

Dave Rose

1/3/03, T1, S1

JT: And what's your name?

DR: I am Dave...David Rose. I was born in 1916.

JT: And where were you born?

DR: I was born in Pendleton, Oregon.

JT: In Pendleton. When did you move to the La Grande area?

DR: 1918.

JT: And how old were you at that time?

DR: Two-and-a-half, three years old.

JT: And you moved to Starkey, or...?

DR: Moved to Starkey, Oregon. There used to be lots of sheep out this...in that country, you know, but... And there was... Everybody had saddle horses and pack animals. My mother run the post office there at Starkey and had a grocery store, too.

JT: And that was at the Starkey store where they called Starkey.

DR: That was the old Starkey store, mm-hmm.

JT: So many people are confused when you say Starkey they think Mt. Emily camp is Starkey.

DR: No, no, no. There wasn't even any Mt. Emily camp there at all.

JT: It was just where the store was...

DR: It was just where the store was. There wasn't any loggin' in there at all, it was just like said, it was sheep outfits, cattle and...and that sort of thing.

JT: And that's the line of work your father...

DR: My dad had a ranch there and he run cattle and horses and grain, wheat.

JT: Then when you got up to the age that you would go to school where did you go to school?

DR: First that I can remember a-goin' to school...to what school, this old school up there at Starkey. And then...then after we left there, why, we moved down to round in the Pendleton country. I went to school down there.

JT: When you started to school at Starkey was that a one or two-room...[tape interruption]

DR: Oh, just a one-room school. Maybe...I don't know, ten, twelve kids, pupils. One teacher for 'em all.

JT: That was one through eighth grade?

DR: Oh yes. Yeah.

JT: Then you moved back to Pendleton and how long did you stay there?

DR: Oh, we stayed there... I left Pendleton and came up into La Grande when I was about twenty-four years old. I went railroadin'. That's the one to go railroadin' so I had to come to La Grande to go railroadin'.

JT: And this was the division point of the railroad?

DR: Yeah. I first hired out on the Oregon Short Line. I really didn't like that 'cause I hired out as a brakeman and I wanted to hire out as a fireman, see. So when I found that I might be able to hire out here in La Grande I came over and the first

thing I did was got acquainted with a couple engineers. They took me over and they hired me.

JT: Good.

DR: Yeah. That was... I think it was 19--[tape interruption]

JT: When you started out railroading that was when they were using coal.

DR: They used coal and...and oil. They had the old Malley-type engines and then some lighter engines, they called 'em Mikes, and other.

JT: What series were those engines? Do you remember?

DR: [tape interruption]...a freight engine, of course. I don't think that the Malley would run it up the mountain single. I don't think they'd take over fourteen hundred tons [tape interruption]...had many more than that they had a helper, sometimes two helpers.

JT: Now when you started working for the railroad [tape interruption] a little bit, did they...

DR: Yeah, they showed you where the peg was on the therm...or on the steam gauge and they said that that's where they like to...like to run it when it was right on about that peg. Of course, if you got one of 'em too hot and they popped off they was mad then too. And some of 'em was real cranky, but some of 'em was real, real good guys, real good guys. Most of 'em, in fact, were just nice guys. And if you...

JT: They were...had a little prestige in those days as bein' an engineer.

DR: Oh, you better believe it! They would show you how... When you first started in they showed to get hand-firin' engines. But that's about the only time they ever picked up a scoop shovel is when they showed you where to do it. After that you done...you have the scoop shovel.

JT: There's a lot more running an engine than just putting coal in it and...

DR: Oh yes, yes. Yeah. A lot more. Of course, those days, you know, why, you didn't get over the road very fast either. You went... You went to La Grande to ___ you could do it in ten hours you made a pretty good trip. Later on, you know, we got so we'd run La Grande to ___ in two hours and thirty-five minutes or something. These big diesel engines

JT: What...[tape interruption]

DR: We run both ways out of here.

