

Gerda Brownton

2/13/03, T1, S1

VC: February 13th, 2003. We are going to get Gerda Brownton's life story today. Okay, Gerda, I would like first of all your birth, when and where, and your parents and your maiden name and we'll start off with that.

GB: Alright. I was born on January 27th, 1919 in Worchester, Massachusetts. My maiden name is Cornell. My father's name was Lynnwood Brownell Cornell. And he had been a native of New England. He had ventured out into the wild West and met my mother and they'd gotten married. Her name was Eleanor Menape. And so they got married then she became Eleanor Cornell and they had a baby in Portland, that's my older sister. But he decided he could probably make more money if he went east so we went east and I was born in Worchester and it was a bad winter. Only the street car tracks were cleared so he had to drive along the street car tracks in order to get to the hospital. [laughs] And I was born with yellow jaundice which was a...as well as a instrument cuts on my neck, you know. So you when my mother saw me I was covered with blood and had yellow skin. So she kind of wanted to reject me, but she couldn't so there we were. By the time I was two years old we were back in Portland and so I was basically raised in Portland. My sister and I were the only children until about ten years later a couple of boys came along.

VC: Surprise, surprise.

GB: Surprise, surprise. In those days you were not real sure, you know, about anything and so... She, in fact, had been told she wouldn't have any more children so these two boys were fine. So I do have two brothers.

VC: Are they still alive?

GB: No. My sister has died and my one brother has died. So I have one brother in Portland and we cherish each other because we are all that's left of the Cornell family. And no Cornell's had boy children so that name isn't going to be carried on. [laugh] But it was a wonderful New England family and the Cornell family had started a meat packing plant which eventually became the Armour company. It was a big deal, but, you know, many, many years ago and we've forgotten all about that now.

VC: Okay. Do you remember some of the health or diseases that you might have had as a childhood? Or accidents, playmates, trips, just different things about when you were young that you remember.

GB: Okay. I lived on 4049 Southeast Ankadey.

VC: You can still remember!

GB: I can. We were between 39th and 41st. And right up the hill from us there were two blocks of hills. We lived on Ankadey and the next street up was Ash and then the next street up was something else. But we would climb up these two...two big hills and whatever the season we would skate down and bike down, sled down, or whatever. And so it was a wonderful neighborhood just to play in.

VC: Oh, I'll bet!

GB: You know, being a kid in those days was a lot easier than it is now.

VC: Yes. And there wasn't quite the population then either.

GB: Yeah.

VC: That there is now.

GB: Really. And you could do simple things and nobody would think that you should be achieving more at the moment, you know. So I had lots of skinned knees and my mother was the neighborhood nurse. Anybody that got a skinned knee came to my mother and she put a bandage on it and so we did fine.

VC: Oh great.

GB: About that time, you know, during the time that you sled and skate and all that, a dog bit me. And so here were two big fangs like this into my leg and she just poured iodine in there and put a bandage on. [laughs]

VC: That felt wonderful!

GB: Oh, it did. But we didn't even have mathiolate at that time, you know. This was the early days because I am eighty-four years old now. I don't feel it, but I...

VC: You don't look it either.

GB: So when you get back there to those times, why, you have to remember that a lot of time has passed and things are different. ___ Park was just a block away so in the winter we ice skated on the logger's pond. And it was just a great neighborhood to live in.

VC: Oh, that's good.

GB: And now, you know, it's such a scary, scary thing to go to parks and things in Portland 'cause you're sure somebody's gonna jump out of the bushes at ya, so.

VC: This makes La Grande look wonderful, doesn't it?

GB: It does.

VC: It really does.

GB: It does. I've always been an outdoor person. I did skiing before there was a Timberline Lodge, you know. We would go and just hike our way up to the timberline and come down because there were no lifts or anything.

VC: That's probably why you're so healthy now, Gerda.

GB: It probably is. I did have mastoidectomy when I was seven years old. I had to stay in the hospital two weeks. But there was no antibiotics at that time, so, you know, that's about the only thing besides tonsillitis that I ever had. My sister had scarlet fever and they made her go someplace else to have it so none of the rest of the family got it. So I have been lucky and I have been healthy. And I figure that good habits and plenty of exercise...

VC: And good luck, too.

GB: Good luck, too, yes, you bet.

VC: Do you remember visits to your grandparents?

GB: Yes, because my grandmother...let's see, the parents on my father's side died very early, he was fourteen and sixteen when his parents died. So he kind of struggled on his own. He went to Pennsylvania University and graduated and then went into the plumbing business and came out with a plumbing company to the West. But...see, what was the question?

VC: Visits to the grandparents.

GB: Oh yeah. So I didn't get to visit them. But my mother's parents lived out on 102nd and Cleason and I just thought we were going way out into the farm land,

which it really was, too, because there weren't too many houses around. And she taught me how to make bread. And she even taught me how to cook. While my sister wasn't very domestically inclined so I did a lot of cooking.

VC: Did she have wood stove?

GB: She had a wood stove and she had an electric stove and she also had one of those fireless cookers. Have you ever seen a fireless cooker?

VC: No.

GB: They are very interesting because they are a big box and there's three holes...three or four holes in...and there's a big chunk of ceramic or something that goes in the bottom. So you heat this...this circle of ceramic on the stove, on your wood stove, and then you put it in the bottom there. And then you put this pan that fits right in there with your food and you can cook a whole meal in these four pans.

VC: My gosh!

GB: Yeah. And if I haven't thrown it away I still have it up in the barn, this fireless cooker.

VC: Oh my gosh! Isn't that something!

GB: Yeah. It was an interesting way to cook and, you know, talk about slow cooking in your crock pot.

VC: I bet it was pretty wonderful, really, 'cause you could cook so much in it.

GB: Yeah. Yeah. And not have any electricity going, or anything, you know, you just had those heated ceramic things. But, you know, with progress, why, that disappeared.

VC: Yes. Definitely. Alright, was there religion in your home?

GB: Yes. We...there was a Presbyterian church up Ankany Street about five blocks and it was called Central Presbyterian. We did all of our kids there. I got a wonderful education, Christian education, because the people insisted that we go visit the black churches and that the black churches come and visit us. That was a pretty big idea in those days. So it was fun. We learned a lot.

VC: Oh, I'll bet you did.

GB: Yeah.

VC: Okay. Your school days were of course in Portland.

GB: I went to Lolhurst grade school and can still remember the teachers I had. They were so outstanding. The gym teacher was especially good, you know, being athletic, why, I would remember the gym teacher. But one of my favorite teachers was called Sue Burg and I corresponded with her many years after I left the...you know, even after I gone to college I would write to her and tell her how much I appreciated my foundation. Then I went to Washington High School because Burnside, which is just one block away from Ankany, was the dividing line between Grant and Washington. But before they decided on that my sister had started going to Grant so she went to Grant High School and I went to Washington High School.

VC: I'll be darned.

GB: And so we were rivals all the time. [laughs] I just thought high school was a wonderful time of my life.

VC: So special activities probably would have been your athletic?

GB: Yes, but you know women were not accepted in athletics at that time. But they had dances at noon.

VC: At noon?

GB: Yes.

VC: Oh, what fun!

GB: It was a small campus, see, Washington High School was right down on a city street and there wasn't a whole lot to do and you couldn't go far enough away to go home for lunch or anything so you just stayed there. So they had these dances to keep people on the campus.

VC: That was smart.

GB: Yeah. And they had all kinds of activity clubs like I was in the Drama Club, it was called Mask. It was a terrific... And then there were other clubs, you know, home ec clubs, cooking clubs, I don't know what all, but that's the one that I went to.

VC: So did you get to be the star sometime?

GB: No. No. I was too chubby [laugh] to be the star.

VC: My, you'd never know it. I was just the opposite when I was little, I was too skinny.

GB: Oh my gosh.

VC: So things do change.

GB: Yes.

VC: Can you think of some __ situations?

GB: I had this older sister and she was blond and thin and beautiful and so she always had more boyfriends than she knew what to do with so she'd ask me to sit and talk with one while she went out with the other. [laughs] I always thought that was a kick.

VC: I'll bet.

GB: Somewhere along the line while we were still in high school we had to move out to 102nd and Gleason because my grandmother died and we moved out there to stay with him. And a lot of things happened out there like picking blackberries to sell to Safeway so that I could have a pair of English riding boots. We had chickens, we had a drying yard, we had hot house. And it was just a wonderful piece of property. We loved it. And my father could really express himself by painting in wonderful colors which, you know, they weren't exactly doing in the '30s.

VC: Art you mean? Art painting?

GB: No. Like the railing going upstairs and he painted that railing three different colors, yellow, orange and black. And it was so neat, you know. But...and I loved living in my grandmother's house. It just had a wonderful smell to it. [laughs]

VC: Of course, you could still remember makin' bread there.

GB: Yeah. But my father was the city treasurer...city...Portland city treasurer. When the...when the Depression got really bad they decided that all the people who worked for the city should live in the city. We had to give up that wonderful house and go back to the house on Ankady because we had...we had just rented it

out to other people. So we were back in the city limits. Now, of course, the city limits is way out to 365 or something, but...

VC: So did they have to sell the grandmother's house?

GB: Yes, they sold it and for years I went back and visited the people who lived there. They were just as proud of the house as we were. And the first time I went back the woman said, "I'm only the second person who's lived in this house, the second owner."

VC: That is wonderful.

GB: Yeah. She felt very proud of it. But right now it has been completely taken down and there is a medical clinic on that corner.

VC: Oh!

GB: Yeah. And we had landscaped that whole acre with trees and a summer house and everything, you know. It just... It was just a wonderful place.

VC: Heartbreaking!

GB: It is. So my sister and I the last time we went by said we'll never come out here and look at it again.

VC: No. It just makes you feel real bad.

GB: Yeah.

VC: Let's see. Courtship and marriage. How did you meet your husband?

GB: I working at Burg's at the time, Charles F. Burg was a woman...nice woman's apparel shop and I was working there. And my cousin, who was a doctor, used to come in and buy clothes for his wife. And so one day he came in he said, "Somebody is coming into town that I want you to meet." I'd been after him, you know, to get me a husband because he was a doctor and I thought, gee, this would be great, you know. So he said, "Someone is coming into town and I've invited him to dinner and I want to invite you to dinner. So come up to dinner at such-and-such a time on the 22nd of June", this was. So I went up and it was Wes Brownnton who was there. And so we met on the 22nd of June...

VC: What year?

GB: 1940. And by the 15th of September we were married. So it was something that was meant to happen and happened fast, so. [laughs] He just happened to have left his law practice here in La Grande and gone to Salem to work at a state job just to get a little different perspective on life. But as soon as we got married and he decided he wanted to get back to La Grande and establish a residence and one thing another. So when we did get back the war was getting a little bit worse.

VC: About what year did you come back, do you remember?

GB: The same year, 1940. And so he was a reserve officer and so we knew that it was inevitable. But we looked around and spent that first year...because we weren't called up until the fall of '41...and bought this piece of property. Yeah. So we had it to think about all the time we were gone. And there was a great big house here and a milk house and a shop and a big barn. And so, you know, we talked about plans and house plans and everything.

VC: So you went with him then when he went in the service?

GB: Yeah. And everything we owned we put in a little roadster. [laughs] So five years later when we came back...

VC: Now where were you when you were in the service?

GB: We were stationed up at Payne Field in Everett, Washington. And he went to several schools and I'd go home to Portland. And our oldest child was born in Everett. And he went to school...the Judge Advocate General school in Ann Arbor, Michigan, he went there during the summer, which is no time to be in Ann Arbor, Michigan because it's hot as Hades there. A general command school in Washington, D.C. where he went and I did go with him that time. Some other things, but then he ended up as a captain in the Judge Advocate General's department, which is the judicial...you know, the lawyer side of it. And he eventually got promoted to lieutenant colonel. And because he was over age, why, he had to retire when he got to the right age, but there was no more...like his brother became a general. There was no chance of him being a general because he had to stop __ the Army.

VC: He probably didn't mind, did he?

