

Buzz Fulton

7/21/04, T1, S1

Interviewer: April Curtis

AC: Today I'm interviewing Buzz Fulton. Could you state your full name?

BF: No one knows me by that, Walter.

AC: Walter.

BF: Walter Eugene.

AC: Fulton. Alright. And when were you born?

BF: January 17th, 1921.

AC: And today is July 21st, 2004 and we...it's about 10:20 and we're in his home at 2108 Second Street. What I would like to start out with is talk about your early life in La Grande and so... You were born in La Grande...

BF: Right.

AC: And then how long did you stay in La Grande the first time?

BF: I don't remember when we went to The Dalles. My dad worked for the railroad and I was probably about three or four maybe, somewhere along in there. I know I ran away from home and my grandmother caught me at the railroad tracks. I don't remember that. We were down on Jackson in La Grande at that time and then we moved to The Dalles.

AC: Do you remember anything about the railroads at that young age? Have any memories about any of that?

BF: Not really here, but my memory starts of living in The Dalles. Mostly we lived on Jackson Street in The Dalles also and we lived on Jackson here. Then I went through up to the seventh grade in The Dalles and then we moved back to La Grande and I started the eighth grade here.

AC: What did your father do for the railroad?

BF: He was a conductor and he ended up with just an eighth grade education, but he was always very interested in education. I can always remember him threatening to punch my lights out if I went railroading. So I didn't, but all my contemporaries that did go railroading from La Grande High School ended up retiring and they worked pretty much through World War II and were never laid off like my dad was. He went through the Depression on the railroad. That was his bias on wanting everyone to have an education was he didn't have one and insisted on everyone else having one.

AC: So what year was it that you came back to La Grande? Do you remember?

BF: Let's see, it'd be 1930... I graduated from high school in '39 and I started eighth grade, so '34, about 1934.

AC: What was La Grande like in 1934 when you came back?

BF: It really probably had a bigger business section downtown, more stores, than it does now. 'Cause, you know, there was everything, clothing stores, a men's clothing store, two of those. The population, as I recall, then was around 9,000 and now it's, what, twelve-something, like that. So the growth has been rather slow. It's kind of interesting on the argument over future growth now and had the big hassle over that and it...really if you look at history it hasn't grown that much. But at that time the railroad was the major employer because there was probably two or three hundred employees in the back shops that repaired engines and repaired railroad cars and all the things that kept trains going. And then there was train crews, was engineer, fireman, three brakeman and conductor, and now they're running with an engineer, conductor and that's it.

AC: So was your father a conductor when you moved back?

BF: He was a conductor. His background, he started out when he was about...I think he lied about his age and started working at about seventeen on the railroad in Montana as a fireman. He had to shovel coal. He told about going to work in the wintertime and stripping down to just no shirt and shovel coal, it'd be below zero. He didn't like that so that's how he came to Oregon and he hired out as a brakeman.

AC: To La Grande?

BF: To La Grande.

AC: So how old was he when he came to La Grande probably?

BF: He was probably in his twenties, somewhere along in there.

AC: What was his name?

BF: Harry. Harry Fulton. Then he... And then a brakeman in those days had to ride the top of the train and set up brakes by hand. Then he couldn't get enough clothes on in the wintertime to keep warm. Anyway, he stuck with the railroading. I think he worked for forty-two years.

AC: What made him decide to go to The Dalles?

BF: Just to hold a job. Depression came along and they had different areas of seniority on the railroad at that time and he didn't have enough seniority in La Grande to hold a steady job, but he could bump on, they call, and hold a job in The Dalles. So he went down there and then it kind of reversed. I think maybe he might've gone down there because of the weather, it was warmer in The Dalles. And then at the height of the Depression in the mid-'30s there, early-'30s, they got laid-off in The Dalles, too, but he could work as a brakeman in La Grande so that's why we moved back.

AC: So he went from being conductor to a brakeman?

BF: Had to go back to a brakeman to hold a job.

AC: So that's quite a lesser job?

BF: Yeah. I remember as a kid in The Dalles neighborhood we had a gang of kids – and gang connotated a different a thing than it does now – it was nine kids that our dads were all havin' a hard time makin' a living and my dad was the only one out of the whole nine of the kids there in The Dalles that had a steady job. I think he made \$75 a half month, so \$150 a month. And that was one of the...of those families of the nine kids was one of the higher income of all. Then he lost the job there and had to come back to La Grande and he came back and we stayed in The Dalles until I finished the seventh grade. He kind of commuted, bought an old car and came back to The Dalles on weekends and sometimes he'd lay off for a week and come home. I think that went on for maybe a year or so and then we came back to La Grande.

AC: So being a brakeman on a railroad, was that a dangerous job, or was it...?

BF: Yes, it was, especially over the mountain between La Grande and Reese, the division point then. They had to ride the top of the trains up the hill to take the brakes off. Ride the train down the hill setting the brakes up. 'Cause they didn't have the mechanical technology that they have now on the trains. Yeah, it was fairly dangerous job.

AC: So when did he become conductor again?

BF: Let's see. Probably about the time a year or so after we came back to La Grande he became a conductor. Yeah, 'cause I remember probably in the eighth grade...I can talk about it now 'cause he'd 've gotten fired then...they had work trains that went to Joseph and worked on the railroad. I rode up there with him several times, he'd take me. 'Cause it was kind of off the main line and they'd go up and stay all night and then come back, sleep on the caboose. I've ridden up there and then we'd stop somewhere where the train now that they're running out of Joseph and Enterprise on the scenic, in there on the Grande Ronde River where there's no road, go up there and fish and he'd run the work train and then I'd come back with him. That was a great experience in the summertime.

In fact, that kind of got me interested in wanting to go railroading, but he insisted that I not.

AC: So describe railroading. Describe how they got... Was it riding under the train? How did... How did railroading work?

BF: You mean as far as his job, or what?

AC: No. You said some of your friends went railroading, how did they do that?

BF: Mike... The guys that were in my class in high school, several of them, their parents worked for the railroad, too, and so they hired out as a brakeman or as a fireman and did their student trips and...

AC: I guess I'm interesting in riding the rails. Did you... Did any of the students ride the rails and climb underneath?

BF: No. In the Depression that was the hobos that did that, the guys that didn't have jobs at all and were goin' around the country looking for work.

AC: Did they climb under the trains to do that? Where'd they sit?

BF: They'd climb in an empty boxcar or just get on a car anywhere. I don't know... I guess some of 'em... I remember my dad talking about would get...there were some, oh, the framework underneath a railcar and they'd get in under there and ride. But, yeah, that was kind of dangerous. I remember during the Depression that some of the hobos that rode the rails would come around and beg for food. I remember 'em comin' to The Dalles. The word was that they'd mark the sidewalk where they could get a handout, you know, somebody that was goodhearted, and put a mark and then the next bum would know which houses to go to.

AC: Do you remember them coming to the house when you were a kid?

BF: I remember some in The Dalles that would come. We lived quite a ways from the railroad. It'd be quite a hike up there. They'd come around and ask for food or want to do some kind of work around the house. I remember my dad always said don't give anything out, you know. The rail crews I think they tolerated some of 'em. A lot of 'em kicked 'em off the train, but some of 'em if they had an empty boxcar they'd let 'em ride.

AC: So when your father said he didn't want you railroading he meant he didn't want you working for the railroad?

BF: Yeah, he didn't want me working for the railroad.

AC: Why?

BF: 'Cause...well...he went through the Depression and didn't have a job and then if any kind of an accident happened they usually fired the whole crew and he got fired a time or two for a...they had a derailment or a wreck and they fired the engineer, fireman and brakemen and conductor and the whole group. I remember...and I think I have some pictures before he and my mother were married he got fired on the railroad here out of La Grande...

AC: What year would that be? Around?

BF: Probably 've been in 1916 to '17, somewhere around there. Then he went to San Diego for work and couldn't find anything and came back. He had... I remember he had some pictures that he took when he was down at San Diego and went to San Diego Zoo and he took a picture of beat-up looking old buffalo. I remember that picture and then quite a few years, well, in the '40s when I was in the Navy I went to the San Diego Zoo and saw a buffalo there and I took a picture and sent it to him. [laugh] Told him it was the same old buffalo that was there when he was there.

AC: So what was going to school like in La Grande in the '30s?

BF: When I started in the eighth grade...

AC: And you said that was 1934.

BF: Yeah. Let's see, '34...yeah, that would've been because I graduated in '39. High school was four-year high school like they are now. So education kind of goes in a circle anyway. And all the grade schools had eight grades, Riveria was one through eight. All the grade schools had an eighth grade football team and basketball teams and played each other in the city league, I guess that would be.

AC: Was the high school located where it is now?

BF: No, it was on the corner of Fourth and M. The old high school that used to be the junior high but they tore that building down when they built the Middle School in, what, '73, I guess. Yeah, it was...

AC: What did it look like? The high school.

BF: It was originally a three-story building and I guess there was a fire in the early '30s before we came back to La Grande and burned off the top floor, or they didn't build it back and they just built it back from the two-story. In fact, it was set by a volunteer fireman. He'd set several fires around town.

AC: Who was that?

BF: I don't remember his name. He was still around here when I came back.

AC: Somebody didn't take him to jail or anything?

BF: No, I don't think he ever spent any time in jail. I think in that...previous to when we started we were talking about Lee Johnson writing a history?

AC: Yeah.

BF: Seems to me that might be in the book that he wrote about the guy that set the fire. But anyway, it was well-known and that...and it was on the corner there. And then there was another old Central School, Central Elementary, was where the Middle School is now. And then when they built the new high school – that was in the '50s, '52, '53, something like that – where it is now on the corner of Second and K, they turned the old high school into the junior high and they made a three-year high school and the junior high was ninth...seven, eight and nine grades.

AC: So when you went to high school it was four years, you said?

BF: Yeah, when I went. And Central was just... Central where I started in the eighth grade was the old building on the corner of...well, where the Middle School is now, that's K.

AC: So when you came back you actually went to elementary school?

BF: Yeah. For eighth grade.

AC: What was that like?

BF: There was two homeroom classes of eighth grade and then we...it seems like we stayed part of the time in the homeroom and probably had English and something else in there and then we moved to another classroom for math and there was a shop class and home ec for the gals.

AC: Do you remember any of your teachers?

BF: In junior high, yeah. Effie Sneider was my homeroom teacher.

AC: Effie Sneider?

BF: Sneider, yeah. She was a nice lady. And I believe she taught English. I don't remember some of the others. Clive Moore was a P. E. teacher and he coached basketball.

AC: Clive? Clive Moore?

BF: Clyve Moore.

AC: What was he like?

BF: He probably was...he seemed tall to me at that time, but I'm not sure how tall he was. Slim guy, nice fellow. And I had him for a study hall teacher.

AC: What kinds of activities were you involved with in your elementary, junior high years?

BF: I... When we moved from The Dalles I wasn't...there wasn't any Scouting program that I recall there, you know. There probably was maybe in the upper grades, but I just went

to an elementary school and then one year, seventh grade, junior high. When I came here I think probably the biggest influence in my life probably came from the Scouting program. And the guy that ran that was Harvey Carter who was a teacher in the junior high school. I didn't ever have him as a teacher, but I joined his Scout troop and...