JT: Both ways.

DR: Unless you bid a job in, which at those days I didn't bid any jobs in 'cause I was on an extra board. So I was liable to be called either on east end or west end. They just called you for an ex...some fireman laid off, why, you got call whether it was east or west or whether it was just a helper or what it was.

JT: About how long did you work as a fireman before you became a engineer?

DR: I... In 1941 I went in the military and I done a four year stretch. When I come back I was...those other men was already promoted around me. So I had to do all this studyin' or I was gonna lose a lot of seniority. So I studies to beat hell and passed all the examinations. In those days you had to take a diesel examination and also steam engine so it was a lot more to it than it would be now. It was a rough go. [tape interruption]...was...you had to pass an inspection because it

went through the government, the federals inspect it. You had to do it so good or...

JT: The engineer's responsibility on a train isn't just a hold of the throttle and...you had to know how many cars you had and their weight...

DR: Oh you... Yes, you had to know how many cars and, yes, the weight.

JT: How... How did you determine those things?

DR: The conductor had to...had the weigh bills and they would give you a message on...or the yard master would tell you, you're leaving here with 3800 ton or 4000 ton or whatever it was. And you knew the type of the engines you had and how many and you know what the 4000 ton was four of those big jacks that you gonna go single.

JT: Now what do you mean by single?

DR: No helper.

JT: Oh, no...okay.

DR: That's what I meant.

JT: I understand now.

DR: Yeah. Then later on, of course, we got those remote...we called 'em slave ___ and we was ordered not to call 'em slave...slave units. And they was run off of radio system and nobody on 'em.

JT: ___ control those as...

DR: You controlled 'em right there on the switchboard right there in front of you.

JT: Uh-huh. So many people don't realize that [tape interruption]

DR: Oh yes. If you take a big heavy train and it would be a mile unless you just went right into emergency and then you'd go a long ways. I run through a band of sheep one time down at...below North Fork. I think the sheep belonged to Hoskins. And they come around there on the forwarder train, those are the fast rate, come around there and then...there'd been snow on the side of the...in the hills, there's white patches around and I looked down the track and there was this white patch down there in the track. I thought it was the edge of the track and it was snow until I saw...the light hit 'em right to see the reflection off their eyes and I ran through a band of sheep that was bedded down right on there in a hill, seventy-eight head. And I know that the rear of the train was passed the sheep when they got stopped.

JT: Of course then you always had [tape interruption].

DR: Then you had to make out a report. Was the whistle blowin'? Was there the bell a-ringin'? Oh hell, I didn't know whether if I ringed the bell or blew the whistle. It didn't make any difference in the middle of the night to a bunch of sheep on the track. I just went in emergency and run through the sheep.

JT: Oftentimes these inspectors would but out fusies or torpedoes and you had to stop.

DR: That's what they called a test.

JT: Uh-huh.

DR: Yeah, if it's two torpedoes you reduced your speed down. And it was...reduced your speed there might be a red flag settin' up the track. If it is, you had to stop for it to check it out. It just [tape interruption] And that's all some of those officials had to do was goin' out there to try and to fire some guy, some guy makin' an honest livin'.

JT: To see you followed the rules...

DR: Yeah.

JT: ...to the letter.

DR: Right.

JT: In the early days when you got ___ or something from the operators at these little depots and they had a hoop out there and...

DR: Oh yeah. If you went by you just scooped it up, hooked it over your arm. Yeah.

JT: And that told you what to do. But later on they put radios on the train.

DR: It was all radioed and Central Train Control. Yeah.

JT: And you worked then...talked to the dispatcher...

DR: Oh yeah, right to the dispatcher. You just talked to dispatch and he'd tell you [tape interruption]

JT: ___

DR: He didn't have to tell you. If you'd get a flashing yellow light than you get the yellow light and the next one a-wrong was either gonna be a double red or a red over yellow. And the red over yellow was you take the passin' track. And that's the way it is. You went in to passing track, get down to the other end you stopped and you stayed there till they cleared.

