

WARREN DOUGLAS CURRY  
APRIL 11, 2002  
TAPE #1  
Interviewed by Brenda Lawson  
Transcribed by Micheal L Minthorn

Side 1

- I: Please state your full name, age, and date of birth.
- DC: Okay, my full name is Warren Douglas Curry. That's C-U-R-R-Y. And my uh age is 76. My birth date is August 1, 1928.
- I: Okay. So I wanna' talk to you about your first impressions of Union County. Can you describe to me the first day that you came to Union County?
- DC: Oh yes, I remember it very well. (chuckle) That was way back in August of 1953. Uh, I had been, uh, going to radio school and had graduated and had been contacted by Ken Willard who was the manager of KLBM right here in La Grande. Uh, we were the biggest and only radio station here at the time. And he invited me to come to La Grande and see what I thought. So I had gotten, uh become engaged in the meantime. I thought, "Well, okay, we'll go look and see." So my fiancé and I drove over here. And the closer we got to, uh, eastern Oregon the most unhappy I became because I thought this is just like it was in Wyoming where I left. Sagebrush and nothing. And uh, then we climbed the hill, uh, Cabbage Hill and got into the trees and I thought, "Whoa! I think we just died and went to heaven, or somewhere." Where's that wonderful place to go? Oh, I can't think of the name of it. Oh. In Lost Horizon. Well, anyway. That place. (laugh) And I thought, "Gee, that's where we've ended up here." And then we did drop down into the Grande Ronde Valley and I thought, "I think I'm gonna' like this already." So we did check out the radio station and, being my first job and all, absolutely scared to death, you know? I thought, "Well, if I'm gonna' get married I better get a job." So, I said, "We'll do this. We'll take it." So, we decided to move to La Grande. Er I did, before we were married. And my first day was September- and this is ironic- September 11<sup>th</sup> 1953 at 11:30 in the morning. Little did I know that day was gonna' be so memorable later on in my life. But anyway that's when it all started for me. And uh, managed to stay 36 years.
- I: Okay. On that first day when you came to La Grande, where did you stay?
- WC: Uh, you mean, uh, where'd I live?
- I: Yeah where did you stay on your, on your visit? Not when you moved here but when you came to visit.

WC: Oh, oh. At the Sacajawea Hotel. The original. Where the US Bank is now. Uh, we both stayed there. In separate rooms, I might add. (chuckle)

I: Okay.

WC: In those days, you know, you had to be proper.

I: So this was on Main Street?

WC: On Adams, yes, Adams and Elm.

I: Can you tell me why you picked that place to stay?

WC: Well, I ... not really, except it was one of the biggest hotels here. And looked like it might be the neatest. It had a coffee shop and a bar. So I thought, "Well, what else do I need?"

I: Okay. So it was not the only hotel in town?

WC: No, no, no. The uh ... there was the Foley Hotel at that time down where the uh, telephone company building is now. And I think those were, as I remember the two main ones. Of course then there were several motels. But, uh, the Sacagawea and then- of course I realized its historical. In fact here, the name, and I'm very familiar with Sacagawea. We didn't go to school together or anything like that, but I read about her in school a lot. And then it just kinda' clicked, I thought, "Well, let's stay here."

I: Do you remember the rate of the hotel?

WC: I have no idea, honestly. But I'm sure it was a lot less than it is now.

I: I'm sure it was. So you moved to Union County September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1953.

WC: Right.

I: Do you recall the population of La Grande when you moved here?

WC: Not really. I'm guessing probably 10,000--somewhere in there.

I: Okay. What did it look like?

WC: Well pretty much as it does now. Uh, except you didn't have the freeway. They had the old highway coming in. But Adams Avenue is pretty much like it was. There's different businesses now. But basically, there hasn't been all that much change. Most of the change has come about on the Island City strip. That used to

be just a road to Island City with not a whole lot between La Grande and Island City.

I: Do you recall any of the businesses that were downtown?

WC: Uh yeah, let's see. Bohnenkamp's, which is no longer there.

I: What did Bohnenkamp's do?

WC: It was a hardware type store. And then, uh, Zimmerman's was a furniture store up on the other corner. The Granada Theatre was here. And I think as I remember also the Liberty Theatre, which was way down at the other end of Adams. Kind of where Domino's is now. Uh, Tropadera was here. Uh, Lawrence's Jewelry. Bernie's Jewelry. JC Penney. Uh, Ann Johnson's which is not here anymore.

I: What sort of store was that?

WC: Uh, the ladies fashions. And then there was a Chinese restaurant pretty close to something-Noodles. I don't remember the name of that one. And uh, Cherry's Florist on the corner there, next to Ann Johnson's right across from the Sacagawea Hotel. And that has moved about three or four times. But, many of the businesses that were here at that time are still here. A lot of new ones, too, of course.

I: Was there anything in town that enticed you to move here? Besides the beauty of the, of La Grande.

WC: That's just about it. You know the location. And uh, being fairly close to Portland where our families were in case we wanted to go back to visit or whatever. And I don't really recollect that we were so close to Boise. Uh, I think being in the mountain areas. And then being close to uh, Wallowa and Wallowa Lake was also a deciding factor. We weren't skiers, so we didn't care that much about uh, Anthony Lakes, as far skiing goes, you know.

I: Was Hot Lake operating at that time?

WC: Hot Lake was here and I do remember, um, I wanna' say Dr. Roth. I can't remember if that was- is right or not. But they were doing- they did have some patients that were out there being treated with the mineral water and stuff. And, they did have the restaurant going at that time. But it was a very small scale. The biggest thing I remember about Hot Lake at that time uh was the little lake out in front with all the lily pads. They were just covered with those things. But of course that's all gone now. Hopefully, \_\_\_ (107) will re-plant, or whatever. But uh, it was operating but on a small scale.

I: When you moved to Union County did you rent a home? Or buy a home?

WC: Yes. No, rent.

I: Okay.

WC: Uh. Actually we rented an apartment in the Grande Ronde Apartments. Um, on the second floor and that since has had a major fire. The third floor was all burned off. But uh, after we were married which was in November of that year, then we moved into uh, the Grande Ronde and then to a small house on Washington near uh, Lynch Motors. And then we bought a home. One of the first homes that was built out in Progress Plaza. South of us, originally. So we bought a home out there.

I: Do you recall the price then?

WC: Yes, I do. It was 19,000 and something-or-other. But the main thing about the price, I remember that it included taxes. \$98 a month. (chuckle) That'll never happen again!

I: Probably not. So when you were renting do you recall what you had to pay for rent?

WC: You know I don't. I really don't. It couldn't have been a lot because I was only makin' \$250 a month. So uh, to pay rent and groceries and everything else, you know, so it couldn't have been a whole lot. To me it seemed like a lot then, of course.

I: Do you recall the utilities, the cost of utilities you had to pay then?

WC: Uh, the price I do not know. We had, uh, we heated by oil. And uh, we had electricity of course. And we paid the water bill. But I have no idea what the prices were, I just don't remember.

I: Um-hm. Did you have garbage pick-up?

WC: You know I don't ... yes, we did but I don't know if paid for that or if it was included in the rent. Places that we dumped garbage was so far from the house. I don't remember anyone comin' to pick it up or whatever.

I: Okay. Were your children born in La Grande?

WC: Oh yes. Yes. All five of 'em at the uh, St. Joseph Hospital which ... up on K Avenue which is now CHD and uh Circuit Court Building. Uh, third floor. Yeah, all five of them. And we have six children. My second wife had a daughter and she was born in Portland.

I: What was the hospital like at that time?

WC: Well it was pretty neat. I remember one thing for sure: You could smoke in the rooms. (chuckle) You don't do that anymore! Uh, not that I want to, but I do remember that we could. It was, of course very clean. And it was run by the sisters, it was a Catholic hospital. And they were very neat and very accommodating. Excellent care. And at that time, I think as I remember, we had the old uh hospital up on the corner where White Birch Apartments is now located. On the curve just going out of town, going west. Uh was the .../ now I can't ... I wanna' say Grande Ronde but that's not right. I don't think. But anyway that was a hospital. Had since closed when they built the new one. They have it now.

I: Were you in the room when your children were born?

WC: No. No, they didn't let us do that then. No, we were had to wait in the room and they hauled our wives way out down and closed the doors, you know. Yeah, they don't do like they do now.

I: What ... what shape was the facility in at that time? The hospital itself.

WC: Excellent. Excellent, yes. And it hasn't really changed all that much, uh, internally that I'm aware of. I know the steps out in front are beginning to get a little haggard and broken. But they're tryin' to repair those and fix 'em. But uh, it was just really quite neat. The elevators were very good. Had two of 'em as I remember, one on each end. And then the sisters lived in that small building just east of the, the CHD facility up there now. It was really quite good. I wasn't all that familiar with hospitals, but for us it was great.

I: Were the sisters part of the nursing

WC: Uh, they were the nurses.

I: They were?

WC: Oh yes. Yes.

I: So was there a Catholic background in the hospital? Did you feel any influence from that religion in the hospital?

WC: Um, not overly. Of course, they had some statues here and there. And uh, with the habits that nurses wore. You were aware that it was Catholic. But uh, not at all intimidating. Not a bit. No they were great to everyone.

