

Wade Booher

2/12/03, T1, S1

WB: I'm Thomas Wade Booher born August 13th, 1928.
JT: And what was your address at that time?
WB: Highway Avenue.
JT: Which is...
WB: Route 2.
JT: Which is called 18th now.
WB: Which is called 18th Street now, yes.
JT: At that time it was outside of the city limits.
WB: Yes.
JT: As you grew up you started to Willow School?
WB: Willow School. Went six years...seven years at Willow School.
JT: And what did you think about school?
WB: It's great. Just right.
JT: What were some of the games that you played when you were going to Willow School?
WB: Baseball, kickball, tag, swings.
JT: Hide and Seek?
WB: Hide and Seek.
JT: Blind man?
WB: Oh yeah.
JT: Is there anything particular that happened while you were going to Willow School that you'd like to share with us? Incidents or fun you had.
WB: Oh, just loved recess and playin' sports and that's about the size of it.
JT: Well uh, what did your family do for entertainment when you were...?
WB: Listen to the radio.
JT: What were some of the programs that you listened to?
WB: Oh, Amos and Andy and I Love a Mystery and The Shadow Knows.
JT: The Creaking Door?
WB: The Creaking Door. Those things you could get on the radio.
JT: And you had to walk from where you lived across the tracks down to Willow School.
WB: Yeah. Every day.
JT: By where is now the new Safeway store.
WB: Yes.
JT: Then when you went into junior high up at the high school what did you think about going from a small school up to...with all the kids in town coming together?
WB: It was quite a change. We...it split up the old gang at Willow and... It was different, but we got by, we made it.
JT: What were the things that you liked about high school? What were some of the courses that you liked?

WB: I took agriculture and went into the FFA class. I liked English. I wasn't crazy about math, but I should've been. But I went mostly to the four years in the ag courses at the high school.

JT: Where were some of the activities you did in high school?

WB: Well, sports mostly. Baseball...not baseball, we didn't have baseball then, but we had football and basketball. The last couple years we had wrestling.

JT: Was there any particular position you played in football?

WB: Yeah, I was a tackle.

JT: Oh. [laughs] Did you feel that you got an adequate education at the high school to prepare you to work?

WB: Yes and if I didn't it was my fault. There's times when I wished I had better, but then it was adequate.

JT: What did your father do for an occupation?

WB: He was a yard engineer on the railroad.

JT: And what is a yard engineer?

WB: Well, at that time a yard engineer just worked in the yard limits in the yard for La Grande, Huntington and Reese at that time.

JT: And La Grande had a great big roundhouse.

WB: Oh, they had a big roundhouse.

JT: This being a division point between Reese and Huntington to the east.

WB: Yes. They rebuilt engines, serviced engines. Back in the back shop they'd tear the engines completely down and rebuild 'em and the boiler up all in the roundhouse. But rip track was a huge rip track and they rebuilt cars and serviced cars. And they had to switch engines around the clock. Every train came into town was switched, a new engine put on, a new caboose put on and cars all switched around that went up the branch or came off the branch to go on the train.

JT: And the branch that was up to Joseph.

WB: Branch was from La Grande through Elgin to Joseph, yes.

JT: Now when you were going to high school what kind of jobs did you have?

WB: Mostly just summer jobs workin' on the farms around out in the valley.

JT: During...when the war started did that...you're still working on the farm?

WB: Still worked. Then I went over to Athena and worked in the peas every summer.

JT: And a lot of kids from La Grande did that because there were a lot of men gone to the service. You had to do essentially men's work.

WB: Yeah, we did.

JT: Did you buy a car?

WB: Not till I was probably a junior in high school.

JT: And what was your first car?

WB: 1938 Chevy.

JT: And you liked to hunt and fish during that time.

WB: Oh, I loved to hunt and fish.

JT: Probably never missed a hunting season.

WB: Never missed a hunting season.

JT: When did you get your first deer and elk?

WB: My first deer was when I was fourteen years old. My first elk was probably two years later when I was about sixteen.

JT: And everybody loved to hunt.

WB: Oh, everybody loved to hunt.

JT: Besides that it put meals on the table.

WB: Yes, that's besides... We lived on about five acre...well, we called it a farm. It's just a little five acre acreage. We had cow, calf and sometimes a pig and raised their own garden, potatoes and carrots and apples and all kinds of garden stuff. But deer meat and elk meat in the fall helped get the family by. We never went hungry like some people I knew at that time.

JT: And wages were pretty low.

WB: Wages was terribly low.

JT: You graduated from high school in 1947 and what did you want to be? What did you...?

WB: Well, I really wanted to go into education and coach football, but I never even got close. [laughs]

JT: Well, you worked for the State Forest Service for a while.

WB: I... As soon as I graduated from high school I went to work for the Union Pacific in the B&B department the summer I was...after I graduated. Dick Hamilton, a friend of mine, him and I worked in the B&B department, that's Bridge and Building. We worked there till September, middle of September when college started. And I went two terms to college and run out of money and went back to work for the railroad and the water service department. That took care of all the water pipes and heat. We rebuilt the...in '47 we rebuilt...relined the powerhouse from coal so they could put fire brick in it so they could burn oil. That was in 1947. And in 1947 the first diesel freight locomotive came through town. We was all standin' on the platform watchin' it come in and it was something I never even envisioned and it didn't look anything like I had thought it would look like. It just looked like a streamliner passenger engine, but of course it wasn't.

JT: When did you decide you wanted to be a railroad engineer?

WB: Well, I couldn't find a job anywhere else. [laugh] I worked... I got married in August of 1950 and I worked for the mill and I worked for Gyppo mills around the valley and worked for farmers and worked in the service station and worked for Mt. Emily a while. Like you say, I worked for the Forestry Department and in 1953, February or March, I got a chance to hire out at what they call a 'call voice' at that time. They were clerks, weigh masters, and I worked there until June of '53 and I transferred into the fire...to be a fireman on the railroad. And I've been there...was there thirty-seven years.

JT: And when you changed over there that established a date working for the railroad with all railroaders worked by.

