

DOROTHY TRICE

Union County resident for 57 years

AN ORAL HISTORY



Interview in August, 2002
at her home in La Grande OR

Interviewer: Eugene Smith

UNION COUNTY, OREGON HISTORY PROJECT

2004

(revised from 2002)

UNION COUNTY, OREGON HISTORY PROJECT

An Affiliate of the Oregon Historical Society

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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 Interview and This Edited Version

The two-hour interview with Dorothy Trice took place at her kitchen table in her La Grande home. At age 76, Dorothy appears to be remarkably healthy, mentally and physically, and to be entirely self-sufficient. Eugene Smith was the interviewer on August 7, 2002.

Heather Pilling's full transcription (available for research purposes) presents the literal contents of the interview. The edited version presented here differs from the literal transcription in the following characteristics:

- 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.

DT designates Dorothy Trice's words, *I* the interviewer's.

CONTENTS

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Birth in Georgia | 1 |
| Coming to Oregon | 1 |
| Marriage | 3 |
| Childbearing & Other Work | 4 |
| Lucky Trice--Husband and Business Owner | 7 |
| Recreation | 7 |
| Attending Church | 8 |
| “Long-time LG resident recounts fascinating past” (article from <i>The Observer</i>) | 9 |
| Prostitution in La Grande | 11 |
| Sickness & Health | 13 |
| Children’s Education & Careers | 15 |
| Dorothy’s Activities Since Lucky’s Death | 16 |
| Dorothy’s Attitudes toward Race | 19 |
| Using a Computer | 22 |
| Deaths & Burials | 23 |
| Index | 25 |

Birth in Georgia

I: Please give me your full name, including your maiden name.

DT: My maiden name is Dorothy Johnson and my married name--Dorothy Trice.

I: Do you mind telling me when you were born?

DT: I was born September 12, 1926.

I: And where were you born?

DT: I was born in Veldasta, Georgia.

I: Is that a small town?

DT: Yes. It might be larger now, though. But it was a small town.

I: How long did you live there?

DT: Possibly about sixteen or seventeen years.

I: And then?



Dorothy in 1940

Photo courtesy of Dorothy Trice

DT: Then I went to Lake Placid, Florida and was there maybe two years. And from there to Oregon.

I: If you left when you were 16 or 17, had you been to high school?

DT: I went to high school, but I had not finished. I think I stopped in about the eighth grade.

I: Was it a segregated school?

DT: Yes.

I: Most schools were at that time, weren't they?

DT: Oh, yes. Many years.

I: Do you have any particular memories of what it was like in that school?

DT: Just that's what you're used to. You just go to school and you assume this is the way everybody is taught--just go to school and learn.

I: You don't have a trace of a southern accent now. I imagine you did at that time have an accent--what we call a southern accent.

DT: Yes. I guess over the years, you just sort of adapt--like if I was living in Germany or New York.

Coming to Oregon

I: Tell me about coming to Oregon. Did you come by yourself?

DT: Yes, I came alone after meeting my husband. He was stationed at Hendricks Field in Florida.

I: He was an airman?

DT: Yes.

I: Army or Navy?

DT: Army. I guess you call it the Air Force base at Hendricks Field.

I: Where's Hendricks Field?

DT: Hendricks Field is out from Sebring, Florida.

I: When did you marry him?

DT: After I came here.

I: Was it his idea to come here?

DT: For me to come here?

I: Yes.

DT: Yes. He sent for me to come here.

I: I guess you had better tell me where he had been before he was in the Air Force.

DT: He lived in Baker City and La Grande,



Lafayette "Lucky" Trice in 1943
Photo courtesy of Dorothy Trice

and he lived out Maxville [near Promise, Oregon, north of Enterprise] and Wallowa.

I: Had he grown up in this area?

DT: He was born, I think, in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. His dad and his brother were working for a sawmill back in Pine Bluff. Lucky's dad got word that men were needed at Bowman-Hicks Mill, so Lucky journeyed to Oregon.

I: Did he say anything to you at that time about whether he thought that racial attitudes might be healthier in the West?

DT: You mean when I met him? He was 22 years older than I was.

I: I mean, at the time that he proposed that you come out with him, did he say anything about what he had found concerning racial attitudes?

DT: No, not particularly. Just that he was thinking about a girlfriend coming out to Oregon.

I: So you first came to what place out here?

DT: Here in La Grande because he was living in La Grande in order to work at Bowman-Hicks. You see he was living in La Grande, and then he lived in Baker City. When he went to the military, he went from Baker City. His mother was living here in La Grande, so, when he came back from the army, he naturally came back to La Grande.

I: Do you remember your first impressions of La Grande?

DT: Yes. I had never seen snow and then I came here in November of '45.

I: How did you get here? What transportation?

DT: Train. When I got out, I saw all this snow. I hadn't seen snow before.

I: Did that please you or displease you?

DT: I just thought everything was exciting. Everything was different.

Marriage

I: Where were you married?

DT: We got married in Baker. At that time it was just Baker. Now it's Baker City.

I: Why there?

DT: Lucky lived in Baker City before going into the Army. He had friends there and got one friend as a witness to our marriage in Baker City.

I: Did he have a car to get you over to Baker?

DT: Yes. Of course, he must have had a car.

I: Then did you come back to La Grande right away?

DT: Oh yes, we got married and then we came on back to La Grande.

I: Where did you find a place to live in La Grande?

DT: His mother's house at 1303 Monroe must have been the first place we stayed. Later we moved into an apartment building on Fir--over Dave's Market, Dave Hutchison. It was right on the corner of Monroe and Fir.

I: One of the many neighborhood stores in La Grande at that time.

DT: Yes. It was a big building.

I: He continued to work at Bowman-Hicks?

DT: Oh, no. In fact, after he came back, there was a lot of time in between there because he was in the military then. He came back and then he bought Harry Patris's shoe shine parlor. He was a Greek. At 1212 1/2 Adams Avenue, he bought a shoe shine parlor. He also cleaned hats and sold candy and cigarettes.

I: Why do you think he wanted to do that after having worked in the lumber mill?

DT: I don't know what was going on at the mill then, but he'd see these places for sale. Harry wanted to get rid of his store, so Lucky just bought it.

I: Was it maybe partly that he liked the idea of working for himself rather than for somebody else?

DT: Yes, that sounds like it would because, before he went into the military, in Baker, he had something he called a car wash, where he steamed out these big tanks.

I: Railroad cars?

