WALTER SMUTZ

Union County resident for 69 years

AN ORAL HISTORY

Interviews in 1992 and 1993
at various places

Interviewer: Dee Ann Smutz Meyer

UNION COUNTY, OREGON HISTORY PROJECT
2004
(revised from 2002)

UNION COUNTY, OREGON HISTORY PROJECT

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In collaboration with Eastern Oregon University
Cove Improvement Club History Committee
Elgin Museum & Historical Society
Union Museum Society

Purposes

To record & publish oral histories of long-time Union County residents
&
To create a community encyclopedia

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Preface

Much of the history of a place is stored in the memories of people who have lived there. Their stories may be told to family members, but, unless someone makes a special effort to record these stories, they become lost to future generations.

Each of the historical societies in Union County, Oregon has begun to make that effort. Tape recordings exist in several locations, some of them transcribed in written form, others not. A more ambitious and thorough effort seemed necessary so that more of the oral history of Union County could be captured and preserved.

The Union County, Oregon History Project, begun in 2002, is making that more ambitious effort. One of its principal purposes is to collect as many oral histories of older Union County residents as possible and to make them available in both taped and written form. This edited transcript is part of the series of oral histories to be produced by that project.

About the Interviews and This Edited Version

The interviews with Walter Smutz took place in 1992 and 1993, when he was age in his mid-sixties and in failing health.

The interviewer was his wife, Dee Ann Smutz. She completed numerous interviews during 1992 and 1993.

The edited version presented here involved the following procedures:

- reorganization of content

- deletion of some extraneous comments

- omission of false sentence starts and other normal speech fillers that detract from readability

- normalization of pronunciation and grammar in conformity with standards of written English.

WS designates Walter Smutz's words, *I* the interviewer's.

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Remembering Grandma Smutz

I: What do you you remember about your grandmother on your father's side?

WS: My earliest recollection of my Grandma Smutz is when I was probably about two years old. I remember my folks stopping in front of her house, which was always referred to as the home place [on Sand Ridge, between Island City and Cove]. When we got out of the car--a Model T Ford coupe --Grandma was standing about half way between the house and the steps. My mother took me up from the road to the steps, and I ran up the walk to my grandma. I thought she was a rather tall, thin lady. She always wore an apron, usually blue. Then Grandma and I went in the house while my folks went someplace. I remember staying lots of times at Grandma's.

What I remember most about Grandma is her apron. We would go to the hen house to gather eggs, and Grandma could carry two dozen eggs in her apron. She would take hold of the bottom, fold it, and make it like a big bucket. She used it the same way when we went into the garden to get beans, corn, and other vegetables.

It seemed that she was always cooking over a roaring fire or washing. Washing was always very important to Grandma. She had four sons living there at the time, and one or two hired men lived there year around. One was Lou Rogers, who herded sheep and considered Grandma Smutz's place his second home; he stayed there in the winter and helped with the chores. When Grandma cooked breakfast, it always consisted of fried potatoes, eggs, meat, biscuits, and gravy. The big meal was dinner at noon and supper in the evening. It seemed to me that all Grandma ever did was cook, wash dishes, and get ready to cook again.

First thing Monday morning she did the washing in a square-tub Maytag with a gasoline engine, even though she had electricity from 1923 on. Dad went by every Monday morning to make sure the Maytag was running, and I often went with him. She had two big washtubs full of water, used for rinsing and the wringers. One of them had blueing in it; I thought the blue water was neat, though I didn't know until much later that it was to make the white things look whiter. Sometimes, when I was a little older, she'd let me run the control on the wringer. When she put the clothes in, I could turn it on and let the clothes run through.

Ironing for her involved an ironing board in the kitchen and heating flat

I.D. Smutz family home at Sand Ridge (Union County), 1900-1910
Photo courtesy of Dee Ann Smutz Meyer

irons on the stove. She would iron until one iron got cool, put it on the stove, and take another hot one. Grandma never used anything but a flat iron as long as I knew her. She died in 1935. I never heard Grandma complain or raise her voice, and she was always very loving.

Recollections of Grandpa Smutz

I: What do you remember about your grandfather?

WS: I don't remember Grandpa Smutz, though I remember the car that took him to the hospital. We have a picture of me sitting on the running board of a big, eight-cylinder Studebaker, 1928 model; he got it just two weeks before he went to the hospital and rode in it just one time--from home to the hospital. He never did learn to drive.

Grandpa Smutz was a school teacher when he came out to Oregon, but he homesteaded when they were first married. They went to White Bird, Idaho to homestead on the Nez Perce Reservation, which had just been opened to settlers. In his journals he wrote that they "proved up the ground" by living and working the farm ground. After proving it up, they sold it and moved to the Sand Ridge in the Grande Ronde Valley, where they had good farm ground.

I.D. Smutz was a big man for his time, over six feet tall, probably weighing over two hundred pounds. I understand he was very mild mannered, but he put up with no horseplay at school. They say he was very firm. At that time some of the boys were older than the teacher; it was not uncommon to have students twenty-two or twenty-three years old still going to school because they still hadn't finished the eighth grade. They were learning to read, sign their names, and "do a little figuring," as they used to call arithmetic. In Kansas, where he taught before coming to Grande Ronde Valley, the story goes that the kids locked him out of the schoolhouse, thinking that was a great trick. They had bolted the door from the inside, so Grandpa took off his coat or maybe found a gunny sack, went up on the sod roof, and plugged the stove pipe. Because it was cold, the fire was going good, and the stove began to smoke, filling the room. It wasn't very long before the door burst open and they came out. After it cleared, they had to go back to their classes again.

