Hazie Werner: "I wouldn't be idle; I like to be busy!"

by Kirk Williams

Hazie, as a young lady

One sunny afternoon my teacher, Tanna Eck, and I went to visit with Hazel "Hazie" Werner at the Storm Hut downtown. Knowing Hazie and living in a small town with her and her family for years, I was not surprised to hear that she had done most everything. Some of the interesting stories Hazie told us were about stage stops, delivering babies, raising worms, long horseback trips, the 1964 Winter Olympics and her experiences shared with her family.

Hazie as she is today.

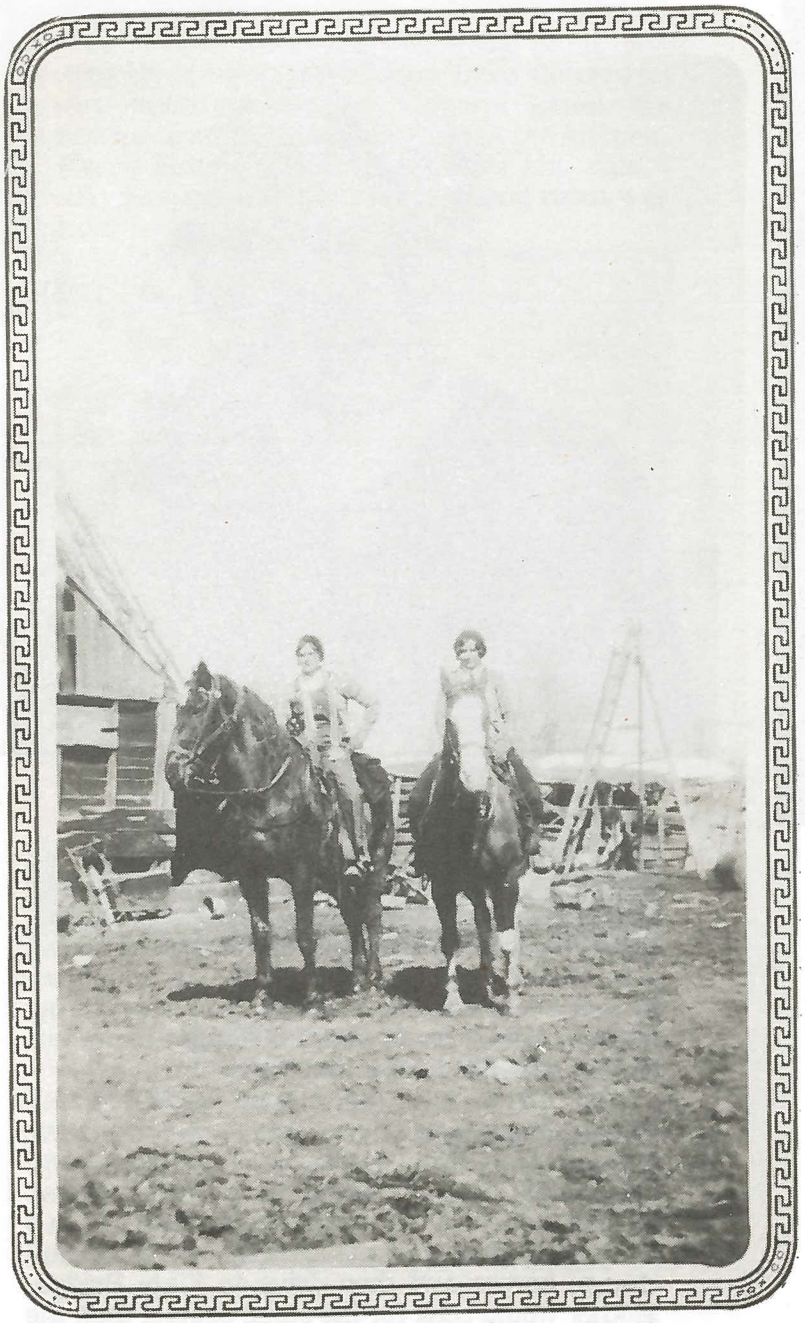
"My dad, W.K. Ralston, came here when he was 14 years old and my mother was here as a little girl. Now Mother might have been born here because my grandfather on my mother's side, Grandpop Jones, was an old Indian fighter. He had a mark on his shoulder where an arrow hit him. I don't know where he fought them, but he was around during that time.

