indifferent and they'd say, "Mr. Borglum didn't come in and pay is bill." He said, "I'm going to bring millions of dollars in here, why worry about my bill?" (laughing)

JE: I suppose there were times when the money was running out and then that would affect your family.

AP: They said that if the temperature got to 32 they didn't have to

JE: Thirty-two degrees, you mean?

AP: Uh-huh (affirmative). They didn't have to go to work that day, but otherwise, they had to shut down when they were out of funds and they had to shut down when it was too cold.

JE: You—

AP: And they put on everything they could to keep warm.

JE: That meant you didn't have any money coming in at some times, then?

AP: Yes, that, and they had to hunt for something else.

JE: So even while he was a carver he had to find another job?

AP: That's right, that's what they did.

JE: Tough life, wasn't it?

AP: Uh-huh (affirmative). Well, they didn't do a lot of complaining. When I grew up and maybe when you grew up bellyaching was a bad thing and you don't do that, you don't complain.

JE: Bellyaching, I haven't heard that one for a long time.

AP: I know but I thought you'd know what that was.

JE: Yeah.
AP: You don't bellyache.
JE: You don't bellyache.
AP: And they didn't.
JE: That's right.

Chapter 06 – 5:34
Rushmore Drillers

John Erling: I understand they were going to present the faces waist high.
Audrey Pullen: That was the hope in the beginning, but...
JE: But then they decided not to because?
AP: Well, they ran out of money and Mr. Borglum died.
JE: When Mr. Borglum—
AP: And then World War II began.
JE: When Mr. Borglum died, was it finished as far as the faces are concerned or did the carvers continue on and finish?
AP: It was pretty well finished but his son Lincoln stayed there and he'd always been with his father. And so they made the conclusion they had gone as far as they could go.
JE: Now your mother, didn't she work at the base of the sculpture?
AP: Well, there was an information booth on the highway. My father always thought that the man made the living and the woman shouldn't go to work. But he didn't mind if she was in the information booth.
JE: Oh (laughing).
AP: Because she knew a lot about the whole thing.
JE: Did she get paid for doing that?
AP: Yeah, I think it was a paid job.
JE: So people would come by and ask questions—
AP: Um-hmm (affirmative).
JE: ...and she could answer everything about them.
AP: Um-hmm (affirmative).
JE: Do you remember the cars that you drove back then?
AP: We had something called a Whippet.
JE: Yes, I knew that.
AP: A new Whippet. And later we got a V-8 Ford, that was really a good thing to have.

JE: Right.

AP: I didn't drive. They had a Model 8 roadster with a rumble seat, that kind of car. I was in school with Donald Clifford, we called him Nicky. He had bought an old car and we'd ride around in it. It had belonged to Mr. Snowy, and when he couldn't drive anymore the boys bought it.

JE: There's a baseball element to this too. Your father was a baseball player.

AP: He was.

JE: Liked to play baseball.

AP: He liked all sports.

JE: Tell me about that and Mr. Borglum.

AP: Well, they loved baseball. He was good at it. Dad was the catcher, for the most part, and played other positions. And his team got good and they went over to Aberdeen to the State Conference.

There, some people saw them coming in and they didn't have any equipment or uniforms or anything and they said, "Oh, they must be ballplayers, they sure as hell don't have any equipment."

Lincoln found that out and he said, "Next year they'll have it." And he got them jackets and he got them equipment.

JE: This is a good time for me to mention that you put together a book detailing some of the things we're talking about.

AP: Yes.

JE: With pictures, and I was just trying to page through the pictures because you have a picture here of them in their baseball uniform. And the name of the town, here it is.

AP: Yeah, they're the Rushmore Drillers.

JE: That's perfect, isn't it?

AP: Uh-huh (affirmative), they're the Drillers.

JE: And there's a picture of them there, we'll have on our slide show. I suppose that Mr. Borglum and your father connected because of baseball and all of this work together.

AP: Lincoln was too, he was a big part of it. And Lincoln was really good with all the men and he kept everything all smoothed out. He was a good looking young man and we all admired him, the whole family.

JE: Okay.

AP: And Mrs. Borglum was just quite a nice lady.

JE: And while they were doing this they had no idea what this was going to mean to America.

AP: No they didn't.

JE: They didn't know what it was going to mean.

AP: At first you just needed a job. And then if you could play baseball, you had a better chance of getting a job

JE: When did your father die?

AP: January 3, 1979.

JE: And what did he die of?

AP: Granite silicosis.

JE: Granite silicosis?

AP: And lung cancer.

JE: And lung cancer. This all came because he had been working on Mt. Rushmore and he got it from the rock dust. So there were those, while they didn't have accidents, they did die as a result of their work there.

AP: They did, um-hmm (affirmatives).

They had respirators and they wore the respirators faithfully but it didn't take care of everything. They were covered with rock dust.

JE: Oh, they wore respirators while they were up there working?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative). They had a mask on.

JE: What were the respirators for?

AP: It was to keep the dust out.

JE: And it, obviously, couldn't do it 100 percent.

AP: No. Orville Worman said he made a hole in his and put his pipe in there. And Lincoln saw him. And he went back up and took that respirator, put another one on him and told him, "Don't make a hole in it and put your pipe in that."

JE: Yeah. Were there health facilities, hospitals in the area?

AP: They went to Rapid City.

JE: How far was that?

AP: About twenty miles. He used to get a little bit of steel in his eye and then he'd have to go to have that out.

JE: Steel in his eye that would come from?

AP: Just from the work. It happened several times.

JE: Did you have brothers and sisters?

AP: No, we had a little girl for a little while. We had her for three years and then she was adopted.

JE: Oh, so you were a foster home for her then, perhaps?

AP: It just wasn't labeled, it was just a mother that needed a place for her baby.

JE: The first school you attended was there.

AP: That was the third grade, I was going to third grade there.

JE: And you had started first grade—

AP: In Mellette, at Palmer's School, it was a one-room schoolhouse.

JE: The third grade thought—

AP: Was Keystone.

JE: Was Keystone, and that was a bigger school.

AP: It was consolidated.

JE: Consolidated school, right. And then you went to elementary there. Did you go on to junior high school there?

AP: I went there until the eleventh grade, and then I would, graduated from Rapid City High School.

JE: Women received the right to vote in 1920, that was before you were born. Did women in your life ever discuss being able to vote?