Grandpa taught at Red Pepper School,

I.D. Smutz & Dora Gekeler
at time of marriage
Photo courtesy of Dee Ann Smutz Meyer

Hardscrabble School, and at Liberty School, which is where the Grange Hall is on McAllister Lane. In La Grande, a lot of the old timers--D. Davis, Old Man Garrity, Toots Garrity, Vic Eckley's dad, and Bob Williams, Sr.--said they went to Grandpa Smutz's class at the Grange Hall. They had nothing but praise for him, saying they had learned more from him than any other teacher. It wasn't just his teaching but his character and his example.

Grandpa also loved sports. He went to all the football and baseball games. They all used to run along the sidelines with the plays because they didn't have stands. He enjoyed a certain amount of horseplay because we have lots of pictures of water fights they used to have, especially with the McCalls and DeLongs.

My father, Charles, was born on the Sand Ridge. The uncles always felt they had very happy childhoods. The boys never remember him being abusive to the kids. George said he only remembers one good spanking. He and Richard were supposed to cultivate the garden--a big enough garden that they had to use a horse. Richard was supposed to ride the cultivator horse and steer, while George held the handles. Instead of that, they rode the horse down to play with Sonny (Art) McCall. When they came home, Grandpa came by in the car and asked, "Is the garden cultivated?" When they said, "No," Grandpa said, "Come with me, George. Richard, you bring the horse home." George said, "The only good thing about it was I was through crying before Dick got there, and I got to watch him whop Dick."

Every year on the 4th of July they used to make homemade ice cream. At that time there seemed to be enough snow and ice that had drifted over the point of the hill still to be there on the 4th. They'd go up with an ax and a gunny sack and cut the ice out of the drift and bring it back down for ice cream for the celebration. Maybe it was colder or the wind blew harder then, but they always claimed that they went up

Students at Hardscrabble School with the teacher I.D. Smutz
Photo courtesy of Dee Ann Smutz Meyer

every 4th and got ice for their ice cream.

My dad pointed to the creek over there and said, “See that bend in the creek? Pop [That is what Dad always called his father] backed a derrick cart down in there and left it over the 4th of July so it could soak up the wheels.” In those days, the wood would dry out and the wagon tires would become loose on the wheels, so they would have to soak them a lot. They went to a 4th of July celebration, and, when they pulled the derrick cart back out the day after the 4th to go to the field, a beaver had eaten two spokes out of the derrick cart wheel. That really upset Pop.

They were all family oriented. They went to church on Sundays and after service got together for potluck dinners. Church would be in somebody’s house or the Grange Hall School.

All the stories I’ve heard or what my dad told was that Grandma Smutz was not happy on the Sand Ridge. So Grandpa Smutz traded Mr. Jasper for the place on Foothill Road [near La Grande] for the place out there.
They had much more ground at Sand Ridge, but he wanted to come over here so that Grandma Dora would be closer to her sisters. Grandma and all her sisters--Minnie, Pearl, Nellie, and Fanny--were very close. They all lived on this side of the valley; it took six or seven hours to make a round trip with a team or four hours with a good buggy team. Also, they didn’t have telephones at their farms.

Smutz family home on Foothill Road, 1910-present
Photo courtesy of Dee Ann Smutz Meyer

So in 1910 1 understand they traded everything but children and some horses and cows. They traded crops, hay in the barn, grain in the field--everything but the kids. Grandma was much happier because being on Foothill Road put her within a half hour of her sisters. That is the main reason they moved over to the Foothill Road.

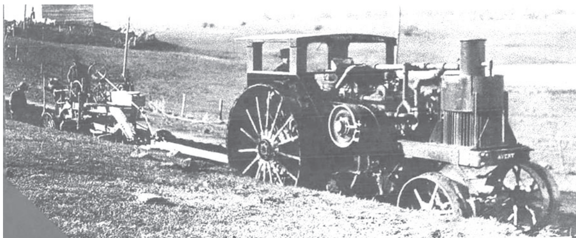
Grandpa Smutz had some of the first automobiles in the valley. The first I know of was a 1913 Studebaker, then a 1915 Studebaker, which he never drove. But Dad drove everybody, so he could take Grandma over to visit her sisters.

Grandpa Smutz put a bathroom in the new house soon after they moved in because they had running water from the spring on the hill. When I was a kid, they had one on the porch, and then they put the bathroom inside. But they said that, unless it was very cold, Grandpa Smutz didn’t use that bathroom because he didn’t think it was right to be going to the bathroom inside the house.

My uncles used to tell me that, when it was really hot, Grandpa would say, "Come on, work a little harder. Get this field shocked [because at that time everything was done with a binder, no combines]. Then we'll get the car and go swimming." They always went swimming where the big bridge is on Pierce Lane; there seems to be a big hole there in the river. A lot of people from Island City went over there to swim for an hour or so every evening, and then they'd go back and have dinner.