GB: No, he didn't.

VC: __

GB: So we came home and started building our house here in 1950. And by that time we had two children, Carol is the oldest and Sally is the next. And we remodeled the little house that was up by the second barn that we bought.

VC: Which we rented.

GB: Which you rented, yes, that's right. You remember that, don't you?

VC: Yes.

GB: Alice Miller sold us that barn and that little house and so we remodeled that and lived in it for five years and then we had it for a rental all those years.

VC: Oh, I know. Danny was three months old in that house.

GB: Isn't that amazing! Wow!

VC: Yes. We were pretty new, too.

GB: Isn't it fun to look back on those times 'cause life was so simple in those days?

VC: When you stop and think of what we lived on in those days and managed, you know.

GB: Yes. I laugh 'cause once in a while Wes...Wes's habit was making out a budget for every month and he started right at the beginning of our marriage. And some months there was more down for gasoline for the car than there was for groceries. [laugh] 'Cause groceries were cheap, you know.

VC: Yes, they were.

GB: Yeah. So some of the funny things were that we were so involved with each other that we would forget that the gas tank had to be filled once in a while and we would run out of gas. It was such a funny thing! And I'd say, "What's the matter with you, Wes?" And he'd say, "What's the matter with you, Gerda?" [laughs]

VC: Neither one of you paid any attention.

GB: No.

VC: Not like some cars nowadays where they sit at you and blink at you that you're about out of gas.

GB: Oh, that's right. That is a help these days.

VC: Oh, I know it. Let's see. Hmm. [tape interruption]

GB: ...lengthy, huh?

VC: No, no. Too deep in things, I think. Okay, your vocation, did you work or did you mostly raised your kids?

GB: I just mostly raised my kids. I'm a great advocate of education so after the girls had graduated from college I went back to college and got a teaching degree.

VC: Oh you did, did you?

GB: I did. But there wasn't... There was a...not a shortage, a excess of teachers at that time and I felt like it would be crazy for me to get a job 'cause by that time I had Mark and Cindy and so I might as well stay home and take care of them. I did a little substituting, both of our mothers needed attention and transportation.

VC: Oh yes, I bet.

GB: 'Cause my mother lived here and his mother, of course, had lived here. The came in 1912, Wes and his mother and dad and brother and sister. They came from Canyon City and of course in those days, even when we bought this piece of property, every street around here was graveled.

VC: Yes, definitely.

GB: And so I was just trying to think of how things were way back then. But every advancement that we make you forget how primate we were the time before, you know.

VC: Yes, definitely. Oh, I got the e-mails, you know, and they were telling the price of things then and now and it was just...you just forget. And then you forget there was so few people and there was so few cars.

GB: That's true.

VC: And this was in the 1910, '15s or whatever. I can't remember which. And it was amazing how few people drove and there wasn't that many paved roads or anything.

GB: I know. [laughs]

VC: We just don't think about it.

GB: Uh-huh. Oh dear.

VC: Okay. So how long were you...did you end up taking care of parents? Did they live with you?

GB: No. Grandmother... See, my mother lived in the little house next door and she china painted so she was perfectly happy in her little...little nest up there.

VC: I think she was there when we lived there, if I'm not mistaken.

GB: I think... I think you're right, she was.

VC: Yes.

GB: And so we would eat meals together a lot, but not necessarily every single meal. She smoked and we didn't so...the rest of my family all smoked and they thought it was the strangest thing that I would tell my mother she couldn't smoke in my house.

VC: It just made it smell.

GB: Yeah. It was a bone of contention to them, but it wasn't to us and it wasn't to her. She was perfectly willing to confine her smoking to her own little house, so that was good.

VC: I can understand that.

GB: Yeah. And so... And Mother...Grandmother Brownnton in the last year or so had somebody stay with her, but she didn't want to leave her house and I know the feeling now. I don't want to leave my house either.

VC: I know.

GB: It's hard to think about.

VC: And the yard gets a little harder, but, of course, I love yard work and I'm sure you love...

GB: I do too. As long as I could do it, I'd do it, but I do have help now.

VC: Oh yes. I hire kids to come and help me weed and do some of the things like that.

GB: If you can catch up with one.

VC: You get one that will work. So when did Wes become judge?

GB: It was 1947. No. No, that isn't it. He was forty-eight years old when he ran for judge. It was 1957 because he was elected the year that Cindy was born, which was 1956. And then he was sworn in in January of '57.

VC: Now see, I was thinkin' that he was judge when we lived up here, but evidently not 'cause we got married in '53 so it must've been about '54 when...no, it would've been '53 when we lived here because Danny was only three or four months old.

GB: Okay.

VC: But your husband had such a marvelous reputation as being a good judge.

GB: Uh-huh.

VC: Yeah.

GB: He did. He... People still tell me that, you know, we probably wouldn't want to print what they say about the other judges, but... [laughs]

VC: Or some of the other lawyers. So how many years was he judge?

GB: He was judge for eighteen years. And then he did senior judging for about ten years after that.

VC: What does that mean?

GB: There's a segment in the state judgeship that once you retire if you still want to stay active, why, they put you on this list and then if they need a judge someplace, why, they just send for you.

VC: Oh! That would've been ____, wasn't it?

GB: Yeah. He got to judge in Roseburg and Klamath Falls and various places, especially Multnomah.

VC: And did you get to go and travel with him?

GB: Once in a while I did, you know. It seems like there was always something that kept me busy. And we just didn't go away and leave the properties because we had horses and animals...other animals and people to care for so you just don't go off.

VC: No, definitely not. Now I know that you have always been busy in the community. Talk about some of your civic and pos...and political activities, positions held.

GB: You know, one thing about being a judge is that you sign a statement that you will not be partisan, you are non-partisan. So that meant that as far as I was concerned I better not define myself as either a Republican or a Democrat. So if anything came up, why, we could not stand up for whatever we believed, you know, as far

as political was concerned. Which is a good thing with a judge, a judge should be non-partisan so that you can look at both sides equally. And I kind of forgot that I was supposed to be one way or the other and...

VC: Oh, I can imagine! That'd be very difficult.

GB: And you never could give a contribution to anything that had any political aspects to it. So it just made for a different kind of a life than you would normally do. So I wasn't active in political women's things, but I have always been interested in great decisions from the very, very beginning. I would go to this little study group we started meeting in the library conference room downstairs. And then it got to be a little bit bigger and they went...we had meetings in homes and in churches because there were a lot of people interested after World War II concerning the state of the world, you know. And that's what we do in Great Decisions, is talk about world affairs. So we kept up with that and we ordered the books through the extension service. And then just recently, why, they've turned that over to the World Affairs Council and we get our booklets from the World Affairs Council. And we had about twenty-five people who meet every other week and talk about foreign affairs.

VC: Oh, how interesting!

GB: And this had been going on for fifty-five years.

VC: Oh my gosh!

GB: It's really kind of an amazing thing.

VC: I suppose some of those people you've known a long, long time.

GB: I have. Mary Jo Thomason is one that's been in it as long as I have. But since then Camille Hawkins who kind of represents AAUW, you know, she...or is the head of the group now...and she gets resource speakers for us and everything. So it's a wonderful activity and it keeps me up on what's going on.

VC: What are you talking about as far as the war goes here lately?

GB: Today we were talking about multilateralism and unilateralism and internationalism and isolationism.

VC: Oh my!

GB: And that all leads you to the United Nations. And so whether you believe in the United Nations or not. And, you know, every good thing that comes up you have a lot of protagonists so we were talking about so many angles because the United Nations represents multiple things that you're interested in like environment and children and human rights and besides what you do as far as protecting nations are concerned, you know. So it's...it's a pretty big deal. We spent an hour-and-a-half just talking about this one thing, whether we should be multilateral or unilateral.

VC: I'll bet!

GB: And it was extremely interesting.

VC: How did most of them feel about us goin' to war? [end tape]

2/13/03, T1, S2

VC: ...with Iran...

GB: Iraq.

VC: I mean Iraq, what were some of the things that they were...most of 'em felt?

GB: Actually, we were not talking about the war.

VC: Okay.

GB: We were talking about other aspects through world problems and whether we should try harder to cooperate with the other countries and why we don't, you know, and...

VC: I don't know. I just don't know what to think sometimes whether Bush is just anxious for war, I myself don't know. We won't get into that.

GB: Okay.

VC: Now I know you belonged to different clubs.

GB: Way back in the early days there was a organization called YWEA, it was called Young Women's Educational Association. And Mrs. Brownton had had something to do with forming that group. This was long before television, or even radio. And they'd get together at the church and they'd put on a play, a meaningful play, and have a meeting and maybe have refreshments and once in a while they'd put on a big dinner. But there was a big stage down at the Methodist church and women from all over joined this organization. And it was a wonderful organization, it allowed people to use their talents. And Ruby Skein was very involved in that. And so that was a organization that I belonged to early on. And the neighborhood club, it also was a separate organization. Eventually they went together, those two organizations, and then they disappeared. But they served their purpose, you know, because you know how life changed once television came in, or even radios. And then, of course, as you heard I started out at the Presbyterian and I became a Methodist because all the Brownntons were Methodist and it seemed reasonable for one person to go to the Methodist church then the rest of the family to change to Presbyterian, so...[laugh] so we...I liked the Methodist church anyway and there's not a whole lot of difference.

VC: Is that the one that's on the corner of...

GB: Spring and Fourth.

VC: Yeah, okay.

GB: So it's a good old church. But, you know, you involve your children in Sunday School and you...as a kid Wes did everything there was to do in that church. The other day somebody had a picture in their hand and I said, "What is that a picture of?" And he said, "a Tom Thumb wedding." And I said, "I haven't heard that for a long time," but when they needed a money making thing they would put on a Tom Thumb wedding. And that would be the little people would be the bride and groom and Wes participated in that and we...

VC: And children would participate, bride and groom?

GB: Yeah.

VC: Oh gosh!

GB: And people would come and pay money to see them, you know.

O: ___ a couple errands?

GB: Okay. [tape interruption] Let's see, the churches, we were talkin' about churches. So this Tom Thumb wedding, this lady had a picture of it from the church...the Methodist church in Union. They had done the same thing probably for a money maker and in those days they were far enough away that you wouldn't go to each

other's, you know. And I just thought that was the most interesting thing and she was trying to get some pictures copied and blown up of that event. I wish that we had some pictures of the Tom Thumb wedding that Sheldon and Wes were in. It would've been so interesting.

VC: Of course.

GB: But...

VC: His parents didn't have any of him, huh?

GB: I guess not. You know, even cameras weren't...weren't too...

VC: I know. They didn't take very many pictures in those days.

GB: Yeah. You had to have somebody from outside come in and take 'em, a professional.

VC: Right.

GB: So that was fun, but there were all kinds of wonderful different kinds of money making things in those days that were legitimate for churches.

VC: Oh yes. Bazaars and bingo and all kinds of things, you know.

GB: Yes. All kinds of things.

VC: And baked food.

GB: Right.

VC: So, what other clubs did you belong to?

GB: The... When I came back from being in the Army with Wes I joined a group called Junior Art Research and some of my best friends were in this group and we studied art for almost a fifty years, forty years at least, and then things changed for everybody and we weren't able to meet as regularly. But we met twice a month. Somebody had a complete program on some artist and we used an outlined from George Nightingale and actually Marion Nightingale was in the group too and we studied art from cavemen to modern art, you know. We learned so much about art and now we really enjoy going to museums and know what we're looking at.

VC: I'll bet!

GB: And Geneva Tuttle is one of them and she has the chance to go down to the big Impressionist exhibit at the art museum down here that's in Portland right now. Oh, she'd thrilled to pieces! And I said, "I wish I could go with you." But, you know, it's just really an amazing thing. Let's see, besides that I belonged to PEO, which is a educational organization for...we promote education for women. And then...

VC: That's not the teachers' one?

GB: No.

VC: Okay.