"Dad came from up around Leadville and Mother came from Nova Scotia. My dad drove the stage from Hahn's Peak to State Bridge, and he had a place up on Yellow Jacket Pass that was the stage stop. They would drive from Hahn's Peak to Yellow Jacket and stay overnight and change horses and then drive to State Bridge. Mother would cook for the stage people, then the drivers changed horses and went back to Hahn's Peak.

"I would imagine from what my dad has told me and from seeing pictures that the stage would carry six to eight people. Of course in the summertime he drove wagons and in the winter he drove sleds. He started driving when he was 14 years old and he did it all his life. They generally had two people--the driver and a person who went withthem to help if they had any trouble. Dad was a driver.

"Mother helped her sisters cook, but she did most of it. The house was right where the stage came to. And that was our home for years. The stage stop and all was right there together. The stage would come one day from Hahn's Peak to Yellow Jacket, and then it took one day to go to Wolcott, if the roads were good. Sometimes it would take longer, and they would stay at Wolcott and then work their way back so it took about a week or maybe two.

Si Lockhart and the old stage



Ruby & Hazie - riding Shortie and Possum

"Anybody that wanted to come into the country rode the stage. They hauled all the groceries and supplies on the stage. Some of the stages had four horses and some had six horses, maybe even eight, when the spring mud was deep, but most of the time they had four to six. That was when Hahn's Peak was the county seat.

Hazie told us about one amazing thing that she remembers about her mother. "Once Mama and Ferry Carpenter rode from Eagle to Yampa because my little brother was sick with diabetes, and we had taken him to the hospital. She was in Glenwood Springs taking care of my dad's mother and father. They got horses at Eagle and it was such a snowstorm that the stage couldn't go, so they rode horses from there to Yampa at night in a snowstorm! It's amazing that they made it. There were times that the road would be so drifted that mother and Mr. Carpenter would have to get off their horses and walk them. One would lead and the other walk. That's the way they got across there in that blizzard. It was just terrible, a very treacherous ride, very hard to try to go that distance at night across Wolcott and by the State Bridge. I don't know what time they left Eagle but mother got to town just before my brother died, just a few hours, but of course, from Yampa to the ranch and then from the ranch took time. Mr. Carpenter said in all his days of seeing how someone could take abuse and stand the cold and everything, that Mother could do it best. He was just amazed to think a woman could do that, and not being dressed for it either. This man up there at Eagle gave her an old pair of overalls to wear. She tucked her dress down in them. Now we freeze even in ski clothes."

Hazie told us of some other experiences she had while growing up, along with the things she did with her parents.

"I was born on a ranch, a homestead, up on Yellow Jacket pass on February 23, 1911. The the house was. It's by the turnoff on Highway 14, the Yellow Jacket Pass road, about a mile off of 131, which goes through what we called the homestead. Dad homesteaded that, and we lived in a little log cabin. I was just a little tiny girl when we moved down to the old stage place, but I don't know if he built the cabin or not, but I think the homestead was bigger than 160 acres. Dad took up, I think, about 280 acres there because it went clear over to the Sidney side into the oak brush.

"There were ten in the family, and I am the oldest girl. There were two older boys than me. We had five girls and five boys but some of them died at a very young age of sugar diabetes. There was always lots of work for me to do at home. Chores? Yes, we had chores! We had to milk the cows--twenty to twenty-five--every morning and night, and help feed the cattle, feed the pigs and chickens, and in the winter times we

Hazie at her house on Yellowjacket Pass.

Chores, yes, we had chores!

peddled meat. We would butcher a beef, cut it up and peddle it to the mining towns around. We tried to go every week. We separated the milk and Mama would churn the butter and make cottage cheese. We took all this stuff that we had, butter, beef, hogs and all to sell.