Grandpa was a pretty fair blacksmith. His old buggy shed had a place for the carriage, a forge, and a blacksmith shop. As a kid I used to go in there, build a fire, and play with it. It had the old type of bellows that you pulled up and down, not the hand crank; they were all cracked out. The leather part was broken, but I got an old piece of inner tube and ran it from the bellows to the forge to make the air go where it should to make the fire glow. I'd sometimes get a fire going red hot when I was just a little kid playing in there. Coals were still in the forge that had been there for years. They finally tore that building down.

I.D. Smutz built two barns that still stand--a horse barn and a cow barn.



Grading of Foothill Road, ca. 1920
Photo courtesy of Dee Ann Smutz Meyer

Next to the one on the north was a big silo; you can still see the foundation. They used to chop sunflowers and corn and put in there for silage for the milk cows. They milked about thirty head of milk cows; they had a lot of hogs and calves; and they ran some registered Short Horns. Lou Rogers was in with the Smutz brothers, so it was "Smutz and Rogers, Registered Short Horns."

If company came by and Grandma or my mother was a little short on food, they'd go out and grab a rooster, chop his head off, stick him in a pan of boiling water, pluck him, and he'd still be warm when he hit the frying pan. A little more milk in the gravy and you'd have all the food you needed.

When Grandpa Smutz's stepmother, Charlotte Allen Smutz, came out from Bird City, Kansas to visit and saw fruit rotting on the ground, she was appalled because in Kansas there wasn't enough fruit available. There were more apples and apricots lying on the ground than people here could use, but in Kansas fruit was so scarce that any little apple would be used whether it had a worm hole or not. In later years Grandpa sent boxes of apples that could be shipped without spoiling. But Grandpa Smutz always said that he didn't feel too sorry for those people in Kansas because for a couple of months out of the year they could get out of there and come to Oregon if they wanted to. That's what he did.

Learning about Farming with Walt's Uncles

I: Tell about what your uncles taught you about farming.

WS: I spent a lot of time with Uncle Lynn, probably as much time as I did with my dad. He taught me all I know about horses and how to drive; I spent a lot of time in the field with him, riding on the combine and the grain wagon. Lynn and George drove the grain wagon principally when the Smutz brothers were farming the thousand acres where we live now, and another two hundred or three hundred acres where the home place was. We used to ride to the mill in the grain wagon; I'd go to sleep, lying in the wheat with the sun shining down on me and lady bugs crawling over my face. George said they crawled in one nostril of my nose and out the other.

In 1937 the State Highway Department told the Smutz brothers they could no longer haul on the highway with the wagon because the weight was too heavy on the asphalt and was starting to cut into it. Also, when it got hot in the summer, the horseshoes would leave an imprint in the pavement. They told us about the time harvest started, so the brothers looked around for a truck. They looked at a new Ford truck, but they couldn't afford that, so they found a 1931 Model A Ford, which had a short box with only a nine-foot bed. At that time they sacked rye and barley, and, since we raised a lot of rye, over half of our grain was sacked. When it came off the combine, there'd be five sacks to a pile. They'd try to arrange them all the same so when you drove down the row they'd be easier to pick up.

When they had used the wagons, Lynn could drive the team from the ground. He'd tell them, "Whoa," and they would stop; he'd say, "Get up," and they would walk along slowly and he could stay on the ground. But when the brothers got the truck, he'd have to hop in and put three or four sacks up on the bed; then he'd have to get up on the truck bed, pile them up in a row, hop back down, put three or four more up. Then, to move the truck he had to go around and open the door, get in, and drive a little further.

He did that about two days and said, "Enough of this." So he took the door off the cab, threw the seat out, put a box in; he made a seat for me out of an old milk stool, with some old collar pads on it. Then he said to me, "You're going to learn to drive," and I started driving. So by the end of the week I was driving to the mill while he sat over on the side and rested.

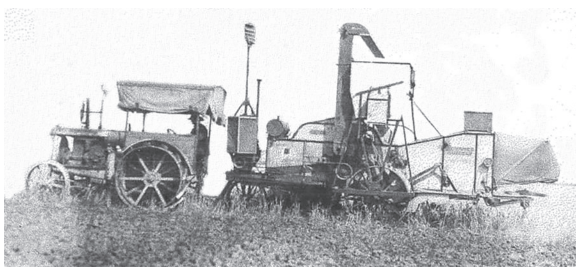
At that time we had very little traffic on Highway 30. We'd come out down on the corner, hit Highway 30 to La Grande, and go to the old mill that was near Willow School. We backed in and unloaded the wheat sacks; then we came back to Adams Avenue, stopping at the Highway Grocery. Lynn, who liked to drink beer, would buy a quart of beer and me a bottle of strawberry Nehi. He'd sit over on the other side and I'd drive home. We came back on Foothill Road instead of the highway, by the house, down Huff

Lane, and into the field. We made four or five trips a day.

About the second year, we came by Tyler's Dairy; they always had a lot of help living there to run the dairy and a bunch of chickens. We were in a hurry, Lynn saying, "You had better whip it right up because we are going to be late for lunch." We went by Tyler's at a high rate of speed--probably going twenty-six or twenty-seven miles an hour--and a bunch of chickens ran through. Lynn leaned out the window, looked around, and said "Well, I think you got one. Just keep going." There were feathers falling everyplace.

That was a very enjoyable time in my life, helping harvest, and getting to drive that truck.

