

Leroy Bushman
Place: His home in Perry
Interviewer: Rosina Armon
9/23/02

RA: Ok, what's your name?

LB: My name?

RA: Uh huh.

LB: Well I've been called a lot of things. But uh.. Leroy {small r} Vincent Bushman.

RA: Ok, um. And I forgot to ask Ducks so I'm gonna ask you right away how old you are. {Laughter}

LB: Uh... 76.

RA: Oh you are? I didn't realize that.

LB: 76 years young.

RA: Yeah. How long have you lived in Perry?

LB: We were here off and on two or three times. Uh, because my dad worked on the railroad and he had to move around to you know keep jobs. But uh, from about 1938 until, you know, I went in the service why we lived in a trailer here. {Phone rings and LB says Oh that's a nice interruption}

RA: So when you lived in Perry, did you live in this house? All this time?

LB: No, we lived in a house the railroad provided for the foreman of the section.

RA: Where was that at?

LB: It's between Lower and Upper Perry. About halfway. Right beside the track there.

RA: Now there's a...Between Lower and Upper Perry, there is a pine tree right there.....

LB: Big pine tree.

RA: Is that where the house was?

LB: Yeah, it sat right there, yeah.

RA: Because I noticed there was some lilac bushes there too and I wondered if there was a house there.

LB: Yeah, there was.

RA: So.... But that's right by the railroad tracks and the road. So where was the road?

LB: Well the road just come that far. Back Then, the road didn't go on through you know, by Lower Perry here. It dead-ended right there. If you wanted to get to where I lived you had to go clear up into Upper Perry off the highway. And come back that way into where we lived. And that was the end of the road. But uh....

RA: So how did people get to Lower Perry then?

LB: Well, there was always just going out here under the track out to the highway.

RA: Oh, but that road now that's going right next to the river, that wasn't there?

LB: No. Yeah, things sure did change.

RA: Yeah. So the house you lived in was pretty much where the road is now?

LB: Uh..... Yeah, yeah it went right beside of it.

RA: I'll be darned. Were there any other railroad houses there?

LB: There was a foreman's house and a bunkhouse; they called a bunkhouse there. For the men that you know worked on the section.

RA: Yeah. And your dad worked for the railroad?

LB: Yes, he was a section foreman they called him. They worked on the track. And uh, maintained it and installed it.

RA: And you said you moved a lot. So where did you... what other places did you live?

LB: Other places? Oh I uh, was uh...Reece [?] and Condon, Arlington. Those were most the places that we stayed the longest. At them locations.

RA: Yeah, I know those little towns are.... Um ...A lot of them were built around the railroad crew staying there.

LB: Oh yeah yeah. That's how LaGrande come about I think.

RA: Yeah I wouldn't doubt that.

LB: Built up around the railroad track there.

RA: Um, so did you go to school here at Perry?

LB: Yeah, I, I graduated in 8th grade there at Perry. I went oh five years I guess here.

RA: Do you remember any of your teachers?

LB: Oh yeah, yeah I remember some of them. I had one teacher, his name was Maurice Wise. He was a one legged.... Had one leg taken off when he was a kid. He was a real good teacher. He liked especially the boys, you know, he was always taking them on trips hunting and fishing and stuff like that. He was uh, liked to coach kids in sports. But then uh..... I had two or three lady teachers.

RA: What were their names?

LB: Gosh, I really uh... I'd have to think about that a while.

RA: Yeah that was a long time ago. And it was a one-room school at the time?

LB: Yeah we uh.... All the people that lived here, their kids uh..... one room building was big enough for all of us. We used the one that's still standing here for um, just to play in, in the wintertime when the weather was bad. We didn't use it for a classroom.

RA: Then there was another school building there right next to it?

LB: Yeah it was this side of where the building is yet now.

RA: How big was that?

LB: Um, it was about the same size as the one that's still standing. It had you know a desk and all that in there.

