

FIELD ROBERSON
JULY 18, 2004
TAPE #1
Interviewed by April Curtis
Transcribed by Micheal L Minthorn

Side 1

I: I'd like you to state your full name if you could for us.

FR: My name is Field Roberson, Jr.

I: All right.

FR: Junior.

I: Junior.

FR: Yes.

I: Where were born?

FR: I was born in, in a ____, (007) Georgia.

I: All right. And uh, were you the oldest child?

FR: No, no, it was eight- eight kids. I'm, I'm right in the middle.

I: Yeah?

FR: Eight kids- five for my mother had five boys, and, uh, two girls.

I: Uh-huh.

FR: Yeah.

I: And do you have a, a wife?

FR: Oh yeah.

I: What's her name?

FR: Well, my first wife- her name, her name, uh, Rose Roberson. But, I married again 'cause- later, that name, uh Laya (sp) Roberson. She's from Selma, Alabama ____ right on _____. (014) Yes.

I: All right. And when were you born? What was your birth date?

FR: 1927- April 22nd, 1927.

I: Oh, I was born in April.

FR: Yeah, I'm 77 years old. Yeah, I'm 77 years old.

I: All right.

FR: Mm-hm.

I: Okay, um, what I would like to talk about or ask you about today is, um, when did you come to uh, this part of the country?

FR: I think it was 1940 ____ (019) about '42 or '43. Yeah.

I: And why did you- why did you come to Union County?

FR: Well, my mother in-law, ____ (021) with my brother in-law. He was in the service. And uh, he was out here. And then my sister in-law; he married my sister and she came out here. And then my mother in-law came out here and then I came out later. My wife and I. Um-hm.

I: So, did you come- did you come out to work, or?

FR: No, I just come out to visit, but after I got out here I stayed.

I: Why did, why did you decide to stay?

FR: Why I decide to stay? Because I likin' it, you know? It's the first I ever settle down here. I lived in Florida 9 years. You know Neal?

I: Um-hm.

FR: Neal is my son. Yeah. He was born in Florida. And he was born after I ____ (029) guy that I worked for in the orange groves. I was down there in hard times.

I: You worked in the orange groves?

FR: In the orange groves. Sprayin'- sprayin', I was a caretaker.

I: Oh, I see.

FR: In a- uh, I named Neal after Neal Carter. Yeah.

I: So, what, uh, what did you like about, uh, Union County? What made you stay?

FR: Well, I liked it- what I like, I just liked it, Union, so when I got here I liked Union County. I met Mr. Dave Baum.

I: Who is that?

FR: You know, you know, you know he was a big man. He was a big man, this town.

I: What did- what was- what was his story?

FR: His story was, uh, he just was a man believed in helpin' peoples. And believed in tryin' to ___ (038) peoples. If you wanted to. You know? Tough. (?) See a lot of people in this town, they don't like him, but I likin' him because he was a good friend of mine. He got- he was a friend from time I met him, from the time he died.

I: What did he do here in Union County?

FR: Dave Baum? He was an insurance man and then- do you know Ray Baum?

I: Yes.

FR: That, that, that's his son. Dave Baum? That, that, that's his son. Yeah. But they was small then, they was little boys then.

I: So, what were they like as little boys?

FR: Yeah. They was good boys! I never had no problem in this, in this, uh, town. Everybody treat me good and still treat me good.

I: So you never had any, uh, problems with racial... or anything?

FR: No, no, no, no. No. No. No names, or no racial-whatever, you know? People in this town treated me good. And then I, I had a job for, uh, movin' mail from the, from the Union Pacific railroad for 9 years.

I: What was that like?

FR: Well, it was just me. I had to meet six trains a day. I couldn't go no place. But, uh, it was three trains goin' each way a day. And I had to meet the trains and deliver this mail to the post office. I didn't have, I didn't have nothin' to do with the mail.

Just pick up the mail and uh, and pick up the mail and deliver it to the train. And then I had to pick up mail from the train and deliver it back to the post office. Yes. And then after that I start workin' for myself, just, workin' around in yards and whatever still doin' that, you know?

I: So what was, what were the trains like at that time?

FR: Well it was a nice 17 and 18, that's good, it was, it was nice.

I: Yeah, what were they like?

FR: I had three train, I had a, I had a train at, uh, four o'clock in the morning. I had train at seven o'clock. And I had a train at eleven o'clock. And I had a train at two-thirty. But then, uh, east. Goin' east I had a train come in at, um, seven o'clock. Another one on six. And then I had one comin' at seven o'clock, and then the next one come in at, next, just rotated around. You know? And just rotated around, yeah. Um-hm.

I: What were those trains like? And what did they look like?

FR: Just like they do now. Just, only this was had mail trains on there. It was a shorter train. Um-hm. It was a passenger train. You don't remember when the passenger trains come through here?

I: No. I wasn't. I wasn't here yet.

FR: (chuckling) It was a passenger train. Yeah. Just like any other place. What, I guess you know livin' in other places. But it was just like in other places. It just was a short train. Maybe a 20 cars. You know?

I: Did they have, uh, food served on the train?

FR: Oh yeah they serve food. Uh, uh, that's what I come out here, on a train.

I: Oh, you did?

FR: I came out here from uh, from uh Philadelphia. On the train. See I was born, as I said I was born in Georgia. But uh, my, my, my, my parents met a guy from the north and she uh, they moved to north. Then I came out here.

I: Um-hm.

FR: Yeah.

I: And you came out here because your family came out here?

FR: My, yeah my wife's mother was here, and her sister in-law, which she is still here. Yeah.

I: What was that like that train trip from Philadelphia?

FR: It, it was nice. It was a long ride. It was nice. And I never forget, I, I got _____. (078) And I had four kids. And they got on the train later (?) (079) from uh, I think from Chicago 'til we got here. You know? 'Cause we had, we had thought maybe, uh, a few dollars would take you a long ways, but we was runnin' out of money. After you run out of money, you know? We told, I told the conductor that we didn't have no money, so we had to, we was goin' to Oregon. He said, "Well, we'll take care of ya' here, which they did."

I: All right.

FR: Yeah they did. Yeah. Uh, people so nice, you know. I had a little boy in, in diapers and so; everything was nice, you know? Yeah. Um-hm. Um-hm.

I: So what was La Grande like when you first got here? What, what, what are the differences?

FR: La Grande is, it's a, it's a lot of changes. It's been a lot of changes. You now, like uh, it used to be a time like uh, the _____. (89) And uh, and uh, and uh, the Baum, and then there was the cinema, Bohnenkamp. They own downtown. (phone ringing) Could I hold on for a minute?

I: Sure, let me, let stop it. Go for it. You can go ahead.

(break)

FR: Now what do you wanna' talk about?

I: Well, you just, you got here. And you got off the train.

FR: You know I got a job, yes. I got a job with my brother in-law. He used to clean furnaces. Lucky _____. (96) He had a little shoeshine parlor downtown. And then out then in a certain time of year...

I: A shoeshine parlor downtown?

FR: Yeah. Shoe-shoe, shine shoes. And block hats. You know?

I: What was he like?

FR: Oh, he was older. He was in his, he was in his, had been in the service. He's the one that causin' me to be out here, really. Yeah, then, after mom, after his- see he

married. Um, he's my brother-in-law. Then he and I are married to sisters. Yep. And so my mother-in-law came out here and then she got a job, uh, workin' around different peoples, and they got to likin' her when she come into uh, own a lot of property.

I: Now where was the shoeshine place located?

FR: It was, was right down, where um, right where the, there, uh, oh, U- UPS at. Right across from, uh, Pioneer Federal Bank. It was a little, small place right in there. _____. (106) He had a, he had a little shop in there, too.

I: How many, how many seats?

FR: Three. Three seats.

I: And one person working, or?

FR: One person working. He could take care of all the business. Yep. And so, from that- after- and then he, uh, he had a, a, a furnace cleaning here.

I: Now what was that?

FR: Uh, clean out your furnace, like when in the wintertime, like when you burn, all your soot and stuff in the, in the stove get all dirty and everything. He cleans them out then in the summer to have 'em ready for the weather. You know?

I: So you helped him do that?

FR: I had- right now I had a- then he plowed snow and I helped plow snow. And after he died, and then I took over.

I: So how did you plow snow then?

FR: He had a, a jeep with a plow on the, on the front end. Yeah. Plow- keep the front end, was a front-end plow. Yeah.

I: How did you get your customers? You just go to door, or?

FR: Well, people just- after we, after we, uh, got, uh, after he was here awhile people knew you plowed snow and people was callin' ya'. Come do their snow. You know? And then we had a regular route that we do. You know, uh, uh, just like every year, "You gonna' take of my snow this, uh this winter?" "For sure." You know? And then the neighbor would do the same. And we just got all the business we wanted, you know? Yeah.