I helped from the time I was ten. When I got to be fourteen or fifteen, I drove the truck myself because I got my first license when I was fourteen--when I was a freshman in high school--because we had no bus and they paid mileage to the parents to take their kids to school. At that time we were renting the place from Judge Couch, who was the county judge, so there was no problem in getting my license. I had special routes that I was supposed to drive: either along Foothill Road, up Gekeler Lane, and down 4th Street to the high school; or by the underpass. But I figured that, as long as I stayed within the state of Oregon, that was close enough. We even ventured over to Walla Walla in Washington] a couple of times.



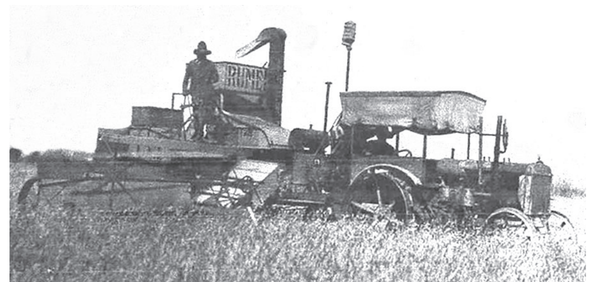
Pull combine for harvesting grain, ca. 1920
Photo courtesy of Dee Ann Smutz Meyer

Harvesting Operations

I: Tell about how the Smutz brothers involved you in harvesting grain.

WS: When they started storing more wheat in bulk during my freshman year, I started driving the truck. I pulled under the combine and loaded my truck; if it didn't get back soon enough to load, they'd pull the old bulk wagons by and fill them. When I came back and, if there wasn't a load in the combine, I'd pull my truck alongside the bulk wagon and shovel it out.

There were lots of times through my high school years that I would shovel maybe five hundred bushels of wheat a day out of the bulk wagons into the truck. What really made me mad was that I would see the combine running and they couldn't see me coming. However, I always thought they could



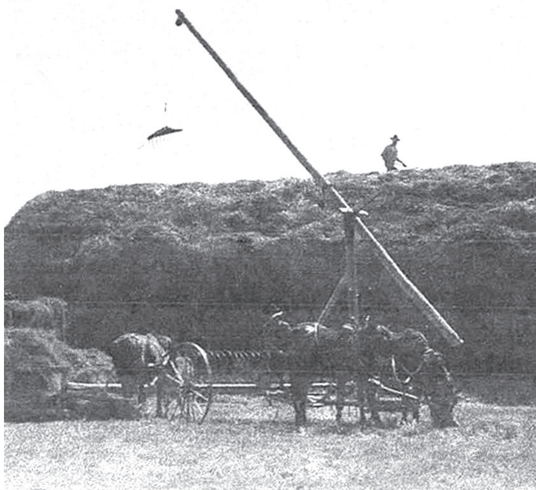
Twin City tractor used to pull combine, ca. 1920
Photo courtesy of Dee Ann Smutz Meyer

see me, although they claimed they couldn't. I always drove fast so I'd be kicking up lots of dust. Just as I'd be pulling into the field, they would be pulling away from the wagon where they'd just dumped fifty bushels of wheat--a ton or more that I'd have to shovel back into the truck. I always felt they could have waited, but they claimed that, if they had waited for me, they would have lost at least ten minutes cutting while I was coming across the field.

Then in '41 we got the new combine, an International, which had a bigger tank on it, and we also bought a bigger truck--a '38 GMC, which, instead of hauling a hundred bushels, hauled about a hundred fifty bushels.

I: Can you give more details about how the combine crew worked?

WS: On the combine were two operators--one on the tractor and the header puncher, who ran the header up and down, controlling the engine on the combine, seeing how it was going. Something else I had to do that I really hated to do was to hang sacks. That was when they sacked the grain. If it was really heavy, they couldn't keep up with sewing the sacks and handing it, so I hung and I jigged. That means hanging the sack on the spout where the grain came out and jigging it up and down to make the grain go into the sack so it would be full and tight. A sack sewer and a jigger did the same thing on the threshing machines. The jigger didn't get paid much, but the sack sewer was the highest paid man on the threshing machine.



Stacking hay with a derrick
Photo courtesy of Dee Ann Smutz Meyer

The Smutz brothers cut a lot of grain. They used to start at Delbert Anson's place and come up Gekeler Lane, combining on lots of little ranches on Cove Avenue. There used to be oat fields on Cove Avenue that we cut. That grain was the most miserable stuff; it came out fast because it was grown on irrigated land. That combine had barley and oat dust covering it. Every time I see an oat field, I still itch. The only good thing about it is that old man Tyler came out from his dairy three times a day with cold drinks in pint milk bottles--Orange Spot, root beer, and grape. On his truck these drinks would be on a bucket of ice; if it weren't for those drinks, I would have refused to work.

I: How did you store the hay after it was cut?

WS: We used a derrick to get the hay up into the loft of the barn. It has cable that goes up to the rafters and a Jackson fork, which is a fork about four

feet wide with big tines. We put it into a load of hay, pushed the tines down in, and set it. Then we hollered at the derrick driver so that he would get the horse on the outside of the barn to pull the cable up--like a block and tackle. When it got to the track, it went out into the loft. The guy who was mounding the hay would yell "Trip" and pull the rope. The fork would swing loose because it was hinged and drop the load of hay. Then he had to turn the horse around and go back. (On our place that was from the edge of the barn clear down to the ditch at the far end.)