DT: No, no. I didn't see this; this is what he told me. He would clean out big tanks. I don't know what was in the tanks--whether gasoline or something else. I just presumed it was a truck. He was doing that, and also he worked at two or three jobs. I think he said he worked at Lee's Chinese restaurant, doing dishes there. Also they had a chuck wagon or something; he cleaned up there. He was always doing jobs like that.

So when he came back here, where his mom was living, he bought the shoe shine place and was blocking hats. The Greek person had agreed that he'd like to come in and spend an hour there every day. That's what was happening when I came in 1945.

I: If you came in 1945, have you lived the entire 57 years in La Grande?

DT: Yes.

I: So you have a lot to say, I think, about how you have experienced La Grande and Union County. With that long a residence here, you've seen quite a variety of events.

DT: Of changes, yes.

I: Do you want to mention any particular event that stands out in your mind, either good or bad?

DT: Just ask me a question.

I: Sure, I was just giving you a chance to tell me anything that you thought was significant about your experience here. I'll ask you questions then.

DT: All right.

I: If you were in the apartment above the grocery and Lucky ... Is that what he preferred to be called always?

DT: Yes.

I: What was his actual name?

DT: His name was Lafayette, so you can see why they ...

I: Lafayette Trice. Did he have a middle name?

DT: No, they more or less called him Lucky. He liked to play poker. I don't know whether they named him that in the poker game or what, but they called him Lucky. Even [the sign] on his shoe shine place had "Lucky's," [and the sign] on his furnace cleaning truck had "Lucky's."

I: That made it a well known name around La Grande.

DT: Yes. Not Lafayette.

I: What did you do with your time during those first few years after you were married?

Childbearing & Other Work

DT: Let's see. We have seven kids.

I: I see what you were doing with your time.

DT: Yes, that's the time I was taking up with kids.

I: What spacing with those kids?

DT: Most of them were two years apart--born in 1948, 1949, 1952, 1954, 1956, 1958, and 1960.

I: With that many children, I don't suppose you stayed in the apartment very long.

DT: No, we didn't stay there. I don't know how long we lived there. But then we bought our first home on this street, which is Madison, but it was two blocks down--1309, I think.

I: Did you decide to buy a house there because you particularly wanted to live at that place, because of the price, or

- because you might have been unable to purchase anywhere else in town?
- DT: My mother-in-law was already living in that block, where we were living in the apartment. When this house came available, my husband knew the people that owned it. He's the one [who] made the deal for the house. The people that owned the house were living someplace else. My husband knew them and he just felt like this was a good deal, and he bought the house.
- I: Were there a number of other black families in that area?
- DT: In the 1300 block on Monroe and the street right behind it, Madison, we had a few blacks, yes.
- I: In many American cities and towns all the way through the '40s and '50s racial discrimination in housing was common. Do you think that was true here?
- DT: I would say that I believe it to be so, but in our case, this house was available and so we got it. We made the down payment, whatever it was, and then we paid it monthly until we got it paid out.
- I: So in that case, apparently, you didn't feel any discrimination because you weren't trying to buy a house some place else in La Grande.
- DT: Right. My husband had never owned a house. He'd always just figured all he needed was a car when he didn't have a wife or any kids. So we got that place. And later years then we moved up here [to my present house].
- I: During those years that you were bearing children rapidly, where did you do your shopping for food and clothing and other things you needed?
- DT: I more or less went to the corner store, which was Hub City Foods store. We went and got food and my husband paid them once a month.
- I: Was Hub City Foods where the Presbyterian Church Friendship Hall is now?
- DT: At first Hub City Foods was down here where Achilles is--the deli. Then they moved up to Chris's Foods, which used to be where Hub City took over. And then after Hub City moved, we moved our account up to Hub City. Anything we wanted I went and got it and he paid monthly for it. We did shop at Safeway, too, and the clothing stores--J.C. Penney's and Ward's.
- I: Was his income sufficient, in your opinion, to maintain a large family?
- DT: We paid the bills and lived on what he made--no frills. He took care of everything. I was just like one of the kids. I got the food, and he paid the bills. Even with the light bill and the water bill he would go every month and pay them himself--ours and his mother's. [Besides] the shoe shine place on Adams we got janitor work at West and Siegrist in the West Jacobson building. We cleaned that building.
- I: At night?
- DT: Yes, cleaned it every evening. At that time Sid Burleigh, Carl Helm, and Dixon were the lawyers that rented the building that we cleaned. We would clean that every night and on the week-ends.
- I: Would you tell me a little more detail

about exactly what you did when you cleaned that building?

DT: OK, we'd go up every evening with a dust mop and do the floors and empty the garbage. And wipe around so you don't disturb their papers. You just sort of tidied up.

I: Dusting?

DT: Yes, dusting.

I: Windows?

DT: Yes, he did them for a while until he decided he wasn't going out there anymore [laughs] on the ledges because they were upstairs.

I: He had to climb out the window?

DT: Yes. Anyway, that's what we would do every night. And then on the weekends we would buff the floor. And all of the offices had the same restroom so we'd do that. We got paid once a month. I don't know what we got paid.

I: How long did it take you each night to do those jobs? Two hours? More?

DT: Really, really, I don't remember. It's been so many years ago I had forgotten we had done that work there.

I: What happened to the children when you were both gone?

DT: Usually, we'd take the kids with us because we didn't have them all at one time.

I: You'd just find a room to put the children in to play while you worked?

DT: Usually the oldest child would entertain and be in charge of the younger ones.

I: So you must have had keys to the building.

DT: Yes, he had keys to the building.

I: Did you carry all of your cleaning equipment with you each time, or did you have a place to leave it in the building?

DT: No, they furnished the supplies. They even had the vacuum and a buffer.

I: Were any of the people who used the offices around when you were doing the cleaning?

DT: Sometimes they'd come, but usually we would schedule it to go in the evening. And usually in the evening they were glad to get out of there. Sometimes on Saturdays we'd go up there after one o'clock. Sometimes somebody would come up to work a little. We'd just work around till they left.

I: Do you remember having any conversations with those people?

DT: No. My husband knew everyone so he knew them, but then I didn't have any conversation with them.

I: What did he tell you about why you should go and help him do that work?

DT: I don't know whether he even said why. We just had to work and you're partners. Maybe your husband might decide it's your job to cook, and I might feel like you could help, too. But we just worked together.

I: I suppose you had the feeling that you really needed to do it because you needed the money.

DT: I suppose that was it because he was paying all the bills and taking care of the business, writing the checks. It was later years that I got to write the checks.

Lucky Trice--Husband and Business Owner

I: You said Lucky knew everybody. Tell me about his personality. He must have been a very likeable man.