RA: Hmmm... And you said it burned down?

LB: Yeah it burned down.

RA: I wonder do you remember when?

LB: No, I wasn't here. We had moved away somewhere else when it burned down. In fact I think I was in the service then when it burned.

RA: I'll be darned. Um... do you remember about how many kids there were in the classes usually?

LB: Hmmm...My own class that I went through, why there was two or three of us in my class. Most of them were sometimes one child in it. Sometimes four or five. But then you know.... But they weren't big classes.

RA: Altogether how many kids were there?

LB: Oh I'd guess about 20 at one time. First to Eighth grades.

RA: Yeah, so where did the kids come from? Were they the kids just from here and Upper Perry?

LB: Upper Perry, yeah.

RA: Um... and you said they used that building that's there now for a gym too?

LB: Mhm.... Yeah we played sports in there; basketball especially.

RA: Not very big for a basketball court.

LB: No, uh... it's about half size of a regular court, you know. We uh... got to be pretty good athletes in there. Generally beat all our games there, because you know, we knew the everything about the building and how far we could make our baskets. You know, in fact, I think it was North Powder come here to play us and I think we beat them 98 to nothing. You know back then basketball was played you had a center jump after each basket was made. They would take it back to Center and jump it and start over again you know. My older brother he was pretty good sized for his age. He would always get the tip. When he got the tip, why generally he would tip it right to the guy that wanted to make the basket. He would just put it in the basket you know. {Laughter} The other team wouldn't even see the ball.

RA: Yeah you guys probably practiced that. {Laughter}

LB: Oh yeah, we could bounce it off the wall and into the basket.

RA: Oh boy. {Laughter} Who, what were some of the teams you played? From what little towns?

LB: Oh we played Island City and Elgin and uh... North Powder. LaGrande's Central School. We played them too.

RA: One thing I forgot to ask you, is the names of your mom and dad.

LB: Oh. My dad is Fred. Fred Bushman and my mother was Iva. You mighta knowed Iva.

RA: Yeah, I knew her. She was still alive when I first came here. Um,

LB: She was of Irish and English ancestry. They come on a covered wagon from Missouri. And uh settled in uh... out of Baker there. Homesteaded up there.

RA: Oh I didn't know that. Huh. What was her last name?

LB: Eeds . Iva Eeds.

RA: Eeds? I'll be darned. Huh.

LB: Her maiden name.

RA: So where did your dad meet her? Do you know?

LB: I think over in Pendleton at the Round Up. I think there. Yeah, my dad was of French Canadian ancestry. They uh.... About half and half I guess.

RA: And um.... How many were there in your family? How many kids?

LB: Well there was three. Three boys in our own family.

RA: Mhmm. Um... Let me see what else. Do you remember uh... Was there anything at all in Middle Perry there where the mill used to be when you were a kid?

LB: Uh.... Just the ruins of buildings. On the other side of the hill there. You know where the old sawmill burned. And there was just the ruins of buildings, foundations and stuff. One building kinda standing, it was a tavern, tavern and dancehall there. They called it the Sunset Tavern.

RA: Oh really? You know it seems so hard to imagine there being a town there because there is nothing there now.

LB: Oh yeah.

RA: And uh...

LB: It used to be a thriving place you know.

RA: Yeah I've seen pictures of it and was just so surprised at, uh...

LB: They called it Stump town I guess back in those days.

RA: Huh. And has Perry changed a lot – this part of Perry changed a lot since you were a kid?

LB: Well there's some new houses in here that never used to be. Yeah, it's basically the same, I mean.....

RA: Well I know your house; you inherited it from your mom. She used to live here. And there's a lot of houses in Perry that started out being built pretty much the same you know. Weren't they basically four rooms? Two bedrooms and a living room and a kitchen. And I wondered if the mill built those or did people build 'em just on their own?