AC: When you were in eighth grade?

BF: Yeah, when I was in the eighth grade. I don't know... We lived right on the Columbia River in The Dalles, but I didn't learn to swim 'til I came to La Grande. So Harvey Carter was quite a swimming teacher and taught us lessons. Well, he taught some up at Pine Cone. There was a swimming pool up on the river right about where Hilgard is.

AC: They called it Pine Cone?

BF: Pine Cone. I have a picture in the book you were showing me of Jack Evans. There was a swimming pool there and an auto court. He taught swim swimming up there, though. Most of his classes were taught over at Cove in the Cove swimming pool. Learned to swim in his Scout troop and then this picture that I showed you is his Scout troop.

AC: And they're doing a production of...

BF: Tom Sawyer.

AC: ...Tom Sawyer. So did they do a play every year?

BF: I don't know. I think that was kind of a one time thing. It was a money-raiser or something for Scouting. I don't know why I wasn't in it. I wasn't a thespian, I guess. I think I had just probably gotten started in the Scout troop when they put this together.

AC: What other kinds of things did you do in the Scout troop other than swimming?

BF: He ran a summer Scouting program at Wallowa Lake over on the west side of the lake where...I think they're all houses now. He and another fellow had this Scout camp. And then on his Scouting program it was in conjunction with the Episcopal church and we met and it was called Honan Hall. It was next to Craig Cleaners o 5th Street.

AC: Honan Hall?

BF: Honan Hall.

AC: How do you spell that?

BF: I think it was just h-o-n-a-n. It was right where Craig's Cleaners is now, right in there. That's where the Scout troop met.

AC: What was Honan Hall? Was it a...

BF: I don't know. It was something... I think the Episcopal church might have owned it. I'm not sure on that. It was just a kind of a recreation hall. All I remember is the Scouting program was there. Anyway, and then I think the Knights of St. John, or something, that was a youth group of the Episcopal church they met there too. Anyway, in the wintertime...and that's another thing that was...Carter was a big influence in my life and got me interested in skiing and made a lifelong thing out of that.

AC: So the Boy Scouts went skiing?

BF: Yeah. We... Nobody knew anything about skiing.

AC: So where'd you go ski?

BF: We... In the wintertime...I was gonna get to that story, that's a long one, too...we would take off Friday night after school, during the school year in the winter, and this Harvey Carter had access to a...it's called Bloomenstein's Cabin on the top of Mt. Emily up there by where the tower is now. We'd take off Friday night after school, pack all our junk. No sleepin' bags then, just a blanket or two. And hiked to the top of Mt. Emily. And we'd get up there probably eleven or twelve o'clock at night.

AC: So hike from down in the valley all the way to the top?

BF: Yeah.

AC: Wow.

BF: Go up Fox Hill. It was a long hike. Go up there and the cabin, as I recall, was always the supply of wood in there and somebody always had to sleep on the woodpile. I think there was only one or two bunks and we usually drew cards to see who got the bunk. And then we'd stay all night and ski around there the next day.

AC: So what did you use for skis?

BF: Everybody... Somebody... Some of 'em had their own that they made, you know, just steamed a piece of wood and bend 'em. I think I had a pair that I bought at Ward's cheap, just a toe-piece on 'em, no bindings or anything.

AC: How'd you keep them on?

BF: You'd put your foot in...just a loop over the toe, but as long as you kept shufflin' ahead the foot'd stay in. And then later we'd get... I remember the shoe shop in town he started makin' some leather straps that went around the heel for ya.

AC: Who was that in the shoe shop? Do you remember the name of it?

BF: No, not right offhand. I can't think of him.

AC: That's okay.

BF: I can see the guy, but I can't think of his name. Anyway, various things and then if you were really rich, could buy 'em, why, you could buy a leather strap that went around the heel and you cut a groove in the heel of your boot, you know, and use big old bamboo basket ski poles and hike up there. Harvey Carter he always had you kind of pair up with somebody to take your meals and this one guy in the picture here that...Shelton, he decided that the way to take a meal would be to take a can of food for each meal, breakfast, lunch and dinner. He only did that once 'cause first off all that food was heavy, you know, canned food's heavy. We'd usually have a meal, what, three meals on Saturday and maybe two on Sunday.

AC: What'd you eat?

BF: Well, to go on with the story, this Don Shelton he took these cans so he gets up there and so breakfast he'd have a can of corn and for lunch maybe a can of beans and for dinner, why, he'd have another can of beans or [laughs] a can of something else. So everybody else, you know, maybe we'd take some bread and hot dogs. The guy that I buddied with we took bread and hot dogs and then we thought, well, we needed...none of us liked coffee and we didn't want to pack milk so we took tea, tea bags...or tea, I'm just so sure they were in bags then. I think it was loose tea. Anyway, for supper and I'll never forget that. We had these weinees and of course there wasn't any water in the cabin, we had to melt snow. Pretty dry snow, you know, it'd take a wheelbarrow full of snow to get a quart of water. [laugh] Anyway, we melted the water and cooked the weinees and then we didn't want to wait...melt more water for the tea so we put the tea in the weinee water and had weinee water tea. [laughs] Pretty bad! Pretty bad. So we changed our things the next year on what we took and tried to take food that, you know, you could cook. We had a lot of laughs over Shelton and his can...one can per meal. [laughs] Then the other kid, Claude Baker and I, that drank weinee water tea. Anyway, coming back down no one really know how to ski. I think finally some of us went to the library and we found a book that Otto Lang wrote on how to ski and we...

AC: Lang? L-a-n-g?

BF: Otto Lang, yeah. He became a...something in the movies later on, a movie director. Anyway, we read that book and then tried to decide how to do it from the book.

AC: So would you ski all the way down then?

BF: Yeah. And of course we couldn't turn and you'd go until you go scared goin' too fast and then you'd fall down to stop. Anyway, and then we got the idea to cut a tree and then you could straddle the tree 'cause you'd break your ski poles if you straddled it and set on it, you know. You could cut a thin tree and cut all the limbs off and then put it between

your legs and drag so you didn't go too fast. That was kind of my introduction to original skiing and then later on, why, oh, we went up a place called the Stump Patch on the highway toward Pendleton. It's where the freeway divides now and one's up high and one's down low just past the Starkey turnoff. And just walk up and down...

AC: Stump Patch?

BF: Yeah. It was a place that had been logged off and kind of went down in a gulley off the highway. And then...[end tape]

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BF: ...his folks had a grocery store here in La Grande, Joel's Grocery.

AC: Where was that?

BF: On Cedar Street about Main, Cedar and Main. Anyway, they put in a little rope tow up there. People skied there. And then McFarlands put in a rope tow along there by Camilla on the old highway.

AC: McFarlands? Who would that be?

BF: Oh, Ray McFarland was his folks. They were... I think he was a railroader, too. Anyway, just a little short rope tow made out of an old car chassis. You go up there and that's really where I kind of started learnin' to ski and then when I was in high school there was a...our senior social problems teacher was, at that time, everybody thought was a real good skier and he started taking us to Anthony Lakes.

AC: Now when did Anthony Lakes open?

BF: Oh, they were going...Harold Lee had Anthony Lakes and there was just a rope tow there.

AC: Harold Lee? Was he from La Grande?

BF: No. He... I don't know where he came from. He lived at the foot of the hill there.

AC: Did he buy Anthony Lakes? Or the land?

BF: It was Forest Service then, too, but he had...I think he had a fishing concession or something at the lake. He put in a rope tow and that would've been about 19...about 1937.

AC: So it was the same kind of thing? A car chassis with ropes?

BF: Yeah, it was a car chassis and metal car wheels on a post that the rope went over and you hung on. Then you ran your fingers through the rope where it went over the wheel and it hurt, [laugh] or you had a rope that hooked on and then you had a belt and it pulled you up.

AC: What did... Just to digress for a second before we get to talking about Anthony Lakes, what did you wear when you skied?

BF: Oh, just whatever you could scrape up, you know. Before...in the '30s if you had some wool pants or somethin' and just a lot of...like a logger boot and then at that time the bindings started coming in and things were a little better than when we hiked to the top of Mt. Emily. [laughs] But anyway, Harold Lee had that and then that's when... Well, there's another book on Tales of Two Skis or something that's written on Anthony Lakes that an attorney in Baker wrote. Anyway, they built WPA projects and PWA and built Timberline Lodge at Mt. Hood during the Depression for all those artisans that needed a job. Anyway, they built that. They had... When Harold Lee had Anthony Lakes they were gonna build one similar to that at Anthony Lakes. There's a picture of that somewhere...of the design of it, that it would be smaller, but similar to Timberline. Then Hitler marches into Poland and World War II kind of was hanging on the horizon and the federal funding got canceled. There was an organization in Baker and La Grande and

they had to raise some money, matching funds, to build that lodge. They'd raised part of the money...

AC: Who was... What was that organization?

BF: What was what?

AC: What was the name of that organization that raised...money raisers?

BF: It was the start of the ski club out of Baker. I don't know... It started in Baker and then there were some other people...well, I think. Maybe some from La Grande. One of the Bohnenkamps, Lynn Bohnenkamp. Some of those were on that committee that was raising the money. Then the war came along and funding got canceled and it all went down the tube. Harold Lee closed up Anthony Lakes sometime...I don't know, must've been in the early '40s.

AC: So when you were in high school how often did you go up to Anthony Lakes?

BF: Oh, we'd probably try to go every week if we could bum a ride. No one had a car, you know, to go. Some of the local older people that was skiing and interested would...you could bum a ride with them. They'd haul you up there. And then this Rolla Goold that was the teacher he kind of rustled some rides for us. He'd take a group and we had a ski club in the high school.

AC: Who would you go skiing with in those days, in high school?

BF: Oh, this John Kopp, was a doctor in Vale, Bill Freese, local guy, and Don Shelton and myself, Bob Fallow, a couple of other people I can't remember their names offhand that kind of drifted away or left during World War II and didn't ever come back to La Grande. And the ski club...I'd have to dig out a yearbook and look at the picture, but we had a picture in the yearbook of the ski club and there were some girls in there, too.

AC: So when you went up to Anthony Lakes was there just that one rope tow?

BF: Yeah.

AC: Or did you hike up other places?

BF: You could hike up past the rope tow. You're familiar with Anthony Lakes. The rope tow went at that top of...what run is that...the top of Lower College. There's a big hump there where it's kind of steep. The rope tow ended right on that hump and then it went down to the road where Road Run is. It really went up about where Lower College Run is. Then I don't... Later on when Anthony started again after World War II they used the CCC camp for a warming hut and there was overnight facility and that kind of stuff, a cook shack and shower room and restrooms.

AC: But at that time there wasn't anything when you first started going out there?

BF: When Harold Lee ran it it was just...I don't even remember where the warming hut was at that time. 'Cause you hiked up Road Run there to get to the bottom of the rope tow. But anyway, we had a pretty active ski club in high school.

AC: What were your interests when you went to school?