I: So you were pretty, uh, pretty entrepreneurial about deciding what you were gonna' do and getting jobs?

FR: Really we are! Yeah and then after that, after that, after the snow was over in wintertime, then I start trimmin' trees. I trimmed trees for about ten years.

I: Now how did you learn how to trim trees?

FR: Well, I learn, I learn on my own.

I: You did?

FR: It was hard times and I need a job. And so I just got up in the tree and start cuttin' trees and start shapin' 'em up good. People liked it and they started callin' me.

I: Now how did you- how did you figure which limbs to cut and things like that?

FR: Well, I, I, I look at- well I get up in the tree and I can look- I can tell which limb to cut. Because during that time we were toppin' 'em straight across. But now you can't do that, so you gotta' thin 'em out. You can't cut the tops off. You can't cut the tops out. You know? But, but now you can't- you just have to thin 'em out, you know?

I: Then did you go door-to-door asking people if they wanted you to do that?

FR: No, no, no people's called me.

I: They call you.

FR: After they got to know who I was, you know? And I was in the town- I- you know I was in _____. (139) Good at that kind of work, you know? Yeah. They was, they was callin' me to come and take care of their trees and their yard, and- you know I was just was a handyman. You know? I was, I was a man- I need to work and I had to work and so, just wasn't never come _____ (142) and I check it for you, you know? That's what happened, you know? Yeah. Um-hm.

I: So you- were you doin' uh, handiwork all over town, or?

FR: All over town. And still doin' it.

I: Um-hm.

FR: Yeah, I'm 77 years old.

I: You still have some of the same customers?

FR: Oh yeah! Oh yeah. Well, I used to have their parents, but now I got the kids, now.

I: Oh yeah?

FR: Yeah I got the kids now, and they um, Mr. Baum just passed in here this morning. He's a lawyer, you know, Dave is? He just passed in this morning, you know? But every Christmas his father was good to me. Think about everybody in this town been good to me and still good to me.

I: So, what do you mean? What did they do, they give you a bonus?

FR: Well, it like during the Christmas time if I need anything they always come to see, you need anything, or you know somebody that- you know? Like, uh, some people didn't have nothin' to ___ (152) for Christmas. But I always look out for another day. You know? My, my grandfather told me a long time ago. Says, "Son, says remember this. You doing good. The sun ain't gonna' shine everyday. It, it's gonna' be a rainy day. There's gonna' be a lot of days you can't get out there in their world, you know." And so I, I, I, I've saved up and look out for that kind of stuff, you know? Yeah.

I: So how did you celebrate Christmas?

FR: I celebrate it big time. I had everything I needed. The stuff I didn't need it. And I had stuff to share with other people didn't have nothin', you know? I share with a lot of people's today don't- didn't have enough to go around most of their kids, you know? You know there's a lot of people in this town, or other places could do better. If they want to do better. Man, I used to drink. And I used to smoke. But I don't do that no more. You see, after Christ come into my life, I, I- he made a new man out of me.

I: When did that happen?

FR: It happened, uh, five years ago. When I- I had a operation. I had a open-heart surgery. And I had five new valves put in me. I said, "Lord, if I can do without cigarettes and whiskey now, I, I'll serve you from now on." And Christ been in my life ever since. I would let the sun go out on me today, if I know I do somebody wrong. Because, you got- God is lookin' at you. He know what your sayin', He know what your gonna' do. He know what you gonna' do in the mornin' time before you wake up. And I tell others, "God is so good." He'll do the same thing for you He'll do for me. You know I have talked to a lot of people. They said, uh, a black man's got a better chance than a white man. I say, why you say that anyhow? You get out in that sun, 90 degrees? It's gonna' shine against the heart- it's gonna' shine on you just as hot on me as it will on you, you know? But I tell you what? You, you better look, you better think another way. You know? So that was it, you know? But what denomination are you?

I: Oh, I consider myself a- a Protestant.

FR: A Prote...

I: I have some questions, but. Yeah.

FR: Yeah.

I: Yeah.

FR: Well that's good.

I: Well, let's get back to when you first got here? I want us to- and kind of know about the differences between La Grande now and then?

FR: Than other places?

I: Yeah. Has it been- and the difference between La Grande now and then? What was it like when ___ (cutoff by FR)?

FR: The hardest place- the hardest- well, the, the really, it wasn't hard for me. Because I kept to my own business down there- when I lived in Georgia. Georgia was rough. A black man had a hard time in the south. A black man had a hard time in the south. But if you- where I lived was some white people. They was good to me. They took care of me, they treated me good. But some people there were really mean to 'em, you know? So I didn't deal with those people, I stayed on the side where- on the good side of the fence. (laughs) On the good side of the fence.

I: Where did you live when you first moved here?

FR: I lived on Madison. I had a, I had only two houses where- I didn't own them then, but I bought two houses over there. I still got one over there. That's why I bought this house, I moved off of Madison. You know where Madison Street? I moved off of Madison Street here in this house. I been in this house now about 35, 35 years.

I: What was Madison Street like when you first came here?

FR: It was a, it was a, a street where all the hobos (??) (202) get off the train, walk up and down their street. You know, and they used to come by and want you to give 'em some bread or some food.

I: Would they ride the rails, or?

FR: Yeah. They wanted to know would you give 'em some food? Or would you have, did you have a pop or somethin' you could give 'em? And we was glad to help

those peoples, you know? We had people sleepin' in my yard all night long, they didn't have nowhere to sleep. Just- we knew they was out there, you know. We close our doors. But we didn't have the trouble they have now, like people hurtin' peoples or killin' people or doin' that kind of stuff. It was a later that- oh, about two doors down, uh; we went to church one Sunday. When we were comin' back home, she was dead. Oh, somebody had kill her, and never did find out. Her name was Buttercup.

I: When was this?

FR: That, that was, that was right along, it's been about 20 years ago.

I: Was she living in the same area you were?

FR: Yeah. Two doors from where we live. And all our kids are playin' so they never did find out who done it. You know?

I: Huh. Did they think it was someone that was...?

FR: Well they don't know who done it, really. You now? Because she was a lady- she was a lady likes to get drunk, and she did, was a lot of mens and stuff around. You know, she wasn't, in no- no kind of business or nothin'. But she was just like to drink and mens come around, she did with drinkin'. So we don't know what happened, you know? All we know, it happened one evening when the sun was going down. About five o'clock in the afternoon.

I: You weren't living over there then?

FR: Yes.

I: You were livin' over there?

FR: I was livin' over there. Yeah, I was livin' over there.

I: So were you ever...?

FR: But we was out of town that particular Sunday. We was in Yakima. And that was Sunday we came home and they was sayin' that the Buttercup had got killed. Somebody had strangled her.

I: How old was Buttercup?

FR: She was in her 60's, 65, 70 years old. Yeah. So...

I: She live alone?

FR: Yeah. She, and I bought the house that next to her. I got a house was another right next to her. The house she died in, though.

I: Was there a big search for what happened?

FR: Yeah, it was a big search. You know? Just like was a lady up on, on Morgan Lake Road. Uh, she was a white lady and, and young lady. And they never did find out who kill- three people's in this town got killed. They never did. Down here in Candy Cane Park. Yep. So they never did

I: Oh, so was Buttercup a black woman?

FR: Yeah, she's a black woman.

I: Huh.

FR: Yeah.

I: Did that cause kind of a stir because?

FR: No, no, no, no it didn't cause no stir because she dealt- she was a lovely woman. She was a, she was a woman. She, she treat you nice. Any way she see you she left a hug and shake your hand. Just like you was a sister or brother. She was a good woman, you know? And the guy she dealt with, he was a older white guy but, he didn't do that because he, he loved her too much, you know? They used to come by the house all hugged up and drunk everyday! (chuckles) Yeah! People didn't pay no attention.

I: Was there a black section and white section at that time?

FR: No, no, no! It was all, it was a, it was about half and half. On this end it was, uh, black, and on that end it was all white. And then on the, on the other end of them two more houses down was some more black people. It was two black families lived there, and they, and the kids slept with one another out in the street and go, go places with another, just like sister and brother, you know? Yeah. So. That's the way it was.

I: So how many black families were there when you first came?

FR: Oh, I'd say about fifteen. Right now it's only about- oh, five or- about six or seven family, families. Yeah, with my, with my kids and all. Yeah.

I: So there, there were more black families when you first came?

FR: Oh yeah. They all went to Portland.

I: Oh.

FR: And most of 'em, they dead now. Because they, they didn't take care of there selves. It was they drank, uh.

I: Why did they move to Portland?