We just took a sled in the wintertime and a wagon in the summertime or spring. Sometimes in the summer when it was hot we wouldn't go, but we always did it in the winter and fall and spring. We would butcher a beef and cut it up into steaks or roast. We probably charged 25 or 35 cents a pound for butter. We took buttermilk and cottage cheese in stone crocks, and it was just so much a dip. The ladies would bring their bowls down to the wagon, and we would dip it out and sell it to them. I can't remember exactly how much it cost 'cause I was a little girl then. I used to go with Mama every once in a while, but not too often, so I hardly went to town much."

Around 1919 a terrible flu epidemic infested the Routt County area. Hazie recalled experiences that she and her mother shared during this time.

"It was a terrible thing. I remember as a little girl mother would go and take care of lots of different people, and in this one family all three passed away just in hours. I can't remember for sure when it was, but I was just a little girl, and we used to make vegetable soup, and mother would take it around to different people who e really sick. A lot of lives were lost with that

terrible epidemic. It was in the winter and those people would have pneumonia with it. Of course, in those days the only remedy was mustard plaster, turpentine and lard to take care of people. We tried to feed them, and this one of two different families, all three passed away plus the mother. Sometimes it might be days before the undertaker could get there to get the bodies because he had to come with a team. It was winter and the roads were bad and there wasn't a thing anyone could do. It was a sad thing. Mother went all over the neighborhood helping the sick people and taking a little soup in a quart jar. She would feed them and then come home and get more and go the other way.

"Got the sun in my eyes."

"No one in our family had the flu at the time, but mother had it about a year later. One of my little brothers might have been sick with it, but I can't remember whether that was the flu or a cold. I do remember cooking soup and mother walking here and there and going each morning till late at night taking food to the people and trying to take care of them. I also remember her taking old sheets and stuff to put mustard plaster on people. For a mustard plaster, you mix mustard and flour and water and spread it on an old sheet.Then put another piece of cloth on top of that and spread it on the chest until you turn red and get hot, really hot. Then take that off and grease the chest with turpentine and lard and then put flannel over that. That's the way we used to break up colds and flu. It seemed like mother would help different ones who would come down with it practically the whole winter.

Another interesting happening in Hazie's youth was her experience with delivering babies. "Well, I just happened to get caught when there was no one around. I brought my little sister, Benita, into the world, just mother and I there. She told me what to do and I did it. I was nine years old then.

"In later years I stayed with a girl friend over in Pagoda country outside of Hayden,and her doctor and nurse didn't get there before the baby was born, so I brought that little guy into the world. Denny Genrich was his name.

"You just kinda take it in stride, nothing you can do. Mother told me what to do when Benita was born and I just did it step by step and took care of her and the baby. I did everything and we had an old coal stove, one in the kitchen and one in the front room. I just put the baby by the stove and built a fire and took care of mother and kept her in bed a couple of weeks. I took care of her and everything, and the doctor never did get there.

"There was a doctor in town, Dr. Cavagnaugh, but in the wintertime when you had to come clear from Steamboat in a sled, that was a long ways to come, and so he just never made it. There were lots of times we wouldn't have a telephone--maybe two or three weeks at a time when big storms and winds would blow the road--and, of course, the only way to get over the roads was a team and sled or horseback. We would go down and pull the wire up and put it on the fence post so we could use the telephone line to call the doctor."

We wanted to know more about things Hazie remembered while growing up. "I can remember once as a little girl walking to school, these bugs, I don't know what they were called, were about two or three inches long and they had a horn on them, right on the front.We couldn't believe how bad they were. The farmers would go out with rollers and roll over them, back and forth over the bugs. I remember going across Mr. Dickson's wheat field, and it looked just as bare as your floor. At night they would plow a big circle around a field and then set it on fire. I can still see those darn eyes on the side of those horns. They were crawly things and brownish in color like a worm. We would just crush them under our feet when we walked to school, even under our shoes. They never bit us that I remember, but I just can remember Mr. Lewis burning his field and Mr. Dickson's wheat field."

Hazie related some stories about school days. "We didn't usually start to school till the fall work was done. Then when spring would open up that would be our school year. We never went a full time at all. We just went till the country kids didn't have to work.

"We had great teachers. Miss Lila Barber was one of my teachers. We had very good teachers, but there was all the grades in one room, from the first to the eighth. It was just a

typical country school. You'd get up and recite geography and history or do math. Each grade had a time to get up and do their work. The teacher taught all the grades from first through eighth and all the subjects like reading and math and history for every grade. So she really had a big job.

