

FLORENCE OTTEN DAVIDSON

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Transcribed by Ryan Shearer

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I: Today I am talking with Florence Otten Davidson in her home, and I'm going to ask you your full name.

FD: Well, I have a middle name, Winifred-- Florence Winifred Sims Otten Davidson. [laughs].

I: All right, good.

FD: But I don't use all of that. [laughs].

I: [laughs]. I'd like to ask you, first of all, how you got to La Grande, when you came to La Grande, how old you were, and why?

FD: Well, I married Dr. Fred Otten. His practice was here in La Grande. So after we were married and went on a honeymoon, I moved to La Grande, and lived in that home for about twenty-two years.

I: Now how did you meet?

FD: Through my family.

I: So did you-- was it a family-- did you get a blind date, or what was it?

FD: No, it wasn't. My sister had a party.

I: Which sister now?

FD: My sister Jeanette Baum had a party. I can't remember whether it was a bridge party. It might have been. And he was there, and I met him there. And--

I: You know about when that was?

FD: Well, let's see it probably could have been in the early-- the late '40's.

Probably the late '40's, and we didn't marry until '51.

I: Okay. And you were living in--?

FD: I lived in Pendleton, and I worked for the Kerns Company in Pilot Rock, Oregon.

I: What was the Kerns Company?

FD: Well, it was-- they made caulk and shooks, and molding and furniture, and they also had a sawmill there. And it was called Pilot Rock Sawmill. And so, the lumber of course, was sold to Kerns. Kern developed it into furniture and other items.

I: And what was your job there?

FD: Well, I really was an executive secretary, and because the president of the company always gave his dictation to me and so did the vice president. So did the manager. I was kind of a jack-of-all-trades. I was in charge of the inventory. I was in charge of furniture sales, and I was kind of a jack-of-all-trades.

I: Mm-hmm. So you came to this party, and you met him. Did you write back and forth, or--?

FD: No. And at that time he was married.

I: What was his full-name?

FD: Frederick Ross Otten. And he was married at that time. And wasn't until he divorced that he sought me out. [laughs].

I: Oh! [chuckles]. And then--

FD: But is that something that has to go in the message?

I: No, it does not. So when did you move over to La Grande?

FD: In '51.

I: And did you get married in La Grande?

FD: No. We were married in Pendleton, in the Methodist Church. Honeymooned in Canada, Banff and Lake Louise, and we came back and lived in La Grande.

I: Can you describe what it was like being a doctor's wife at the time that you came to La Grande?

FD: Well, he had a very fine practice, and he was a popular doctor. And besides being very good, a very fine doctor, and of course he had night calls, and those were the days when he made house calls. A doctor made the house calls. So he might even have to go clear out into the country, and of course they don't do that now. They say if you're sick enough, you get to the hospital to the emergency room.

I: Where did he practice? Where was his office?

FD: It was in the Sacajawea Annex, on the second floor.

I: Could you describe what his office looked like?

FD: Well, he shared the reception room with a woman doctor, and I can't remember her name right now. My computer's not working. And there was sort of a small office space that had windows up around it, and the receptionist sat behind there in that office. And he had a nurse, and he had rooms of-- examining rooms. And he had an office for himself. And I think he-- and there was the lab, of course. So it was probably as up-to-date for those times as it could be.

I: Do you remember-- did he have a specialty, or was he just an M.E.?

FD: Well, he was a surgeon and a family practice. He delivered babies, but he also did surgery. Of course, things like heart and lungs he would send to Portland. That was before Boise, you know, had this wonderful hospital that they have now, or two hospitals that they have now. So-- but he did gall-bladders, tonsillectomies, appendectomies, hysterectomies, that type of surgery.

I: So did he work with young and old?

FD: Oh yes, yes, yes.

I: So if, uh-- what would you say were the differences between going to the doctor now as opposed to going to the doctor at that time, other than he made house calls? What do you think would be the difference between a doctor at that time and now?

FD: Well, now I go to a very fine doctor here in La Grande. [phone rings]. And-- Oh dear, can you turn--

I: Sure, sure. [recording clicks - no interruption]. Ok, so we were talking about what might be the difference between a doctor at that time and a doctor now.

FD: I know my husband was very meticulous, and always wore a suit and a white shirt and a tie. And he had a-- if he had to do minor surgery in the office he put on a white coat. And-- he certainly didn't have a beard or a mustache-- clean-shaven. And you don't see that too often with the men doctors today, here in our community.

I: Why do you think he had such a good reputation?

FD: I think he had quite a wonderful personality. I think he had charisma, or moxie. [chuckles]. He-- and I think he truly cared about his patients. He was a compassionate man.

I: Well, he certainly did a lot of surgeries that are very specific nowadays. But he sounds like he did all kinds of things.

FD: Yes. In fact, he was-- when he came to La Grande, he was the first doctor to get his patient up on their feet after an appendectomy, and had him walk around for a little bit. And the other doctors told him he was very foolish man to do that, but he had done it during his training, and-- but he was the first one here in La Grande to do that.

I: Where did he get his training?

FD: At Charity Hospital in New Orleans.

I: And what brought him all the way out to La Grande?

FD: Well, he was born and raised in North Dakota-- Grand Forks, North Dakota. And he wanted to go somewhere where there wouldn't be such severe winters. He was hoping to be near water. He was a swimmer. In fact, helped put himself through college and medical school by being a life guard. And the west appealed to him, and he came out. And I know he considered Coeur d'Alene and was really interested in that beautiful lake there. And then he came into this valley and was impressed with the beauty of it-- surrounded by the mountains, and not too far from Wallowa Lake. And so he chose La Grande.