FR: Well, I don't know. They, this town here got too small for 'em. Yeah, it got too small for me but I ain't goin' nowhere, I'm gonna' stay here because I, I'm livin' good. I'm doin' good, you know? I can go downtown and get anything I want. I go to Portland, what can I get? Nothin'. So, I'm not gonna' leave. And my first wife, she went to Walla Walla.

I: Oh she did?

FR: She doin' good, yeah, she went to Walla Walla, yeah.

I: Do you keep in contact with her still?

FR: Oh yeah, oh yeah! I, I'm still in contact with her, I see her, I calls her, talk to her quite often, you know? All my kids been to school, and I got one son work for the Corps of Engineers in Walla Walla. I got one son is a, is a teaching University of Portland now. Yeah, he teaching University of Portland. I got one son he's a- he work for, work for- in fact why he's in the service. He work for a medical hospital in Walla Walla. I just, he just called me couple days ago that he's in Iraq.

I: Oh he is?

FR: Uh-huh. But he was in; he was in the National Guard. But he wasn't in the Army. But he, he was in the National Guard but he had to go to Iraq. Yeah.

I: So he just left with the rest of the battalion to go over? Oh.

FR: Yeah. Um-hm. Yeah he just left with the rest of the guys, yeah.

I: And do you have other children? Besides the three boys?

FR: Well I have eight kids.

I: Oh eight.

FR: Yeah.

I: So where are the rest of your kids?

FR: I have one son, one daughter Yakima. I mean, in, uh, Spokane. She married a ____.
(282) And I got- I got a one dau- one son in, in a Walla Walla. And I got a
daughter in Walla Walla. And I got, as I said I got one son in Iraq and Neal live
here? You know Neal?

I: I don't.

FR: He work- you know Albertson's?

I: Oh yeah.

FR: Yeah, Neal is my son.

I: Oh, he's great.

FR: Yeah he's my son. He work at Albertson's, yeah. Um-hm. And then I have
daughter in New Jersey. That's when I was out playin' around. And got caught,
caught in the crossfire. (chuckles) Yeah. Yeah. So all my kids done good.

I: So you brought how many children with you when you came out?

FR: I brought three- four!

I: With your wife?

FR: Yeah.

I: Or you just- or when you?

FR: Um-hm.

I: So you brought four children?

FR: And I have one kid born here and one in Walla Walla. Mm-hm.

I: Wow, so how was it- bringing them on a train coming across the country?

FR: Oh, it was kind of rough, you now? But we enjoyed it. We had plenty, they gave
us, they had plenty of room. The, the seats was wide and you, you know, you
couldn't see that much at night. But daytime you could look out. Across the field
and see animals, animals. And my kids just loved it then, you know? Yes. My
kids just loved it there. Yeah. So anyway, uh, then, after I came out here and got
to makin' a little money then I went back to visit a lot of my friends in New York
City. That's when I had a pretty good time. I lived in New York City five years.

I: Oh, so you moved back? To New York? And then came back?

FR: I went back from- I went back and stayed five year. And then, I met

I: Now when was that?

FR: That was in '40, around '47, '48. Somewhere along in there. Yeah. Um-hm. And I moved back in, uh, and a friend of mine was a judge. He's a black guy. He's a Circuit Judge. His name is, uh, _____. (sp)

I: What's that- how do you spell that name?

FR: _____. (sp)

I: Honna. (sp?)

FR: Yeah. But anyway, he's a Circuit Court judge. And he and I was good friends. He and I used to, were was raised up together. He was born in Georgia, too. He and I were raised up there, and we hadn't seen each other in 40 years. And I, when I went back, oh my God he just- we were never apart from each other again. Because me about- well in fact, why he should be callin' me anytime today sometime, you know.

I: Has he come out to visit you here?

FR: No, he ain't been out yet. But I go back; I go back and visit my folks every summer. I, I be goin' back to New Jersey, um, September the 1st. I go back there, I be gone for a month, yeah. And then I see all my, my friends. My schoolmates from, uh, Georgia and, New Jersey. I got some Éclair, in Hollywood, Florida. They comes up, we all meet there and we have a good time. You know.

I: Friends all over the world.

FR: Oh, well, not all over the world but, but all over the south. You know? Yeah.

I: So what about your friends here?

FR: I got a lot of friends here. Yeah, a lotta' friends. White and black. You know? All the business people in this town is, is my friend. Like the John Day place? John, uh, Stuben and, and like uh, uh, Kim Elvis (??) and, ____ (336) a contractor thing. Yeah, they is my friends, yeah. Yeah, he- in fact about it, Jim Miller's come over to my house about ever'day and sit down here and drink coffee and, and uh, whatever, you know? And he with me sometime and, when I have a little cookout in the back, uh, my friend across the street Mike Lawrence (sp) and uh, there's another Mike across the street. And then, people pass, stop in and look in on me, you know? So, we just have a sit and have a nice time. Yeah.

I: I'd like to go back to Madison, uh, Street and uh, talk about, um, what it was like for your kids growing up on Madison Street?

FR: Well Madison Street- they, they only had- it, it was nice. Madison Street only had, uh, three blocks to walk to school. Miss Hutchison, uh, uh, Charlie Hutchison. His wife used to teach my kids. And Miss

I: Hutchison?

FR: Hutchison, yeah. And excuse me. And then a Miss Cooley, she used to teach my kids. All my kids went to Green- you know where Greenwood School?

I: Yeah.

FR: Yeah. All my kid went to Greenwood School.

I: And was that a, a, did that have all grades? Or?

FR: Yeah, all. Yeah.

I: And how many teachers do you- were there at that time? Do you know?

FR: Well it was about- let's see, well; I don't know how many teachers there. But I know Miss, Miss Hutchison, Miss Cooley, and then uh, Miss ____ (361) uh the Vanderbilt (??) wife. She used, she used to teach my kids.

I: What was the school like?

FR: It was nice. It had no problem. The kids just loved goin' there. Yeah. So after they moved away they'll- they never forget to come by and see Miss Hutchison. They done got a little old now; you know, some of 'em are sick, some of 'em in nursing home. And they come out and visit 'em, which is they love that, you know. Yeah. So they, they are, they really, everything was really nice, yeah. Um-hm.

I: Yeah, and they went to the high school here, or?

FR: Yeah. My kid- uh, Neal went to college. Neal went to college here.

I: Oh he did?

FR: And I had- Blair (??) went to college here and the rest of my kid. The rest of my kid went to Walla Walla. After my wife and I separated she moved to Walla Walla. And they went to uh, to the Seventh Day Adventist School in Walla Walla. Wa-High. Yeah they went- all my kids went to school. And three of 'em went to college. Yeah, three of 'em went to college.

I: You must be very proud of them?

FR: Oh very proud of 'em! They, they never been in no trouble. Never give me no trouble, so I never had no trouble, not none of my kids. It was, they was nice, yeah. Um-hm.

I: So when you have, uh, vacations and do you travel out of state still? Do you go back to?

FR: Yeah. I, I travel- I goes every, I've traveled every year. We goes to, we flies into Philadelphia. And my brother live right across the river there in Jersey. In Briston. Right uh, uh near the one with the Delaware line. Only take 45 minutes for him to pick me up. And then sometime, uh, we drives clear to- my wife's from Selma, Alabama. That's where _____. (390) You know, you hear talk of Selma?

I: Uh-hm.

FR: Well that's where they took King right on that bridge. It was where they took King right over that bridge. And she was- that where she was born and raised there. Yeah.

I: So, now, who of your family was the first person to come to La Grande?

FR: Me.

I: Yeah?

FR: Yeah, I'm, uh, I'm the first one and the last one and the only one! (chuckles)

I: No my brother's been out here, but he's been out here, but he's from- he lives in New Jersey. Yeah.

I: So you were- you were a relative of, of Lucky ____? (400)

FR: _____. (401) You know Lucky ____? (401)

I: No, what was he like?

FR: He was a- well he was a, he was a nice guy. He was a real known. People liked-ed (?) him. He was sort of like a business man. He was a man sort of get thing movin' an', and somebody want to find out somethin', they either come to him because he was the oldest black guy here. And uh, they used to come and ask him about, "Lucky, you think we should do this or we should do that or?" Then he'd give his opinion about it.

I: Yeah I heard he was quite a character.

