

ERMA LOREE

October 31, 2005

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[# 1 and # 2]

I: Test. It is October 31st, 2005, and this is an oral history interview with Erma Cunningham Loree. First of all, can you tell me your full name?

EL: I'm Erma Cunningham Loree.

I: And when were you born, and where were you born?

EL: I was born in Ashton, Idaho, in 19-- April 2nd, 1922.

I: Now, when did you first come to Union County?

EL: In 1934.

I: And so you'd have been about--?

EL: 1934-- I'd have been twelve, wouldn't I? Twelve.

I: Twelve.

EL: I was twelve.

I: Now what brought your family over here to Union--?

EL: My dad came over with a friend from Idaho. He evidently had relatives over in this area so my dad came over with him, and when he come back he said "We're moving over to Cove."

I: Because he liked it, or he just--?

EL: He liked it. He just loved it. Uh-huh.

I: I see. Now what was your father's name?

EL: My father is John Alma Cunningham.

I: And what did he do when he came?

EL: He was a farmer. He worked for Dr. Belmont in a-- out on his farm, out of Nampa.

I: And did he spend the rest of his life here?

EL: Yes. He spent the--well, he went-- uh, moved to La Grande probably the last ten years of his life. But he lived in Cove all the other time.

I: And your mother came here also?

EL: Yes.

I: What was her name?

EL: Her uh-- Minnie Larson Cunningham.

I: And did she-- was she employed?

EL: No.

I: Was she a homemaker?

EL: She was a homemaker. We had twelve kids in our family. So she was a homemaker.

I: And where did you all live when you came to Cove?

EL: We lived in a little house down here on the uh-- oh, it was about two blocks or three blocks down here. We lived in a little house.

I: From where you are now?

EL: From where we are now.

I: And so did you go to school and finish school here in Cove?

EL: Yes, I went to school in Cove. I started in-- I was in the sixth grade. They tore the old school down. I went to school a half a year in the old schoolhouse, and they tore the schoolhouse down. And I went the rest of that year. I was in sixth grade, and I went the rest of that year in the old bank building. And then the next year they had the new school.

I: How come they tore the school down before they had the other one built? Do you know?

EL: Well, they built this one in the same place, only it's bigger, a lot bigger school.

I: Oh. So they needed you to--

EL: Yeah.

I: relocate.

EL: So there was grades everyplace, in the Masonic Hall, all different places in Cove.

I: And you say you finished sixth grade where?

EL: At the old bank building in Cove. They used to have a bank in Cove, and that-- and the fifth and sixth grade was in the old bank building for the rest of the year 'til they get the school built.

I: What was that like?

EL: It was-- it was different. I'd never been in anything like that before. [chuckles]. Where I went to school in Idaho all this was-- all eight grades was in two rooms so it was a little different. [chuckles].

I: Well, was this-- was there a different teacher for each grade here?

EL: No, we had one teacher for two grades.

I: So fifth and sixth grade were together?

EL: Fifth and sixth, uh-huh. And then the-- the same grade, first and second, and third and fourth, fifth and sixth, and seventh and eighth. And then the high school was combined.

I: What was that like to-- do you have any stories or experiences from going to school in that bank building the rest of the year?

EL: Well, not really. It was kinda odd that you didn't see other kids, you know.

I: That was just the fifth and sixth--

EL: Yeah, just the fifth and sixth.

I: graders were in the bank?

EL: And we was down there, and other kids was way away and that. So, it was different.

I: Did they-- what did you do for lunch and things-- and recess?

EL: We just had to take our lunch then. And recess, why, we'd go out behind the building and see how much trouble we could get into! [laughs].

I: Did you get into any trouble?

EL: No, I didn't. I was-- I, oh, had been over in Idaho in a-- had a farm and never got out where I could get in trouble, so I didn't know how I could have.

I: Oh, I see.

EL: [laughs].

I: And you spent the half a year of that year?

EL: Uh-huh, a half a year in the old schoolhouse, and then half a year in the-- the old bank building.

I: Do you remember who your teacher was then?

EL: Yeah, I had Stella Edvalson. And she-- I don't know how many years 'cause I was a stranger there. I didn't know how many years she taught before I arrived, but she was my teacher.

I: Now at that time was the grade school a one-to-eight grade school here?

EL: Yeah, it was, but there was two classes in each room.

I: Right. So you were in a multi-grade classroom.

EL: Yeah.

I: But you finished eighth grade at Cove?

EL: At Cove, uh-huh. And then I just went my freshman year, and then I got married. So I-- I just went to freshman year.

I: Your freshman year of high school?

EL: Yes, I got married after I finished my freshman year.

I: And who did you marry?

EL: Merton Loree. [laughs].

I: Uh-huh. And I've-- you've been with him for how long?

EL: Sixty-seven years July the 7th.

I: When did you get married?

EL: I got married in 19-- July the 7th, 1938.

I: Now, you went one year of high school and you got married. Do you remember how old you were?

EL: I was fourteen, I think.

I: And--

EL: No, I must have been fifteen because I got married when I was fifteen. I turned fifteen in the summer and got married in the summer.

I: You mind if I ask how that happened, or do your-- did your parents object? What-- what--?

EL: They didn't know! We ran away and got married and come back and told 'em, and-- and they weren't very happy. [laughs].

I: Did they do anything about that?

EL: No, uh-uh. They were good parents and they didn't, but it made 'em pretty sad.

I: Was it legal to be married at that age?

EL: Yeah. They didn't object. 'Course, when uh-- when we gave our age in Walla-Walla we didn't give the right age.

I: Oh.

EL: You know how that goes. [laughs].

I: How old were you when-- how old did you tell the Justice of the Peace--?

EL: Eighteen.

I: Oh, I see.

EL: I just lied two years.

I: Uh-huh.

EL: [chuckles].

I: You didn't have to show ID or prove--

EL: No, uh-uh.

I: your age or anything?

EL: Merton's brother and his wife went with us, and they just verified it. And he was a minister.

I: Well, now.

EL: [laughs].

I: It seems to have worked out.

EL: Yes--

I: You've been together ever since.

EL: we've been together ever since, uh-huh.

I: Now, where did you first live then when you married to Mr. Loree?