DT: Yes. He knew people sometimes without asking them. Everybody said, "Hi, Lucky. Hi, Lucky," and I would say "Who is that?" He said, "Really, I don't know his name, but I know where he works"--or something similar. Everybody didn't get shined, but people came in. That's how they know you. At that time, at Graham's Drugstore they would sometimes have coffee in the mornings. He'd come through the drug store.

I: Did he open the shop by eight o'clock each day?

DT: Possibly did.

I: Do you remember how many shoes a day he said he might have shined?

DT: No, I don't remember that, but when he bought it, after he got out of the military, everybody was getting their shoes shined. Everybody wore leather shoes; they didn't wear tennis shoes like they do now. There were times that I would come in while he was cleaning hats and I would shine shoes. And there were times, if he went someplace or to clean furnaces, I would go open the place. After Harry left, I would go in and shine the shoes. I do know that during the summer, when the kids got big enough, maybe

one or two of them stayed there and shined the shoes and then the other went to work with him on the truck. I don't know concerning the bookwork because he did all of that. As time passed, less people were getting a shoe shine because they wore tennis shoes.

I: What else besides hat cleaning and blocking did he do in that shop?

DT: Besides selling candy and cigarettes and things like that, he would block the hats at night. Then people would come in there while it was open in the day to pick up the hat. So he did that for awhile. And then some fellow--Frank Thomas, I think it was--moved in there with a barber shop for a while. I don't know how long it was.

I: Was Frank Thomas a black man?

DT: No. He was Austrian or Greek.

I: Do you remember how long Lucky operated that store?

DT: No, I don't know how many years--never even gave it a thought. But I do know that he started ordering Kawasaki motorcycles from somewhere and then selling them from there. I don't know why he decided to move to the corner of Fir and Jefferson and rented that. I think it was from Zimmerman. At that time he had gotten a slot car track--those little cars--and a snooker table, a pool table, and he still had part of the shoe shine shop there.

Recreation

I: What did you do for entertainment or recreation?

DT: Not much. We went fishing with the kids.

I: Where did you go fishing?
DT: Owyhee Dam. During the week some ladies and I would go to the sloughs around Alicel. We'd get perch. We'd go to church and go to the movies.

I: Which church?

Attending Church

DT: I've always gone to the Baptist Church on T Avenue, 1300 T. Back when I came here it was going, and so that's where I have gone most of the time.

I: Has the congregation increased or decreased in size?

DT: Decreased. When I first came here, I was about the youngest adult and now it's down to zero almost and I'm the oldest. Many have died or moved away.

I: There are fewer black families living here now than when you came, aren't there?

DT: Oh, yes. There are people that I don't

know--younger people. But when I came, there were quite a few.

I: At the time you first started going and maybe for the first few years, did the church have a regular minister, a full-time minister?

DT: No, we had a minister that would come once or twice a month. It was Reverend D.D. Banks; he lived in Walla Walla. It was either he or he would send another minister to come either from Walla Walla or Hermiston or Pasco.

I: What's the situation now with a minister?

DT: The last minister we had lived at Hermiston and he would come once a month on Sunday. He was as old as we are, or older, and he had vision problems. He'd lost one eye so he doesn't come anymore; he gave up the job due to ill health. We have another woman that lives in La Grande. She comes to the church once a month. So really we're just sort of keeping the doors open--sort of like a mission.

I: Are there any other activities during the rest of the month?

DT: Usually every Sunday we meet for Sunday School--devotion. And then the third Sunday Rebecca comes. I think she is associate pastor to Bread of Life church on Cove Avenue.

I: In the earlier days were there other activities?

DT: Yes, there were. At least 3 nights a week, we used to have mission group prayer and choir rehearsal, and we'd have Sunday School in the morning, 11:00 service, and then a young people's service. Sometimes we'd have a speaker that night.



Lucky Trice ca. 1983
Original courtesy of Dorothy Trice

continued on p. 11

Long-time LG resident recounts fascinating past

(article by Steve Stuebner, reporter for *The Observer*, January 26, 1982--
reprinted with permission of *The Observer*)

Lucky Trice is a guy who has been around.

In fact, he has been around for almost 80 years, and during that time, he has done more things than most people could do in two lifetimes. And Lucky isn't ready to quit.

Although glaucoma has claimed most of his vision and a recent heart attack has slowed him down, he still walks more than a mile a day and remains active in the Oregon Steelheaders Association, an organization he started in 1975.

Fishing and other outdoor recreation activities, however, are only a few of a multitude of activities in which Lucky has participated. At one time or another, Lucky has been a logger, truck driver, shoe shiner, furnace cleaner, train engineer, chauffeur, amateur baseball player, amateur boxer, U.S. Army sergeant, private businessman and father.

Born on September 16th, 1903, to Arthur and Ella Trice, in Pine Bluff, Ark., Lafayette Trice grew up in a logging camp. Between watching his father work the various kinds of machinery and roaming the woods, Lucky and other children in the camp kept themselves busy.

When the United States entered World War I in 1917, the camp's working men left to fight, leaving the children to run the equipment. "I could run it all," Lucky said. "I'd watched my dad do it when I was little. I had experience."

So the kids took over. Lucky operated a steam log loader until 1921, when he moved to Shreveport, La., to work in a flooring mill. He also helped build the first Shriners hospital in the country in 1922.

Then Lucky's father received word that log-gers were needed near Wallowa, Oregon, and they left for there in 1924.

"My father brought the first group of blacks out here," Lucky said.

Being among the first black people in Eastern Oregon wasn't a problem for Lucky, however. "I knew how to use these," he said, raising his hands, or mitts, some people might say.

"A guy had to get his hands on me to whip me."

Unfortunately for one white boy, somebody tried. "I gave the kid a real whipping. I knocked a few teeth out," Lucky recalled. "I didn't have a problem ever since."

Lucky, who got his nickname from winning poker games, and his father worked for Bowman-Hicks Lumber Co. in Promise, 16 miles north of Wallowa.

A couple years later, in 1927, Lucky and other workers got laid off. But someone came looking for Lucky with a new job. It was Dr. Phy, who owned and operated the Hot Lake Hotel and was looking for a chauffeur.

"He knew I could drive--there weren't many people who could drive back then," he said.

But the job brought more than a position behind the wheel. A friend of Dr. Phy's recognized Lucky's baseball pitching talent and took him to Yreka, Calif., to play amateur ball.

Lucky played baseball during the summer and then boxed in the "L-St" gym in Sacramento during the winter. "I never lost a fight," he said.

In 1929, Lucky came back to work as a logger in Wallowa until the operation shut down a year or so later. Then in 1935, logging outfits started transporting logs by truck instead of train. So Lucky bought himself a truck.