FR: He was. He, he, he got one son he just finished, he just, he just uh, retired from the service. So now he got his wife livin' over there. He got a son lives right up the street and he got a daughter lives in, uh, Detroit. She met a minister, they just moved back to Detroit. And he got one son live in uh, in uh, oh, where they ended up, Spokane. Yeah. And they got one son what is always a bad apple, you know? He got one son he stayed in trouble. He just got out of prison. Yeah, just for, he didn't kill nobody it was just uh, like drugs or stuff. You know? Things he didn't have no business doin'. But he got one son is a lawyer. Uh, his grandson. ____.
(425) His son's son is a lawyer. In Portland now. Yeah he's a lawyer. And then he got one son that uh, one grandson that the lady he live with- he kill her daughter. Which is- I don't know this trouble. But he, he all stabbed that girl what- ten or twelve times. But they was on drugs, I really- I can't tell ya' what happened. I don't know. All I know he killed her. And that mornin' I saw that boy, he was lookin' just like ain't nothin' happened. He done kill that lady's daughter. They was all about the same age. But he's in prison now. You know? So that was it, how much time you got?

I: Oh we got plenty. I'm just makin' sure the tape is till rolling.

FR: Oh, it's rolling. I see it flickerin'. Yeah.

I: Well, let's go back to when you first got there. What did you do for fun?

FR: Where?

I: When you first got here and you were a young man and you had these children with you?

FR: Well, well, I, I, I went to church and uh. I got

I: Which church did you go to?

FR: Church of God in Christ.

I: Now where was that?

FR: Well, it, they tore it down now. It was ____ (448) Jackson. He was the pastor of that church.

I: Uh-huh. Who was it?

FR: Church of God in Christ.

I: Uh-huh. And where was it located?

FR: It was, it was, it was a holiness church.

I: A holiness church. Where was that?

FR: Over on the corner of Four and uh, Monroe.

I: Uh-huh. What was that like?

FR: It was a- that's where people come to worship, you know? And then every so often we have a lotta' people fro out of town to come. And it was a lot of people there at that- that particular weekend, you know? And then we used to go out and visit other churches. We used to go to the, to the, to the Nazarene or to the Church of God over to the Nazarene, right there, just right there back of Safeway. They tore it down. And then they moved it out here on uh, Fir. Out right here by Shoppin' Kart.

I: What was his service like at that church? Yeah, what kind of service did they have at the holiness church?

FR: Well, they had a what you call a holy roller!

I: Did they really?

FR: Yeah they had- you know they had, some people have, some people be louder than other. But they had, they had, this was, this was really loud! You know it really makes you, if you know, uh, like you had a small baby the baby couldn't sleep 'cause it so loud. (laughs) Yeah. Yep. And then it- you know, it makes you wake up, too, you know?

I: Did they have music?

FR: Oh yeah, they had good music.

I: What- are they a band? Or?

FR: No, it was just had- it- there's people there could just play like a guitar. And had, uh, drums. And a organ or piano. Like that, you know? Then they sang a few songs, and, ____. (483) I'm Baptist (baptized?) now. We got a little small group of peoples over there, but, we only have a few, but, you know. We, we uh, got to carry on. All the peoples are gone. We only got about, oh, 15, 16. And, and, and, enrolled, you know? But we got to carry on because God is, whether there is just one or two of us (?) God is there, you know? Yeah, so.

I: So, the, the, the early church that you went to- how, how many families do you think? Were- that went?

FR: Went there? Oh, maybe about ten families. It was- it was, had a quite a few people then before they moved away. Yeah, before they moved away.

I: So, it was a Holly Roller church?

FR: Yeah, Holy Roller Church?

I: What's that mean?

FR: Well, it means just like, uh, uh, some churches is real quiet. And you go to some church they makes a joyful noise. Just like it's a big band! Just likes you go in a club where the music really loud. That's the way them churches were. You know? Especially when they, when the preacher get up to speak. You know, they get to singin' and ever' body testafyin' and- the power of the Lord come in the, in the church, you know? And so, I've seen the power of the Lord hit some people and knock 'em to the floor.

I: Really?

FR: Yeah. Anyway, they fall. I-

I: Were they speakin' in tongues, or?

FR: Yeah! Oh yeah they speak in tongues, yeah. And, and I believe, I believe in it. I do. I do because the Lord would use this on all the people. (?) I went to Seattle one, one, uh, one time when my chil----

End of Side 1

Side 2

I: ---talking about the church.

FR: Yeah! I was, some of those people I said, some of those people were screamin' and hollerin' the power of the Lord. That was youth night. That was the night the children could get up and speak they piece.

I: What do you mean speak their piece?

FR: Just like they was talkin' about the word of God and tell you, tellin' the people in the church how the Lord kept them all day, how the Lord lifted them up, and how the Lord- how they want to go along with the Lord, you know? And they said, so many people was sayin': I ain't go- I uh, they just sing a song. I wouldn't let *nothin'* sever let me from the love of God. Because they- they, they parents taught them what was right and what was wrong. And they believed in that. And they was just spreadin' the News. Good News! (chuckles) Good News! (chuckles)

I: Is there a church like that now that...?

FR: All over, they have churches like that all over.

I: Uh-huh. Is there one in La Grande that's like that, or...?

FR: Well. Well, it's within him (?) (012) they don't have the people to carry on like that. But down in Portland or Yakima and Toppenish, and Pasco. All them places where there is a lot of peoples. And they got good speakers, and you know, can carry on. They got 'em like that now, you know?

I: Um-hm. But not here in La Grande?

FR: Not here in La Grande.

I: How long did that church go on?

FR: It went on for, oh, I was here for over 15 years before the people start movin' out. Before they start movin' out, you know?

I: Yeah, and the, the pastor was who?

FR: Sadell (sp) Jackson. He dead now.

I: (repeats first name) Sadell Jackson? Huh, and, what was he like?

FR: Oh, he was a good, he was a good speaker. Good speaker. Well, in fact about all our- I, I, goes up to um, to uh, Roger's (?) church up on Gekeler. You know where that little orange (?) church up there?

I: Mm-hm.

FR: Now *he's* a good speaker. His name is Roger Koch, (sp) (021) I think. But he is a, every time I get a chance I go up to attend in it. He's a good speaker.

I: It's, is Sadell Jackson from La Grande, or, live in La Grande?

FR: No, he, he move from Walla Walla. He move from Walla Walla. Over here.

I: Is he a black man, or white man?

FR: Yeah, black man. Yeah, he was a black man. We had two-

I: Yeah? Is he still alive, or...?

FR: We had two- we had two black- no, he dead. And ___ (another name) (0126) he had a good, he, his church was a, was a church of...Church of God in Christ.

I: Who is that?

FR: Ella Low. (sp) (027) He's dead, too. Didn't have good- he used to have good sermon. But he's dead now.

I: Uh-huh. Was it mostly black families or did white people go to?

FR: Yeah. Yeah. Or white, or white or black go there. Yeah. Um-hm. Yeah, anybody wanna' attest in Christ go there. You know?

I: Uh-huh.

FR: So that was it, you know? People have, a lot of peoples come in and look in on us, you know? They come in to tell you what the Lord has done for them, and so. During the service they'll usually a, a, a, start prayin'. And then they sing a few songs and each one get up and sing a song. Until just like you, you say- I wanna', I wanna' tell you what the Lord has done for me. Personal. You know? So that's the way it is. You know?

I: Hm.

FR: Yeah, so, like I tell a lot of people about me. The Lord is, I say he turned my life around. He made a new man outta' me. You know? I was no violent man, nothin' like that. But I was out doin' things I shouldn't have been doin'. But, ask the

Lord. Lookin' back over my life I won't make them mistakes again. Because you know when I leave here I wanna' see Jesus. I wanna' see Him just like I'm lookin' at you. I wanna' see him face to face. I've said, I won't let *nothin'*, nothin' stop me leavin' (?) (042) from the love of God. Nothin'. And I, I ain't gonna' let nothing get in my life. But you, I can see blessings. So many times people say, "It's hard for me to get out there and make it." But you know, maam, I'm doing good (to April).

I: Well, you've made a good life for yourself.

FR: I'm doin' - uh, that 's right. I'm doing good. I get out there and work every day. I got two guys workin' for me. And peoples calls me, I turn down jobs. Sometimes I can't find no job, but I just can't take on no more because I got all I can have.

I: Um-hm. So you did, um. You did a lot of landscaping, and?

FR: That's right.

I: What, what else did you do to make money?

FR: Well I did landscapin', as I said I trim trees. And I always knew, I don't, I don't let, I didn't let- I didn't stop at no one job, I keeps me a lot of job. If somebody said, if somebody tell me, say, "Field, I don't need you no more." I tell 'em thank you. If somebody knockin' on my door to come here, over here, I got job here. You know I went to the Longbranch- 15 years!

I: Oh my God, what was that like?

FR: It was like I get up I get four o'clock in the morning, go down there and scrub-clean the floors and...

I: When did you do that? You know when that was?