WB: Yep. 7/25/53 was my hiring out date as a fireman. And I worked thirteen years as a fireman at Hinkle and La Grande, Pendleton and Huntington. Hoslin' at Hinkle and La Grande and Huntington and in the yard at Hinkle and La Grande and Huntington. In the fall of...winter of '54 I was cut off for about two months and in the winter of '55 I was cut off two months. And they went from a seven-day work week to a five-day work week and that put a lot of us back on and from that date on I was never cut off as far as not working. I was cut off the 'extra board', which was a premier job in most cases. If you could work as much as you

- wanted and then not have to go back. Two different winters I went to Huntington to fire in the yard and then I didn't...I wasn't cut back anymore.
- JT: And all those years you worked different times of the day and night and never could depend on a holiday at home.
- WB: That's very true. Unless you was on a assigned yard job, why, you worked any hour of the day and night, any weekend or holiday they wanted you to.
- JT: When you first started as a fireman how did the engineers treat the fireman? Was there a little hazing or...?
- WB: Nah. There was some engineers that's just plain mean and others could care less and then there was a good many of 'em that liked ya and enjoyed your time and your...you spent with 'em and was enjoyable to work with. But there were some that wasn't that way.
- JT: There was a lot more to running an engine that just pulling the throttle. What were the things that you had to worry about and learn so that you became a good engineer?
- WB: That's...that'll take a long time to explain that, but yes, there was a lot...a very, very strict rules and orders and regulations that you had to know and you had to know 'em by heart. And many has heard the expression you did things by the seat of your pants and that's one place where you...you felt the train by the seat of your pants or just the way it...you topped over the hill and set your breaks and just the way you felt at the situation and if it didn't feel right you tried...you adjusted it. If you adjusted right, why, everything worked out fine and if you misjudged it then you...you had a little problems gettin' down the hill or up the hill. Down the hill is the worst. Most anyone can run up the hill, it's when you top over and get everything gathered up and go down that hill. And it's not straight down or straight up, there's flat places and...especially on the east end where you can't use your brakes all the way down, you have to release 'em and gather 'em up, do it all over again. The same way on the west, you...if you top over at Kemela and set your brakes and you get down through Meacham you got to release 'em. Then when you get over the west end of Meacham you really gotta put 'em back on because that's steep, must steeper than goin' from Kemela down and it's longer.
- JT: What was it, did this division of Union Pacific one of the steepest grades?
- WB: Yes. We have a 2.2 grade on both east and west out of La Grande up and down. This is where the...ninety percent of the helpers were used and it was a short run because at the mountain the average speed or the maximum speed on the mountain was twenty, twenty-five miles an hour until you got down on the flat like Gibbon and then you could release 'em and go track speed from there to Hinkle.
- JT: And what was track speed?
- WB: Well, it varied according to straight track or curved track. You had speed restrictions on curves that you had to abide by and speed restrictions through towns. The east end when you...you had speed restriction down the hill and when you got down to Durkee, why, you could go up to twenty-five to thirty miles an hour down through Burnt River Canyon. You get out of Huntington then you could go about as fast as the engine could pull it.

JT: As an engineer did you have to know how much weight you had in the train?

WB: It helped you in your mind to know what the tonnage was in the train whether you could make adjustments to...to know when to set the brakes to slow down for curves. You had to...they said a quarter-of-a-mile to a half-a-mile before curves you had to speed board, tells you what that curve was good for and what the maximum speed of your train was good for. It didn't take you long to realize and learn that that speed board...if you waited to that speed board to set your air to slow down you was too late. You had to do it...you looked down the track and know where you was out, knew where that speed board was and you set the air accordingly. Like going out of La Grande eastbound as soon as you got your head end over what we call the Pepsi-Cola crossing the east end of La Grande you could go as fast as your train was ordered to go, till you got to the curve at Hot Lake and then you had to go around that at a reduced speed. And you had to go the east end of Union Junction was a very restrictive curve and you had to approach that at reduced speed. And then from then on way up the hill from then on you was at that speed 'cause you couldn't go any faster.

JT: You got this information from your dispatcher?

WB: No, you had a time table that you lived by and that told you what your speeds were. These speed boards had a mark on 'em, freight, passenger and streamliner. A streamliner was on the top. The speed a streamliner could go and the next numbers was the speed a passenger train could go and the next numbers, bottom numbers, was the speed a freight train could go. That's...you just...a person could become an engineer a lot quicker than thirteen years, but we had an extreme amount of fireman. Every train, every engine, had a fireman at that time. It wasn't till about '64, '65 that they started doin' away with the fireman jobs. The yard engineers had fireman and they started doin' away with those jobs. When I was a yard engineer I didn't have a fireman most of the time. And most of my railroading days I didn't have a fireman unless I was teaching one, giving one instruction to how to become an engineer. And we did that...that's how they were taught how to become an engineer is they worked with another engineer or many engineers for that matter, but they worked with an engineer and what he did rubbed off onto them, hopefully the good points. Some of 'em picked up some bad points, but then...

JT: When you were a engineer was running a helper when you...how did you hook up a train and then did the other engineer set the pace or how did you communicate back and forth?

WB: Well, before we had radios...yeah, that...the head end of the train...head engineer on the train could set the pace. Of course you knew what the rules were. You would watch your gauges, the speedometer, and when he started settin' there and your gauges would show that you were putting more power into it because he was slowing down, then you would throttle down accordingly. You had gauges that would show like a hundred, two hundred, three hundred amps, four hundred, six hundred amps on your gauge and when they would go up extremely high then you'd throttle down. Watch your air gauges so you could tell when he was settin' air.

JT: It became much easier later when you got radios and you communicate back and forth.

WB: Oh, much. But you generally knew where...what the length of train was, how far up ahead he was setting and you knew when he would set air that he was either gonna go in at Hilgard or goin' up the hill you didn't worry too much about it except when he'd set a good amount of air to slow down to go into Hilgard or Kamela or so on. Out on the flat you watched it and if he set a lot of air and the speed of your train was comin' down you knew you was approaching let's say Haines, why, you would throttle down accordingly. But your speed into the passing tracks was twenty miles an hour over the switch and then immediately when you got into that passing track you come under a different rule that anything in that track if it's visible opposition to you you had to stop short of it.

JT: Later on when they had a number of units in the train it could all be controlled by the front-end engineer, couldn't it?

WB: Yes. They had... They came through with what they call slave train, slave units and they would hook them in by radio to the train, you controlled it from the head-end by the gauges on... You had another box that set on your stand that told you what that unit...those units back there were doing. And you could also set the throttle what they were doing and worked it accordingly to what you were doing. Sometimes you might work them a little harder to keep the slack up or when you were in dynamic braking, electric braking, going downhill you'd work those in dynamic braking also.

JT: Is that the thing that they call "dynamiting a train"?

WB: No.

JT: What was that?

WB: "Dynamiting a train" is going to emergency. But dynamic braking is on a diesel electric locomotive is when you take it out of...your controls out of power, go into dynamic braking and it reverses the current from the traction motors and makes them into electric generator and reverses the current and throws the current back up through dynamic grids and burns it off into the atmosphere...the current off into the atmosphere. See, each wheel on a locomotive has a traction motor. That diesel engine in that eng...in the locomotive all that does is make...turn a generator that makes electrical power that turns that traction motor and allows the engine to move one way or another and they can run it backwards the same speed as they can run forward. And then when you top over the hill, or want to go to dynamic braking you take it off of power and put it into a dynamic braking. It makes the generator out of that traction motor. It makes it just like shiftin' down on a pick-up or car goin' downhill.