JT: Which was the hardest go, west to Reef or east to Huntington, with the mountains?

DR: West. Goin' west to Reef. Steeper hills ___ heavier curves and more break in twos. You know, these big diesels, you know, you wonder if they get to slippin'...slip a few times and they go off right through if you pull a draw bar out or break a ___. They're...they're...

JT: Would you ex...[tape interruption]...draw a bar so that people that don't know about that what'd be?

DR: You know, like a glide hand where this...to where their knuckles and everything closed together and put ___ a draw bar, it went clear back into the car. ___ pull one of them out, break one of them out, or lots of times you just...you break a knuckle. If you was lucky you just broke a knuckle. If you could you pulled a draw bar. If you got a draw bar then you had to chain up and take that car wherever you could get it off in the passing track or someplace.

JT: Off to the side or someplace there.

DR: Yeah. Then you had to go back and get your train. A lot of 'em ___ around.

JT: [tape interruption]...or a...

DR: Oh yeah. You wire or just anyplace to set a car out.

JT: Passing track.

DR: Yeah. ___ set a car out. After you... If you had to sit an engine out... I hit a...a carload of two-by-fours one time when we was runnin' into Nampa and that's fast track over there and we used to run some of them sixty-five, seventy miles an hour. [tape interruption]...right out in front of me and I hit this...of course I was in emergency quite a ways before I got to it 'cause I saw he stalled on the track. And I had to slip the engine out. It got hurt. We had to set that unit out. Ordinarily, though, a lot of those trains ___ three or four A-units and an A-unit is a control unit. You had a... You could switch it on and [tape interruption] Oh yeah. Oh yes. There was a...on the curves.

JT: How did you curve in that?

DR: On the degree of the curve. You notice...we never paid too much attention on the degree of the curve because there's a sign up there. The sign was just 30 miles an hour. Of course you knew your railroad anyway and you already knew that. Of course, you've run over it a few times, why, it was just [tape interruption]

JT: You're experience as a fireman and then...

DR: Oh yeah. Yeah.

JT: ...were able to handle it when you became a full-fledged engineer.

DR: Yeah __ quite a bit on your mind. You had the responsibility and you had to watch out... I was always worried to death that I'd...if some woman with a bunch of kids in the car goin' to school, especially the last few years I worked over on the Idaho, like I said, it was fast track and lots of crossings. It was quite a worry.

JT: I can appreciate that.

DR: I hit several cars. I never...I don't think I ever killed any [tape interruption]...oh yeah, they'd pull right up and, you know, there seems to be like they pull you up and they'd seem to take their foot off the break and the car would roll into you. I don't understand how they would do that, but the other...the idea anyway, you should stop back a ways because those trains goin' by pretty fast. What if a brake shoe would fly off of there? It'd hit you...pretty near go through an automobile if you was doin' about sixty miles an hour with a freight train and one of them big brake shoes come off. I would stop back a little ways. Railroadin' is a very interesting job, a lot more so than a lot of people realize. They thought all you had to do was get on there and blow the whistle and ring the bell and open the throttle.

JT: Those were the questions we wanted you to help answer.

DR: There's a hell of a lot more to it than that. You had air brakes. A lot of people figure when you set the brakes you added air. You didn't add any air, you took it off. You had ninety pounds you'd draw it down to twenty pounds you was sittin' twenty pounds of air...air brakes. If you set the brakes on the train you had to release the brakes on your levers only you rang it. 'Cause if you're workin' power and set a little air...you do that a lot of times...of course, it kept your slack runnin' in and out.

JT: And the slack __.

DR: That's right. If you want to be a smooth...smooth train handler you took a little pride in that sort of thing. Yeah. Railroadin' was quite a job. The hours was terrible. Like hell they worked you any hours of night or day. Get called any night or time of day.