I: And where did your children go to school?

WC: Uh, here in La Grande. They started out at the Ackerman School on campus. And uh, then of course when from there uh, junior high before we had a middle school and then high school.

I: Are those buildings the same now as they were?

WC: Well, they've changed uh, they built a new middle school and fit the junior high kinda' (tape artifact) \_\_\_\_ kept up part of it. But they built a new middle school. And the high school, uh, has had, I think two additions over the years. But pretty much where it is now.

I: Okay. Let's talk about working in Union County. Tell me about your job at the radio station.

WC: Well it was really wonderful. As I say, when I started out I was just scared to death. My very first job in radio. And uh, as I remember ... like I said I started at 11:30 in the morning, my shift. And as I remember it was a program that's called *Buyer's Guide*. People could uh, call in and kinda' like a Want Ads thing on the air. Little small things were for sale to give away, whatever, you know? And uh, then we had this gong-thing like the NBC "da-daw-dum," you know? And after each album we had to hit one of those. And I don't know how many of those I read and missed the gong and hit the wood, or whatever, you know, clank! (laughs) I finally got the hang of that pretty good. And then of course, uh, played a lot of records. Uh, 78's in those days. I think we had uh; our engineer at the time had built a 45-record player. Uh, and I think we- at the most we probably had a hundred 45 records. And that was it. The rest of 'em were all 78s. These big 16-inch, um, records. They were bigger than albums. They were 16 inches. It was called a standard library. We used that a lot. But uh, then read news periodically. Read a lot of commercials. All ... we had very little taped stuff in those days. I don't think cartridges had been invented. But uh, and then just basically about a six-hour shift or so, you know?

I: And what were you earning again?

WC: \$250 a month. And really thrilled! (chuckle)

I: Did you choose to move because \_\_\_\_\_. (226)

WC: Oh yeah. We got to choose our own. And then, of course, people would call in and request. They did have a request hour. But uh, people would call in anyway during the day and say, "Can you play this, play that?" Whatever. I remember, uh, specifically when Elvis Presley first came out on Sun Records. He had a record called *I Don't Care If the Sun Don't Shine*. And I thought it was absolutely fantastic. I tried to play it a lot. Nobody ever requested it. Like: who in the world is Elvis Presley? You know? Until *Hound Dog* and *Blue Suede Shoes* came out. Oh my gosh! Which I could not stand. I thought, "yuk!" But those are the ones

that made him popular. And then Willy Nelson was another one. I tried to play a lot of his music, but I didn't get any response. Nobody seemed to think he was ever gonna' amount to anything. (laugh) Well, he did. He sure did. But we did get to pick our own music.

I: Did you answer your own request lines?

WC: Oh yes. Well actually, it was mail-in. People had to mail-in requests.

I: Oh.

WC: And uh. Send cards or letters in. We didn't, the ones we did by phone were just casual, you know. It wasn't an on-purpose type thing.

I: Were there limitations on what sort of music could be played?

WC: No. In those days, not really because most of the music was okay. You didn't have any swear words or anything like that, you know? And uh, it ... the only thing I objected to most of the time were these records that talked about uh, divorce and triangle ... uh, romantic things you know? I thought, "Is that all they can write about," you know? My grandma got hit by the train and this type of stuff. I actually wrote a letter to Nashville once about that. It said, "Can't you straighten out these people and have 'em stop writin' this kind of music?" And, uh, they didn't. I got no letter back from Nashville. Nashville is still there. Going strong! (chuckle)

I: Did you feel censorship in any other way?

WC: Not really. Uh, everything was really cool in those days. You didn't ... you just didn't have anything to be censored for. And of course, you didn't dare use profanity on the air. No way.

I: Were there ... you said you couldn't use profanity, but were there other certain words that maybe are used now that you weren't allowed to use then?

WC: No. Just uh, profanity ad the usual four-letter words, you know? Just were unheard of. You didn't even think about usin' 'em. Uh, We didn't really have that much talk time like they do now. Whenever we were talking it was mostly reading commercials. Or reading news. Uh, or introducing records or whatever. We just didn't have what they call talk radio like they do now. So you didn't have much chance uh, to get off track with the language.

I: Where was the radio station?

WC: Uh, when I first came here it was out on, uh, Adams Avenue, way out. I'm tryin' to think who's there now. Uh, that one where you drive in to go to Bi-Mart. After

you've gone out of town a-ways. Uh, I think Larry's um, Olympian and warehouse is there on one side. And then on the other the Mushroom Buyer or something. But it's out in that area, right there. And that was there until 1955. Then we moved into the Sacajawea Hotel downtown, on the mezzanine. At that time.

I: Were there any other buildings located near the radio station when it was out on Adams?

WC: No, actually, it was ... uh, you were pretty much out in the country. At that time we had the big tower, which stood right there. Self-supporting tower. And it was all kinda' right there. Um, there were some homes nearby, but Bi-Mart wasn't there, or anything like that. Out there.

I: How long was that radio station in existence before you arrived?

WC: Well, as I remember they went on the air in 1938. And I think they first were located in the uh, old Sacajawea Hotel. In one of the backrooms up on the- up on the mezzanine floor somewhere. I never did really learn the true story on that. I think it was 1938 when they started up there.

I: Was it the same- who was the owner when you began working? (?)

WC: When I came here? Uh, the owner and let's see, and then Radio Incorporated is what it was called. And uh, Lee Jacobs at that time was the President. Gordon Katz, (?) (320) on at Ontario, KSLB in Ontario. And then Lockwood in Baker. I think they're the main ones. And then Ken Willard, of course was our manager here in La Grande at KLBM.

I: Can you describe the equipment that was used on the job?

WC: (laugh) Boy! Oh, yeah! Pretty antiquated compared to what we have now. At the time I thought it was really first-rate stuff, you know? And it was, really. We had uh, two great turntables and a full-fledged console with knobs and dials like crazy. And then that 45 record player I told you which was kind of a homemade thing, but it worked. And uh, we had a studio with microphones so we could do live broadcasts from the studio. And I remember when we moved from out on the highway up into the hotel. Then is when carts- cartridges became popular. And I remember saying to the other guys, I said, "Why in the world are they buyin' those? They'll never be popular. Who'd wanna' have a cartridge? Yeah. I couldn't have gotten along without 'em. After it happened, you know?"

I: Was this an 8-track cartridge?

WC: No. No they're single ... single tracks. But they were specifically designed for broadcast. And uh, and then things just got better and better. Better tape recorders.



- Uh, played longer. Uh, then they came out with the longplay tape. Put a tape on, and the thing'd go like for three hours, which was just unheard of. You had to be careful when you rewound it, you didn't stretch it, you know? (chuckle)
- I: So at that point, then, did you record, you pre-recorded your show?
- WC: No, but we did pre-record a lot of, um, interviews and things that could be played back later. And then uh, when we joined the ABC Radio Network then we taped a lot of programs: Paul Harvey, Alex Dryer, (sp) (363) um, some of the other guys. I've almost forgotten their names now. But we taped the programs earlier and then delayed broadcast. Unless we could ... sometimes we 'em live.
- I: Where was the radio tower located once you moved to the Sacajawea?
- WC: Up where it is now. Out on Cove Avenue.
- I: Can you tell me about some of the memorable interviews you may have done?
- WC: Well, actually- I myself did very few interviews. Most of that was up to the- to the news department. Bob Mask (sp) (377) was our local newsman at that time. And he did almost all of the interviews. Uh, so I ... I really don't have any memories of, of doing anything special with interviews.
- I: Okay. Were you always a DJ at the radio, or did you have another position?
- WC: Yeah, it evolved into several things. It started out as a DJ and then it worked into sales- I became a salesman. And uh, was Assistant Manager for a while.
- I: Can you tell me more about your work in sales?
- WC: Yes, it was really quite interesting. Uh, it was very hard to explain to people that "How do you sell airtime?" I mean, you know, it's air. How do you sell it? Well, you had to explain to 'em what you were talkin' about. It's commercials and- and in those days, uh, radio was still pretty new as far as advertising. So, you had to convince people that that number of people would hear the announcements of uh, so, sales is really very interesting. I liked it really well.
- I: Do you recall what type of ads you were selling?
- WC: Oh all kinds, all kinds. Uh, and we'd sometimes we would get to do our own commercials and some you could 'em humorous and some wanted 'em straight. Um, I do remember one I was doing once for uh, the old Montgomery Ward Store. That's- this is when uh, barbeque braziers were becoming very popular.
- I: Now what is that?

WC: Braziers. Like barbequing outside, you know? And uh, so I was doin' up this real good commercial and reading it on the air and just havin' the time of my life. And stop in and see the new brassieres. (laugh) The new barbecue brassieres at Montgomery Ward. I remember that day! (laugh) I did not get fired. (laughs)

I: Do you recall how much ads were selling for? Did you have any knowledge of that part of the business?

WC: Well I did have, but I'd see ... I don't remember. Um, we're talkin' probably, like 250 for a 30 second commercial. In that general area. And then, of course, they had packages, you know? The more you buy the cheaper they get by ... uh, 60-spot package or, or if you go on a yearly contract it's like...