JT: On a car you'd call it compression.

WB: A car you'd call it compression. The engine you call it dynamic braking.

JT: You told me sometimes one of the worst worries for an engineer was to see somebody along the tracks and afraid you were gonna hit 'em and there was nothing you could do about stopping within how far.

WB: Absolutely. Yeah. If you got a train movin' any speed at all you go to emergency, that locks all the wheels in the train, and that train on the average will go the length of itself before it can come to a stop. So when you see anyone on

- the side of the track or a car on across the crossing there is nothing you can do. You can go to emergency, but you're still gonna hit 'em. I went out the branch with an engine and three cars and hit a car out there on the crossing between La Grande and Island City and go to emergency and we still went through beyond the crossing, the engine and three cars.
- JT: Uh-huh. You told me one time over in Idaho you...there was a grandfather and a little boy there and he was so upset...and it's hard on an engineer to see something like that and know there's nothing he could do.
- WB: Yeah. Fortunate enough I wasn't on the train that hit the little boy, but then they were...that incident they were fishing off the Snake River bridge at Ontario. Nothing you can do. They can't out run that train off of that bridge. I've never seen anyone able to do that. They just... People in La Grande especially talk about too many whistle blowing for crossings, but all they have to do is get on that engine and ride it for a day and, you know, see what stupid people do around railroad tracks and I don't think they would ever complain again. Because all that engineer is doing is telling you "I'm coming to a crossing" or if he sees anything along that track there's a prescribed whistle that he has to blow according to the law of the State and the government and the railroad. It's a long, two shorts, and a long. And that tells you to get the crap out of the way because I'm coming and there's nothin' I can do about it.
- JT: Wish more people would pay attention.
- WB: Yes. Unfortunately, I have hit cars and I've hit people. And, like you say, that's a most sickening feeling that there ever was to hit an individual or a car and there is not a thing you can do about it. You can't go out of the...you can't swerve and you can't stop until that train's ready to...you know, you go to emergency and that train will go till it's ready to stop and then it'll stop.
- JT: Now with some of these trains as long as a hundred cars they're a mile long, aren't they?
- WB: Oh, most trains out here now are a mile long, sometimes a mile-and-a-half to two miles long.
- JT: That's longer than I thought.
- WB: Oh yes.
- JT: During the time you were working for the railroad you had a little time to help in the community, you were on the school board. Can you tell us a little about when you were on the school board?
- WB: Yes. I served on the school board for a year, I think it was 1969, and then I filled a vacancy for a guy and it was a year lapsed and then I went back on the board for a five-year term. And I just did my best, did what I thought was the community and the children more than anything else needed. I could approve...we were...I was on the board at the time we had a bond raising to make an addition to the high school and build a new middle school and build a new Island City grade school on the same bond levy. And I was proud to be a part of that.
- JT: Also you had a son and a daughter that were going to school here.
- WB: I had a son that went to school and graduated. A daughter went to school here, high school and all through school in La Grande and high school and graduated. Both went on to college. The boy graduate with three degrees from Eastern

Oregon. The daughter went a couple years and then quit and went to work, still lives in the community.

JT: And during that time you were an Elk in the Elk's Lodge and also became a Mason and eventually a Shriner.

WB: Yes, I did.

JT: And you were very active in the Shrine Football.

WB: Very active. I put in twelve years as the West team manager for the East-West Shine Football Game. We played some...a few years in Pendleton and the rest since then they've been in Baker, Oregon.

JT: A very rewarding...

WB: Oh, much. I've been through that Shrine Hospital, well, I know twelve times. We'd meet the boys in Portland and take 'em to the Shrine Hospital and load 'em on busses and bring 'em to La Grande. We spent two weeks with 'em every summer. Now they...I think they only spend ten days.

JT: And when they go to the Shrine Hospital it was...none of 'em came out with a dry eye.

WB: Never seen a human go into that hospital come out with a dry eye. Even after bein' in it ten or twelve times myself I can't come out with a dry eye. But it's not from the pitiful action of the children, it's just the...I've never seen a child unhappy or cry...[end tape]

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WB: Yes. Like I say, I've been through there numerous times and the children are always glad to see ya, want you to put their name on their cast or... They're very, very appreciative of everything that the ball players do for them and that the Shriners do for them. And the Shriners Hospital does not charge one penny for any care of a child in those hospitals and I think that's tremendous. I think there's twenty-three hospitals throughout the United States plus I think three burns institutions that the Shriners Hospital and their doctors both in the burns portion and in the children's portion teach lots of other doctors how to handle bones, patients. And I think it's improved a lot of burn conditions...treatments for burned children that they've learned from. The burns institutions are always...I want to say they're always striving, testing to do better, make better conditions, treat the children better.

JT: You've been a part of the Shrine Caravan.

WB: Yeah.

JT: Tell us a little bit how that works.

WB: Yeah. I've...was in the food caravan we call it for about ten or twelve years that starts in Fruitland, Idaho in the wee hours of the morning and comes through Ontario, Baker, La Grande, Pendleton, that people, Shriners particularly in the communities, these communities all the way from Fruitland to Portland, throughout the fall of the year gather food substance, non-perishables, some perishables 'cause they can go down in one day and get put into a freezing unit. And I've been where there's been thirty, forty vehicles in a line that end up at the Shriners' Hospital in Portland with thousands and thousand of dollars worth of

food stuffs for the Shriners' Hospital which they...they use. There's some cases that they have a tremendous amount of non, of perishables they have a deal with one of the other children's hospitals in Portland like Doernbecker that they will exchange, give them food for other...for non-perishable foods and so on so nothing is wasted.

JT: Then as you went along and you retired from the railroad you became very active in the Elks, the Christmas baskets.

WB: Very active in the Elks. I've...this is thirteen years I'm working on the Christmas baskets. We gather money and food stuffs in the fall and go out to different stores and purchase turkeys or now for the last few years we purchased a gift certificate where the person can use it instead of...for meat instead of givin' them a turkey. It's very rewarding. We...when I first started on the Christmas baskets I think we did fifty or sixty and now we're up to a hundred, hundred-and-seven, hundred-and-five. Sometimes we've even done a hundred-and-nine, but that's really crowdin' the room, the space we have to work in.

JT: We also make up candy in sacks with an apple and orange and candy.

WB: Yes, we...we might...

JT: How many we doin' now?

WB: We buy candy and apples and oranges and peanuts. And the last few years we made up a hundred-and-thirty candy sacks for children and for the Elks Christmas parties and then just to give to children. And we make up a hundred-and-fifty what we call diabetic sacks for the nursing homes and the hospital and those consists of quite a bit...quite a bit of candy. The diabetics we buy diabetic candy for that and we give 'em an apple, an orange and a big handful of peanuts.