When he got out there far enough, he had to unhook this cable from the doubletrees because, when he pulled the rope back, it dragged the cable back. If he didn't unhook it fast, the other guys would be jerking on the rope so hard that it lifted the double-tree up so that it could hit someone in the face. Guys would scream, "Un-hook, unhook, back up!"

On good alfalfa we could unload a load of hay in six or seven trips, but wild hay sometimes took fifteen to twenty trips because wild hay didn't hang together like alfalfa.

In later years, instead of a Jackson fork we used nets, which took the whole load at one time out of a wagon. With the net in the wagon box, we'd load the hay into the net. But most generally, when we were stacking, we used a buck rake and spread the hay out on the ground. One side of the net went up to the boom of the derrick, came down to the ground, went out to two 2 x4s, where the latch was. We used a shovel to dig a trench so that, when we ran the wheels of the buck rake over, it was flush with the ground and spread out into a peg driven in the ground. When the hay came in, it wouldn't sweep the net up; it would stay over the peg when we backed the load off. We got the chain that was up there and had to pull the net up enough to hook on to the thing. When it went up, it pulled the whole load up, and the net swung out over the stack. We tripped the net and dropped the whole buck load of hay on the stack. When it came back down, the guy setting nets would be getting ready to go again. This way we took a whole load of hay at one time.

I: How did the uncles get along together and with your grandfather when they did this work?

WS: When the uncles worked, each person seemed to have a special job. Two of them did the stacking because they took pride in making nice looking stacks. Dad took care of the mechanical things and the business. Another uncle did a lot of the horse stuff and whatever else was required of him--a lot of the heavy work.

The uncles all got along quite well and were happy most of the time. Sharing the work, they seldom, if ever, got mad at each other, and they seldom made any major investment without talking to Dad first. He seemed to be the leader of the group.

Getting and Sawing Firewood

I: You had to gather firewood often, didn't you?

WS: The brothers and I used to go to the mountains to cut firewood on the forty-acre woodlot on Glass Hill. We had a fine 1925 Model-T pickup; I don't know how they fitted into it. Dad and two uncles, all wearing big hats, rode in the front, which wasn't very wide. Grandpa Hopper, my mother's father. and I always rode in the back. We also squeezed a big picnic lunch and a full crosscut saw in there someplace because the pickup box was only about four feet.

When we got to the really steep part of the road, we had to go backwards because the gas tank on those T-models was under the seat; if the engine got higher than the gas tank, it wouldn't run. So we'd have to whip the truck around and back up the hill in reverse. Then, when we got past the steep part, we'd whip it back around, and away we'd go to cut the wood. Sometimes we'd bring it down in tree lengths on a bob sled; sometimes it was cut in four-foot lengths and brought down on a wagon.

In the fall we'd have the sawing bees. with a big buzz saw, we'd go around to each of the relatives' houses--the Hugheses, Smutzes, DeLongs, McCalls, and Spencers--and saw up their winter supply of wood until everybody's wood was cut up. They all worked until it was done.

The saw had a big one-cylinder engine that was pulled with a team, though in later years they had a tractor on it. It came to each place and maybe be there for one or two full days. Everybody that used wood would be there--ten or fifteen people--packing wood to the saw, throwing it in the woodhouse, if it was handy, or into a pile. They sawed above our old woodhouse, which had a big door in the upper end. Two guys sawed, two guys pitched it in, and two guys were inside stacking. Those inside had to be careful of the wood coming through the door because they were just throwing it through the hole. We took twelve cords a year because we had three wood stoves.

In later years I remember buying the wood from Parson in four-foot lengths. George Hughes had a saw on the front of his John Deere tractor, and he came to saw wood. A lot of the time we'd save the wood posts from a fence we'd torn out, providing they had no nails in them, and saw them up for firewood. George was pretty particular that no nail got into his good saw.

Sawing wood wasn't too bad, but it was a miserable job if the wind was blowing because the sawdust would get in our eyes.

Butchering Hogs

I: What are your memories of butchering?

WS: Butchering, when I was a kid, was always in January or February, when snow was on the ground. Again, it was

a family effort. I remember really good times at the butchering because all the family would get together; it was like a big holiday through the early spring months before we could do anything else on the farms.
They thought Dad should always shoot the pigs. It seemed that, if the pig wasn't killed with the first shot, they had to cut off his head and hide it to make him die after that. Dad had a .22 short rifle; I never remember his ever having to shoot any of them more than once. George Hughes, though, had tried to kill one and claimed he shot a whole magazine full into it and still couldn't kill it.

When we were butchering at Grandma Smutz's, we must have killed over twenty pigs for our family and theirs. We did the butchering down there because they had the facilities--the vat and the smokehouse. Dad shot them in the horse barn and put them on a stone bolt--a slip with two runners and a plank across the top--and used Duke, the stud horse, to pull them on the snow up behind the house. We'd roll them off into the vat. It was very important to have the water just right to scald them. If it was too hot, they claimed it set the hair, making it hard to get off. Then we rolled them back out onto a platform, where we gutted and cleaned them. They really shone white after coming out of scalding--really pretty.

We cut them in half and hung them in the smokehouse for a while to be smoked by the fire. When we brought the meat home, Dad put Morton's smoke salt into a big washtub; it was a cure that he put on the bacon, hams, and shoulders to give the same flavor as they got from being smoked.