GB: And then I belong to AAUW which is if you are a college graduate you can belong to AAUW, it's the American Association of University Women. And I joined that and stuck with it for about twenty years, but when Wes got sick and needed more attention it was one thing that I could drop. However, this Great Decisions group was the one I didn't want to and the AAUW has kind of taken it over so I'm kind of related to AAUW without having to be a member.

VC: How nice!

GB: Yes. It is nice. Let's see. As far as a little social club was concerned, a group of people who wanted to know each other better formed a little group of all kinds of different people called The Sunshine Girls. And we just had a great time. We met once a month and...for a Saturday lunch and discussed everything there was to discuss.

VC: Sounds like what thy got goin' now called the Red Hatters.

GB: Oh, sounds like it, yeah. That's right. And so then once a year we'd have a Christmas party or something and the men could belong. And now, you know, almost everybody, including the women, are gone, which is just really kind of an amazing thing because it seemed like we would never end, you know, but we ended.

VC: I know. When did you join the Hospital Auxiliary?

GB: I joined that way back when St. Joseph was going.

VC: Oh my gosh!

GB: Yeah. I've been a volunteer for hospitals for a long time. And then when St. Joseph closed, why, we just melted into the Grande Ronde. And so I was president of it for one year. Probably...

VC: So you're one of the oldest members then aren't ya? Pink ladies.

GB: Yeah, I would think so. I know Ilene Brownton, Shelton's wife, had joined at the Catholic church too...at the Catholic hospital too, so that was interesting, but I think she belonged for a few years more than I did. She didn't have any children to raise. [laughs]

VC: It makes a big difference.

GB: It does make a big difference.

VC: Let's see, when did Wes get sick?

GB: He really was in very good health up until he had a heart attack about six years ago. And he bounced back from that, but after a couple years he got pneumonia, pneumonia takes an awful lot out of you. He bounced back from that and then his brother died and then... So two years ago it was pneumonia that killed him because it was a sudden kind that just cut off his oxygen supply and we didn't know. We got him to the hospital the rest of his body was closing down.

VC: So how many years did you get to have to enjoy each other?

GB: We were married for sixty years.

VC: Oh, that's wonderful!

GB: And, you know, he was thirty-two when we got married so we didn't ever expect to even get to fifty let alone sixty.

VC: Wasn't he almost ninety?

GB: He was ninety-two-and-a-half when he died. Is that amazing?

VC: ___ so blessed!

GB: Oh, I know it.

VC: I only had forty-five years with Elton.

GB: I know. And you know that so often happens. It was pretty hard with Elton, too, wasn't it?

VC: Yes. Elton had such a rare disease called progressive supranuclear palsy and it just slowly paralyzes ya.

GB: Oh. I remember hearing about that. That's really bad. Wes was really in pretty good health. He could get around. We played cards the night before he died.

VC: What kind of cards do you play?

GB: Oh, just a simple little game like King's Corners.

VC: I play pinochle. Okay, do have a hobby? Things that do, I mean, make or...

GB: I'm not much of a craft person, but if I...if somebody shows me how to do something I can do it. I'm just... I did sew for the children when they were little. I took lessons from Bernice Brown. But what I enjoyed doing most was riding horseback. I rode a lot with...you know, about the first person I met coming to La Grande other than my in-laws was Jean Bernie and she was my mentor for the rest of her life because she was such a fabulous person. She had a string of horses and she was very generous with them. And every week we...that the weather was good we went out on a ride up in the hills and cooked our lunch out and it was a group about ten people who did that. Some people had their own horses and some people rode her horses. It was a most wonderful time of my life! We often went on Thursdays so I called it maid's day...it was the maid's day off so I left, got a babysitter to take care of the kids. And that went on for a long time and it was... Jean Bernie was a very intelligent person. She had taught piano lessons to both Sheldon and Wes. But she'd always been an outdoor person. Her mother said she got married on horseback and stayed on horseback the rest of her life.

[laughs]

VC: That's about like Gertie Hibbert. My gosh, you know, she just celebrated her ninetieth birthday the other day and she still goes out there and gets on the tractor and does stuff on her ranch.

GB: I saw those pictures and I was really impressed. Have you interviewed her yet?

VC: Uh-huh.

GB: Oh, that's good. Good.

VC: I tell you she's a goin' girl. She'd more like a tomboy in a way, you know, but she just farms the place for I don't know how long.

GB: That's good.

VC: So, let's see. Let me stop for a little bit. [tape paused]

GB: ...on, no there's the light.

VC: There is goes. It's going.

GB: There's the light. Okay.

VC: Okay.

GB: Before Wes became judge a few years a paint store became available to have an investment in and so we decided that we would buy it and this was a store that Mrs. Bradley, Nora Bradley, had already been working in. And so we just kept her working there 'cause she was a great person. We decided to keep the paint store, initiate a framing department...

VC: Where was this located?

GB: It was right down on Main...on Adams Avenue approximately where the...oh, it was down from the coffee shop about the middle of that block between Elm and Fir. Fitzgerald had a florist in there. There was a bakery in there. And then Cherry's Florist was on the corner. And then this paint store was there. It was called La Grande Paint and Glass...no, Town and Country Paint and Glass store.

And so then we initiated a gift shop in there and he and I had a lot of fun going to the markets and buying for it and that was a lot of fun. But when he became judge he couldn't give it his attention and that was the year that Cindy was born so I couldn't give it my attention so we just sold it to Rose Lewis, as a matter of fact. And he was the music teacher at the college at the time. And so he sold musical instruments from there.

VC: Oh, I remember that!

GB: Remember that?

VC: Yes.

GB: And then it burned down and he moved over to where McGlasson's used to be next to the drugstore on that corner, you know, Jack's Drugstore, Jack Earnest's drugstore. So things have changed a lot downtown.

VC: Oh my! Do you remember the Chinese noodle parlor?

GB: Oh yes! Yes. We went up to that many times. I thought that was such a treat.

VC: We did too.

GB: And then, of course, I was around when the Sacagawea was knocked down.

VC: Yes. And our sororities used to have big balls there, you know.

GB: Oh, remember that!

VC: That was so fun!

GB: And the dance club that used to meet there all the time. And the Symphony Ball was there and...

VC: I always thought it was tragic that the Sacagawea was torn down, kind a.

GB: Me too, yeah.

VC: We kind of lost a historical building there.

GB: We did. You know, the KOBM was in that building and the nice restaurant. And I met J. F. Kennedy there and his wife.

VC: Oh my goodness!

GB: You know, it was just a nice place because of the KOBM being there and everything. So that was a landmark that we should never have torn down.

VC: I agree with you. And they had a dickens of a time getting it down because it was so well built. You know, I don't think you specified the names of your children.

GB: Okay. The first one is Carol, she was born in 1942 in Everett, Washington. Sally was born in Chicago, Oak Park, Illinois, actually, in '44. And then we were mustered out of the Army in '45 and bought...decided to work on this piece of property and so we lived in the little house up by the barn that we had remodeled, where you lived, when Mark was born in '48. And so when he was three years old we moved into this house. But we waited five years because...because of the war effort. Almost all the building materials were...had to be restocked and redone and all that. And fifty years later this house is still standing...fifty-three years...still standing in pretty good shape so I think we did a pretty good job of building this house.

VC: Definitely.

GB: And we did all the painting and all the finishing in here because in those days even though carpenters only charge two or three or four dollars an hour, why, we didn't have that much money either.

VC: No, we don't when we're first married.

GB: Yeah. So we... We feel like this house is a lot of us in it.

VC: Oh my, yes!

GB: Then after he...after we moved in and through the years he refinished the basement and he built this cabinet and he built that cabinet and, you know, he...

VC: He did a lovely job, too.

GB: He opened up the attic and it's just amazing what you can do if you have the skills and he did have the skills and he was a perfectionist.

VC: And to just to think he was a judge, but yet could do all those things.

GB: Yeah. It's amazing.

VC: And so how many grandchildren did you tell me you had?

GB: Okay. Then Cindy was born in 1956. So Carol has a son named Eric who is thirty-five tomorrow on Valentine's Day and he has not been interested in getting married yet. He doesn't think that he is earning a good enough living, I think. You know how it is, "I can't afford a wife." [laughs]

VC: Of course they'll never be able to afford one, but they have to make up their mind.

GB: Sally opted not to have children. Mark had gone to Vietnam and had difficulty having children so they adopted a child at birth and so she is just a precious granddaughter. Her name is Lisa and she's twenty-one years old, a junior in college down in California.

VC: Wonderful.

GB: And Mark has...is a hard worker, but enjoys life too. He wasn't enjoying life last night when he called me. It was pouring down rain and couldn't drive on I-5 'cause they had a big mudslide.

VC: Again?

GB: Yeah.

VC: Oh my gosh.

GB: And so he was out on 54 or something and he said, "It's so slow and I just decided I'd call you 'cause I'm takin' me so long to get home." [laughs]

VC: Oh, that was nice of him to call.

GB: Yeah. So then Cindy got married and had two children and they are now...their name is Chad and Chelsea. And Chad's twenty and Chelsea's eighteen. They lived in the little house next door.

VC: Oh good.

GB: So they're practically live with us, you know. I need to take better care of Cindy because of all her arthritis.

VC: That is so hard to put with, so miserable.

GB: Mm-hmm.

VC: Well, my dear, I imagine you're just gonna keep active and keep learnin' and keep doin' things for the rest of your life.

GB: I hope so. I'm not a very well organized person so I have to keep reorganizing and we have just unfortunately put a lot of stuff in the attic that I really need to go through with before I'm through with this world and, you know, eliminate.

VC: There's the cutest book called *Clutter's Last Stand* and it tells you that all this stuff that you've saved your poor kids are gonna have to get rid of. [laughs] We should be doin' that, but it's not easy 'cause they're all sentimental and we hang on to 'em.

GB: Yeah. Oh boy.

VC: Gerda, I have always admired you and thought that you've done well, done lots of nice things in the community and just pretty special people.

GB: Thank you. You know, Mary Helen Garoutte and I decided to start the recycling program because we got interested through the Ford magazine and she was always getting this Ford magazine and she said, "You know, we should be doing something." So all my life I have been a recycler and a gleaner because down in Portland they have all these places that you can glean peas and apples and everything else after they're harvested, you know. And so my mother and I enjoyed canning and making stuff like that.

VC: So have I all my life.

GB: So it was a natural...

VC: Do you still can?

GB: I freeze now, but I didn't can anything this year. You know, you kind of lose your heart for it.

VC: I canned applesauce and peaches.

GB: That's what I would have done if I had found a good price on apples or peaches. But I like to eat peaches fresh, too. But...

VC: Getting back to recycling.

GB: We talked Fred Arnst into teaching and environmental class over at the high school and that he could incorporate into that how to recycle. And then the shop class built some containers so people could put their cans at school. So we had containers for cans at every school and then the city would pick them up. But before we got that far we had several pick-ups right down on Washington where the parking lot is now behind...next to OTEC. And people would bring their bottles and we had a big truck that we smashed the bottles in. We had big truck to put all the tin cans in.

VC: Oh, that was nice.

GB: And then Mary Helen and I took the truck over to Walla Walla where they had the cannery and they sent them off to the Midwest where they heat them up and use them again, you know. And somebody else drove the truck to Portland where they have a glass place. And then we finally talked the school into doing these things, of having these boxes around, and then the city would pick them up. And then the city finally took 'em over to Walla Walla and they used the money to buy trees and stuff for La Grande. And that was great and it lasted for quite a while, you know, as long as the interest was there, why, and the boxes held up. But as everything it went by the wayside. I was active in the advisory committee for the solid waste when they built that recycling place down on 82 and I don't want to bad mouth anybody, but they didn't build it the way it was supposed to be built and so it wasn't successful. But it was unfortunate that they spent that much money and didn't do it right.

VC: Yeah.

GB: But, you know, in those days, which it's been thirty years ago now, I believe, maybe thirty-five, men did not think that women should be in positions like that and they really didn't want to listen to...

VC: Any of the ideas, huh?

GB: No. So even though they'd been tried and true, but we never did get to try the whole thing that would've made the whole thing work, you know.