JT: And this is a tradition that happened even when you were a child. You lined up and got your sack of candy.

WB: Yeah. I can remember taking my children down to the Elks and get their Christmas candy sack. And it was a much bigger event then it is now. They had the Christmas tree in the corner...in the middle of the intersection at Depot and Washington and they would just block off that intersection, candy passin' out time and the children would line up for blocks to go get their sack of candy. Now we only do, like I say, a hundred-and-thirty and we don't...we have to look up children to give it to 'em. They don't seem to come and...come around and pick it up anymore.

JT: _____

WB: Yeah.

JT: What do you think about how La Grande's gone having lived here all your life?

WB: Basically, La Grande hasn't changed as much as people like to think it's changed. I've always loved La Grande. It's a small community, I used to think I knew everybody in town and now I don't even know two people on the street. As I recall when I was a kid growin' up that we was about 8,000 people in the community and now we're up to, what, 13,000. But a lot of that is on account of the city limits have changed more than influx of people. The downtown has changed to the point that there isn't as many merchants downtown as there were when I was growin' up. And that's sad because that's a long of communication...I visited with lots of people and lots of merchants that I knew

back then. You don't...you don't stop in town and very few places in town that you go to anymore. There used to be a Montgomery Wards and a Sears and, of course, J. C. Penny's has been there as long as I can remember. Then you had a shoe store down by...in the same block as M. J. Goss and you had three clothing stores for men, several for women. You just don't have 'em...the banks bought out and changed a lot of the way the town looks. I think one of the saddest things that ever happened in my lifetime is when they sold the Sacagawea Hotel and it was torn down and made into a bank. That was one of the cornerstones of the community was that Sacagawea Hotel. They said it was rickety and gonna fall down and I laughed when they tore it down they had a Caterpillar up on the fourth floor and I don't think it...if it was a rickety old building it'd been able to put a small Cat up on the fourth floor to help knock down the building.

JT: They tore it down floor by floor?

WB: Yep, they did.

JT: In those times we had Zuber Hall for dancing. A lot of young people went there.

WB: Yeah, you had Zuber Hall, you had Payless up on Main Street and the National Guard used to practice and meet before the war...before the Second World War upstairs over the Payless.

JT: Payless was...this was the very first store in the Payless chain.

WB: Yes it was. First store in the Payless chain and now there isn't any Payless anymore.

JT: They changed it to Rite-Aid.

WB: Yep.

JT: How many of your friends are around that went to high school with you? Did they find occupations here or did they have to move?

WB: Most of 'em moved. There was... There was a handful that stayed and some that's came back after they got into retirement age. By and large the majority of the graduates from La Grande High School had to go somewhere else to find employment. I was fortunate enough to find it on the railroad. There was a few out of our class that went to the railroad, but not very many. But the railroad and the mill was the employment hub of La Grande.

JT: Do you think the farming's changed a lot since when you were young?

WB: What?

JT: The farming's changed a lot?

WB: Oh, absolutely! I can... First job I ever had I worked for Crossen, Ray Crossen. He lives out here...he lived out there below that Grandview Cemetery, the first farm on the Foothill Road. And I got two dollars a day and we put up hay, I drove the team. I road my bicycle from my home out there every morning. They fed me lunch. We put up...just him and I would put up the hay and then I'd ride my bicycle home. Then I got a job out by Hot Lake and I went out there and stayed on that farm and got two dollars a day and my room and board. And then when the...that harvest season came, why, Dad came out, told me that I could go over to Athena and work for my uncle in the harvest. I think I got eight dollars a day for that job. And I was a header puncher, what they call a header puncher, a thrashing machine, a combine, pulled by a big Caterpillar. I think the header was twenty foot long, twenty-four foot long. And my job was to lift that up and down

according to the height of the wheat so that you didn't get too much chaff and make sure you got all the heads of the wheat into the combine. And that was a turning point. From then on I went to Athena every summer and worked in the peas and stay right through to the wheat harvest, come home before school and go to school. When spring was over here and school was out back to Athena I'd go.

JT: Mostly that was during the war.

WB: During the war. All during the war.

JT: What did the war do? Changes in the community that you remember?

WB: I really don't...don't know that the war...it changed everyone. I can't dream that things would've...I've sure they would've been different, but what difference it would've been...it made us all grow up faster.

JT: More responsible?

WB: More responsible and of course we were...as graduates from high school in '47 we were quite upset because, as we recall down through the years and watchin' all the things you can...tapes and things you can get out Oregon, Oregon State and the bigger colleges, why that was first couple of college is supposed to have been fun and easy and big times had by all, but when we got into college all the veterans was comin' back from the wars and wantin' an education and they set the standards higher than what we had anticipated and it was a little rougher that way.

JT: And we did have the Air Cadets living in the Sacagawea Hotel...

WB: Oh yeah.

JT: ...going to Eastern College during...

WB: During the war.

JT: ...the war. And then taking flying out at the local airport.

WB: The airport then they graduated, went to ground school, flying school in Texas and then they came back...most of 'em came back to Pendleton. Pendleton and Walla Walla was an airbase for the military for the air...Air Force during the war. And one thing I do remember that the boys that went over Tokyo for General Doolittle, trained Pendleton and Walla Walla before they...of course this wasn't the only place they went, but they did...the ones that went trained at Pendleton and Walla Walla.

JT: There was a shortage of men around the community because of the war.

WB: Oh yeah. They was all off to war.

JT: And that's why you had to grow up and do things to take their place.

WB: The college was... I think the biggest change in the community has been the college because back then if they had four hundred students they was countin' the janitors. I can remember in high school football and basketball we used to play the college, just to scrimmage, but we played the college. When we went to high school two-thirds of our graduating class went to Eastern Oregon. And I think Eastern at that time was about seven hundred students, that neighborhood. Now they got quite a few thousand students, three thousand I believe, that's the last I heard, three or four thousand students. The campus is a lot bigger than it was. I used to play in the old Quinn Coliseum. We used...the neighborhood kids and I used sneak into Quinn Coliseum and play basketball when nobody was supposed to be around. We had ways we could sneak into the gymnasium dressing rooms and into the gymnasium.

JT: One good thing that came about both the college and the high school use the same athletic field which is a good thing.