Lucky always enjoyed driving. "People would say, 'Watch out for that black man in the black Ford,'" he said.

Once his truck's brakes failed on the way into Elgin. The bridge on the east side of town was under construction at that time and men were busy at work. "I was going

Long-time LG resident continued from p. 9

so fast that I made the engineer jump into the river," he said, leaning back into a couch in laughter.

Several years later, the world was again at war, and Lucky wanted to go. "I was 39 years old--too old, but I got in anyways," he said.

Nearly 20 years older than his fellow soldiers, Lucky passed basic training in flying colors. "I was in a lot better shape than most of those kids," he insisted. In a short time, he made corporal, then sergeant.

Lucky also learned how to fly in the army. While attending flight school in Florida, Lucky finally found time for women. He met Dorothy in 1944, who is 23 years his junior. In 1945, he brought Dorothy, a Georgia native, back to La Grande where he would marry her in the next year.

In the ensuing years, Lucky would start a furnace cleaning business, shoe shining business, janitorial service, and he would own a coal yard and open a youth center.

"It was the best one in the state of Oregon," he said of the center. "We had a slot car track, pool tables, a bowling machine--we had everything."

The track was 218 ft. long and race cars sped up to 90 miles per hour around the track, he said.

The Trices had their first child, Lafayette Jr., in March 1948. They would have six more in approximately two-year intervals.

In addition to work, Lucky spent much of his time recreating, which included flying airplanes.

"I loved to fly," he said, recounting several memorable flights. Twice he was high up in the air and the engine failed.

One of those times he had his wife and mother with him. "I was up at 7,500 ft. and the engine quit," he said. "So I spotted a water hole and kept up enough speed by doing spirals. I looked close so that I didn't land in any squirrel holes."

Lucky brought the plane down without incident. The second time, "I made a three-point landing on the old highway," he said.

Lucky always has fished and hunted, ever since he was old enough to shoot a gun and hold a fishing pole. In Arkansas, "we would fish during the day and hunt at night. We only caught enough to eat."

Once in Oregon, Lucky hunted in Wallowa County until his kids grew up, and then he took them into the headwaters of Catherine Creek. Lucky has many favorite fishing spots. "I've fished for steelhead in the Deschutes and Clearwater (rivers) and for salmon in the Willamette and Columbia."

Lucky said he felt he had an obligation to teach his kids, at least his boys, how to hunt and fish. "I had to teach them how to do it--I felt they should know how to do it, and to do it right."

Lucky won many honors for the great strides he has made in this area in conservation. He received a special award from the Isaac Walton League for the Oregon Steelheaders Association's work at Thief Valley Reservoir.

And most recently, he was honored by the state Marine Board for his idea of barging salmon down the Columbia River.

With all of his talents, Lucky has had many offers. A Portland television station, for example, offered him a job as a helicopter pilot. "But I wasn't going to raise my kids in a city--there's too many people."

La Grande is obviously Lucky's home. "I started out in La Grande ... I've buried people here. I'm not going to go off and leave them," he said.

And after leading such an active life, Lucky's ailing health doesn't bother him. "At this age, you just play it by ear. As long as I can go fishing, I feel relaxed.

"What's going to happen is going to happen, and it's going to happen when it's going to happen and I can't do anything about it ...

"But I'm not going to hurry it any."

I: Were there any events that you'd call purely social, like dinners?

DT: Yes. Occasionally we would go to Pendleton or Hermiston. They called it the Helping Hand. Our group would be at this church, and then that group would come here and help. We had some friends at Mountain Home [Idaho] and the whole group once came--a busload of them--just to sing and have a good visit--fellowship. The Wilfongs were members of the church; he died.

Some of my kids--I guess three of them--would go to daily summer-vacation Bible school. Then they started attending the First Baptist church downtown [at 6th & Spring]. I would take my kids to that church in the mornings and pick them up after it was over with. Then I would go to my church over here.

I: Why didn't you want to go to the First Baptist church also?

DT: I don't know because really my membership was there. I was baptized in that church--First Baptist Church. I had friends up there. For daily vacation Bible school up at the First Baptist, I just said to my kids, "Now you guys go to school. It was my idea you guys go to school with these kids." Someone said to me that I shouldn't be sending my kids to Sunday school up there. "What's wrong with the Sunday school over here?"

I: What did you say to them?

DT: I don't remember, but I can understand the feeling there, too. They went to [public] school with these kids, and over here [north side of La Grande] there weren't a lot of kids my kids' age. So usually here the Sunday

school was for adults. My kids didn't mind it, so then I sent them as long as I could. After they got to a certain age, they'd say, "Why do we have to go to church?" I said, "You go there that 1 hour, and then after that you can hang out. You're not going to be doing that much anyway."

I: Did you tell them you thought that being in Sunday school would be good for them?

DT: Yes, I told them, "At least you're putting in an hour at the church, and you're learning about the Lord. If your dad's going fishing, then you don't have to go that day. You go with Dad. Or if he's going hunting, then you go with him."

I: Do you mean that Lucky wasn't much on church?

DT: No, he wasn't. Occasionally he'd go. When our daughter was baptized or something [like that], he'd go.

I: Just special events.

DT: Yes, special events. But before he died he was just lying around thinking, and a friend would come by and talk to him about the Lord. When I came back from wherever I was that day, he had accepted the Lord. After that we talked about the Bible to him. But sometimes he wouldn't want to hear it.

Prostitution in La Grande

I: Does the name Joanne Douglas mean anything to you?

DT: No. Who is Joanne Douglas?

I: According to a man who has lived in La Grande for a long time, she was the madam at a brothel.

DT: Joanne, Joanne. Let's see. Yes, I didn't know her last name. Joanne. Yes, I know where that was because my mom worked with Joanne. My husband sent for my mother to come here because the lady that they had working for her [at the brothel] wasn't working for her anymore. So my husband sent for my mom, who was living in Lake Placid, Florida. My mom came out here to work for Joanne.

The brothel wasn't open too long before they closed it down again. So then my mom had to get work elsewhere. It seemed like another woman came and tried to run it a little while, and they closed it down for good.

I: Would it embarrass you to tell me what you heard about what it's like to work in a brothel? If it would embarrass you, don't tell me.

DT: Really, I guess maybe my mom didn't know that much. Whatever she was paid to do, she did it. She'd do their laundry--bring the laundry and do it here and then take it back up there. It was upstairs. I don't remember her talking that much about it, though. She just said they're nice people--Joanne. Working at a place like that, Joanne knew everybody in town.

I: Joanne was white?