AP: No, and I think about the women and women's rights, which is very important, I don't remember any of the women in my family ever being very timid about anything. They just all seemed to be strong in their own way

JE: They didn't need somebody telling them they had rights, huh?

AP: No, I don't think they did.

JE: Do you remember the first time you voted? And was that a presidential election? And who did you vote for?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative). Oh, I voted Republican (laughs).

Chapter 07 – 1:35
Dust Bowl

John Erling: John Erling: Nineteen thirty-two you're ten years old and you're living at Keystone. Now the Great Depression, of course, in 1929 through '39, but you were able to survive the Great Depression because of the work of Mt. Rushmore.

Audrey Pullen: Yes.

JE: So you didn't feel any of the effects of that.

AP: Oh, we did, we just had the essentials, mostly. But our mothers were very capable and our fathers were too.

JE: You hadn't come to Oklahoma yet.

AP: That was 1945, that was after World War II.

JE: All right. And in that time period, the Dust Bowl was taking place here.

AP: It was taking place there too, in South Dakota.

JE: Oh, was it really?

AP: They still had farmland in Mellette and the Dust Bowl was there. They couldn't keep it out of the house, it just came through the doors and windows.

JE: You remember that yourself?

AP: Uh-huh (affirmative). Yeah, that's what the family talked about. They swept out the door and it came through the windows, piled on the windowsills anyway.

JE: We often think about Oklahoma as being the Dust Bowl state.

AP: I know it but I don't know what that is.

JE: So then it had to have affected Kansas and Nebraska and South Dakota, that whole area.

AP: They didn't lose their land immediately. At first they'd have wonderful crops and then they'd have poor crops and then they'd have no crop. And then they'd hope they had enough seed to plant a new crop.

Mother and I would go back there and she'd make arrangements to do that. The ground was cracked open and the toads were hopping out.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

AP: It was really dry.

JE: Yeah.

AP: Grasshoppers were eating the fence posts, that's what they said about it.

JE: Grasshoppers were eating fence posts. Sometimes it was a whole flight of grasshoppers.

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: You see them, it could even almost look like a dust cloud but it would be grasshoppers flying.

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative).

Chapter 08 – 3:14
FDR and Polio

John Erling: Back to the president, President Roosevelt was president from 1933 to 1945. So you voted against President Roosevelt in your first election.

Audrey Pullen: Must have. By then I'd met the young man I was going to marry and he was a Democrat and I voted Republican. But I don't remember what, so I guess that's why we didn't talk about.

JE: What was your husband's name?

AP: Robert Pullen.

JE: Let me ask you about President Roosevelt. Do you have memories of him, like listening to him on the radio?

AP: Oh, we saw him.

JE: Where?

AP: Well, he drove along in an open car and we all stood around at the foot of the mountain.

Everybody talked with him and he just waved to everybody and talked to Mr. Borglum. I'd asked Mother why the National Guard was there and she said, "Just to honor him." There wasn't any other reason to guard him.

JE: So he did make a visit while Mt. Rushmore was being carved?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: And then his famous relative Theodore Roosevelt was on there.

AP: Yeah.

JE: So that was probably what brought him out, do you think?

AP: I don't know, I imagine Mr. Borglum did it.

JE: But you distinctly remember seeing Franklin Roosevelt?

AP: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah.

JE: He died April 12, 1945. Do you have memories of that, when he died?

AP: I was in San Diego, California, in the Nurse Corps. My buddy and I had gone uptown for lunch and we heard it on the radio.

JE: How were people feeling?

AP: We were feeling the way we do now (laughs). And who was Harry Truman?

JE: Who was Harry Truman?

AP: Yeah, that's what we thought.

JE: Did you know that President Roosevelt had polio?

AP: Yes, they had the March of Dimes and you had functions where you put dimes in. It grew into other things too but we knew that he had it.

JE: Did you know anybody else who had polio?

AP: Oh, yes, yes, that was the scare for a long time.

JE: Because it was a contagious disease. You would get that by being—

AP: If you were super clean you were in more danger than if you weren't because you didn't have the immunity. Then your mothers bring you in to rest, and all that.

JE: But nobody there working on the mountain families, that little village, nobody had polio there?

AP: No, I don't think they did. But my husband had a cousin who had it, they had it in Oklahoma. And I had friends that were nursing there. It was very tedious work. They put them in hot stukes, they called the really hot packs. Did it after Sister Kennedy developed it, they did it wherever they were treating polio.

JE: Tell us again how they treated it.

AP: Hospitals called them stupes, but it was a hot pack. You used very hot water and you got all the water wrung out of it. You put it in a washing machine, put it through the wringer, and then you put that on the limbs. It's massage and exercise and use heat, minimize the damage.

JE: That didn't completely minimize it but you're right.
AP: That was a new treatment and controversial.
JE: Why was that controversial?
AP: Well, the medical profession didn't think that that was sufficient, that they thought they probably didn't really have it, but they really did have it.
JE: Didn't have what?
AP: Polio. And my roommate worked in that after she graduated.
JE: It just attacked the limbs of the people. Do you remember when the Salk Vaccine was discovered and announced?
AP: Yes.
JE: Tell us where you were and how it—
AP: Oh, I was here and had little children. And we were concerned about our little children too, so we were glad that there was a vaccine.

Chapter 09 – 4:47
Navy Nurse Corps

John Erling: Now you referred to earlier, you were in the navy...
Audrey Pullen: San Diego, the Navy Nurse Corps.
JE: And what made you join the Navy Nurse Corps?
AP: Well, that's just what you did.
JE: How old were you?
AP: I was twenty.
JE: How long were you in the Navy Nurse Corps?
AP: Just till the end of the war, it wasn't very long. I joined the navy and they sent me six months to Fitzsimons Army Hospital in Denver. And then from Fitzsimons Army Hospital—there I had a ward of nurses who had gotten tuberculosis in the service. And then I went to San Diego.
JE: Now you didn't have to enlist in the navy?
AP: No, no.
JE: But tell us why you did.
AP: Well, I was the only one we had in the family. Mother said she'd be going crazy and Dad said, "I'm proud of her."
JE: You know, you're to be admired. You could have just not to have gone in the navy. It was in honor of the war effort that you did it.