I: And so was it unusual to have a practice with a woman doctor?

FD: Well, he didn't practice with the woman doctor. She had her own practice.

I: Oh, so they just shared the office?

FD: They just shared the reception room.

I: That was very unusual at the time for a woman to be practicing.

FD: I don't even recall-- she didn't have a big practice, but-- not like my husband's.

I: Did she specialize in anything specific?

FD: No, I don't recall that she did. And I don't think she did surgery.

I: So did he do surgery in his office, or did he do surgery at the hospital?

FD: Well, minor-- he could do minor things, you know.

I: And then he went to the hospital for the--?

FD: Oh, yes.

I: So, did he-- was he one of these kinds of people that worked night and day--?

FD: Yes, because he was on-call at night.

I: Oh, every night? Wow.

FD: Mm-hmm. Whatever-- if his patient called him at night, he would go out to their home. But he was a man that always took a nap after lunch. He came home for lunch, and after lunch he would go in, and maybe it would be twenty minutes, and maybe it would be an hour, but he would always take a nap. And then go back to the office.

I: What was--can you describe La Grande when you first moved here from Pendleton?

FD: Well, they didn't have very nice restaurants. [chuckles]. They were terrible. I felt that they were friendly people. I immediately became involved with the Presbyterian Church and made friends there-- then started the family.

I: Can we talk for a minute about the Presbyterian Church at that time?

FD: Sure.

I: Who was your minister, and--?

FD: Well, it was Reverend Louis Samson, and his wife's name was Jean. And she was a lovely lady, and he was a very fine minister.

I: Was it a big congregation?

FD: You know, I have no idea what the number was, but I thought that it was well-attended at the time.

I: What made you choose the Presbyterian Church since you'd come from a Methodist Church?

FD: Well, I was raised in the Methodist Episcopal Church when we lived in Medford. And my husband was raised in the Baptist Church. And he did not want to belong to the Baptist, so he said, "Why don't we go to the Presbyterian Church because Louis and Jean are my patients!" [laughs]. And he liked Louis as a person, and he felt that he would be

a good spiritual leader.

I: Well, I understand that you got involved in clubs and organizations in La Grande when you got here.

FD: Yes, I did.

I: Can you tell me some of those clubs?

FD: Yes. Well, I became-- let's see, it was three years after I had been here they asked me to join PEO, which is a Philanthropic Educational Organization. And we-- it's for the benefit of education for women. And it was started back in 1862. And it is a national organization for women. I don't know whether you know about it or not.

I: I don't.

FD: And we give scholarships. I'm still a member of PEO. In fact, I've been a member now for 54 years, 55 years now. Oh, wait a minute-- 51 years.

I: Where would they meet?

FD: In homes. And I belong to Chapter I, and there was another chapter called "CO," and it is still going, as well as "I." And then a group of us in "I" left and formed a new chapter called "DK." And so we have a tri-chapter scholarship for students going to the university here in town.

I: When you first got here who was in the chapter with you--?

FD: Well, when I joined "I," there were a lot of elderly women, and I was one of three young women in the group. They had let themselves-- they had let themselves become too picky in choosing their members. And some of 'em [chuckles]-- one was Edna Brown, who at one time was state president of PEO. And she had a son that was Judge Brownton here in town. And Judge Brownton was married to Gerta Brownton, who is-- maybe one of you have--

I: Oh yes! Oh yeah.

FD: interviewed her. And-- but anyway, Judge Brownnton's mother belonged to Chapter "I." And Gerta was in "I" too, but she and a group left and formed "CO."

I: Now why did people leave and form different groups?

FD: Well, one of the reasons "I" became-- they started black-balling people. When a name was submitted for membership they would vote on it, and they would black-ball.

I: For what reason?

FD: No reason was given. But they had their own reasons. And so they were stagnant, really. I don't know how I happened to make it through! [laughs]. Why I wasn't blackballed?

I: So, how would that be done? Would it be by vote?

FD: Oh, yes. There's a little box, and they have little white marbles, and they have little black marbles. And uh-- there's a black ball is against 'em, and the white is for them.

I: And they would actually do that?

FD: Yeah.

I: So, these people left because they didn't like that process, or what?

FD: I wonder if I should have told you that.

I: [laughs].

FD: [laughs]. We'd better not talk about the voting.

I: Okay, all right. Well um, so, how would you choose the women to get the scholarships?

FD: They apply because we go through the high school, for one thing. And then on references, people will let us know, or we as members of PEO become acquainted with people that want to return to college.

We are-- we have a wonderful scholarship for women that maybe had a year or two of college, quit, married, raised a family and wanted to return. And, and--

I: Was that the case when you first came in earlier on?

FD: Right, yeah.

I: Was that there were women that wanted to go back to college?

FD: Yes, uh-huh. In fact, I noticed it a little later on. Maybe not right when I joined PEO I wasn't aware of that happening. But we even had international scholarships for women, and we-- it involves thousands of dollars, of course, with them. They're usually women that want to get a doctorate, and we do it with the idea that they must return to their own country.

I: I see.

FD: And further the education of the people in their own country.

I: And how would you raise money for these scholarships?

FD: Now this is a national thing, a national scholarship when I mentioned the international. And we pay. Our Chapter pays. So much of our dues goes to national.

I: Oh, I see. And then from the national comes the scholarship money?

FD: Yes.