DT: Sure, she was white. At that time you could take a plane--maybe you still can--out here [at the La Grande airport]. Wherever they [the prostitutes] lived, they'd go there and take a plane and go home. The girls who did the work had families. I guess I must have taken them because my mom didn't have a car then.

Before my mom I knew another lady that had worked there.

I: You mean did cleaning work.

DT: Yes, not actually doing the servicing of the fellows. No, she'd just do the cleaning.

I: You think those women had families elsewhere?

DT: Oh, sure, they did! They had families elsewhere like all of them you see on television; they have families somewhere. When they get done working, they go home. They make money and take care of their families. Some of them have husbands, too.

I: Do you think that most of these women who did the servicing, as you put it, were white?

DT: I know they were because, if there had been black women up there, my mom would have said something about it. They were all white girls.

I: What was the location at that time?

DT: Of the place that they ran? It was on Adams Avenue. You would go in on the alley off Depot Street, next to the Red Cross Drug. You turn there, and then you just go right around and park your car. Then they'd go up the stairs.

I: The stairs entered from the alley?

DT: Yes.

I: Do you think that at the time prostitution was known about?

DT: Do I think it was known about? People had to know about it for them to stay in business. They had to know about it for them to close it down. I don't know who their doctors were, but my husband was saying, "Really, those women are safer than a woman

you meet on the street because they have to go to the doctor.”

Sickness & Health

I: Was Lucky ill for a long time before he died?

DT: I would say he was because he had asthma--bronchial asthma--and glaucoma. He had lost vision in one eye. I would have to lead him around--take him wherever he'd have to go. Sometimes the bronchial asthma sort of gets you down.

I: Was he getting medical attention?

DT: Oh, yes, he took medicine--definitely the last year.

I: How did you handle the need for a doctor?

DT: He was on Medicare.

I: And how about you? You've been healthy all the time?

DT: No, I've had sickness.

I: Requiring hospitalization?

DT: Yes, several times.

I: Were you satisfied with the treatment you got in the hospital?

DT: Yes. Every time I was at the hospital, I was satisfied with the treatment they gave me.

Children's Education & Careers

I: Your children: during the elementary school years did they go to Greenwood School?

DT: Yes, all of them went to Greenwood.

I: Tell me what you remember about what they said about school or what you knew directly about that school.

DT: I guess there wasn't any problem at the school, as I can remember. They just went to school--no big deals.

I: Did they ever complain about how they were treated--any more than any kids ever do?

DT: No. My kids have always liked to go to school. And it's possibly because, if they stayed home, they had to work. Even if they were sick, they'd try to get out of here and go to school. So I guess the school was pretty good. I told my daughter that there might be some little girls that won't want to play with her because she was "different." I said, "But then if that one doesn't want to, there's always somebody else that will want to play." So she didn't seem to have any problem because everybody, as far as I know, just got along OK.

I: Did Greenwood have the largest popu-



Gwen Trice in 1970
Original courtesy of Dorothy Trice

lation of all the city schools of black children?

DT: I believe so because right in this area is where the most of the blacks lived.

I: Maybe that made it better for them.

DT: I don't know because kids usually have white friends and black friends.

I: Were there ever, during the times that your children went to Greenwood, any black teachers?

DT: No, I don't think any.

I: Or at any other La Grande school?

DT: I remember an African man at the high school when my kids were going there. Really, they haven't had many black teachers. I think if they had lived here, I would have heard about them.

I: Did you ever hear anything about black teachers in Baker or Pendleton or Hermiston or Walla Walla or any other places around here?

DT: No, I never heard of any in Baker. I don't know if there were or not in Pendleton either. I wouldn't know about those places.

I: How did your children--I suppose it varied with the child--fare in junior high and senior high?

DT: Each one was different. It seemed with the boys they always had friends. But when it comes to girls--boys and girls like each other--there was sort of a boundary there with the white kids' parents. My oldest daughter, when she went to junior high, was in 4-H and Future Homemakers. Usually the girls were friendly; they'd sew and have competition and all of that. There didn't seem to be any problems. She was outgoing, and she'd spend the night with some of the girls and girls would spend the night with her.

But in some cases it was different. My niece, who lived next door, would spend the night with a doctor's family --out in the country somewhere--and this girl would come spend the night with her. Then there was another girl my niece was telling me about; I think she was Seventh-Day Adventist, and her parents had different ideas about associating--being too close with black men--and concerned about what people would say. I know one of the girls was in cheerleading, starting at Greenwood. Her white friend's mom said that, if my daughter got the leading part, she would let my daughter be



Doug Trice featured in La Grande High School newspaper, late 1960s
Original courtesy of Dorothy Trice

According to an article in *The Oregonian*, 12/6/73, Doug's high school coach was Doc Savage, who was quoted as saying, "Doug has the kind of attitude that is rare to find in a man. He is very dedicated. He is a rapid learner when it comes to athletics and it has carried over to the classroom. I'm not saying there isn't discrimination in La Grande. There isn't discrimination against Doug Trice."

a cheerleader. Her mom had also told her, "Anytime she wants to come to your house, it's fine, but you can't go to her house." It didn't mean anything to Jackie, my daughter, but it did to me because I knew where she was coming from and my daughter didn't. I still remember it today; later I was talking to my daughter about it and she didn't remember anything. So that's the way it was with her--just slid off the top of her head.

I: How did it make you feel at that time?

DT: Just like it did when she started to school--that all the kids, all the parents, are going to feel this way. I know it's there, because of history. So you can't deny that it wasn't there.

I: When the boys were in high school, did they participate in athletics?

DT: Yes. The first was in Little League ball and then they were in track, football, and basketball.

I: Were they good at all those activities?

DT: Not necessarily good, but they were in them.

I: They were on the teams?

DT: Yes, they were on the team. I think Doug made varsity; David did maybe. They took part in sports because they liked activities.

I: How did they do academically?

DT: Doug went to Western Oregon College--Monmouth--and graduated from there. He was into recreation or coaching or something. He was offered a job in math and he wouldn't take it. I think it was in The Dalles.

I: Teaching?

DT: Yes, teaching math, but he wouldn't take it. The people [school administrators] knew him because they had gone to school with him. They agreed to help him, but he wouldn't take it because he said, "I don't know math and I'm not going there." So really all he did was substitute teach.

My son Arthur went to Eastern Oregon College for a little while and dropped out. David decided he didn't want to go. My oldest son went to Oregon State and later he got into ROTC. He



Trice Family in August, 2001
Photo courtesy of Dorothy Trice

just retired from the military and is still in Leavenworth, Kansas.

I: Did he become an officer?

DT: Oh, yes. He went in as an officer and became a major. But after so many years, I think he said, you either go up or you go out. They didn't need him, so that was what he did.