AP: Well, when you sit in school with all these guys and they're all off in World War II and somebody's going to have to take care of them and that's what you've been taught to do, so it wasn't any difficult decision.

JE: Okay, were you a nurse before you joined the navy?

AP: Yes.

JE: Okay, so I didn't understand that.

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: How did you become a nurse? Where did that training start?

AP: At Denver General Hospital. They had nurses quarters. They called it our Friends School for Nurses at Denver General Hospital.

JE: Did you want to be a nurse from early on? Is that—

AP: Yes, my Aunt Alice was a nurse and I think that's one of the things I came into the world to do.

JE: Okay, so you had the calling to be a nurse. And then since you were trained that way, then you decided, "I need to go in and support these soldiers." What kind of a hospital were you working in in the Navy Nurse Corps?

AP: It had been Balboa Park and it had been a—

JE: In San Diego?

AP: In San Diego, been a park.

JE: What was the nature of injuries or the sickness that the soldiers had?

AP: Well, my healthcare is at the VA Hospital and we have a woman's advocate. And I told her recently that if anybody said anything about the veterans I was inclined to bite their head off.

And she said she was too, because if you haven't walked in their shoes you don't know what you're talking about. And so I went to a function out at the Heritage Center and this nice professor came up from Emory University in Georgia, where my husband had been. We were talking together and he said, "It was pretty much all over, wasn't it, when they came back to San Diego?"

And I said, "Not if your face is blown off."

JE: Umm (thoughtful sound).

AP: That just never goes away.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative), right.

AP: You don't know what it is. Most of them where I first went were shot in the chest and they had chest wounds.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound). December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor, where were you and what are your recollections of that day?

AP: Mother and Dad had just moved out to Denver. They were going to do job hunting and war work. Dad went somewhere and Mother and I were in the motel. It came on the radio, so we said, "Now what?" And I just got on the streetcar and went back to the nurses quarters.

JE: You were already in school?

AP: I was already in school, I was already where I needed to be.

JE: Yeah. Was there fear of what's going to happen next?

AP: No, I don't remember ever being afraid. I don't think we had much to fear growing up.

JE: Yeah.

AP: My oldest son said, "You just surround yourself with good, reliable people and you don't pay any attention to what else is out there." And there wasn't anything else out there.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

AP: All the people that are around me, none of the men in my family were ever bad to me.

JE: Yeah.

AP: Not my father nor grandfathers nor uncles nor cousins, they just never were, so I wasn't ever afraid.

JE: The war ended with the surrendering of Japan August 15, 1945. What are your recollections of that time?

AP: I was just getting ready to go to work and glad that it was over.

JE: There must have been celebration, jubilation, you went to work at the hospital, everybody happy?

AP: I think somebody got some alcohol out of the locked closet and we all had a drink. (both laughing)

JE: But the soldier that were there had to be excited that this was over and…

AP: Well, I think most of them were through anyway and those that were still on active duty were glad they weren't going from Europe to the Pacific. They had enough by then. It was a relief and always controversial about whether we should have done what we did, but…

Two people that I know from Rushmore, one is Don Clifford, he's just about a year older than I, and one is Bob Hayes. He was two when I was seven so we got together later as friends. And I'm in touch with him now. His father ran the tram and the hoist bucket. He took the honor flight to Washington. He graduated from high school and joined the service and the war was over in May in Europe.

Chapter 10 – 1:40
War of the Worlds

John Erling: Do you remember, it was in 1939, the War of the Worlds and Orson Welles?

Audrey Pullen: Yes (laughing).

JE: What is your memory of that?

AP: I was taking care of the neighbor's children and the people were out in the street. We wall went out in the street. Somebody figured it out pretty quickly that it wasn't real, that it was a theatrical production.

JE: It was a drama they took from H. G. Welles' novel *The War of the Worlds*.

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: People had been listening to it on the radio—

AP: And they were out on the street talking to each other.

JE: Where were you when that happened?

AP: I was at the neighbor's house in Keystone. It was Frank Hughes and Jane T. Hughes's house.

JE: Were people afraid at first that aliens were coming into the world?

AP: They didn't seem to be very upset but they were trying to figure out what was going on. And they soon realized that it wasn't true.

JE: Right, there weren't—

AP: They just went out on the street but I didn't see any panic.

JE: Did you actually hear the broadcast?

AP: No, I just saw the people out on the street.

JE: You remember listening to the radio back then?

AP: Oh, I had some favorite programs, *Little Orphan Annie*.

JE: *Little Orphan Annie*, any other radio programs?

AP: That was my favorite but I liked some country music from down in Texas

JE: I suppose your family listened to the news on the radio?

AP: Well, in Mellette you always heard about the price of Red Durham wheat and bull and China hogs.

JE: Right.

AP: That was my idea of the radio.

JE: That was the farming, yes.

AP: Yes.

JE: How about movies back then? Do you remember movies like *Wizard of Oz* or—

AP: That was a little bit later but something would come to town and then you'd see a show on Saturday. And the *Wizard of Oz*, I asked my mother what a tornado was and she said that it was something that people out in Kansas had.

JE: (laughing)

AP: So we didn't worry about it.

Chapter 11 – 7:36
Tahlequah in the '40s

John Erling: Let's talk about, you met your husband and, again, his name was Robert Pullen. And where did you meet?

Audrey Pullen: A patient introduced me to him in Denver.

JE: He was a soldier?

AP: He had gone to be a pilot and he was colorblind to green and gray, so they sent him to Denver to learn about the bomb site on a B-17.

JE: And that's how you met?

AP: Uh-huh (affirmative). One of his kinfolk, I'd known her before, she had written to me and said could her kinfolks call me. She had two kinfolks in Denver that didn't know anybody. Yeah, that's how I met him.

JE: When were you married?

AP: In 1945.

JE: He then was from here in Tahlequah?

AP: He was in Tahlequah.

JE: Your Oklahoma story begins then. What did Robert do?

AP: The Pullens always had their own business and at that time they had a home and auto store, Otasco, Oklahoma Tire and Supply.

JE: Did they own a franchise?

AP: Yes.

JE: How many children did you have?

AP: Two.

JE: And their names?

AP: Robert Christopher and Bruce Edward.

JE: So that was your main income then, from Otasco for a long time?

AP: Well, it was, yes. I did some nursing in a reserve type nursing. Sometimes at the old Indian hospital, sometimes at the city hospital.