WB: Yes. Back when we were in school we played at what is now the middle school soccer field. That was a premier football field in Eastern Oregon. It was much better than Pendleton's or Baker. And the college played their games there, what teams they could muster up during the war and right after the war, and they played their games there. Then when the college progressed, why, they built an athletic field down east of Quinn Coliseum which was...which was a farce as far as I'm concerned. Here in the...here around La Grande if you build a field, football field, you want it to run north and south with your bleachers on the west side 'cause the wind comes down Deal Canyon fiercely. The field that the college built down there east of Quinn Coliseum, why, the cemetery was...the field laid east and went...and the people...a lot of people didn't know it, but one end of the field was about six foot lower than the other end of the field and it did make a difference on which quarter you played which end of the field you was on. It was easy to run downhill than it was uphill. [laugh] But they finally got their act together and built 'em a nice stadium there south of Quinn Coliseum and it's a very nice stadium, a nice track. And sometime you want to go look at their baseball diamond, that was a joke of the whole league 'cause it...they call it Snowflake Field, but you look at and your home plate's uphill from second base or anywhere else in the field.

JT: Is there anything you'd change?

WB: That I would change?

JT: Yeah. That you...when you were growing up that you'd do different? How do you feel about it?

WB: I really don't think...looking back on it I thought I had as good a life and growing up. Yes, there are things I would've changed. I didn't think I need all this sophisticated education. In the high school I took what required of me for English, was tickled to death to get out of that, but I would encourage anyone to get all the English they can get and all the math they can get 'cause you don't think that on the farm or on the railroad you need it, but you work with figures and you need the ability to express yourself especially in this day and age and I found it very early after graduating from high school, that I needed it then. Fortunate enough there were things that I did in organizations that I belonged to that I did learn how to express myself. Sometimes I get a little upset and make too big an expression of myself, but then...

JT: When you were a fireman engineer and it didn't...there were times when things happened to other employees that you were able to go to the officials and work things out.

WB: Oh yes. I worked... Back then you had...what they do now...back then we had a three union organizations on the railroad, we had a firemen's organization and you had an engineers organization and you had a trainmen's organization. I started right off involved with the firemen's organization and was the mileage man for at least ten to twelve years. And when I went into the engineers' I took over the same job and what they called then a local chairman. And I did represent different employees and engine service that got either in trouble or called up on

the carpet by the company and had to have what they called an investigation, supposedly to try to find out the truth of what happened and a big share of the time it was a one-way street that the company thought the individual...the person's fault. But I was involved with that till I retired.

JT: That went along with the rules car that everybody had to be tested every...how often was it? The rules?

WB: Every two years.

JT: And any infraction you got demerits.

WB: Demerits are time off. They call discharge. They'd never fire you permanently unless you did something very, very gross. But, yeah, we had to take a very strict rules examination. We had to take three rule...three examinations, mechanical, air brakes and rules. And they were from three hundred to a couple thousand questions on each. You had to take it orally and in a class discussion and in written. And you had to be perfect. In other words, oral you couldn't just him-haw around and guess at the question. He knew...he knew the answer when he asked you the question and you better give him the answer back the way it was in the book. When you did it written it had to be letter perfect with the punctuation marks in the proper place, i's dotted and the t's crossed. I never had that kind of...that much of a problem, but I do know guys that got marked down for not havin' their punctuation in the right place. We'd take three fireman in at a time in each class had three in it and it'd take all day each time. You didn't do it all at one time, you'd take mechanical and then so many months later you'd take the air and after that you'd so many months later you'd take the rules. Then after you got those all completed and got your card then you was an engineer. But you didn't get a date on the board until you went out or someone below you went out on a trip as an engineer. Then you got the date.

JT: And all railroaders carry job insurance because...

WB: All railroaders carry job insurance.

JT: ...the railroad may pull you off for most any infraction and decide who was at fault and then...

WB: And you couldn't live with unemployment so you'd carry job insurance enough to... Most people... Most men carried enough job insurance to...just like working day, you made that much a day, didn't lose any money.

JT: Overall, the job gave you a good job, enough to earn a living and buy your own home and have a car and raise your family and...

WB: Very good job.

JT: ...have a good retirement.

WB: Very good retirement. Back then it was fun to go to work. I enjoyed goin' to work. They used to have the call boys, crew callers, here in La Grande, the dispatchers was here in La Grande...[telephone ring] [tape paused] I guess most of the...lots of times guys that was waiting to get called throughout the day would go down to the depot and go into the call boys room to check the board to see where they stood or where their term stood or where they stood on the extra board. There was always three or four, half-a-dozen guys in there and you'd visit with them. Then when they moved the dispatchers to Portland and the call boys to Portland all you were were a number on the telephone. They'd call you by

telephone and you'd take you're calls by telephone and go to work and there was someone there to hand you...give you the orders and what train you were taking and so on. They took the personality out of the job. Then, a few years they moved the call boys and the dispatchers to Salt Lake City and it's the same as in Portland, you was just on the telephone. And now...before I retired they went to Omaha and everything is run out of Omaha by computer more and more than anything else. You don't...they learn your...your voice and who you are, of course, but they don't...they don't know you by sight. And when you were here in La Grande all you had between you and the call boy was a window pane. You could see 'em, talk to 'em, visit with 'em, joke with 'em. They were neighbors, they lived in the community where you live. They knew you or knew of your family. I knew all the call boys, some personally and others by reputation. When they went to Portland and Salt Lake and Omaha you didn't know 'em. You knew the sound of their voice. It's a lot easier to tell a guy you can't lay off over the telephone than it is three-foot away lookin' through a glass window. That was always our contention. We didn't like it, but that's the way it is. Now if you miss calls, if you're not on the...if you're not home...but back then if you wasn't home they had to come to the house...or if you didn't answer your phone they had to come to the house and call you. Some men didn't have phones for that reason. They want 'em to come out and call 'em. When they moved to Portland, Salt Lake and Omaha, then you had to have a phone and everything was done over the telephone.

JT: You usually have an hour from that you're called to go to work.

WB: You had an hour to an hour-and-a-half. Most of the time it was hour-and-a-half they'd get prepared to be down there ready to go out on that train at that hour-and-a-half. They always had...had the crews called in such a way that they would be there waitin' for the train to come in instead of the train settin' there waitin' for the crew to show up.

JT: Did you ever work at the branch...?

WB: Worked up the branch both as a fireman and as a signed engineer. And the branch is a good run. I loved to work on the branch. It was... It wasn't like the main line, it was slow and the scenery was horrendous, you could see all kind of game and wild animals and activities on the branch. It was an all-day job, it'd take ya...we'd take ten or twelve hours goin' up, come home in six or eight. We always run faster comin' home than we did goin' up. But, yeah, I liked that job. Lots of people liked that job. And then when they moved...the crews started going to...from Huntington...we went from La Grande to Nampa in '73 that was the premier job. You got more time at home by working that job because it was a hundred-and-eighty miles from La Grande to Nampa and it's only a hundred-and-six from La Grande to Hinkle. So you could go make a round trip from La Grande to Nampa and get two to three days off when you got in before your turn worked up to go back out again. I liked that very much. One of the prettiest things you ever see in your life was coming from Nampa to La Grande and you top over Telocaset came down through Crooks and around Pyle's Canyon to where you could come around the turn into the valley the first time you see...[end tape]

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WB: Ready?

