

Marjorie Howell Parker Edited

Growing Up in Imbler

MP: My name is Marjorie Howell Parker and I was born on October 27, 1918 in our home in Imbler. I have a brother Bill who is nine years younger, and Dick who was two years older.

I: What do you remember about your early days of going to school in Imbler?

MP: I remember the first grade when snowdrifts were over the fences, and I cried because my hands were cold. I got chilblains when the chill in my hands knees got bad, walking to school was so cold.

We would stop at Krauser's, the next house up, so I could warm up my hands. We also would stop at the store. Sometimes my dad took us to school on a sled if the snows were really bad. The sled was just the flatbed we used on the farm that Dad put runners on the bottom. He didn't like to leave the horses with their harnesses on.

Growing up, we had a neighbor who would let his horses stand maybe all night with their harnesses on and, it just upset him terribly. My mother loved to give parties – and Dad would have to go to town to pick up the kids with this sled pulled by workhorses, and bring them back. The horses would have to stand until the party was over; he didn't like to leave them like that.

I: Do you have any idea what the temperature would get down to?

MP: I doubt that we had a thermometer. One time after I lived in Portland and I came home on the train, (Patty was a baby) and Dad had to come and get me. He got the neighbor boy to drive into La Grande to get me and he had to scrape off the ice on the windshield. It froze everything in Portland that year.

I: Did you always walk to school?

MP: Most of the time there were no busses. I remembered that first year, that was quite traumatic walking to school. I thought how important my brother must've thought it was to walk to school with me. By that time, my brother was already in school since he was two years older. But it was my first experience.

I was one of the smallest in the first grade. But by the third grade I started getting pretty chubby, chubbier than the other girls. One of my favorite teachers was Miss Nielson in the fifth grade. She was an outstanding teacher.

Two boys, Chase Loucrowser and Chase McCoy were naughty. I don't remember what they did, but Miss Nielson took them in the cloakroom and hung them up by overalls. Every time I see Chase I mention it to him. I said, "Do you remember?" He says, "I sure do." I just saw him at the Imbler reunion and he said he loved her. "She bawled me out a few times, but we just adored her."

In the seventh and eighth grade, Maurice Wise was our teacher. He had had a leg amputated, but he had a really good physique. He would swim in Wallowa Lake. At the Cove swimming pool; we saw him take that leg off and just swim like everything.

He also started this ukulele band. There were about five or six of us girls that were real close friends and we all sang and played the ukulele. We'd go to basketball games in the big gym. I remember going to Union and during the intermission we'd play. I don't remember if he played other musical instruments.

I: Is there anything else you want to tell me about growing up in Imbler?

MP: One of my most memorable memories was when I was probably about four or five and the old grain elevator burned. We stood up on the hill where the Bingaman place is and watched it burn.

I: Did you use to do a lot of fruit packing in Imbler?

MP: Yes, for the Gales but I don't remember which Gales. They had a place in Imbler. When I wasn't working at the Observer I packed cherries because in the fall I was going to get married. I was stationed by a belt that went by and I remember saying to Donna Watson, "Is it getting awful warm in here?" She said, "No." The next thing I knew I was waking up; I had passed out! Evidently from the movement of that belt going by. But I earned enough money for a cedar chest. I guess I thought that everybody should have a cedar chest or a hope chest.

High School

I: Tell us a little about high school.

MP: It was this big square brick building and next to it was Wade Hall, built while I was in school and there was also a small gym.

MP: The high school was on the upper floor and the grade school was on the first floor. I still can picture it. I was scared to death because I'd never been upstairs. The only time you went up was if you were called to the principal's office.

It was just like the kids today going up to junior high from Greenwood Elementary. When I saw my son going to school and he just kind of seemed scared, and I thought he was going through the same thing I did when I moved from grade school to high school, so new and different; one is scared.

I: Did you have any particular good friends while you were going to high school?

MP: Well, there was a group of us that went clear through grade school and we were good friends. I never dated in high school, but we went to dances. Saturday night we went into La Grande, the boys played in Dick Lindsey Band. The family bought groceries and Dad would go to the show. We would wait in the lobby of the Sac Hotel until the dance started. Mom would sit up in the balcony and I danced. That's where I met Walt; that was a wonderful time and so much fun.

I: Did you have social activities in Imbler?

MP: That little Mormon Church in Imbler was where I first went to dances and mom always went with us. We would have pie socials and potlucks. Then we'd walk home that mile. We never, Dick and I, drove the car, because we couldn't afford it; we made a family occasion on Saturday night.

I: That's the advantage of a small community -- everybody knowing everybody. Every holiday and all of the activities were at the school.

MP: Mom always went to the dances with us and Dad liked the basketball games so he took us to those games.

I: Was there any outstanding thing that happened during high school that you remember more than others?

MP: I think most kids in English class go through having to get up in front of the class. This just terrified me. They had Declamation Contests at that time. In English class it was part of our assignment in school, to give a speech either with a humorous or non-humorous topic. I thought, well, I could do it.