LB: Oh.I I imagine that the mill, you know in order to keep workers probably close you know, they probably built some of the homes, yeah. Cause there was kinda a pattern to 'em.

RA: Yeah there is. Then people built onto them. A lot of them are that way. Especially these on, as you go into Perry. There's back, three houses in a row that look pretty much..... they used to look pretty much the same but they were built on. So you went to school through the 8th grade. And then what happened? Where'd you go to school?

LB: Well then I had to ride a bicycle to high school in LaGrande. They didn't have no bus you know. And so we'd ride a bicycle until the weather got so bad we couldn't ride a bike. And uh... we'd either stay in town or our folks would try to get in there you know, drive us into school.

RA: Where'd you stay? When you were in town?

LB: In LaGrande?

RA: Uh huh.

LB: Well I stayed at a hotel there. Called Sommer's Hotel. Upstairs there.

RA: Where was it at?

LB: Oh... What street is that? It's uh... on Depot Street I think it is. It's between Adams Avenue and uh... Washington Street, on the side street there.

RA: You had said that you ate there too?

LB: Yeah, there was a cafeteria right, couple doors down. So I'd go and eat there a couple times a day. In there.

RA: I, uh...So did all the kids ride their bicycles at the same time into LaGrande?

LB: Yeah, we all...There was four or five us going to high school; we'd tend to all ride together you know. Into school. In fact one girl was killed from riding into school. A girl from Upper Perry. Her name was Marie Foley. Her bike slid on the ice you know and she wrecked and she hit her head on the cement there. And I guess she never recovered from it.

RA: Oh for Goodness sake. Well, it's three miles to go in there, so that was quite a ride every time.

LB: Oh yeah. Well there wasn't all the traffic like you got now.

RA: Yeah.

LB: The old highway used to go down and cross under the railroad track and went around that bluff you know into Ordells, that way into town.

RA: Oh it kinda followed the tracks and the river.

LB: Just past where the weigh station is; just east of the weigh station it used to....The highway used to cross under the railroad track there. And then go around, right around that rock bluff and back across the river. Going into LaGrande there.

RA: Well...

LB: Between here and Hilgard the road was all different then too you know.

RA: Where did it go?

LB: Well from Upper Perry you know across that old bridge; you got pictures of that there? It crossed right there and went right on up and crossed the track and the river up above there.

RA: Uh huh. Well that dead-end...what's the dead-end road now that was the road.

LB: That used to be the main highway.

RA: Did it? It probably kept going?

LB: Yeah it went on through and had an overhead there going across the track up there. Before you got to Hilgard.

RA: I, I...Is that road still there up past Hilgard? Can a person still drive the old road?

LB: Yeah, you could. Some of it is uh... It's the old highway you know that goes right on through and all up above. You know the old highway used to take off of Spring Creek there and go up right along the track up to Kamela and Meacham... went through Meacham. Then down old Cabbage Hill over there, used to call Cabbage Hill. Going into Pendleton there.

RA: It wasn't where it is now though?

LB: Oh no. The road is still there. Still passable. In fact in the wintertime I'd rather drive that old highway than I would the freeway.

RA: Yep.

LB: Too much congestion and wrecks on that freeway.

RA: I know. There aren't as many people on the old way. So it's still paved?

LB: Yeah, yeah it's... All the way from Spring Creek on through it's paved clear to Pendleton you know. The old highway.

RA: I'll have to go travel it one of these days.

LB: Yeah, you'll have to take the scenic route. {Laughter}

RA: Yeah. So you worked for the railroad too?

LB: Yeah, I started the signal department of the railroad in 1943. And uh... I graduated in High School in 1944. Right after that I went into the service, into the Navy. And then I got discharged out of the Navy after World War II, I went right back to work on the railroad. I told them you got any jobs? You bet, for you we got one. They hired me right back.

RA: Oh great. So um....Do you think there was a tradition of hiring people like... From families that.... Like your dad worked for the railroad. Uh, I don't think it's so much that way anymore.