BF: I tried to... I was pretty thin and not very big and I made the football team when I was a senior, but I tried out earlier than that and didn't make it, and played a little basketball. Skiing was probably the main thing. I was still active in the Scouts until, oh, probably most of us drifted away about the time we were juniors in high school.

AC: Did the same person have the Scouts that whole time?

BF: Right.

AC: Did you continue to go up to Mt. Emily?

BF: We kind of gave up on the hikin' up there after we'd started goin' to Anthony. And then when we were...some of these people in the picture that when we were old, juniors, seniors, we were the big guys and kind of helped at the Scout camp and some of the younger ones were coming up to Scout camp.

AC: And that was at Wallowa Lake?

BF: Yeah, that was at Wallowa Lake.

AC: What was that like?

BF: We worked with Harvey Carter and kind of went up early and set up the camp. They had board floors and tents on the floor. A couple of canoes. I don't think there was much of a boat dock there. It was just kind of a bank down to the lake. And we kind of helped set up some of the stuff and then would stay...

AC: What kind of activities were at the camp?

BF: Oh, they had leather, crafts, you know, craftwork and then usually there was a lot of hikes out of camp, like to Aneroid Lake or Ice Lake.

AC: Was that when Wallowa County was in Union County? Were they all the same at that point?

BF: No, it was separate counties, Wallowa County. The thing I remember, one year after we worked up there at the Scout camp ones that wanted to we hiked back from Wallowa Lake to Cove and packed everything. I believe it took us two, three days, and went up through the lake basin. I remember I... That would've been in...that was probably '37 or '38. Anyway, I'd forgot about it, I'd carved my name on a tree way back in North Minam Meadows there along the trail and the date. And then this guy, John Kopp, that's a retired doctor over in Vale, he and his son Jim they were real active with horses and backpacked in there and he told me...it was sometime, oh, it must've been in the '70s, they were back there on a horsepackin' trip, happened to go by there and saw my name on the tree carved in 1937 or '8 and he reminded me of it. Yeah, those were some good times.

AC: So you graduated from high school in what year?

BF: '39.

AC: '39.

BF: 1939.

AC: Then what did you do?

BF: Everybody kind of drifted to Eastern Oregon and started school over there. Of course it was pretty small, one building.

AC: What was it called at that time?

BF: Let's see...they just changed... It started out as Eastern Oregon Normal School and then I think when we started it was changed to Eastern Oregon College. Then it was Eastern Oregon College of Education. So it's had several names. Anyway, most of us started there and then...

AC: What did you major in?

BF: I just...lower division. I didn't want to be a teacher. I didn't think I did. In fact, I gotta give skiing credit for getting me into education 'cause it finally dawned on me that there might've been a correlation between teaching skiing and teaching school. But anyway, I started there and then...I'd go two years and then I went to Oregon State.

AC: Kind of back up for just a second. What is it about skiing that made you just fall in love with it when you were in junior high? What is it about the art of skiing that you enjoy so much?

BF: I guess part is the challenge of trying to do it better, try to do it without falling down. The beauty of the winters, I guess. I never thought much about how miserable it could be, you know, cold, if you didn't like cold. And then just the challenge in being out. It used to be not the commercialized thing it is now, you know, with big resorts. You were kind of like you were out in the wilderness. And then it was something that you didn't have to do in an organized team fashion. I guess that's kind of the goofy thing about sports is most people by the time they get through high school very few are successful in basketball, football or track, and you gotta have a facility. Skiing you could do on your

own. Then, you know, why, like the Mt. Emily trips, you were breakin' trail and out in the wilderness kind of on your own. I guess that was probably what I got interested in and then later on teaching other people to ski was enjoyable. Some of that's pretty challenging. [laughs] Yeah, I don't know. But then it's something you can do all your life. I'm still doin' it.

AC: Okay, we'll get back to... Okay, so you were at Eastern Oregon...

BF: Yeah, and then I went to Oregon State.

AC: What year was that that you went to Oregon State?

BF: Oh, I was down there when they had the transplanted Rose Bowl at Durham, North Carolina. Oregon State went to the Rose Bowl and they didn't want to have it in Pasadena 'cause the war had just started. They were afraid Japanese were gonna disrupt the Rose Bowl so they played back there. Then I got... I went into the Navy... I enlisted in the Navy...finished that second year at Oregon State.

AC: Do you know what year that was that you went in the Navy?

BF: I went... I enlisted in '42, in the fall of '42 and I finished the school year in '43. I should've graduated in '43, that was four years after high school, but I changed majors a couple of times.

AC: What was it like being up at the college in those years? What was the college like?

BF: It was really uncertain, I guess, the least you could say, 'cause you didn't know how much longer you were gonna be there 'cause the draft was in effect. That's why I enlisted in the Navy was...I didn't want to be a foot soldier, I guess. And I was in a fraternity house and...

AC: Which fraternity?

BF: Sigma Nu.

AC: How many fraternities were on campus?

BF: Oh man, fraternity was a big thing then. A guy from Union and La Grande got me to go to the house, David Baum. Anyway...

AC: So David Baum was going to school at that time as well?

BF: He was at Oregon State, yeah. He graduated from Union High School and he went right to Oregon State when he was a freshman.

AC: Were there fraternities at Eastern as well?

BF: No.

AC: No.

BF: No. And so anyway, you had to make your grades to be initiated and I think I made a 3.5 for that term and got initiated and then after that and the war was looming large I didn't do very well in school, too much social life, I guess. [laughs] Anyway, and then I thought, well, I'm not gonna be here anyway, so I finished up the year in '43 and then I went in the Navy, San Diego and was in 'til '46, got out in late '46. Ended up mostly in schools and training and went to a PBM school, a flying boat school and radar was comin' in then. I was a radar technician. And then I just...I didn't really care for the Navy and all I wanted was out, which was kind of dumb because I didn't really have anything in mind to do when I got out. So then I ended up goin' back in the National Guard as soon as they reactivated it and stayed for 25 years.

AC: So did you move back to La Grande after you got out of the Navy?

BF: Came back to La Grande, thought about goin' back to school.

AC: What year was that that you came back to La Grande?

BF: Oh, it was 1946.

AC: Were a lot of people coming back from military service?

BF: Quite a few, yeah. And some going back to school. Anyway, I went back on the GI Bill...

AC: Back to Eastern?
BF: No, I went back to Oregon State when I got back out one year and then decided I had a whole bunch of hours and it was in education and I didn't want to teach and so I quite and came back to La Grande. And then I went through kind of the experience of finding everything I didn't want to do.
AC: [laugh] Such as?
BF: Oh, workin' in the sawmill and I surveyed for Union County and I carried mail.
AC: Which sawmill was that?
BF: It was Stangg's then and then it was...what'd it go to...eventually Boise Cascade. I worked there when it was a furniture factory.
AC: So it was the same sawmill? What was your job at the sawmill?
BF: Oh, I was...I fed a planer...planer. And then...what'd I do...oh, I drove truck for a wholesale grocery outfit and had the Baker Nehi Bottling Agency here in La Grande. It was out of Baker, but I had a warehouse here. Drove truck for them.
AC: Were jobs at that time fairly easily...easy to obtain?
BF: Yeah. There was a lot of 'em. I suppose there was...yeah, and school teaching was starting to catch on, you know, I mean expanding, the educational system. Anyway, yeah, you could find all kinds of service jobs, that sort of thing, I think. And then...
AC: Was that because there were a lot of people away at the war or...?
BF: They were all coming back and I think everybody was kind of just wanted out except there were a few that stayed like by good friend Bill Frees, he stayed as a pilot. But most of 'em got out and came back.
AC: Did most of the guys that you went in with that you had gone to high school with did they come back to La Grande?
BF: Out of the group that left La Grande there was several in my class in high school that went railroading and didn't go in the service. There were several of us that came back. One of my good friends he came back and then he went back to school down in the valley and then came back as an attorney to La Grande.
AC: Who was that?
BF: Ross Hearing. Yeah, there were quite a few came back. But then I got married.
AC: Was this someone you had known before?
BF: No. Well, Velva she went to high school here in La Grande, but I didn't know her in high school. She was four years behind me. I met her after I came back from the Navy.
AC: Velma is v-e-l-m-a?
BF: V-e-l-v-a. Velva.
AC: Velva, okay.
BF: And we got married and...
AC: What year was that that you got married?
BF: Ooh.
AC: Uh-oh. [laughs]
BF: 1949...'47...'48. Well...
AC: Somewhere in there.
BF: That's another story that I've been in trouble on all my life.
AC: Oh, tell it.
BF: On our... Oh, it was somewhere close to 25 years we got married in March – her birthday is March the 5th – we got married March the 7th and for some reason one year I thought something was March the 10th and I missed both of 'em, both the birthday and wedding. And so for our 25th our kids bought me a money clip engraved with “25th anniversary” and then on the back was engraved on when we got married. The guy that

engraved it made a mistake too and engraved it wrong. [laughs] So it was still off. But anyway, I finally redeemed myself.

AC: Where did you get married?

BF: Here in La Grande.

AC: Where?

BF: At the Episcopal church. John Kopp, his dad was the minister of...that'd be Jim Kopp's grandfather...minister of the Episcopal church.

AC: Was that where it is now? Was it the school church where it is now?

BF: Yeah. And so... And at that time I was working as parts man at Caterpillar Tractor. And then we got involved in the Elks club and I started through the chairs and got involved in that and involved in American Legion and everything. Was at the Elks club one night having a beer with a registrar from Eastern Oregon College... Oh, in the meantime after that I...another guy and I bought a service station. I had it for eight years. While I was doin' the service station thing, why, having a beer with that registrar at the college he knew I'd gone to Eastern and he wanted to know what I was doin' and everything. So he says, "why don't you come up and let's go through your transcript and see how much it'd take to graduate?" 'Cause I didn't have a degree yet.

AC: Where was your service station, by the way?

BF: Up here on Second and Adams. Texaco station. And I went up and he said, "well, if you come back I think we can get you graduated if you go one term in a summer session." I thought, not too bad, so I sold the service station. Had three kids. Still had the state GI Bill, which wasn't much. Went back to school.

AC: So you had three children between the time...during the time you had the service station?

BF: Right. And so I ended up I had about three jobs, keeping books out at Pioneer Flour Mill and worked for a competitor service station guy, George Kalmbach.

AC: Where was the Pioneer Flour Mill?

BF: Out at Island City at... They just tore it all down not too long ago. Anyway, got that done and then in the meantime I was teachin' skiing at Spout Springs at the time, too, in wintertime. So I finished... I got my degree and we were gonna leave town and find a job somewhere. They fired the football coach at the high school here and he ran the ski program, too. So the guy that was principal at the high school, Ron Walk, he got a hold of me and wanted to know what I was gonna do. He says, "I can't get you a job, but if you'll take the ski program, if you'll go to a post-summer session at Portland State and get your credit for driver ed I can have you teach driver ed and give you a half-time job if you'll handle the ski program." So I did that and spent 25 years at the high school.

[laugh]

AC: So did you also do the football as well?

BF: No, I didn't do football. They hired another football coach.

AC: So what years was this that you started teaching at the high school?

