

Dad

by Marilyn Reeves

My father's name was Richard Tuttle, but most folks called him Dick. A month ago, at age 98, Dad's poor, frail mind and body finally gave up the fight, and he was laid to rest the following Wednesday in his beloved home of Salida.

There was a nice turn-out at the funeral, mostly senior citizens who knew him. There was also a full front-page spread in the Salida "Mountain Mail" devoted to him and the contributions he had made to the community.

Dad met Mom at Illinois State Normal and they were wed in 1935. Both taught elementary school for awhile, but after my sister Janet was born they moved to Denver, where Dad worked for the Civil Service at Lowry.

It was my mother Ruth, who talked Dad into moving to a small town to start a business. So in 1945 they leased a store in downtown Salida and called it "Tuttle's Trading Post". Dad sectioned off the back as an apartment for the family, paneled the walls in knotty pine, and built matching counters to display the toys and souvenirs. The guns and fishing tackle were kept behind the big glass-front counter, where Dad spent much of his time waiting on customers. He could also be seen running up and down the old wooden staircase, or pulling the rope-operated elevator down to the basement where the inventory was stored. Dad also carved and painted the trout-shaped store sign that was an icon in downtown Salida for over 30 years.

Dad loved to fish, could play the piano by ear, sang with a deep bass voice, and could whistle like a canary. Whenever he was happy at work, you could hear him whistling.

Before he retired from the store, Dad was elected as a County Commissioner. He was instrumental in getting the waste disposal plant built outside of town as well as putting in a new county road called Holman Avenue. In 1977, it was my mother who saved Dad from an early death. He was scheduled to fly to Pueblo with his fellow Commissioners in a small aircraft, but Mom insisted that he stay home. The plane went down and all aboard were killed, leaving Dad to pick up the pieces and run the County business on his own until new replacements could be found.

In the early '80's Dad designed, negotiated financing, and oversaw the construction of the new Salida Senior Center at 3rd and F Streets, where he served as both Director and custodian for over 25 years. Being a store keeper at heart, Dad converted the basement into a money-generating flea market, and spent many hours each day – including Sundays – gathering, sorting, cleaning, and displaying items for sale. He kept this up until both his failing health and hearing finally forced him to retire at the young age of 93.

In his spare time, he also did odd jobs for the Methodist Church. Whenever anyone in town needed anything done, the first person they called was my father, Dick Tuttle.

Dad was an amazing person and a hard act to follow. He will be missed. But in my mind I can still hear him whistling.