EL: Oh, we had a how-- rented a house up by the swimming pool, and then we moved to Ferndale for a few years. And oh, for-- for four years, and then we moved back and-- and bought a place above the school then and lived up there.

I: And how long did you-- when did you move here where you're at now?

EL: We had to-- to move down with Merton's mother, and I think that was in '52, I believe. His dad died, and we had to move down and take care of her. She was crippled.

I: So then when did you move to this location on Jasper Street?

EL: About -- this is where we've lived all this time, uh-huh.

I: Is this where his parents lived, then?

EL: Yeah, his parents lived here, and then when his dad died we had to move down and take care of her. She was crippled, and so we moved here.

I: And you've been here ever since.

EL: Uh-huh.

I: Have you um-- have you been employed?

EL: I worked as a cook when we had Minam-- built Minam Lodge up on the Minam. And I was-- was the cook back there. And we had all totaled-- we were in there, oh, about twenty-two years, but we didn't have Minam Lodge built at that time. I think we built it probably in about 1950. And I cooked in there, and then I cooked at a restaurant in Union. And I worked out at Hot Lake, and-- and-- when they had the hospital, or it was that nursing home, I mean, out there. And I worked out there, and I-- I cooked, or whatever they needed done out there.

I: Okay.

EL: I worked out there a year.

I: Let's explore each of these, then. You say that you built the lodge at Minam--

EL: Minam Lodge.

I: or worked up there. Now, did you own this place?

EL: Yes, we owned it, uh-huh. We bought the land and built the-- the cabins, and-- and we had the main lodge, and then we had the three beachfront cabins and some other buildings.

I: Now I haven't been up there for a long time. These would be the buildings that are still there now?

EL: Yeah, they're still there. In fact, we built one more then, uh, just before we sold it. So, it's actually got four of 'em.

I: Now, did you commute from Cove to there when you were working--

EL: Yeah.

I: at that place?

EL: Well, when I working out here it was in the summer, or the wintertime when it was closed out there.

I: Oh, so it was a seasonal--?

EL: Yeah, it was a seasonal thing. Soon as elk season was over we came out. And then we-- I didn't go until the kids got out of school in the Spring and then, but Merton would. And then as soon as they got out then all of us went back.

I: So you cooked for the place?

EL: Yeah.

I: Was there a restaurant there?

EL: No, I-- it was just a main lodge, and I cooked in that. And they had a place for everybody to eat. And we had some rooms, a couple rooms downstairs, and then there was a big upstairs and all these outside cabins. And I cooked for all of 'em.

I: Sort of like a rustic hotel then, maybe?

EL: Yeah, mm-hm.

I: And how long did you do that?

EL: We sold out in 1969, and I think we started in-- well, I think we had a lodge there about 1950. But we had been in there and-- and leased the Richards' place for about two years before that. So we were in there at least twenty-two years.

I: Now, you said Richards' place, who's that?

EL: Yeah. Can't think of it-- it was uh, well, _____ Richards has it now, and his folks had it before that.

I: Before you did?

EL: Before-- yeah, we just rented it from 'em for those years.

I: Oh.

EL: It was about two years. And then we built the-- bought the land and built Minam Lodge then.

I: Who did you sell it to when you--?

EL: We sold-- sold it-- I can't remember the man's name. I don't remember his name, but he had it-- he didn't have it very long.

I: Okay.

EL: So, it's been changed hands. Well, at least people have leased it. Several different people have leased it then, and with that elk conditioning the way it is they're not-- not making a lot there. It's right next to the horse ranch. You know where the horse ranch is?

I: I think I do. Okay, so what did you-- was your next occupational pursuit after that?

EL: Well, when I got through in there I had to go and have hip replacement. So I didn't work for-- I couldn't work after that, so I didn't. But my restaurant work in there out at Hot Lake was my last job. I was in back there.

I: Now didn't you say that you worked in a restaurant here in Cove, or you cooked somewhere here in Cove?

EL: That was in Union.

I: Union.

EL: The little-- yeah. The little uh-- the restaurant that uh-- I can't remember what they call it now, but it's right across the-- not very far from the-- oh, the bank. It's across the street and down a little bit from the bank.

I: Do you remember what the name of it was when you worked there?

EL: I can't remember.

I: That's okay.

EL: [chuckles].

I: That's okay. How long did you work there approximately?

EL: I worked that-- worked that-- when I got off work in the Fall and then 'til Spring when I just had to go back in. And that's as long as I worked there. And the same way out at Hot Lake when that was a nursing home. I worked from the time I got out, and then worked 'til it was that we had to go back down to Minam.

I: So, you were working seasonally--

EL: Yeah, uh-huh.

I: when-- when the Minam wasn't in operation then you would work?

EL: Then I'd go and do that. And I also was cook, or assistant cook down at the extension [Ascension] School. And I did that a couple of summers. I worked there 'til I had to go into Minam. I'd start in the Spring when they'd get people in, and I'd work down there until I had to go to the Minam. And then I'd have to quit.

I: Let's talk about this extension [Ascension] School. What is that?

EL: That's the Episcopal extension [Ascension] School. They have uh-- they used to, and I bet they still do have a bunch of kids in the summer. And they have a summer school, and its-- go swimmin'. And I guess they have-- it's a religious thing. It's the Episcopal Church.

I: Where was this at?

EL: It's down below Cove. It's just about a block from where the library-- or the-- the Post Office right there on the corner on the right.

I: Now did you do this in the summer, or--?

EL: I did it 'til I had to go into the Minam in the Summer. I do it starting in the Spring when they get people in, and then I'd have to quit when I'd go into the Minam.

I: What-- what-- what do you know about that extension [Ascension] thing? You said that it was a summer school for--?

EL: Well, they have a-- it's the Episcopal Church, and they have a lot of things going on. They have a place for 'em now down there where they have a restaurant, and they have places, I guess, people can stay. And they'll let people stay and eat and so forth, or like the senior citizens will have dinner down there and different things. And the other part I think is mostly for kids and people that come for different services, you know. And maybe the rest of the week or something, or something like that.

I: Now did you know what was going on in the operation while you were there, or did you just cook?

EL: I just cooked. I never got in on any part of the rest of it because we had to be there early in the morning and finish up late at night because they gotta have a good three meals. So I never got in on any of the programs or anything like that.

I: Okay. So, you were there early in the morning and usually there until later--

EL: Probably--

I: like after dinner?