I: Oh, I see. So, it comes from _____?

FD: And then also endowments. Our foundations-- they've set up a system now of foundations. And so our chapter, "DK," has a foundation that we contribute to. Maybe in memory of a member that has passed away instead of sending flowers to the service or the family we give donations to the foundation.

I: So, has it always been a female _____?

FD: Yes. We've only had one boy apply for the scholarship, but-- and we considered him. But he-- his background was-- and his GPA and SAT tests and everything were not as good as one of the girls that we chose.

I: And did they write you an essay as well as having their transcript?

FD: Well, they fill out an application. And they do give a short essay of what they want to do, what their goals are.

I: So, did you make a lot of friends when you first came to that organization?

FD: Yes, I did. They were mostly elderly women. There was only, I guess three of us that were-- see, I would have been in my early thirties.

I: What other organizations did you belong to when you first came?

FD: Well, I was a member of the church. I was a member of the country club.

I: Would you talk about the country club in the '30's? That must have been _____.

FD: Well, it wasn't the '30's. It was the '50's.

I: Oh, it was the '50's? Oh, so it didn't come in until the '50's?

FD: Well, no. I didn't--

I: No, you didn't get here 'til the '50's.

FD: come here until '51.

I: That's right. So what was it like then?

FD: Well, it's just like it is, I think, today. You know, you have your women that are very easy to get along with, and then you have your

negative element. And--

I: What was your-- in that early fifties-- what was-- when you went to the country club, what did you go there to do? What was available for women at the country club at the time?

FD: Well, they always had lunches. They served lovely lunches. And the women themselves prepared the lunches.

I: Oh, really?

FD: Uh-huh. And set the table and decorated the table, and of course--

I: So, there weren't people to prepare the lunch? You had to do it yourself?

FD: No, not then. We all took turns preparing the lunches. And we played golf, and some played nine holes, some played eighteen. And I liked the women my age. I didn't think they were complainers. But some of the older women were rather bossy and-- [laughs].

I: Were there days that women could go to the country club?

FD: Yes, it was Wednesday. It was Wednesday.

I: Could you go any other time, or was that just Wednesday?

FD: Well, men's day was Thursday, so you usually didn't go on Thursday.

I: Mm-hmm. And were there events for both male and females to go to the country club?

FD: Let's see, at the beginning, I think it-- a number of years later they would have Couple's Night. And it would just be a nine-hole tournament. And you'd bring your own steaks and barbecue, and then bring a salad or dessert along with the steaks. And so yes, we-- they did have that later on. I don't remember anything-- they had dances at the country club, and New Year's Eve parties, and--

I: Was this live sounds, or live music?

FD: Sometimes they did have live music. And sometimes it was recordings.

I: So would you go weekly to the country club, or--?

FD: Umm, let's see, when I started playing-- I didn't when my children were really young. It wasn't until they were older and I started playing golf. And uh-- so, yes, I would go weekly-- go on Wednesday.

I: So, you had your children. When were they born?

FD: The first one was born in '52. The third one was born in '53. Let's see, '52, '53, and then '55 and '56. They were all within three-and-a-half years. The eldest was three-and-a-half when the youngest was born.

I: And did you have the babies at the hospital?

FD: Did I what?

I: Did you have the babies at the hospital here?

FD: Oh yes, uh-huh, at St. Joseph.

I: Mm-hmm. Was your husband in attendance at all, or did he--?

FD: He delivered all of them.

I: He did?

FD: He delivered all four of them.

I: Wow.

FD: Yeah.

I: That must have been nice to have your husband there while you were delivering.

FD: Yes.

I: Yeah! When um,-- describe to me if you would-- okay, we're focusing on the history of La Grande-- what a young mother might do with her children in La Grande in the '50's. I mean, you've got a lot of small children. Did you have activities with other young mothers? Did you-- were you mostly at-- in the home? What-- what was it like?

FD: Well, I think probably the first place was the church. You know, through Sunday School, and I belonged to what they called a "circle" in the church.

I: What's that?

FD: It was a lady's organization, and we had monthly meetings. We would put on lunches. I know I had several meetings at my house. And they would bring their children, and the children would play in the little playroom that we had.

I: Where were you living at that time?

FD: Up on the hill where Dr. German and Elaine German live.

I: What street is that on?

FD: Well, it's called Otten Boulevard now.

I: Oh! Uh-huh.

FD: And then we owned the surrounding land. There were no houses up there, just ours.

I: Oh, so you lived a ways away.

FD: Well, that wasn't too far away. Terry, this is April Curtis. This is Terry Croft.

[Audio speed inconsistencies begin]

I: Nice to meet you.

FD: Terry helps me out. [laughs].

I: Oh! That's great. That's great. So, what was the name of the circle in the church that you--?

FD: I don't recall a name. It was-- maybe it was Young Women's Circle, or-- I just don't recall.

I: What other kinds of activities did young mothers engage in? And this would be from La Grande. What types of church activities? Was there other things that you could do?

FD: Well, it wasn't until Kindergarten times that we would share carpooling, you know. We would take turns. We would each take a week, and maybe there'd be five children that we would pick up and take to the Kindergarten. We had a swimming pool, so my children all learned to swim early. And we had other children over for them to play with and to swim. And the mothers would come and help lifeguard. And we never had an accident or even a close call of any kind. So, those were things that we did. And then of course when my children got older they joined the swimming team that was in operation during the summer. And uh-- of course, we would-- my husband would take the children fishing occasionally.