JT: And you never had a holiday at home.

DR: Oh no. Not...no. You could... You worked Christmases and whatnot. It isn't... But you expected it and they did pay you damn well, especially your last few years you worked it was a big good-payin' job. The hours was terrible, the pay was real good. You could support your family and own a decent home. When you got ready to retire if you had sense you had a few dollars saved and they retired you well. You get a decent pension. And your supplemental insurance and whatnot would help a great deal.

JT: I can appreciate that.

DR: Yeah. [tape interruption]...now... I had a light stroke about three, four months ago so now I take Pletix and that cost a dollar...\$119 for thirty pills.

JT: Hmm.

DR: Mm-hmm. I think Medicare I am allowed \$1700 on my insurance will pay that, but I have to pay fifteen dollars for each prescription. Then I have to pay for the medicine [tape interruption] \$1500. And then I have to...

JT: That is [tape interruption]

DR: ...marvelous.

JT: Now when you were working did you ever get on to [tape interruption]

DR: Oh yeah. That was... Yeah, you did. You knew you's...when you was here you knew you were gonna get called the next morning, yeah.

JT: And how did your run go up the branch?

DR: Pretty slow. Track wasn't all that good and it was very crooked. But there wasn't any...there wasn't any Central Train Control or passing tracks. You wasn't gonna meet anybody, if it was ___ it'd be a speeders or a section crew and they'd be off out of your road anyway.

JT: Did you go up in one day and come back the same day or did you most generally go up on day and back the next?

DR: No. You went up one day and come back the next. And a lot of times you was twelve, fourteen, fifteen hours makin' that one trip because you had all the switchin' to do. And then comin' back, why, you just take that. Picked up your cars that you switched out and usually come back in, oh, eight, nine, nine hours. It was... I took that job because I got tired of the extra board. Otherwise I wouldn't a took it. As soon as I could get off of it I took a mainline job as a regular crew member.

JT: But it paid pretty good, didn't it?

DR: Oh yes. It paid real good. Yeah. Paid good.

JT: Then you kind of knew what you were doing.

DR: You did and you knew what times you were called and if they didn't call ya you got paid anyway. You got a hundred miles pay, but ordinarily you didn't miss...

JT: [tape interruption]...at Looking Glass.

DR: Oh yes. A lot of fisherman and, yeah, we'd haul 'em down there where we'd pick 'em up and which would've been frowned on, but we did it. We picked 'em up and let 'em off and it didn't cost 'em nothin'. When they first went out there, why, they used to have a baggage car and they would...I think they had to pay when they rode that, but other...when they got rid of that, why, we just pick 'em up and tell 'em get back on a unit there and tend to your own business, don't bother anything. And one of the...one of the other A-unit and A would be one of the control units would be in the back. If you didn't have one, why, they'd just ride in the cab with ya. And let 'em off where they wanted to. Yeah.

JT: That was a great time.

DR: Oh yes. Yeah. There was a lot of steelhead fisherman, trout fisherman and...[tape interruption]...our whole camp outfit and everything else and take 'em down below ___ and stop down there and let 'em off. Yeah. Didn't... Didn't ask any...[tape interruption] Yeah, yeah. The section crews up on a job

like that were a different too than they were on the main line. They were [tape interruption] __ because with their price they had to be, see, 'cause any problems you tell 'em where it was, if you had a bad piece of track so-and-so or this and that. Why, you'd tell 'em [tape interruption]

JT: I had worked for Sylvan when I was timekeeper ____...

DR: Good guy.

JT: ...for the railroad.

DR: And I can't remember...what in the hell was his last name? Can't remember his last name now. That was a good job although the main line job was a lot better job. It paid more. You know, an engineer got paid by the weight on the drivers. One unit paid you a lot less...quite a bit less than four or five or six of those big...that big engine, those big Jacks...I called 'em Jacks. And [tape interruption] by the hundred. You also got terminal delay, you laid too long in the terminal they had to start payin' you. And things like that, you know. Yeah, it was [tape interruption] I remember when one time my son got...he was just a kid and was gonna go into high school...he bought me a...one of them little...not computer, but a thing that you...