"Of course, the best time was recess. We had fifteen minutes in the morning and a half hour for lunch or even maybe an hour, and we went to school, most generally, from eight to four. Some went from nine to four.

"I was a good student, but I could never spell for nothing. As a little girl I remember the teacher up at Yellow Jacket, one of the schools we went to, used to stop by and help me with my reading down in front of the house. We'd just go out on the grass and she would give a lesson that she wrote and my brother and maybe Rudy, my younger sister, would sit and learn. That's how we went through the first grade, or you might call it kindergarden. Other than that if the winter was bad we might have summer school, but not very much.

"We went to Pleasant Valley to school. They had a teacherage, living quarters usually next door to school, over there when Margaret Wingate taught. She lived the school days in the teacherage and at home on weekends. At Yellow Jacket the teacher would usually stay up at the ranch down from the school or with the Carpenter family. They didn't have a teacherage there, and at the lower Oak Creek School when we went there, Miss Bartholomew lived at home. She could walk a couple of miles to come to school.

Yellow Jacket Schoolhouse

"Sometimes we might not have school in Yellow Jacket so we could go to Pleasant Valley or lower Oak Creek. They would have school at different times. So we were in one of those districts, so that we could go to any one of those schools. If the county didn't have enough money for Yellow Jacket then we would go to Pleasant Valley, but we went the whole year when they didn't hire a teacher for all of them. We would walk or ride a horse or ski: Pleasant Valley was three miles and the other schools were about two to two and a half miles away. They never consolidated when I was there, that was in later years when they did that."

Hazie talked about community and social affairs while she was an adolescent. "Sidney the closest stop we had around. It was a general store, and the railroad went through there. That is where we hauled the potatoes and grain and took the cattle to ship. That was the place - the only stop between Oak Creek and Steamboat, at the little general store.

"I never went to a picture show in my life, I'll tell you that. I'm not particularly fond of picture shows. After I got to be a young lady we'd go to the dances. We had a dance hall right there by the old Grange Hall and we used to go to Sidney to the dances.

That's about all we ever did, but we never got to do that till I was a grown girl. As a kid we just worked. Of course I had lots of brother and sisters to help with the chores. Two of my sisters still live here, Mrs. Ruby Heid and Benita Bristol, and I still have two brothers who live in Oregon."

Pleasant Valley Schoolhouse

Once while Hazie was a youngster she had a startling experience with a barn burning. "It was a big red barn, the stage barn, that burnt down as we lived on that place. We had no idea how the fire started. We lived in a little house. Dad had torn down the big house. I remember waking up in the night and the room was all clear. I yelled and grabbed my clothes and said, ' Orville, the barn is on fire!' That was my older brother. My dad and all of us went out the door, and I don't know why I did, but I was the first one out and I grabbed a butcher knife that was lying there on the cabinet. I ran up to the barn and started cutting halter ropes. The first horse we called him Old Tom, he was the meanest thing in the world. He never could wait to get in or wait to get out. When I cut his halter rope he snorted and tore out of that barn. As I cut the ropes the rest followed. We also had a cow barn. We were up the rest of the night, and as soon as the neighbors saw the barn burning they came and carried water. It was wintertime, not really a bad winter, probably in the spring 'cause I can remember the sled with hay still in the yard. We were feeding with the sled, but the farmers got there pretty fast and helped us."

In 1930 Hazel Ralston and Ed Werner were married. "My wedding wasn't a big thing. We had a shivaree at the Mesa schoolhouse. Oh, the neighbors came down and grabbed you and took you to dance and have dinner and make a lot of racket. They always had a shivaree over anybody that got married.

"After we married we lived on a ranch, and jobs were very hard to get. You really couldn't get a job, so Pop joined CCC, Conservation Corps Camp. Then I lived at home with my parents and he went to CCC camp where he worked for the government, over by Walden and Cameron Pass in the forest that winter then he was transferred to Goodland Texas. After that we lived on the Mesa on Mr. Brown's ranch and then up on Elk River on Grandpa's ranch. We lived up there until Skeeter, my daughter, was old enough to go to school. When she got old enough we moved to town and lived with my parents and worked in the laundry. When I lived with my folks Pop got a job with the CCC camp in the timber or whatever there was to do. I worked at the laundry and for nineteen years I worked at Boy's Market. Pop worked for Larson's Transportation after we left the ranch." Pop died in 1970.