I: Is that two dollars and fifty cents?

WC: Yes. Yes.

I: And that could be played as many times as they wanted?

WC: No, that would be a "time." Per spot.

I: Do you recall the types of businesses that advertised with you?

WC: Oh all of 'em! Yeah.

I: All of the locals?

WC: Yeah. None of 'em could get away from us! They were out chasin' 'em all! You know for everything. You bet. You bet.

I: How did you get news from outside Union County?

WC: It ... we had a, a teletype. Associated Press. Uh, which came in by telephone line and had that going for many, many years. And then eventually we started getting stuff by satellite.

I: Do you know when that change occurred?

WC: To satellite? Uh, let's see, da-da dat-dah ... probably about 1980. Roughly. About 1980. Then it went into the satellite communications thing, and then ... we ... we didn't. But since I've left the station they are now getting music and stuff by satellite.

I: What are the most memorable times of your working at the radio station?

WC: Oh my goodness, there were so many. Probably to kind of bunch it a little bit together. When we had moved to the Sacagawea Hotel on the mezzanine. That was great because any notables that came to town stayed at "The Sac." And we could look out our windows down on the lobby and see all kinds of people, you know? Marty Robbins was here once, I remember. Uh, Jeff Chandler. Uh, Dorothy Malone. The people from *Pillars of the Sky*. Uh, or government figures that ... the Governor. I do remember one time Senator Mark Hatfield was visiting and uh, he was going up the stairs to the mezzanine, you know, I was going down the stairs apparently had gotten off shift or something. And I don't know why I did this- it was so dumb. As we're going down the stairs and I passed Senator Hatfield, I said, "Hi, Mark." (chuckle) And when I got to the bottom, I thought, "You jerk!" (chuckle) That was a United States Senator, idiot! Even if you do know him, you don't call him Mark, you know? But I did.

I: Did he respond to you?

WC: Oh yeah, yes he did. (laugh) Oh, that was great, I'd almost forgotten about that one.

I: Is there anything else that sticks out in your mind about your time at the radio station?

WC: Oh there are probably a lot of 'em. And I'm gonna' think of a lot of 'em after we get through here. Um, and of course we were always involved in community affairs. And since we'd just had the county fair we were always doing something with the fair. Or the Eastern Oregon Livestock Show. We were big into making floats and stuff like that. But I do remember uh two parades. Union County Fair parades. We decided to be a band. Not a one of us played an instrument. But we used, uh, dish tubs for cymbals, you know---

End of Side 1  
Side 2

WC: And I do remember, uh, two things, uh, parades for the Union County Fair. The one was we were gonna' be a band. Not a one of us played an instrument. So they came up with all this crazy stuff to play, you know? Tubs, uh, wash pans; we- I remember a big washtub we used for a bass drum. And uh, walk down the street kinda' humming stuff, you know? I think one guy did have a kazoo, or whatever. But I do remember the funny ... our manager, Ken Lillard at the time, was the drum major. He was leading out in the front of the band. With a baton. And it was hilarious, absolutely hilarious. And then I remember one of the parades; we were the very last entry. And I forget what we called ourselves. But we were picking up manure from the uh, horses. So ... but we were all dressed ... the girls in formals and the guys were in suits. White shirt and tie and all that stuff. And here we are shoveling this stuff, you know? (chuckle) At the end of the parade. And it had ... we had a great name, but I wish I could remember what it was. (laugh)

I: Now during the fair did you go out on location?

WC: Oh yeah. Yeah, we ... in fact we had a booth at the fairgrounds and we did a lot of broadcasting right from the fair. We would, uh; he'd have them come into our booth, uh the livestock people and whatever. And the commercial exhibits, this type of thing. Or, we would take a remote microphone and stuff and go out in the field out there at the fair. Yeah, we did a lot of broadcasting at the fair.

I: Did you work alone, or?

WC: Well usually there were at least two of us. One to operate the equipment. And then, Bob Mask most of the time, or Ken, were doing the interviews themselves. But you had to have somebody there to kinda' watch the equipment, too.

I: Why would you have to watch the equipment?

WC: Well to make sure that it ... you have the levels right. That it doesn't get unplugged, or something or, you know, whatever. Somethin' doesn't break down. It's just a normal thing to have somebody watching what's going on.

I: How many hours a day were you ... at the radio, operating?

WC: At ... at the fair, or just generally?

I: In general.

WC: Yeah. I think we for the most part signed on at six in the morning, and off at eleven o'clock at night. We were off overnight. And then, a few years ago then it went to a 24-hour operation. But the ... then we were automated. And didn't have to have anybody right there at the station.

I: Let's talk a little bit about entertainment in Union County.

WC: Okay. (chuckle) Well, let's see. Myself I'm not an entertainer. Not intentionally. I'm a jokester as many people will tell you, but ...

I: But what did you do for entertainment?

WC: Oh, I see ... I see what you're getting at. Yes. Well we had a lot to do. We had a roller skating rink. And we had uh, two movie theatres. And uh, the Tropadera for those of us that, uh, liked to go dining and dancing. Uh ...

I: Where was that located?

WC: The Tropadera? Right ... oh, where uh, steakhouse ...-Elkhorn Steakhouse is now located. Right on Adams. And of course there's always uh, picnicking, hiking, uh, water sports. One of the big things of course was Wallowa Lake. And we've always had two nice parks: Riverside and Pioneer. And uh, if we wanted to go up into the Elkhorn's, up, uh, to Anthony Lakes. Or to go to Baker. Baker City. Uh, all up in Wallowa County all over. Uh, Elgin, and up into the Tollgate area where the ski area is. So there was, there was quite a bit to do, you know? It- plus, what you wanted to do around your own home. If you wanna' call yard work entertaining.

I: You said, uh, dining and dancing at the Tropadera?

WC: Yes.

I: What sorts of music could you expect? Was it live entertainment, or?

WC: Oh yes! Oh yes! You betchya'. And uh, it could be mostly probably country. I remember once the Ink Spots were there. Performing.

I: The Ink Spots?

WC: Yes. You prob'ly don't remember them, do ya'? Or do ya'? That was a famous quartet, way back in the 40s. Yeah. You were talkin' real big time here. (chuckle) But they were here, and uh, actually that was a concert more than anything. 'Cause I don't think anybody moved. It had chairs and once we got situated and they started in nobody moved to do anything else. They were just infatuated 'cause they were so good. Uh, but the music was varied. But mostly, uh, either rock or soft rock then. Or, or country.

I: So what did you wear on a night out?

WC: Oh gosh. (chuckle) Well, you did not go with suit and tie, or I did not, at least. People- some people did. Unless you were goin' to a, a fancy dinner or somethin', then you would. But usually it was pretty casual, you know? Jeans and shirt, whatever. A lot of 'em wore boots. I never got into boots.

I: Cowboy boots?

WC: Yeah, right.

I: You mentioned at one time in a previous conversation about The Wheel?

WC: That is another, uh hot spot. It was called The Wheel then, it's where Ten Depot Street is now. But it was called The Wheel. And then Dave's Woodshed, and then it became Chris's Woodshed. That's uh, much the same thing. Uh, dining and

dancing. Uh, they had really good food. They had a soup--chicken bisque, I think it was called. And they never would give the recipe for it. But it was so good.

I: What kind of food did they serve other than that?

WC: Uh steaks, pretty much steaks, you know? It was pretty much a popular steak place also. And French fries, you know. The low calorie stuff. No carbs. Yeah, right!

I: Was there anything else about The Wheel? That you recall?

WC: No, not really. It was just ... it was a real fun place to go.

I: Did you bowl?

WC: Yes. Now there's another one. Yes. We did have a real fine bowling lanes. \_\_\_ Bowling Lanes. (092) Out where Les Schwab is located now. Or ... in fact they bought the building next to Les Schwab for storage. But a lot of bowling. And uh, a lot of leagues, you know? So bowling was very, very popular. Kirk and Brownie Brim were the owners as I remember. And Lois Ferguson was manager. But uh, and they- it was just a really good neat place to go. They had a nice snack bar. And lockers so the people that bowled all the time could uh, store their shoes. And stuff like that. So I'm glad you mentioned that because that was really a real popular form of entertainment.

I: Were you a member of a league?

WC: No. I bowled but I wasn't on a league. I was in Portland when I worked for Meier & Frank. But uh, I didn't join a league here. Didn't really have time to do it.

I: How big was the bowling alley at that time? How many lanes?

WC: I'm thinking about 10 lanes.

I: And were the teams then sponsored by a local business?

WC: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. You bet. They had good support. Good support.

I: I've also looked into Mc\_\_\_'s Tavern.

WC: Okay now that was located out on what is now the Island City strip. Uh, boy and I can't really remember, where at was the lo- maybe about where Legacy Ford is now. Kinda' in that general area. But they had some cabins out there, too, that people rented. Uh, it did have a tavern. And it was primarily uh, they had food, and they had great burgers. Finger steaks. I remember one thing about that. They would have peanut night. And of course, then they had beer. And so you'd sit at

the tables and stuff and eat these peanuts and so we were out there one night. And I was being so neat and tidy. Eating peanuts and putting the shells in the ashtray. And the owner came by and said, "Warren, you better not do that anymore, or you're going to have to buy the whole house a round of drinks. Throw 'em on the floor!" And we did! Oh my gosh, the floor was just cluttered with peanut shells. So, I threw 'em on the floor! You better believe it!