VC: I wish right now with our recycling business that they would have a container you could put the glass in, you know.

GB: You can go over there and put the glass in.

VC: Yes, but I'm ___ I don't do it. I'm not good at recycling. And like in Vancouver we had a bin that for glass and metal and paper.

GB: That's the way it should be.

VC: Yeah.

GB: It really should be. I can't believe that they can be getting anyplace with all this mixed up recycling.

VC: Oh, I know! And just like you can't put wax cartons in there and you can't put Kleenexes in there and you just... I have one that's supposed to be recyclable and before I know it I'm throwin' a Kleenex in it, you know. [laughs] Then I have to go and pick 'em out, so I'm not too enthused about it yet.

GB: Oh dear!

VC: How are we doin' on tape?

GB: On that story that I gave the Hospital Auxiliary I should say I belong to the Auxiliary and did a lot of volunteer work over a period of fifteen years. And then...what else did I think of just then? What was it?

VC: At the hospital?

GB: Oh, about our trip around the world.

VC: Oh!

GB: You know, Wes got an invitation to go to a World Peace Through Law conference and it was the first one that they held and it was to be held in Athens, Greece. So my friend Jenny Clark who was here at the time, her husband was a professor at the college, she said, "You should go. You two should go, now get busy and make the arrangements."

VC: Oh, I'm glad you did and aren't you glad you did?

GB: Oh yes!

VC: What countries did you get to go to?

GB: We actually went clear around the world. We went to Hawaii and Japan and Hong Kong and Calcutta, India and Lebanon, while it was peaceful, you know, long before the war...

VC: What year was this?

GB: 1963 and that's a long time ago.

VC: It was sure a better time.

GB: It was. We went to the Holy Land and that was before the '67 war so that it was entirely different than when people go now, you know. It's quite different because there's more Israel than there is...

VC: Palestine.

GB: Palestine, uh-huh. But we certainly did get an appreciation for other cultures and other things. It was a real eye opener for us.

VC: And you just find it amazing how much older some of these other places are than the United States. It doesn't seem like the United States is that young, but it is compared to the rest of the world.

GB: Oh yes. And to think that we have to remake the wheel every time we try anything instead of pulling on the old civilizations, you know. We did go to Egypt and down into Egypt and saw all of the wonders of the pyramids and ___ and all of those things. And then went up to Europe and came home by Anchorage, Alaska. We were in Anchorage before the earthquake up there. Because the earthquake was 1964. Now we can't believe that it's a big town now because it was just a little village when we were there.

VC: I'll bet.

GB: Yeah. But we were in Copenhagen. We were in Belgium. We were in France, England. And the only country we didn't go to was Germany, we just didn't have time to work that in.

VC: You can't do everything, that's for sure.

GB: Can't do everything. Then later on...

VC: A marvelous, marvelous experience!

GB: Oh, it was, it was. It was just grand! And then we took a trip to Russia in 1980 with a Willamette professor and his wife who was Russian and had a wonderful time.

VC: I bet. What time of the year did you go?

GB: Let's see, I think it was June. In fact, it was the year that St. Helens blew up and it blew up while we were there.

VC: Oh my gosh!

GB: And so we didn't know about it till we got back because there was no news there that we would understand that, you know, you could hear that this was happening. When we got back on the plane, why, here was a magazine telling about St. Helens blowing up.

VC: You never want to go to Russia when it's cold. Those poor people just about freeze over there.

GB: Oh, I know it.

VC: It's so sad.

GB: Yeah. We went from Leningrad down to Armenia so we saw all of those different states that now have broken away from Russia, like Georgia and some of these other states, you know.

VC: You didn't get China.

GB: No. We always wanted to go to China, but we didn't make it. We got to Hong Kong.

VC: We have in our church John and Betty Sprenger, do you know them?

GB: I do know them.

VC: Okay. They got back from India, but they also go to go to China. And so they came to the sorority and they showed slides, oh, about an hour-and-a-half on India.

GB: Oh, wonderful!

VC: And it was just fascinating.

GB: I loved India.

VC: And so now they're gonna come March 26th we're gonna do it out at Island City for the other sorority and tell us about China. So we're lookin' forward to that.

GB: Oh my! That'd be wonderful. So they took pictures and everything?

VC: Mm-hmm.
GB: Oh, great.
VC: Did a real good job.
GB: That's one place he wanted to go and Australia...[end tape]

Gerda Brownton
July 16, 2003
Place: EOU classroom
Tape 1, Side 1

(All interviewers are identified as "I." since I did not know who they were.)

GB: ...grow up, why, the old stuff doesn't look quite so interesting. But it's interesting to me because I came from the city to La Grande and every outdoor thing was available in five minutes. And I thought, "Oh, I'm in heaven!" You know, "I couldn't be any closer to heaven than I am" just because I've always been a tomboy and loved to hike and took horseback horses lessons and so...but I had to ride English in Portland. I belonged to two different clubs. But that paid off because when I came up here and Jean Bernie gave me a test I could go up a hill without falling off the horse. And so she let me go on this wonderful ride. But that developed over the years because when I first came we...I was twenty-one years old. I married a man who was thirty-two years old. And, of course, I thought that I knew as much as he did because you do at twenty-one, you know. And it wasn't until I raised some children and went back to school that I found out how little I know. [laugh] Even after we went around the world one time I came back saying, "Oh boy, I just have so much to learn still." And then I decided to get a teacher's certificate and so at the end of the time, "Well, are you prepared to teach?" I said, "I'm prepared to learn something more." [laugh] And so... But much of my wisdom came from a lady by the name of Jean Bernie. This is another picture of that same one. This was the famous...famous group...

I: This might've been the same day, too, huh, as the one I...?

GB: Uh-huh. Yes. I think it is.

I: Is this Jean on the end there?

GB: Jean's on the other end.

I: Over here?

GB: Uh-huh. And just to set the scene because I think everything about my outdoor life in La Grande has been woven through Jean Bernie. She was a contemporary of my mother-in-law. Because my husband was older my mother-in-law was older too, see, so she was in her sixties. And I thought that was old 'cause at twenty-one you think sixty is old. And you no doubt think that I might be old because I'm eighty-four [laugh] and it's an ancient age. Only felt once in a while, but I do feel once in a while. I met Jean Bernie and she immediately asked me if I'd like to go for a horseback trip around the hillside. And that was great. But when I was asked to go on the coveted trip to the high mountain country that was the real test, you know, if I could... If I could go up hills around here they

figured I could go in them high mountains. And so there was another girl, Doug's wife's mother, who was my same age and we went together. Her name was Marty Reese. I think I should show you a picture of Jean Bernie. You can tell what a lovely woman she was just by this picture. It is absolutely gorgeous. And when I was looking these things up I realized that the people who had written these articles were much better...more concise in their language and that I should read probably some of them. But to start out, uh, it all happened so easily and about the first four trips that I took on horseback into the mountains I knew where I was. I would just say, "Well, you know, that place where we had corn on the cob for lunch" or "that place where we had biscuits and jam" and that sort of thing. They would know where that was and that was great. I also wanted to emphasize that back in 1940 we were still in the Depression and you know, I'm sure that all of your studies have led you through a little taste of the Depression, but you couldn't taste the Depression very well until you'd lived it. And I'm sure you're never going to have to because the affluent society is so well embedded into our spirit, you know, that we can't get over it. But life was much more simple. There were no paved roads in this end of town, it was all gravel roads. And after we went into the Army for World War II and were back we couldn't go forward very much because even after the war was over there was not very much available to build a house with or that sort of thing and that's what we wanted to do 'cause when we came home we had two children and we had bought a piece of property, that was lucky, but we had to buy...we had to build a house. And so we were lucky the get the house built, but it took us five years after we were home to get that done. In the meantime I was having all this fun with Jean Bernie. And I wanted to tell you my husband happened to be an outdoor man, too, and had spent a lot of his life fishing with his father. His father was a dentist here. And their family went on lots of camping trips and lots of fishing trips. He didn't happen to be a fisherman, but then he enjoyed other things about the outdoors. And so when I moved into the family I learned how to do things the Brownnton way. Well, keep in mind that there was no women's lib in those days. You were supposed to do what your husband wanted you to do and the way he wanted you to do it. So much to his surprise after I went out on a horseback trip with Jean Bernie then I was telling him how to do things. I soon found that didn't work. [laughs] "I know," he says, "that Jean Bernie has been doing things for a long time, but this is the way I do it," so we had to kind of back up and change our minds. But as you see this...these pictures...this picture with the horses and everything you can see that the ladies were very informal except that I think it's very significant that they have ties on.

I: I was noticing that.

GB: In the group that I went on we never wore ties, but this was a few years before that. And so maybe they just did it to pose for the...before the picture. I never did ask them about that. I'm the only one left who went on these trips and was lucky that I was young enough, you know, to keep on living and so that I could relate it to people who come along. But the basic equipment was a saddle, a saddle blanket and we didn't have fancy equipment. You probably are well acquainted with some of the old equipment that we had.

I: Yeah.

GB: Do you still have all your harnesses in your barn and everything?

I: Yeah. In the barn, yeah, we have 'em all there.

GB: 'Cause the Smutz's have been involved with even large wagons of work horses and teams, you know. They always soods team for parades and things and even work. [laugh] 'Cause in those days they plowed with horses. Well, anyway, I just brought an example of what an alphocis looks like. But if you went to look for one these days you'd never find one that was well used like this. And this has a...hook in and these...oh, I see a mouse has been in here, too. But anyway, this is a thing that fits over the horse and the person, poncho...a poncho. Because no matter how safe you thought it was to go in the middle of the summer it always rained. You always had all kinds of weather. This is a pack saddle and you put one of these elpocas on either side, you hang it over here and the other one over there. And this little pad is next to the horse. And Jean really prided herself on doing the diamond hitch because after you got these elpocas hung on here you would pile your shovel and your fishing poles and your whatever else you needed for equipment and then blankets and tents or anything else that you wanted to take. It was pretty simple. We usually took a...just a canvas to put up between two trees. We never bothered with a tent because we all liked to sleep out under the stars. And so... But the equipment is...is always an amazing thing because nowadays even I would not recommend anybody starting out on a horse with...in their family, you know, without a trailer. We didn't have a trailer. [laugh] None of our horses knew how to get into a trailer. That's the first thing you do with horses now is teach 'em how to get into a trailer. It makes it a lot easier. But on several of our trips we rode across the valley. The first day was riding across the valley then we'd leave the horses in Cove at the Hancock's, which was the last place on Moss Spring Road.

I: Oh, on the left there?

GB: Yeah.

I: Uh-huh.