After it had been in the barrel with the smoke salt for about a year, Mother would have to parboil the ham or shoulder because it was getting pretty salty by that time. After we'd eaten two or three slices of ham, we needed several glasses of water. But we had meat all year without refrigeration.

After we cut big tubs of meat, we'd grind sausage and mix it with sage, making four or five washtubs of sausage meat. With no refrigeration, the women canned it by making patties that would just go through the mouths of quart jars; I suppose there'd be ten or twelve patties to a jar. They put lard around the patties. When we finished at the Smutz's, we'd do the same thing at the other relatives' houses.

We killed a lot of hogs at Uncle Charlie Gekeler's. He had a big smokehouse and gave away a lot of meat. Since times were tough, he knew a lot of people didn't have meat, so he butchered twice as many hogs as he needed and hung the meat out; by spring it was all gone--some given away and some stolen. His theory was that people wouldn't be stealing it if they didn't need it to feed their families. He even had a plank across the Gekeler Slough so they could come in off the railroad, go through the corral fence, and cross the slough on a plank to the smokehouse without being seen from the house.

Uncle Charlie also had a big vat--prob-

ably five feet across--where we rendered lard. We kept all the fat and trimmings to take over there. We built a fire under it; it took four to five hours to get the fat melted down. Then we poured lard out into buckets or five-gallon cans that we set in the cellar with wax paper over them.

When we got down to the fat with the meat on it, which made the cracklings, we had a press, which was about a foot across. After we got most of the lard out, we put the meat into the press that had corrugated holes in it. We filled it full, closed the top, and screwed down the plunger. That forced the grease out of the cracklings. When we got done, we had a cylinder about four inches thick and a foot across--like a little wheel full of cracklings that were softer and better then we buy today. Boy, was it good eating!

The Smutz Brothers' Six-horse Hitch Team

I: Did the Smutz brothers do anything special with horses?

WS: The first parade that we were ever in was really the start of the Smutz brothers' Percheron hitch--in about Fall, 1941. George had always had visions of having a Budweiser Team after seeing the ads about the Budweiser eight-horse hitch. For the parade we got the four best horses we had, and George took a can of yellow paint and painted the wheels on one of the grain wagons we still had. It had one of the best boxes, with green paint and a fine seat.

Lynn and George drove because they were used to driving the teams to the mill, and we were all riding along on our horses. D. always rode ahead on Tony, a fine big sorrel horse; he liked to ride in front of everybody, wearing his white hat. I rode Silver, Lynn's horse, and Thelma rode her own black horse.

After that first parade, George decided to get a wagon--I think the old Broomfield-and-Richardson dray that was used to deliver coal. Broomfield and Richardson used to be down across the track where La Grande Lumber is today. He modified it a little, painted it red with white stars, and worked on

The Smutz brothers' painted wagon and six-horse hitch team at home
Photo courtesy of Dee Ann Smutz Meyer

the wheels--painting them white, with red spokes. The next parade they were in they used six horses. He had been making the harness all winter long, putting spots on it, and made imitation scotch collars that went under the hames to make it look like Scotch harness; every loose penny he could get he spent on spots and harness. He always wanted to get a real Scotch harness and a team of registered Percherons.

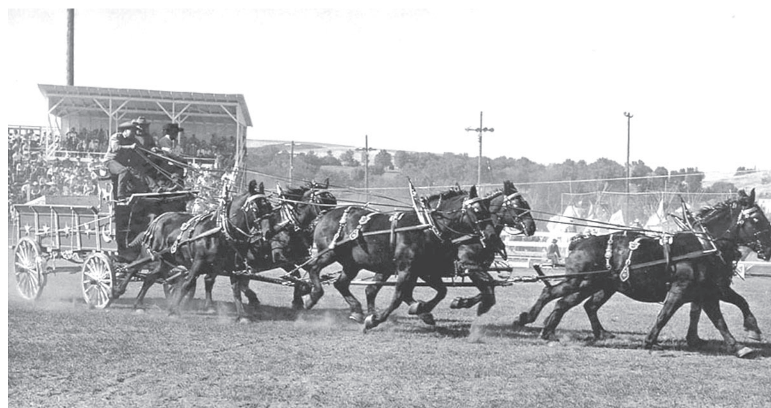
First we went with six horses, and then he decided we had to go with eight because Tamarus, another team and driver at that time, had a six-horse hitch and a good team he was putting in parades. At this time we were showing in parades in La Grande, Union, and Elgin.

I: Did George ever get his Budweiser team?

WS: George said we had to go with eight head, like Budweiser did. So the next time the parade came around for the Union Stockshow, we had an eight-horse hitch. He didn't think the wagon was big and fancy enough, so he made one. He got the running gear from the old city-sprinkler wagons that he bought. He seemed to come by lots of wagons and wheels. He took the tank off it and made our second wagon, which was bigger and heavier than the first. He kept the same decorations--still red and white with stripes on the wheels--and he wanted the seat up high.

We went to the stockshow with that eight-horse hitch when I was in my senior year, driving from home around Foothill Road to Hot Lake, to Union Junction, and to the Union Experiment Station barns, where they stayed; they had a lot of nice stalls and barns. We showed in the arena and the parade.