BF: I think fall of '58. Yeah. Oh, and then I drove bus at the high school 'cause I was on a half-time contract. I don't know... I must not have done anything really well 'cause I was doin' too many things to do it. I don't know how...

AC: Now the service station that you owned for that seven years, was it one of those full service service stations?

BF: Yeah.

AC: So what kinds of... What kinds of things did you do for people?

BF: We had front end alignment and lube oil change, tires, sold tires, pump gas, you know, full service, everything. I had it eight years.

AC: So was it a name... Did it have a name? The Texaco?

BF: Yeah, just Fulton's Texaco.

AC: Fulton's Texaco.
BF: Yeah. And Velva's...[end tape]

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AC: Go ahead.
BF: Yeah, of all those other jobs the one job that I did enjoy was a summer job when I first got out of high school I worked for an oiling crew. There was four or five of us, that batch, and we traveled all over Eastern Oregon.
AC: Oiling crew? What is that?
BF: Oiling crew, repairing highways. The guy that's still in town, Ken Lilly, that's a retired school person, he and I worked together on oiling crew. And drove truck and they oiled the road and dumped gravel on it and rolled it. It was a big crew probably, oh, thirty-five, forty people on it. We traveled from Hermiston to Ontario and down in Burns and John Day and all that. Worked two or three summers for that. And then at Oregon State the one summer I was down there I worked at Camp Adair when they built a camp and the war started.
AC: So did a lot of GIs work a lot of different jobs when they came home?
BF: I think probably a lot of 'em did. They were trying to find something to do, if they didn't go back to school although you know they say the GI Bill was the greatest thing that Congress ever passed for the country because it raised the whole level of education for the nation. So that was a real boon to the economy of the U.S.
AC: So how much...what percentage do you think of people that came back to La Grande use the GI Bill? Did most of them or did most of them go back into different trades?
BF: I think probably the ones that came back to La Grande might've been about half and half. A lot of 'em went back to the trade or had a farm or their folks were farmers and they took over the farm, that sort of thing.
AC: Did former GIs get together and talk about their experiences over there?
BF: Yeah, somewhat afterwards the American Legion was strong here in La Grande. They had a drum and bugle corp. All of... All of the legions...well, there was a few World War I veterans that still were kind of the cornerstone of the Legion and held it together, but then the new guys that came back kind of took over. I was commander of the Legion post here in La Grande once and in the drum and bugle corp and was real active in the...
AC: What'd you play?
BF: I'm a total music nerd. [laugh] I can't play anything. Lucky to play the radio. But a bugle that doesn't have valves like any note will harmonize so I played the bugle. We had three or four that were really good musicians and we could follow them, like the notes, but could march. They had a good unit.
AC: So you marched in parades?
BF: Parades, yeah, all over. But then I got involved in the Elks...
AC: So the purpose of that organization was to welcome people home? What was the purpose of that?
BF: Of the Legion?
AC: Yeah.
BF: Nationally it's a lobbying organization for the veterans, of course, and then it's kind of...became a local social organization for a veteran. And the Legion seemed to always be a...I don't know whether it's because they had more members, but a little stronger organization than the VFW. The VFW is still a viable organization, as is the Legion, but the Legion seemed to attract more people.
AC: Do you remember what year you were the commander?

BF: Oh, man. No, I don't for sure. I spent nine years in the Elks and before that probably I was in the Legion for...well, I'm still a member...I think it maybe was probably about '51, '52, something like that.

AC: It sounds like it was really active.

BF: Yeah, it was a pretty active organization.

AC: Is it still that way?

BF: Yeah. They have a building down there on corner of Jefferson and Fir and have remodeled it. It's pretty nice. Baker had a real strong Legion program, too.

AC: Let's go back to the high school. So you were hired as the drivers' ed and the ski team. And this was just half-time position?

BF: Yeah. I think I had one crafts class. 'Cause all my hours in education was pretty much in industrial arts. So then...

AC: What did you do the other...for the other half of your stuff?

BF: That's when I worked at the mill out at Island City. And then Dale Wyatt and I – he was just starting, too, he was over at the junior high – we split a bus route. He drove one in the morning and I drove the same route in the afternoon. Then in the second year I got a fulltime contract. Still had the ski club and ski team and I got into the shop classes. Taught drafting, mechanical drawing and had a couple craft classes. Then eventually I was fulltime woodshop and drafting.

AC: What kinds of crafts did you teach students about?

BF: Oh, leatherwork and, oh, where you made little ash trays, tin thing and then line it with tile, just different things like that.

AC: Did you continue the Scouting? Were still part of Scouting when you came back?

BF: No. I didn't ever go back to Scouting as a Scout leader or anything, wasn't involved. Got involved with Special Olympics in the high school...yeah, in high school...after my daughter got me...conned me into that, Kay.

AC: This was in the '50s?

BF: Yeah. Then I...

AC: So was that an organization that was begun here?

BF: No. Special Olympics is a national thing that...

AC: But did they have...they had a Special Olympics section here?

BF: Yeah. My daughter kind of ran the Special Olympics program and she got me to help her with the ski program in it. And then she ended up in the international Special Olympics was in Park City, she was an Oregon coach. Then the next Olympics when they were at Squaw Valley I was an Oregon coach for the Special Olympics and took the Oregon team. And then after that Special Oregon...Kaye did it as a volunteer and then they hired somebody to that and she was teachin' special ed and didn't want to do that as a hired thing and so she quit and so I kind of quit, too. We still... I help run the program when they run their races at Anthony Lakes and things, kind of stuck with that.

AC: So how long were you the shop teacher, the craft teacher?

BF: Oh, let's see. My term of active teaching was... I think I only taught for six years, seven, something like that, and then because I started late I thought, well, I'd better get into the most money I can make and so I went back to school and I got a Masters and then I got in...

AC: A teacher? Education?

BF: Yeah.

AC: Was that from Eastern?

BF: Eastern, yeah. And got my Masters and took all the administrative courses I could and got my administrator's certificate and that's when I got the vice-principal job.

AC: What year was that that you got the vice-principal job?

BF: 1964.

AC: That was a time of quite a bit of unrest in the country.

BF: That was the hippy era.

AC: How did that translate to La Grande? Did they have any hippies at the high school?

BF: Oh yeah. I remember sendin' a kid home for wearin' sandals to school and medallions around their neck. It was different. I... La Grande wasn't too bad that way. The ones that... The one I sent home was a kid that came from outside, I don't know, came from Portland or somewhere. He didn't have too much trouble. Really the drug thing wasn't the problem then that it became later because the only thing there was a lot of beer parties, you know, keggers around. No hard drugs. Marijuana...

AC: Did the students ever protest the war or act up in any of that kind of ways?

BF: I don't think we had any of that in La Grande. The La Grande kids were pretty... Oh, the music came along then, you know...

AC: The rock music?

BF: Rock and roll and everything. But it wasn't too bad. Our after-game dances the only thing about those I could come after those dances and still feel the drum beat in my innards almost, [laughs] you know, but...

AC: Did the students change between the '60s and '70s? Did you notice any kind of change in their behavior? How they acted? What their attitudes were like?

BF: I think we had a lot of rules that I don't know why we had 'em. Several things that made me think about it is, well, for one thing, a married student...if a student got married they couldn't participate in athletics or any extracurricular activity. And even in P. E. I remember...that'd be in the early '60s...if a gal was married she couldn't take P. E. I'm just sure what the rule...why, you know. 'Cause one time later a gal that run a beauty salon here in La Grande now I ran into her after she'd graduated, I think in Ontario. And she came up and said, "do you remember me?" And I said, "Yes." And she says, "You wouldn't let me take P. E. in high school because I got married when I was a senior. Why?" And I couldn't answer her. I said, "I don't know." It was the dumb rule at the time. Later on it didn't really make any sense. I remember a pretty good football player that got married when he was a senior and they didn't let him play. But, yeah, so some of those things I think changed probably for the better.

AC: When did you become the principal?

BF: I was principal at the high school in the one year...see, Dale Wyatt was president of the Oregon Education Association...it must've been about '71, something like that. And then I was principal at the junior high for two years. That was... One year was a nightmare because they changed to a four-year high school from a three-year anticipating that we'd get in the new addition on the high school. Well, it wasn't finished so we didn't get in. Here we had a four-year high school and no place to put the extra year of kids. So the junior high – I was principal at the junior high – so we intermingled all of the English classes from seventh grade through twelfth was in the old junior high school. So you had seniors mixed in with seventh graders. And then some of the...all the seventh graders stayed there, I think...some of the eighth graders and some of the ninth graders went to the high school. Kids were comin' and goin' between the two schools. You didn't know where they were. It was a heyday for the kid to come late to class 'cause he could always say, "well, I was over at the high school and Mr. So-and-so he kept us after class." It was a real zoo.

AC: What was the difference between being the principal at the high school and the principal at the junior high? Which did you like better?

BF: The high school. Particularly because the junior high at that time, when it was seventh, eighth and ninth, the ninth graders got by, they were the big wheels in the three years.

Then when they went over as a sophomore they were the low man on the totem pole. It really hurt some kids. But the ninth graders were a pain in the neck, really, you know. They thought they were really big time. And then the poor old seventh graders they were kind of out of place. They were a little young and everything's a major crisis with them, friendships, you know, and be buddy-buddy one time and enemies the next. Emotions up and down. I liked the high school, as an age group, better.

AC: They kind of even out.

BF: And then in the last three or four years after we got all the buildings built and everything, why, then I went in the superintendent's office. They didn't hire an assistant superintendent and the superintendent decided he wanted three directors, one of curriculum in the grade school, one for curriculum in secondary schools and then the other director was gonna be kind of the catch-all guy and plant operations. At that time we still had our own school busses. So I got that directorship and all cooks the classified employees as the personnel and then all the maintenance of the buildings in the whole district. That was a pretty good job. I enjoyed that. The only thing I missed I didn't...I moved around, I got to go to every school so I kind of still had contact with teachers, but I lost track of kids. The best part, I think, on the education was when I taught driver ed because I had every sophomore in school. So in a period of three years I knew every kid in the high school.

AC: What was it like being the drivers' ed teacher? Did you ever fear for your life?

BF: It was harrowing at times. [laughs] I rode through a few parking lots when I didn't mean to.

AC: Any major crashes?

BF: No. Had a deaf guy back into us one time downtown. We were stopped at a light and he backed out of a slant parking and that was a little confusing 'cause he couldn't hear what I was talkin' about.

AC: What kind of cars did the drivers' ed program use when it first started?

BF: MJ Goss furnished the cars, Chevrolets. And when we first started the program we insisted on a stick shift, clutch car. Then it got to where they were harder to get so they finally went to automatics. Yeah, it was a good program. The State contributed and then insurance programs gave a discount if the kid had passed the driver ed course so parents liked it.

AC: So how did you end your career? At the high school?

BF: No, I was in directorship when I quit. And I...

AC: When was your...

BF: ...quit in 1983. So I've been retired almost as long as I worked. [laughs]

AC: And what have you spent your retirement doing? What have you been doing?