FR: I don't. Anyway, I, I, no, no, I don't know what year it was. But anyway I, I worked there 20 years.

I: Work at- you worked there 20 years?

FR: Well, \$150 a month. But listen now I just only go down there about the time they close. And all I done was just, uh, clean the restrooms and, and mop the floor. And, and take out the garbage. And so, it changed hands three times while I was there. And the last time it changed hands, well, a friend of mine was in there. And he said, "Well, Field, I just can't use you no more. I'm just getting' started and business is slow now. That's what I'm thinkin', you know?" But I had been there 20 year. And then.

I: And then you, when you first started working, what was that, the, the Longbranch like?

FR: It was, it was nice, you know? There's a lotta' drunks and, peoples come there late at night, you know? And, there'd be fightin' and regulars there, they didn't bother me. But uh, because, ever' body know me, it was, they treated me good.

I: Um-hm. What were the fights, there, bar fights?

FR: Well, you know how people, they get to drinkin' and stuff like that get violent, you know? That's the way it was.

I: So, what was your job? What did you do in there?

FR: All I done was just clean the floor, sweep the floor, and mop it. Carry out the garbage. And that's it.

I: And what time did you go to work?

FR: I go there, uh, around about, uh, five o'clock. 'Cause they opened at six. But it's still open all night. But anyway business slow down about that time. I could work around peoples, you know? With all the railroaders comin' in, from the depot, over to the Longbranch.

I: Oh they would?

FR: Yeah. See that was, that was, that was, that was, that what kept them, the Longbranch goin'. The railroad guys, because they work all night. See them trains be comin' in all night long, you know? Just like the trains come through here now. All day and all night. Well they, that, that was what supported the Longbranch, you know?

I: Oh.

FR: Yeah. That was before the Longbranch. But anyway after that guy fired me, um, Mike, I got a job at Western States. Mike was in there that morning eatin' breakfast. He knew I'd, uh, this guy telling me about he couldn't use me no more. And Mike says, "Field, come on down, I can- I hire ya'." And then, and, this, this, I went down to Western States, and then I was makin', I was makin' \$150 a month down there workin' one hour a night. I mean about two hours, one hour in the mornin' time. And down here I makes \$1175 a month workin' with me for hire for 15 hours and 20 ____, (087) I think. And I had that job ever since 20, uh...

I: Who was your boss?

FR: Well, Mike Clain (sp?) (088) but he got fired, but anyway I got another guy now he's the boss. His name is Dale (sp?) (089)

I: And what did you do there?

FR: I just cleaned. Dust and clean. Down there.

I: So you're doin' a lot of different kinds of jobs?

FR: Jani- janitorial work. Huh?

I: Doin' lots of different jobs?

FR: Lots of different jobs. As I told you I'm just a handy man. Whatever they call me to do, you know? Yep. I mow lawns. I rake up leaves. I gotta' snow- snow deal in the wintertime. And so I'm just so, I'm just a blessed man. You now? So I got two guy work for me, so, I pay them \$8 an hour, so, you know and that keep 'em goin'.

I: Did you have your children work for you when they were younger?

FR: Oh yeah. Couple of 'em. In, in the, any of them _____ mama. (098) Their mother was pretty strict, she wouldn't _____. (098) She like every mama's kid, you know? But after they, after they got up in age, then I told 'em they can, when they get, uh, 18 they better get a job. Don't, they are gonna' have to go. And they did have to go. (laughs) I didn't pet my kids, I made sure they get out and got a job. Yep. I send 'em to school; I send 'em to college, and all that stuff. But after they got up, you know, where they could on their own, could help there self. I never had no problem on none of my kids.

I: And three of 'em went to college?

FR: Four.

I: Four of 'em went to college?

FR: Four- four of 'em.

I: That's great.

FR: Yeah. Yeah. But all of 'em finish high school and all of my kids got good jobs. My daughter, she's at that medical, medical group on 2nd. You familiar with Walla Walla?

I: Um-hm.

FR: It's 2nd Street. She's a, she's a, the operator there. She answer the telephones and all. Her husband work for the city. He's a, he's a minister. He work for the city. There's a lot of people, he the only black guy workin' for the city of Walla Walla. Um-hm. Yeah. There's a lot of people, it was a lotta' black peoples in Walla Walla, but you, you go there, you think black peoples there was a lot of 'em over there. Yeah. And Pasco, you gotta stir 'em with a stick when you get in Pasco. That's a place I wouldn't live. Pasco, all the Mexicans and the Indians and blacks and they, they raise a lotta' sand over that area.

I: So why do you think that, uh, La Grande doesn't have so many diverse kinds of people. Why do you think there's not as many?

FR: Well, um, La Grande always has been a pretty cool town. To me! I, it's no, I mean if you wanna' make your bed hard, you make it hard. You wanna' make it soft, you can make it soft. Because I never had no trouble, I think about it, I don't be out at night. When sundown I come on home.

I: Really?

FR: And I don't drink and I don't smoke, and, and I ain't got no business out with them boys. That's the only place you can go. And I ain't gonna'

I: So what were the bars like when you first came? Were they still there?

FR: Well, it was just nice. You know. It, it wasn't no, it wasn't no problem with the peoples in the bars and things like that. You know, people get to drinkin', some of 'em get a little rowdy, you know? And the ladies gets perty, get rowdy, so all that stuff, you know? But they didn't bother me.

I: So when the Longbranch was there to serve the people coming in on the railroad. Were there other other places?

FR: Anybody!

I: Were there other places around there that, uh?

FR: Oh yeah! The, the Long- the Tropadera. See, the Trop was the, was the, was the biggest thing goin'. But see they closed it, too. And anybody that was in the Trop and come over to the Longbranch 'cause they was open 24 hours a day. And then they- everybody, is, who wanna' go out to ___ (132), you know if somebody drinkin' or drivin' they wanna' go out to ___ (133) because they get pulled over by the cops. And, and so they just hang at the Longbranch, you know? Unless they get a cab to take 'em home. You know? Yeah. So that was it.

I: So there were other, uh, businesses that were torn down, um, that were along the, near the railroad?

FR: Well they had the pool hall.

I: Oh they had a pool hall?

FR: Right next to the Longbranch.

I: Oh, what was that called?

FR: Shorty and Chesses Pool Hall.

I: Shorty and Chesses?

FR: Yeah I worked there, too. I worked both places side and side.

I: So tell me about Shorty & Chesses Pool Hall.

FR: Well they gamblers. And uh, if you got money to spend, they, they, it's in the, in the bag. Uh, lot of times they have money stacked up on the table that high (demonstrates pile height).

I: Oh my gosh.

FR: Uh, like, guy come over to buy cows like on the _____. (143) And he buy a lot of cows? And so they, they just gamble all day and all night there, you know?

I: So there was backrooms for gambling?

FR: Yeah in the back. It had a little room. It was open but they had a room to the side open, you know? Where they gamble, you know? Yeah, I worked there for, oh, 15 years. Yeah. Had a key to go there when I get ready, you know? (?) And all the big, all the big wheels around town, they go in there and shoot dice and stuff like that, you know? And I stand there and watch 'em. So about, by holdin' me up sometimes they'd leave me a \$150, \$100. Sometimes leave me 40 or 50, you know? I didn't care what they leave me, I take what they give me. You know? Yeah.

I: How many pool tables?

FR: About six. Oh, the place stay full all the time! For young peoples, you know. You know kids go in there and shoot pool, and, and then a lot of times people go in there and shoot for big money. You know? But the, the money was back there on them poker tables. In the back. That's where the money was at, you know? And then he sold guns, he sold, uh, cigars, cigarettes, and all that kinda' cigar stuff. Yeah. They sold all that kinda' stuff, you know? Yeah.

I: Any other businesses along there that, that you remember around, uh, the Longbranch?

FR: Well, the, a lot of businesses. It was the Longbranch and then there was a, the Eagle, another little bar right on the corner but see, they close at two o'clock. And everybody come to the Longbranch, you know? And there was a, the American Legion. They, they uh, they didn't stay open all night, you know? In fact about two o'clock at night anybody come there to eat before they leave to go home. And so they, uh, business was good. Yeah, business was good, yeah.

I: So you worked at the Longbranch at the same time you were working at the pool hall?

FR: Well, yeah- no, no! I clean the pool, I clean the Longbranch, then I go to the pool hall. 'Cause, see I had a key to the pool. I could go in there when I get ready. As soon as the business gets slow in the Longbranch, I go in there and clean, then I go next door and clean that. And then I come home. Yeah. And then I used to work out to the truck stop. I had a-

I: Which truck stop?

FR: Uh...

I: Oh, Flying J?

FR: Flyin' J. Yeah.

I: How long has that been our there?