GB: And the old barn, I think, maybe is still there, but the old house is gone. The Hancock who lives there now is a...not a horseback rider [laugh], but he's a very nice fellow. Anyway, then the next day we would get started. Long before we'd start on this wonderful trip we would have met in Jean Bernie's backyard. And her house was where Dr. McMann's dental office is now and it went clear through to the other road. She had a barn there where she kept some of her horses. And the other part of her farm was up Glass Hill Road where the Houses now have a place. And we would plan the food because when you're going into the high mountains where there is no thing...nothing...no place to buy anything for ten days you have to be pretty well... And she believed in taking plenty of vegetables and we would take meat for the first couple of days because it would be safe. And...but we took plenty of vegetables and very few canned goods. You talk to anybody who goes camping these days and they have all kinds of perks. First they have their...their fancy horse equipment and they have to park it someplace and start off with everything, you know, clean pans and stoves and tents that have stoves in 'em and everything. I'm always amazed at how much

stuff these hunters will put into a hunting trip, you know, when you can survive without all that stuff. Then when you had all of that available then you had to be sure that all of your tack was in good shape, all your harness and your horse that you were responsible for was put together. You couldn't allow yourself to lose any little piece of leather because that would be needed and there was no way to get any new. Rarely did we run into anybody. Once in a while we would run into backpackers that had...that were fishing and they would give us some fish. But we had a couple of ladies who would fish, too. But these stalwart ladies were able to wrangle horses, tie the diamond hitch. We would actually practice on that before we'd go. And before my husband died we had him show us how to tie a diamond hitch on a video so we have that forever, you know. It's a little tedious to watch, but it's...it's a wonderful...a wonderful memory for us to have...to know how to do the diamond hitch. I just thought that I might read this one little article and then maybe more because it...I was impressed with the way these things were written myself. This is '51. "Ten women return from...to La Grande Tuesday from a horseback trip into the Whitman and Wallowa Forest." We would never say that now, we'd say Wallowa-Whitman. [laugh] "an outing taken nearly ever year by the same women for the past twenty-five years. Unassisted, the women with fourteen horses and Kim, the dog, packed up their own equipment and traveled more than a hundred-and-thirty miles stopping at Tombstone Lake, Diamond Lake, Minam Lake and Blue Lake. Many of the trails were uncleared and hazardous sometimes to the point that the horsewomen found it necessary to dismount and let their horses feel their way across the dangerous spots. The group traveled approximately fifteen miles a day." And we decided that we wanted to see as much of the mountains as we could so we didn't stay and camp because we weren't necessarily interested in fishing, so... "Several colored pictures were taken during the trip. Taking the trip..." [tape interruption] Okay. "Were Mrs. George Bernie, Mrs. Albert Epling, Mrs. Thomas McGuire, Mrs. Clyde Sites, Mrs. Wesley Brownnton, Mrs. Clarence Gilstrap, Mrs. Ralph Badgerly, and, from Portland, Mrs. Kenneth Williamson, Mrs. Dan Reese, and Mrs. Lloyd Hassell." Dan...Mrs. Dan Reese is Marty Reese and Jean Hassell...they were sisters and they were the...kind of the foster children of Jean Bernie because they belonged to her best friend and her best friend died of a bursted appendix. So when these kids were young, why, Jean took them on. Is that a picture of...

I: Of Grace.

GB: Of Grace. Yeah. This is... This is her friend who died. And whenever we would think about it we'd be mad at the doctor, but then, you know, they didn't have penicillin in those days and people weren't aware of their bodies as we are now. So we have to make a lot of excuses for the doctors in the old days. But she was...she was a lovely lady. I never did know her because she was gone when I came.

I: Isn't that amazing how much she looks like Melissa?

I: She's Melissa's grandmother?

I: Yeah.

I: Melissa's my wife.

I: She does look just like Melissa.

I: They're just nearly identical

GB: Yeah. That is... That is really neat. And this Mrs. Ralph Badgely was the Badgely of Badgely Hall. And she was the most intelligent woman. She was a scientist in her own right and so precise and elegant in her speech and really kept us on our toes culturally and, you know, educationally. So we...we enjoyed Mrs. Badgely...her name was Esther...for many years because after Ralph died she was around here for a long time and she always kept us up on the latest events and so... This is one that was written about her when she died. And it says, "Her spirit will remain always singing in the ponderosas. Jean Bernie passed away last week. Everyone who knew her will feel the loss for you could not meet Jean Bernie without being profoundly affected by her. At eighty-eight age had taken what it could, but still beauty shone forth. Certainly spiritual beauty, but also a physical beauty. If we must live in our God-given face until fifty and after that was the one we have created. Then Jean certainly created for herself a beautiful face out of a beautiful life. A quick mind, unfailing sense of humor, shining eyes, made her simply sparkle with vivacity. Jean's greatest loves were the mountains, the forests and the streams. In the spring she was the first in search of a buttercup. She loved all living things domestic and wild, especially her dogs and horses. During World War II when the men were away she organized an Hen Party into the mountains. Of course this was before wilderness classifications, printed maps and lightweight effective...or efficient camping gear. But Jean and her friends could not let the summer go by without a trek through the mountains. Her deep love and respect for nature has been passed on to those who's lives she touched. At eight-five she thought her mountain days were through, but when the opportunity to fly into the mountain in a light airplane came along she was aboard for that turned out to be her last trip into her beloved country. She had a way of defying tragedy by making the best of the worst. And when her best friend died leaving behind her small children she guided their lives and their children...and their children called her Grandmother. Much later when Jean lost her hearing she did not lose her sense of humor. She delighted in telling of crazy mix-ups which occurred through her misinterpretations. Jean, who loved the howling of coyotes and the singing of birds equally, who preferred chopping wood to embroidery, wood cook stoves to gas or electric ones, the simple life over anything complex, was buried Monday in a simple pine box, her body wrapped in an old Indian blanket. But her spirit will remain always singing in the ponderosas, sparkling in the mountain streams, smiling in a wildflower, dancing in the blue sky."

I: That's really nice.

GB: Isn't that great? I just didn't think I could improve on that at all so [laugh] I had to read that to you. Now this article is something about my interest in the Oregon Trail, but it ties in with Jean and her explorations around the valley here because we climbed up every hill and went over every mountain. And she was interested in the Oregon Trail, which, of course, is found very easily along 'B' Avenue and up...up at the end of 'B' if you kind of go up and behind the mountain...behind Table Mountain and then up and over. So on...all summer we would ride horseback every Thursday and stay out all day. And otherwise in the wintertime

we hiked. And every time we'd build a fire, make lunch, sit around and philosophize because that's the way we liked to do it. And that's why I learned so much from Jean Bernie because you don't learn if you're just busy doin' somethin' else, you know. You just sit down you learn about the wood that burns the best, you learn how to cook outdoors, you learn the books that she read and on and on, you know. It was just great. But she does say here, "Brownton said she and other hikers learned to fend for themselves on the trail. The hikers would cook from scratch using coals and bringing no prepared foods. They would also take care of the horses at night." That was on the Hen Party. "We did it all on our own. Brownton hiked with Bernie for twenty-five years. Brownton still hikes today. Some..." This was written in '87. [laugh] "I still hike today. In fact, I went over the Oregon Trail to Hilgard in June. "Sometimes bringing people along the eight mile stretch of Oregon Trail starting on 'B' Avenue and ending at Hilgard Park. Brownton said she likes to hike the trail because it brings back memories of Bernie and how she taught hikers the lay of the land and the flowers on the trail. Brownton remembers sitting around the fire cooking and philosophizing about things. The women who went on hikes with Bernie were well educated ladies who wanted to be a part of the outdoors. All these women could hold their own in a deep conversation. Brownton has taken people all ages along the Oregon Trail for the last ten years. She said sometimes organizing the tours is not easy. First she had to get permission from property owners who owned the land where the trail goes through. Or course smoking is not allowed on the properties. She doesn't recommend taking dogs or children under eight, but for the most part her love of hiking keeps her going and she likes to point out these things about the Trail that make the history of the pioneer travel so rich." Like the spring along Foothill Road, you know, where they mass of trees is in the curve at the end of the Foothill Road. That is where the Spring is and that's one place where the pioneers on the Oregon Trail would stop and rebuild their wagons. Then they'd move up to the end of 'B' Avenue and get more water at that spring and then they'd start over the hill. And...but that's another story. We're trying to keep on the Hen Party story. "Was the main source of water for early travelers. Above all Brownton stresses the spirit of the pioneers. It took a certain breed of people to pick up and go on no matter what happened, no matter who died. Of course times have changed since those days, since the days that Brownton was hiking with Bernie. Nobody had fancy hiking clothes at that time, only practical clothes that kept a person warm. But the fancy clothes won't stop Brownton from hiking the familiar hills she's been on a good portion of her life. "I'm never going to give it up if I don't have to." There was something else here. "When Brownton first moved to La Grande in 1940 at the age of twenty-one she met Jean Bernie, wife of the late George S. Bernie active member of the Lyons Club who deeded the property for Bernie Park. Bernie was not only known because of her connection with her husband, but also for her hikes. She was a great outdoors lady. Anytime you go anyplace with Jean Bernie it was memorable. Bernie organized weeklong trips along the Oregon Trail and the group was...the group was a select one. One women... Only women were allowed to come. Only women were allowed to come. It was during these trips

that Brownton became acquainted with the trail. Long before Boise Cascade or the Oregon Highway Division or the Oregon-California Trails Association started marking the trail, why, we decided to...and the other women...decided to preserve landmarks themselves about thirty, forty years ago these women places rock carrons along the trail. Brownton said she and other hikers learned to fend for themselves.” I have to tell ya that where we...where I have found one carron up there on the top of the hill. When G...SG...GPS...is that it? Is that was it’s called? ...person came along and pinpointed where the trail was it was right on that carron. Now don’t ask me how Jean Bernie knew that except that the rest of the trail the ruts went down and there was a tree that had grown between the ruts. So she was pretty sure that that had to be the exact space. So whenever I take anybody on this trip I say, “This is the most memorable carron and the only one we can find actually.” [laugh] But it’s...it’s pretty neat. If you...you know, I don’t know how much you want to go into when you do a oral history, but this tells about Jean Bernie and George Bernie getting married. And this one tells about George Bernie dieing. And George was an exceptional person. He came to this country on cattle boat when he was a youngster and worked his way out to the West. He became an optometrist and a jeweler. And when he had a heart attack the doctor said, “I don’t want you to plan to chop any more wood.” And he said, “Life isn’t worth living if I can’t chop wood.” So he went on chopping wood and he died. [laughs] So let that be a lesson to you. Rarely do we have to chop wood anymore although I’m having to work harder than I meant to work when I was eighty-four.

I: Really?

GB: I am. I still have this big place and nobody else wants to do the work so I...I just work harder than I should. No, not harder than I should, but harder than I meant to. This...Jean’s maiden name was McDonald and Haddie McDonald lived next-door to them, the little house that was just burned a couple of weeks ago, was where Haddie McDonald lived. And when we’d go out on Thursday she’d come over and she was about eighty-five, at one time, she lived to be ninety-four, she’d come over and she’d say, “Jean, I just wanted to tell you goodbye because I might be here when you get back and I just hope that you have a good time.” [laugh] We always said we thought probably she’d outlive Jean because she didn’t do anything. [laughs] But she was the one who told us that George and Jean met on horseback, they had their romance on horseback, they got married on horseback and their honeymoon was on horseback and they’d been on horseback ever since. [laughs]

I: Did they have any children?

GB: They had one child who had a crippled foot and I don’t know too much about it because he was...he had died before I came. But, you know, Jean was sixty by the time I came so a lot of these things had happened to her before and that’s why that one article said something about the hardships of life, you know, you leave...you lose a child. And in those days it was fairly common to lose a child. My mother-in-law had lost a child and for the longest time I couldn’t understand why this child who had been gone for seventy-five years was still memorialized, you know. You have to get old before you can understand things like that. But

it...understanding does come with age. [laugh] Now are there any questions you'd want to ask?

I: Oh, I think we have a bunch of questions. Can I ask the first one?

GB: Sure.

I: I have these books that I think relate to the trip although it's not just the Hen Party. Is it okay if I pass those around while we're talking?

GB: Sure. Oh, sure.

I: This is a family heirloom. It's sort of comin' apart at the seams literally so try to be careful about how you handle them. I think there may be a photograph of Jean Bernie in at least one of these.

GB: I had a lady say to me, "Isn't Jean an interesting women?" And I'd say, "Yeah, I just really loved Jean." "I've never seen a women with more wrinkles." And, you know, that was the first time I realized that she had wrinkles. To me she was just as young and beautiful as anybody could be because she was, she just shone out. Her personality was just absolutely fabulous. And she made huckleberry dumplings, which is what I like to make, and she made biscuits on this contraption over here. That's the way 'cause you can carry that pan in a saddle bag so even on a day trip, you know, you can put this in the saddle bag and, you know, there wasn't even aluminum foil or plastic sacks or things like that in the days when we went in the '40s. It's hard to remember that there wasn't hardly anything. Go ahead, ask another...ask a question.

I: How did the trips begin as far as you can remember?

GB: I am sure that, you see, she spent her honeymoon wandering around the mountain and she thought, "I think we could do that." And then everybody who had horses in those days and in those days almost everybody had a cow, too, you know. It's unbelievable to think that there was a cow that people...ordinary people...my husband was a lawyer, he milked a cow for twenty years and the college professors milked cows. It was just the common thing. Well, we all had horses so why not go for a ride together. And then, well, why not eat lunch out while we're there, you know. Why hurry back to eat lunch? So we have been all over these hills and over in the Rock Creek country and everywhere.