I: Oh, where would he take them fishing?

FD: Well, probably up Catherine's Creek I think was about the only place they went.

I: Well, can you describe what that grade school was like at that time? Where they went to school and what a typical day for them would be like at that grade school?

FD: Well, my children went to Central. And they first went to Ackerman Kindergarten with the exception of the eldest child. I didn't get her in there. She went to another Kindergarten, a private one. So, they started first grade and went through eighth there at Central.

I: Was Ackerman at that time-- was that a lab school?

FD: Yes, yes.

I: How did that differ from what the other Kindergarteners were going through? What were they doing there that was unique or different?

FD: Well, they had a very fine teacher by the name of Miss Gossage. And she was a large woman. And we learned how she kept control. She never raised her voice, but if a child was acting up she would grab them by the shoulder and squeeze real hard. [laughs].

I: [laughs].

FD: And the child soon came into line, you know. And-- or she was known to spank too, also. In fact, I had a daughter that was--
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FD: Yes, she did. And I didn't know about it until after she had left La Grande. And my nephew, who happened to be in the same class as my daughter told his mother and me how Miss. Gossage-- all he could see was Ms. Gossage's hand going up and down, spanking my Chris! [laughs].

I: [laughs].

FD: So, that was how I learned about it. My Chris never told me.

I: Did they have students working in the classroom at Ackerman, or--?

FD: No. No they didn't.

I: So, why was it called a lab school? What did they do?

FD: Well, they had-- I beg your pardon. They had college students, yes. Yes, indeed. They did. They were like a student teacher.

I: And did-- were the-- the things that they were doing, were they different from the other Kindergarteners and _____?

FD: Well, I-- gee, it's been so long ago. I don't know that I can compare. I think Miss Gossage was very much ahead of herself and other people.

She was very creative, and she kept the children busy. And of course, they had their rest periods.

I: Were there arts? Did they do--?

FD: Yes. Art. Yes.

I: Music, and--?

FD: Yes.

I: And what do you remember about Central School?

FD: I felt that they had good teachers there until I had one daughter who, all of a sudden-- she was in the fourth grade-- was complaining of a stomach ache and not wanting to go to school. And it was happening more and more and more, and finally I took her to the doctor and he said "I find nothing wrong with her." And he said, "The only other thing we could do would be an upper and lower GI. And he said "I hate to put a child through a pain like that." He said "If I were you, I would go to school and visit her class and see what's going on in that classroom." So I did. And the teacher was a nagger. And she picked on one boy the whole morning I was there. It was terrible, just terrible. So, I knew she had picked on my Chris. And Chris might have been one of her problem children or something. So, I moved Chris to Ackerman for the fourth, fifth and sixth grades. And I put my youngest-- and my son also, over in Ackerman after that.

I: So, you had your choice of where they were to go? So, you could decide where to send them or not send them?

FD: Yeah, they allowed it.

I: Do you remember plays or music events or pageants that were put on at Ackerman at the time the kids were there?

FD: No I don't. I don't think there were plays, or pageants. Nor in the grade school, I don't remember a pageant or a play. They would do music. They would have little concerts with their singing. Florence Miller, Eugene's mother-in-law, was-- in fact, she felt that she owed

we mothers her job, because Central did not have music. They didn't have a library. They had no recognized play during recess time, or organized play. And so a group of us mothers got together. I think at the time I had two children in Central. And we wrote up a resolution asking for these things for Central. And we went before the board and presented it. And the superintendent was ousted that year. And they had a new one come in the Fall, and he adopted all our solutions-- our resolutions. And we had a library. We had a music teacher. We had supervised play at recess time. They even brought in a reading specialist. And so we owed a lot to that superintendent that realized we-- we really were trying to upgrade our little Central School. [chuckles].

I: [chuckles]. So at that time the children were in school-- now did your husband continue to work in the same office and do all the same surgeries and that kind of thing?

FD: Mm-hmm, up until '62. And he and his father had planted a cherry orchard and a peach orchard, and--

I: Where was that?

FD: Right alongside-- our house was on the hill. And as you went up the road the cherry orchard was on the left and the peach orchard was on the right. And so he was kind of a farmer at heart and had a beautiful yard. In fact, he had a landscape architect draw up plans for our house, and he put up rock walls that were beautiful. They're still there today. And as I said, he planted the orchards with the help of his father. So he, of course, would plow, and spray, and trim, and do everything that you-- orchardness does. And he bought a tractor. He had a tractor that had the tracks that would go around like this, rotate. And the tractor-- he turned that in on a new tractor. And it was a three-wheel tractor, and we were on a hillside. And one of his friends, Ken Seagrist, who had a big ranch out in the valley, told him that he had the wrong kind of a tractor for the hillside. And I heard this conversation. And my husband said to him, "I can always feel-- I can always tell when the nose comes up, and I just throw in the clutch-- clutch. And the nose goes down." Well, one time he didn't. And he was killed by a tractor-- in the tractor-- in a tractor accident. So that happened in '62. So--

I: So the kids were still small.

FD: They were. They were six, seven, eight, and nine.

I: Wow.

FD: So, that was it. [chuckles slightly].

I: It must have been really difficult.

FD: Well, you-- your deep regret, of course, is that the children did not have a father.

I: So did you raise them pretty much on your own?

FD: I did, uh-huh. And they were pretty much out of the nest when I married the second time.

I: Do you remember events during their high school that made you-- memories that you have of things at the high school with the children that you think might be noteworthy in terms of history?