I: Has the shopping changed in La Grande over the years?

WC: Oh, well, uh it has mainly because of the bigger stores now. What with Wal-Mart and Bi-Mart. And uh, some of the smaller stores downtown. Some of the people, you know, have just gotten to their retirement age and have just retired. But uh, there were really some magnificent shopping stores in La Grande that you don't have now. Because of the bigger stores. People that travel to out of town to shop, uh, in the Tri-cities or in Pendleton or whatever. But it, it has changed. But fortunately there are still some local businesses that remained. And uh, people I hope are still patronizing them, you know?

I: Do you recall other sorts of entertainment that people in town might ... were interested in at that time?

WC: Well, uh, the gun clubs come to mind. We have two of 'em. People that uh, you know shoot rifles and, uh, at targets and stuff like that. Not each other. Uh, I think I've pretty well covered ... um, here again I'm gonna' think of a thousand things after we get through here.

I: Do you feel that ... that Union County is divided by social class? Or was that evident in the different forms of entertainment?

WC: I never noticed it. I never did. I never was aware of it. Anywhere. I, I didn't mention rodeos. Rodeos were big here. With uh, the Stock Show in Union, the Stampede in Elgin, then Blue Mountain in La Grande here. And then of course, uh, we always had big doin's at Baker City. And then Chief Joseph Days up in Joseph. So rodeos was, was a big form. But I never really noticed any, any class division at all.

I: So you could expect if you went out to the local, uh, dining hall or lounge all sorts of people would be there?

WC: Oh yeah. Gosh yes. I never noticed any problem at all. Yellow, pink, purple, black, or whatever, you know?

I: Let's talk about public service.

WC: Well, I've been in involved in it for many, many years. And it started way back. At the radio station, uh, back in those days in you know, in early 50's or 60's you

could tell what month it was just by listening to the radio. If you did not have a calendar you could tell what month it was by what public service spots we were playing. Promotions. January was always March of Dimes. February was Heart Month. March and April ... Easter Seals. You know this type thing. And then all of a sudden they kinda' all kinda' ran together. But I got pretty involved with all those working, not just doing the announcements on KLBM but actually working with the committees. And uh, many, many, many years ago I was asked if I would become Chairman of the American Red Cross Blood program for Union County. And uh, I was a pretty heavy blood donor. So I said, "Sure, no problem." So I did. And I did that until just, oh maybe five years ago. I ... 32 years I think is what it lasted. But we would organize the blood drives and the bloodmobile from Boise would come in. And uh, and do blood drives. As, as they do now. So we really were pretty heavily involved in that and that's probably one of the biggest public service things that I have done.

I: Why Red Cross?

WC: Well I was familiar with it. And uh, it's just kind of a funny tie-in. But when I was in the Navy back in 1952 we were on uh, I think \_\_\_ (?) (199) Japan. And they passed the word that they uh, need blood donors ashore. Anybody that would give blood would get liberty the rest of the day. That's like, get the rest of the day off. So I thought, "O-oh, cool." So a bunch of us signed up for it and went ashore to the hospital and did our thing at giving blood. And uh, I don't remember a thing about it except afterwards this Navy nurse handed us a little paper cup thing and told us to go out and sit on the front steps. You may not want to include this but I'm gonna' say it anyway. And so we did and I thought, (sigh) "Well this is kind of a strange thing, you give blood and then they want a urine sample. I thought, why?" And uh, so anyway, I think, "Why after you give blood do they need a urine sample?" So we all went out and sat on the front steps and here came this Navy nurse with a bottle of whiskey. And filled these little paper cups up and said, "Now you guys drink this!" And uh, I was not a whiskey drinker and but she was a Navy officer. She had gold bars. I thought, "I'm gonna' drink it." (laugh) So I did and after that and all these 32 years of being involved with the blood program I never did get whiskey. All I got was orange juice. (chuckle) Oh my!

I: So how did you go about arranging the blood drives in La Grande?

WC: Well we'd have to find a place, you know? Lutheran Church, the Methodist Church. Sometimes the Catholic Church parish hall. Find a place they wanted. And then, way back then we had to also get all the nurses that we'd need to work the program. Arrange for refreshments. The whole ball of wax. Then the Bloodmobile came in from Boise. They just came in with the van and that's it. And the six nurses that actually would, would draw the blood. But we had to have nurses do other things, you know? Take blood pressure and temperature and all this. So, but uh, you got to be quite a routine. And we had such a good committee set-up, you know? We'd just make a couple phone calls, and BOOM. It was done.



And I'm sure it's much the same way now. But uh, over the years I've, I've, I've lost track but I think- I'm almost 11 gallons of the blood I've donated over the years. And that prob'ly doesn't count the one in \_\_\_\_, (?) (243) Japan. (chuckle)

I: How many people would you expect to come to a blood drive?

WC: Well we ...we would have a quota that we'd have to get of ... try to collect it ... you know, like a hundred and fifty units. And so, we had a list of people we'd call.

I: How many people does it take to fill 150 units?

WC: 150 people. Oh yeah.

I: Each person can only give one unit?

WC: Yes. Yes. You bet.

I: And how ... did that number change over the years?

WC: No, it stays pretty much the same.

I: Does it?

WC: Yeah. Because the ... Boise has several areas where they draw blood. And of course they can only keep it so long. Now they ... they factorize it into different units. Uh, which they couldn't or didn't do in those days. But uh, they ... there is a limit as to time that they can keep it before it has to be destroyed.

I: Were you handling the blood at that time, or only handling the organization?

WC: Just the organization. No I didn't ... didn't handle the blood at all.

I: Okay. So there was no specific training that you to be involved in?

WC: No. The people from Boise did all that.

I: What other activities were you involved in?

WC: Oh my goodness. Let's see I taught a class at the high school once briefly, on uh, public speaking. Teaching the students how to operate the tape recorder and the microphone. Uh, hm. Other than uh, all the public service stuff that pretty well handled it. That's pretty much full-time just taking care of all that.

I: Were you involved in any other groups, like the uh Kiwanis, or?

WC: At one time, yes. I was a member of Kiwanis and uh, and then the Elks Club. Uh, da-dat-da-dah, couldn't have ... Well, they had Jaycees but I was too old for that, I guess. About- I guess Kiwanis and Elks are the two main ones, yeah. Oh! And then uh, speaking of rodeos, um, my wife and I were members of the La Grande Mavericks, which is a riding club still. But they eventually started having their own rodeo I think about 1971, somewhere in there. And that was a lot of work, you know? You found that was a year-round job. You get through with one it's time to start plannin' the other. And one of the main things uh, about the Mavericks and the Blue Mountain Rodeo that I remember so well is picking rocks in the arena. Goin' out there and pickin' what ... I'd swear those rocks grow! "Cause every year we got to just pick those rocks out of there because you didn't want these cowboys getting' bucked off of one of these horses, you know? Man. But we were active with them for many, many years.

I: Have you seen a change in how the community support is structured around activities like this?

WC: No, I ... I haven't been involved with them all that much but it still seems to be pretty active. Uh, be it the ... now we don't have Blue Mountain Rodeo anymore but uh, the Union County Fair still pulls a lot of support. And there's so many volunteers that work together to put all that together. And the same thing with the Eastern Oregon Livestock Show. And the Catherine Creek Junior Rodeo, which is great. That's- kids' rodeo. And uh, the Stampede in Elgin. Chief Joseph Days. So they- they all still receive a lot of local volunteer support. So it's pretty much the same.

I: I see. Were you involved with any of the churches? The local churches?

WC: Oh yes. Early on, uh, involved pretty heavily with St. Peter's Episcopal Church. 'Cause I had uh, joined the Episcopal Church when I was in high school back in Wyoming. And uh, I remember ... this is another funny; you may not want to include. Back in Wyoming it kind of became a, a bad thing to join the Episcopal Church. So a bunch of us guys and gals did ... but I got to be an altar boy. And, this was really a thrill. I remember eight o'clock in the morning we had Communion. So we'd have to be there to assist the priest. And he'd mix up the wine and the water and get all ready to go for Communion. Then when you get all through, of course we had to consume what was left. And I thought, "This one goes back kinda' to the orange juice bit and whiskey." And then, all of sudden I got to drink what was left of this wine, or, Father would share it, you know? I thought, "Oh! Being an altar boy isn't all that bad!" (chuckle) At the time I thought that was a pretty good reason to join the Episcopal Church. And of course, I realized that there was a lot more to it than that. And then uh, somewhere in the shuffle here in La Grande, uh, all of a sudden ... and I don't really remember the reasoning behind it ... probably I think the biggest thing would have been the divorce of, of my first wife and I. So I kinda' lost interest in church altogether. And then, uh, all of a sudden something came up and we got

interested in the First Christian Church. So we have been with them for many years now. And very active.

I: Do you know how long, you know when you started this?

WC: Uh, I think it was like 1981.

I: What was the attitude in the area about the different churches in La Grande?