FR: Long time. A friend of mine had that. 'Til he sold it. Then after he sold then I had to go. And then, uh, so I

I: So who was that that owned the Flying J?

FR: Gary Onada. (sp?) (178) He lives up on M. 'Er, he lives up on N. When you leave the hospital, turn and come down N, M. That first house on the, on the right. He used to live, he live there. Well he was a, he was a retarded guy. He, he, you know he couldn't get around, you know, but he had a nice- he had a good business there. It was good there. He was, as I said everybody treat good. They were real nice to me, you know? I didn't have no enemies and still don't have none that I knows of.

I: Maybe we should stop for a minute and maybe could we move into the kitchen just because the TV might be too loud? Just a moment.

FR: Yeah, okay. Okay.

I: Okay we are continuing our interview with Field Roberson. Okay?

FR: Uh, I would like to say, uh, hard times. I was born in Georgia, as I said I was born in ___-burg, Georgia and I had it rough. But as I said, by God help and my help it was good. It was great.

I: Um-hm. So you didn't have hard times when you came to La Grande?

FR: Uh, no, no. Didn't have no hard times. As I said I was broke, but I said, I never got a problem once in my life, because I'm a workin' man! Yeah, I was a man, don't mind, if I wanted somethin', I'm, I'm the man don't mind gettin' up and askin' somebody for somethin'. Instead of goin' around, takin' it. Because, if you ask somebody for somethin', they'll give it to ya'. And there wasn't many black people here at the time. And my wife, she uh, takin' on. She got with some ____ (199) work. The Landers. They own that

I: What, what's your wife's name again?

FR: Anna Ruth. (sp?)

I: Anna Ruth?

FR: Mm-hm.

I: Uh-huh.

FR: And uh, she got, uh, Stang, (sp?) (201) they own that sawmill. And there was one black lady workin' there. You know, as a cook and all. And so. They got her on up there workin', so, about, she gettin' on up there. And hope for, get, sort of get on top.

I: So she worked at which sawmill was that?

FR: Uh, she didn't work for the sawmill; she worked for the people *own* the sawmill.

I: Oh. Who were they?

FR: Well, Stang. (sp?) (207) And uh, and uh, and uh, and uh, Landers. You now? Before they, they dead now. You know? But it wasn't before she got scared then; it was somethin' else then. But anyway.

I: Mm-hm. So what did your wife do for them?

FR: She just cooked. And uh, and just uh, clean the house and all that kinda' stuff. You know? Yeah.

I: So, she was a handy-*woman*.

FR: She was a handy-woman. Yeah. Um-hm.

I: All right.

FR: And then she had other jobs around town. She was a maid, like, around town workin' for different other people. You know, help ____, (214) you know? Until I could start to workin', then as I said I met Mr. Baum and then he started helpin' me. You know? And give me work up to his house and then, and then introducin' me to other peoples. Uh, uh, about workin', you know?

I: Was he the first person that you worked for, Mr. Baum?

FR: Yeah.

I: What was he like?

FR: Good man! He was a good man, you know? He called me "Sunshine."

I: Sunshine?

FR: (laughs) Lotta' people don't like where they were, (?) (221) but he was good to me. Yep. He was good to me, yeah.

I: So did he get you other work as well?

FR: Oh yeah! He introduced to, to; you know he was a big man, and all. You know? A lot of people didn't like him because he was a man, he was a moneyman. He's the one that causin' that hospital to be at where it's at today. Do you know where Grande Ronde Hospital used to be?

I: No.

FR: Uh, just as you goin' out of town, right on that curve. You know, as you're goin', uh, uh, when you're goin' out of town on the old road, there. That's the- when first go on that first curve right over that motel? The hospital used to be right there. See, they had, too, had the Grande Ronde and St. Joseph. See the St. Joseph was up here on, on the hill by the, by the K house. You know, that was just, that was, that was a Catholic Hospital. And then after they moved out, then they moved up, moved up there.

I: Now, where were your children born? Were they born in that hospital?

FR: No, I had one- I had two kids born in Florida. I had one born in New Jersey. Had one born here and two in, in uh, in uh, Walla Walla.

I: So where was the one that was born here? Which hospital?

FR: Up there at St. Joseph's.

I: St. Joseph's. What was that like? What kind of hospital? That was a Catholic hospital?

FR: No, it was a regular hospital. Yeah. St. Joseph's a regular hospital.

I: And when did they tear that hospital down?

FR: They took that hospital down first in here, but it went to the Catholic hospital.

I: Oh.

FR: And then they left the Catholic and they went up there on the hill. Yeah. So that's the way it- well I always thought the hospital should have been out there where the state, uh, where they have, uh, I mean where they- where everybody gets their drivers license and all that. That's where I thought the hospital should have been, you know. 'Cause they could have got all that drivin' around there to find that end. Instead of up on that hill. But it got it pretty good there now because they have good doctors. Dr. Gregory or Dr.- you know Dr. Lumpkin? (sp?) (252)

I: No.

FR: Anyway, he's a good doctor. And Dr. Gregory- there was a older, but I think Dr. ___ (253) is about the oldest doctor here now. When I first come to this town, I bet you there wasn't five doctors here.

I: Really.

FR: And now I bet you there's over 30. (chuckle) There's over 30 doctors here now, yeah.

I: So it's grown.

FR: Yeah, yeah. There's over 30 doctors here now. So, that was it. Well, I was, I would say, you know, the kids have got to want to, it's not a matter of, does the teacher want to. Give them a good education if they want to accept it. But see a lot of kids get with those kids hardheaded and wanna' smoke cigarettes and skip out of school.

I: So how come your kids turned out so well?

FR: Because, maam, my kids, my wife didn't spare the rod. If my kids messed up she'd get one of those switches out and tear his rump up. You know? And, and, and if it was like was like today, the kids would work (?) (269) better. I hear kids cussin' they parents and, and, and it just makes me sick. But if my kids had of cussed me out, you wouldn't a ____ (272) I knock all the ____ in they head. It's not a matter of I want to kill 'em or nothin', but I wanna' let him know that when I speak to him, he hear me. My parents done the same for me. I didn't have a chance. I wanna' get- I didn't get no ____ (275) but I can read, and, pick up better'n some kids who went to college. You know? I'm serious. If they was to take a kid from the south and bring him in this town and put them up on the stage like they used to do back when I was goin' to school. They could have 50 kids of- a row of kids long into that buildin'. And I'd be willin' to bet that one of them kids from the south, start from the tail end and get to the head end.

I: So why do you think that's true?

FR: Well, I seen that happen. I seen that happen. You know? Uh, there'd be spellin'- you know I saw, you know I saw on the television where there's kids spellin' these too big words I can't- I cain't pronounce those words. But it was two of 'em- one from two different countries. And there was kids spelled that word, is a lot of people- it was a long word. And a lot of people- a lot of people, educated people couldn't spell that word. Look at Mr. Baum, what he- he was the vice-president of, I forgot what his name now. But anyway, it was a word he couldn't spell and they kept him up there for a long time. Yeah. It was they kept him back there for a long time. You know?

I: So your kids did well because you were strict?

FR: Yeah my kids- well, sure, my wife was strict on my kids. She was hard on 'em. She didn't let the sun go down, them kids they didn't be out on the street after dark, and she made sure they were good kids. She made sure.

I: So what is this, um, being out after dark? You mentioned that you would- you don't go out after dark.

FR: No!

I: What- why is that?