I: Did... Does it...this is an assumption on my part so correct me if I'm wrong.

GB: Okay.

I: I had imagined that it began as both men and women initially and then during the war it became women. Is that true?

GB: I think that's right, definitely right. Because I'm sure this Grace and her husband no doubt went on rides with them because it was a common thing to go on a ride and if you...if you liked camping and there were no restrictions then, you know. A few years ago we tried horseback camping in the Wilderness Area. It's very difficult when you're used to having a horse run free with...even with hobbles, you don't. when you have to tie up a horse, take in your own food for the horse, the horse couldn't get any...can't get anywhere near a lake. And, you know, there just is a thousand regulations now. So it wasn't...it isn't as much fun as it was then. And there's more traffic up there now. When we went we didn't see anybody else maybe for ten days and it was...it was wonderful.

I: Did you... Each year did you take a different trail or did you take the same trail?

GB: Pretty much the same trail, but we...we could go...when you get up to Moss Springs and you can go over to Catherine Creek Meadows or you can go down to the Minam. So if you go over to Catherine Creek Meadows and go over that way you get up on Meadow Mountain and Burger Butte and China Cap, you know. All those are on the maps now, but they didn't have good maps when we were there. It was just that she had made maps that we followed. And, yes...and even after we did Hen Parties they still went on doing parties 'cause Dr. Gilstrap liked to go. And in one of these articles it tells about Neville Chute. Do you know who Neville Chute is? Neville Chute is the fellow who wrote *On The Beach*. He was a Australian writer.

I: Yeah. Sort of post-apocalypse, that one where they're...the people stranded on the beach, the whole world ___.

GB: Yeah. He wrote all kinds of books. But somehow or other Dr. Gilstrap had written to him and said, "Just by reading your books I kind of think that maybe you'd like to see our country." And sure enough he came and visited and they took him on a trip in the high mountains. And that was just a big eye-opener for them. I didn't get invited on that, but Dan and Marty, of course, went on a lot of these trips and Dr. Gilstrap and Ralph and Esther Badgely and, you know, a lot of people who liked outdoor adventure, you know. And it was adventure because it was hard work, but it didn't seem like it, you know, when you're twenty or thirty you can do almost anything. We called ourselves the Antique Girl Scouts. Did I make that clear? [laughs] That... That was the basis of the Hen Party. And I was talking to a lady who's ninety-four...ninety-five, same age as Wes would've been, and she said, "I don't...I don't think you can tell them how it was during the Depression [laugh] and in the simple times." And I said, "Well, I'm gonna try and if they listen, why, they'll learn something maybe." [laugh] You have a question?

I: Can you kind of take us through a day?

GB: Oh, I'd love to.

I: On the trail?

GB: I'd love to.

I: I mean a typical day in the Hen Party trail. Like what was...like when did you do first and so on?

GB: Okay. Now when we would make camp, you know, we would first take all the saddlebags and the saddles and everything off of the horses and get them ready for the night and get the horses ready and we could let the horses go with hobbles. Do you know what hobbles are? Hobbles are two leather things that are tied together with a chain and you put them on the front foot...feet of a horse and a horse can jump like this with 'em, but it allows them to eat without running away or being tied up. So, it's amazing. There are lots of tales about what people...what horses have done with hobbles on. But you don't...you don't even see a hobble anymore because of all these rules and regulations nobody needs a hobble, but that was common equipment. Every horse had a hobble. Okay, we would...we would see that they were taken care of first, unpack everything, take...put the hobbles on, let them go. Then we would make camp and each one would fix their own bed because it was a good idea to do it while it was light.

And then...and then you could even cook in the dark as far as that goes. But the food was all in a elpocas like this and it was fairly well organized like you would organize it in a cupboard so that you didn't have to go like this for everything. And the menus were already made out so you know what you were going to eat. And somebody would get busy making a salad, somebody would get busy making the biscuits and somebody would get busy frying the meat or whatever...whatever main dish we were having, and somebody would go to the stream and get the water. And this is another thing about that time, nobody ever worried about ghirardia then. We always... We always drank the water out of the streams. As long as it was running it was okay. But you don't dare drink water out of anyplace anymore, not anyplace, or you will get sick. And having ghirardia is no funny thing. It's... It's...makes you really sick. [laugh] So that was a wonderful thing about that time. I don't know, maybe there weren't as many animals, but there certainly weren't as many people who were leaving germs around so the onslot of that, but we could just get water out of the stream. Because we were the only ones in the mountain you could yell and it would echo and you'd find a nice little glory hole and you could take a bath and nobody would care, you know. You usually did that in the morning, though. You didn't do that at night 'cause you needed to see what you were doing. We didn't care along a Coleman lamp or a Coleman stove or anything. We all had flashlights and hoped for the best. We would cook our dinner, eat our dinner, somebody would be assigned to washing dishes because you would heat water on the fire and...oh, somebody would have to gather wood and build the fire and somebody would have to heat the water so that we could wash the dishes. So we always had soap and towels along to do that 'cause...so much to hold or something. And then we'd sit around and philosophize or sing a song or whatever you do, you know.

I: What sort of stuff would you talk about when you were philosophizing?

GB: You know, religion is always a good thing, but nobody wanted to be too specific about their religion. Politics was also something, but it was a lot calmer than it is these days, you know. I can get...I have gone over the peak with politics. I'm on the... I'm on the downside now. I cannot stand it and I'm a Great Decisions Person, you know. Ever heard of the group called Great...Great Decisions People? I just love to talk about politics and world affairs and one thing another, but it's just so disgusting now. Well, let's go on with this other. Life was simple then and you could talk about simple things. And you could talk about what you'd known in your life before you got to this place. You could tell about who you were and the other persons could tell about who they were and then we could...there never seemed to be any...any lack of conversation, especially with people like Ralph and this Edna Sites was a funny person because she didn't have a sense of humor. [laughs] So every time that we were jolly with each other we had to say, "Edna, this is a joke." [laughs] It's really kind of hard to do, you know, but this is what we did. And then you'd snuggle down in your sleeping apparatus and Jean Bernie never would sleep in a sleeping bag. Sleeping bags had been invented, but, of course, they weren't the forty degree below zero type. They were just... But she had a way of making a bed with folding a blanket over and then folding this blanket from here over and then this one from here over until

she had her nice little nest to sleep in. But she didn't want to sleep in a sleeping bag, it was...you know, she could've been claustrophobic as far as that goes and not be wanted to be zipped up. So everybody had their own foibles and you find that out pretty quick when you're on a trip like this. When you get up the next morning, why, you'd check the horses to see that they hadn't gotten completely out of hand. Maybe put their halters on and bring 'em back into camp. And then we'd have breakfast and pack up and be on our way for the next day. And this meant that you had to do the diamond hitch every time, you know, and then you had to keep your shovel out so you could get the fire out. And it was a very simple life and it didn't move fast. We weren't... We weren't in a great big hurry, you know. So many people have three days to have a vacation and they've got to get everything done in...in that short of time, you know. But it's...it's just wonderful. We would talk about the wildflowers and the trees and the wonderful trees in the high mountains are so different from those in lowland. If you've never been in the high mountains you don't know what a sticky pine tree is and what weather and environment does to...for...and the survival of all the little...the little animals around and the appreciation that you have for everything living, just like it said in that article, you know. It just came out in the conversation that we should be loving and kind to each other and that life in the long run, you know, is all about getting to know each other and liking each other. So, getting back to the real world was always very difficult [laugh] because we were on...kind of on Cloud Nine for these ten days or so. One time we'd had a terrible rainstorm the night before we were coming out and we didn't have time to get everything dry, but everything had been up drying in the fire, you know. So when Dr. Gilstrap met us out here a little ways he said, "I could smell you a mile off." [laughs]

I: Is it... Is it true that there was someone in...in the party was sort of noted to be the poet?

GB: That was Mima, Mima McGuire. And she has a...she has a book published, actually. Mima, m-i-m-a, McGuire, m-c-g-u-i-r-e. It's probably someplace on the internet. [laugh] I don't know.

I: And then was...wasn't there also another woman who did a fair amount of paint...[end tape]

Tape1, Side 2

GB: ...and she was one of the ones that went with us, but one faculty wife went with us a lot and now I can't remember her name. But she's the one who painted that picture that I think I gave to Melissa. You'll have to ask her if I didn't give her this, it's a...it's a watercolor. And we were out on a picnic and she just did this and I'm in my gaucho hat. And one time I was walking the Oregon Trail and I took my gaucho hat off and left it on a fence post and the next time I went by it wasn't there, so I have never had another gaucho hat. I...I loved, you know, a flat-rimmed hat that you would wear riding because they were just right.

I: When we think about his project one of the things that we were planning on doing is...is doing a piece of art that could be placed in some kind of pivotal location.

When you think about that where do you think would be a good spot for that to happen? Any particular...not singularly, like are there a number of spots that you can think of that would seem appropriate to you?

GB: [laugh]

I: Blue Lake.

GB: Oh yeah. That...

I: [laugh]

GB: Have you been there...you been there?

I: Yeah.

GB: Isn't that the most fabulous place to be?

I: That's the best lake I've ever seen without a doubt. The water's perfect to swim in for about ten seconds. [laughs] A quick swim.

GB: It is gorgeous any time of the day or night and you can't sleep because it's so beautiful. Especially one night we were there it was moonlight night and it was just so bright and everything about that setting was just so perfect. Blue Lake is just at the end of Minam Lake, but up the hill a little bit.

I: You camped there at Blue Lake?

GB: Mm-hmm.

I: Or at Minam Lake?

GB: We camped at Blue Lake. But we camped at Steamboat and we camped at Swanock and we camped, you know, we moved around a lot. And sometimes we would go into Red's Horse Ranch and then up the Minam. And there was a certain place as you were going along one of her horses, if he were a pack horse, would just take off on the trail. Well, what's he...what's Jack doing that for? Jack had been taken this way so many times because there'd been a plane crash over there and then everybody who came to the mountain got to see the plane crash. So this horse just automatically went in that direction. [laughs] I just loved it.

I: We were... We were thinking of Red's Horse Ranch as being one of the places we could put the art.

GB: Mm-hmm.

I: It might be hard to do it in one of the Wilderness Areas 'cause we had mentioned there'd be a lot of...who knows what kind of forms we'll have to fill out. But the Horse Ranch we think it might be simpler.

GB: Maybe not. Of course it's government owned now, so who knows. Bernie Park, if you can picture where that one tree is there was a big barn there and my...one of my pictures is Jean Bernie picking ticks off of a horse under the horse's tail and the horse kicked her and she was so indignant, this horse was her friend and he was...she was doing him a favor and how could she get kicked by this horse! But she [laughs]...that was just the way she was, you know, very basic. And we didn't even have the kind of salt that you...that you feed horses now to keep them from getting ticks in those times so you always had a lot of ticks and ticks were the great awful thing, but you had to deal with them. Have you ever seen a tick? Haven't you seen a tick? Everybody's seen a tick. We don't like to see 'em, but they're a reality, but not as much now, you know, as ever. Our last horse died about five years ago and so we don't have a horse around and it's really sad, you

know. [laugh] And I can't...I can't even think about ticks anymore, but they are still there in the pasture. If you don't watch out they'll get on ya.

I: So was Jean's barn right there where the park is now or was there another property where the house was?

GB: She had a barn at the house and this same Jack that I was talking about could open three doors to get to the oats if you didn't have 'em locked really good. She'd jiggle the...jiggle the...the thing and, you know, there were a lot of innovative ways to close doors then, wood fitting into each other and, you know, they didn't all have metal locks on 'em like everything does now. So this horse could either lift up on something or move it back and forth and then he'd do that three times to get to the oats. And she was so disgusted with this horse! But she also had this barn over here and she did keep hay in it and the horses she kept over in that other barn. It was old. Everything, you know, everything is old until you make it new again. And so...