We kept showing eight for quite a while, but nobody seemed to notice the difference. It really made George mad because people would say, "It seems like your six-horse hitch was giving you more trouble than so-and-so's six-horse hitch." What they didn't realize was that we had two more horses in



The Smutz brothers' painted wagon and six-horse hitch team in performance
Photo courtesy of Dee Ann Smutz Meyer

there and another swing tongue. So he finally dropped off to just a six-horse hitch that he showed more than the eight.

We went to a lot of places. One year we showed in La Grande, Union, Elgin, and Joseph.

In 1949 we were at the Walla Walla Southwest Washington Fair. They had us down at the end of the field and were introducing everyone like they do at the beginning of a rodeo. They came running by on their horses to tell us that, when they announced us, they would wave at us; we wouldn't be able to hear because of the horns and because the loud speakers were pointed the other way.

George was getting ready while they were still announcing. He said, "Is that us?" I said "No, no, I'll tell you." George always had a great whistle to start the team. When he whistled, the lead team would jump about ten feet. We had them really fired up that night, too. George's team was great, with Queenie and Bessie out in the lead. To train them, he'd have me walk around, and, when he'd yell "Queenie," I'd whop her in the rump with a wood paddle, so she'd go when he yelled "Queenie."

Man, she was ready to go when the announcer said, "Now, the president of the Rodeo Association, Melton L. Looney." He had a big, white horse and was wearing a blue shirt, blue pants and a blue hat. George said "That's us!" and I screamed "No," but it was too late because he had whistled and hollered "Queenie." We came off from the other side just like a stage coach, right across the front. We cut between the crowd and Looney, who was riding by, and the announcer said, "Well, I guess we got the Smutz team, too." We went by the stands in a cloud of dust.

At Walla Walla we showed for four nights, and then we went to Lewiston, Idaho, which was really hot and where we showed ten times in five days. Then we went on to Craigmont, Montana and Nez Perce, Idaho. We were gone for about five weeks, which really made the neighbors look because all the hay was still standing. We had just pulled out of the hay field and left it standing. Of course, it was all wild hay, but we didn't get the haying done that year until the end of September.

I: Was George satisfied with those successes?

WS: No, George decided that we definitely had to have a Scotch harness and that we had to buy registered horses, because we had to get bigger ones. The wheel team at that time weighed about eighteen hundred pounds and the lead team about sixty hundred fifty or seventen hundred--nice horses but they weren't big. We were using them to farm, so they weren't as fat as other horses around.

He started writing letters and, through an ad in a draft-horse magazine, found a man who had a show team; he lived in Marysville, California, near Chico,

north of Sacramento about fifty or sixty miles. He had these horses and Scotch harness for eight head, but he was having trouble keeping them because government officials wanted to zone him out. They needed the land for orchards and nuts. He was getting very old anyway. George was all fired up, so he went around and got a little money from everybody. He was calling it "Smutz Bros. Team," which it was, but George was doing most of the work. We were all fired up to go to California and look at these horses. They were pretty nice horses. We ended up buying twenty-three head of large, registered Percherons--mares, colts, and the stud horse--along with the harness.

Theo Gregory, who had a trucking line out of La Grande, went to California to pick up the horses and bring them home for us. George and I went back in his pickup to get the harness about a week later. The brothers paid about $1,000 for the harness, which they thought was outrageous. Now, it would cost $10,000 or $20,000 because it was very nice and well-made. The collars were big and made of patent leather, with chrome hames. It was one of the best I had ever seen.

The thing that really impressed George was that our wheel team was heavier than Budweiser's wheel team. Old Lady and Ruth weighed 2,410 and 2,430 pounds respectively--four hundred pounds over a ton. The lead team, Snip and Tubby, weighed just over a ton, so every horse we had in the hitch weighed over a ton. They were very good, very beautiful horses.

I: What happened after that?

WS: We kept the team and showed them until George couldn't take care of them; he was having battles with cancer, alcohol, and with ex-wives. Most of the horses went to Tracy Anderrite in Portland, who had the Meadowland Dairy and Columbia Wineries. Dick kept the lead team around his ranch for quite a while. The harness, I think, went to Billy Hindman and then he sold it. One of the wagons went to Washington, the other to somewhere in Oregon.

George went to work for Bob Green at the livestock sale yard. He made the wagon that Bob Green used for his show team; he had some parts from another wagon that George had--a heavy wagon that Frank Cleavenger had used for deliveries by Cleavenger Transfer. I think the front end was from that one, and the back wheels were from another water sprinkler that he got from the city. He took one whole winter and built that wagon.

Bob had a team of Belgiums that George and Gilbert Owsley showed and took to pulling contests. We took them to the state fair a couple of times and to many pulling contests. George always referred to the Belgiums as "salmon-headed Belgiums," he said because they had little heads and hung them on the ground. They never had fire like a Percheron horse, but they were certainly a lot easier to drive and take care of. All the time we had the big team, we showed them at the Roundup, pulling the band wagon in the parade and driving in a team exhibition during the rodeo, especially

between the acts--like the races in the Roundup grounds.

Dick and I used to run our cows together and worked a lot together. Although we each owned our own cows, we worked together on the haying and the riding. We used to get up about 5:00 a.m., go over to the truck stop, and have a cup of coffee before we went to the mountains.