FD: Well, you know I started teaching in '65, I guess it was.

I: At the high school?

FD: At the high school, uh-huh. I had a BS from Oregon State. And so I went back to Eastern Oregon College at that time, and picked up the education courses that I needed, and received a job teaching in the high school.

I: What did you teach?

FD: Well finally, it mostly was Accounting and Business Law. The first year I taught what they called General Business, and Business Law.

I: Describe that.

FD: General Business?

I: Mm-hmm. And what would you teach?

FD: Well, it was very elementary, I felt. But it was amazing that the children didn't know things like how to write a check, you know, how to make a deposit. They knew nothing about the stock market. [chuckles] And it was rather a basic Business course.

I: So by the time they got out of there they could run a household, do household finance?

FD: Well, they could certainly budget.

I: Then what did you do?

FD: Well, after three years of teaching, I went back and got a Master's at Eastern Oregon College.

I: What was your Master's in?

FD: In Education. And so, then I came back and taught seven more years. And then, that's when I taught Accounting and Business Law.

I: And what was the difference between the basic class and the Accounting? Was that--?

FD: Well, Accounting was more detailed. It started you from the beginning, and you know it's a beautiful course. I loved teaching it because it builds on itself, you know. And it's something you never really forget. You might-- might not use it right away, which is what I told the students. But a little review and it's right back. You-- it's just like swimming. You never forget how to swim. And it's the same way with Accounting. You might, if you don't use it, you might forget some of the details, but a review, it'll come back.

I: And what about Business Law? What was that course?

FD: Well, it's basic. It's very basic. And you talk about torts and liability and--

I: Did they have debates and that kind of thing?

FD: We put on trials, and I took them to trials over at the courthouse. And one time I took them to hear at the Supreme Court that was meeting in Pendleton, Oregon. And we got permission to go. And the court accepted our visit. And of course we had to sit very quietly and--

I: Do you remember what the trial was about?

FD: Well, they heard several cases. But the most interesting case-- and you almost expected this one Justice to put his feet up on the-- on this sort of a crescent type of a desk that they were sitting behind. And he leaned back in his chair, and he said, "I don't see why you're so upset about this." And what it was, that a woman-- her ex-husband was killed. And she was terribly upset and deeply grieved for him. And several weeks after the funeral, or months-- I've forgotten the period of time. She went back to the cemetery [chuckles] and couldn't find his grave, and became hysterical, and out of control, and went all to pieces. And this came out in the trial before the Supreme Court of the State of Oregon. [laughs]. And this was when the Justice said, "I don't see why you're getting so excited because you couldn't find his body." And they did find it. It was moved. It had been in the wrong grave and they moved it, unbeknownst to her. And she was the ex-wife. [laughs].

I: Gee. So, what was it like teaching in the '60's? Didn't the student's behavior change quite a bit during that time?

FD: Yes. I noticed it.

I: In what ways did they change?

FD: More rowdy, particularly with the boys, not the girls. But the boys didn't particularly want to study. And one time Dale Wyatt, the principal, came to me and asked if I would take six boys into my Business Law class because they had been kicked out of other classes. And they were seniors, and they needed credit to graduate. And he asked me if I would take them. And they were absolutely terrible. I couldn't get them to settle down. I approached them in a nice manner, and [laughs] I couldn't-- couldn't do it. So I went to Dale and told him. And so he said, "Well, we've given them a chance. We'll just call in their parents and have a talk." And so he did. All six parents--

well, the mothers were the ones that came in. And he laid down the law, and he said that you tell your son if he acts up in class, then he's out of the class and he doesn't graduate. They all graduated.

I: How did the um-- how did the war affect-- now how long did you teach? You were in there until when?

FD: I taught from '65, three years. And then took a Mas-- went back for a Master's, then taught seven more years. I quit teaching in '76.

I: So you were there during the whole Vietnam--

FD: Yes.

I: situation. What did you notice about students when-- with the war years?

FD: I must say that I noticed nothing.

I: So, were-- there weren't any protests, or--?

FD: No, no, none. It was never discussed in the classroom.

I: So, did you have your own students-- your own children in your classes?

FD: I only had my son in an Accounting class one year. And I gave him a B+ in his first nine weeks, and he was very unhappy with me. And I said, "But that's the way it worked out." I said, "You really didn't do A work." But he got an A for the semester. But I had to be honest with him about it, and [laughs] he felt he should have had an A.

I: When did you meet your uh, second husband?

FD: I was introduced by friends.

I: And did-- when was this _____, do you know?

FD: I met him in May of '76.

I: And what-- what was his full name?

FD: John Raymond Davidson.

I: And what did he do?

FD: Well, he was retired at the time. And he had two businesses. He owned a cattle farm, and he also ran a logging business. He didn't own the trucks. He hired trucks, you know, to haul the logs. But he had all the big equipment like the DC6's and all the chain-- chainsaws and all of that. You know, whatever you need for a logging business. One year logging would be good, and maybe cattle prices would be down, and so they sort of balanced each other out. Sometimes, if he was lucky they were both good. So that was great, of course. [chuckles].

I: Mm-hmm. Where did you live when you got married?

FD: When I married him? We lived on Hillcrest Drive. You go up 12th Street, and Hillcrest is about two-thirds of the way up the hill on the right-hand side. And you go down a quarter of a mile on the lane, to the end of the lane. It overlooks a little ten-acre lake. And we sold that just a year ago in May.

I: Um, let's see--

FD: And I lived there twenty-eight years.