I memorized a humorous one, and I would jump and down, and keep repeating what I was going to say until my mind kind went blank. Lo and behold I won at the county level. I got a little medal for it. I can remember going completely blank. I thought I was going to die! Then it came back. I cried and cried when it was all over.

I: Were there any disappointments for you during those years?

MP: Not particularly for me, I felt I had a good life. Of course it was during the Depression and Mom made all my clothes and everything. She had what she

called the rag -bag that had nice older clothes that she could refashion. I think I was about twelve maybe when I got a store-bought coat. About underwear I can't remember too much. When I was little, I had black sateen bloomers and probably Mom made those.

When I was ten an aunt of my mother's looked us up. (She was an aunt by marriage; she had divorced my mother's uncle. She found out where we lived and looked us up. She had remarried and was quite well-to-do.) She would send me suit boxes of clothes out of lovely material that she no longer wanted, and my mother would remake those. That was later when I was in business college, and times were still hard.

My mom and I would go to Penney's and look at a dress and then she'd go home and make one like the one we saw in the store. Mom was very talented and I had some really pretty dresses that she made. I never was without pretty clothes in high school and business college.

When we were seniors there were two girls who were competing for valedictorian, and both were special friends. A rumor was started about one of them, that she had cheated. She hadn't. I don't remember just how it all came out. I stood in that line graduation night crying because we had had all this trouble. It was too bad. I'm not sure how many were in our class, maybe twelve.

I: What games did you like to play when you were young or books that you liked to read?

Westenskows

MP: Probably we played a little Kick the Can and some of those kinds of games. There was lots of music in our home.

There were four Westenskow boys who worked for us in the summer and they were all musical. Melvin was the oldest but I don't think that he played music. Then there was Clifford, Pete and Lester. Lester and I grew up like brother and sister because his family managed the garden. My mother was cooking three meals a day for the hay crew and she didn't have time to garden. I have memories of Lester's folks and the little kids out in the yard dividing up berries and vegetables.

I: Were they sharecroppers?

MP: Yes, they did the gardening. One time Lester and I -- I must have put on boy's jeans, because girls didn't have jeans in those days -- went over to the slough about a half mile away on our land. We would cross the Grande Ronde River and then walk over to the slough to catch carp. Lester took a pitchfork and a gunnysack and we went down in that slough. He'd stab the carp and then he'd throw them up to me. They never went right into the gunnysack, so I would have

to grab the fish and put them in, laughing the whole time. He took that sack home to his mother and she canned them. No way would my mother can those carp! Carp were a dirty fish. But with their big family, food was food.

It was hard times. At Christmas, I think there were about eight children and we exchanged Christmas dinners. Lester's mother Mattie, fed her children before they came because there were so many of them. I guess she hoped they would fill up before coming to our house, but they usually ate everything in front of them.

The four older boys worked for us and they just about ran me ragged getting them water at lunchtime. I think they did it on purpose. I don't know how in the world they could drink all that water.

We had a big dining room table and they came in the house for a meal at noon. We had cold water in the kitchen and an artesian well that ran all the time. It seems like I'd just go fill a glass up when another one was empty. I don't remember a pitcher for water.

While they were in the field, they filled up a canvas bag with water and took it out with them.

I didn't date when I was very young. I was having a good time without it; the folks were quite strict and didn't want me in cars and driving into La Grande. Once in a while we would drive in with the Westenskow boys.

The four older boys worked hay for us. I just grew up with Lester who was the closest to my age and he was like a brother. We were real good friends.

I: How many were there in that family?

MP: There were four older boys that I knew well and probably four girls. There were two younger boys, eight or ten years of age that I didn't know very well.

Bernile was one of the younger ones. My gosh, I think they're practically all gone. The younger ones died. I have kept in touch with Lester. He did so well, after his wife Ruth died, I thought he'd go within a week. He kept a good attitude, wrote poetry and songs.

I: Did you feel that by living on the farm that you missed out on a lot of things?

MP: Maybe at the time. I can remember when I was a teenager if Daddy broke down, boy, I was ready to go to La Grande. One time in the spring, the rain was coming down and I was trying to get up to the car. I slipped and got water in my shoes and I couldn't go to town; I cried because living out on that old farm.

The folks went to town and to the Mormon church in Imbler for dances. I guess I didn't dislike living on the farm. As far as dating went, I probably was kind of scared to date. I remember one of the fellows in my class came and we had this separator on the porch. He got so flustered when he came to the door and asked me to go out; I said no I couldn't go and he turned and he fell over the bucket there. Another one I remember came to ask me to go out and I remember he smelled so good, he had so much on, but I didn't go with him. I was so glad I hadn't gone with him because he stole things and got caught.

I: Were there disadvantages living on a farm?