"In 1943 we bought the house in town. Loris was just a little baby then. Times were rough then. It was hard. I worked at Boy's Mart during the time of rationing. We didn't have carryout boys or anything in that time. We did it all ourselves, and if there was a gentleman by he would do it sometimes, but other than that we would pick up a twenty-five pound sack of potatoes and a box of groceries and out we would go to the car or wagon. I worked through the war time and it was really rough then.

Hazie and Lloyd picking potatoes

"Rationing was on flour and sugar and Karo syrup and bananas. We put the Karo back for the babies to have in their milk, and there were just lots of things you only got so much of. Benita worked for the OPA they called it, and through the government they issued books with so many tickets and you could bring coupons in to get five pounds of flour and two pounds of sugar or five pounds of sugar or whatever it was.

"I worked at Boy's till we opened up this (Storm Hut) seventeen years ago. During that time I quit once. Because of all the lifting I hurt my back, so I quit for a couple of years during that nineteen years and worked a couple of years at the dry cleaners for Buzz Nelson, but most of the time I worked for Boy's Market till here.

Hazie remembered the old tree that used to stand in front of the market. "There was a tree right over there on the corner. When the sheepherders came to town they would tie the pack horse there and their horses and come into

"Look at the length of those skis!"

get supplies. Then we would go out and help them load their panyards, but they always tied up to that tree. It was the funniest looking thing."

Hazie speaks proudly of her three children, Skeeter, Buddy and Loris. She told us some interesting things about their youth and growing up.

"My kids started skiing when they were big enough to walk. On the ranch at Mesa we had a fenced-in yard and Skeeter would ski around and around the house, even when she first started to walk. Mother gave her some skis--a little pair of barrel skis from Montgomery Ward. They were just about a foot or a foot and a half long, and they had this little clamp she'd stick her overshoes in. She would ski around the house and when Pop went to feed the cattle he would tie a rope on the hap rack and pull her behind the sled on her skis. It was the same way with Buddy and Loris. They practically learned to walk on skis, just as a fun thing to do.They loved to play in the snow.

"Then we moved to town and lived with Mother and they built a little ski hill. They also plowed the roads and the kids would ski down that. Then when they got big enough they skied on Howelsen Hill. They started there as junior racers and went right on through. Gordy Wren had a good program, but Loris didn't get to go with Gordy as he had Crosby Perry-Smith. Of course Mr. Wegeman was the first coach here.

"When the kids first started at Howelsen they had a rope tow and a T-bar and a boat tow. The boat tow was just a big thing you stood up in that went to the top of the hill. One went up and one went down. It had a cable hooked to the cars or boats and you could sit down, but most generally they stood. Of course I didn't ski then but it was a boat made of wood and it ran on rudders right up the street. It used to sit over there and I always thought it should be in the museum. It would probably hold five or six standing up and they had to take off their skis. It was designed mostly for the jumpers on the hill. They also had a T-bar over there to ride up the hill and a rope tow to get up the Sulphur cave. It pulled the kids up over there.

"When we lived in town the kids went every night after school and Gordy Wren Sr. had lessons for them.If they had chores then they did those after skiing. They would go from school over there and ski till dark. They could walk right over the bridge from here.

"As soon as my kids were big enough, they all worked. Skeeter worked in a hardware store when she was in the fifth grade and Loris and Buddy mowed lawns. Buddy went out and worked with his grandfather practically every summer. They had to keep up their grades to be able to ski, so all three were good in school.They all went to college. Skeeter and Buddy went to Denver University and Loris went to Western State College at Gunnison.

Skeeter, Hazel & Betty
ready for a day of skiing

"I remember when Buddy went to the Olympics in 1954. He called Mr. Sauer and told him that he had to leave the next day for Europe and wondered what he was going to do about his school work. All his teachers told him not to worry, that he could make it up when he came back. Then when he returned he made up his work. For speech he had to tell about his trips abroad to service clubs and to his history and geography class he told about his travels. Then he had to make up his mathematics. He went every morning at seven o'clock to math class until the work was made up.