EL: I imagine, probably 7:00 o'clock at night, maybe, 6:00, 7:00 o'clock at night. Because I think that most time they eat between 5:00 and 6:00, and then we had the cleanup and everything after that.

I: How early would you be there in the morning?

EL: Usually we were there by 6:00.

I: So that's a twelve hour day.

EL: Yeah. It was a long day.

I: Were you paid hourly?

EL: Yeah, I think I was. I don't remember what I paid, but I think it was hourly.

I: Now how did you deal, and how-- was it a five day a week?

EL: No, we worked six days, or seven days a week because they had all these people, even on Sunday they'd have 'em, and then we'd cook for 'em.

I: Was there overtime consideration or anything at that time?

EL: No there wasn't, never was anything like that.

I: So you just did it _____?

EL: We just did it. [chuckles].

I: Would you be paid twelve hours a day, then?

EL: I suppose, yeah. How many hours we were there we would get paid for. 'Course the wages weren't _____, but _____.

I: So, how many people would you cook for?

EL: Oh gosh, I would say a lot of times about on an average of twenty-five people, but when the uh-- the summer school kids was there, we'd

have probably fifty or a hundred. We had a lot of 'em. I don't remember how many, but I'd say maybe fifty.

I: Did you-- I'm kind of assuming, but let me know-- things probably weren't as ready-made then as they are today.

EL: No, you cooked things then.

I: So, what kind of-- what kind of routine would you have? Did you have to, like start with peeling potatoes and the--

EL: Oh yeah.

I: making all basic preparation?

EL: Uh-huh, we did all those basic things, uh-huh. And for breakfast, like we'd have hot cakes, and oh, I suppose bacon and all those different things, or sausage or something, just a real good meal. And then--

I: How many people worked with you?

EL: There was three of us that did the cooking. There was one lady that was the main cook, and then there was two of us that were preppers that we helped her. But she was the main cook, and _____ did that. And uh--

I: Were you the main cook at Minam?

EL: No. Oh, I was at Minam, uh-huh! Well, I thought that was better because the horse ranch would hire cooks, and they'd get _____ to get somebody to cook. And I said, "Well, if I do it myself, then I know it's going to be done." So, I was the cook. And then months of the _____ I had helpers, but a lot of times I was just doing the cooking.

I: How many people would you cook for up at Minam?

EL: Oh, we had-- most of the time we had probably twenty. And then we'd have these different things like the Mavericks would come in, or we'd have fly-in dinners. And sometimes we'd have thirty, forty people.

I: Now in this-- at the Minam and at the Episcopal, or the extension [Ascension] place that you talked about, were the menus set-- or were they-- uh, did you have menus?

EL: No, we'd just fix what we thought they would like, I think now.

I: So, it was a set menu then.

EL: Uh-huh. I was an old-fashioned cook, and so I'd just cook what I thought they'd like and they did. [chuckles].

I: Were there meals included in both of these places?

EL: Yeah--

I: Did that space--?

EL: when they came in-- now, like the deer hunters when they'd come in, everything was furnished. They brought their guns and their own stuff, but we did all the meals and everything just along with what they paid to come in.

I: And the same with the extension [Ascension]?

EL: Yeah, the extension [Ascension]. I think that was probably the same too.

I: Yeah. Now where else did you-- you said you were out at Hot Lake?

EL: At Hot Lake when it was a nursing home!

I: Tell me about-- tell me what you know about that.

EL: Well, it was a wonderful nursing home, and I wish they still had it. My mother went out there, and this is why I went out is that I wanted to make sure she's gettin' good care. And so I decided I'd-- because I'd done all these work in different places, and I thought, "Well, I'll go out there and make sure my mother." So, I got to work in the nursing home, and I got to cook. And I got to sew, and all these different-- but it was wonderful. They had a wonderful place out there, and

when I had to cook, that was a big job because there was a lot of people to cook for. And uh--

I: Was-- was that a-- was that a big establishment then?

EL: Yes, it was. It was a big one. And-- and uh-- uh, they-- I don't know how many they had in the nursing home, but they had a lot of people.

I: Was the hospital still running at the same time?

EL: No, the hospital hadn't run for awhile. And so it had-- I don't know whether they'd had anything in between that and the nursing home or not, but the hospital hadn't been in there for quite awhile before that.

I: Was there any other activity besides the nursing home going on when you worked out there?

EL: I think they had other things that they'd rent rooms out for, but I don't really know what it was. But I think they did have other things that went on. Then after the nursing home closed, they started a restaurant out here, but it didn't seem like it lasted very long.

I: Did you work in that facility?

EL: I didn't work-- I didn't work in the restaurant. We went out there, but I never worked in it.

I: Now you say your mother was a patient in this nursing home out there?

EL: Yes, uh-huh. She'd had a stroke and was completely paralyzed. And so she was a patient out there. And uh, we want-- I wanted to make sure she was gettin' good care, so I got I job out there so I could tell. And it was wonderful.

I: What was the first thing you did when you went to work out there?

EL: I worked on the floor as a nurse, uh, nurse's aide at first, and then as the assistant leader _____ the kitchen. And sometimes they needed

wall sheets or sheets made or something like that, and I would do those things.

I: You mean sew those, or--

EL: Sew those.

I: make them?

EL: Make them, uh-huh.

I: Let's talk about-- let's talk about being a nursing assistant out there when you first did because I'm sure the things you did then are different than what they do now.

EL: Oh yeah!

I: What did you do? What-- what kinds of things did you do?

EL: Well, I had to bathe people and change the sheets and all these things. And then make sure that they were eating, and they'd kind of assign me to a certain _____. And you had to make sure these people were getting the care that they needed, and uh, bathing people and all those different things.

I: Did you perform any treatments or apply any medications _____?

EL: No, I didn't do that. That was up to the nurses. I didn't do anything like that.

I: Okay. Then you did some sewing or--?

EL: Yes, I've always done a lot of sewing so I'd make these _____ things to put underneath the patient under the bed so you could pull 'em and move 'em and all of that. I made a lot of those. And uh-- and then a lot of their clothes needed mending and-- and things like that, and I did those things. I just worked wherever they needed me.

I: How 'bout the kitchen then, working in food services?