MP: I never was hungry, my goodness no. We had always raised our own meat; I can remember Dad smoking the ham, though I didn't like it very much. He would put it out in the woodshed, hang it and then smoke it.

Mom canned all the deer meat. I don't care a lot for deer meat, but Mom canned the deer meat and it was good.

Daddy had about twenty-five Holsteins. Before he got a milking machine, my older brother Dick couldn't take sports because he had to come home and help Dad milk. By the time Bill came along they had the milking machine and Bill was very active in sports. Dick passed away in '76. He hadn't been very well. I think he had scarlet fever when he was little.

Music Lessons

I: Was your family musical, Marj?

MP: Yes.

My older brother Dick took a correspondence course for the piano. That was one thing my mother had, a player piano, and she wanted us so badly to have music. I think the piano was new and the only piece of new furniture we ever had. Dick got the correspondence course and learned to play the piano. He also got some free lessons from Mrs. Robinson. Mom had had enough music so that she could help him with the correspondence course. He had to fill out questionnaires and then they would correct and send them back.

Then I got to study the same course with all the marks already on the pages and everything. Mom made me learn the piano keys from that. I always thought Dick was getting the best of the deal.

I knew the basics of the keys and chords, and learned real quick. None of us played by ear. Mom wanted us to have music. Walt's family all played by ear,

and he played the accordion by ear. He played as long as he could breathe, he would play everyday.

When I was in high school Dad said, "We can afford it, what kind of lessons do you want to take?" I decided I wanted a guitar. I don't know why I said that. Guess who was my teacher? Lauren Blanchard. He was down at Tassis and Mom and I would go in and he would give me lessons.

Tassis was a music store. In the basement Loren Blanchard gave music lessons. It was right there by the First National Bank, a little, long narrow store. They carried sheet music and instruments. Our family bought all of our music supplies from there.

Then Loren moved into a one-room apartment. It had a dresser and a bed and a chair. He said, "Now, Mrs. Howell, I want you to come with Marjorie so there won't be any talk." I got so I could chord. He'd say, "Can you stay a little longer?" He'd play the banjo and I could chord with it. I really loved it and kept my fingers toughened up so I could fret the guitar. I stayed with it until I got married and had children.

I: Did your kids then inherit any of this?

MP: Patty started with piano lessons in the second grade. She was kind of young, but I thought because I was raised that way, you had to have music. She took piano lessons from Mrs. Combes for about five years.

Walt got an accordion during the war in Germany but the men over there played it so much they ruined the bellows. He always wanted her to play accordion. He bought another accordion after he got home and she had several years of accordion lessons. Patty played everywhere. She read music well, but she was not a natural musician. Our son Laddie wanted to play the drums but we would not buy him drums. He had to wait until he could buy them himself. He played with bands and toured Wyoming and Canada. He played off and on until about a couple three years ago.

I: When you graduated from high school what was your first job?

MP: I graduated in 1936 and I went to Draper's School of Commerce, which was up above Lawrence's Jewelry. Then, I got a job at *The Observer* sometime in late 1937 or early 1938.

Draper School of Business

I: What subjects did you take at Draper's Business College?

MP: Typing, shorthand and basic bookkeeping. What I did at The Observer was the bookkeeping. I remember that the La Grande girls were way ahead of us Imbler girls. I had taken typing in Imbler, but they were quite a bit ahead of me.

I: How long did you go to Draper?

MP: I think it was nine months to a year. I graduated from high school in '36 in the spring and that fall I went to Draper's. Dad wanted me to be a teacher and I didn't want to do that.

I: Did Draper's give you any help in finding a job when you completed your course?

MP: Not that I remember.

I: Was there a Mr. Draper who was in charge?

MP: Mrs. Draper taught as well, both of them taught. We liked her a lot.

I: How many students were in the class?

MP: Probably twenty or so. Some came from out of town.

I: Do you remember how much it cost to go to?

MP: No, I don't. It must not have cost a fortune or my dad couldn't have afforded it.

After I graduated I stayed and did shorthand and typing for people coming through who just wanted something done in a short time. I think the school probably did help me get a job since I stayed doing that temporary work.

I: When you were going to Draper's you still lived at home, didn't you?

MP: Yes, I rode in with a fellow who was a couple of years older who was going to college.

I: Was there a certificate or a diploma you received after attending Draper's?

MP: We had graduation out at Hot Lake and a banquet. All I can remember about that was I went with Jim Eveson, who was in this class, and he took a carload of us gals out. Jim used to sit in front of me and we were always getting in trouble because he would turn around and talk to me.

I: Do you remember what were your first wages were when you were working at the Observer?

MP: I don't remember but I do know it was enough that I wanted to eat out.

I: Where did you like to eat?

MP: There was a place across from the Sacajawea, the Fountain and there was also the Lavender Lunch.

I: The Shakeswood Shop on Fir right behind where Zimmerman's was later.

MP: The one I went to was just right there by Wimby's.

I: Tell us a little about the Dick Linsey Band at the Sac.