BF: Involved heavily with the ski program in the Northwest. I'm on the board of directors for that, Ski Instructors of America. And ran ski school at Spout Springs and Anthony Lakes. So that pretty well...

AC: When did you start running the Anthony Lakes program?

BF: I quit at Spout when they had a kind of a goofy owner. My kids were all teaching at Anthony Lakes. They wanted to get away from their dad at Spout Springs. So I thought, well, I'll just go over there and maybe teach a little and...

AC: Was this after you retired?

BF: Was it? I think it was. Or maybe it was the last year. I can't remember.

AC: So in the early '80s?

BF: Yeah. Anyway, I just thought I'd go over and ski with them and teach. And so when I got over there I think I taught...well, Spout always closed a month before Anthony Lakes so after I got through with Spout I'd go to Anthony Lakes and just teach skiing. So

anyway, then I went over and they got us running a ski school then he kind of wanted some help and then he got interested in Nordic and goin' other places for races. I kind of eased into the ski school that way and pretty soon he wanted out, Dick Knowles.

AC: Have you always been a cross country ski person or a downhill, or both?

BF: No, I've always been downhill. Well, then I started cross country and I taught that a little bit, but I always thought that's why God invented chair lifts so you didn't have to walk uphill. [laughs] But anyway, I ended up runnin' the ski school over there and finally retired from that.

AC: When was that that you retired?

BF: About...let's see...one, two...about four years ago, I guess. And so I've just been kind of still on the staff and have a place to leave my skis and could teach when I wanted to. And this year I don't think I'll teach at all. You ski free almost everywhere if you're old enough.

AC: So what did... You said that you kind of were a reluctant teacher. It didn't sound like you really wanted to go into education and then you did. So what did you get out of teaching? What kept you in teaching?

BF: I've always said that it's the only job that I ever had that I didn't feel like I didn't want to get up and go to work on Monday. I always thought it was fun to go to work. The only reason I retired or got out of teaching was when I was in the directorship thing, I had to go to all the school board meetings and they weren't any fun. I didn't like that end of it. As long as you were dealing with the kids and actually teaching it was okay. In fact, when I...and I always kidded the other people that wanted to get into administration when you went to administration your hourly rate dropped and it still does because...if you do it right. Because at the high school...and now it's worse than ever with all the women's activities and the music and everything. I'm still a firm believer that the principal should be there for all those activities and they aren't always, I don't think. Some of 'em probably delegate somebody else and they don't show. But anyway, when Dale and I were running the high school...

AC: Dale?

BF: Dale Wyatt. We were there for every music program, every athletic event. So, you know, it ended up that you were workin' probably...Monday and Tuesday usually wasn't much at night, but the rest of the week was something going on and one of us would always be there. And so my hourly rate dropped considerably because before when you were just teaching, you know, you were there from eight 'til four and that was pretty much. You didn't have to go back at night. A lot of times I'd be there 'til five, come home and grab a quick bite and be back at six-thirty and not home 'til ten. Then you draw all the football games and takin' money to the bank and all that stuff, you know, Wyatt and me. A lot of hours. We didn't do much of anything else during the school year.

AC: What'd you do in the summertime?

BF: We had a boat and had a dock down Snake River and spent a lot of time down there on weekends and during the week even and a little fishin'. And then there was still...it seemed like all of the vacations that Velva and I ever took were all either connected with an Elks convention or Confederation of Oregon School Administrators state meetings and two board meetings a year at least on the ski programs.

AC: You've been really active in civic organizations as well as your work in the school system and your teaching and your skiing and skiing schools and all that. What... Why do you think that's important to be involved in those kinds of organizations?

BF: I always hated people who bitch about everything and don't do anything about it. If all you do is complain, then you end up being part of the problem. And if you don't like

somethin', why, maybe you better get involved and change it. I'm not sure I ever changed a lot of things.

AC: Have you seen your organizations, such as the Elks, change over the years?

BF: There's a different generation of people that have joined things like that. In fact, there was somethin' on television news last night from Boise about the percent drop in the Elks organization and the Eagles and all the fraternal organizations. They've all taken a hit. I don't know whether those so much more to do. Kids are involved in more things and they don't join those organizations.

AC: So what was the reason why you joined the Elks?

BF: It was kind of a social center of town. My dad had been a lifetime member of the Elks and he kind of got me started. I probably... I think I gained a lot of the Elks in having to memorize all that stuff of funeral organizations, you had to supervise at funerals, and initiations and all the stuff. I think it gave me a better outlook on education when I went back to school, I mean I was serious about it. I don't know why they aren't popular anymore. The city and the other things that you can do something about, I guess. Velva worked for the... When I... That was another place I looked for a job when I went back to school was the city manager. I knew him and I went down to get a job.

AC: Who was the city manager at that time?

BF: Oh, Fred Young was his name. He said, "well, no," he said, "most employees are fulltime, but I sure need a secretary." So I came home and told my wife and she worked for the city for fifteen years.

AC: ___ interview, too.

BF: So anyway, then somebody came...talked me into running for city council, I can't remember who, and Velva said, "boy, you don't want to do that" 'cause she'd been working for the city and in all the meetings. I did it anyway and got elected...[end tape]

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AC: Okay, so you ran in what?

BF: I ran for city council in 1982 and took over in...they change in January '83 'til '90. So I was in there for eight years and I guess about four years as mayor, which is kind of misnomer and that time because really all the mayor is is the chairman of the city council. Everybody was equal at that time and then after I quit they changed the charter and had a separate mayor.

AC: What were your duties as mayor?

BF: As I said, at that time it was five-council body. The mayor is just elected by the council. So you're duties other than the councilperson is just to preside at the meeting. If there's a tie vote you break the vote. And then you're...I guess you're a figurehead that's someone for people to meet if you want a representative of the city at any function. I had to do to a...they had a state square dance convention here and you had to go welcome them.

AC: Did you square dance?

BF: Pardon?

AC: Did you square dance?

BF: No. But anyway, that was kind of the concept of mayor at that time.

AC: Do you remember anything that you had to deal with at that time that was either really wonderful or really difficult?

BF: Yeah. I learned one thing, in the public things that are really important for the city or the government and whatever the general public really doesn't pay much attention to it, big money items even. But if you change the rules about dog control you're gonna get a

crowd. [laughs] The biggest crowd we ever had I think in the eight years that I was on there was when there was a lot of complaints about animals running at large and we were gonna revise the animal ordinance thing. A lot of rumors came out and people came up with the idea that they were gonna have to have leashes on all their cats and everything, you know. When we had the vote for that thing it filled the city chambers and people were standing in the hall. They were really irate about things that really weren't gonna happen, but we were goofin' around with their animals and they didn't like that. Then you turn around and have a big thing and spend a lot of money or a very important thing, nobody cared about. Well, like the thing that's really helped is the cooperation between the Fish and Wildlife and the Big John out here on...instead of dumpin' into the river made the wetlands. Nobody really made comments about that, but it was really a good thing, a successful thing. The other thing we kind of...council got in a little difficulty and we had some complaints on, as I recall, is the state wanted to redo the main street through town and so they tore up all the street and put in new sidewalks. It was really... And the state paid for it. It was really a good thing for the city, but there was really about four...three or four downtown business people that just raised heck with us. Others were imaginative and did some creative thinking and keepin' their businesses open. 'Cause it did disrupt the businesses that just faced Adams only, you know. Others made a rear entrance to their building and painted things down the alley, you know, to get people to go in, footprints on the wall and all that. So in the long haul it was a good thing, but for a couple months there we took a little heat on bein' torn up.

AC: Was that in the mid-'80s?

BF: Yeah. I don't remember the exact date, but it was in the '80s, yeah.

AC: Did you enjoy being the mayor?

BF: Yeah, I kind of enjoyed being on the council.

AC: Who was on the council at the time? Do you remember?

BF: Let's see, Dick Staub and Roberta Bates and Susan Turley was on there when I was and Bob Dalton and when I first went on Bob Davidson was on and he was mayor and then he died while he was still on. Oh, and Mike Taylor, that was a school person. He's superintendent of schools in Park Rose now. Somebody else... Anyway, yeah...

AC: Did you work well together? Did you feel like the council...that you...

BF: Pretty much. I think when we were on there I think we had a...there were some changes, you know, that they came and went. Susan Turley went off early, she left, but in general I think we had a good council. I think I would have preferred that'd stayed... Oh, Di Larson Hill, she was on there, too, towards the end. I think I would've liked to have seen it just stayed as a five-person council and the mayor being chairman of the group as opposed to seven people now and a mayor separately elected. I think La Grande was one of the first cities to ever have the city manager form of government. I think that's a positive thing and they should stick with it. That's kind of a strong manager, weak mayor form of government. And every council person is equal. I don't think you can get elected people that... See, Portland has the commissioner type, so you elect someone and their head of the police department or the head of the streets. In general, the elected person doesn't have that kind of expertise. They aren't educated in those venues so the council should be representing the people on what they want or think they want in terms of government and then you hire the city manager to see that he does it. If he doesn't follow the general direction of the council then you fire him and you get another manager. The council shouldn't be doing...going out and telling Joe Blow that's patchin' streets how to do it. You don't get into that. That's the manager's job.

AC: I have one more question for you. What advice might you give for people who live in La Grande, be they teachers, students or mayors or councilors...lots of women. You can

either maybe address it, you know, what you see as the teacher for what's happening with La Grande or some advice you might give for...besides just what you talked about? You know, the betterment of the community. What advice would you give for future generations about being a civic leader?

BF: I don't know what the answer would be on smaller communities like La Grande that are losing their kind of "downtown business-types" to the big superstores and the population is more mobile and people don't think anything about going to Portland to do their shopping, you know. It makes it rough on the small business, like there are no hardware stores downtown, there's no clothing stores except Penny's, no men's, women's, you know, that...it's kind of gone. I don't know what you would do to strengthen that. They have a pretty active downtown group now that's fighting for business.

AC: Do you think the library will help that? The new library building?

BF: Yeah. I think anything that is...yeah, the new construction downtown has gotta help, I think. That kind of created a little furor, too, on designin' the library. But they've been fighting for twenty-five, thirty years to get a new library so I think this has to be a little cooperation or a little give on each side. It might not be quite what a lot in the community thinks it should be in design or location, but they've been trying to get one for so long that go ahead and get one and then, you know, live with it, I guess. I don't know what the answer is for smaller communities and yet you're starting to see a lot of people who have left La Grande come back to retire. So it's a nice place to live and you aren't troubled with the gang wars of the bigger areas.

AC: So you've been happy living here?

BF: I have been, yeah. I don't... The time I've spent like on the council going to other communities, on the ski activities and being in Seattle a lot I wouldn't want to live there. They're nice to visit, but I wouldn't want to stay. If I had to commute to work like you do in Portland, Seattle I'd probably quit.

AC: So what's kept you here?

BF: I suppose the lifestyle and maybe, what, not being ambitious enough to fight the big city, I guess. That'd be part of it. Bein' a little...you are a little remote alright, but, you know, you could be in Portland in four hours if you want to drive there. And I haven't really had any ambitions to be something that would require me to be in a big city. And maybe that's why I've kind of been active in a lot of local things.