JE: Let's talk about Tahlequah back then. In 1945 and up to 1950.

AP: Well, when we came to town they said, "There's absolutely no places for you to get a house. You can't have a house of your own."

But my husband found us a little house that we were real proud to have. For a short time, when they had to have it back.

JE: You had the house for a short time and then had to give it up?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Why?

AP: Well, the owners had sold their house and they had to go live in it themselves.

JE: Okay.

AP: And then we got a garage apartment and we were really happy to get that too. Then we wen house hunting.

JE: The businesses, you remember the names of businesses here in Tahlequah at that time? Grocery stores or restaurants?

AP: Yeah. Well, they had a lot of, they call them Mom and Pops now, I never did, but Mr. and Mrs. Bodie and Mr. and Mrs. Dawson, Mr. and Mrs. Everett Bolen and all like this downtown.

JE: Racially then, right now today, this is the headquarters for the Cherokee Nation, Tahlequah is. But where there African Americans living here?

AP: Yeah, some of this was my first experience. We didn't know any in South Dakota so it was different. Also in the navy too, people commented on my lack of discrimination. (laughs) But right now, two of my friends have bought the old Antioch Methodist Church. They've just bought it. It's from 1877, it had some really good people in it and they moved into a new facility and it was vacant. So they're going to do something to preserve it.

JE: Good. But there wasn't any racial unrest or strife back then in the '40s and '50s?

AP: Those that I knew were just really good people. They had three great big sons and had the little mama and then she told them all what to do and they did it. They were really very well loved.

JE: Yeah.

AP: Just like they were.

JE: Of course, Oklahoma was very much a segregationist state.

AP: Yes.

JE: And in many areas blacks could not use drinking fountains or restrooms or restaurants. Did that happen here in Tahlequah?

AP: Yes it did. One of my younger friends had a job taking tickets at a theater and they wouldn't let them in. A group came in and she sold them all tickets and they said that this one would have to go out. And she said, "They all said, "We'll all leave then.' "

JE: So did they leave? Because she wouldn't sell a ticket to a—

AP: Oh, she would, but the management wouldn't. She just did it already. She didn't worry about it

JE: Right.

AP: But the management wouldn't.

JE: So the group, did they leave or did they stay?

AP: They left. She said, "I've never been able to forget having to do that, give them their money back."

JE: Because of the girl that was African American?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative). We didn't even use political language when we grew up. You didn't either, I don't—

JE: Well, back then, I suppose, it was Negro, that word? Is that the way you referred to them?

AP: I don't think we knew much about it at all.

JE: There was no point in saying black, yellow, red, or white?

AP: Um-um (negative). We didn't know any.

JE: You didn't have a name?

AP: There was one in Rapid City that worked in the barbershop. We just didn't know anything about it. But one of them was named Lucien Maxie, he delivered for the trucking company. And I told my son that Lucien had died and he said, "Why didn't you tell me so I could come to his service?"

I said, "I'll show you where he's buried in the black cemetery out east by the hospital."

He said, "Why isn't he over there with the rest of us?"

And I said, "He probably wants to be with his people and be buried in another place."

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

AP: They weren't welcome at the library.

JE: That must have bothered you coming from up north and not feeling—

AP: Well, my cousin Helen was the same, she didn't know any more about it than I did.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). So that had to be kind of a shock for you to come here and see the way blacks were treated.

AP: We just couldn't understand it. Of course, we were raised on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Did they read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to you?

JE: (laughs) No.

AP: They did to us (laughing).

JE: The Native Americans, were they treated any differently?

AP: Ross Swimmer was chief of the Cherokees and we went to the same church. He and his wife, Margaret, and their little boys. And she said, "We're trying to teach them they can keep their culture without poverty."

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

AP: "You don't have to be poor to keep your culture. But just taken a while." But they had leaders that tried to do that.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

AP: Joe Grayson was the deputy chief and he's a friend of my son's from the first grade. They were Vietnam vets and they're best friends but they were having more of a hard time than I realized.

JE: Wilma Mankiller, does that name mean much to you?

AP: Yes, she was really easy to talk to. I was for a while archivist at our church. Our priest brought me a phone number from the Smithsonian. They wanted me to call. They were doing stories about women in clergy and there was a Cherokee woman from Muskogee who was coming over here to do a service. And the children were going to sing.

The Smithsonian kept calling because they didn't know about this culture. And they would say, "What are they doing in this picture?"

I finally told them, "The photographer's a good friend of mine. And I asked him and he sent me really nice pictures and I'll identify them and send them to you."

Wilma Mankiller was at home so I called her. She was all right with it, so I called the Smithsonian and said, "She's at home and she'll talk to you. That is the best connection you can make, just directly to the chief."

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

AP: And she never lost that quality.

JE: First female chief of any Nation.

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative). There's a new book I just bought this week about the baskets that they made and it contains more history than I realized. They'd sell a nice basket for ten cents and maybe they could make forty dollars in a year.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound), the Native Americans were doing that?

AP: And they did.

JE: Making baskets?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative). But they came to be appreciated after a while.

JE: Yeah.

AP: But when I worked in the Indian hospital it was quite different then.

JE: How was that?

AP: They could come in and stay as long as they needed to. They didn't have to be hurried out. The women were very sweet, gentle people.

Chapter 12 – 4:06
Billy Graham

John Erling: You worked as a registered nurse in a place called Go Ye Village.

Audrey Pullen: Yes, I was there one year.

JE: Back then it was a whole complex, the Go Ye Mission and Markoma Bible Academy.

AP: It was part of the Billy Graham family.

JE: I think it was at Billy Graham's uncle.

AP: Well, Billy Graham came to preach at one of their funerals. And the Graham house is there, just the other side of Go Ye Village. Markoma School was there.

JE: So Billy Graham's uncle, I don't know what his name was, do you?

AP: No. Tom Graham was a dentist and they were family of the Grahams.

JE: So these were Billy's aunts, uncles, or something, and he had these families here. Then he came and spoke at the funeral of his uncle.

AP: It's somebody, I don't know it's all about that.

JE: Where you there?

AP: No, my mother's doctor told me that what we were doing wasn't working anymore, we would have to change and he wanted to go to Go Ye Village because it was the best med center around. That's where she went and at that time they took private-pay patients. She was there six years.