One morning Dick wandered over in his pickup, got out and walked up the hill, smoking his pipe. I went out the back door and lit up a cigar. You had to be right close to him and listen because he mumbled so you couldn't understand him easily. He and his brothers would mumble, mumble, mumble and then roar with laughter. As Dick came up the hill, he looked a little glum; I couldn't understand why so early in the morning. He said, "Well, we lost the old lady last night." I thought he meant Martha, his wife, when he said *old lady*. I thought he was sure taking it pretty well. I said "Gee, that's too bad," looked at my boots, and didn't know exactly what to say.

When I said, "How'd it happen?" he said, "Oh, she got down in the spring hole. We found her this morning." Then I knew it was the horse, it wasn't his wife, and so that was a little better. But for Dick it was about the same. It was just about as bad. I don't think he could've felt any worse if it had been his wife. When I finally told Martha that story, she said she had never heard it and thought it was pretty funny.

Haying with Horses

I: What else can you say about using horses in farming?

WS: The average farm horse at that time didn't weigh a ton, like a big horse. A farm horse weighed sixteen hundred to seventeen hundred pounds. They just weren't bred that big. We used our farm horses for a little bit of everything. They used big horses in town to haul freight, but most of the freight horses in teams were sixteen hundred- to seventeen hundred-pound horses. The Morgan breed was a good horse --a horse that could work in the field all day and then be ridden to church on Sunday; they weighed only twelve hundred to thirteen hundred pounds.

The Smutz brothers had mostly Percherons, used in the field during haying, that ran from fifteen hundred to eighteen hundredpounds.

When I was a young kid, we put about twelve or sixteen horses in the field on grain drills [machines that plant wheat seed]. But along in '34 or '35, when I was seven or eight, we bought the International tractor and quit using horses in the fields.

When I was driving the horses myself, we used them on the mowing machine, the dump rake, and the buck rake, and we hayed with them up until 1952. We put three teams in the field for haying, two on the mowing machines, and one on the dump rake. Generally George, Dick, and I worked together putting up Gekeler's hay, Dick's hay, and our hay. Then the Smutz brothers got so busy

farming, after they bought the Smythe place, that Dick put up their hay, too, for, I think, $2.00 or $3.00 a ton. We did that for only a year or two because then they decided to start baling.

After the hay was mowed and dump-raked into windrows, we'd take our buck rake, run down the windrows, back out, and make another load. We'd have buck wedges [small piles of hay] sitting all over the field. Sometimes we'd yard it in close if we were only going to use one team. If there were two of us working we'd just get a close one and a far one so we'd rest the horses. Picking the hay up out of the field, we'd come in with about a thousand pounds of hay and go up on the overshot stacker. Dick would do the stacking or sometimes he'd have to use two people. If we had it yarded in close, we could throw up two stacks a day, which is forty tons. That's a lot of hay for a man to try to push around, so we used two men. Alvin Madsen used to run the derrick; that's why I still call him Derrick. When we were haying at different places, one of the wives of the Smutz brothers--Mamma, Doris, or Thelma--cooked dinner. Generally, we ate at the place where we were haying, but, if we were at one place for five days and another for one, the wives would take turns so that they shared the cooking more or less equally.

Testing an Old Wives' Tale

I: Tell the story about dead rattlesnakes.

WS: We were haying at the Smythe Meadow the first year we owned it. At our house, we had torn out the board walk from behind our old porch out to the outhouse and had killed four rattlesnakes. We dumped them in a muffler box from the one of the tractors and set it by the front gate. We were all riding in a flatbed truck--four or five of us sitting on the back. We told Lynn to pull up in the front of our house, and I said, "Derrick, run up and grab that muffler box." He ran up and got it. Everybody knew there were supposed to be four rattlesnakes in it. Just about when we got even with the barn, Derrick dumped the box out on the flatbed of the truck, and, instead of four snakes, there were five! When we saw that, everybody on the truck jumped off. Lynn looked around and saw everybody leaping off the truck, landing on the gravel with their knees, and slammed on the brakes to see what was the matter. What we didn't know was that Grandpa Hopper had killed another snake and put it in the box. There is an old wives' tale that killing a rattlesnake and putting it in a container will cause live rattlesnakes to come to it. So we were sure that one of those snakes was alive. This time the only harm was skinned knees.

The End of Farming for the Smutz Family

I: Since you're no longer farming, why did you stop?

WS: I really enjoyed living and working on the ranch with Dad and my uncles. I especially enjoyed running the cows, riding, branding, haying--even delivering the calves. But when the freeway

[I-84] cut our property in half with no way to cross over or under it, Dad and I could see the writing on the wall: sell the land on the other side of the freeway and get another job or lose everything. We'd saved enough for Dad to live comfortably. My dad's dream had been to farm with me, but Dad was smarter than the average farmer; he decided the best plan was to sell.

I found a job immediately driving trucks for Inland Trucking. I had already driven trucks several winters for Pacific Intermountain Express and enjoyed it thoroughly. We hauled chips and shavings to the Boise Cascade particleboard plant and to the Wallula [in Washington State] paper plant. A year later Boise Cascade took over the trucking firm, and for some reason the new owners moved me up to number one seniority and I had a fabulous job--home almost every night and week-ends off. Changing careers was very good for all of us.

Endnote

Walter Smutz was diagnosed in the early 1990s with pulmonary fibrosis. In 1994, after treatments at Grande Ronde Hospital and in Portland, he learned that the disease was incurable. He asked to be allowed to die at his and his wife Dee Ann's home on Foothill Road, La Grande--in the house where he had lived for sixty-four years. He died in 1996.

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