MP: It was a big band, maybe seven or eight members. I remember some of their names: Clark Wheeler, Clark Ruckman, Avery Milreen, Merl somebody, my brother Dick, Bill and Dick Lindsey.

I: Was that Zuber Hall or the Sacagawea ballroom?

MP: It was called the Zuber Hall, where the parking lot for the US National bank is now. Zuber Hall was wonderful. Mr. Buel and his wife ran it, it was private, and he didn't stand for any nonsense.

Walt

I: When did you and Walt start dating?

MP: I was living clear out across from the highway shops. Roslyn Knight and I batched in a one-room place that had a kitchen stove and a bed. I think the owners were the Rhodes and they had lived in Imbler. We stayed in town and rented from them. I had met Walt at the Zuber Dance Hall and he wanted to take me out on a date. My mother said, "Oh, he's so much younger than you." I wasn't going to go with somebody younger.

Well, I found out he was only two and a half months younger, so that was all right. He asked me for date even though I was living out far from town. I prayed he had a car because I was wearing high heels. Of course he didn't have a car and we had to walk all the way to the movies downtown.

On the way home, he said, "Well, I spent all my money on the show. I don't have enough to go out and eat." That endeared him to me, that he acknowledged the fact that he didn't have enough money to go out to eat. That was in 1938. We went together for about five months and we broke up because I wasn't positive about him. I won't go into detail. I knew then I did care about him. Oh, I just suffered till we got back together again.

I: When were you married?

MP: On October the 29th, 1939. I was just twenty-one.

There was a fellow that worked for Dad, his name was Frank Brown and he had never married. He said he'd give me a horse if I'd wait till I was twenty-one and had better sense than to get married. Years and years later he gave me that horse, but Dad had it out in Imbler. Walt said, "Well, I wanted her to be twenty-one so we'd get that horse."

I: When you were married what was Walt doing at that time?

Melville's

MP: The Melville sisters ran a Gift store. In the back was a sheet mill shop that the two Melville brothers ran. When Walt was in high school they had a job opening and Walt was sent there. The next season he went out for football. The coach – and I don't remember his name – said, "What are you doing here?" Walt said, "I came out to play football." He said, "The hell you are. You get back to that job that I got you."

It was a godsend because there was no money for him to go to school and his dad was raising him; I don't think he cared very much what the boys did. When we got married he wasn't quite finished with his apprenticeship, but that became his livelihood. He had taken mechanical drawing in high school and he was so good at it.

We were married, bought a little house on Cedar and M Street. Walt had ten cents in his pocket at the time, and he got his step-dad to sign for him. I think it was a hundred dollars down payment; the house and lot was a thousand dollars. Walt was making some ninety dollars a month at Melville's.

Then I was pregnant and by golly, the two brothers closed the shop and went to work in the shipyards. We had to pick up and leave in the middle of winter. There were no jobs here.

Walt's brother was living in Portland and we went there. We left the day after a blizzard and there were cars in the ditches, but we got through. He went to the union and he was only off work three days. They sent him out daily.

I: It looked like there was going to be a war; men were drafted and those with families had to earn a living. The shipyards in Portland were one of the places that people from La Grande went.

MP: We were scared. We had heard of men falling off of scaffolds and such, so Walt didn't go right to the shipyards. He went to his brothers and they left the next day

to join the union. With his background in mechanical drawing and in sheet metal work they sent him out every day. He was sent to Kelso and we were there several months. Then we came back to Portland where my daughter Patty was born in 1940.

Later he went to the shipyards. I guess we weren't so frightened anymore that he was going to fall off the scaffolding. Walt was working in the shipyards, Patty was three and I was pregnant with my son when Walt got drafted. A lot of the Park Rose families were mothers with children, and their husbands drafted. Some were older than Walt. Walt was twenty-five and he was considered an old man.

I: When was Walt drafted?

MP: Let's see, I was expecting Laddie, so it was 1944. We had bought a little place in Portland after living in Kelso for a few months. Then he went to Texas and he got home on a ten-day leave; Laddie was born in October of '44. Walt saw him and then he was gone. He was sent right to Germany. He was gone sixteen months. When he came home he had two months leave and that counted. We held our breath until he got discharged because they were sending so many men to Asia.

I: Did he fight in the Battle of the Bulge?

MP: Not quite. He was close. He was a Ranger whose job was to go out ahead of the troops. He volunteered for it and it was very dangerous. The Germans left their homes and the boys came in. He was up in a German house fighting the German's and when he started to walk out he couldn't walk. He had what they called battle fatigue. They had to carry him off. I got the news maybe from the pastor or the chaplain that he was in the hospital. It was terrible not hearing from him and not knowing what he was going through. They come back changed. They go in as kids and come back as old men.

I: You spent a lot of time writing letters to Walt while he was in the service?