JE: Who was that, do you—

AP: My mother. I worked there the year before but after Mother was a patient there I didn't. I go there now to play bridge, become residents.

JE: Do you remember the fear of communism in the '50s?

AP: Well, I didn't take it too seriously. Recently, the last week, a friend lent me a book called *Legacy of Ashes*. It's about the CIA and how poorly they had done with everything. My personal view is that politics is a little bit difficult and Native American politics is more difficult than that. I don't feel a bit knowledgeable about that.

JE: The Korean War was between 1950 and '53. How did that affect your families?

AP: Well, they told some of our husbands that they were going to have to come back in, and they didn't want to go back in. But they didn't go back in.

JE: Because they'd already served in World War II.

AP: They had already served, um-hmm (affirmative). Those that were a little younger went and they feel like they were in a forgotten war.

JE: When you were a nurse here then, in Tahlequah, what did church did you attend?

AP: When I first came I went to the Methodist with my mother-in-law, but then we started the Episcopal church. I'm an Episcopalian.

JE: So did you get involved in the church?

AP: I got involved in the church, yeah. The director from Grace Church Muskogee came over here to this room and they called some people in and so we began.

JE: You began a church right here in this room?

AP: We had our first meeting here.

JE: President Kennedy assassinated November 22, 1963, you're forty-one. What do you remember about that day?

AP: It was just appalling. My husband called me and I couldn't believe it.

JE: And the nation was in mourning for a long time.

AP: My husband was the greatest admirer of John Kennedy. He went to Oklahoma City because Kennedy was going to be there. They thought he was part of the cavalcade so they just waved him in too. And he said it was one of the highlights of his life.

JE: What did he do, just walked along with them?

AP: No, he drove, he had a new green Cadillac with fins on the back and they thought he was part of the—(laughing). So—

JE: Oh?

AP: One of his favorite things was that. None of the scandals had developed yet.

JE: Scandals about Kennedy?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative). You just continued to think that he was special and flawless. It's become popular now to look for anyone's prominence to see what flaws they might have, you know.

JE: Yes.

AP: Washington had flaws and Jefferson had flaws. I don't think Teddy Roosevelt had so many flaws.

JE: You're pointing out that we're all human, is what you're saying.

AP: Depends on where you want your emphasis, I think. They'd call me ask me about Mr. Borglum's bad temper. I said, "It was never complained of at our house."

Radio or public television, somebody called, fishing around, you know. "What was his disposition?"

I said, "Nobody ever complained about him at our house."

JE: Did he have—

AP: I think he had an artistic temper, no doubt.

JE: Yeah.

AP: He wanted it to be as perfect as he could make it.

JE: Did he ever get mad at your father?

AP: No, they had the greatest respect for each other.

Chapter 13 – 4:34
George W. Bush

John Erling: Your father had to be awfully proud that he worked on Mt. Rushmore.

Audrey Pullen: I think he grew to be proud of that. And Mr. Borglum gave him a signed photograph, "To my good friend, Red Anderson."

JE: As they were working on it for these twelve, thirteen years, the images started appearing more and more.

AP: All across the world. We would go to London every year and there'd be a big billboard with Mt. Rushmore, all over the world.

JE: And that was a proud time, wasn't it?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: But I'm thinking about the actual time that they were working up there. He was a carver, he'd come back down and look back up and then he could realize, "This is what I'm working, now I see the eyes, now I see the nose." And it started becoming real to him.

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative). It became a large part of his life.

JE: Those of you who were standing at the bottom, you'd watch them work and then you'd see over time then, the images are coming through stronger.

AP: And then I think even after that they'd have a gathering and the little kids would come over and say, "Are you one of the carvers? Could I have autograph?" It was fun for him.

JE: So they did become celebrities—

AP: Um-hmm, um-hmm (affirmatives).

JE: ...because they realized—

AP: They really did, uh-huh (affirmative).

JE: ...what was happening.

AP: When President Bush came for the 50th we were disappointed in that.

JE: Why?

AP: Well, we'd had a letter and my son and I flew out and we had a rental car. We were getting ready for the next day, as they told me, and he said on the radio, he said, "They're having it now, they told you wrong."

I talked to Bob Hayes and I said, "Well, we missed it."

And he said, "You didn't miss anything." He said, "Go down to the carver studio tomorrow."

I said, "I don't have an invitation to that."

And he said, "You don't need one. Just go down to the carver's studio."

JE: What happened at the carver's studio?

AP: The men that were left were there and their families.

JE: President Bush, this was George W. Bush—

AP: People lined the road to see the president go by and he didn't go by. He went to an undesignated place in a helicopter.

JE: That was disappointing that—

AP: It was.

JE: Yeah.

AP: It was further disappointing too.

JE: But then you went to the carver's studio. Your father was not living at that time.

AP: That's right.

JE: These men that were still living were there and, of course, your part of that family. So that had to be a nice observation for you.

AP: It was. My youngest cousin, Jim, went and from his father he knew that that was Uncle Rusty. So he went in and there was a big picture there with all the men. They just teased him and said, "Be sure you go in the studio when you get there." And here was the big picture up there with the tools in front of him. He would say, "That's my uncle Ruston."

They said, "No, that's Red Anderson." (both laughing) That's Uncle Rusty.

JE: To this day are there pictures of the carvers there?

AP: Well, I haven't been in the last few years.

JE: Yeah.

AP: They had an ice cream place at the restaurant. Had a big picture of Dad in his baseball uniform. Keith just said, "Be sure you go in for ice cream." And they didn't tell me what I was going to see when I went.

JE: It is a remarkable feat when you look up at. They say two million people a year come to South Dakota to see what your dad helped work on. That's got to make you feel good.

AP: They said to Bob Hayes, "I don't think Dad ever thought of a time when you'd have to have designated parking and an elevator." But they've have to because the meetings at night with the lectures and all, so when they came out they couldn't find their cars, they were scattered all over the hillside. We thought they did a good job with what they had to do.

JE: But for your family it was a job. And Mr. Borglum didn't know for sure whether this thing was really going to work, did he?

AP: I don't really know what he thought about that.

JE: Yeah.

AP: He'd had successes and failures. I think he just had great determination and vision.

JE: The Oklahoma City bombing on April 19, 1995, you're seventy-three, what were your thoughts that day?

AP: At that time we had an antique shop downtown. I was there and my son was in there with me. We were really just speechless.