I: Oh. So, can you talk about the sawmills in Union and Wallowa Counties? Things that you might remember?

FD: My husband, after he graduated from the University of Idaho, came to La Grande and got a job as bookkeeper with a company called Bowman-Hicks that was here in La Grande. He worked-- well, the Depression came along, and they decided to move to Wallowa. And so they dismantled Bowman-Hicks Sawmill and Lumber Company here in La Grande. And this was before World War II, so they sold all the steel part of the mill to Schnitzer of Portland. I don't know whether you've heard of the name Schnitzer.

I: _____ that's the Hall.

FD: That beautiful field.

I: _____ Schnitzer, yeah.

FD: Yes, well, it's um-- Well, her husband is the one that has the business now. They're in the steel business, and they shipped a lot of steel to Japan before World War I. And anyway, that's where most of the steel went from the Bowman-Hicks Lumber Company. But anyway, they moved up to Wallowa, and set up a sawmill. So that meant that my husband and his first wife moved to Wallowa. And his father-in-law and mother-in-law lived in-- moved up to Wallowa also. And the father-in-law, I think at that time was manager of Bowman-Hicks up to a certain point. And then Bowman-Hicks sold out to Bates. And Bates was run by a man, Mr. Bates and his five sons. And eventually my husband became manager of the Bates Lumber Company.

I: In Wallowa.

FD: In Wallowa. And he was-- I don't know how many years he was there as manager. And then he decided to go into the logging business on his own, which he did.

I: So did he keep continue-- the managing the Bates as well?

FD: No. He left that company. He left that company. And his father-in-law passed away, and the mother-in-law owned quite a bit of timber. And-- but she had-- she was-- land, for, you know, she owned land, but didn't have the income. And so, my husband and his first wife bought-- paid her a monthly salary, or payment I should say, a monthly payment, and bought the timberland from her.

I: Now, this was all in Wallowa?

FD: In Wallowa County. And so they acquired timber, and then they even bought-- she also had a small farm. Ray and his wife bought the farm from her, paying her monthly payments so that she could live-- have money to live on. And have you ever noticed Water Canyon when you go up to Wallowa? Well, that's where they lived. The father-in-

law, mother-in-law lived in one of the white houses, and Ray and his wife lived in the other. And then he sold out everything and moved to La Grande and built the house up off of 12th Street.

I: He built this house after you moved?

FD: Yes

I: And was that in the '40's or '50's?

FD: No. He came down and started building-- I think he sold out around '73 up at Wallowa. And started building in about '74, and then discovered that his wife, Gilda had cancer. So they had to go to Portland for treatment, radiation. And at that time they had chemo, but not like they do today, I don't think. And so she only lived in the house-- and it was not completed when she lived there-- oh, about two weeks. And then she passed away.

I: So now he had the logging business brought down to La Grande?

FD: No, he sold out.

I: He sold his logging business there? Mm-hmm.

FD: He kept one DC6 for awhile because he dug the lake, what we call the lake in front of the house. It used to be called Slotter's Pond. And do you know Mary Hearing?

I: Yes.

FD: Her father was Dr. Ingle, and he was a chiropractor in town, and a very fine one. And he told me that he used to ice skate on Slotter's Pond when he was a boy. And if he were alive today, I think he would be maybe 125 or something like that, you know. And so anyway, my husband dug that pond deeper and bigger and made a little island in the center. And the Oregon Fish and Wildlife people came and put a post in the island and put the box on top. And the geese come and lay-- a family is created there. And so we had geese on the lake, of course. But anyway, then he sold the DC6 after he had-- he even made part of the road going in too.

I: Now, what's a DC6? I don't know what that is.

FD: Oh, it's a huge tractor, just huge. It's a big thing, and it was used in his logging business. I think he had several of them.

I: Did he have trucks too, big trucks?

FD: No, he didn't have the hauling trucks-- hauling the logs, no.

I: Uh-huh. So, this was made to be--?

FD: He hired people to do that. And the men had their own trucks, you know. They owned their own trucks, and they do today, too. I think Boise Cascade just hires them to do the hauling.

I: I see. So, what was the name of the company when you met him?

FD: Probably Davidson Logging. I don't-- I don't know that I ever heard him speak of a name. But, of course, that would have been in Wallowa County.

I: So when he got to La Grande, then he-- did he start a new logging company, or how did it--?

FD: No, no. He retired.

I: Oh, he retired once he got out of _____?

FD: Yes. I really don't think this is very historical for you.

I: Oh, I think it's very interesting! I do.

FD: Well, it might be interesting, but it's not historical.

I: Well, the fact that he had that company there. I think that's what's really interesting because Union and Wallowa were in that same-- all in the same county.

FD: I want to back up and say something about my first husband.

I: Great!

FD: At that time that he was practicing medicine, there were two hospitals, St. Joseph and a very rickety old Grande Ronde Hospital. You know, it was really an old one. It was badly in need of repair and everything even to bring it up to standard. And St. Joseph would not allow the doctors to do certain surgeries. In other words, my husband was operating at St. Joseph one time, and the lady had cancer. And it involved the uterus, and the superior would not allow my husband to remove the uterus because she was of child-bearing age. So, my husband realized that even St. Joseph had reached a point where they needed to do some remodeling in bringing things up to standard, and so did the Grande Ronde Hospital, very definitely. And so he went before Hill-Burton, which was the federal agency that provided funds for hospitals throughout the United States. And he met with them and asked for donation for a-- you wouldn't call it a donation, I guess-- well, maybe you would-- anyway, so that they could build a new hospital here in town where all kinds of surgery could be done. At the time St. Joseph had several sisters there at the Hill-Burton because they were applying for money, too. And my husband got the okay to build, and all they got was 250,000 dollars, and it meant that La Grande had to--

[END OF TAPE]

[3 and 4]

FD: So, it was my husband that went before Hill-Burton Committee and got permission and money to build a new hospital in La Grande. And of course, he had his practice which was-- took 100% of him-- maybe, 125 or 50% of his time. And so he asked David Baum to head up the drive for a new hospital. And that's how we got Grande Ronde Hospital was through David Baum, Sr.