LB: No, it kinda was railroad families, yeah. They uh...had a job, why they'd get their boy on working somewhere else on the railroad you know. Or find 'em a job.

RA: Was there a lot more railroad traffic and things to do for the railroad in LaGrande than there is now?

LB: Oh yeah, there was big shops and roundhouse. Lotta...it was just a _____[?] you know, and had lots of steam engines there all the time servicing them. Pretty busy place, the railroad in those days.

RA: Yeah. So they uh... they still ran steam engines when...

LB: Yeah

RA: And they went, I bet that was something to see. Those steam engines going over to Pendleton. Over that hill.

LB: Yeah a lot of times they had three, at least, steam engines on one train to push them over the mountain, over the grade you know.

RA: Uh, did the freight go through pretty much like it was? Or did they ship out any grain from the valley or...?

LB: Yeah almost everything moved on the railroad back then. You know, the freeways..... the trucks, they couldn't haul it all. They weren't equipped to haul a lot. Until after the Second World War, well they had all the highway building projects going on. They built what they call freeways now. But back then the railroads hauled almost everything.

RA: Yeah. Is that when the freeway was built the way it is now? Around the Second World War? Or after?

LB: Well yeah they built it right after the Second World War. Improved it, widened it, put more lanes in.

RA: Now...um, Decca told about... told me about the Pinecone that was down here, do you remember that?

LB: Oh yeah. Yeah they used to have cabins. Like motel cabins there. And a swimming pool. Used to be a Pinecone. Changed the road a, little bit and their business fell off, why they used the swimming pool for fishing. They'd stock it with trout and they'd let kids come and fish in it, swimming pool there and catch fish.

RA: That was quite a deal. And you had said that they had changed the river here somehow when they put the freeway in or where they put the railroad track in.

LB: The railroad I think uh.. went in first you know. But previous to that why they..... the river and the road and the whole works used to go around; it skirted Perry here went right around the bottom of the hill.

RA: Yeah.

LB: You know you can look over here and see where the railroad and the freeway cut right through that. They used to float logs down the river and they had a big millpond over there. Back when the mill was operating.

RA: Yeah, I'm gonna have to walk back there and look at it again, it's been years. But you can't even see... Well to look and see if I can see where the millpond is and all that stuff, so... Well, I wonder if this bluff, you know the railroad cut through it. And there's a little bit of a bluff on the other side of the river. I wonder if that was connected.

LB: Oh yeah. The river, the river used to go clear around.

RA: Yeah, so that didn't even go anywhere where it is now.

LB: No when they cut through, they diverted the river too. Went right down through... where the railroad went, or alongside the railroad there.

RA: Well I'm trying to picture where they diverted it. Because it's... they must have started diverting it past Upper Perry, because

LB: Yeah, uh

RA: Where it's going now, that's where it turns.

LB: Yeah, it followed it's own course till they blowed through there. Put the riffraff in for the railroad grade and stopped... turned the river goin straight through more or less. But it used to make a big swing yeah.

RA: Yeah. The left side I know that one of the neighbors dug down and.. Uh, oh Larkin's, for a septic tank and hit a big, very deep layer of sand. And I think this whole area was just a flood plain for the river, at one time.

LB: Yeah, coulda been, yeah. Yeah it uh...

RA: Did you travel on the... you traveled on the trains or did you? Through your work.

LB: Oh sure they had lots of passenger trains back then. They had uh-well four of them goin' each direction. Four of 'em goin' east and four goin' west. If you wanted to catch a train why you'd go down anytime of day and there would be one comin' you know.

RA: Well, ... So that place... the train station was a busy place, now it's empty.

LB: Oh yeah it was a hub, yeah.

RA: And you said you were a signalman?

LB: Yeah I was a signalman, signal maintenance.

RA: What did you do exactly?