JE: Yeah.

AP: My son just said to me, "This is not all there's going to be of this." And this is unfortunately true.

I had friends that were there from Oklahoma City and it's always been very sad to them. And I have friends now that worked 9/11. One of my friend's son-in-law was in the police department and he worked 9/11. And—

JE: He lose his life?

AP: No, but he's ill.

JE: That's in 2001 when the twin towers came down.

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative).

Chapter 14 – 2:11
Vietnam War

John Erling: The Vietnam War, which began in 1965, how did it affect you and your family?

Audrey Pullen: My son is a disabled Vietnam vet. And so life has never been the same.

JE: Yeah. There were, of course, anti-war demonstrations and all that. What were your feelings about the war?

AP: I think I pretty much ignored it because we were starting the church and I just thought I'd put my mind someplace else. And I expected him back, and he came back, and I was forever grateful but I didn't realize how hard it would be for them.

He said it was very bad over there and worse than horrible, but the worst part was the way they were treated when they got home. They put up signs, "Help wanted, no Vietnam." And if you got a job, they'd say, "You and that Vietnam, crazy work over there." That's the bad thing we did.

JE: Yeah. What was your son's disability?

AP: Well, his doctor said, "I don't know you do it." What the trouble was in large part, they spread millions of gallons of poison on them.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

AP: They said, "I don't know how you're living with lab reports like this."

JE: How old is your son now?

AP: He's sixty-seven.

JE: Is he on his own? Is he disabled?

AP: He has figured it out for himself.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

AP: He said he doesn't sit around very well, he has to be active, and he has to do when he's able.

JE: What were your thoughts about President Johnson through all that? And then ultimately had to announce that he was not going to run for office again because of the Vietnam War?

AP: Well, I've never accepted that it was a defeat. I just think he went to help somebody and it didn't work. That's not a defeat. The Democrats in the family that I married surrounded me and they liked all that sort of thing. If we'd have gotten into something we shouldn't have gotten into. But it was the thinking at the time, everybody had a right to be free from dictators.

JE: The fight between the North and the South of Vietnam, that's when we were afraid of communism and—

AP: And then there's a North and the South of the United States of America.

JE: And there's a fight going there too? (both laughing)

Chapter 15 – 5:16
Lucky Strike

John Erling: Here you are, we're talking to you at ninety-three. Did you have any major health problems in your life?

Audrey Pullen: Not really. I have a walker because I've got trouble with the left hip.

JE: So all this time you really haven't had any major health problems?

AP: No, I've got some heart pills now.

JE: Heart pills?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative). The doctor just said, "You've been here a long time." (laughs)

JE: Yeah.

AP: "Time for heart pills."

JE: Did you have parents, grandparents, anybody that also lived a long life?

AP: Neither of my grandmothers lived to see a grandchild. I think that's always given me an interest in women's health. Neither of them saw a grandchild. The grandfathers we knew.

JE: You never speculated then on how long you would live?

AP: No, I'm rather surprised. I don't realize what I'm doing here. (laughing)

JE: You're surprised now? I suppose people want to say, "What did you do to live so long?" And what is your answer?

AP: Well, my Norwegian friend from Minnesota says it's our good gene pool.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). Well, let's suppose that it is genetic, obviously.

AP: Given a chance we live a long time.

JE: You took care of yourself?

AP: I think the only thing I really did wrong was at times I overworked and my doctor would tell me to quit. He had to tell me three times before I did.

JE: I don't know if you're always mindful of the food you ate. As a nurse, you probably were.

AP: I'm getting close to being a vegetarian.

JE: Now you are?

AP: I always kind of was. I used to hide the meat under the plate.

JE: Ah, you—(both laughing) so you wouldn't have to eat it?

AP: Uh-huh (affirmative). But my doctor says eat it so I eat it.

JE: So obviously you didn't smoke.

AP: I tried it, I didn't like it.

JE: But everybody smoked back then, didn't they?

AP: They said they did but they didn't. You know, Hugh Heffner said everybody was promiscuous in World War II and we weren't either. (laughs)

JE: There you go.

AP: It depends on who you think your authority is. No, not everybody smoked, a lot of people smoked.

JE: Brands of cigarettes back then, what was it, Camels and…

AP: Well, my dad had Bull Durham on workdays.

JE: What was Bull Durham?

AP: It's a sack of tobacco.

JE: And they rolled their own cigarette?

AP: Well, yes, and Mr. Borglum saw his sack in his pocket and said, "Roll me one, Red." So they'd sit there and have a smoke.

JE: And they often did that because it was less expensive, wasn't it?

AP: I think so. Saturday night when you're going to the dance you had Lucky Strikes. (both laughing) Mother had a little machine for making your own too.

JE: Your own cigarettes?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative), you could roll them back and forth. She offered them to me but I didn't like them.

JE: Did your mother smoke?

AP: Yes. I used to walk to the grocery store with my friend to buy her mother a package of Wings, it cost about twelve cents.

JE: A package of Wings?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: What were they?

AP: The cigarettes that her mother smoked.

JE: It was a brand. How about drinking, did you drink any?

AP: Well, I never thought about it as being as wicked.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

AP: Down here in the Bible Belt it seemed to be expected to think it's wicked. But my dad made the beer for parties and my grandfather could make the wine. He had a nice house, and a place under the eaves, and a crock full of wine and it smelled wonderful. When they thought it was time we gathered in the kitchen to taste it. They included us, we just didn't think about it being a moral issue.

JE: You still to this day kind of shake your head. You're been here since 1945, you know the way you were thought in South Dakota. Some of your family came from Wisconsin. The difference in culture, do you still today at ninety-three kind of shake your head and wonder about that?

AP: I think I do because some people say, "You've become southern now."

And I said, "I'm not southern, I'm from the North." You have to go territories that borders Canada, that's the North.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

AP: And I think I am. And I like pine trees and little streams and rocks.

JE: I came from Grand Forks, North Dakota. You must have spent some time maybe?

AP: I didn't, my parents went up to North Dakota to be married but I didn't ever go there much.

JE: What as you look back on your life would you say is the best time of your life?

AP: Probably right now.

JE: This is a good time for you? At ninety-three?

AP: I'm blessed to have two fine sons and lots of friends.

JE: Yeah. And a nice big home here in Tahlequah. You live here by yourself, not many at ninety-three can do that.