MP: Yes, but I wasn't hearing from him. My mother sent a letter to Red Cross I think, and someone higher up got a hold of the letter. He wrote back, "Don't ever do that again." They must have chewed him out. He had been writing, but it wasn't getting through to me.

I: They were censoring the mail at the time.

MP: Letter weren't coming through, and then all of a sudden, I'd get a bunch. When he got stateside we came back to Union County from Portland on the train. We'd sold our car because I wasn't driving and we went out to the farm. We wanted to come home and Walt wanted to open a sheet metal shop. There was no place downtown at all. We ended up buying this place. There was a two-car garage out

there that was really old. He started in out there that first winter. However, you couldn't get metal and it was so cold. The first job he got was for a metal roof and he could get the metal out at Elgin. He put it on and oh my goodness, that was the height of it; we were on rocking chair money. We were living on \$52.00 a month from the service which wasn't very much.

We had sold our little house in Portland for around \$5, 750 and go this, almost two acres for the same amount of money we had sold for in Portland.

We borrowed the down payment from his dad, but we paid it right back as soon as we got the money from our house in Portland. We kept some of the money out to get started. This was originally the Parker Dairy, no relation though. This place was a milk house. It was about two stories high. Walt tore all that down because it was deteriorating. He built that little place where the fireplace is out there. It is getting kind of old now but I've been here fifty-six years.

I: Besides Walt doing sheet metal, didn't he get into glider planes?

Gliders

MP: Oh, wasn't that awful! 1959. Our daughter Pattie was graduating and there was the Junior/Senior Dance that night. I had worked so hard to make her dress that I insisted she go. She'd asked Kenny Blanchard. But, Kenny ended up at the hospital with me. Lauren was driving along towing Walt in his glider behind him. When the glider got in the air, he was suppose to disconnect it, but it didn't happen, the line didn't release and it pulled Walt right into the ground.

He had safety belts all around, so it was just that one leg, his ankle was just shattered. The thighbone and his ribs were broken, he had a cracked pelvis and the other heel was broken. Walt didn't give up on many things.

He was four and half months recuperating. They put him in a body cast after he was in a wheelchair and that leg fell off. Instead of the doctor operating again, why, the doctor just put him in that body cast for four and a half months.

He was in Walla Walla and that osteomyelitis almost took his leg. The doctor here knew that he hadn't done what he should have done.

I: That's why they call them practicing physicians; they're still practicing.

MP: It was bad, but he didn't let it get him down. Six years later he had plans to build more airplanes. That was devastating to me; I never thought he'd go back to it. But, he built a hot little number and he knew how to fly it. He went out one time, and the gas gauge showed there was gas. He got over Elgin, ran out of gas, and flipped over in a muddy field. It didn't hurt him, but even his billfold had mud in it. I said, "Maybe somebody up there's telling you something." But that didn't stop him.

He and Roy Kneeler rebuilt a plane. Walt's lungs had gotten really bad and he wasn't supposed to be flying. I knew he was; people said they saw him out flying around. He loved it and it was in his blood. I think all flyers are more or less that way. Finally he sold his shares in the plane business.

I: What kept you busy?

MP: At first I wouldn't fly with Walt. We would go up to Wallowa Lake and have a lot of company; Walt was taking everybody flying.

I thought if everybody else was trusting Walt to fly them around, I had better go with him or I was going to be a bitter old lady. The kids were gone by then, so I started flying with him. The plane was just a little old puddle jumper. We would fly down the coast to California and into the desert.

I: Palm Desert?

MP: No, it wasn't Palm Desert, I can't remember where it was. There was a hotel up on a hill, the golf course down below along with a motel. We flew there after spending a night along the way.

We built a cabin at Wallowa Lake in 1954; we really didn't have money for a cabin but it had always been a dream of ours to have one. Walt traded his chainsaw to young George Ambrose. In turn, George bought half logs to start a house and then he decided he didn't want to build that kind of house, even though that was what Walt traded him for. George then loaned back the chainsaw so Walt could work on the cabin.

We spent every weekend there that year, cooking over a bonfire. There were some trees that we could camp under. We'd get so wet and cold, we'd go into the movies to dry out. Believe me, people dressed up to go to the movies then, and here we were just like Indians. A lot of friends came and we pot-lucked.

I had been very active in Girl Scouts and learned a few tricks of bonfire cooking. Finally, I said to Walt, "You've got to fix me a table and a bench." It was just too rough. Walt threw something together and we used that for years. We have wonderful memories of those years. He was happiest when he was building, when he was doing something. We had bought a lease on the property from the Forest Service -- a ninety-nine year lease for \$300 where the cabin was. The next lease to the west of us was \$750 and we bought that. We thought, the way that people were moving in that area, we had better get as much property as possible, so the next piece was to the east, and it was \$1300, and we bought that too. I think they're probably \$10,000 now.

If Walt wasn't working all weekend, we just up and leave. It was our salvation. We'd go up there and work, but it was different. I would be kind of uptight getting the food and everything ready, but just as we would be leaving Elgin, I could just feel that stress disappearing.