EL: That was a big thing because it was so different from what I had done. Pat, the gal that left, left little notes, and I kinda went by that. And I made it fine.

I: What kinds of things were different from what you knew that you did there? Can you think of any that-- that the routine was different, or the-- what might have been different about?

EL: Well, let's see, I don't-- they cooked some different things than I'd ordinarily cook. But I knew how to do 'em, so I made it. But they uh-- they had different things that I had to fix that I didn't ordinarily fix at home.

I: Were their menus altered for some of the patients in terms of texture or--

EL: Well, yeah.

I: or seasoning?

EL: Different ones had to have different things. But I would fix all these things, and that was up to somebody to get 'em right to these patients.

I: So, you didn't have a--

EL: I didn't--

I: role in that.

EL: Yeah, I didn't have to do that. I had to have the food all fixed, and-- and the special things that different ones needed not a lot. But I didn't have to dish it up for each one of them.

I: Now, I've been told that um-- that previous owners of this place-- that it was a pretty self-sustaining operation. That a lot of the food and things actually came from-- were farmed or--

EL: Well--

I: raised in that area. Was that still being done?

EL: I-- I think it was at that time. I think they pretty much knew what was _____ around here and so forth. And they-- they served real good stuff out there.

I: Did uh-- were you familiar with the place when the-- the train used to stop there at that-- was the train stopping there--

EL: Uh, yes.

I: at that time?

EL: Yeah, but they didn't let any people off. They-- they usually went-- stopped there, but they'd go on through. But they didn't-- people weren't getting off there when I was there.

I: So, this was maybe before it became a public restaurant, or--?

EL: Yeah, I think so, yeah.

I: Okay. Did you know the owners or who operated that facility at that time when you were working there?

EL: I knew who he was, but I didn't know him 'til I went and got this job I didn't really know him. But he didn't want me to quit. He said, "No, I don't want you to quit." [laughs].

I: What--?

EL: 'Cause I could work any place that he wanted me to.

I: Oh. Did-- were you just there as long as your mother was a patient, or did you stay a little longer?

EL: No, I just got-- I just stayed-- I just worked from when I got out of the Minam in the Fall until I had to go back in, and then I had to quit because I had to go back to the Minam.

I: So really, quite a bit of your employment was always, for awhile anyway, around the Minam work.

EL: Yeah, it was for years, uh-huh.

I: Even when your mother was there.

EL: Yeah. I just had to work that-- through that winter and spring, and then I went back to Minam. Then after we sold out in there and I had my both hips replaced, then the doctors wouldn't let me do those things anymore. They said, "No more cooking and standing and sittin' and that. You have to do different." So I didn't go back to cooking since I _____ then.

I: What did you do, then?

EL: Well, I just took care of my family. [chuckles].

I: You didn't-- or you weren't employed anymore?

EL: No, I never was employed again.

I: So, let's talk about that family then. Did you say you came from a family of twelve, twelve kids?

EL: Uh huh, I'm the youngest of twelve kids, and I'm the only one left now. My sister was a hundred and one, and she died just about a year ago. And she and I were the last ones for quite awhile.

I: She-- where was she in line?

EL: She was in the second. She was the second in line.

I: Second oldest?

EL: Mm-hm.

I: And she was a hundred and one?

EL: Hundred and one when she died a little over a year ago, or about a year ago. It'd been a year. She'd have been a hundred and two in October last year.

I: I see. What was that like to live in such a large family at that time?

EL: It was wonderful. We never had a lot. And the things that I remember-- I would come home from the school. My mother always baked a big bunch of bread. And we'd come home from school-- we always had these fresh bread and-- and then whatever else we had. But it was always-- we could go and we get to break one loaf of bread. And oh, [chuckles] _____ bread! [chuckles]. Every night when we come home from school we'd break one loaf of bread and eat the bread like that. But the rest of it had to be sliced like _____. But it was-- we had good parents. And at night my dad-- I always sat on one knee and my brother on the other, and then the rest of the family would gather round. And he would sing to us, or we'd all sing or something like that. We were a happy family.

I: Did you live in town, or were you living outside or town?

EL: We lived out in the country. And Dr. Belmont had a farm out there, and my dad was runnin' his farm. And we lived out on it, and then we walked about two miles to the _____ at the school. [chuckles].

I: No school bus.

EL: No school buses. No cars or anything.

I: How-- what was the spread of the-- of the family? So, your second oldest-- how many years were there between the oldest and you?

EL: Oh gosh, I don't think there was much more than a year and half or two years between any of us down there.

I: So, about--

EL: I was about four years old when my oldest brother and my next oldest brother got married. I don't know how old they were when they got married, but it was-- we were pretty close together.

I: Now you lived on Dr. Belmont's farm.

EL: Uh-huh.

I: So-- and your father worked there. Did you have-- did you have chores?

EL: Oh yeah. We all had little things we had to do, and of course the boys helped on the farm. And-- but we always had little chores to do.

I: What were some of yours?

EL: Oh, probably to go out and feed a calf or something like that, you know. I just-- just little things-- just-- but we each had a little duty. And then we had some stuff that we helped in the house, little things that we did. 'Course I wasn't very big, and so I didn't have to do some of things the other kids had to do.

I: What were some of the things you did?

EL: Oh, I would help make the beds, but I always had to have help. And maybe I'd sweep the floor or something like that. With big families there's a lot of work to do.

I: Were-- how big was the house that you lived in?

EL: I don't-- there wasn't a lot of room in his house out there. I think we probably only had three bedrooms for all of us, but we made it. [chuckles].

I: How many brothers were there?

EL: There was six boys and six girls.

I: So was it like a boy's room and a girl's room and then Mom and Dad--

EL: Yeah.

I: or just something like that?

EL: For years I slept at the foot of my mom and dad's bed. [chuckles]. If they changed me some place I'd end up in there. I'd go crawl in the foot of their bed. [chuckles].

I: Was the-- did the house have plumbing and electricity or like that?

EL: No, nothing like that. We had lamps, and uh, we had a well that we went out and took a pump. That's how we got the water.

I: Were you living in this house when you got married?

EL: No, huh-uh.

I: Had your family moved into town?

EL: Yeah, my folks lived up, oh, on up the canyon up there, and that's where we lived. But Merton was living in this house, and his folks was-- I think had just moved in it maybe a year or something like that before.