I: Jean's house was a very simple house, too, wasn't it?

GB: It was. And then Jean Bernie always made...she had a great dane and little tiny poodle. [laughs] The great dane thought it was a poodle because that's the only thing it ever saw. [laughs] So he was trying to get through openings that the little...little dog went through.

I: I understand what you mean.

GB: The little dog's name was Molly and this was...this was really funny. The...well, you know, everything was fun and simple in those days, just nothing sophisticated at all. No clothing that was facis...and you didn't have to wear makeup or anything. And if you were ever going to hike up off of Catherine Creek by...over Meadow Mountain there used to be a lookout tower on Meadow Mountain.

I: I think I have a picture of that.

GB: Probably do. And that was one of my favorite spots. You could see everything from the top of Meadow Mountain. You could see clear over into Baker County and you could see over this way and on into the other rows of mountains down the other way.

I: There's Jean's great dane right there I bet, huh?

GB: Yeah. Did you say that was it? This?

I: Right...right back there.

GB: Oh, right back there. Oh, oh, I see. It's the same color as the...[laughs] Have to look...it's probably 'cause I'm old. Isn't that good? There's a rock carron. The rock carron we made up on this hill was better than that one, but this was a marker alright. Yeah, that's the great dane. What a beauty! And Judy Gilstrap had weimerheimers so we had big dogs with us. Did you see this great dane in there?

I: What was the great dane's name? Do you remember?

GB: Somebody said that name just the other day and I said, "Oh, I remember."

I: There's some photographs of dogs in there, too, that maybe it's... Is that the lookout that you were talking about?

GB: Yeah, I'm sure.

I: There was a dog in one of the articles, too.

GB: Yeah, it says "lookout station on Meadow Mountain." Oh, I always...I always hated it when they got electronic things and they could do this fire watching down

on the ground someplace, you know. My husband was a lookout on Mt. Emily one summer when he was in high school here and it was just...it's a romantic thing to think about being on a lookout. And Chad Quaintance, who was the son of this other Quaintance who was a faculty member, was on the lookout that it mentioned in the paper last night, Johnson Rock. And he didn't have much business that year, but he read every book he could get his hand on about Lincoln. I'm so impressed, you know. I've never had enough time to read everything there is to read about Lincoln or anybody else, but [laughs]... Yeah, these are great pictures, aren't they? And they have names. You know there is a matter horn easily available from Hurricane Creek Road. You hike up Hurricane Creek and come to a matter horn.

I: That's a great place to hike...

GB: Yeah, isn't that great? It is great. You see the kind of clothing people wore in those days.

I: Yeah, you're beautiful.

GB: Jean Bernie had sidesaddles, too, and people were always borrowing them from her to ride sidesaddle in. And we didn't have fancy Arab outfits either when we rode sidesaddle. [laughs] These are wonderful pictures, Doug. I really... I really like those.

I: How did the... How did the men in everybody's lives react to you all going on your own? I was wondering if they were supportive, if they thought that was a great thing for you to do, or were they kind of resentful that they didn't get to go or against people going?

GB: You know, we must've had a bunch of good husbands because I never heard too much grumbling. And maybe they were as glad to have...be rid of us as we...[laughs]...as we were to get away from them. And one year my husband and I went back into the mountains when...as we came out from this trip. We just took one of the horses and our own horses and went back in. And that was the time that I found out that there were a lot of things that were fresh in my mind that Jean Bernie that he said, "We don't do 'em that way." [laughs] And by that time we had a couple of children and I had a mother-in-law who did not ever want to be asked to baby-sit. And when you're gonna be gone for a week, you know, you don't find a babysitter very easily. So we were very happy when my mother said she'd take the girls and his mother said she'd take our boy and he was only about four. She kept saying, after we got back, all Mark could say was, "Aren't my parents ever gonna come back? I don't think they're ever gonna come back." [laughs]

I: So childcare was provided by relatives and stuff.

GB: Yeah. I did have... Have you read any of the oral histories that are available now?

I: Mm-hmm.

GB: Have you?

I: The ones that Eugene's been doing. We went to the county museum down there in Union yesterday...

GB: Oh, you did?

I: ...for their function. They have a function.

GB: Oh good. There's one lady, Bessie Knapp, who was willing to stay with our kids for a week or two, you know. And she just died the other day, but her oral history is in that group. And then there was another one that had wild Indian stories that she told our kids so we...[laughs]...we came back to a lot of, "Did you know...Did you know that there were...da, da, da, da, da," you know. Whatever it was it was Indian stories. [laughs] So the reason that I got to the place where I was was that I had a older sister who became a Catholic when she went to the University of Oregon. And so my dad belonged to the Masons...now see, this is all stuff that you wouldn't know about if you hadn't studied the era...but Masons didn't accept Catholics and he didn't want his daughter to become a Catholic 'cause the Masons didn't believe in Catholics. And those were the days when it made all kinds of difference if you married out of your religion. You think of it now and you think how can that make so much difference because we treat everything so different. But anyway, I got sent to Stevens College in Missouri because they didn't want me to go to the University of Oregon. [laughs] That priest might get a hold of me and make a Catholic out of me, who knows, you know. So it was a girls' school and supposed to be a finishing school. And at Christmastime I went to New York and spent the Christmas holidays in New York with some relatives and up in Rhode...Rhode Island and had New Years' Eve in New York City. And, ah, it was just absolutely fabulous! I've never had to ever again celebrate New Years' Eve because that was the ultimate, you know. [laughs] I knew everything that I had to know and I just had a wonderful time. And there was all the excitement that anybody could have. On that experience I had ridden to New York with a professor who lived in Pennsylvania and he lived in a Pennsylvania Dutch house that the kitchen was in the basement and they had just slaughtered a pig, you know, and all of that experience, you know, it just added to everything. So then when I finished my first year at Stephens I decided I needed to go someplace where I'd meet men. [laughs] So I went to the University of Washington. I took pre-med. It was the Depression. I graduated from high school in 1936 and the Depression was still on clear into 1940 so you know it was still on. But my father just felt that I needed to go. When I finally said, "Dad, I think that I should really know what I want to do instead of spending your money" you know. So I came back to Portland and went to work and I...I worked until...so I'd actually had two years of college. And wonders of wonders when I finally got here and enrolled in this college those credits were still good. Nowadays if you go five years without going to school they're no good. So I was lucky to have those two years count and I was able to get my degree, my teaching degree. But by the time I got here I had...I had been through those two college experiences and a work experience for several years in a women's dress shop. And it was pretty boring. I made sixty dollars a month and that was enough to feed and clothe and pay rent, if you can imagine. I mean how could you do it? You can't even imagine getting by a day with...with sixty dollars. That's... That's the salary I made. And so I was liberated when I came to La Grande. [laugh] And I loved every minute of it, have kept on loving every minute of it. I love La Grande. [laugh] So then I went to Eastern and graduated, but in the meantime we had taken a trip around the world 'cause my husband, being a

lawyer, he wanted to go a World Peace Through Law meeting in Athens. And the travel agent said, “for a couple hundred dollars more you can stop twenty-five places if you’re still going in the same direction.” So we did that and we just, you know, we just really saw a lot. There’s a lot more to see, but I was glad to get to see what I did see.

I: Did you travel primarily by boat?

GB: No. We were primarily by air.

I: Oh really?

GB: Uh-huh. This was in 1963.

I: Okay.

GB: Which seems like an ancient day, but, you know, travel was a lot cheaper than it is today and probably a lot safer. But the war was over, you know, things were back to normal and it was a good time to travel. So we...we had a lot of foreign students here at this college at that time so I met a couple of them in Calcutta and ate in one of their homes and they owned a taxi company so they took us around...

I: That was convenient.

GB: ...both Calcutta and New Delhi.

I: Wow.

GB: And then there was another group in Lebanon and they had twenty-five people meet us at the airport, only one spoke English. And so we just had the grandest time and we were only supposed to be there for an hour, but they changed planes and we were there for six hours so we got to see the casinos and the downtown and the horse racing and the, you know, everything that was good about Beirut, Lebanon before the war. And you just can’t imagine those nice people, they’re sweet people, having to endure that terrible war that they...they’re still in, you know. They still don’t know what they’re fighting about.

I: I meant to bring my camera today, but of course...I had it all ready to go too...so I might just run home and get it, if that’s okay? I’d like to take a couple pictures of you and maybe these things you brought.

GB: Oh, okay.

I: So it won’t take me long to get it.

GB: Alright.

I: Did somebody else bring a camera?

I: No.

I: No, I also forgot my copy with her folder thing. Had to go beg copy off of Deanne.

I: I’ll be back in just a few minutes.

GB: I want to show you how this works.

I: Oh boy, this book is really coming apart.

GB: That is.

I: I wanted to show you that photograph, too. I think if I was reading that correctly that’s Jean.

GB: Jean at sea.

I: Yeah. Did she... Did she take a trip up to Alaska with Grace?

GB: Yes, she did. I have a little book that was written by Grace.

I: Really?

GB: Uh-huh. That tells about that trip.

I: Wow.

I: What's Grace's last name?

I: Was it McKinnon?

GB: McKinnon.

I: Yeah. This is...that's Grace right there. Grace was a...was a nurse in World War I, wasn't she?

GB: That...I don't have that memory, but, you know...

I: I think she was.

GB: Carol Campbell of McGlasson's is a relative and she can tell you.

I: That's a good...for background.

GB: She can tell you anything about Grace.

I: Carol who?

GB: Campbell. She... She and her husband own McGlasson's.

I: That's...okay.

GB: She is one of the ladies I walk with at five-thirty every morning. [laugh] And so I get quite a bit of information of what goes on downtown.

I: Are there...on that matter are there other folks left in town that are relatives, living relatives, of any of the women that were part of the Hen Party?

GB: I don't believe so.

I: That would be Melissa.

GB: Melissa is about the only one.

I: Really?

GB: Of course her sisters are...are cognizant of what went on, but I think Melissa was more tuned in to it and has more of the memorabilia. But you can see how old these things are. Some of these ladies started doing it long before I came on the scene. I bet they'd been doing it for ten years before I came along. And I came along in 1940 so, you know, it's a history, it's a real history. And I have some other written stuff, but I'm not a very well organized person and I always thought when I got older I'd be well organized, but I'm not. But I have to show you about this pan. In the old days they didn't have separators, this was before separators and separators are plenty old because nobody uses them anymore, I don't think, especially the hand...hand crank kind. But they would put milk in a pan like this and set it on a shelf in a cool room. Most barns had a place that was...the walls were filled with sawdust so that that room would be kept cool. So the cream would rise to the top and they had a special kind of a spoon that they spooned the cream off the top of this. And so this was called a milk pan and it's enamel. So this...they were thrown away long, long ago, but Jean brought this to my attention so that whenever I would see one I'd say, "Oh, I got to have that for my biscuits." On many of the trips that I've taken over the hill on the Oregon Trail I've had every member of the trip bring something to put in a salad and I would take the biscuit stuff. But all of that land that we walk on is private land and they kind of frown on fires now, you know, so I don't do it anymore. And...but you melt a little butter in here and you mix up the biscuits, you take your biscuit...Jean Bernie always had a sack of flour and she knew how many cups she was supposed

to take and she'd mix this up. She always used cream of tarter, baking powder and cream of tartar, and it gives it a special flavor. And then you'd fix your biscuits in here and by...in the meantime you'd have your fire built, you'd have a bed of coals and you just put this down on the coals like this. And you have a little shovel to help you with your fire and you shovel ashes onto the top of this and that makes a nice little oven and have a little hot pad or something to move this around so that it doesn't just burn in one place, you know, and "wa-lah" you've got wonderful biscuits. And she'd always see that there was jam, but this was the way it was done.

I: And so it's very much like a dutch oven except it's a lot lighter.

GB: Yes, a lot lighter. That's what you do with a dutch oven. But mostly those are for longer cooking, you know, where you have to sit...let something cook for a long time. Have you ever heard of the stone boilers?