FR: I don't have no business out there! Where is it to go after dark? If you goin' out and eat? Then I keep ____ (refrigerator??) (305) I'm a good cook, I like to cook. (chuckle) And my wife like to cook. Because we keep plenty of food here for the kids to eat. And next thing about a while, say after dark, well, uh, I'm in the bed every night about seven-thirty, eight o'clock. I don't care if the sun be up yet (?) I'm goin' to bed. I be tired and I be sleepin', you know? I been worked all day

- and I be tired. And I don't sit up and watch television that much, and when the news go off I don't care what come on. You know?
- I: So what time do you get up if you go to bed so early?
- FR: Well, my wife get up about 5, she used to work up there at the nursing home. And she had to go to work about five o'clock. But after she, after her shoulders start givin' her problems, she don't work no more. So that was it, you know? So, she wakes up and then she gets up and bring me some coffee. She bring my coffee to the bed every mornin'. Just bring my coffee to the bed, you know? And I drink coffee watchin' news, sometimes I go back to sleep 'cause I don't go to work 'til about seven-thirty, eight o'clock.
- I: So, do you not go out at night because, um, when you were a young man when you first in La Grande (cut off)...?
- FR: Well, I, I been like that all my life! Maam, uh, I tell ya', um, and nothin' on them streets but trouble. Where is to go? Where do you go, where you go at night?
- I: Well, I don't go out much at night, either.
- FR: (laughs) That's why I asked you. Because, you know, there's nowhere to go but these bars, and I don't go it no more because there- everything's on television I wanna' watch, you know?
- I: Did you go to the bars when you were younger?
- FR: I- sure I did. Sure I did.
- I: Did you have a favorite one that you went to?
- FR: Pardon me? No, no, no, no. When I was drinkin', maam, I wasn't a drunker, but I could drink one beer and if I feel it kickin' on me, you couldn't give me another beer. You couldn't give me another beer or take another drink. I never been in jail in my life. I never had no problem. You know? But as I said, ain't nothin' out there but trouble, you know? You get out there and get to drinkin' and somebody get cryin' (?) and it brings on this and that, you know? And, and, a lot of guys wouldn't be in no trouble today if they was to take it easy and when the guy started arguin' and walk away from it. Well they wanna' stand there and, and get _____. (big and get loud??) (343) And sometimes get knocked down. (laugh) Yeah. Both guys get knocked down, uh-huh.
- I: So your advice for people raising their kids; their children in La Grande, is what?
- FR: You give the kids the best kind of respect. You know, if you wanna' raise a kid up, you cain't, you got to raise a kid up when their tiny and small. See when the

tree is small you can bend it this way; you can bend it that way. When it grow up, when it get up this big you cain't bend it, you can't bend that tree. So you gotta' raise a kid up, you know, it's nice to love your kid. Be kind to your kid. And uh, be good to 'em. But let 'em know when you speak to 'em they hear you. When the words are hard, not your heart. Hard, not your heart. You know? 'Cause so many times people workin' with their kids get too big. Kids get 15 or 16 and then they start tryin' to chastise 'em. And that's wrong. You can rub your kids head, you can pat 'em all you wanna', you can love 'em all ya' want when they small. You know? But sometimes, you rub 'em too much when smaller, you know? But my kids never have sassed (?) to me. Do you know what- you know what I got- excuse me- but you know I got a brother today. He practically- see my father died when I was small. And I got a brother raised me today. And I tell you and I tell the world: I wasn't a bit more sassy to that boy than nothin' in the world. He wouldn't say things to me that I wouldn't say to him. But you know what? I have to give him respect because he raised me up after my father died. He was the oldest one. And he took- he, he put bread on the table and put the clothes on my back. And I do give him respect. And I tell him, he done laugh a lot of times. He say I shouldn't do that. But uh, I say, "No, brother, I couldn't do that. I couldn't say no hard, harm word to you." And I seen the time I should have had said somethin'. But I didn't say nothin'. I armor myself. And he thank me for that today.

I: I like your tree- tree, uh, idea with the children.

FR: Yes!

I: Yeah, you get a lot from nature, don't you?

FR: Oh yeah!

I: What is it about, um, nature that fills you because your house is- got- covered with beautiful flowers and you work on trees. What is it about nature that...?

FR: Well, you know, uh, when I first started plantin' flowers in people's yards Dr. Hill, you know, you might not know Mrs. Hill. Jerry (?) Hill, he was my dentist, he's the one, I, I, I got my bottom teeth in _____. (394)

I: Dr. Hill?

FR: Dr Hill, he was my dentist. And I used to go up to his wife every summer and plant her yard. She'd tell me how to do it. And then I said, well, gosh, I want my yard lookin' good, too. You know? My yard is terrible now because I just thatched it, you know. This _____ (401) that like to kill all my grass, but I think I'm gonna' put in new sod. I got beautiful grass in the back and down in front of the house. So that was it, you know? Yeah. I sell; that stuff, too. That- that's good sod. Look out the window at that beautiful sod. Can you see that sod?

I: Oh yeah.

FR: That beautiful sod, yeah. Beautiful sod, yeah.

I: So how did you do- learn how to be a gardener or did, how?

FR: Uh, ___ (408) Lester. You know the Lester? They were the state people, used to have that big house right there on...but see he used to be in the business, he was a real estate. But he sold out to, uh, this other guy. And uh, he, he had me around puttin' down sod and after I put down some for him then I learn it. And I start put- I got a lot of people yard this town. Lotta' peoples yard this town. Yep. I start puttin' sod in they yard, and so, that's the way it was. Ain't nothin' to do but lay it out and cut it out, you know? Like you wanna'. And like apparently just take a knife and cut it like it like you want it. And kind of length you want. You know? So that's...

I: And then you started planting flowers, too, or?

FR: Planting flowers, you know, and then I get the book and- just what they want. You know and then I get it for 'em and plant it for 'em.

I: Where did you buy all your flowers when you first started?

FR: Anywhere. Portland. I done that National Bank down there. I did that. That's the first job I ever did out of my home. But what happened to it, it was a architect. And he uh, he'd draw it out, you know, he uh, ordered all of what all he wanted. And he had it, and he had it, in different places. You know? And so I had to put it right- put the flowers in different place where he wanted 'em, you know. So that's the way it was, you know? Yeah. But anyway, uh, anybody can beautify they yard if they want to. They can say, "Well, I want this particular plant here, and this particular plant here." And make the arches and all that stuff around, and, you know? And so, they got to get the- what the shady stuff. The sun shinin' stuff. Then all that, you know?

I: So you had to learn about all of this?

FR: Oh yeah I had to learn about that. You know? Just like goin' to school, we had to learn about that stuff, you know? Yeah, but it's no, it's no problem. Had to learn about it. But, there's one thing about it I don't guarantee nobody no plants because I done a lot of people yard that I told 'em that uh, I, I put it in but I won't guarantee it to live. Because if they don't water, they, it won't live. And a lot of people I have put in, done had eight thousand dollars worth of work, and they just let they yard die. And sometimes they hire me to do it again. I said, "Look. There's no use. I hate to take your money. But I can't do it for nothin', you know? So if you want me to do it, I'll do it. But I'm serious. But if you wanna' ___ (456)

is fine. You have- you should hire me to come up and water.” And a lot of ‘em did hire to come up and water, you know? So that’s the way it, you know? Water is the life, you know? If you don’t drink water you ain’t gonna’ live too long. (chuckle) I don’t think so. No. And a tree ain’t gonna’ live, either, you know? Yeah.

I: So your yard is always just beautiful, you decorate it for different times?

FR: Yeah, and then uh, you notice the signs here in my yard.

I: Yeah, you’re the sign guy!

FR: (laughs) Right, yeah! Yeah, so people come here. But, you know all those guys is my friends. One guy say, “You should let this guy put his sign in your yard.” I said, “Why? I let you put yours in there.” People know who they wanna’ vote for. They- you don’t tell anybody who to vote for. I said, “Well, I don’t tell nobody who to vote for. But I tell somebody who I like. It’s up to you sign your name on that, on that particular party, you know?” Dave Baum, uh, Ray Baum he went twice in my yard. Put his sign up, you know? Rest of the- everybody was lookin’ and I could go out in the yard and could see ain’t nobody in town got no bankers (?) on the corner but me. I got a banker on that corner and a banker on that corner. And I see old people’s out there and I got outside and talk to ‘em, you know. And I enjoy to a lot of ‘em, just, sittin’ out there talkin’, you know. Yeah, so. That’s it.

I: So, you- you’ll allow anyone to put their sign wants to?

FR: Anybody wanna’ put a sign up. I never took nobody down. Because people know who they want, who they don’t. You know? I’m like, I’m, next time election come up I’m gonna’ put a sign: WHO SHOULD EVER WILL and let ‘em come. And be friendly. Don’t knock on my door, just put a sign up here where you want. But you ain’t say puttin’ it on the city property. Isn’t that somethin’? The city won’t let you put a sign on their property if you ran for some kind of office. No. That’s it, you know? So I don’t know why, but that’s the way it is, you know? Yeah. So what else you wanna’ talk about?

I: All right, let’s see. What about, um, uh, what changes do you see in the way that uh, people in La Grande view different people, or ethnic groups? From, has their been a change in the way people in this area have viewed minorities? You think?

FR: Well, I don’t know too much about that because I don’t really don’t pay too much attention. But there have been a lot of change in different things and you know?