I: Now when-- when your family moved in close-- was that closer to town, or was that-- oh well, you stayed in that farm house until you got married?

EL: Yeah.

I: You did.

EL: Uh-huh, we stayed up there, uh-huh.

I: And so you walked to school from there.

EL: Yeah.

I: Who were your playmates?

EL: Oh, my-- both of my sister-in-laws. And I still-- I still-- still been-- laughed with them a lot of times. I didn't know if they were my friends, or if they wanted my brothers. I wasn't sure. [laughs].

I: Oh. Were they the same age, or close--

EL: Yeah, maybe not--

I: in age to you?

EL: Right. One was in my grade, and one was in my brother's grade.

I: And have you carried that friendship on for--?

EL: Oh yeah! Yes.

I: What were their names?

EL: Uh, Betty. Uh, she's Betty-- was Betty Orton. She's Betty Cunningham. And uh, my other one, Donna, is dead. Well, her and my brother both. But Betty's still alive. My brother died, but her and I are just dear friends and call each other. And we'd go visit and just have fun. It's always been that way.

[END OF SIDE 1]

I: And we're continuing with our interview with Erma Cunningham Loree. It's still October 31st, 2005. So, did you have other playmates?

EL: Oh yeah.

I: Now these playmates, the-- these two women that you described, were they neighbors? Did they live out there?

EL: Betty was my neighbor when I lived down below there where we first moved in from Cove, she was. And then I-- the other one it was just-- she lived up on the hill, and-- and we just were playmates in school and very dear friends from then on.

I: Did you have playmates out at the ranch when you were living out there?

EL: No, huh-uh. We didn't-- we didn't even have neighbors. They were so far away I didn't have anybody that-- that was playmates at all.

I: Okay. And you said there was no plumbing.

EL: No plumbing.

I: No electricity?

EL: No.

I: What does that leave? I think that's it.

EL: That's about it. [chuckles].

I: So, what-- was your mother cooking on a-- a wood oven?

EL: Wood-- wood stove, mm-hm.

I: Did you learn how to cook on a wood oven?

EL: Oh yeah, uh-huh! In fact when we moved down here mother still had a wood stove. And when we went back to Minam we had a wood stove there. And then we had some grills, but I cooked on a wood stove at least back there.

I: When did you first encounter electric or gas cooking?

EL: Probably-- well, I think we used to have logs probably two to four years before we got an electric stove. But I sure had that-- I had that wood stove right there because I could--

I: You would still use it in other words?

EL: Oh yeah!

I: Which did you like better?

EL: Oh, I liked the wood stove 'cause I could put stuff on and slide it back and it would cook the way I wanted it. And-- but I liked the oven in the other one better because it was more _____. If you got too much fire in the wood stove, you might burn something.

I: How-- how um-- since I assume you had to pack water out there, how was bathing and that kind of thing done at that time? Did you have a routine? Was there a bath house?

EL: Oh, we had-- back there we had a-- a bathroom with a toilet and a-- and a shower and everything. So, we had those things at the lodge.

I: But if-- if I'm talking about in the house you grew up in--

EL: Oh!

I: out there at Dr. Belmont's.

EL: No, we didn't. We just had a washtub that we brought in. [laughs].

I: Was a-- was that a-- was there a routine for that, or--?

EL: Well, yeah. We uh-- it wasn't every day like you would ____ there to be. There was so many of us, but we had pretty much a routine to do that. Take our bath in the bath-- in the washtub. And-- and it was pretty much-- and then we had the washing too. We had boards, and we didn't have washing machines or anything like that. So, we just-- and my mother had a lot of washing. And we had-- it almost _____ now about the things like that that we did.

I: When was laundry day?

EL: It was every day.

I: Every day out there?

EL: Every day, mm-hm.

I: Was there a partic--

EL: With a family that big it just about had to be.

I: Now was there a particular laundry day when-- when you got into modern times with your husband and--?

EL: Oh yeah, Mondays.

I: Do you know why that was?

EL: I don't know. [laughs]. It's just one of those things that I did.

I: Do you-- would you have considered doing it on any other day?

EL: Oh, sometimes I had to, but it-- it threw me off schedule.

I: I see.

EL: I liked that Monday. I'd strip my bed and all of 'em and wash the sheets and all these things. And-- and then there were those things done sometimes in the middle of the week, too, but I mean that was my wash day.

I: What about-- so obviously no electricity no running water out there, then definitely no phone.

EL: No.

I: How would you communicate if you needed to?

EL: There just was no way, unless you just-- my dad had an old car. And if you had to, why, you'd have to take that old car and go. And when he'd come in, why, sometimes he'd drive into the grass. He didn't waste the grass, but he wasn't a very good driver 'til he'd run through the back of it. [laughs].

I: Goodness.

EL: But he learned to drive, so--

I: How about things like going to the doctor, or anything like that?

EL: We never did. We never went to the doctor for anything. When a family's so big I guess you couldn't afford it. And we just didn't.

I: So, do you-- are you still in contact with any of your classmates with the times that you did go to school? Do you still--

EL: Oh yeah.

I: see or socialize with any of them?

EL: There's-- there's one of them fellows up here. There's not too many of them left, but there's one up here, Roy Comstock. And I don't know that most of 'em-- if there's any of 'em left it seems like they moved away. But Roy Comstock lives here, and we're still friends. Then of course my sister-in-law, Betty, and I still got a lot of friends that went to school when I did.

I: So, let's talk about-- now I forget, what year did you get married again?

EL: 1938.

I: 1938.

EL: July the 7th, 1938.

I: Where did you first live?

EL: We lived up by the swimming pool was our first house.

I: Here in Cove.

EL: Yes, there's a house right there, and we lived in that one. And then we moved-- no, we didn't either, I'm sorry. We moved into the-- there's a garage down here, and it had a little apartment on the side. And we moved down to that. And then we moved to Prineville and lived there for three or four years.

I: And you came back here to take care of his mother?

EL: Yeah, we came back because his folks needed somebody close by. And we-- but then they lived quite a long time after that. But we came back because of them. And Merton was a house painter and so he painted houses and that. Then later we got involved in going back to Minam. But his folks was old enough they needed to have somebody here, and so we moved back from Prineville to be close to them.

I: How many children do you have?