WC: Well, I don't think there was any attitude necessarily. There were a lot of people that were "churchy" and a lot of people that weren't. And uh, you know, you didn't make a big thing about it. At least, I didn't. I figure if they wanna' go to church, fine. And if they don't, fine. But there was, there was no real big animosity about it. That I was aware of anyway.

I: Can you describe to me what your involvement was at First Christian Church?

WC: Uh, yeah. Kind of, uh, at first oh kinda' ushering a little bit. And then uh, became uh, a member of that which helped serve Communion. And then uh, eventually became an Elder and also uh, aside from religious activities I uh, volunteered. Well, I didn't volunteer I- I requested to be the new janitor. The one we have is leaving going to school. And so, I thought, "Well I wouldn't mind doing that." So and I got the job to do that. So I was janitor for several years after there awhile. And then I got diabetes and it was a little hard to go up and down stairs and move tables and... So, I retired from that at age 69.

I: Were you involved with any of the youth groups in the church?

WC: Just supporting them. I ... I wasn't a teacher or anything like that. But we did work, you know, with the youth kids. And when they had their programs and stuff we would help them whenever we could. Whatever it might take to help.

I: Can you think of anything else you were involved in La Grande that ... that sticks out in your mind?

WC: Well after ... we've talked about so many things here, Brenda. I do remember uh, aside from the Red Cross, I was also very much involved with New Day Enterprises. And I can't remember when I started with that, but it was many, many years ago. Uh, they started out kinda' in the log cabin out at the fairgrounds, 'cause it was really small. It was a beginning. And then we moved into uh, part of the uh, old St Joseph Hospital where CHD is located now. At one end, then we finally moved to the other end. And then, eventually moved to the location now on North Depot. But uh, there have been so many years. And so many wonderful things that have happened in that program. And, I can't believe what it's done for the people that are involved. The people that work with it, uh, the staff that teaches and works with these people. And then it ... it's just astounding to see the

changes that have come about with the clients. You know? The young men and women that are involved with that program. I'm thinking of one young man for sure, and I won't mention names. But he works in a local business in La Grande and has for many years. And he ... he just does an excellent job. Just wonderful. So, the New Day Enterprises program is a good plus for Union County. And they now have ... I think the last count was five group homes in addition to their headquarters there on Depot. And they have since now built a new office facility on Washington. Uh, up there near Lynch Motors. So, uh, of all the things I've been involved with, I think the most rewarding ... and it's kinda' hard to say this 'cause they all were, but the most rewarding prob'ly would be working with the American Red Cross and New Day Enterprises.

I: You've been very involved with people it sounds like most of your life.

WC: Yes, I really have, yes.

I: Very people-oriented. Have you seen a change in, in how people interact in this area over the years?

WC: Well, not really as such. Uh, if there's any interaction, as far as I'm concerned it's because I cause it. You know? I try to at least. Uh, and uh, it's very hard for me to be unfriendly. I don't know where I learned all this, prob'ly from my parents because they were both very popular. But uh, I wouldn't know how to live any other way.

I: One last question to wrap up something we talked about before: when did you retire from the radio station?

WC: Okay, now we're talking. How many times? (laugh)

I: Well, tell me more about that.

WC: Okay, well, the first time I think ... oh my goodness! I wish I could remember the year. Well I ... I decided that I had probably been at that long enough, so decided to retire. And uh, I did. And they had a big wonderful dinner party for me at Red Lion in Pendleton. And, Ken and the troops gave me a very fine gift of fishing gear. Because I thought, "Now I'm gonna' have time to go fishing." So, anyway, I'm guessing that was prob'ly around 1983, somewhere in there. And uh, we had gone to Washington to visit our daughter who had just had a baby. And while I was up there I had heard that one of the local salesman from KLBM was gonna' quit radio and go fulltime at the railroad. I got to thinkin' about that. I was not happy with retirement at all. So I remember I called Ken from Washington. And I said, "You're not gonna' believe this"---

End of Side 2

End of Tape #1

Transcription completed on Wednesday, August 01, 2007

WARREN DOUGLAS CURRY  
APRIL 11, 2002  
TAPE #2  
Interviewed by Brenda Lawson  
Transcribed by Micheal L Minthorn

Side 1

I: Can you give me a description of what the Sacajawea Hotel may have looked like on the inside?

WC: Okay, uh, of course the radio station at that time was located on the mezzanine. And I remember when we were out on the highway and we were gonna' move downtown and I thought at the time, "How in the world are we gonna' put a radio station on the mezzanine?" It just didn't seem big enough. But, it's like a lot of things when you build. The more you build the bigger it gets. And it worked out very well. They put uh, up glass walls, you know, I mean windows. And uh we had a studio and a control room and a newsroom and a record room. Which had uh, tons of records. Back in the good ole days, the 78's and this type thing. And 45's, we had more 45's by then. But uh, we liked it so well because we could see anything that was going on down in, in the lobby. We overlooked the lobby. And whenever anybody important came to town they always stayed at the Sac.. And uh we had full view of 'em. And most of the time, uh, we were able to get them and uh interview 'em on the air, you know. And uh, one time ... and they made the movie *Pillars of the Sky*. Here, Jeff Chandler was here. And oh, I can't really think of the rest of 'em now. But the rest of their names. But anyway they uh, spent a lot of time at the radio station. But I remember uh, just so much activity going on down in the lobby. If anything important was happening in town it happened at the Sac. And I remember upstairs, uh on the same floor we were on the mezzanine. They had a small ballroom and a large ballroom for dances and meetings: Lion's Club, Kiwanis, a lot of those met in the small ballroom. But uh, I do remember one time Frankie --- [Call?] [027] and his orchestra were here. Uh, and that doesn't mean beans to you, you don't even know who Frankie \_\_\_ [028] was, do ya'? [chuckle] Well, he was, uh, a big orchestra back in those days. And uh, he and his orchestra were in the large ballroom and they had a big crowd up there for that.

I: What did it look like in the large ballroom?

WC: It was not ... nothing really spectacular. It was like a big lodge hall is what it was, you know? Just chairs, uh, no special chandeliers or anything like that, you know? You'd think there might be but-

I: Do remember the coloring of the carpets or ... ?

WC: No, of course it was bare floor; there was no carpeting.

I: Oh bare floor.

WC: It was bare floor, both large and small ballroom. But um, there was just all kinds of activity. Something was always going on in either one of those two ballrooms. Of course, then the upstairs. It was seven stories high. And rooms were very adequate. Uh, and we had the elevator, had only one elevator. And it uh, was always in working condition as I remember.

I: Were there also stairs?

WC: Yes. There was, there was a pretty neat stairway. Uh, nothing really outstanding but it was kinda' neat. Kinda' 'bout half circular stairway that came from the lobby up to the mezzanine. So that was kinda' neat.

I: Did it have a wooden banister, or?

WC: Yes. Yes. And um. I do remember when they decided that the hotel was gonna' go and they were gonna' tear it down, uh; they had kind of a real special type party. Uh, where they uh gave away dishes and glasses, you know? And uh, there's still- a lot of people still have those as souvenirs.

I: What did those look like?

WC: But uh- oh, they had the picture of Sacajawea on 'em, you know? Indian, kinda' Indian painting. And uh, this magnificent picture of Sacajawea is now hanging in the US Bank. They saved that thank goodness! That was really a magnificent picture. But uh, and then next to it, of course, was the Sac Annex, which is still standing. But at that time, one of the things I remember about that was back in the good ole days we had the Ground Observatore, which was uh, a series of volunteers working with the Air Force. To uh, spot planes or keep track of aircraft. And uh, we had a post on top of the Sax Annex, up there. And we had uh, private phone lines into headquarters so you could phone in airplanes coming over. And we had to sight them and tell what kind they were. But I re... I been thinking

I: What was the purpose of that? What were you looking for?

WC: Well it was during the Cold War, you know, type thing and they just wanna' keep track of aircraft. And it, it Ground Observatore was a nationwide thing. I mean they were everywhere. But it was volunteers that volunteered to go up and keep track of those all day long.

I: 24 hours a day?

WC: Oh yeah. Yeah it was quite a thing. But I ... the thing I remember the most about it I guess is that uh, sometimes we didn't have the elevator. We had to walk up seven flights to get to the roof. [chuckle]

I: Why didn't you have the elevator?

WC: I don't really remember now, I just ... maybe we were younger and just wanted to get the exercise. I don't know. But I thought, "Oh, that's a long ways up there. Seven flights!" I couldn't begin to do that now. But that, that was such fun. And I don't remember how long that lasted. Uh, or when it ended. But uh, it was- speaking of, you know, community events and things. That was also one of the big things. Oh, was being in the Ground Observatore. And you worked directly with the Air Force. And it was volunteer; you didn't get paid for it. But uh ...

I: How many volunteers do you think that there were?

WC: Oh, I'm ... I'm guessing this. I imagine we prob'ly had, oh, thirty.

I: Wow.

WC: Yeah there were quite a few. Uh. Both men and women, you know? Around town. But I just remember so much activity going on between the Sac Annex and the Sacajawea Hotel. And of course we'd had the coffee shop. And uh, the Sage & Sandroom which was the bar and lounge was downstairs.

I: Do you recall what the coffee shop looked like?

