

**“This is probably the most exciting time that anyone could live in.”**

## **Richard Soash**



Four years ago, Darolyn (Robson) Bangs and Debi Davidson began a story for this magazine about the life of State Senator Richard Soash. At the end of the school year, both students graduated, and the story was left unfinished. This year, I (Toni Lockhart) interviewed a few other prospects and coming up with nothing substantial, I decided to finish an already-started article, the Richard Soash story. In undertaking this, I interviewed Senator Soash a second time to update the previous information. We discussed his youth and rural upbringing, as well as his eventual involvement in agriculture and politics. This is part one, focusing on his early life and philosophies. In the next issue, part two will emphasize his political career.

“I feel I had more advantages being raised in the country because young people who are raised with a rural background, particularly on a farm, have to develop a number of skills. More than that they learn to work independently. When a person has a certain job to get done, he has to be

## **Part One**

### **by Toni Lockhart**

a self starter and pursue that job until he's finished. I think throughout life, that's real. If a person really wants to be successful in life he has to learn to adapt himself to an unstructured environment, whether it's at home or on the job. In an unstructured environment one must budget his time well and know when to work and when not to. That's really important and something to remember. Farm kids learn to do that just by necessity.

“What we didn't have was a great deal of activities that the kids have now; we didn't get to town much. The main reason for that was they didn't keep the roads plowed in the winter. Life was all rural, and it was a big event to go to town, even as a kid.

“My earliest memory is when I was three or four years old. There was a drawing for a five pound sack of sugar at the old Safeway store, located where the Shortbranch Saloon is now. Everybody who came to the store got a ticket. As it turned out, my ticket won. I remember my dad lifted me up over his head really high when I won the drawing. I think it scared me, but I do remember that.

“As a child, we had to entertain ourselves, only there used to be a lot more people that lived in the country than now. We used to get together and play on the hills. I always liked to read books; my favorites were **Robin Hood** and **Huck Finn**. The other farm kids and I would play out the parts of the books. It was more difficult to act out Huckleberry Finn because there wasn't any place to approach the Mississippi River. We built a raft on dry ground and pretended we were on

the river. I also had a horse, and we rode horseback a lot.

"The first of the two country schools I attended was the Mystic School, which is just to the west of Elk Mountain and across from Joe Blandford's place. I also attended Fairplay School which is the little red one across from Clarence Wheeler's place, on the lower Elk River. I went to Mystic School for one year and to the other for five years.

"In a lot of ways school was kind of an interesting experience because of the small number of kids. When I graduated there were only 65 kids. In grade school there were three or four kids in a class. I remember each class had to go to the front of the room and recite poems. Tests were often recitation. The teacher would ask questions about history, English or math which we were studying. Now, if we paid attention, we could keep ahead. I always listened to the older kids recite their lessons, and then I generally learned those along with whatever I was learning in my grade. The last two years I was in the one-room school, there was a total of six kids in the entire school; three were in one class, two in another, and one in another, in eight grades. We got a lot of individual attention.

"I felt school was rewarding; sometimes we'd get out after lunch to play **Lorna Doone** on the hill, and we wouldn't get back to school until two or two-thirty. We'd catch hell for that. It was different and I think probably kids get a better quality education now, but there were some things that were good in a one-room school that you don't have now.

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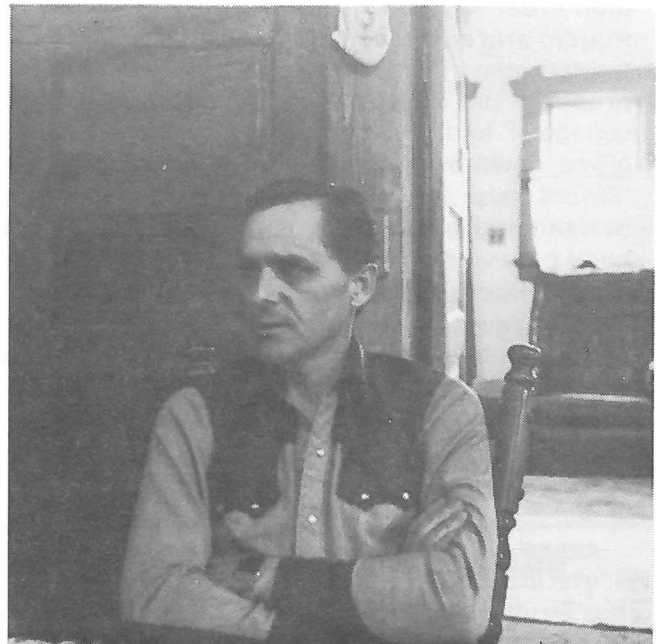
"We did Christmas programs and Saint Patrick's Day programs. One Christmas program (I only recall from other people telling me) when I was in the first grade, I was to get up and recite a poem that went, 'I put my foot upon the stage; my heart went pitty-pat, I thought I heard someone say, 'Whose little boy is that?'. When I got up to recite, why, I didn't say anything. My sister Barbara who was five years older and in the sixth grade whispered to me, 'I put my foot' and I whispered to the audience 'I put my foot'. Everyone laughed but my sister, of course, who got very upset. Anyway, we'd do a Christmas program generally with another country school. For some reason, I don't know why that was, but we always did a Saint Patrick's Day program, also.