AC: Remember what year that was?

BF: Oh, no.

AC: That's alright. We can look it up.

BF: That's another thing, I think, I'm not remembering dates and I sit around trying to think of someone's name all the time and I can tell you their whole history. It's kind of like that picture, you know.

AC: I was amazed that you knew as many names as you did.

BF: Tell you about all of 'em, but I might be able to have trouble with some names. Although I guess that's a sign of old age. You remember old things than current.

AC: I think you're doing very well. So you're gonna keep skiin'?

BF: Yeah. Another year or two. See how it goes. And then historically, I guess, the other reason I haven't really been a person that paid a lot of attention to relatives. I'm an only child and I have one cousin that lives in town and that's it. But yet McAlister Lane out here was named after my...what would he have been...I didn't ever know him, but he would be my great-grandfather. Dan McAlister was his name. He homesteaded that, oh, farm. I think Duane Fleet owns it now. It's on the middle of McAlister down from the grange hall that's on Gekeler. Got all the cows and the barnyard and the mud. That was my grandmother's father's place and he raised race horses and hauled 'em to Seattle and

Portland on the train. Well, they were the...what do you call 'em...the Sulky two-wheel cart that a guy rides and then there are trotters, pacers, you know. And won a lot of ribbons. And then his son, Reese McAlister, that would've been my Mom's uncle, I always called him my uncle, he took over and ran the ranch until he died. Then it went into the estate. Then my grandmother, that was a McAlister, married a Moss and they were a family that Moss Chapel School was named after them out here on Hunter Lane.

AC: Are Moss Springs named after them, too?

BF: Could've been. I don't know. But anyway, there was about...a set of twins and then they were all boys in the family, I think, about six or eight. One was a Salvation Army leader and the others were farmers.

AC: So you've had a lot of family history in the valley.

BF: So my... All of those, the Mosses and McAlisters, they're all buried here in town. I never...well, I knew my grandfather, my dad's dad. He was a railroader back in Iowa. And my dad was Ottumwa, Iowa and then came out here to make his fortune railroading. So I haven't really kept track of that... But other than that... And I do...

AC: It just sounds like your family is all over.

BF: Yeah, they're all here and then of course my one cousin, Phyllis Moss was her name and Blackman, and, of course, her married side of the Blackmans they're longtime Island City people. And so we have quite a few pictures. I have some pictures of my grandfather and grandmother and this Reese McAlister and all of 'em on the house over here on Cedar. I think it's about 2107 Cedar was where they lived. And when we lived in The Dalles we were coming up and visiting them I was probably in fifth grade, fourth grade, and watching Ku Klux Klan march with their pointed hats and they burned a cross up on Table...on Rooster Peak.

AC: What were they marching about?

BF: Oh, Ku Klux Klan they were the neo-Nazis of the time, I guess.

AC: What were they angry about in La Grande? What is Chinese or Black families?

BF: They were... I read some of the minutes of that and they were pretty much they were anti-Catholic and they were anti-Chinese. And in those minutes I read there was some restaurant that hired a Chinese cook and they advocated boycotting the restaurant because of the Chinese cook.

AC: So they marched down the street? Was that in the '30s?

BF: Yeah, that'd probably been in '32, '31. We lived in The Dalles then.

AC: Did you see them or did your family tell you about them?

BF: No, I remember seeing the cross on Rooster Peak. And then, as I recall, it was when they marched up Adams to burn the cross, I guess, we probably saw them then. But I don't remember where I saw, but I can remember seeing them in their white sheets and pointed hats. And then after I read those minutes and... And then that guy wrote a book...what was his name...it was in the *Oregonian* a while back. La Grande was really a major place of Ku Klux Klan. Some of the local people that I knew later on were members of the Klan. I don't know where they had their meetings. I can still...yeah, I remember seein' that cross. Of course I didn't know what they were all about, the political aspects of 'em. I guess they're still hanging around in Texas and...

AC: North Idaho.

BF: Yeah, north Idaho, Hayden Lake.

AC: That's fascinating. I really appreciate your memories. It's great.

BF: There was a... When we came back to La Grande I remember there was an old Chinese guy that had a pushcart. I remember seeing him around town. And then over here...where are we...well, where...

AC: Was he selling vegetables or something?

BF: Yeah. There was a lot of Chinese houses there where Commercial Tire is and then on the lot where Safeway used to be where they're building the library. There were some Chinese buildings there then and...

AC: So did they...did they have laundry there? Is that what it was?

BF: I don't remember any laundry, no.

AC: So it was just...

BF: Just old houses and I think that guy lived there.

AC: Where did they work, the people that lived in the Chinese houses?

BF: The railroad brought the Chinese in when it came into La Grande early on. That's how some of 'em stayed. My dad... There was a lot of Chinese in Reith running restaurants and when my dad worked for the railroad he used to bring me home letters that had come from China. He made friends with some of these Chinese guys in the restaurants through the railroad and they'd give me stamps –I had a stamp collection – and give me letters and write...wrote my name in Chinese.

AC: Did you save any of those?

BF: I don't know whether I have any of those things or not. I think that stamp collection's around here somewhere, but I'd have to look for it. Yeah, they're really...when I was in high school there wasn't much of a black community here at that time. In fact, there was two gals in high school when I was. One later became the first school administrator in Portland, Helen Torrance Law. She just died here not too long ago. And then there was...her brother was way ahead of me in high school. He was an outstanding athlete in high school and went to the University of Oregon. Of course they didn't want black people playing athletics.

AC: So there was a black family in town?

BF: Yeah. It was the Torrance family, they were.

AC: How were they treated at the high school?

BF: I don't think we even thought of 'em as blacks. They were just another kid in school. Then even when I was teaching later on, why, we had Trices. And of course I had one of his kids in school. And in some times I'm not sure that because there was such a few of 'em they weren't sure they weren't any different either. 'Cause I remember Art Trice, who is still around town, was in school and he and then his sister ___...there was only about two other black kids in the high school when I was vice-principal. One day I looked out the back and I saw these two kids runnin' across skipping school and one of 'em was obviously Art, I think he showed up pretty good, you know. I didn't know who the white kid was with him. The next day I caught Art and accused him of skipping school and wanted to know where'd he go. He said, "How'd you know it was me?" [laughs] I got to laughin' about that and I said, "Art, you know, I don't know who the guy was with you, but you really showed up and I know you skipped. I just wanted to let you know that I knew you skipped." I don't think I did anything to him. I still don't know who the kid he was with. Yeah, there were some. Willy Torrance I think he'd have probably been a great college ball player, but he got hurt. I think they probably hurt him on purpose, which is kind of sad. He was a Pullman car porter for years.

AC: Here in town?

BF: Well, he went through town and then his family was still here. Then my dad he was on passenger trains, too, and he made friends with...there was a lot of blacks on the...cooks on the passenger trains. And one of him when he retired started a restaurant here in La Grande called John's Kitchen. It was in the old brick building, well, where the auto store is on Jefferson right across from the railroad. What's that side street? Elm? On Elm.

AC: When was that operating? John's Kitchen.

BF: That was probably in '37, '36. And then there was a brewery along there and it burned. I think that might've put him out of business. Anyway, he was a cook on a passenger train and my dad made friends with him and we used to go down there to dinner.

AC: What kind of food would he serve?

BF: Oh, I remember he served good fried chicken. It was kind of a general restaurant and his experiences on a dining car. A really good cook. I don't remember what his name was other than John. Yeah, my dad he thought he was a great guy. Anyway, we used to go there for dinner. That was when I was about eighth grade or a freshman.

AC: After you moved back.

BF: Yeah, after we moved back here.

AC: [pause in recording] So a lot of houses of ill repute?

BF: Yeah. And they were kind of all over the ...[end tape]

8/4/04, T1, S1

AC: I'm speaking today with Buzz Fulton. It's August 10, 2004 at about 11:00 in his home. Buzz, what I wanted to talk about today was your career in politics. You said that it began in 1981. How did it begin?

BF: I guess... I don't remember... Bob Davidson was the mayor then and somebody, I think it might have been Bob Wilkins, talked me into running. They just wanted somebody new on there, I guess. And Dick Staub and I were the two...another position started. My wife had worked for the city for a long time and she warned me not to do it because of the many hours of meetings. I was probably aware that there would be a lot of meetings, but I didn't realize that you ended up being a representative of the city on every committee and councils in the town. I was on the Chamber and Northeast Oregon Economic Development committee as a city rep after I got on. So there was a lot of outside activities besides just the Wednesday night meeting.

AC: What was the nature of your position? Basically, what did they ask you to do when you were first voted onto the...?

BF: I think the council is an ___ type thing, you get the training on the job. The only thing that really gave me any background is...there is a pamphlet out by League of Oregon Cities that says what council people should do, particularly where it's a city manager form of government, which is supposed to be a weak mayor, strong council form of government. That was kind of the book to go by and then try to do what you think is best for the community, not what you think you might do.

AC: What was your relationship with the city manager at that time?

BF: Let's see, who was the city manager? Yeah, I think the relationship was pretty good. The only thing as time went on he...I don't know whether he became paranoid, but he seemed...if you made a suggestion or said, well, "I was over here on Cedar Street and there's some real potholes over there, can you do anything about it." Instead of him going to the road department and finding out what their schedule was and everything he'd go and tell 'em, "hey, a council person just complained, you better talk to him." So then you'd get a call from the head of the road department and that isn't the function of the councilman. The manager is supposed to take those things and do it. So that kind of was a sore point with that particular manager. Then, let's see, while we were there we had...he quit and we had another one, Bill Wharton. Then as I quit he left...

AC: So did the role of the city manager change with each person that came through?

BF: No, it shouldn't. I think sometimes it tends to, particularly when councils get into the micromanaging of the city, business. Everything should be done through the city manager. Then if you don't like the way he does it you fire him and get another manager.

Then we had an interim manager for about a year-and-a-half from The Dalles. He'd been city manager in The Dalles for about twenty years. When he retired he just filled in around the state. We tried to get him to stay, but his home was in The Dalles. He was a real good fellow to work with. Then about the time I quit I think we hired another city manager and he now is...runs the airport in Pendleton.

AC: What kinds of procedures did you go through for your candidacy? Did you do radio or put signs in yards? What kinds of things?

BF: It was pretty low key for me. I think I made a couple of...several radio spots and then had some ads in the Observer that were, oh, maybe 3" by 5", good-sized ads. Just was low key, kind of a little bit about me. I did nothing in terms of... Right now I really hate in politics bitin' the other guy and tryin' to tear down your opponent as opposed to saying what you intend to do. You can't make any rash promises in what you're gonna do on local government, I don't think, because most of that is the day to day management. We did get into some major things when they remodeled the whole street, the state highway.

AC: What happened there?

BF: Let's see, that would've been in about '83. Anyway, that was a state highway, US 30 is the main street, Adams. So they came in and wanted to redo the street. We figured it'd be a good chance to upgrade the downtown so we went along and it was all...they tore the street clear up down to the base, took out sidewalks. Ran into a little trouble 'cause most of the downtown old-time businesses had those metal doors in the sidewalks and emptied into their basement and the way they got deliveries. That kind of...some of had to be closed up and then some of 'em were saved. I think the one by Rexall Drug Store is about one of the only ones. But anyway, it was kind of a major disruption to the downtown businesses, but...