WC: Uh, well just like a restaurant. I ... the color green comes to mind, like green walls and... But uh, it was just your typical coffee shop, you know? It had really good food. It was neat. Everybody ate there. Well not everybody but when you went out and do something special you know? There weren't a lot of specialty places to go in those days. And the, and the Sac Coffee shop was one of them. But it, it was just so neat to be part of that and uh, I do remember one thing about the Sac Hotel, adjacent to the radio station. When we could climb out the windows of the studio and be on the marquee. And we would sit out there and broadcast parades and stuff that went by. So that ... that worked out pretty good. [chuckle] It was really a fun place.

I: So how big was the radio station then?

WC: Well, let's see. We were ... I think we had ... had finally gone a thousand watts up there. And uh, that was a lot for us. I mean at that time we were the only station in town. Didn't have the college station yet. And I'm not even sure if FM had been invented. It ... I'm sure it had but we didn't have it. At that time. And uh, we were remote. Our tower was way out on Cove Avenue. So everything went out there on telephone lines. Uh, that was back before satellite, so everything was

ground lines. But uh, and we were into everything. I mean, we covered elections, uh, if it was news we were in it or on it, you know? We were just a part of the community, uh, much more I think than, than some stations are now. It's not quite as uh; convenient I guess maybe with the satellite systems. Uh, to have as much localized uh information as we had then. But it, it was really great. It was a great time, I'll tell ya'.

I: You mentioned before in an earlier interview that you were nervous on that first day of work.

WC: [laugh] Terrified might be a better word!

I: Can you describe for me the working conditions on that first day? You know, maybe your headphones. Tell me about some of the equipment that would have been involved.

WC: Well the equipment we had was a console, and I mentioned I think earlier the uh 45 record player which was kind of a homemade thing that our engineer had put together. And, and I think at the most we probably had 30-40 45-records.

I: And what are 45 records?

WC: Well ... [laugh] they're-

I: Just in case I didn't know!

WC: Oh yeah. Well, they are about, I guess seven inches in diameter and they had a, a hole in the middle of 'em that fit down over a, a, holder whatever you call it, you know? And the 78's were a little bit bigger; they were about like a diner plate. The 78s. And then we had what were called electrical transcriptions and they were big dudes, they were about 16 inches. Um, they were like a, just a huge big platter, you know? We had a few of those. But uh ...

I: How many songs would that hold?

WC: Oh, I think there like maybe eight to a side, on, on the ET's. And of course the 45 is just one song per side.

I: And the 78's?

WC: And 78's one song per side.

I: So why were the 78's larger but still only had one song?

WC: Uh, I really don't know. They, I guess because they were invented first. [chuckle] Before the 45, and now we have, as you know, CD's and stuff like this, you



know, which were unheard of back in those days. Couldn't even spell CD then. [chuckle] But I- and I do remember uh, looking back at it now it really looked pretty snazzy to me but it was pretty antiquated equipment compared to what we have now. Of course it ... a ... progress has improved things so much. But it was plenty adequate. We were able to do what we were there to do, you know? Play songs; read the news, interviews, uh, community entertainment. And at that time we were it, we were the only station. So uh, we had ... we had a lot of responsibilities.

I: So what is- was the significance of radio at that time?

WC: Well, uh, I suppose the spontaneity of it. Uh, being able to be on the spot and get information out compared to printed matter. Uh, the *Observer* was always getting' important uh. [pause] After ... we were at ... the phone rang while we were talkin' to this, and I forgot what we were talking about.

I: We're talking about the significance of radio at the time in the community?

WC: Oh yes! Yes. Now as I did mention we did have uh, the *Observer*. Uh, which was a big part of the community as far as advertising and information. Between the *Observer* and the radio station that was what people got their news. We hadn't- uh, television hadn't come into the valley yet at that time. So we didn't have the benefit of television. And uh, but we did have, of course the *Oregonian* and the, and the bigger newspapers were in here. But that- the main thing was that we were just the hub of the community. If there was anything going on, they- we just felt responsible that we had to report it. Or tell people about it, you know? And I remember elections- uh; we- we'd be on the air all night. You know waiting for election results to come in. And uh, people relied on that. Here again, our responsibility to perform that duty, which is \_\_\_ [obscured by background noise] did. So I think the main thing is just uh, after, after I had been here awhile and realized what an important thing it was to be in that community. To be in a position of- at a radio station to fulfill uh, entertainment and information. Again, I use the word responsibility, but that's exactly what it was. And of course, that's what the FCC, Federal Communications Commission wanted stations to do was to perform community service.

I: More so than entertainment?

WC: Well about as much, you know? They knew it was an entertainment medium, but then they also knew that it was viable communication access to keep the public informed as what was goin' on.

I: Do you feel that, um, radio during that time helped to keep this community together?

WC: Oh, I'm sure. Oh yes, I'm sure it is, you bet. Not only here, but I mean any small community. Uh, or even the larger ones. Uh, Baker, Enterprise. These smaller communities, Ontario, all had their, their radio station. You know? And only one at the time in each community. So uh, I'm sure that uh, it, it helped hold everybody together. Kept us informed.

I: You also mentioned previously something about cartridges. I'm not sure if we've covered that completely. What exactly is a cartridge?

WC: Okay cartridges, uh, gee whiz, you remember 8-tracks at all? Yourself?

I: Yes I do.

WC: Okay. Well, they're kinda' like the 8-tracks only cartridges came first. And it was, uh, where you could record music, or, comm.- we used them a lot for commercials. I remember when they first came out; I think Baker got 'em before we did. And I thought, "Why in the world would any self respecting radio station wanna have cartridges?" You know, I couldn't see any purpose to 'em at all. And then finally we did get 'em. And then I thought, "How did we ever exist without 'em?" You know? Because they- they were so, you could have a whole bunch of 'em lined up and have a whole bunch of commercials, and just anything. You hit the ON button and they play, you know? And uh, as opposed to using live copy. You know before that we read everything live, news and commercials. So uh, the cartridges really filled a big void. You could have sound effects; you could do a lot of things with them that you couldn't do with live stuff.

I: How did that change the order of your working day? When cartridges came along?

WC: Well it- it simplified it a great deal. You bet. And uh, but it is a lot easier and that way you could have different voices, too. Because other people on the staff could record commercials. So, people didn't have to listen to one guy, you know, for five or six hours straight. So it made a lot more variety.

I: Did your hours increase?

WC: Not really, no, it- the hours stayed about the same per shift.

I: So when would you do the recording and when would you do the live?

WC: Well you'd- you did the recording when you were off- the board shift, you know? Do it later.

I: And what is the board shift?

WC: Yeah. On the- on the air. [chuckle] It's what they call "being on the board."

I: Okay.

WC: But uh, after that done after you got off at that work, or somebody else. Sometimes we'd just have people and that's all they did was do commercials. You know? Type the copy and then record 'em. So you- it did- it tended a lot of times to increase your staff because you had more people involved in doing these things.

I: Can you take me through a typical workday? As far as the order of what would happen?

WC: Okay, as best as I can remember the first thing, of course, uh, and for many, many years I signed on the station. Uh- this was way back before 24 hours. We were on the air from six in the morning until eleven at night.

I: And what do you mean be sign-on the station?

WC: Well, you'd- it-turn everything on and go on the air and make the announcement that this is KLBM, or whatever station it is, you know? Broadcasting on what frequencies and da-dat-da-dat-da-dah. And then uh the first thing, uh you did, usually a newscast. Live. Or the days when we finally went to the network, then we uh, we'd go on the air with ABC News first. And then from there, uh, into commercials, um, and music. And then uh, along about 7 or so then we would go into, uh, the local news. Cover it pretty well. And then we had special programming, uh, the Trading Post I remember was one where people could buy and sell merchandise or things, you know? Kinda' like a yard sale on the air is what it was, pretty much. And uh and then throughout the whole shift the rest of the day was- uh, sometimes there would be interviews. Like at 10:30 was a special time to have a fifteen-minute interview.

I: Do you recall what that was called?