I: And how did he get _____ to do it?

FD: Well, he had a man by the name of Dale Beals, handled the finances, and they had their own system of approaching people. He had businessman helping him. And people that said yes, we can do this. Of course, there were people that told-- like David Baum, that he couldn't possibly raise that kind of money in Union County. And that it wasn't possible, and they-- but it didn't deter him. He went ahead and they raised more than what they had to match.

I: That's great.

FD: Now Jeanette, my sister Jeanette Baum who was the wife of David Baum, has given the background on that drive, and--

I: When she was interviewed she gave the background?

FD: I'm sure she did. I've never read her book. I don't-- I've never read it.

I: I'm not sure if it's done, or what yet.

FD: Well, I'm not sure either.

I: Was it community wide effort?

FD: Oh, evident-- yes, absolutely! And uh, one man even donated farmland.

I: So when was that-- when was the new hospital constructed, do you remember?

FD: Let's see, my husband was killed in '62, and they were working on the project then.

I: So he got to see some of it realized.

FD: Well, not a lot. I think they just barely were getting started. And I really don't remember how far along they were or even when the completion was.

I: I hope they named something after him, a wing or something.

FD: Well, all he did was get the initial funds and the okay. And the thing of it was, he told me that when he went before this committee, that they asked the Catholic sisters was it true that there were some surgeries that cannot be done in your hospital, and they said yes, that is true. And so that was one of the reasons that my husband was able to get permission plus the funds to do it.

I: That's wonderful. So how soon after the Grande Ronde Hospital was built did the hospital at St. Joseph's close? _____?

FD: It wasn't too long after that. There were many people who were very sorry about it, I know. But they didn't have the money to bring it up to the law and the standards.

I: Did your husband ever say anything about working with the sisters?

FD: Yes, he thought they were wonderful. He really thought they were a wonderful group of women, good nurses, very dedicated. He spoke highly of them.

I: Who were, um-- I have this question about who would be some of the people that were doctors at the time that your husband worked with?

FD: Do you know there isn't a one of 'em that's alive today? John Vanderbilt was one who died maybe two years ago here locally. I don't know whether you ever knew him or knew of him. There was a Dr. Hall, Dr. Vanderbilt, Dr. Joe Fredericks. Dr. Joe Fredericks just passed away here maybe six months ago. And there was a Dr. Moon, a Dr. Ross, a Dr. Brandon.

I: Did your husband ever have a practice with anyone else, or--?

FD: No, he was always by himself. Dr. Cooper was one of the doctors, and Dr. Lumsden.

I: Lumsden?

FD: Uh-huh. And Dr. Lumsden just passed away this past year. But they're all gone now.

I: It sounds like you really _____ doctors here.

FD: Well, we had wonderful doctors here. We were-- I think our little town had wonderful doctors. And I think my husband contributed a great deal to the medical care of the people.

I: Well, it sounds like it would probably not have the hospital without

him and Baum's efforts.

FD: Uh-huh. Well, David Baum is the one that should be given credit for it. But I did want to point out that my husband was instrumental in getting the initial funding.

[recording clicks - no interruption]

I: Okay, now what was that you were going to mention?

FD: [laughs]. Well, I wanted to mention that I am one of seven trustees of the Dewuhs Keckritz Educational Trust Fund. And this was established by two farmers that lived in Union/ had their property outside of Union.

I: When was that established?

FD: About '73, I believe. They established it-- it didn't-- I think it was-- came into fruition in '73. And I became a member of it in '76. The two men did not have any living relatives, and they owned this lovely ranch and timberland. And that was really very valuable. And it's over a half a million dollar fund. And that ranch in the timberland, you know, established it. And when they passed away, and so that was what they wanted to do with their money was help young people with their education. So we give out about thirty five, thirty six thousand a year--

I: Wow!

FD: in scholarships. This year, we gave only four, but we gave six thousand apiece, which was twenty-four thousand. And the reason it was less was because of the stock market. You know, we uh--

I: How did you get chosen to be one of the people?

FD: The trustees asked me to. Carlos Easley is a retired university professor.

I: I got to interview him.

FD: Did you?

I: Very, very nice man.

FD: Yes, and he is the executive secretary. He's retiring now. Carl Helm, who was a lawyer in town, he was the one that wrote up the wills and established the foundation legally. And we of course are a 501c3 Foundation, non-profit. And we do have to spend 5%, you know, of the income.

I: And how do you determine who is eligible?

FD: We go through the high schools in both Union and Wallowa County. We used to do it with three counties, including Baker, Baker County. But Leo Adler passed away and left billions to the school system in Baker City and Baker County, and so we no longer include Baker County in our scholarships. We just deal with the outstanding boy, the outstanding girl in each of Union and Wallowa County.

I: Who identifies these?

FD: We do. The trustees do.

I: Oh! So, do you have to look through--?