EL: I've got three living children, and I had two premature babies I lost.

I: When were they born, approximate years?

EL: I had-- the oldest boy was born in '41, April of '41. And the girl was born April of-- 4th of '44. And then our youngest boy was born in October the 14th of '45.

I: So, you raised children during World War II?

EL: Mm-hm. Merton went into the service in World War II. I think he went in August or Sept-- September, I believe, of '42. And he had ulcers when he went in, and 'course he'd been doctored for that. Well, they took him over to Vancouver and put him through all the tests and sent him anyway. As soon as he got into the-- that food based _____ 'course that wasn't for ulcers, why, he was sent for a time in the hospital. So, he was out. And I think it might have been in five or six months and they discharged him because of that.

I: And so during that time you were on your own raising a family?

EL: Yeah, I had those two kids.

I: How was that? Was that-- how did you manage that while he was away?

EL: Oh, I made it fine. I didn't have a car or anything so I just had a baby buggy. And [chuckles] I just-- when I wanted to go down to the store I'd just push the baby in the buggy, and the little boy would walk. And we'd go to the store and get whatever we needed. And then, when I had to go to La Grande or something, my brother or somebody would take me.

I: Was there a grocery store here in Cove?

EL: Yeah, there's one right on the corner down there was the grocery store. It's-- well, it's changed hands a lot of times, but it was there.

I: Do you remember what it was called then?

EL: No, hm-mm. I can't remember.

I: Okay.

EL: It's the Farmer Grocery now, but that wasn't what it was then. I just can't think of it.

I: Well, and these are in the days before credit cards and--

EL: Yeah.

I: things like that. Were you able to charge things, or did you--?

EL: I-- I just made what money I had do then. I had a little bit in the-- at the bank. And one day I wasn't used to money. I just wrote it all in checks. So one day I went down, and I had to write a check. And the next time I went down the grocery man said, "I don't understand this." They said, "This is not right." And I looked up, "What's wrong?" And he looked at me, and my friend said-- she finally said, "You signed Erma Cunningham." [laughs].

I: Oh. [chuckles].

EL: So I gave him a check with Erma Loree on it, but I'd never done no check writing. And I just thought something wrote Erma Cunningham. So that was always a joke when I went in there.

I: Were there other-- were there other experiences like that while you were on your own with family that--

EL: No, I don't--

I: interesting challenges that you met head-on while your husband was away?

EL: No, I don't think-- I don't remember anything. That was the funniest thing that happened. [chuckles]. Somebody reminded me of that last time I was there. They were in the store when I did that. [laughs].

I: Now when you moved here into this residence which was your father's-- the place where your father's parents lived--

EL: Yeah, actually Merton helped his folks get it. He was helping his dad and helped his folks get it, but they soon paying him back.

I: When-- when-- when you came to live in this house was it plumbed and electric and everything like it is now?

EL: It had some plumbing and a hot water tank, but it was run off of a wood stove and that. It wasn't very modern.

I: It didn't have electricity then?

EL: Yeah, it had electricity.

I: Okay.

EL: Uh-huh. But there wasn't-- and she had a-- oh, Ellie got her a washing machine so that she didn't have to wash on the board and things like that. But after we moved down then we got the electric stove and--

I: Would that have been a ringer washing machine?

EL: Yeah, that was one of those, uh-huh.

I: Was it an electric one or was it a gas powered?

EL: It was an electric one, and boy she thought she'd went to heaven when she got that! [laughs].

I: Did you like that machine?

EL: Yeah, I liked it, and I used one for a lot of years. And we bought 'em an oil stove 'cause he wasn't able to get out and bring wood in so we bought 'em an oil stove. And they had oil stoves in, and that made a lot of difference. But they still had the little wood range in there to cook on.

I: They did?

EL: She'd have never picked out an electric one, I don't think. _____ that she would have done that at all. [chuckles].

I: Did they have them then?

EL: Oh yeah, they had them then. In fact we, up in the place where we lived they had one. She had never used one, but she had a wood stove and loved it.

I: How 'bout telephones, did--?

EL: Yeah, they had a telephone, uh-huh. I didn't have one when Merton went in the service and lived up here on that hill. I didn't have one. And so, if I had to use a phone I had to come down here, and that was quite a little distance to come down to--

I: Was it a crank phone, or a rotary?

EL: Yeah, it was one of those on the wall, uh-huh.

I: How 'bout driving? When did you learn to drive? You said you didn't drive when your husband went--

EL: No.

I: into the service.

EL: We sold the car, and I hadn't-- I never had a driver's license, I guess, for awhile after we moved to Cove. But I think I had one then, but I didn't-- yeah, I did have a driver's license then, but we didn't have a car 'cause we sold the car. And that gave me a little money to run on. But I think I got a driver's license after we moved up from Prineville, or I probably--we'd probably been married four years or so before I got a driver's license.

I: You still would have been very young.

EL: Yeah, I was still pretty young then.

I: Do you remember what your first car was, or driving it?

EL: It was a-- I think it was an old-- I don't really remember. I think it was an old Dodge, but I'm not sure. He got it over at Mike _____ before we was married. He had that before we was married.

I: Did you ever drive it?

EL: I didn't drive it, but I guess he still had it when I learned to drive. And then we got one-- a different one later, but he already had that one. I never learned to drive at home. My dad had a car, but he's the only one that drove it. My mother never learned to drive.

I: What kinds of social activities or-- or leisure things might you and your husband do when you were in your-- in your youth?

EL: Oh, we used to go to movies. That's about the only thing. And then to ball games and things like that when they'd have those.

I: Where-- where would you go to movies at?

EL: At La Grande they had the-- they had one over at Union, too, but we usually went to the one in La Grande.

I: There were three-- were there still three theaters in La Grande then?

EL: Mm-hm, The Liberty and-- no, just two. The Liberty and the one they had down-- The Liberty was up on the other end of La Grande where-- across from that-- oh, where the uh-- where the hotel it'd be down a block. It was down there, and then they had that other one, the La-- uh, what'd they call it?

I: Granada?

EL: Granada, yeah. But later then they got that drive-in out there.

I: Did you like the drive-in? Did you go?

EL: Well, I kinda liked it. I didn't get to go very often, but I liked it.

I: Did you go when it first opened?

EL: Uh-huh.