One of my daughters just got her bachelor's degree in June [2002]. She was into nursing and had been working at the Veterans' Hospital in Seattle-- seems like fifteen years. She decided that she was going to go farther. She said she hoped that she could get a master's degree. In fact, I have three children living in the Seattle area. David lives there and drives the bus for Metro. I have another daughter living at Renton. She worked at Boeing for about twenty years. She got laid off last December. So now she's going to Bellevue; when you get laid off, they give you something to help retrain you.

My son Doug, who went to Western Oregon College, works for the railroad now.

I: What does he do?

DT: He's a brakeman. So he goes to Hinkle and sometimes he goes east. He goes to Ontario. What's the other place?

I: Huntington?

DT: Nampa.

I: Has he talked about any kind of discrimination he's experienced on the railroad?

DT: No, he's not a talker either so really he doesn't. But he did talk to his daugh-

ter to let her know because he married a white woman. So he just was letting her know about life and that everyone's not going to feel the same.

I: Is the white woman that he married from La Grande?

DT: No, she lived at Salem. They're not together now. They were together about seventeen years. She still lives here.

I: Does he live here also?

DT: Yes.

I: Did he remarry?

DT: Nor she. They have a couple of kids so they still live here.

Dorothy's Activities Since Lucky's Death

I: Has reading been an activity you've enjoyed?

DT: Sort of.

I: Do you read *The Observer*?

DT: Oh yes. I take that, read that. And then I read *Reader's Digest* and *Guidenposts*. I can get that in the big print, which makes it better.

I: Your eyes keep you from reading comfortably?

DT: I think they're going to be better because I just had cataract surgery a couple of weeks ago. Next week I'm having the other eye done.

I: That should help a great deal.

DT: Yes. I don't know how many years ago it was that I got my GED [General
continued on p. 18

One of Dorothy's grandsons, Eric Trice, son of Arthur Trice, graduated from La Grande High School in 1990. After years of playing baseball with Little League and other La Grande teams, he was drafted by the Cleveland Indians. He opted instead to become a student at the University of Oregon. Two years later, the New York Yankees drafted him in their amateur player draft, but, again, he chose to be a U.O. student, while continuing to play in the Northwest Collegiate Baseball League.

Baseball prospect turns prosecutor



The Gresham Observer/REPORTER

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD: Eric Trice, Gresham's new neighborhood district attorney, helps officers determine whether to prosecute a case and whether additional charges should be filed. He also helps residents in legal matters, such as getting their property returned.

“

I decided I was getting too old to play sports. I just wanted a solid education.

”

Eric Trice, Dorothy's grandson, an attorney practicing in Gresham OR
[from an article in *The Observer*, 2/23-24/02]

Education Diploma for high school equivalency]. I guess I started in 1985 or '86. I got that because I was thinking, after my husband died, that I was going to have to get a job. My daughter said, "You don't have a high school education. You're going to have to have it." (She had worked at the telephone company here at that time they had a switchboard.) So then I thought, "I'll get my GED." I did get it, but then I really didn't go after a job.

A friend talked to me and said, "Let's sign up for a class at the college." After you're sixty-five, you can take this learning without getting any credit. I thought I'd take vocabulary and reading improvement and also writing. I knew I shouldn't have been on the writing class, but, anyway, that seemed like the easiest, and so that is what I took. To me it was just a fun thing. My husband was gone and the kids were gone, so that I could sit here and study.

I: Tell me a little more about the GED process.

DT: At the time I went to GED, they had it up at the Joseph Building [in La Grande]. The first time I went in there they gave me a little book to check so they'll know where to place you. I saw all this stuff like fractions, and I remembered this was what they were doing when I left school--the eighth grade. After looking at that, I thought, "Some of this I don't even remember." And so I thought, "I don't have to do this. I could just take this paper back up there and walk out." I thought about it a long time. I said, "I don't have to do this." Anyway, I did it.

I: Were you a little afraid?

DT: Yes. I said, "I don't have to do this. I

don't have to study. I don't have to do this now. I can just go home and not worry about this." But anyway, I went ahead with it and got the little book, and the woman at the GED office said, "You take it home and do what you can. Then you bring it back and we'll work from there." That was what I did. We worked a while and then on channel 13 they had a broadcast concerning the GED; they said, "If you're having problems, call this number." See, with this class you had to read sometimes ten or fifteen pages to be ready for the next day. And they had this math and I wasn't getting that; it was simple, but I wasn't getting it. So then I called this number. They connected me with a person that would help me. After I got acquainted with her, we've been friends ever since. So I did get my GED.

And then on top of that she was a volunteer for the Labach method of reading, so we went that route--the phonics and all that. I didn't know anything about phonics and so I just got to studying. I'd go to this gal's house for two hours--twice a week. First it was one hour. Anyway, I got through with that, when she suggested, "Why don't we take this class?" [at EOC] So I jumped into that--here alone so nothing was keeping me from studying. I could sleep all day and study all night if I wanted to. Some of the teachers said, "Really, we don't know where to place you with this group because you know this, but you don't know this so you fall through the cracks somewhere." I went along with them till I got this other person that was a tutor. That way, if I didn't understand, I could just ask, "Show me this. What do you do?"

I: The GED includes some science and history subjects, doesn't it?

DT: Yes.

I: How did you make out with those?

DT: I passed it. I had to go over to Island City--the place to take the test. I passed and I have a certificate. It's good I got it then because they've added something else to it. You have to write a paper, so I guess if I had to write a paper I would have gotten some help in writing, too.

I: What are some of your activities now?

DT: I go to water aerobics now.

I: Have you done that for many years?

DT: Yes, for a lot of years. I try to go to water aerobics every day even now.

I: What got you started on that?

DT: For a lot of years I couldn't swim, so then I took my kids out to the pool here in town--the municipal pool--where some of them learned to swim. Then when they had the adult class, I got up there and I learned--somewhat. When they had the college pool, I went with a friend up there and, after I knew where to go then, I just started going up there alone. I'm not a good swimmer, but I could swim across and then rest and swim back across. [laughs]

I: Has that been a friendly place while you've been there?

DT: Yes, it's one of the friendliest places I know of. We talk about everything from recipes to losing the phone and can't find it or getting these marketeer calls and all of that. Most of us are in the same age group--some young women, sometimes college kids. Usually the things I go to are mostly friendly. Years ago I bowled, so I

started back bowling again with the seniors. And then I go clogging.

I: What made you want to start clogging?