LB: Well in construction why you know, we built all the signal facilities, wired them, and then we maintained them after we got 'em built. After the...well, we put in a centralized traffic control between LaGrande and Hinkle. Er not Hinkle uh.. Reece [?]. When I was working when I was in high school, we were working putting that in. When I got out of the Navy, why I went right into construction again and we built centralized traffic control from LaGrande to uh...to uh...what's that... Huntington.

RA: So what is that, I don't know what that is.

LB: Centralized Traffic Control?

RA: Uh huh.

LB: Well that's when it's all uh... operated with the electronic machines. In other words you know, a dispatcher will sit in front of a great big board that would go like almost around the room, showing all the tracks. If a track, a train was there he could watch that train go from one section of the track to the other. Then when they'd come he'd line the switches...he'd see two trains getting close, why he'd line the switches and run them around each other.

RA: That was pretty important.

LB: He'd flip a button on his board there and control the train movement. Previous to that, why the old semaphore signals and lots of operators on the stations along the route. All the train movements had to be governed by train orders. You know when they used a key you know, to send out on the... why on the line, there they had all these operators and they'd hand up the orders to the trains. When the train would come by, why the operator would go out and hand 'em up. When the trains didn't stop, they'd just scoop it up you know. And say you'll proceed you know, to the next whatever siding they wanted them to go into or whatever. But after the CTC come in, why of course they didn't need all them operators no more because they had one guy sitting there running the whole thing.

RA: Oh yeah what a difference. And that's why in these little towns like, well even, it's out there by Thief Valley Dam. There's some little building, right by the railroad and uh... even... well at all these little places, I suppose they had to have a person every time the track moved; there had to be somebody there to move it manually?

LB: Oh no, no, after they put the CTC in it was all automatic.

RA: But before that?

LB: They had to hand throw the switches yeah.

RA: Oh, and they got the message over the wires?

LB: Yeah.

RA: Huh.

LB: They uh...when they had to...a message to go in the siding, why they had to stop and the guy would get out and line the switch and they would pull in you know and they'd close the switch back. By hand.

RA: Oh the...Did the Engineer or Conductor do that? Or was there somebody else that ran those?

LB: No, they had to get off the train.

RA: Oh, so they had to stop the train?

LB: Yeah.

RA: Well I'll be darned. Every time they were gonna....

LB: But they had classifications on the trains. I mean some of them stayed on the main lines, you know, the locals and stuff like that; why they'd put in siding for the hot shots they called them that go straight through. Moving right along.

RA: Did they have side rails like they do now here at Perry? Where they would move where a train would have to go off of the main track and stay there till another was coming past it?

LB: Well yeah they'd have to stay there until the train that was in the beat went by. Then they could line the switch and they could proceed if they had a clear signal you know. Now they just get on there and enjoy the ride; the train crew. All they do is get on there...they don't have to line switches. Dispatcher wants them to go, the light will just go green. Off they'll go. Switch a line for 'em and take off. Close it back after the train gets over it. {Laughter}

RA: Well even, yeah that Central Control System has sure made it a lot easier. A lot safer too I think.

LB: Yeah, Oh a lot safer. There's not so much human error. Used to have a lot of train wrecks cause humans you know, are not infallible. They make mistakes.

RA: Do you remember where the roundhouses were? Now what is a roundhouse, I think I know what it is, but...what are they?

LB: Well, it's a...They were where they serviced the engines. And they were built oh kinda circular. They had a turntable out there in the front of them. When the train...an engine, they'd just pull it in there onto this turntable, it'd turn and it would put them in a track that goes right inside the roundhouse, a certain track. Whatever one they wanted them to be on why they'd just pull it in there and they'd work on them in there.

RA: Where were those roundhouses?

LB: Well they was just a little west of where the depot sits there now across the track.

RA: I don't know if there's anything left there or not. When I first came here there was some bricks and some ruins and I suppose that's where it was.