JT: Yes.

WB: The most beautiful times...wantta plug that in?

JT: What? Yeah.

WB: Was early morning when the sun is up shining bright and in the summer when everything was green, beautiful, or in the winter when everything was covered with snow. And I've never seen a more beautiful valley to come into when you make that turn out of Pyle's Canyon over to Union Junction and see the Grande Ronde Valley. So you...coming down from Kamela you're in the...you're in the canyon all the way and you don't get to see the valley till you're right out in it.

JT: How about working the other men on the railroad? The section men were very important.

WB: Oh yes.

JT: And the maintainers were very important. What was your working relationship with these men?

WB: I didn't really have a working relationship with 'em. I didn't know 'em by name. I knew a lot of 'em by sight, by seein' 'em a lot of times. Had a lot of respect for the section men because I knew that if that section man didn't do his job properly I could be in a wreck out there and possibly get killed or do a lot of damage to the cars and engines. A lot...I don't know if others felt that way, but I did. A lot of respect for the work that the section man did. The maintainers keepin' the signals goin' 'cause if they didn't keep the signals goin' we couldn't...we couldn't move. We were...all our work was done by signals, for red you stopped and green you went and yellow you was cautious.

JT: They had already pulled off the Mt. Emily Lumber Company line by the time you started as ___?

WB: No. It was running when I first hired out. It'd go... It'd make a turn-around they called the Hilgard Logger. You'd call an extra crew to go up to Hilgard, take the empties, flats up and the Mt. Emily Lumber Company train would come down to Hilgard and push their loads out on the Y and then you'd pick 'em up and they'd reach in and take the empties and go back up to Mt. Emily Lumber Company.

JT: Where did that Y cross the highway there, Wade?

WB: Yes, it crossed the highway. The tail of the Y would go across the highway 'cause that's where they'd...

JT: Where? Where exactly?

WB: Right there at Five Points.

JT: Five Points Creek.

WB: Yep.

JT: Uh-huh. I couldn't remember just for sure.

WB: Well, they got it all covered up with curb on the freeway now. It came in and crossed the river and...

JT: And that Y did that extend up the Grande Ronde River there or did it...?

WB: It just out to the river.

JT: Out to the river.

WB: Yeah.

JT: When you went out on a run how many hours can an engineer run before he has to stop the train and be replaced?

WB: Well, when I first hired out he could work sixteen hours and then you had to have twelve hours rest. And then they changed it in later years to you could work twelve hours and have ten hours rest. But you could tie up short five minutes off of that twelve hours, make it eleven-fifty-five, and go back out eight hours. Otherwise you had to have a full ten hours rest.

JT: Did you many times go right up to the limit of the time?

WB: Oh, many times, many times. Many times I'd go dead at Ontario goin' east and they'd have to come pick us up, take us into Nampa.

JT: I remember when you were running a helper engine sometimes you'd go clear over past Baker there.

WB: Oh yeah. Lots of times you go down to...down to Durkee and hook into a train and help it back. Or I've went down to Lime. You couldn't go into Huntington 'cause if you went into Huntington back...they had helpers out of Huntington then, but if you run out of a...a helper crew out of La Grande, why, you could go down to Lime and hook into a train and come back. If you went into Huntington then they'd have to tie you up and run a Huntington crew out then.

JT: In the early days there was a regular helper station to Telocaset and then to Kamela...

WB: Kamela.

JT: ...west.

WB: Yes. Yep, there was.

JT: Was that still running when you?

WB: No. They...they were...when I hired out they had done away with the Telocaset and the Meacham...or the Kamela helper station and they run 'em all out of La Grande...they had a helper...helper in Huntington but none anywhere else. And we would...goin' west we'd run down to Reese with Pendleton and help trains back...back to La Grande.

JT: But you really...after your later years like to run east from La Grande to Nampa...

WB: Oh yes.

JT: ...and that was an assigned area. If you signed up to go east that's where you went, if you signed up to go west then you went from La Grande to Hinkle.

WB: Yeah. When I was on the...when you was on to pull freight, why, you either...you either run from La Grande to Hinkle or you worked from La Grande to Nampa or Huntington. Before they started workin' into Nampa we was...all our board run out of La Grande and if they wanted a train east if it was your turn you went east, if they wanted a train west and it was your turn you went west, we intermingled and went each direction. But when they went to Nampa they had to bring over a half of the crews on the east end were Idaho crews and they come out of Glenn's Ferry and they moved the Nampa. So then they couldn't run from La Grande to Hinkle so we split the board and run La Grande to Hinkle...Hunting...or La Grande to Hinkle or you run from La Grande to Nampa and you intermingled.

JT: But there was just about as half as many jobs as there had been running east to Nampa.

WB: Oh yeah. Yes. Yep, that's true. But I liked...I liked the east end, you got a better run. You make better money, didn't have to work...a lot of the crews on the west end you'd have to work ten or twelve hours every trip over and that much back. And many a time if you caught a fast train you could...five hours and you could be in Nampa or if you caught a slow one you could be over there in ten hours, twelve hours gettin' there, but...

JT: Yeah. The engines became a lot more comfortable to work in as time went on...

WB: Oh, much.

JT: ...compared to when you first went to work.

WB: Yes. When I first went to work they still had steam engines. They wasn't...on most their runs they used them most...most of the time in helper service. But they were...I've heard a lot of guys down through the years say, "oh, the good old times of the steam engine", well, I don't recall of any good time on a steam engine. You either froze in the wintertime or cooked in the summertime. One side would be cookin' and the other side would be freezin'. And it just much different. You had to have a crew on each engine on a steam engine. On a diesel you could hook up five or six units together and all run by the same engineer. They'd pull more freight 'cause we got...like I said earlier, most of your trains out here at least a mile to a half-a-mile...mile-and-a-half or sometimes two miles long. They extended a lot of passing tracks, made 'em longer, and they still...when I was still working they still had passing tracks...or trains that wouldn't fit in some of the passing tracks.

JT: And what was some of the sizes of some of the engines when you first went to work?

WB: Well, I...they were much little...much smaller than what they are now. You had a lot of 100s and 400s and now your up to the 6900s and 7000s.

JT: I've heard about a 9000 Indian engine that they had down at Huntington, but it wouldn't go around the curves up in this area.