AC: How did the downtown business owners react to that happened?

BF: I think there was mixed feelings. We got in trouble...accused of ruining their business by three or four, but most of 'em were about ready to want something done because there'd been so many asphalt lifts put on the street by the state that some of the curbs was only a couple inches high. There was no access for wheelchairs in the corners. So when they took it clear down below grade... And a lot of the businesses were innovative in that they changed and the city tried to clean up alleys so they could have access from the alley. Most of 'em painted footprints on the side of a wall and said, "come around to the alley" and different things.

AC: Was that the entire downtown?

BF: Yeah. It went from...let's see, it started about at Greenwell Motel, or Oak Street Mobile, right in there, and then went clear to...yeah, it went to the underpass...I think it went on up past the underpass. 'Cause that was changed highway in from Island City...that was when we changed the street over to Washington to the three lane, you know, middle turn lane thing. It was not the five-way stop like there is now. I remember we had a big argument with the city engineer over that. They didn't want to change that to a five-way stop, said it would block traffic. It worked out pretty well, really. It moved traffic pretty good. But we got the traffic lights in and then I think one mistake city council...there was a lot of planning done between the city council, state highway engineer, Joe... I can't think of his last name right now. He was a neat guy to work with...with this engineer and we had a lot of input on what was to be done. Mike Becker Construction got all the sidewalks and...

AC: So what was the procedure for doing the downtown? First they just dug everything up? What was the arrangement there?

BF: They tried to go about a block or two blocks at a time. They ran into problems first off right by Foley Building and the city hall in the way down deep there was no base and it

was just a deep mud hole probably...I don't know, they had to go down five, six feet deep to put in a base. So that was the first kind of delay. And then...it was torn up most of the summer alright, as I recall, probably early spring also. Then of course they poured concrete. That's where we kind of got talked into...talked the state into putting the bill for the colored crosswalks. One mistake – and hindsight is always 20/20 you know – I don't like the street lights that we ended up putting in. We wanted better lighting. And of course they do light up well, but I kind of liked the old antique ones like, I think Don Keeling rustled up one over there in front of where the Chamber is now for the fire station, the museum. And Baker City put those in and I think they're real attractive and they give out enough light. Anyhow, and then the other thing that I'm kind of disappointed in the way it turned out is the roughness of the concrete, particularly in front of Goss'. That's really worn bad. I don't know whether it was the fault of studded tires, a combination of that and whether it was good or bad concrete. I don't know. But anyway, I think it wore a little excessive. I don't know what they can do now other than start again with a bad idea of a layer of asphalt. That would make it nice and smooth, but then it starts building up and then you run out of curb.

AC: So you said that shopkeepers were pretty innovative in getting people to come to their businesses. Did people keep going downtown even though it was torn up?

BF: Yeah, I think so. There was probably...the greatest crowds downtown was when they tore down the Sac Hotel of people coming and watching and the same thing with the construction.

AC: Was that at this time?

BF: No, that was way before.

AC: When was that? In the '40s?

BF: No. I don't know. It was...no, it was in the '50s or '60s maybe.

AC: Why did they tear the Sacagewea down?

BF: It was really well built and they had a hard time tearing it down, but it wasn't profitable for the owners and there was a Legion club and a barber shop and a restaurant and KLBM radio, that was in the ground floor, and then of course the rooms were older in the building, in the late '20s. So rather than updating it – another hindsight, it'd been nice if they had kept it. It was real interesting. It matched the annex.

AC: So you said people came to watch it being torn down?

BF: Oh yeah. They worked on it quite a while. But, no, I think...I think...back to the street program...there were some of the downtown were really against it because it did disrupt their business. Others were very supportive. I'm not sure what the percentage was. I think, perhaps, more supported it than were against it. It didn't really... I don't think it really drove any business out of business. Downtown has lost a lot of businesses from that period of time.

AC: So there were more businesses then than there are now?

BF: Oh yeah. There was hardware stores, men's clothing stores. They were kind of starting to go. And I'm not sure what the demise of all of 'em...the reasons were. Just change in small town culture, I guess.

AC: This was before the mall was there or anything?

BF: No, the mall was in when we did the downtown. Had been in. And now they're... That was another thing that we did talk about was changing the entrance to the mall because of a fatal accident on the highway there were the traffic light is. Now they're doing it. I don't know what really was the reason for the downtown to kind of disappear, but it's done that in other small towns, too.

AC: Do you see it revitalizing now?

BF: I think it's better than it was two or three years ago.

AC: What do you think makes a good community?

BF: I think the first thing is that if you can get a consensus of the major population of the community what the goals might be for the community and not have 'em fighting each other is the first step to success. I think Baker City is a pretty good example. And The Dalles is another good example, I think, of towns kind of hitting rock bottom financially and people finally decide, hey, we better do something and we better do it together and they kind of bring it back. I don't know if you've been to The Dalles lately, but downtown both two-way streets. Most of the buildings pretty well full and they've kept capitalized on the Lewis and Clark thing and have murals the size of all their buildings, you know.

AC: Do you think La Grande needs a theme?

BF: Yeah. They've been working on that for forty years, as long as they have for the library.

AC: So what...forty years ago what kind of community were they trying to develop?

BF: They were...the logo at one time was "Hub of Eastern Oregon." I think they had a wheel and showed La Grande and the center. Then they've changed. Then they had a study on whether a conference center would be, like, you know, an asset to the community. Was it Kogan and Sharp, I think, did the study and said La Grande wouldn't support a convention center. They probably would some kind of smaller conference center. So we looked at... And that was during when I was on the council, too, and...

AC: This was in the '80s?

BF: Yeah. And they... We didn't have any money and somebody offered us some property out by the Pony Soldier, but no money to build it and motels didn't want an increase in the motel tax. To finally the state came along and was gonna build a new armory and at that time the commanding general of the guard in Salem had been in the unit in La Grande. He had kind of liked La Grande and he got the idea of maybe combining it with local funding to build a conference center and kind of add some amenities to the armory. So we started on that track. Well, immediately there was kind of a split in the community and other people thought, no, they didn't want anything to with the Guard. So they had other meetings that's when I'm saying that we need to work together. So that kind of divided the community in a way and they couldn't raise any money either, the other group, and so we went ahead and it's been kind of an uphill battle to get that done.

AC: So that was started way back in the '80s and the conference center was finished, what, five years ago?

BF: Yeah, about that. So it was a long term thing. That was one of the things that was divisive in the community. And then on a complete agreement for the remodel of the street community.

AC: What other kinds of debates besides those two do you remember during your service?

BF: Not so much during the time I was in the council, but there's been the long term battle up until maybe previous president of the college, Dave Gilbert, that there's always been a divide between the college people and the downtown. They've never been real supportive of each other until the last ten years. It's getting a lot better. It better be because the college is a major contributor to the economic welfare of the community and...

AC: Why do you think that split was created, or created itself? Can you remember...

BF: I don't know. Looking back fifty, sixty years ago, you know, the community was really...the majority of it was railroad, train crews and then they had the back shops and repaired engines. It was, you know, the biggest employer in Union County. The college was just a thing that La Grande kind of lucked out and got it instead of the tuberculosis hospital that went in in The Dalles. So there was kind of that economic-social divide between the laboring group that was the total community and the academic at the college.

Although the original staff at the college remained for clear into the '40s, it was a pretty stable staff. So there was kind of that divide, as I see it. I don't know why. It took a long time for that to get over. Because the community really was caused by the railroad and that's what built La Grande. That's why those five-way intersections are in there.

AC: Why's that?

BF: Old Town started up on C Avenue, where John Brown started La Grande. I guess he was one of the first one. Anyway, they laid all the streets out north and south, east and west. The railroad came through and they came down the canyon from the river and they wanted to go as straight as they could and get on to Ontario. So they went diagonally across the valley to Union and up Pyle's Canyon. So then the community started building up next to the railroad. Then the streets there were parallel to the railroad. Then when the towns met at about Washington, in there, they started comin' in with all those angles streets.

AC: I wondered about that.

BF: It wasn't very good planning. But otherwise they'd 've had crossings at angles to the railroad, which was a bad one the highway that went out to Island City went over the railroad tracks before the underpass. So it went over at an angle to the railroad and people didn't always look back and a lot of cars got hit. Of course there was no crossing arms or no signals or anything then. Of course that was quite a bit of travel on Highway 82. So that's why they put the underpass in there. Then the other one, the viaduct here on Second Street, there was an old one there and it didn't line up with the streets, it was offset a little. And then when they built the new one they had to try and line it up. So that's kind of why the city got the five-way intersections.

AC: Fascinating. What about the entrance into town?

BF: From the west?

AC: From the west.

BF: That pretty much had always been the same as far as I know. I think there was an old bridge over the Grande Ronde...well, I know there was two old ones before they put the freeway in, but they were down lower. There was one down low and the Orodell Bridge.

AC: Orodell Bridge?

BF: Orodell, yeah. Orodell was kind of...they had...there was a mill at Perry, sawmill. And then there was another mill out by the fairgrounds. That was _____. In fact, when we first lived here it was Palmer or Bowman-Hicks mill and then Stangg's mill. A whole bunch of mills in Union County, sawmills.

AC: Do you remember going out to the sawmill?

BF: Unfortunatley, I worked in a small mill.

AC: Which one?

BF: At Boise Cascade. When I first got out of the Navy I worked there a winter. Probably one of the better paying jobs, but I hated it the worst.

AC: Why's that?

BF: It was so repetitive. They were...

AC: What was your job?

BF: ...a furniture factory then. They made dressers and stuff, parts for assembly by, I think, Wards and Sears. My first job there was off veering on a resaw machine with little drawer fronts about a foot-and-a-half long and eight, ten inches wide and stackin' 'em on a pallet all day long. Asked for another job and got a job feedin' the planer, which was a lot more work, paid a nickel more an hour.

AC: So what was your salary?

BF: I don't even remember. It was hourly. That would've been '48. Pretty good money. Guys had worked there for years, too. Then was that... I think that was... Yeah, I didn't go back to school then. I worked two or three other jobs.

AC: What other jobs did you work?

BF: Oh, surveying for Union County, carried mail.

AC: Where did you survey?

BF: All over Union County, like all the county roads, Godley Lane and out by Elgin.

AC: How as surveying in those days different than it is today?

BF: It was all just with a transit and a rod for measuring. No electronics. Write everything down in a book, you know, try to look for hubs on previous surveys that had put 'em in the ground for markers. Then you'd find a lot of discrepancies out in the county, you know. People would say there was a hub in their property down here, but if you went from a different one it didn't come out the same. So I think there was a lot of work for surveyors in redoing property lines.

AC: Can we go back to the sawmill for just a minute? How many people worked at the sawmill at that time?

BF: Several hundred. Let's see, when I worked there it was Stange's sawmill and then it went to two or three other owners before Boise Cascade. It was... In today's technology it was pretty primitive machinery as far as the main carriages, or, you know, and there wasn't any electronic computer-controlled things.