"In 1964 we went to the Olympics. The kids gave us the trip as a Christmas present. That was the first time I had ever been anywhere besides where the kids would ski race.

"It was exciting and nice, but I will tell you the rudest people in the whole wide world live there. They pushed and shoved and hit and everything. It kind of took the fun out of it because on opening day we were up where we could see and thought we had a good place, but before it started we were pushed clear to the back. We could see the tops of their heads as they came in. That was about all.

"At the downhill race we went up with another group of people and hung onto the fence for dear life. They were the rudest things I have ever seen, sure like animals. They pushed over the fence to try to get ona post in front of you.

"We were there for ten days, then we toured around with the Brookshires to all Europe, which was a fun thing to do. Don't take me wrong. We enjoyed the Olympics, and we stayed right by the Olympic Village where Buddy was. We had a nice time and enjoyed every minute of it,but don't go to the Olympics thinking you are going to see them because you might as well watch it on TV.

"We took in everything there was to see, but in order to see the bobsled run the kids hung in the trees. The police would shake their fists at them, but that was the way you got to see. It was fun and we met a lot of nice people. Loris didn't go because he was at Western State, but Skeeter, Pop and I met Vanda, Buddy's wife, and her sister over there and had a good time."

The Werners are well known in Steamboat Springs because of their involvement in skiing.

"We started the shop, the Storm Hut, when the mountain started (1964). We had the shop in the bottom of the A-frame. Skeeter had a rental and repair shop. Well, it was kinda Loris, Skeeter and Buddy at the time, but Buddy was away skiing and Loris was going to school so it always has fallen to Skeeter to run the shop. She had the shop, the ski school and we even sold tickets to the skiers. Then we moved from the A-frame to the octagon building,that is now torn down. That was a bigger shop. Then we moved over to the bottom of the gondola building, then to where we are now in the plaza. Then when Loris got out of school he helped and now has the ski school for Mt. Werner.

"For the last eighteen years I have worked here or at the mountain. I am generally here and Skeeter is at the mountain. If they need me I go to the mountain on Sunday to help out."

Hazie entertains lavishly for her kids and friends. She still has time after working, cooking and general housekeeping to get in a hobby or two of her own.

A painting of Buddy Werner hangs at the Storm Hut.

"I raise worms in some bins in the basement. I have had that since 1968, and it keeps me working. I sell them here at the shop to fishermen and give them to the kids. We dig them and bring them here. To learn to raise worms I wrote the government and got a pamphlet. It seemed like a crime to me to pay somebody so much for worms, when I thought I could raise them myself. Pop never wanted me to do it because he thought it would smell. Well, they don't smell. When we changed the furnace over and got the coal bin out of the basement Loris and I went and got the worms. He tells wild stories about the worms, but anyways he got me the worms. Carl Combs built some bins and Loris got me the dirt and everything.

"I have ten bins now. They are about the size of this corner, three or four feet long and six or eight feet wide filled with dirt. They're just plain old earthworms who keep multiplying. I cover them with gunny sacks and feed them lettuce and stuff from the table. I don't put anything that might sour in there. Then I dig and feed them every month. I just leaned last summer from a vet in Boulder to feed them cardboard, they are doing just great this winter. This is the first time I've done that. I used to feed them corn meal and now I just put a piece of soaked cardboard there and they eat it. It sounds funny, but you can hear those worms eat by putting your ear down there to hear a sucking noise.