I: Was that a novelty?

EL: Yeah, it was! That was something that, you know, you would be able to go out there and sit in your car, or get out and mill around and talk to people. [chuckles]. Yeah, it was. It was nice. I don't think they're open anymore, are they?

I: Yeah, they are. They just closed for the season about a week ago.

EL: Oh, I wondered 'cause I go by there to go to Evergreen, and it says, "Closed for the winter." And I thought, "Well gee, it's not winter!" [laughs].

I: Right, right. Would uh-- when you were young, or even when you were a young adult, was going to La Grande kind of a-- a big trip?

EL: Oh yeah!

I: Yeah.

EL: It was-- it was a big trip when we went, uh-huh.

I: What-- what-- what would you do on these big trips to La Grande?

EL: Oh, we'd usually go out and eat and go to the movies and then go home. And then uh, later Merton got so he'd go in ____ .

I: But not you?

EL: I'd go in with him, but I couldn't handle that stuff.

I: Oh.

EL: [laughs].

I: Now, were you allowed to go in? Was the drinking age twenty-one then?

EL: I think it was, uh-huh. And I-- we even tended bar down there some. I used to tend bar. I had forgot about that now when some of them had it and they'd go for the winter, why then we would tend bar and take care of it. But I think the drinking age was eighteen at that time. But they never pushed it like they do now.

I: Right. What were the roads like between here and La Grande?

EL: They were just gravel roads.

I: It wasn't paved back here?

EL: Huh-uh, they weren't paved for a long time.

I: Do you remember approximately when they got paved out here?

EL: Oh, I just don't remember. It's been quite awhile ago, but they weren't paved for a long time.

I: Uh, well after you were married.

EL: Oh yeah, a long time after that! But I don't remember when.

I: Was there any uh-- any sort of public transportation or a way to get back and forth to La Grande or anywhere else?

EL: Hm-mm, nothing, uh-uh.

I: You would have to go La Grande to catch a bus or a train or--?

EL: Yeah, or something like that, yeah. You'd have to find somebody to drive you over.

I: And did they always have a gas station out here?

EL: Uh-huh. It was always in the store. It was all-- it wasn't either. There was one down below where the drive-in is. There was a gas station down there.

I: Do you mean a drive-in restaurant?

EL: Uh-huh, _____ and Gas Station. But it's just a drive-in restaurant now.

I: Where there other kinds of businesses in Cove in the early days compared to what's here now?

EL: There was another grocery store that was in a big building beside where the fire department is. It was a big building, and that was a grocery store. And then right across the street there was another big grocery store, so there was-- then this one that's up here was built a lot of years later. As you can see it's the main grocery store.

I: What other businesses was here?

EL: Oh, they had a garage. Uh, _____ Garage was in just up from the Post Office in that same building. And they had a pool hall that was kind of in-between there.

I: Now would that be a pool hall-- just a pool hall, not a--?

EL: Yes, just where they shot pool and-- and I-- maybe a--

I: So, it wasn't a bar?

EL: No, no bar in it. I think they played cards, maybe, but it was just a pool hall. And they didn't have any-- but they had a tavern someplace there. And uh, let's see what all the-- they just maybe had that packing shed, fruit packing shed they packed cherries? And I worked in those as a kid. I worked at anything I could make a little money when we first moved to Cove. And they had packing sheds, and I worked in it sortin' cherries and _____. They had one that was down behind the drive-in, and then they had the one that's down below where they load cherries now, so they had about--

I: Were cherries a big crop here?

EL: It's a big crop here.

I: How do you pack cherries, what-- what did--?

EL: They had 'em in boxes, and they just pack along the rows. And then another row on top, and they'd have those boxes packed that way. They didn't-- I don't think they do that anymore unless they do that away from here. They just load 'em in big boxes and ship 'em over there with that _____.

I: What was your particular job or task when you're cherry _____?

EL: Oh, I uh-- everybody had gardens, and I used to pick beans and anything I could make a dollar at I would work at. And pick berries, people would hire you to pick berries. That's how you got a nickel or somethin'. [chuckles]. I picked berries, anything-- I picked cherries-- whatever I could find work at.

I: And you could do that all-- all around here?

EL: Oh, all around here! I could do whatever it was. And everybody knew if they needed somebody that I would do it, and so I'd get any kind of a job that was available.

I: Do you belong to a church out here?

EL: We belong to the Methodist Church.

I: Is that here in town?

EL: Yes, it's right out here about a block.

I: How long have you been a member of that church?

EL: Oh, about maybe ten years. I was raised Mormon, and that you probably know right because it was a big family. But I proceed to _____ Merton, I left that. And-- and I'm-- we're both Methodist now.

I: And you've been at that for about ten years?

EL: About ten years, I think, uh-huh. He was raised Baptist, and then he didn't want to go back to that, so we went out to this one.

I: Was there a Baptist Church here then?

EL: Yeah, there's a Baptist Church right down there-- not-- just below the store and then right below.

I: Now are you-- are you involved in any activities with the church?

EL: I do whatever-- now like the 11th, uh, Veteran's Day, they're gonna have a big turkey dinner. And I make all the coleslaw, and I make a bunch of rolls and things like that. I make enough coleslaw for about a hundred and twenty-five people.

I: My goodness.

EL: That's a lot of coleslaw! [laughs].

I: Well, you must be used to cooking for big crowds anyway.

EL: I am. I am. And they know if they need something-- I used to make up three batches of peanut brittle, but when I had to go get my hips replaced another lady made it. And I said, "Let her make it. I'll just do the other." [laughs].

I: Do you uh-- are you on a board or a committee or anything at the church?

EL: No, huh-uh. I didn't-- I just didn't take anything like that that would have me doing some year things. But I-- when, Merton wasn't real good it was kind of hard to, and so I don't. But they know if they need anything I'm there for it.

I: Now, did-- have you been on any-- have you done any community service work over the years, uh, helped out at school when your kids were in school, or--?

EL: Oh yeah, they'd say, "We need this or that," and I would go help out and whatever they needed. But I never was a volunteer before I'm worked there continually 'cause I usually had a lot of other things that I had to do.

I: Did you belong to any clubs?

EL: I belonged to the Eastern Star, and I'm very active in that. And I do whatever they need done.

I: Have you been involved in that a long time?