JT: Calculator?

DR: Calculator. And I told him, I said, "Well, I don't know whether I want that or not." I said, "In three months I'll be another idiot. I want to know how to figure my time with a pencil." It made it so much easier, you know. And, by the way, you kept a time book, your time down. You kept a time book. And if you could figure your pay within five or six dollars you was brilliant. It just couldn't be done. So much [tape interruption] and this and that and different things. So I used to work that [tape interruption] real close a few times. Now, railroadin's a...you have to be born to really make a good railroader. It's gotta be with you. Because I saw the time...a lot of times I set on the edge of a bed I'd get called maybe only been in bed about three hours and get called to go back out and think "Why do the hell don't I quit?" And then I get to thinkin' about Evaline and the two kids and I'd get up and go to work. Yeah. [tape interruption]...those railroaders are used to workin' nights. They're used to it. You don't get used to workin' nights 'cause you're gonna be workin' nights and then you'll change back into days and work... No one get used to that! [tape interruption]...used to be a lot of men that worked here in the roundhouse, lots of men and car inspectors and... Later on when they got Central Train Control, diesel trains, diesel, there was very few. There was no roundhouse, in fact, they done away with it and even tore it down. You know that.

JT: It's sad to look over the yard.

DR: Yeah, it is. Yeah. Got a lot of men out of work.

JT: True.

DR: But that's the way big company... Then you hear people talk about...cuss the unions, cuss the union. When you work for a big company like a railroad you better belong to a good union. I belong to the Engineers, of course. You'd better because one man can't contest an organization like that.

JT: And then you had to have job insurance.

DR: I had job insurance. I had so much job insurance. I laughed one time they was... just kept turnin' the light red. We was tryin' to switch some cars. And I got mad and I decided...I just went on through it, back and forth through it. And I got through I called the dispatcher and I said, "___ ask you about that light," I said. He said, "You treated it like a clear would," he said, "Must've been clear." And I said, "Yeah." And I said... He said, "Besides that I had an official in here and told me that you had a hundred dollar a day job insurance." [laughs] I did, too. A hundred dollars a day job insurance. I did.

JT: When something would happen they'd always fire everybody in sight...

DR: Yeah.

JT: ...sort it out later.

DR: One time they fired George Driskell and he [tape interruption] ...-five cars away from where this happened. And I came in and I... Mr. Roberts was the big wheel. His private car was settin' there so... I knew that he was a lodge brother of mine. Of course, he...him and I weren't buddies or anything, but I knew that... I just went in there and he said, "What... Is there anything I can do for you, Dave?" And I said, "Yeah." I said, "Why don't you put George Driskell back to work?" I said, "You fired him when he's ninety-five cars away from a...where this run through that switch and whatnot." I said, "How in the hell can you do that?" And he said, "Oh, it's easy." I said, "Yeah, but," I said, "is it fair?" And he said, "I'll tell you what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna put him back to work in ten days now you get out of here!" [laughs] He said, "You get out of here!" And he said, "And if they...anybody asked me was you in here I'm gonna tell 'em no." They put him back to work. But he'd been awful long there if I hadn't a went in and...

JT: Yeah.

DR: Yeah.

JT: When I...[tape interruption]

DR: ...railroad men are pretty good on the helpin' out people. But I can't remember just too much about that.

JT: [tape interruption]...flashlight.