"After my sixth grade, the schools were consolidated and I went through junior high and high school in Steamboat proudly. The junior high and high school were in the building that's now been abandoned on Seventh Street. The grade school at that time was an old two story brick building on the vacant lot next to the school, also on Seventh Street. At one time that was the high school.

"Coming from the country school to high school was quite an unnerving experience. I think by modern standards I would have been an unruly child, and I had a hard time adjusting. I had a real tendency to show off to seek attention and that got me into a lot of trouble. I got in trouble quite a bit in junior high too, because I was a bit overactive and extremely sociable when I should have been being quiet.

"As a teenager I did go out. Once I got my car, my parents didn't have a choice. In high school I had three cars. I had a 1948 Studebaker, which I traded for a '49 Chrysler New Yorker that I wrecked. It wasn't my fault, and fortunately my uncle was then Justice of the Peace. With the insurance money I bought a 1952 Chevrolet.

"We went to the movie, at the Chief Theater for dates. Sometimes we'd go to the drive-in in Craig during the summer. We would also just drive around. We didn't go to dances like you kids do now.



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“I did very little work to support myself in high school. I worked primarily for my father and I used to work for some of my neighbors in the summer stacking hay. There wasn’t really that much work around then. After I got out of high school I worked on construction. Then I bought a self-propelled combine, so all the time I was in college I custom cut grain in the summer and made a little money. You know, those were not hard times. The people on the farms were actually making more money than now.

“As far as college goes, I went one year to the University of Colorado, then transferred to CSU and graduated from there in 1964 in the top five of my class. I had finally learned to settle down. The only problem I had in college was that I didn’t really know what I wanted to do. I changed majors and ended up with an English major, but I didn’t take any teaching classes. I wasn’t really prepared to do anything. When I got out of college, I told my mom I was going to rent an office downtown and put up a sign that said, ‘Smart guy for hire’. I didn’t have an understanding of what I was going to do. I came back here and went into agriculture, which I’ve always liked. Since land was cheaper then, I’d buy cut pieces of land; one by Hayden (Colo.), and one in this area, closer to Steamboat. I guess it’s not a way to get rich quick, but it’s a good life.

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**“We got a lot of individual attention going to a one room school.”**

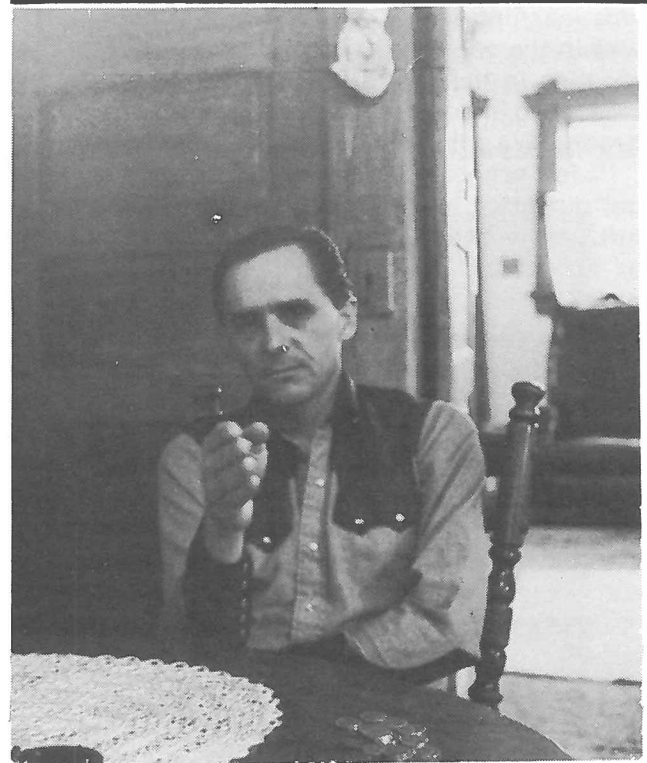
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“I never went off to live by myself until I married. When I married, of course I assumed responsibilities. I didn’t make as much money then as I do now, but things were a lot cheaper. I had to watch where my pennies went, but a