AC: So the logs would come in and what would happen?

BF: They have a guy that would have to...[end tape]

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BF: ...he had to just eyeball it and do it the way he thought best. And then, of course, it was all steam powered then. There was a big steam boiler and a giant wheel in there that ran pulleys and then that went out through the planer and each planer had pulleys. To stop the thing you had to go pull a rope down to take the pulley of the track and crank the lumber. So it was... Boise Cascade and the other mills really modernized. I wouldn't know what to do over there now. [laughs]

AC: Were there a lot of GIs working?

BF: Yeah, there were quite a few who came back.

AC: So this was an entry level kind of a job for a GI at the time?

BF: Pretty much. And some of 'em stuck it out and stayed with all the mill changes.

AC: And you said how many mills were operating in Union County at that time?

BF: Oh man! Well...then later another job I worked as a parts man for Caterpillar Tractor and all the loggers came in there and all the little gypo mills. There were probably a couple, three in Elgin, three or four around there. Cove had some. North Powder had a couple. All over Enterprise.

AC: So that was the main industry besides the railroad was the mills?

BF: Yeah. And then that was part of railroad's business was hauling logs. There was a... Way back the Hilgard camp up there, Camp Elkanah that the church runs, that was a logging camp and there was a railroad that came down from there to Hilgard and then Union Pacific sent their engines crew up to pick up the logs. I remember my dad liked to get that trip called Hilgard Logger 'cause it was a...usually a daylight trip and he was in and out the same day.

AC: So then your next...besides surveying, what else did you say you were doing?

BF: Oh, then I worked at Caterpillar Tractor as parts man. Then...what...oh, I had a Baker Nehi Bottling distributorship here. I hauled pop out of Baker and then I sold pop up the branch, Joseph, Enterprise, Wallowa and went to Union, Cove, Imbler.

AC: With a truck?

BF: With a truck, yeah, peddlin' pop. Did that.

AC: So did you peddled it to stores?

BF: Yeah. And then...

AC: So did you have to sell each store and individual supply of...?

BF: Yeah.

AC: And it was up to you to...

BF: Just had a route that I traveled summer and winter.

AC: What kind of pop did they have?

BF: It was Baker Nehi.

AC: So Orange Crush...

BF: Orange and strawberry, root beer, Royal Crown Cola.

AC: Was that the most popular brand?

BF: And it was all... No, Coca-Cola was probably more popular then. It was bottled in Baker. I had a warehouse here in La Grande and they'd bring a freight truck over and we'd unload it and then I'd load it back on the truck had and delivered that. See, was that... And after that another guy and I bought a service station. Had that for eight years and then that's when I went back to school. I saw this guy outlines in...a portrait in *The Observer* that when I was on the council, wanted to know everything I did. I actually go back and read it every once in a while to remember what I did.

AC: So I guess we'll skip forward again to your work with the city politics, talking about making a good community. At the time it sounded like La Grande...at the time the streets were being done, et cetera, it sounds like La Grande was flourishing. Can you think of reasons why, you know, there were good times and bad times, what made the good times good and the bad times not so good? What was going on that would create this community?

BF: I don't know. That's a tough question. I think everybody in the '70s and '80s had a job, jobs were plentiful. It was kind of the attitude of the plain working guy was, you know, I can always find another job, you know, if this one doesn't pan out. There were other businesses in town then that were still going. The railroad hadn't pulled all their employees out and so...

AC: When did the railroad pull the employees out?

BF: It's... It had just been a steady reduction. Started when... It probably started back when they did away with steam engine and that closed the back shops.

AC: When was that, in La Grande? Do you remember? In the '50s or earlier?

BF: It would've been in the '50s. And they worked with skeleton crews and then as the back shops closed...

AC: What do you mean by back shops?

BF: They were all on the back side of the railroad tracks, called 'em that. There was a big roundhouse and a big mechanical building and a turntable to turn engines and a lot of side tracks – they're still in, but there was what they called the rip track – and then they had an ice track where they iced cars. So as that stuff faded out it went...the attrition was not all at once. They didn't just move everything out. Technology changed, did away with steam engines, took down all the coal chutes. They had converted to oil burners, even on the steam. And then the diesels came in. They took out all the water tanks – because they used to have to have water for steam engines. So that depleted two, three hundred people from the railroad when those all disappeared. They still had... They still had

passenger trains. Those crews were out of Portland and Pendleton, not La Grande. But the freight crews were still here. Then you gotta remember that a regular train crew consisted of an engineer, fireman, three brakemen and a conductor. Then they started cutting out brakemen, maybe going with two brakemen, then pretty soon they started cutting out more brakemen and...

AC: How could they do that? Didn't they need them?

BF: Just on the economy of running the railroad and also on technology of trains were different. Braking systems were better. They didn't need the brakemen to ride the top of the train so...

AC: What happened to these men who'd been working on the train? Did they stay in La Grande or did they move?

BF: Some through attrition, just retirement. Others went for other jobs. Then they started with the engine crews and now they run all their trains with an engineer and a conductor, no firemen, no brakemen. So you got two people and I understand they're probably...you're looking at runnin' on just an engineer. And then they stretched...they can go farther, they can haul more than they used to, more power. So technology has done that.

AC: How did that impact La Grande when those men were let go?

BF: It just did away with that job and that was a family paying job that supported that particular family and that money was gone. So that was less money for the community. And then inflation goes up. Yeah, you know, it's not too long ago that interest rates for a CD was 14%. Now what is it, .08? Anyway, back to the... And I don't know what the statistics would be of...you'd have to look at what the total economic income is for the city of La Grande and compare that with what it was then and the ratio of what the increase in salaries have been from a few years back. So it'd be kind of a tough math problem to come up with to see if we really are better off or worse off now. I'm sure, you know, that when you could buy a car for \$1,400 in 1951 that same car'll cost to probably \$22,000 now.

AC: What kind of car did you have in the '40s?

BF: Oh, let's see. My first new car – that's why I quoted the 14 – was a 1951 Ford and I think I paid \$1,491.33.

AC: Did you buy it in La Grande?

BF: Yeah.

AC: From what dealership?

BF: It was Walker Motor Company, Ford garage. It's where that... I think where the church is right across from the railroad on Jefferson. What is that church? There's an auto shop in there, part of it.

AC: I'm not sure. What color was your car?

BF: Black. Two door. Yeah, that was '51 Ford. Before that I'd had a bunch of used cars. That was the first new one. So anyway, you'd have to equate all that, total income versus comparable incomes. And I'm sure now that the total would far outnumber... 'Cause see, the population in La Grande has not varied much. It was around 9,000 probably in the early '40s and it's, what, 12,000 now? And one thing that's caused that is the city hasn't expanded it's city limits. There's a lot of people outside the city limits still adjacent to La Grande so population...that 12,000 doesn't represent what the 9,000 represented in the '40s. [recording paused] Yeah, back to the city council and the concept of La Grande being one of the oldest city manager forms of government. I think maybe I'm biased in that respect that I'm a strong supporter of the city manager form of government. I'm not in favor of the direction the council has gone in the last few years in terms of enlarging the council, of having a separate mayor. The idea of city manager and

council form of government is the fact that the city manager is supposed to be a person who is trained in that job function. He should have knowledge of engineering principles, of...it's kind of a tough position to fill because you should know something about engineering, road building, budget making, handling large sums of money, handling personnel, hiring, firing, competent people for all departments of the city, water, you know, the whole works. That would be his job. That is not the job of a council. The council are...should be people who are elected by the members of the city to set policy, decide direction for the city in general, not specifics, set some goals for the city and clear those, have an understanding with the city manager what you want in terms of those goals and then see that he enforces it. The council doesn't give direction and tell the road department that they want F Avenue repaired next year, you know. Those are internal functions.

AC: So when you were sitting on the council did you feel like the city manager was a strong...strong enough person to be able to make those decisions?

BF: Yes. I think we expected from the manager. Maybe you didn't always get it, but, I mean, that was the direction. And I think that unified the council in a way. And then every council member at that time, and even farther back in history, had an equal say in...at meeting and an equal vote. The chairman, which grew into being mayor and I kind of objected to that term when I was there, but it came with the position I guess...

AC: Why did you object to the mayor?

BF: I thought it was a misnomer. You should've been just the chairman of the council. And maybe that's being...looking into semantics too much, but I think that that is the way the city manager form of government should be run is with a...you can call 'em chairman, president of the council, those have all been names that these guys have had in the past.

AC: So do you think that La Grande sort of has a hybrid system right now?

BF: Yeah. I think it's developed into that because the mayor is kind of a separate entity, it is, all act separately. See, that changed the charter. You had to change the charter of the city government to do that.

AC: When did that charter get changed? In the '80s?

BF: No, just later than that. Whenever they went to...when they went to a seven member council instead of a five and elected a mayor. And then, of course, the good thing in changing that is that they had...they put in there that the mayor...if the mayor...if the person wanted to run for mayor and was on the council he had to resign his position on the council. Some cities in Oregon didn't do that and it caused...well, a real good friend of mine was principal of the high school in Albany and Albany had a separate mayor, but the guy...they didn't have to resign from the council. So the guy that was mayor had been elected to a term on the council as well as being elected mayor. This friend of mine ran against him as mayor and won, but the previous mayor still had a term on the council and they just locked horns all the time. It destroyed the functioning of the council.

AC: So when you were elected mayor did you...you no longer then were a member of the council?

BF: No. There wasn't a separate mayor. That was just a title. So when I said I kind of object to me being called the mayor it's a matter of semantics there because I had an equal vote on the council. I was just a councilmember...

AC: Why did they want you to be mayor?

BF: I was elected mayor by the council.

AC: Oh, by the council.

BF: I was really just president of the council. The public had nothing to do with electing the mayor until they changed the charter. It kind of grew from that idea of being president of the council, or chairman of the council...what else...that was about the only two titles as

I recall. I don't know when...now Bob Davidson was called mayor, but he too was just... And it was usually the senior member of the council. When you have the elections for the five positions on the council they tried to stagger 'em so that you didn't have a whole new council all at once. There were four-year terms and there were two-year terms. I was elected... And the four-year terms were the people that got the most votes, if there was a bunch running. I got... I was elected two four-year terms. So I only had to run twice in eight years and was lucky enough to have a pretty unanimous vote on those two elections. Then with the two-year terms in there you got new people, but you still had someone there for a four-year term and so you didn't clear out the whole council all at once. That might've been part of the thinking in wanted to get a seven-member council instead of five was so you had a little continuity over a period of time.

AC: How often did the council meet when you were mayor?

BF: Every Wednesday. Wednesday evening. And goin' back to my wife's criticism, with all the other meeting there was a lot more of them. But anyhow, on the council thing, then...now...the good part of the way the council is now is that the mayor is separated from the council and you aren't gonna have the problem of a mayor kind of being a councilmember and getting beat in election. I guess they could run again later, you know, and that part of it is good. I think it might take away...the perceived image that it makes, I think, that the mayor is a more powerful position and than it really should be if you're gonna stick with a city manager type form of government. [telephone ringing]
[recording stopped]