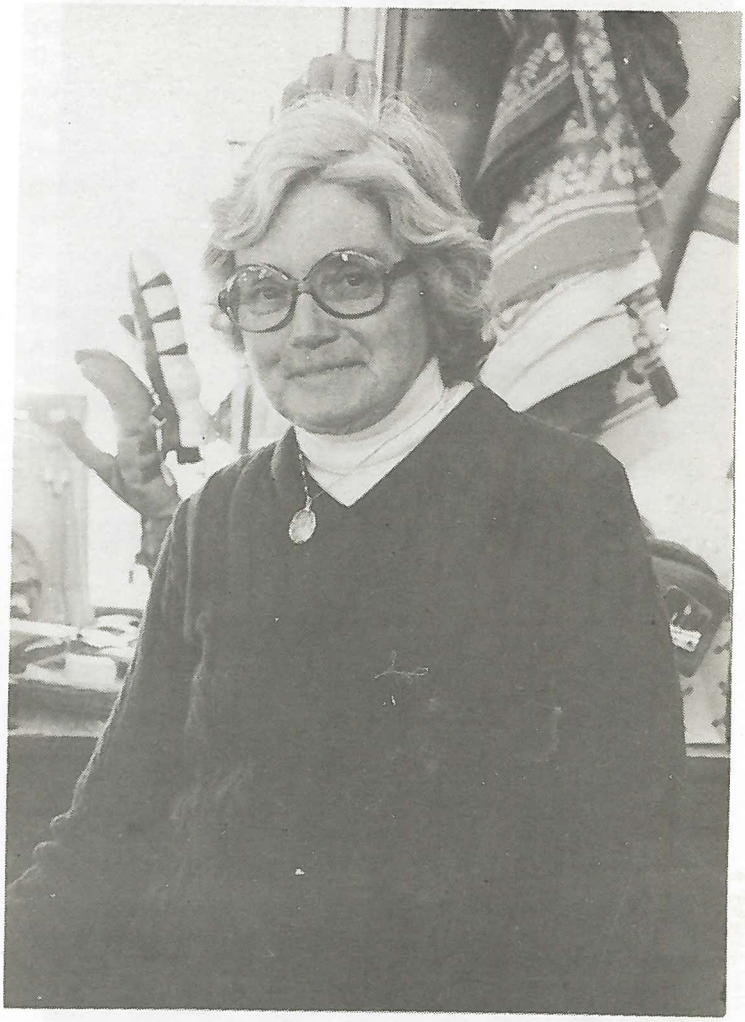
"I also have three dogs--Maltese and poodle combination. I had grandma put to sleep this year, but I still enjoy the others. Then I keep busy keeping the house.We have lots and lots of company and I enjoy entertaining a lot."

A philosophy of life spoken by Hazie Werner is full of significant meaning for those of us without as much experience. "As a child I had to work hard, but I don't think it hurt me at all. I think it was good for me, I really do. As kids we did have to work hard and that was all we knew. I don't

think work hurts anybody. I think idleness hurts people personally. I am going to work as long as I can because I just don't like to be idle. People should be busy and if they don't have a job I think they should. There are lots of little things you can do. You could visit the homes of the sick and people that are shut in. If I didn't work here I am sure I would find something to do. I wouldn't be idle because I like to be busy."

Hazie also talked about her skiing hobby. "I am not a good skier because I just started about three years ago, but I go clear up and come down from the top of the mountain, Heavenly Daze and all those places. I love Buddy's Run but I am not a great skier. I don't go too fast or anything, I just have a good time and get out and enjoy myself. Also I took a cross-country ski lesson just last week and I enjoyed it a lot.

July 4 always drew a large crowd



Hazie Werner in the downtown shop.

"I am not surprised when I see changes in town. There are a lot of good people here and I think it is good. We used to have Ski Carnival and the Fourth of July, that was about all, but now I think it is great with the new people here every day. Many have bought property or are looking for some. I know there are people that think the newcomers will take over, but I think it is good to have new faces with the mining now gone. I enjoy learning about the new people and why they come here and what they think of country and the town and everything. And I think it is just positively great about the new jump. I enjoyed watching the jumping and it was really neat. My kids used to jump, so I really love it.

WERNER will always be a big name in the Yampa Valley area because of the ski hill, Mt. Werner, named after Buddy who was killed in a Swiss avalanche. All the Werners have accomplished great feats in skiing, with Buddy, Skeeter, and Loris all competing for medals in the Olympics.

After talking to Hazie it is not hard to understand where these talented people received their inspiration and even less hard to understand why Steamboat Springs looks to her for an extension of mountain hospitality.

Ruby and Hazie - "No pictures please!"

Hazie and Old Shep.

Hazie dressed in the latest fashion.

Hazie and Ruby clowning around

Ruby and Hazie at Seedhouse on Elk River