WC: Well, it, it varied. There could- different programs, and uh, no, I don't remember now. Gee whiz, how soon we forget! But they did have special names. And of course our news director Bob Mask was the one that was pretty much in charge of setting up these interviews. If it was during elections, uh, you'd have candidates on the air, you know? Uh, if it was a school election they'd talk about the school issues, this type thing. And then uh, here again then back to more music and, and weather. And then uh, my shift ended at 11:30. And then they would do much the same thing. Of course the noon hour was almost always devoted to news. Either network or local. Northwest news, farm news, you know? Whatever. If it was news you- that's when you heard it, from 12 to 1. And then it was just uh, the rest of the day was pretty much music and commercials and uh, trivial information, you know? Back in those days the DJ's didn't uh, didn't yak it up all that much. I

- guess maybe we hadn't learned to do that yet. We relied pretty heavily on music. And this type thing.
- I: You had also mentioned, uh, writing-in requests as opposed to calling-in requests, and what was the difference in those? Why was it so different?
- WC: Well, if they would write in, we had that, too. If they had anything special they wanted to know, it was a lot easier if they would write it and send us a letter that we could respond to. Uh
- I: Is that because it took longer to find the record they maybe were looking for, or?
- WC: Well that- that would be involved. And you just didn't have the time to necessarily go get it right then, unless you knew right where it was. Which wasn't always the case because you had many, many hundreds of records to go through. But it was just easier if they would send a letter and request it in writing, you know? And then we could respond to that letter on the air as- before we played the song, or whatever.
- I: So were the letters, um, specifically requests for music? Or was it; was it also a request for other types of information?
- WC: Well mostly- mostly for the music for the Request Hour. But a lot of times, uh we got letters people were requesting information, uh, on, on people, or things. You know- the community. Not so much that we'd need to answer it right away on the air. It's just that they were curious about having us check into this, and, and do some investigative reporting, I guess is what they'd call it now.
- I: And those who were using the phone to call in. Were they the same, just requesting music or were they requesting other information?
- WC: Uh, it'd be both.
- I: You have a little bit of problem with some of the lyrics that were coming out on some of the music. And you said that you wrote to Nashville about this-
- WC: Oh yeah, early on.
- I: Why did you write to Nashville?
- WC: Well I don't know, I- this was- I was really very new in the game and uh, it seemed like all this country-western music, which I wasn't in to at the time. Uh, seemed to be about divorce, or drinking, or, my mother got ran over by a truck, or, you know? These crazy things. But primarily, the one that really got to me the most was these uh, triangles. You know? And I thought, "Why do we have to have all this music about these sordid love affairs and stuff like that, you know?"

Now can't you write music about something else besides that?" And, so I just- I wrote a letter to Nashville and I don't know if I got a response. I can't remember. [chuckle] Prob'ly not.

I: To someone specific in Nashville, or?

WC: No, just- uh, whatever. I can't remember now.

I: Okay.

WC: But just one of the record- prob'ly one of the major recording studios, you know? But I just thought, "Oh, my goodness. Can't they come up with something else?" And, they're still doing it, you know? They still are. Funny- not at first, now, it- on movies, you know, on TV and stuff.

I: So what did you feel your role as a DJ was? At- when it- relating to the case of peoples music?

WC: Well, uh, I felt, uh, here again the word responsibility comes in. To uh, keep people informed and entertained and uh, to set an example as such. So that's why, in those days we were very careful with the language we used, you know? There was no swearing and foul language on the air at all. You just- it was unheard of. So uh, we- we just had to make sure that we complied with that. And could set good examples 'cause we- you know the kids- a lot of the young kids were listening. And a lot of times would come and visit the station just to watch. Especially when we were in the hotel up on the mezzanine. They'd be up there standin' on the mezzanine leaning over the rail watching us behind the glass in there, you know? So we just knew that we'd have to mind our P's and Q's. And be careful what we were doing.

I: So how did that affect the selection of music that you may have played?

WC: Well, it- it had a big factor. 'Course, most of the music that we had to choose from was okay, you know? No big problem. 'Cause they're just- I can't even think of any records, that uh, that we could not play in those days. You just didn't have- 'cause it just- there's no problem there. No foul language or anything like that, you know?

I: So were you able to play a variety of, of music from country to rock and roll?

WC: Oh yes, you bet. You bet. We covered it all. I wasn't too big in rock. But uh, I probably played a few that were a little borderline. [chuckle] I was not a rock and roll fan.

I: How many DJ's were there at that time?

WC: Let's see, I think we had uh, five on the staff.

I: So I would imagine the selections varied from DJ to DJ? As what [obscured]

WC: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. The night- the night guy was into rock. 'Course that's when the kids were all listening and stuff, you know? So, we primarily had the- the younger guys at night that could keep up with it, you know?

I: Why do you think broadcasters would choose a small place like La Grande when it's- when radio wasn't everywhere?

WC: Well, actually uh, a station is selected by local people that get together and raise the funds, or whatever it is to build a radio station. And they have to apply for a license and this type thing. But if, if they see a need in a community as they did here that uh- I mean we were at that time, you know, 10,000. Which is pretty good size, so they just felt that there was a, a reason for a station to be here. And that's- businesses involved to pay for it. You know? They could make money. That's the main thing you wanna' do.

I: Through advertising?

WC: Yes. You bet. Absolutely. So uh, you just- they figured if a community was big enough and had enough business goin' on. And uh, enough people that'd be interested in uh, having a communication device that that's what they would do. So it's individuals that decide to build a station. You know big or small. Takes investors.

I: The radio station moved from the Sac Hotel? Correct me if I'm wrong. And it moved to another location and then back into the Sac Hotel?

WC: No, we uh, well; you know way, way, way back I guess at one time they were located in, in the Sac Hotel. In one of the back rooms upstairs. Now I don't remember that for a fact. But I've heard it said that that's where they started. Then they moved out onto the highway, uh, like, Highway 31 out of town. Like to Baker. About a mile out of town. We were located there in a house. And then uh, in 1955 then we moved into the Sac Hotel downtown. And uh, we were there until I think it was 1970 when they- that's when they decided they were gonna' tear down the hotel, so we had to find someplace else. And we already had the tower out on Cove Avenue. So the decision was made, "Well, why don't we just go out there? You know by the tower? Uh, we'll be out of town- there's nothing out there, nobody's out there but us." So that's what they did. And of course now everybody's out there. You know? It- houses and businesses all around the radio station out there. So that's- uh that's why they moved out there and that was in 1970.

I: Do you know why- uh why they moved from the hotel in the first place? Into- uh, what would be the reason for-?

WC: I really don't know and- unless they just wanted more room. 'Cause they prob'ly didn't have much room upstairs- it was kind of a backroom-type thing. And, we're talkin' really antiquated equipment, you know? If they wanted to get into some place where they could have a bigger console, more turntables, this type thing they just had to have a bigger place. So I'm guessing that's why they moved out there.

I: Now the house. Did it have to be remodeled specifically to have- did it have to have the glass, uh, walls in the studio?

WC: Not really. Just- just one for the studio between the console- the control room and the studio. Uh, was the only glass wall that I remember. Just like a huge big picture window is all it was. Then we had, uh, two offices. A main office and uh, a restroom and a transmitter room and a cot [?] [478] and that was it. Wasn't very big. No bedrooms. No sleeping. [laugh]

I: Uh, tell me more about your position as Assistant Manager at the radio.

WC: Okay uh, there wasn't really an awful lot involved in that, unless uh, the manager was gonna' be gone somewhere. And uh, I don't remember having to make any major decisions as such. But uh, that was the primary purpose- would be in case, uh, he was gone and something came up that I would have to make a decision on. But I don't think I ever had to really make any that I remember of. It must not have been very important! [chuckle]

I: Uh, another thing that you discussed was: convincing how many- convincing the advertisers downtown of how many listeners you had. How would you do that if there were no polls or?

WC: Well, we, we did have printed matter. I mean we, we hired, uh, an organization to come in and kind of check the community. And then they'd come out with printed material that you could take- a brochure type thing that you could take to the advertisers. And, and of course most of 'em could tell---

End of Side 1

Side 2

WC: But the uh, we really didn't have- as I remember, a problem tryin' to convince people to use radio advertising. Because they- they knew it worked. It just depended on what they were selling, you know? Some things sell better than others. But we had people that had been on the air for years and years and just

stayed with it. Either sponsored programs or had what we call spot announcements. But we never really had a problem that I remember of selling advertising.

I: Was there an awareness in the beginning days of radio of “how did radio work?”

WC: I’m sure there was!

I: Or, was there confusion?

WC: Oh, that’s pretty hard to answer. ‘Cause I really, I really don’t know. But I imagine in the early days, uh, people prob’ly just, “Oh, what in the world is gonna’ happen, you know?” This radio thing: is it any good. You know? And then you- people were able to get bigger stations in here. They had a radio system they could pull in. But I think that, uh, if they were able to get into the bigger stations and monitor what was going on. [artifact] Years and years ago *Jack Benny* program, *Fibber McGee & Molly* ... the big ... the big shows. And a lot of people were able to get those out of the- out of the bigger markets. The bigger radio stations that could send those out to the air. But I think eventually it just became a process, uh, the people tried it. And if they got response to their commercials or the information then they realized that it ... it did work, you know? And it does. Even today.

I: Were the ads cleared by the advertisers before ...

WC: A lot of the times, yes. You’d ... you’d get the advertising; get the information they wanted in their commercials. Go back to the station and either you or the copywriter would do the copy, type it up. And then we would take it to the advertiser. Or if it was gonna’ be taped, then we’d tape it and then call ‘em up on the telephone and play it over the phone for ‘em. So they would know what it was.

I: What is a teletype?

WC: Teletype is ... [chuckle] Well, it’s a ... a bona fide typewriter, of course, that uh, at that time it was put out with the telephone company hooking it up. ‘Cause all the information came by telephone lines and it was a ... the news. It typed out the news, you know?

I: What did it look like?

WC: It looked like a typewriter, actually. You’d just ... basically, that’s what it was.

I: ‘kay. Well, how did it work? Um, as far as the paper physically coming out. Was it a big long stretch of paper, or?