AP: Well, I have help from my two sons. I see them every day.

JE: For your sons, but you don't need help for yourself.

AP: No, but they come to see me. We just look after each other.

JE: Right.

AP: And I'm going to move to the country with one of them.

JE: Where in the country?

AP: They got together and they presented this idea to me that they thought I shouldn't live in a retirement place and live in a room and walk in the hall because I didn't live that way. Their houses were too small. I said, "Well, if you'll get a bigger one, we'd better get looking."

JE: So have you done that?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative), we've done that.

JE: So you've found a home in the country that you'll be moving to?

AP: Yes. We came out of the post office one day and my son Bruce saw his fraternity brother who is in real estate. And he said he was looking for something, so they found us something close to town. But in the country.

JE: And your sons and you will live there?

AP: The other son got another house. We have two places in the country as of yesterday.

JE: Wow.

AP: (laughs) We got one too many houses, we're not going to keep this one.

Chapter 16 – 4:14
Inventions

John Erling: What do you think were some of the greatest inventions in your lifetime? Was it a big thing when the washing machines came out?

Audrey Pullen: Well, I liked the one that we had. It was just the kind where you put the clothes through the wringer. No, I really think if everybody was sweeping the dirt floor with a bunch of twigs I probably would do that too.

JE: What about vacuum cleaners when they came out, was that important?

AP: My mother said she could never make a housekeeper out of me. I have somebody come in once a week and she does it. It's not my favorite thing. I was cooking before I went to school but…

JE: Yeah. Back then in the '30s—

AP: I don't have a great eye for dirt, I just like it to be in order. I got other things to do.

JE: 'Thirties and '40s, telephones, on the party line, people would listen in on conversations?

AP: Well, we'd stand on the chair and turn the crank. I thought it was funny because Mother said her mother talked to a friend every evening and somebody listened in. And she said, "Don't say anything, she's listening in."

And she said, "I am not." (both laughing)

I think my family must have laughed a lot.

JE: Yeah. Microwave oven, that had to be a big thing.

AP: I use it all the time now.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

AP: I just gradually quit family cooking and so on. I might make a dish and take it to a party or something like that. I use the microwave all the time. But they say older people might go off and leave food on the stove and burn the house down. They won't with a microwave.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

AP: I don't know what my favorite invention would be.

JE: Television, when they came out, was that interesting for you?

AP: I'm a reader, I like books.

JE: So that was more important than television?

AP: Books, always books.

JE: Always books. Any favorite books that jump out?

AP: Well, I happen to like Garrison Keillor.

JE: Garrison Keillor on NPR, yes, stories of Minnesota and all. Any other author that's important to you?

AP: Tahlequah has got a lot of writers groups and I go to three of them. One of them, we have a memoir group at the library. The library got a grant and they did a good job of it and made a nice library for a small town.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

AP: The Carnegie Library here was the only one given to Native Americans in 1907, before it was statehood.

JE: The Cherokee Nation headquarters here, that's very important to this town.

AP: It's very important.

JE: What do they contribute to the—to—

AP: Right now they contribute employment. And they have a lot of casinos. I don't go to the casinos but they have a lot of them and they seem to be buying up what they used to own. Going back into Cherokee hands.

JE: They've done a lot for the area too, haven't they?

AP: They really have, um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Infrastructure, roads, and all that.

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative). They do it in their own way, which you could expect. They are not as punctual as we are, they do it when they get to it.

JE: We're in the midst of a presidential campaign between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Here we are, 2016, do you have any thoughts on this campaign?

AP: If I have to acknowledge it I say my credulity has been damaged. (both laughing) That's difficult for me. I suppose I just believed all the things you want to believe when you're growing up and it's just not there now and it may never have been there. I don't have confidence in the candidates.

JE: Of the presidents, is there one president that was—stands out for you?

AP: I suppose it was Roosevelt. My father was a Republican but he said, "The trouble that we were in, you know, we needed what he did." He said, "I don't know what we would have done without him." I know he's complained of this and that but...

JE: Do you remember the WPA, the Works Progress? Projects?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative), yes.

JE: Were there any around here?

AP: Yes there were, they made good stone buildings down on Water Street, this next one over. It had an armory, it's a work of art. And then they have one, it was a black school. And then they have one that was something else. Stone buildings, they're still standing. They did good stone work but a lot of the Cherokees did it.

JE: The WPA provided many, many jobs for people at that time that needed it.

AP: It really did, and bridges that lasted a long time.

Chapter 17 – 8:55
Advice for the Young

John Erling: Anybody that you would say that was the most influential person in your life?
Audrey Pullen: My father.
JE: What was about him that you mention him now?
AP: Well, I think that he was just accepting, you know, that no matter what I did I never did any wrong. (laughing) His opinion.
JE: He had obviously a very strong work ethic.
AP: We did, it's expected. He had strong family ties too. He didn't say a lot and he never did nag, he'd just tell you what you needed to know. He'd ask me once, he said, "Do you remember when I told you never to tell any lies?"

And I said, "No, but I can't remember a time when I didn't know it."

JE: (laughs)
AP: "You can't do anything with lies. Tell the truth and maybe we can do something, you know."
JE: Yeah.
AP: You might not want to tell it, but tell it.
JE: Was there any turning point in your life? Something major that happened that had an impact on your life?
AP: I don't think so. It seems like an ordinary life, to have marry and have children. I was very fortunate in my mother-in-law. People talk about theirs but she accepted me with open arms and I was very fortunate in that.
JE: What do you know about living a happy successful life now that you didn't know when you were twenty-something?
AP: Well, I think it doesn't all have to be done by me. Leave other people's lives to them, I didn't always know that. I had to have some help with that.
JE: It didn't always have to be done by you, what does that mean?
AP: You know, the way we grew up you didn't ask for any help unless you had to. And you didn't refuse if you could possibly do it. That was just the way it was.
JE: Um-hmm (affirmative), you think that has changed, that attitude in this day and age?
AP: Yes, I think they overdid. It's good to help but you have to know when to quit. You take away people's initiative.
JE: You'll be ninety-four in December.
AP: Um-hmm (affirmative).
JE: December 9th. I suppose you're looking forward to be ninety-four. You're looking forward to be ninety-five, aren't you?

AP: Well, we just make very small celebrations, we don't do a whole lot.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

AP: We used to go out to our favorite restaurant, just the three of us.