penny bought something in those days, too! It probably wasn’t as difficult as it is today for someone going out on their own. I, myself, would have been better off if I had gone out and worked and seen the world instead of going right to college. It is something I feel kids today should look at as an alternative.”

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**“You kind of had to watch where your pennies went, but a penny bought something in those days, too!”**



After relaying his childhood memories, Senator Soash told me of his family and personal history. “My parents are Irving and Nellie Soash. My mother was born on this property about half a mile up the creek. Her parents came here and homesteaded around the turn of the century. My father was born in North Dakota and he came here when he was 14 years old. I have two older sisters, so I was the baby of the family, born August 3, 1941, and the only boy. I was a lot younger, so I was quite spoiled.

“When I was a child we didn’t have electricity, at least until I was nine years old. The electrical lines were two miles down the road from our house. This was before World War II, and it took

until the late fifties to get those lines extended to our rural area of the country. I also remember we had a wall phone with a hand crank until 1961.

"I think that life today is probably more challenging than any other time in history, but I think that's good. Today, we are faced with tremendous problems but at the same time, it's a great challenge. It's kind of exciting being with people just ready to go out into the world and face a more challenging life than other generations have faced. That to me is an exciting thing. I wouldn't want to live in a different era in history either. For instance, I wouldn't want to go back to 1896 and live or 1723 or anything like that; I think that this is probably the best time that anyone could live in. Anytime life is filled with problems, it's challenging, but that's what makes it so fascinating because we get to solve or get a hand in finding a solution to life's quandries.

"People are different now than they used to be. People go through a constant evolution just as fashions are updated. People are changing. Women, for instance, have assumed a different role in society than they had 20 years ago. Women play a more important part in the economy and society in general. That's a change from what it was a few years ago.

"I think that there have been some obvious changes in civil rights and the position of minorities in this country, but all of these things are part of a constant evolution that mankind has gone through since the first cave men were swinging from trees. This will continue, and no one knows what direction it will take. The kind of surprising thing is that people resist change, especially rapid change. The greater the resistance the more turmoil there is in society. The late 60's and early 70's were a time of tremendous change. The Vietnam War, the racial unrest and a number of things created a great deal of confusion and chaos because people were really fighting change as they always do.

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**"The kind of surprising thing about it is people resist change."**

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"We see this resistance in a small community like Steamboat with recreation and energy, and people resist that change. It takes different forms but people just don't readily accept change, even when it is apparent. It's probably good that we do resist this too rapid a change, because it wouldn't be good for society. First

thing we have to decide is what direction this country is going to take. What we see happening today is a reaction to what was happening in the late 60's and early 70's. During that time we saw a prevailing attitude that was extremely liberal socially, economically and environmentally. In all these different areas there were tremendous changes. Now the mentality and the general feeling is swinging back more to the 'right'. It's becoming more conservative, a reaction to things we have done before. Most of these things are prompted by economics. The two previous decades cost a lot of money. The environment changes, for instance, increased the cost of virtually everything that we have. The overall change has been a more conservative attitude, and it's good to return to a more balanced society.

"I think that it's unfortunate that some people live their lives and say, 'Gee, I wish I'd done it differently.' By and large I am satisfied with my life and the things that I've been able to accomplish. I've even been satisfied with some of the defeats I have suffered. A hind sight is always good. If I was faced with the same situations in the past with the knowledge I have today, I doubt I would have learned from it. If you have a good mind and you're healthy, you're going to get along alright. At this point, there are still some things I would like to do."



**"It's not a way to get rich quick, but it's a good life." ★**

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