VFW

I: You know Walt and I were both active in the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

MP: Yes. I had to laugh because he was vice-president and Ray Snider said, "I'm going to turn the meeting over to you, Walt." Walt got up there and adjourned the meeting. He was not a leader in that respect. He, George, Bethel and I, we just thought that was the thing to do as soon as we got here from Portland.

I: Les Westenskow was also your good friend. He was with the VFW at that time.

MP: Walt kept going to the meetings. Bethel and I quit, but I still belong, pay my dues. I know Leo and Paul Nice still go, too. There friends of mine. We joined the American Legion, and VFW – we very patriotic. We belonged to the American Legion until, a few years before Walt died. We both stayed in the VFW.

I: Is there anything that you'd do differently in your life?

MP: My step-mother used worry about what she hadn't done with her son. I said, "Dolly, I think we'd be the same person if we had it to do over." I remember I use to make resolutions not to yell at my kids every year and then I'd do it.

I guess if I had it to do over, I think I would support Walt wanting to fly.

I: He really liked that.

MP: He just had to do it, he had to do it. It wasn't what killed him, it was lung disease. I told my son's step-daughter -- she was married to a pilot and flew -- I said, "Honey, accept it because it's in their blood and they're going to do it."

I've had a good life. The farm life growing up was wonderful. There was something I thought about. My dad and his younger brother both had typhoid fever as babies.

My Grandma prayed for a well and got an artesian well; that was a story I heard all my life, that God gave her that artesian well. When I was growing up it was

running all the time. The river was close so maybe that's where the water came from.

I went to visit Nell Stephens who grew up with my dad. She was about 102 when I went to see her. Daddy had a sister who died when she was six. I said I thought she had died with quinsy or something like that. Nell said, "Oh no she didn't!" Her mind was good.

I: She's 108 and still pretty sharp.

MP: My grandfather did die of quinsy at age 28. That's a phlegm or thickening in the throat. They don't use that name anymore. That was what he died with at a young age. We looked that up on the tombstone

Imbler

I: I didn't know a lot about Imbler other than I worked out there one summer. It seemed like a nice little community.

MP: I remember the Ruckmans, Garnet and what was his name, who had the nice house there in Imbler, the one his folks owned first. I remember as a little girl going and visiting her. She was real heavy and I don't know that she walked very well. She was always sitting in a chair. I'd go visit her little girl.

I: Who was the man that always had cider on his front porch there?

MP: Old Lyle Wilson. His daughter Nita was in my class. She had store-bought clothes! Most of us had what our mothers sewed for us. Of course, Mama sewed nice, but I thought that it would be the height of fashion, to start school every fall with store bought clothes. She was real pretty Swedish. Lyle and Clyde Wilson had such a sense of humor. Shirley Wilson was in Bill's class, but they said she has died. We just had our Imbler reunion. Lyle sold that cider until they said he had to purify it.

I: It was so good. In the fall you could always stop by and take a gallon of cider off the porch and pay him.

MP: I can still see the twinkle in his eye. Right across the road from him was Fox's. Clayton Fox still lives there. When I went to school there was just the brick building. They built the Wade Hall while I was in school. That was really something. I don't know if that was Mrs. Wade from Elgin that donated money, toward the building. I couldn't figure out why, coming from Elgin that she donated all that money to Imbler.

There have been a lot of changes there in Imbler and now they're talking about tearing that old red (elementary building) down. They say the mortar isn't good in those older brick buildings.

I: Same as the school here in La Grande.

MP: They couldn't say that about the Sac Hotel; they had a heck of a time tearing it down.

I: Do you remember they put a Caterpillar on the top floor and tore it down from the top to the bottom?

MP: That was in those pictures, wasn't it? We saw those photos at one of the reunions. That's sad. There was a nice restaurant there. I can remember going there. It was one of the nicest.

I: In the old days they had the Liberty and State theater, Granada theatre and we all went to China Marys.

MP: That was the first place we went out to eat. We would order hamburgers and Walt poured ketchup on his plate. I thought, "Isn't that kind of uncouth to put ketchup on your plate?" I learned it was pretty good! I was so green, by gosh. I didn't have sisters and I was raised on a farm. In the first grade I just scared to death. What was I scared of? I just hadn't been out in the world very much.

I: Living on the farm did you come to La Grande very often?

MP: No. Dad tells in this book how long it took to go there in the early days. Also about going across the mountain; my mother was from Walla Walla and she got real sick. Going once across Tollgate they fell asleep and the horse stopped. It just stopped. They woke up and finished their trip. They left I think, at four o'clock in the afternoon and got there the next morning.

I was tickled pink if something broke down on the farm and Daddy had to go into town. Boy, I got ready real quick to go into town. I remember him giving me a dime or a nickel or something and I bought little round perfume bottle with the top a black square. That's what I would spend my money on. I probably paid a dime for it. I never wore make-up; my mother didn't like make-up.