FD: We take all the information to the high schools, and all the schools in Union County and all the schools in Wallowa County. And not this spring, but a year ago, we gave, I believe it was thirty-six thousand. And we had the outstanding boy and the outstanding girl in each county. Then we had four runner-ups. And so we gave at that time, five thousand to the outstanding ones, and four thousand to the runner-ups. This year we were a little low on money, so we gave six thousand to four, and they were the outstanding boy and the outstanding girl of Union and Wallowa County.

I: That's wonderful!

FD: And it's all based academically. It has nothing to do with their parent's financial background. Strictly academic, and leadership-- we take that into consideration, probably about 20% and 80% academically.

I: That's wonderful.

FD: Uh-huh.

I: That's just wonderful.

FD: I enjoy working on it.

I: You get to meet these young people?

FD: Oh yes, we have a banquet! We had a banquet this last May for them up at-- held it at Hoke Hall, on the third floor; had a lovely prime rib dinner. And these two men were always very helpful with young people. I know one of 'em, Joe Dewuhs, would, when the boys were coming home from World War II, he would meet the bus and welcome them home, and take them for a steak dinner. And, and they-- he would loan money to students to go to college. And I know he was approached by the president of the college, and I forget which president that was. I think it was before Bennett. And they wanted him to give a scholarship to the college. And he said, "Well, how much are you talking about?" And I wish I could remember the figures exactly, but he said "My goodness, that's exactly what I get for a cow!" [laughs].

I: [laughs].

FD: At that time probably was around two hundred dollars, maybe. Or, a hundred dollars, whatever, whatever the figure was. Anyway, he thought of money in terms of what a cow would bring. [laughs].

I: [laughs]. So, they were both bachelors and they just _____?

FD: Well, one had been married to the sister of the other, and she passed away. There were no children, and they had no other brothers or sisters that were living. And so they left it all to this educational fund, and it's all Dewuhs Keckritz Trust Fund-- Educational Trust Fund.

I: And it's making a big difference?

FD: Uh-huh, it is. And at one point the fund reached a billion dollars, you

know, during the boom before the downturn.

I: Yeah! Were you able to give a lot of scholarships back then?

FD: I think fifty thousand is the most we've ever given.

I: Wow.

FD: And then we made it so we didn't have to pay taxes, so that's why we set it up for a 501c 3.

I: And you think this will just keep going and going and going?

FD: We're hoping, uh-huh. And we had our first donation from a previous recipient this last-- well, I learned about it just last May. And I forget what she received. I think she received probably three thousand as a recipient. And she-- and this was quite a few years ago-- and she sent a little over five thousand dollars as a donation to the fund.

I: That's giving back. _____.

FD: Yeah. Oh, I should say.

I: That's great. What an honor to be on this committee. What an honor it is for them to have you!

FD: Well, I thought it was. And so I've been on now since, let's see-- I came on-- I came on before '76. I guess I came on about '73 and they must have started in '72 because I replaced a woman that these two men had decided who would serve on the board. She lived in Central Oregon and I replaced her. I think about the second year of it that they were in existence. So I think it goes back to '73. So I would be-- have been a member for thirty-two years.

I: Wow.

FD: I enjoy doing it.

I: I'll bet.

[END OF TAPE]

August 9, 2005

Transcribed by Paula Helten (10/19/2011)

FD: Right.

I: Well, I'll ask a couple questions here. Uh, we're-- I'm talking today with Florence Otten Davidson at her home. It's August 9, 2005.

FD: Alright.

I: Okay, Mrs. Davidson, we-- one of the questions that I had about the PEO, what was its major function in La Grande at the time?

FD: It was furthering education for women.

I: And what-- what did the organization actually do in order to further education for women?

FD: Well, they would hold-- well, I'll tell you about what we're doing now which is different chapters do different things. Like one chapter has a big sale on nuts that are absolutely wonderful. They're all packaged, and you-- they have quite a variety that they are. And this is the way they make their money that goes towards education. Our chapter, Chapter DK, has what we call an Auction Dessert in November, about the middle of November. And we have-- sell goodies and bread, pastries and jams and jellies, and then we usually have several tables full of "bakes" that we silently auction. And then we have a verbal auction. And we'll raise money this way for education. And I know our chapter has been very successful with this Dessert Auction.

I: When did that start? When did you start _____?

FD: Well, it probably started about-- it might be as long ago as seven or eight years.

I: So, when you first started in the PEO what kind of fund raising activities _____?

FD: Well, you know, I'm not aware of the fund raising. And I don't know that they did a lot. I think it was through donations of the members

that went towards the scholarships for education for women.

I: And how did you choose the women? And we're talking the earlier, so, when did you join PEO? What _____--?

FD: Back in '54, 1954.

I: Okay.

FD: I've been a member for over fifty years.

I: How did you-- how did the group choose which women would get the scholarships?

FD: Well, they would have a committee. And it would depend upon their need, mostly-- but academic achievement. And they even looked at leadership achievement, not only in the school, but in the community. That was pretty much the basis, I think. And I think they still do this. And I think need pays-- plays a very big part in it.

I: How are the members for the "DK" selected?

FD: How were they selected?

I: Uh-huh. When you first joined in _____, how were they selected?

FD: Well, let's see, I joined "I" in '54 which was the first chapter in La Grande. And then a group of us left and formed "DK" because "I" was becoming harsh. And so we felt that we could start another chapter, and we could under the rules and regulations of the state. And so we chose people that we felt were interested in furthering education for women. And they would-- we thought that perhaps they
[audio ends]