I: When there have other- have other black families had

FR: Problems?---

End of Side 2
End of Tape #1
Transcription completed Monday, July 23, 2007
FIELD ROBERSON
JULY 18, 2004
TAPE #2
Interviewed by April Curtis
Transcribed by Micheal L Minthorn

Side 3

FR: Hard times. My mother had eight kids. And as I said I was born in Georgia. And I know that time; you know she worked for white peoples. That uh, they couldn't afford to pay her no money but they could afford to give her plenty of food. I remember a time when you could buy a pop for three cents. I'm serious, a pop. And, do you remember that? I remember when you could buy a pop for three cents. And I remember when you could buy like; go into these, to these grocery stores you could buy uh, 15 cents worth of sugar. You could buy 15 cents worth of milk. (?) You could buy, uh, maybe a little flour, syrup, molasses. And that's from the sugar cane plant, you know? And I worked here for some people once that uh, they used to have me out there feedin' the _____. (013) 'Cause the old mule be goin' around and round and round, but they had, somethin' this big with big jaws but when it come together, it come like that and the cane come right through here and squeeze the juice out. And theys cook syrup all night and all day.

I: Where was that?

FR: In Georgia.

I: Wow.

FR: In Georgia. Yeah.

I: Well, you were saying that, uh, in La Grande some black families did have some problems?

FR: Oh yeah they had problems! You know, uh, uh, they, they did, they was big drinkers. But they like start cryin' or pickin' at peoples when they are, they get to drink. And they, he would used to go to jail. I remember once he was a good painter. His name was _____ Keith. (020)

I: Keith?

FR: Key.

I: K-E-Y? Like a?

FR: K-E-Y. Yeah, K-E-Y. And uh, and um, he get to drinkin' then he start the cryin' on, you know? Or pickin' at people he shouldn't be pickin' at. I remember once he made over \$1500 down to that ___ (024) paintin'. And then, he didn't have no drivers license and he was comin' across the big, uh, cross the 2nd Street bridge and Captain Miles- they were, they had a captain here then, Captain Miles.

I: Captain Miles?

FR: Yeah. He, he, do you know him? He was a captain here then. He was a older guy. And Key like to have run him off the bridge. And then he called some of the officers up there havin' to go pick Key up. He was drunk as a skunk. But anyway, that \$1500 he made didn't do him a bit of good. And charged him that. And so, Monday morning he didn't have no money go up on, he had to get him another job, and start back all over again. (laughs)

I: What he had to pay \$1500?

FR: Yeah. Yeah by the time he got him a lawyer and all, took all that, you know. Yeah, he tryin' to run the guy off the bridge, you know. But this, this time here have been so good to me. And uh, a black person never had no problem here, like the kids goin' to college here now. All of 'em, they seem to be doin' pretty good. They never had no problem up there as I know them. But most of the kids from out of town. I don't know none of 'em. I know a couple people, kids works up there. ___ (039) and uh couple more guys work up there that uh, they been here a long time. I know those guys, you know? And so.

I: Do people in the African-American community here, do they get to, do you guys get together? Is there a community?

FR: No. They do anything, they do anything. If, if a white person havin' somethin. We go there, we meet and that's it, you know? And I'm invited out all the time. You know, to churches and different peoples homes and stuff like that, you know. So that's the way it is, you know? But other than that, everything been cool as far as I'm concerned. You know?

I: So what do you see in your future? What is it that you?

FR: A good life.

I: Mm-hm.

FR: Happiness. Happiness. I like to look at a person and say “Good mornin’, Good evenin’” without him sayin’, says _____. (049) So, you know, that’s the way it is.

I: How did you get your name, Field?

FR: I don’t know.

I: You don’t?

FR: No. I was born in Georgia, as I’ve told you. And my

I: So you don’t know why your parents named you Field?

FR: I didn’t like that at first, but now I like it. It’s, it’s, I think there’s only about two Fields’ in the telephone book. Yeah. See, a lot of people spell my name P-H-I-L, but it’s F-I-E-L-D. Yep, it’s F-I-E-L-D. Field, yeah. And, and, and so a lot of people think R-O-B-E-R-S-O-N I don’t have a T in my name. So that’s the way it is. You know, my brothers and sisters, I don’t know how it got mixed up. But see they got a T in their name. And they call here at times, and, they, “You spell your name with a T?” I say no. Because my brother just sent me a airline ticket. He say I got to get this name right! You know? And he spell it with a T. I said no, it’s R-O-B-E-R. He spell his name R-O-B, or R-O-T. Yeah. You know, he got a T in his name. But I don’t have a T in my name. You know? But how it got mixed up I don’t know. So that’s the way it is, you know? Yeah.

I: So do you ever go back down to Madison Street? See what it look like down there? You have a property, right?

FR: Yeah, I have, I’m over there everyday. I’m over everyday. I lived on Madison 15 years. Yep. And I lived right next to the Trice’s. (sp?) Lucky Trices.

I: Oh you lived next door?

FR: She and I were sister in-law. And she’s a 77 and I’m 77. Her birthday, her birthday and her husband born in the same month as my first wife. And my birthday is in the same month. Yeah. April 22nd, yeah.

I: So does she still live down there in that house?

FR: Yeah. You don’t know ___ Trice? No. So you- you didn’t know none of the Trices? No?

I: No, I haven’t lived here that long so?

FR: Oh really? How long you lived here?

I: Um, 11 years.

FR: 11 year, well you should know, she goes all the time.

I: See I've probably have seen her, but I...

FR: She beads everything. You know? She goes swimmin', she be up to the college everyday. She goes to the library, she goes uh, she goes swimmin'. She, she be's all, she plays tennis and she- she- she's just a little handicapped lady. Yeah.

I: She's active just like you are, huh?

FR: Yeah she's our Sunday school teacher. Yeah. You gotta' cut this off?

I: Um, maybe just another question about the churches that you have gone to in La Grande. Um, so your- the- the first church you went to was the...?

FR: Pentecostal.

I: Pentecostal church.

FR: Yeah.

I: And then what church did you go to after that?

FR: Guess I went to the Church of God in Christ.

I: Now what

FR: It was a holiness church. Just different denomination. Huh?

I: Where was that located?

FR: It was in there pretty close to side to side. Yeah. After those people left then that church went down. Then I went to this, to this Pentecostal church. And, it right now

I: Is that in the same location, or?

FR: Yeah.

I: Oh, I see.

FR: And right now, uh, I'm a Baptist.

I: So how did you make that switch? What happened to make you decide to change churches?

FR: Well, after I start goin' to the Baptist church. Ever' body that was getting' older, and they wanted me to take over that church to, not to run it, but just to be like a, a oversee over it, you know? And so they made a deacon out it. I'm a deacon now. They call me Deacon Roberson. You know? So, uh, if somethins, somethin' come up and the people have to come before me and then I have to talk to the sisters and- I ain't got no none other brother there- I'm the oldest man in that church. (chuckle) So I have to talk to the sisters, but they- 'bout their opinion about it, you know? And then we start to talk about it, you know?

I: Now this is the church that's on Fir? Is that right?

FR: It's on T.

I: T.

FR: You know where 1st Street at?

I: Mm-hm.

FR: You know where that muffler shop on Monroe?

I: Yes.

FR: You know it's a little V goin' around there, its right around the corner. Call it uh, Mubar (sp) Baptist Church.

I: Mabar?

FR: -bar Baptist Church there.

I: Huh.

FR: And so that's where that church at. We only have a small 'nomination. Which is I said was two or three together in my name. Yeah. Is a child of God.

I: So, do you speak at the church now, or you just?

FR: No. Uh, well I have to, I have to get up and speak sometimes. You know, I have to speak sometimes, there ain't nobody there, and then I have to get up and speak. So, but we got a good Sunday school teacher, she's a musician and all that. She plays the piano and all. She sings good and so, that's it. Yeah, we got a pretty good 'nomination of people there, so everything is cool. Yeah. Everything is cool, yeah.

I: Well, and um, I think I'll just finish it by asking you to say something- I know that you've already talked about your faith.

FR: Yeah.

I: Um, do you have anything else you'd like to say for people that are reading these books about, uh, how you believe?

FR: Well you know sometime it's hard to- different denomination. Different- it's hard to explain to peoples- I spreads myself- and I tell you or anybody that God is so good. He been good to me. He woke me up this mornin'. He woke me up with a mind to say, "Lord, I thank you." And, and I'm gonna' tell ya' I thank God for the food that I eat. I thank Him for the water that I drink. And I tell Him to "believe on." Peoples really don't know Him. Believe on Him. (?) (126) But so many people I wish, I wished- it might not happen. And sometimes it might happen. God be- when so many times people said, "I don't believe in Jesus Christ, I don't believe in God, and I don't believe in this." But I just wish He could just touch them and shut they mouth up. And they can go and tell somebody about what God done for me. And I can tell ya' what He done for me. He made a new Christian out of me. He made a man out of me. He's made a man out of me. You know, I tell anybody God is so good. He is merciful. He is wonderful. And He'll do the same thing for you He'll do for me. Amen! (chuckle) Amen. He the same thing. He is so good.

End of Side 3

NO Side 4

End of Tape #2

Transcription completed Monday, July 23, 2007