I was in several plays in high school because I could smear on that make-up and I loved it. One time Daddy, Bill and I were in a play together in Imbler. My mother said, "I just don't know how you can do it!" She was more timid.

Mormon Church in Imbler

I: Tell me about the Mormon Church in Imbler where you had pie social and dances.

MP: It's gone now. I don't know what's in that lot now. It was just a little Mormon church. Pete Westenskow who was about six years older than I was, he was very involved with the Church's youth group. He guaranteed that I'd be queen of the Green and Gold Ball. No way that he could guarantee that and I didn't want it but he always told me I would be queen.

I: You didn't want to be queen of the Green and Gold Ball?

MP: No way!

I: You weren't Mormon?

MP: No, but a lot of people thought I was.

I: What church did you belong to?

MP: There was a little Methodist church as you're going into Imbler. All of my girlfriends when to church and Sunday School there.

I: Did the Westenskows who were Mormom pressure you to join the Mormon Church?

MP: Pete mostly, especially with that 'Queen of the Gold and Green Ball'.

He wanted to date me from the time I was thirteen. He went on a mission and when he came home I was engaged to Walt. He said that ring didn't mean anything. But oh yes, that ring did! Melvin, who was the oldest of the four boys, would preach a lot to Mom.

I: Did your mom have any particular church?

MP: My dad's mother was radically religious and when her husband died at twenty-eight, she had three little babies -- Daddy was three-and-a-half, four years old, and there were two younger ones. Grandma gave her last ten dollars to the minister and prayed to be taken care of.

My dad remembered that and that ruined him for church, it really did. He said there was only one good minister he knew and he worked in the hayfields to make his money, didn't take money from a widow. I know it would've pleased Grandma so much, but Mom and Dad didn't go to church. We went only on Christmas Eve as a family.

I: So these pie socials and potlucks were all at the Mormon church?

MP: At the Mormon church, yes. We were real good friends with the Mormons and everybody thought I was a Mormon here in La Grande.

I: Did you listen to the radio much?

MP: Not growing up. I can remember the folks trying out radios, but we didn't have electricity so we couldn't have a radio. I would hear kids or people talk about a lot of the programs. I remember my folks trying a washing machine out in the yard that ran on a gas motor, but they never bought it. We had the old machine that you worked by hand to wash clothes. We'd take turns doing that. Mom would boil the white clothes to get them clean.

I: A big copper double boiler like you have in your front yard?

MP: It probably wasn't copper, probably some kind of metal. I don't know where that came from. I have another one that I think Walt painted copper out in the back and I thought I ought to get and fill it.

False Teeth

MP: I remember a funny thing about my mother. Her niece got killed in a fire in Olympia. My mother had had her teeth pulled the year before and had gone without teeth for a year. She had heard on the radio about this guy who made false teeth at a pretty good price. Mom went to him and he made the false teeth that day and I don't think she ever replaced them. He said, "Now don't leave these in very long." She did, for the funeral and everything. Well, she had a sore mouth. But that was really something. My goodness, look how the teeth are now. Who would go without their teeth nowadays; why, I wouldn't go outside!

I: Was your mother still living when you met Walt?

MP: Yes, Mama died in 1959. We were married in '39. Their house burned in '44 right after Dad had a new shed put up for housekeeping. They built a nice home in '53 or '54 and were there nine or ten years.

She was a very good mother-in-law. Dad and Walt really got along. I was going to be the best mother-in-law in the world, but I'm afraid I wasn't.

Volunteering

I: You spend a lot of your time now helping at the hospital with the Pink Ladies.

MP: I still can do it. I have been doing since Walt died, about nine years now.

Marj Goodwin in 1980 – she belonged to a little club I did – and we were going to go hand-in-hand and join the Pink Ladies in 1980. The night before we were going to do this, my dad got real ill, Walt was already having problems with his breathing and I never joined. Marj did and was there for years.

When I first joined, Miriam Holman was on the desk and they didn't tell me that she left forty-five minutes before her time was up, and that I was to do the desk that I was never trained for. But I was able with the magnifying glasses and bigger print to read the room numbers and such. I could do that and learn where to tell people to go. Then a year ago this winter I lost my vision and I couldn't do that anymore. They made the print as big as they could, but I can't do that part anymore. I can do the coffee, I can do the flowers, I can do the cards and go over to the business office if they need me. I can still manage and I'm awful careful walking.

Somebody said the worst thing that can happen to you is losing your eyesight. I said no, what if you're in pain all the time. I'm not in pain and I have to adjust to this older age. I'm very outgoing --I try to get a hold of a person before they can get away. I need to know whom I'm talking to you. I want to give a hug to some people but if I can't see them, I just say hello instead.

I go every week on Monday mornings to the hospital and then twice a month I go to the Seniors and work there; I wouldn't mind working more. I don't pour coffee, but I can set the tables, wash and help clear up.

I: What group is this with?