WB: That was a steam engine. Yeah, they had some of those, what they called "the big boys" would come in and they wouldn't go around the curves. When I first hired out what diesel engines, freight engines, we had would have two traction motors under each end and now you have three and four traction motors under each end. Then in the...then they developed...I'd say twenty years ago...they developed a huge engine called...it was a 6900 series and it had two diesel engines on the same chassis, back...you know, back to back and they had four traction motors under each end. And they were long. They were...they worked up here, but they was mainly for a high-speed. It wasn't really that efficient on the mountain. But the Union Pacific had a policy if they bought something they worked it where in the hell ever they wanted to work it. They told 'em way at the beginning not to mix a 100 series, 200 series, 400 series, 500 series engines, that they worked better in their own series and some railroads welded them together so that if you shut down...if you had a three unit set any part of that set...you couldn't just disconnect 'em and hook 'em onto another engine. Union Pacific would not do that. They would run a...I worked with a 200 series and a 400 series, a 500 series

- all in the same unit. And their horsepower were different. The 400s, back way back at the beginning was very powerful engine. The 300 or 500 series engine on each side of 'em would work...I mean they would spin tryin' to keep up with those 400s. They were just a different series altogether. But the Union Pacific made it work. They would not set a four-unit set out because one engine had a little problem. They'd just unhook it and hook another one on in its place and go ahead and run.
- JT: Do you ever envision that they'll run all the way through La Grande and do away with La Grande as a division point?
- WB: They could do it now if the railroad wanted to put the time and money into it. My feeling is that as long as they run the big, long, heavy trains and they don't have sufficient enough passin' tracks, why, no, they won't. But if they would double track the mountain where you wouldn't have to go into a passing track and wait for a train to come up the hill from the other side and set in there thirty minutes or an hour waitin' for a train, yeah, they could...they could run from Nampa to Hinkle. But I don't think that you're gonna see that because that's gonna cost a tremendous amount of money to double track the mountain.
- JT: In a way you might say that saves La Grande because there's quite a large payroll that comes into La Grande...
- WB: A huge payroll.
- JT: ...and people don't realize it. They notice where the roundhouse used to be and the number of employees that were there, but there's still an awful lot of money made right here by the railroaders.
- WB: Yeah. You had different situations on the railroad. You had the roundhouse and you had the back track. I can remember in '47 and '48 when I worked and even after I hired out as a fireman and would hostel engines in and out of the roundhouse there was a tremendous amount of men, like three hundred men working...combined working the roundhouse and the back shop. And now there is nothing. You can't even tell where the back shop or the roundhouse was. You had at one time I know of they had twenty helper crews out of La Grande. They had fifteen to twenty at Kamela and there isn't anything at Kamela. They used to have a roundhouse at Kamela, turntable at Kamela. Nothing up there anymore. You don't have any helper crews. You used to have five or six helper crews at Huntington and there's noth...they go through Huntington like it's not even there. So it...the railroad has changed tremendously. It's not the same railroad. I don't know, it just...back then it was a railroad and you enjoyed it.
- JT: There's something fascinating about railroad and a big engine pulling a large train.
- WB: Oh yeah. I've never...all the years I worked on the railroad you go along the highway and wave at a car and it waved back or they'd honk their horn and wave at you first. There's always something that fascinated 'em. [pause in recording]

I asked John if it was feasible to put anything on the end of this tape that I felt earlier should've been on the front of this tape. What I was referring to that my dad hired out on the railroad as a yard fireman in the fall of 1923 and was promoted to yard engineer in 1928, the year I was born. I hired out on the

railroad in the summer of 1953 and was promoted to engineer in the summer of 1966. You can tell there was only five years difference between my dad's hiring out and his becomin' an engineer and there was thirteen years difference between my hiring out and becoming an engineer I explained it. In 1950 they consolidated the yard...yard fireman and the road fireman. Prior to that you either hired out as yard fireman or you hired out as a road fireman. And your bein' an engineer was which branch you were on whether you was a yard engineer or a road fireman. In 1950 they consolidated the road...or the road and the yard fireman, but it was 1964, I think '63 or '64 when they consolidated the engineers from the yard and the road. But they used your...everything hinged on your fireman's date. You couldn't promote one man ahead of another man because of his date. But... So consequently they made it retroactive so every road engineer and every yard engineer got a firing date as of 1950. So the road men got a yard firin' date as 1950 and the yard engineers got a road date 1950. So all of us that hired out after 1950 fell in behind those gentlemen instead of them fallin' in from their date in 1964 they went back to 1950. So that set us all back a little bit, too.

JT: It made a few more people to compete against.

WB: Make more people...you had to...had to retire or quit before you got to move up. One thing that to me was unique I did fire for my dad, but his...you don't have...you have a...initials and your last name for your...you had stamps that you had initials and your last name and p-number for your...you stamped on all your time slips, that's how you got paid. My dad's initials was T. H. Booher p-number 1028. And thirty years later my initials was T. W. Booher p-029. One number difference in thirty years. But of course they...all of the number was taken in alphabetically.

JT: Wasn't it fantastic payday was...if you'll give the dates when you went down to get your pay at the freight house?

WB: Yeah. When we hired out they had the old freight house down there about where the old hotel was built.

JT: Washington and Chestnut. Or Jefferson and Chestnut.

WB: Jefferson and Chestnut at the west end of the depot. And I knew guys that worked in there, they knew me all my life when I was a little kid. When I went to get my check I had to give 'em my social security number every time before they'd give me my check. Clint Thatcher, which knew me when I was born, would not give me my check until I give him my social security number. Therefore, I learned that social security number and I could still repeat it to you. [laughs] And then they quit doin' that and those gentlemen retired and the freight house was torn down and they moved everything into the depot and those guys wasn't so particular, they'd just give you your check. And then the great thing that happened that direct deposit come along and I just had it...the railroad company deposit the check in my bank account and not have to cash it every day. And I thought that was quite fascinating to me that my dad's number and my number after thirty years difference in hiring out was one number off. But they never...the railroad never mixed it up. I never got any part of his check or he never got any part of my check. And my nephew hired out after I did and he worked on the railroad, was a fireman and an engineer, and he fired for my dad

quite a few years...numerous years. And then I had an uncle on my mother's side that was a hostler for the Union Pacific down around Las Vegas on siding either way from Las Vegas. And back those days you had hostlers that worked for the railroad that were not fireman.

JT: And hostlers did what?

WB: Hostlers moved the engines in and out of the roundhouse and spotted it for fuel and such as that. And then they...before I hired out they did away with the...what they called hostlers and give 'em...they went on to be...become a fireman, give 'em a date and they become a fireman. And they had hostler helpers. We never had to touch a fuel hose or water or anything, the hostler helpers did all that. All we did is move the engines. If you was a hostler you run the engine and if you was a helper you threw the switches to move the engines from one track to another like a brakeman in the yard. But I fired for John Mulligan here in La Grande for, oh, some several years when I had enough seniority. That you had...that was the day job. You could work five days a week, eight hours a day so long as you could hold the job and somebody didn't bump you off. You had regular hours for those. But if you went to the extra board our out on the pull freight job you didn't have regular hours. When they called you you went.

JT: And a lot of times you worked with a particular engineer when you were a fireman.