I: Uh-uh.

GB: I also belong to a group called Art Research and George Nightingale had made outline for us. And young mothers who were more or less confined to home raising children in those days, my oldest child was sixty-one so you know how old that was...how many years ago that was. We would meet for lunch and somebody would give a report and we followed this...this outline perfectly. In the early Indian art everybody would study as much as they wanted to about the subject, but it was so interesting that I happened to get a hold of this article about how the early Indians here maybe ten thousand years ago in this area learned how to heat a stone in a fire, dig a hole in the ground, put your skin in the hole and fill it with water and then you drop the hot rock in there and that would make the water boil and you could put your vegetables, your root vegetables or anything else in there to cook. And you take your stone out and you'd have cooked food. And they were a unique group, evidently, because they got named the Stone Boilers. And maybe that didn't last too long because somebody figured out how to do it with a...something on rocks, you know, to cook it up here and so they moved on. But I just loved that concept! Isn't that a neat concept of going to the trouble of putting...boiling your vegetables in that hole? Well, you practically know everything I know now. [laughs] Unless you want to know about world politics and any other thing. ...mice terds around here. [laughs] I didn't realize... It was kind of hard for me to that elpocas down off of the wall because it was on a hook, you know, and there was a lot of stuff in-between so I had to...had to go over here and raise up over that hook so I didn't take a lot of time looking inside of it. But I thought just knowing that you had to look out for weather and so you always had a poncho of some kind.

I: How many times did you go on the Hen...?

GB: On the Hen Party? I must've gone about five times, but I went with my family many more times, you know. We would keep these horses, at one time we had seven horses. And it isn't a sophisticated thing that you do now, having horses, you just had a horse, you know, and you had...you had tack and then you used it, you know. And then you rode the horses and you rode them a lot. And as I was saying there was all this gravel roads around so it was easy to go up Glass Hill or even to Morgan Lake it was no...no paved roads. Even 'B' Avenue wasn't paved

and Twelfth Street wasn't paved. And you'd go up Twelfth Street and go on up around and then come down Glass Hill rode and go over your mountain. [laugh] I loved that place up there. It is... It is a really neat place to ride. But even after everybody was gone except for Bernice Brown we still rode up there.

I: Yeah.

GB: Yeah. The wildflowers, the lady slipper orchid, the calypso orchid, we have fabulous wildflowers around here. And since we've had a drought for the last eight years, why, not all of the wildflowers come out every year, it just depends if it rains or is it dry when they're germinating. Why, this year we didn't have any birdbills at all. I never did see a single birdbill, but there were lots of curly-cues. And some of the...let's see...Melissa and her family know all of these wildflowers by the Latin name, botanical name. It is just disgusting. [laughs] I'm not a perfectionist, I'm just a...you know. It probably be better if he would wait to take the picture in a month from now 'cause I just had all my hair cut off yesterday. [laughs] I don't exactly look like myself.

I: Do you eat cookies or drink coffee or anything?

GB: Oh, I drink coffee. If you have coffee that'd be great. Wonderful.

I: Can you use some refreshments?

GB: So probably you just don't know enough to ask questions, you know. It's so hard to ask questions about something you've never had any experience with.

I: Was it usually the same ladies that you went with?

GB: Yes, a little variety depending on who was available and, you know, maybe there were demands from the husband someplace else or children.

I: You have two girls?

GB: I have two girls just to start with. [laugh]

I: Did you take them camping and all that, too?

GB: Yes. Our family camped. We had all four kids with us. And our son is just a kick. He was a president of FFA for Oregon and so he was a fabulous public speaker. He is just a kick even to this day when he's fifty-five years old and so he would keep us laughing and...with his antics. And so...thank you for the coffee.

I: There's some cookies and other stuff up there if you'd like anything.

GB: Okay. I'm probably okay. Now do you meet all day? How long is your session?

I: Oh, a couple hours.

GB: Just a couple of hours?

I: Mm-hmm.

GB: So then do you go out and do what now? [laughs]

I: Yesterday we were at the...at the Union County Museum.

GB: In Union?

I: Mm-hmm.

GB: Mm-hmm.

I: This class will...in the end will produce some piece of writing that's based on our information that we're getting from you and anybody else we can find with regards to the Hen Party. And we'll probably produce something that looks something like those oral history booklets that are...that we read yesterday at the museum. Tomorrow Eugene Smith is coming and we'll get more of an idea of

how he'd gone about that project. And then we're gonna make a piece of art starting probably the end of this week.

GB: So all this time you've been trying to think of something in your mind to make in the way of artwork?

I: We're talkin' about a bell.

GB: A bell?

I: Mm-hmm. That might be located, say, at Red's Horse Ranch that could even have, for instance, a silhouette...

I: I was thinkin' about that.

I: ...of that photograph.

I: I think that would be really excellent.

GB: Uh-huh.

I: That might run around the bell or it would certainly say something about...should it be referred to more accurately as the Hen Party or the Antique Girl Scouts, do you think?

GB: When you went up into the high mountains... Oh, I believe this is Jean over here. This is Nel... This is Nel Grimmet over here. This is Jean over here, yeah. Kate Howcks, this is Lu Epling. This is Mima.

I: Which one's Mima?

GB: This one. This one's Mima. And this is Kate Howcks, I think. This is Lu Epling. And VanTassel just bought Lu Epling's house.

I: Oh really?

GB: Yeah. And is...is going to... One day we hitched up the sleigh and went out to the Epling's for dinner. You know, that was the ultimate...because it never snowed at the right time and it never stayed on the ground long enough to run a sleigh. And so this one time we took this horse out to Epling's...it's only about a mile from here, but it was quite an event.

I: Was that Marty on the left?

GB: This could be... This could be Marty, uh-huh.

I: Would it be okay if I took that...that photograph and Xeroxed it?

GB: This is a little bit clearer than some of those others, isn't it?

I: And then maybe we could even write people's names down on a Xerox, would that be okay with you?

GB: Sure.

I: Okay. I'll be right back.

GB: Sure. The Antique Girls Scouts are the ones who met and walked and rode every week all year long.

I: I see.

GB: And it was the Hen Party that went to the high mountains.

I: Right. I see.

I: How old was Jean and how old was...?

GB: She was eighty-eight when she died in '74. So, see, seventy, sixty...you know, she had to be over sixty-five when she was going on these that I was going on. And she carried more than her weight. But, of course, I didn't start slowing down till I was about eighty anyway, so, you know, it's possible. I don't know that I'm slowed down except that I have no place to go. [laughs] No horse to go on.

I: There's somethin' I'm...I'm diein' to know.

GB: What?

I: It might be impossible for you to answer this question, but those mountains, I've been up there quite a bit, and I was wondering what you think is the prettiest place you ever saw in the Eagle Cap Wilderness? Which mountain in Eagle Cap Wilderness? What's the prettiest place? Like I said, it might be impossible to answer.

GB: For that time... For that time I would say that...here's Blue Lake over here and there's a big long area here. What did we call that? There's a stream running through. It must be the head of the Minam River someplace and it was called some kind of a Meadow. What did she call that? Anyway, I just loved that as much as anything, but Blue Lake, of course, was the best. We went to Tombstone and Diamond as well and I've been in Eagle Cap, too, you know, on the other side. We camped over there at Echo Lake and Trappers Lake. And really from that and clear down to...to Lostine. And Wes took a photographer with him one time and he just...it just took him forever because he had to put up this tripod and his thing to take the pictures, you know. And half the time they were traveling at night and getting lost and they ended up camping almost in the middle of Lostine when they got back to camp...or maybe it was Joseph. You know where the Hurricane comes down into Joseph and you're right on the edge there. And they woke up the next morning to cars going by and so forth. [laughs] It was really funny. A law professor of his wanted to see the high mountains and so he took this law professor when he was just, you know, in law school. And they went all over everyplace. They went up to the half point, horseback, everyplace, all over, the Snake River and the Wallowa Mountains. But for view I like Meadow Mountain, I just love Meadow Mountain. But, you know, I'm sure that everything has changed. We were pretty upset with Justice Douglas at the time because he left his whiskey bottles at Burger Butte. We'd say, "Oh, we see that Justice Douglas has been here again." And Justice Douglas was the head of the liberal court, you know, when...when everything started changing from conservative to liberal. So those of us who were conservative in those days had it in for Justice Douglas. [laughs] Besides, a local...he was married to a local girl and he divorced her. Well, we knew her and we knew her sister and we just didn't think that was very nice. [laugh] But that's...that's the type of thing that you run into.

I: Did Jean Bernie have a favorite place?

GB: You know, I think everyplace that she settled down to build a fire and to enjoy was her favorite place, but she liked this large meadow, too. Do you know where I mean? You get on the trail and you go down into Blue Lake.

I: Yeah.

GB: It's a long...

I: There I've been, but I don't know the meadow that you're speaking of.

GB: But the North Minam Meadows a place where our family liked to go. Have you ever been to North Minam Meadows? You go along the Minam and then you take a trail that goes up to the left and that's the North Minam. And that takes you up to those two lakes.

I: There aren't any lakes in that area.

GB: There aren't, but there's one that you really have to scramble to get up to especially if you're on horseback or taking a horse up there. And it's...it's a wonderful lake. But my husband had been through every single lake and he talked about them like they were just, you know, everyday things because he'd gone with his father and his brother everyplace. I just came into the picture fairly late and didn't...had to have children and stuff that slowed me down from going [laughs] from going to the... But that was what was expected of you in those days. [laugh] You will think that...that I'm kind of a rebel talking the way I do.

I: Are you?

GB: Yeah, kind of. [laughs]

I: I like rebels.

GB: Anyway, I have always tried to stand up for myself, but the older you get the harder it is because life changes so fast. You have no idea how many things have changed in fifty years. It's been forty years since I've gone around the world, you know, that just doesn't seem reasonable somehow. If you weren't gonna go as far as Red's Horse Ranch and you wanted to do something that people would see around here you could either do it at the park, because it's a very memorable place. That is...anybody who knew Jean Bernie knew this little park. It was a pasture and she always had her horses there and we were always fixing fences and we were always over there. And we had an art teacher one time [laugh]... Have you any history of the art teachers here?

I: Not much.

GB: This was a woman art teacher and she lived in that barn.

I: And what was her name?

GB: Oh, you know...

I: Did you did teach at the high school or the college?

GB: No, she taught at the college. She was a real character, too.

I: Suma Cass?

I: All you need is a year and you can find that.

GB: You could find that?

I: You can find it if you remember the year.

GB: It's probably a '60.

I: It wasn't Mary Jane Loso?

GB: No, she wasn't exactly... She was a lady. [laughs]

I: Her picture that's what idea you get just looking at it.

I: That's why I prefaced it by saying it wasn't.

GB: No, it wasn't. I did know Mary Jane and she was a lovely lady. Maybe Melissa will be able to fill in some of these, too. You know, I tried to tell her group of hikers, backpackers, about this trip and it's awfully hard to make you get the feel of it without actually experiencing it. She'll probably be able to fill in the rest of these. Catherine Howit is...is one of these people and I'm not just sure...I'm pretty sure this might be Marty. And I...you know, as close I can tell.

I: What years did you go on the Hen Party?

GB: Oh, let's see. This one that was dated '51, I know about that. But it seemed to be...like one time when Wes was still in the Army his last tour of duty was in San

Francisco and I decided not to take the two girls down there with me so I didn't go and it was during that time. It was before Mark came along, before...that I went and so that had to be about that time. So you people are way past your lunchtime probably and you're anxious to go do the next thing.

I: I'm not anxious to go anywhere. [laughs] This has been great.

GB: It fills in a lot of things. I hope that you saw that... Do you have a picture of Jean? This lovely picture of Jean?

I: No.

GB: I think you should have a copy of that.

I: Yeah.

I: I should make copies of all those things.

I: Yeah. Would that be okay if we made...?

GB: Oh sure. Sure.

I: Okay. I can run back down to the office and do that.

GB: Okay. I like this one about her dieing and, you know, if you want to know more about her all of these...[end tape]