JE: You could live to be a hundred.

AP: Well, when Matthew Walker opened his dental office about eight years ago he wanted to do things I thought I didn't need at that age. And he said, "You're going to live to be a hundred, you'd better go on and take care of yourself." He said, "You're like my mother, you just think everybody else needs to be taken care of first."

And I think about that. I'll have to tell Dr. Matthew I may make it.

JE: There is a point where we have to take care of ourselves first and then you can help others, right?

AP: And I wasn't very good about that. I think it's common to nursing.

JE: But if you live to be a hundred and you have your health that would be all right, wouldn't it?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative). I've got a lot of unfinished business.

JE: You do? (both laughing) You still have things to do?

AP: Uh-huh (affirmative).

JE: Name one or two that you have to do.

AP: Well, I've got to move out of this house. You can see it's not going to be an easy job. (laughing)

JE: You'll get help but it's still part you.

AP: After I got my book done, well, then my friend wants me to write another one.

JE: You want to move out of this house and you're going to write another book.

AP: Well, at first I thought that I didn't have any idea how he wrote a novel. He's just that kind of a teacher, he sees things, you know. So then I think, "Well, yeah, I do know how to do that." I don't know what it's going to be but I'm going to do it anyway.

JE: Are you reading a book now?

AP: Several.

JE: What are you reading?

AP: Well, I've *Norse Mythology*.

JE: *Norse Mythology*.

AP: *Norse Mythology*. Ancient aliens say that maybe that wasn't all a myth. (laughing) You just let your imagination go. I'm reading that. And *Legacy of Ashes*, which not my usual thing to read but it's about the CIA and how bad it is. And *Cherokee Baskets*. The author of *Cherokee Baskets* also had a book of poetry.

JE: Part of your daytime you'll just sit and read?

AP: Um-hmm (affirmative), it's in my messiness beside my chair (laughs).

JE: You know, as I look at you, you don't wear glasses. Did you ever wear glasses?

AP: I've got some.

JE: Okay. So do you use them for reading?

AP: No, I don't use them for reading. My son's friend moved back to town and opened his office and they went and had what they needed done and they kept after me to go too. So I went.

Gary put up the chart and said, "Read that," so I read that. And they just looked at each other. So I bought some nice new glasses and they're by my chair.

JE: And you don't wear them?

AP: I don't think I've worn them a dozen times.

JE: But basically you don't wear glasses?

AP: No. A long time ago Dr. Wilkins said, "You're a little nearsighted and have a little astigmatism."

And then ten or so years ago Dr. Miller said, "You have a little astigmatism and you're a little nearsighted."

So Dr. Morgan says, "You have a little astigmatism and you're a little nearsighted." (laughs)

I said, "I only went to please you and I've got three hundred dollars' worth of pretty glasses. (both laughing)

JE: What kind of advice would you give to people who are in high school, college, in their twenties? Any advice for them?

AP: I think that I would say that I know women's lib needed to come and I'm glad it has and you don't have to beat up on the men to do it. But a friend explained to me that when something's been wrong for a long time and efforts are made to fix it mistakes are going to be made.

JE: Good.

AP: There are a lot of divorced and didn't need to be. Maybe there's a lot of people that need to be and aren't. To put a lot of blame on somebody is not going to get you where you need to go.

JE: How would you like to be remembered?

AP: Oh, I don't know. As a good friend, I'd say.

JE: It sounds like you probably were, one of the first ones to jump in and help.

AP: My mother was. We have a lot of new friends now but when you get this age and they die and your Christmas list is way down and your bridge list is down, you'd better keep making new friends.

We had this community dinner called "Feed My Sheep," it's at the Methodist Church Activity Building, no questions asked. If you want to come in and eat, come on in and eat. And it's really a fun thing to do. I'm a table host, it's an easy job. Somebody came in new and somebody that had been there was telling them what to do. "Just sit right there and they'll bring you a plate of nice food. You don't have to wait in line and then they'll bring

a tray with cake and you can choose what you want." And you never know what you're going to hear.

You see two people, one of them will say, "I got a job!"

"Are they hiring?"

"Keep in touch with me, I'll get you on at the nursery," you know. You never know what it's going to be.

But the room has a nice attitude about it. The men are active and I don't think it would work if they weren't and the children are comfortable and they run around and play with each other. And it's a nice thing.

Other groups come in from out of state and say, "How can we get one of these going?"

So I got new friends.

JE: That's probably helped you too to live a long life.

AP: Oh, yeah, yeah.

JE: To be very social.

AP: Yeah.

JE: So your new friends are all younger than you.

AP: I think they are. I can't find too many otherwise. (both laughing) Yes, I guess that's one of those things that just doesn't matter.

JE: Yeah.

AP: Yeah.

JE: Well, this has been very interesting talking with you.

AP: Well, it's a lot of fun, yeah.

JE: Audrey, I admire you.

AP: You surely know how to do all this. I wouldn't have a clue. One thing I'm sadly lacking is electronics.

JE: Well, your voice will be preserved and your stories will be told for many, many years to come and they'll be fascinated by Mt. Rushmore and these comments you made about life. And I thank you for doing this for us.

AP: I've enjoyed it. I had a good friend here for many years from West Virginia. They tell us we're good transplants. (both laughing)

JE: We can't conclude this without talking about Keith. The reason I'm sitting here talking to you is because I knew Keith, living next door to him and his wife, Leila, in Morehead, Minnesota, back in the '60s. They moved and then we followed and they moved to Omaha, Nebraska. And we moved to Omaha, Nebraska. We've stayed in touch ever since.

And so this connection of her friendship has led to being able to talk to you and hear your story. We should mention that Keith is related to you, you're cousins, aren't you?

AP: Yes, his mother and my father are brother and sister.

JE: And now Keith and his family, his wife, live in Wisconsin right across from St. Paul.

So it's good to be in touch with people, maintain friendships, good things come out of that. And the best came out of this, as I shake your hand now.

AP: (laughs) My husband said one day, "I thought I knew what friendships were but I didn't know until I met your father."

JE: Thank you for visiting with us.

AP: Well, thank you.

JE: I enjoyed it very much.

AP: I did too.

Chapter 18 – 0:33
Conclusion

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation-funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience. Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time, on *VoicesofOklahoma.com*.