LB: Yeah. They had to pay taxes on all that. So anything they don't need, why they got rid of.

RA: Um...

RA: Yeah....Um, we were just talking about during World War II. And you said there were guards along the track?

LB: Yeah, they were guarding all the bridges and any places you know that could be sabotaged. Well they had guards there to watch it.

RA: Yeah, that makes sense. I was kinda wondering if they would do that now after September 11th, but...

LB: Well they haven't yet.

RA: No, they haven't yet. But did they ship a lot of military supplies over the railroad?

LB: Oh, yeah everything went by railway. All their tanks, trucks and all their equipment, troop trains. There would be several troop trains a day going through you know. Just nothing but big long passenger trains with troops. Soldiers.

RA: So were they going to Portland and Seattle to ship out? Were those two, because I don't remember there being any military bases here.

LB: Well they would just go down there and get on a ship you know. We come up the Columbia River on our ship right up to Portland and took on a whole load of soldiers on our ship there.

RA: What's, what's the name of your ship?

LB: It was Bosk. The USS BOSK. It was APA, it was specifically designed to carry troops and make landings with landing boats you know.

RA: Oh you know what I didn't ask you is about your beautiful wife Beverly. Now I have to ask this cause I asked who your mom and dad were. So tell me about your family. The name of your wife and kids, and how many kids you have.

LB: Well, you heard, I don't know. Well, my wife is Beverly. Grayville was her name, and she used to work in a movie theatre as an usher. When I got out of the service, why we met. Now we have four children. We lost one. They're all grown. How many grandkids...let's see. {Laughter} One great grandkid.

RA: What movie theatre did she work at?

LB: I think she worked in a couple of 'em, didn't ya? You worked in the Liberty and the State and uh at that time we had three theatres in LaGrande. Granada yeah.

RA: Where were they? The theatres? Ah, one was in there right where the Granada is now. And State and Liberty were where the Tropicara... in that area right there where the Tropicara was.

BB: And where that pizza place is.

RA: Yeah I heard there was one upstairs there and that some of the equipment is still there. I'd like to get in there. {Laughter} Um... so the Somer... You talked about the Somer Hotel and that you stayed there when you were in high school. Was it just one story? Like it is now?

LB: Oh, it was upstairs. The hotel was upstairs. The ground floor...I don't know what businesses was down there. Oh that cafeteria was on the ground...hotel for one thing. But the hotel was on the...up off the street level. You had to go up steep stairs to get up there. I remember that. You had to go upstairs to get up there to the room.

BB: He used to ride his bike.

RA: Yeah he told me that. So what was your first car? When did you get your first car?

LB: Oh, when I got tired of riding my bicycle to school I got a car. I was about a Junior I guess. I liked to work on the railroad why, I made a few bucks and I went and bought a car for \$50. It was a Model A Ford I bought.

RA: Oh boy.

LB: I'd like to have it now.

RA: Yeah. I would too.

LB: If it was still running, you know, it would be worth a lot of money.

RA: Yeah, I know.

LB: Yeah, I used it of course to drive to school with. Last, when I was a senior.

RA: So you worked for the railroad while you were in high school?

LB: Yeah. You know during, between school years. The summer I worked on gang. Working over the mountain here. Between LaGrande and Kamela. I worked up there building construction signals.

RA: Was that when they were putting in that Central system?

LB: Yeah. Centralized Traffic Control.

BB: They didn't start that till later did they?

LB: No. Between here and Reece [?] we put in during the war, doing that. After the war then they went from LaGrande to Huntington. When I got out of the service I went right to work putting it in the other direction.

RA: Well that's neat. It's a lot more than I knew about it.

BB: Did you tell her, did you tell about the teacher?

LB: Which one?

BB: The one that just had the _____ [?]

RA: Yeah.

BB: What was his name? I can't remember.

LB: Oh that was Maurice Wise.