DT: I had a friend that was doing it and she talked me into it. After I got into it, I've just enjoyed the country music. Later she got out; I'm still going, but, if they weren't friendly, I wouldn't go. Many times I'd go to something and I wouldn't even say anything to anyone. If they don't talk, I don't talk. As I've gotten older, I've gotten away from not talking. My daughter, when she was going to school, said, "Mama, why don't you sit and talk with the ladies?" I said, "I'm OK." Part of this, I guess, was coming from the South. You know, when you're in Rome, you do what the Romans do. In the South it's a different ballgame--or was then. I don't know how it is now. That was a lot of years ago. But pretty soon people start talking, you start talking back, and you find that it's easy. We're on neutral ground.

Dorothy's Attitudes toward Race

I: Were you concluding that, if a white man or woman didn't talk to you, that probably meant that he or she didn't want to have anything to do with black people?

DT: Living in the South, if people talked to me, then I would talk. If they didn't, I wouldn't start a conversation.

I: Is that like "knowing your place"?

DT: Maybe. When I first came here my husband had these friends--white friends--at Union [Oregon]. We'd go out there to visit and he was talking his head off. If they talked to me, I would talk to them. Everybody's different because I had this other black friend, Marian, who talked to everybody.

Once they were discussing me, and she said, "Dorothy doesn't talk that much." So Marian said, "Once she gets to know you, she will." And so that's what happened--once you get to know that people are friendly. Sometimes you just play it safe. You go a place and sit where you feel comfortable. Maybe there might be a group of Japanese over there and you might feel, "I'll sit over here." Or there might be a group of blacks sitting there and I might not sit by them. But if I saw somebody my age, then I'd probably sit by them.

I: Have you gotten to the point that you simply accept that that is the way some people feel?

DT: Sure. And they can't help the way they do like I can't help the way I feel. If I don't like somebody, you can't make me. I'll treat them nice, but that's all you can do--just treat them nice. I can't make them like me. Sometimes something does happen to change that person, but then I can't do that.

I: Is resentment a part of your feeling?

DT: No, I don't feel like I have a resentment right now about anybody.

I: You seem very accepting.

DT: Yes, because for survival you go around it. You don't like everything, so you say, "Well, big deal." But everybody doesn't feel the same.

I: Has it ever been your desire to return to the South for a visit?

DT: I did go back. I took my son--after I was married and had a son--before he was a year old. I went because my mother was there and my grandmother was in Jacksonville, Florida. Later my grandmother and other relatives came here so I don't know if I would be interested in anybody back there now.

I: Do you remember any particular reaction to returning to the South? Did it seem much the same as when you had left?

DT: If you ever lived there, you know the customs, so you just go by the customs. The bus station had a big sign that said "colored." You see all of the colored people there, so that's where you go and so you don't go blundering into the other one [in the waiting area] and hear someone say, "What's wrong with you?"

I: And that's the way it was when you came back to visit?

DT: Yes, I'm quite sure it was "colored" when I went back by train.

I: That was still the 1940s, wasn't it?

DT: Yes, about '49 or '50. It hadn't changed that much.

I: The South started changing in the '60s.

DT: My mom and I went to see my brother because he had a nervous breakdown. So we went to Tampa. We flew there. Some of his friends picked us up and we stayed at a friend's house. Usually when you go there you stay around with people you know. And they take you where you need to go.

I: Later in the '60s when you heard or read about Rosa Parks [black woman in Alabama, who, in 1960s refused to go to back of city bus], for example, did you have any reaction to what she did?

DT: I guess not because, after living back

there, I do know the signs, “The colored to the rear.” So you go there and that’s where you sit.

I: But she decided she wasn’t going to go by that.

DT: She was tired, yes. Sometimes that can happen. You just said, “The heck with it. Whatever happens happens.” Of course, some people have to be talked into it. She just said, “I’ve worked all day and I’m gonna sit here.” In that case one person did make a difference. But then everyone doesn’t think like she did.

I: From what you’ve said, I guess, if you had been living in the South all the time, you wouldn’t have done what she did.

DT: I probably wouldn’t have.

I: But do you think it’s a good thing that she did do what she did?

DT: Yes, it is. It did make a difference.

I: Made things better on the whole, would you say?

DT: Sure. Because after that, just reading about a lot of things there gave people the courage to stand. Sometimes it might cost something. Many times, like when they decide to boycott and since they couldn’t ride as first-class citizens, they’d carpool or do something different. With a lot of people, if it’s going to hurt you and you’re working for someone, then you try as long as you can not to take part in it because you need that job.

I: Don’t rock the boat.

DT: Yes, right. Don’t rock the boat. Really in some cases it’s survival. Some people say, “I’m not gonna have any part of this. It’s just me and my wife and I don’t want to get hurt.” So they take another route. There are people like that now. You go home where you belong.

Sitting at the counters there: by doing that the people see that everybody is not alike. “They’re troublemakers.” There can be troublemakers in every corner. So you have to make a decision. Everybody’s not alike. You might meet someone who says, “I didn’t know they were like that.” So you take a chance. Same thing with me. But I can’t say everybody’s like that and neither can you.

I: Do you expect to live the rest of your life in La Grande?

DT: Probably.

I: What would make you want to go elsewhere?

DT: I don’t know. I’ve been content here. My nephew said, when my husband died, “Why don’t you leave La Grande, come to Seattle? Sell that place and get you a place in Seattle.” So I listened to him talk because he has been saying that for years, ever since he went to Seattle. He lived there-- Robert Terry. So he got a job teaching and he moved there. He was saying, “You ought to get those kids out of La Grande,” ever since he’s been there. Each person has a different point of view.

I: Nothing he said persuaded you?

DT: No, I guess I was just content here. One of the youngsters said to me--that was when my daughter was living in Portland--“I thought you had moved to Portland with Jackie.” I said, “No, and

it's a good thing because Jackie is not in Portland anymore. Her husband is in the military so she's not even there anymore." Anyway, I'm still here. I visited my son in Kansas and, when he was in Germany, I visited them and stayed about a month. That was after my husband died. Since then I went on a tour and I would need to go another time to really enjoy what's there. But then I'm not dying to go to anyplace. There they showed you all these tombs and cathedrals and all of that. That's interesting, too, but whenever you go on a group like that, that's what they key in on. A lot of people, I guess, are interested in that.

Using a Computer

I: This computer you have over here [in her kitchen]: why do you have a computer?

DT: My daughter gave it to me--the one who's in Seattle.

I: Do you use it?

DT: I'm learning.

I: To write letters--or what?