MP: TOPS. I did this long before Walt died, until this eye business happened and I just quit, because I knew I couldn't pour coffee. One of our cooks is in our TOPS group and she asked for help. I said, "I'd like to do it again if I don't have to pour coffee." So I table hop. While the girls are pouring coffee I work several tables and I know who's sitting where. Sometimes I can't tell if I know the person. Now, I wouldn't know who you are at all across the table. So I will go up close to them and a lot of times I don't know them, but maybe I make a new acquaintance.

At this party for Jesse, a gal in red set down and she was visiting with her, pretty soon she says, "You don't know who I am." I said, "No, I can't tell." Well, it was Sigrid Jones, but I couldn't hear her voice good enough to tell. I think if I had heard her voice I would've been able to recognize her.

I: I can tell at church that you recognize voices.

MP: Some voices, yes, and certain postures, but not always. I just have to keep interested. I asked Patty who the district attorney was. There's a case going on that I know about. She said, "Why do you want to know? Was it about this case?" I said, "It's just that I am interested in how the system works, after a person's arrested." I knew the district attorney could tell me – but I didn't call him.

One time when we built the duplexes and rented them, I couldn't get this fellow to leave. So somebody mentioned, call the district attorney. I don't even remember who it was in at that time and that was years ago. He told me exactly what to write in the letter, and to register it, an eviction notice was what it was.

That was just wonderful. So I thought, well, if you really want to know something, call the District Attorney or someone who knows what to do.

MP: So I found his name the other day and wrote it down. I don't intend to call him, but I was just curious. I can still read the paper with the help of this machine.

I would be helpless here without it. I couldn't see my mail. I can't read anything. Patty would have to do so much more. Gosh, you just don't want to impose on your kids; they're busy and doing their own things. I try to be independent and I hire a lot of work done. I hired a guy to clean some in the front yard, but I wanted him to leave me some so I can go out and rake and use the wheelbarrow; I love outside work. However, it's kind of hard to tell weeds from flowers anymore.

MP: We didn't have telephones while we lived in Portland. I know my mother must've been worried sick. I was pregnant and Patty had to have appendicitis operation before I had Laddie. This was during the war. Of course I thought it was the end of the world almost and then my mother came and stayed. But for her to be here, and no communication, only through letters. She was a worry-wart.

Jean Bean comes and reads the Bible, and she said something about my being outgoing and asked, "Where did you get it?" I said, "I didn't used to be." I don't know where it came from, but I'm not near as scardy-cat as I used to be. Part of that probably was not being around girls or sisters and not many females just to play with even.

I wasn't around a lot of kids growing up, so it was a whole new world when I started to school.

I: During those hard times we all cultivated friends and they were in the same position as we were so that made life worthwhile.

MP: Like at the church and everything that we went to. I was looking forward to those things.

Presbyterian Church

I: When did you start going to Presbyterian Church?

MP: Cleaver was just there for a while. I can remember Kevin was a baby. And he now fifteen or sixteen. I didn't go to church with my kids, But when Hendricks Methodist shut down and we were home long enough, I took the kids to the Presbyterian church. I don't know why I picked that church, I guess I liked what they taught.

Patty went with a friend to the Nazarene church when she was in the first grade. She came home crying because they wanted the little ones to come up and to confess their sins. They portrayed hell as fire and brimstone, and over here was heaven, water and flowers. It scared her to death. I didn't want any of that.

Whoever her teacher was – I don't remember now – but they told her that God will take care of you, but that doesn't mean you can run out in front of a car, that God will take care of you. In other words, it was like you've got a brain up here. I thought, boy, I like that! That impressed me enough that I decided to join. Walt was ill and I thought I was handling everything and something came up that I couldn't handle.

Betty Walker had invited me twice to the ladies' luncheon and I laughed and said to her, "If you keep inviting me I'm going to have to join this church." It was really odd, this happening with Walt being ill. I thought, I can join anytime. I didn't try any other churches. I said, "You'll come first, Walt. If you want to do anything." We were always building the cabin were always gone weekends.

By that time he was not wanting to do very much. I'd try to get him to go for rides and things like we used to do. He'd study the map and say, "I'd like to know where that road leads" f and we'd go. I never pressured him to go to church. He'd say, "Honey, you look awful nice. Who are you meeting?" I'd say, "If you want to know, why, come go with me." That was the extent of it. I never pressured him.

Just like I learned from my dad, don't pressure because you'll turn people away. I think we all know it's there for us.

I: What do think of the changes of Grande Ronde Valley over your lifetime here?

MP: Up to a few years back, it's been fine. I would kind of like to have the downtown like it used to be. I'm very against a bigger Wal-Mart coming in. I would get lost and not enjoy that big store. It's going to wreck what little we got left of downtown.. I liked it way it was, but everything has to change.

I shop quite a bit at Penney's and the drugstore right across. I'm a Pink Lady and I get benefits but I only have one prescription.