WC: No, it was- in a roll at first and then they came out with box paper. But it would- it would just start typing and then uh, you'd, you'd watch what it was doing. And if it was doin' a- like a local or a northwest news you'd tear it off as you wanted it. You know? Maybe, or about the size of your paper there. What's that: 11 inches or somethin'? And, in sheets. [artifact] ...and sometimes it'd come in like a, a special program. You'd wait for the whole thing to print out and then you'd tear it off, and then fold it up and save it. [artifact] ...yes.

I: Or did it come off in paragraphs, or?

WC: No ...well, in paragraphs. But it was ... just like you were typin' a letter, you know? Much the same thing. And then they'd separate the paragraphs by a few spaces. And it was usually double-spaced, so you could read it, you know, easy.

I: So the paper would come out of a roll in a readable form? Not ... not in a little skinny piece of paper that you had to put together?

WC: No. No. No. No it came out on a solid sheet of paper.

I: Okay. How large were the rolls?

WC: Oh my goodness. Well, they would be about the size of a roll of toilet paper only maybe twelve inches wide.

I: Um-hm. Okay. Uh, another thing you mentioned that I wanted to bring up was New Day Enterprises.

WC: Yes.

I: Can you tell me more about New Day Enterprises?

WC: Well, they started out years and years and years ago I think, as I remember at the little log cabin down at the fairgrounds. Which is still there. And then uh, then we moved up into where the ... old St. Joseph Hospital where CHD is now located. We were in that area for a while. And then eventually, then we built uh, the complex on Depot Street. And then since then I think they now have six different homes, you know? For the uh, the clients to live in. And it... it's such a ... as I mentioned before an unbelievable organization and how they can work with these, uh, developmentally handicapped people that are able to do things that are ... have never just been given a chance to do anything until New Day came along. And now works with these people and were able ... they're able to do things with their hands. And uh, they can think. And uh ...

I: Do you know how it was started?

- WC: Not really. Uh, it, that was before my time and it really got started there. I don't know what the impetus was to get it going. I just really don't know. I just know it's become a very big thing. It's a very special part of our community here.
- I: Do you know how the name may have come about?
- WC: I don't know that, either. It's always been called New Day as I can remember.
- I: Okay. And do you know how it was financed?
- WC: Uh, it's financed through uh ... well, a kind of state funding through into CHD, the local mental health departments. And then part of our funding comes, uh, in from them. And then of course, then we have private uh, contributors that donate.
- I: And so what ... what kind of people were involved with New Day Enterprises when you started?
- WC: Well, uh ... people that liked to work with; uh ... now you mean the people that work there?
- I: Both volunteers and the clients.
- WC: Yeah. The clients, uh, as I say are those that for some reason or other are developmentally handicapped, uh ... I'm reluctant to use the word "mentally" handicapped. Because some of them really can think pretty good. They just are not able to physically do a lot of things. Uh, and I think prob'ly their families initially would approach New Day to see if they could get their son or daughter, or whatever, you know, enrolled in New Day. To be part of their ... their program. And then the people that work there are a very special type people that, of course, have some training. They'd have to have some training to work with these people. And uh, and they are paid staff. So, uh, it ... they're just unusual people that can work with people like this, you know? It takes special kinds. And we're very fortunate here, uh, through the years that I was involved in it that we had the people that could do that and do it well.
- I: Is there anything else about the ... the New Day Enterprises that you can think of?
- WC: No, only the fact that it's uh, it just seems to get bigger and bigger, you know? I-I think the last I remember they had five different homes here in the community where these people actually lived. And they have people that uh, that uh live with them 24 hours a day. Staff, you know? But they uh, they have their own kitchens. They cook their own meals or they are cooked for them. And they have yards, uh, and they're taken out in the community to go sightseeing. Some of 'em are taken to bowling. This and that thing, you know? They're ' tryin' to get these people as involved as they can in the community. 'Cause that was- they were never before. You know, they just stayed at home; I guess and didn't do anything. And there

was no trained staff other than their parents to take care of them. So with New Day, they have a work activity center where they go down actually during the day. They do projects with their hands. And um, cut out things, build things. So they're ... they're happy, you know? They just ... don't sit around and do nothing.

I: Um, I wanna' talk about a couple of more businesses that, that maybe you were in that you could tell me a little more detail about what they looked like on the inside. One is the Tropadera.

WC: Oh okay. [chuckle]

I: Describe for me what the Tropadera was and what it looked like when you walked in the front door?

WC: Well, the Tropadera ... and I think the name prob'ly came from Tropics because all I remember was ... uh, palm trees and, and tropical setting, as such, you know, in there. And that ... that's the biggest thing. And of course they had a dance floor, and a very fine dining area. And another one of those special places to go. Uh, as I mentioned the Sac coffee shop ... that's ... Tropadera was, uh, a little fancier, you know, type thing. And they had really good food. Excellent. But I ... I just remember that whenever I think of Tropadera I think of palm trees. [chuckle]

I: Do re recall if that would have been uh, wallpaper on the walls, or?

WC: No, actually I think there actually were some imitation palm trees when you walked in the front door. Uh, boy, we went back a long ways here now. [chuckle] But I...that's what I ... comes to mind with me. Really. And I'm sure the wall decorations prob'ly were, you know, South Seas. Tropical type stuff, you know?

I: Do you recall any of the architectural, uh, details?

WC: No I don't, not really. They had just the tables, uh, booths, uh, I don't remember anything really outstanding. And of course it was usually pretty dark in there, you know? Like most lounges are. So I never really saw but what I saw turned on.

I: Could you tell me any more about Bernie's Jewelry?

WC: Uh, well, let's see. Loren and Betty Hughes owned Bernie's Jewelry long as I can remember and they have since retired. But, at the time, uh, it and I think up on the other corner Lawrence's Jewelry--Jack and Donna Lawrence. Uh, I think at that time were the only two jewelry stores in town. That I remember. And uh, that I guess that's about it. You know? They're just the typical jewelry store with all kinds of fancy jewelry. Diamonds and all this good stuff, you know? But I do remember that uh, that both Loren and Betty at Bernie's Jewelry and then Jack

and ... and Donna Lawrence up at the other corner both very wonderful businesses for La Grande. And uh, were much needed in the community.

I: Did you ... do you recall ever going inside Hot lake Hotel?

WC: Oh yes. Uh, I remember ... I can't remember ... they were trying to do a little remodeling there and they did have ... opened up part of it for um, for dining. So we were out there once to go to dinner. And then later on they wanted to kinda' redo the uh, hot water systems. And so they did do some tours where you could see where they actually had run the hot water through, uh, through the uh, \_\_\_ [188] or whatever you call it. But they tried to do back in those days. But uh, it was a very small tour. It was no big deal. And I don't remember much about it when the- way back when it was a- the big deal and the rail would actually stop there. It was called the Mayo Clinic of the West as I remember. But people would come out here to be treated with the, the hot mineral water and stuff, you know?

I: Do you recall what it ...uh, what the rooms looked like? Did you see the rooms?

WC: No, I didn't see any of the rooms, so I don't know. Never got that part.

I: Um, did it look the same on the outside as it does now?

WC: Well only better. [chuckle] Not near as many broken windows. No and I remember the lily pad lake out in front which is all dried up now. But uh, that had just millions and millions of lily pads in it, you know? So that was kinda' neat.

I: Were there staircases in the hotel? Or an elevator?

WC: You know I don't remember that. I'm sure there was. No, I don't remember an elevator. I don't remember an elevator. But I'm sure there were stairways.

End of Side 2

End of Tape #2

Transcription completed on Wednesday, August 01, 2007

WARREN DOUGLAS CURRY

APRIL 11, 2002

TAPE #3

Interviewed by Brenda Lawson

Transcribed by Micheal L Minthorn

Side 1

WC: But I ... I was gonna' say I don't remember what year that was. But I'm guessing it was in the 70's or somewhere in there. My gosh! How can you forget something like that, you know? But anyway I did go back to work. And uh, worked for

KLBM until then 1988. So I suppose going back was prob'ly in the 70's somewhere. And then, from the church, I think I retired two or three times. That, uh, eventually it just got to the point where I couldn't handle the stairs and move tables and stuff like that, you know? I just knew it was time to quit.

I: So that was a paid position at the church? As janitor?

WC: Oh yes. Oh yes. Yes. And that, that ... I was at age 69. I can't remember what year that was. I was 69 years old I know. [chuckle] And uh, so now I have two jobs that I like very much working at Wal-Mart as a greeter uh, on Wednesday and Friday. And then delivering prescriptions in the afternoon Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday at the Red Cross Drug Store. So I'm still pretty active. And uh, out among the people, so to speak. And enjoy it very much.

I: Is there anything else you can think of that you would like to share with, with the oral history project?

WC: Well, not, not specifically. But I think it's wonderful that uh, you have given me the opportunity to reflect back on the years. Because it's been almost 51 years. Boy, that's a long time. And most of that is working. You know? 'Cause I came here to work. And uh, and still am working. And I'm so glad I'm able to do that. And then to have the opportunity to share what I hope are some memories for other people, too, that may have forgotten. But like I say, you're gonna' leave and I'm gonna' think of a million things. [chuckle] But you can always come back!

I: That's right. I can. Well thank you so much for the information that you shared.

WC: You are very welcome, Brenda.

End of Side 1

End of Tape #3

Transcription completed on Wednesday, August 01, 2007