DT: She got it at Boeing. They were, I think she said, deleting them or whatever. They had all these and they were selling at a low price. So she said, "Nothing was in it. I put the guts in it and everything." So she brought it from Seattle and set it up and she said, "When you learn this, then I'll put another unit in it." She showed me a few things, and, when my son was here, he took it apart and said, "This is the motherboard and this is ..." I thought, "Why is he telling me all this stuff? I don't need to know that." He said, "But it doesn't have a modem in

it." I didn't know what that was. He said, "So you have to have a modem in it before you can send e-mail. Next time I'm here, I'll bring one." So he put it in there. My son and my friend have been helping me send e-mail and do stuff like that. There's a lot of other stuff on there, but I just say, "Wait a minute. Let me learn this first." They have all this information they know and want to show me. I said, "Not yet."

I: Are you at the point where you feel confident in using the computer?

DT: Yes, with what I know. I learned how to type a little on my own with the high school book. I pick and I peck. And I have a dictionary handy for spelling. And it also has a spellcheck. I sent them a letter and said, "Don't be telling me that I've spelt the word wrong. Just take it."

I guess it's been since June [2002] that he had the modem in it. The friend, who was my tutor, has one and updates me with all this information.

I: Is this a way of perhaps feeling less lonely? Or maybe you don't ever feel lonely.

DT: Oh yes, there are different feelings. With my schedule, on Mondays at nine o'clock I'm at the bowling alley for a couple of hours. And then about two-thirty I'm at water aerobics. I come in, eat a snack, and then I go to work. If it's a Monday then I go practice clogging. And then on Tuesday I've been playing tennis maybe from eight till ten and then still go to water aerobics and still got to go to work. When you do that, you're glad when somebody has a cancellation. And then I go to a nursing home. I have an older friend

up there and sometimes feed her and whoever is sitting next to her. And so really, I guess it's not too much loneliness.

I: Apparently not.

DT: No, no. Sometimes I'm glad when people don't call me. I can just sit here and eat and watch TV and go back to sleep.

Deaths & Burials

I: Where is Lucky buried?

DT: Out at Island City.

I: Why there?

DT: I don't know. I think he had gotten five plots there because he buried his mother there and his brother and his sister, too. Where you have the ground, you just enter them there.

I: Is your mother there?

DT: Yes, my mother's there, too.

I: You said your grandmother was here. Did she die here?

DT: And my brother. Yes, they died here. They're there, too--at Island City.

I: Are they all together in the same place?

DT: No. My mom and some of the other people are on one side of the road. They don't have a special place for the black and for the white. While my husband was here, he talked once about how to really invest in it you'd have a whole plot where everyone could be. It made sense to him, but it didn't to me.

I: Is that where you expect to be buried?

DT: I guess. Not unless my kids have some other idea about cremating me and putting my ashes somewhere.

I: You don't have a preference?

DT: I don't think about it. I haven't told them what to do yet, and I should have.



Dorothy playing tennis
at a 2002 Baker City Tournament
Photo from *Baker City Herald*, 8/14/02

Index

Symbols

4-H 14

A

accent, southern 1
Achilles 5
Adams Avenue 3
aerobics, water 19, 22
Alicel OR 8
apartment 4,5
asthma 13
athletics 15
attitudes, racial 2,20

B

Baker City OR 2, 3, 14
baptism 11
Baptist Church 8, 11
basketball 15
bowling 22
boycott 21
brothel 11
 entry to 12
 work in 12

C

carpool 21
cheerleading 14
children, Trice 4
church, African-American 8
Church, Bread of Life 8
Church, First Baptist 11
citizens, first-class 21
clogging 19
computer 22
Cove Avenue 8
customs, local 19

D

dam, Owyhee 8
Dave's Market 3
Depot Street 12
discrimination
 acceptance of 21
 racial 5, 21
dishes, washing of 3
Douglas, Joanne 11

E

Eastern Oregon University 18

F

families, black 5
Fir Street 3
Fir and Jefferson Avenues 7
fishing 8,11
football 15
fractions 18
friends
 black 19
 black and white 14
furnaces, cleaning 4,7

G

GED 16,18
Germany 22
Greenwood School 13
Guideposts 16

H

hats
 blocking of 4, 7
 cleaning of 3, 7
Helm, Carl 5
Hendricks Field 1,2
Hermiston OR 14
home, nursing 23
housing, discrimination in 5
Hub City Foods 5

I

Island City OR 19, 23

J

Jacksonville FL 20
janitor work 5,6
Johnson, Dorothy 1
Joseph Building 18

K

Kansas 22

L

Labach method of reading 18
Lake Placid FL 1, 12

La Grande OR 2, 4, 8, 11, 14, 16, 21
loneliness 22
Lord, acceptance of 11

M

Madison Avenue 4
marriage 2
mathematics, teaching of 15
Maxville OR 2
Medicare 13
military 22
 service in 15
mill, Bowman-Hicks 3
minister, African American 8
Monroe Avenue 3,5
Montgomery Ward 5
motorcycles, Kawasaki 7
Mountain Home ID 11
music, country 19

O

Oregon, coming to 1
Oregon State University 15

P

Parks, Rosa 20
Patras, Harry 3,7
Pendleton OR 14
Pine Bluff AR 2
place
 friendly 19
 knowing one's 19
plots, burial 23
poker 4
pool table 7
Portland OR 21
prejudice, acceptance of 20
Presbyterian Church Friendship Hall 5
prostitutes
 doctors for 12
 families of 12
prostitution, closing down of 12

R

Reader's Digest 16
recreation, study of 15
relationships, black and white 19
restaurant, Lee's Chinese 3
Roberson, Field 14
ROTC 15

S

Salem OR 16
Saturdays, work on 6
school, segregated 1
Seattle WA 21, 22
servicing men (for sex) 12
Seventh-Day Adventist 14
shoes, shining of 7
shoe shine parlor 3, 4
shop, barber 7
shopping 5
sign, "colored" 20
snow 2,3
South, returning to 20
spelling 22
spell check 22
surgery, cataract 16
survival 20

T

tanks, cleaning of 3
teachers, black 14
Terry, Robert 21
The Dalles OR 15
The Observer 16
Thomas, Frank 7
Trice
 Arthur 15
 David 15
 Doug 15
 Jackie 15, 21
 Lafayette 4
 Lucky 4-6, 11, 12, 19, 21, 23
 personality of 7
troublemakers 21
tutoring 18
T Avenue 8

U

Union OR 19
Union County 4
University, Eastern Oregon 19

V

Veldasta GA 1
Veterans' Hospital 16

W

Walla Walla WA 14
Wallowa OR 2

West and Siechrist 5
West Jacobson building 5
Wilfongs 11
work, partners in 6
writing, skill in 19

Z

Zimmerman 7