WB: Yeah, I did. First firing job I got with...with Doug Wilson and then I went to work with Bob McClay, which I worked for two or three years with Bob McClay. Then I went to work for Ted Bean and worked with Ted Bean for two or three years, four years till I got promoted. Then you worked off the...you didn't have a regular...I didn't have a regular man then 'cause I worked off the extra board or else I was out running off the extra board myself. Sometimes after you were promoted and you was on a regular job...firing job and they run out of extra engineers they just reach out and tell you you was gonna go to work as an engineer, you'd go to work as an engineer and come back and go back on your firin' job. But they were good engineers and then, like I said earlier, there was some that was scoundrels, but all-in-all you loved to work with the good ones and you didn't particular care to work with the others.

JT: I can appreciate it. There's one thing I didn't ask you, when you were in high school did upper-classmen ever harass you at any time?

WB: They tried, but I outrun 'em. [laughs]

JT: What did they do when they were...?

WB: They never did catch me, but they would...I knew of other people that they would take 'em out to Hot Lake or take 'em out in the valley and take their clothes off and their shoes off and make 'em walk home. But most of the time they didn't want to get out of their car. They'd come up along beside you in a car and I could dodge down the alley or to the...behind somebody's house, get away from 'em. Then I just didn't prowl around at night when them guys was out. Just growin' up in the east end of town you walked and I didn't...I didn't get uptown much.

JT: It was about a mile uptown, wasn't it?

WB: Oh yeah. Yeah, it was a good mile. You walked to high school, walked to junior high and walked to high school, or rode your bike. They didn't have school buses. The only school bus they had was the varsity bus that took football and basketball teams to different cities to play ball.

JT: How many were in your family?

WB: I had five brothers and sisters, myself, six. I had three deceased at birth so there would've been nine all together.

JT: That happens. How many brothers and how many sisters?

WB: Well, it would've been five sisters, three brothers. One's living.

JT: And where did you stand in the family?

WB: I was the fourth one, the middle. [laugh] I had three older sisters, then myself. One deceased brother would've been older than I was. And then I had a sister younger that lived and one younger that passed away and one brother younger that passed away and then one brother younger lives.

JT: Places that you remember when you were a kid that you used to eat? Did you ever have hamburgers in at the Log Cabin Grocery out there?

WB: Log Cabin Grocery, you bet. The best ice cream in town!

JT: And the Shakeswood Shop downtown where you get a hamburger and milkshake for thirty-five cents?

WB: In high school... When we got into high school they wouldn't let...you couldn't eat lunch with the grade school kids so we'd take money to go down...walk down on main street to the ice cream shop and have sandwich and milkshake. Then they had a little store across the street on off of Fourth Street that would make hot dogs and hamburgers and we'd eat there sometimes. Yeah, that Log Cabin Grocery out there where the laundry mat there is now there, corner of 18th and 20th. I remember Harvey Smith built that and run it for years and years and years. Good place. Grocery store and a sandwich shop, ice cream, milkshakes.

JT: Did your family take many vacations when you were a kid?

WB: Well, not too many. Not till I was older in years. We went to...on the middle...early '40s we went...took a vacation and went to Missouri one time.

JT: Did you go by car or rail?

WB: By train. Yeah, we went by train.

JT: And everybody had a pass on the train.

WB: Yeah, everyone that worked for the railroad had a pass. My dad was an engineer at that time, of course, and we had a...if you worked I think five years you got a pass for the family. Everyone's name was on it and you could travel on the Union Pacific for free. Mother made sandwiches and lunch stuff and put it in a separate suitcase so we could eat on the train, couldn't afford the dining car. And I could see why in later years, the dining car is expensive.

JT: Kind of elegant, you might say, in those days.

WB: The passenger trains was elegant. I thought that was one of the biggest, saddest things they ever did is take the passenger trains off. The streamliner was absolute elegant way to travel. If the railroads had the passenger train business back today they could...they could make a profit. Amtrak can't make a profit, never will be able to make a profit 'cause too much is management and overhead. Of course they've got to pay the railroad so much for the right to travel on their track, but

again, it's bureaucracy, the government involved with Amtrak. But they used to have four passenger trains a day each way in and out of La Grande.

JT: Carried the mail.

WB: Carried the mail.

JT: The Railroad Express Company.

WB: Yeah, UPS wouldn't...there wouldn't be a UPS if they had the Railroad Express Company back.

JT: And that was the way to send things.

WB: That's the way to send packages. And mail they had a...[end tape]

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WB: ...when that train came in and you wanted the mail to go the direction it was going you could put it in the side of the mail car. And they had Railway Express cars on the train and they collected lots of mail...lots of...well, the freight house that's what it was for was to handle freight that came in off of those trains. And you'd take it to the west end of the depot was for the Railway Express. And you could take it there and they'd weigh it out like at the post office and tell you how much it'd cost you and they would put it on the train and ship it to Portland or Boise or back east, wherever you wanted it to go.

JT: They even delivered cars by box cars and there were unloaded there at the freight house on the ramp.

WB: Yep, on the ramp. That's when the...oh, back then all cars was in...shipped in freight cars. They'd double-deck 'em in there. Then they come out with auto racks and could haul...it was longer and they could haul more cars, double-deck it.

JT: At first they didn't have the sides on 'em, but they had a number of 'em damaged, people shot at 'em as the train went by and things.

WB: Yeah, throw rocks at 'em.

JT: They had to cover...

WB: Throw rocks off the viaducts on 'em. They had to cover 'em up.

JT: Very interesting times. When you were a kid did you ever take the branch and go up fishing at Looking Glass?

WB: No, never did. I have when I was firing, even had 'em...had my engineer run up there. You'd pick a guy up and take him up there, let him off, pick him up when you come back or the next... Back when I first hired out you'd go up the branch you went up and back the same day by steam engine, had a little old steam engine. Paul Parker was the engineer. You'd go up and back the same day. Now those guys moved. Then when they went to diesel and got...they put two crews up there. We'd go up one day, lay-over, and come back the next and meet the other guy goin' up wherever it was convenient. We stayed at the... We stayed at the hotel. There was an old hotel up there at Joseph we stayed in and sometimes they had a couple of cars...outfit cars that the crews stay in. And then when I was up there as an engineer, why, we stayed at the motel at Joseph. That... That's quite a little walk to go in there in the middle of the night, the snow a couple feet deep,

and walk from there up to Joseph. That was a good mile or so to walk up there to the motel. By that time there generally wasn't anything open to get anything to eat so we'd stop at Enterprise on the way up and eat our dinner meal. And there was a place open for breakfast every morning and we'd eat our breakfast there at Joseph. Come back...sometimes we'd stop at Wallowa for lunch or a piece of pie or something and then come on home. But those are the good old days.
[recording stopped]