EL: A long time, uh-huh.

I: Have you held office with the church there?

EL: Oh yeah, I-- I think I've held all but about three of the offices. And then the one that I'm in now I've been that for probably four or five years. I've been Worthy Matron a couple of times, and I've been pretty active in-- in that.

I: Any other community or civic involvement like that?

EL: No, I'm not really involved in much of anything else. I used to be kind of more, but then after Merton got so he wasn't feeling good I didn't get out and go very much.

I: Were there any-- ever any hotels or restaurants here in Cove?

EL: There used to be. Well, there's a restaurant now in the tavern. One side is the tavern, and the other-- and it's a busy restaurant. And there used to be a hotel here, but that was before I came to Cove. And it burned down with a lot of the other stuff. They had a hotel, and I think a Masonic Lodge was in there, a bunch of stuff, and it burned down. So, they've never had one since.

I: Did you ever stay at that hotel?

EL: No, I-- that was before I came to Cove.

I: I see. Any other businesses in Cove that you remember that aren't here anymore?

EL: They had butcher shop and a barber shop. There's a lady has one down here now that's from-- that features a barbershop like the men go to. And let's see what else? I can't think of anything else, but uh, they

used to have quite a few businesses. And then they-- and that fire came, and it wiped out a lot.

I: Do you remember when-- there's a high school here in Cove, isn't there?

EL: Yes, it's combined with the-- the grade school. And then they have a big gymnasium across the street that they have classes and stuff in too. They also have the old gym on the end of the schoolhouse. But they have that big old one, and it has classes and stuff in to besides the gymnasium.

I: Do you remember when they used to have roller skating was big up here--

EL: Yeah!

I: in the--?

EL: Yeah!

I: Did you skate, or did your kids?

EL: Oh yeah, I took my kids down and we skated.

I: So, you skated too?

EL: They skated better than I did, but I skated. [laughs].

I: At the rink, uh-huh.

EL: Yeah, and I used to go down and play volleyball after. I played volleyball and basketball in school that I afterwards, why, I just played volleyball. And I'd go play volleyball with the old ladies. [chuckles].

I: What kinds of things do you do now?

EL: I still go to Eastern Star. And then they have a senior dinner down here a couple times a month. I go to that. Other than that I don't do a

lot. And I go to church. Other than that I don't do a lot because I don't like to leave Merton that much. And of course he's over there now, and I just kind of flounder around. But uh, my boys took me to the tavern the other night to have a salad. [laughs]. They thought that was really funny. They said, "Would you go?" And I said. "Sure!" And they thought that was really funny. So, I had a glass of water, and one of the ladies had a Pepsi. And my sister-in-law had a cup of coffee, and the other lady had a beer. [laughs].

I: Do you-- did they think that you might not approve of that, or--?

EL: Oh, they just thought I probably wouldn't go to the tavern.

I: Ah!

EL: Somebody might say something--

I: Right.

EL: but I'm not like that. If they want to stay up, they can stay up.

I: You're not worried about gossip?

EL: Huh-uh.

I: Uh-huh. Was it a good salad?

EL: It was a delicious salad. It was worth going down there for.

I: So-- so, you're familiar now with what they expect--

EL: Yeah!

I: Mom to do?

EL: I know now if I wanted a salad I can go down there and have a salad. Of course, I could have it in the other room, but they wanted to sit in the tavern part because the ball game was on.

I: Oh.

EL: And you don't-- couldn't see it in the other part. They had the World Series.

I: Right.

EL: My sister-in-law had a-- a TV at home that she could watch it, but she said, "I don't like to watch it by myself. I have company." So, there we were. [chuckles].

I: And there you were.

EL: [laughs].

I: When did you first get TV?

EL: Oh, it was, uh, our son was seventeen, and he just got back-- he had TB. And he got back from TB hospital so we got that TV from then, and he was seventeen. And he's sixty-four now, so--

I: And you hadn't had television before that?

EL: Uh-uh.

I: Was it just a couple of channels out here did you find?

EL: There was, uh, just a few channels, and I know I watched the _____ Channel it had on. And I got-- _____ Fall team, and they're still my team 'cause we could see them every day. And then they took that station off. 'Course we didn't get color for years after that before we got any color.

I: What did you do before you had TV? How about radio?

EL: I just turned the radio on, and I loved Western music. If I could find Western music, why, I'd get that. Otherwise it would be news or whatever they had. I just would turn the radio on.

I: Did you have radio when you grew up out on the farm?

EL: We didn't out on the farm, but as soon as we came to Cove we had it. He had it after we got here, but we didn't have it out there.

I: Were there any shows in particular the family gathered to watch, or I'm sorry, listen to? Or were there favorite programs that you remember that you liked?

EL: I don't remember too much about that. I know that-- that my dad, he'd listen to somethin' once in a while he'd get shocked. Things that were [chuckles] said you know! My goodness, you know! But he loved music, and I think they kind of liked Western music and that too. But once in awhile things got made kind of shocked him because he'd-- [chuckles].

I: How would he react when that happened?

EL: Oh, "You kids mustn't pay attention to that." [laughs].

I: But he wouldn't turn it off, or tell you--?

EL: He wouldn't turn it off, no, because there was somethin' good comin' later. You know, there's always somethin' good. [chuckles]. He loved the radio. They had television before he died, and he liked it. But I think he enjoyed that radio as much as anything.

I: Did you uh-- do you remember rationing during World War II?

EL: Yeah, I-- I remember that they-- you had a kinda _____ things, uh-huh.

I: Did it create problems for you where you were?

EL: Not too much because after Merton got home he was workin' pretty good, and it wasn't too bad.

I: Were there any things that you had a hard time living without?

EL: I don't remember anything, don't remember anything. We always had three meals a day, and our kids knew that they would be there for those. Lunch time, they probably wouldn't be there because they'd be

in school, but um, breakfast and supper they were there. And they knew that I cooked meals. I didn't throw a hotdog at 'em or anything like that. And they always knew they had to be home for supper time. And I had three meals a day. [chuckles].

I: And they were expected to be there.

EL: And they were expected, and they would be. And kids don't anymore, and they don't know what it is to have a meal. They just eat what's-- what's cooked.

I: Right.

EL: But our kids knew they were gonna--
[END OF TAPE]