DR: Yes. ___ lived off the side of the track there between Enterprise and Joseph. And she's standin' there and go you up there and it'd be dark...we's goin' up and there would be a little light in the window a-wavin' the light at us. And we got to talkin' and it's Christmastime and I...we's talkin', Lavern Draper and I, so why don't we buy her a nice little...buy her a present? Well, and ___ alright, so we went in and there was a beautiful doll. Oh, it was a big doll, beautiful dress, but it was expensive. And I said, "We'll buy that one." He said, "Well, what are the other guys gonna say?" I said, "They make big money. Watch, that ain't gonna hurt him anyway." I said, "We'll do it." And I said... What he said, "They won't pay, we'll do it." And I said, "Okay." So we bought the big doll and went back and put the arm on the rest of 'em and made 'em pay. [laugh] We pulled up there, we got off, we went over and give this little girl the beautiful doll. You said she was fifty years old now?

JT: About that.

DR: She must be about...yeah. But she was a little girl then. Maybe she was, oh, seven or eight.

JT: She still has the doll the way I understand.

DR: Oh does she?

JT: Uh-huh.

DR: Yeah, she was a cute little doll. Always give us the highball when we'd go by at night.

JT: What a nice thing to do.

DR: Yeah. [tape interruption]...and I was waitin' for a helper, a helper train. I was on this helper and I had three of those big Jacks and the fella was pullin' some stumps out and he had a big cable there and team of horses. Right up passin' track I said, "Hook that cable around that stump and I'll pull it out for you." He couldn't pull it out with a horse. "Oh," he said, "I don't know whether you can pull that or not." I said... [laughs] I said, "Tie the... Put the chain on, or cable, rather." I pulled about seven or eight of them stumps for him and no problem either, you know. And he was amazed, you know. Another time was had...put a car off the end of the track at the ___ Mill at Wallow' and they couldn't get it back on. They took two D8 Cats down there and hooked onto it and they couldn't pull it back up. So they just wanted to ask ___ to see if we could pull that car up. "Yeah," I said, "I can pull it up there. Yeah." But we was gonna have a big train out and I had three of those...those big diesel engines all hooked together, you know. So I pulled down there and there's a pull down I sanded the rail and they put the cable around this car and it was all ready and I sucked it right out of there and up on the track and those guys was amazed at... They couldn't pull it out with a couple of Cats. They had no idea what three of those big engines would do, you know. And I didn't even open it up the throttle hardly only about the third throttle notch and just sucked 'em right out of there. Yeah. Very amazing. [tape interruption] Yeah. We had... If you had a coal fired engine you'd pile a bunch of coal up in the gangway as you went by these houses down there closest to the track you'd kick the coal off and the women'd be out there with buckets to pick up the coal. Times was pretty...[end tape]

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DR: ...was his name. And Pete was...was different. And then one time there's a railroad detective and they called him Red. And he got killed there at Hilgard. Maybe you heard about it.

JT: No, I didn't.

DR: They shot him off... Somebody shot him off of a car there. And Pete Kutrus went down to the phone and he says...grabbed the phone and he said, "Mr. Dispatch, a dead bull on the track." The dispatcher thought it was an animal, see, and finally went to the phone and told him and he says, "Hold everything. It was..."

JT: Railroad detective.

DR: Yeah, railroad detective was shot. And that's one thing for Pete Putrick. Another time there was a big...big rock come off the track. It was as big as an automobile and lit right in the track. That was down below Meacham. Pete...he wouldn't let anybody else to do it, he had to be the big wheel that done all the talkin', you know, on the phone. "Yeah," he says, "Mr. Dispatch a big rock on the track." And hung up. The dispatcher cleared all the signals red. He didn't know where the hell it was at there, you know. On that end he put everything red. Finally they __ the fact where it was and they had to go down there and I think they had to put some...blast some of it and break it and get it off of there. But that was Pete. He...a big rock on the track.

JT: You were tellin' me [tape interruption] hole down at Duncan.

DR: Oh yeah. There's a section crew's down there and we was tryin' to get coal and there...wasn't gettin' it. So I'd talked to the section guy down there. They was grappin' about it. We was comin' back up and we had a car of coal right behind the engine, a dandy load of coal. And I said to the brakeman, I said, "You know," I said, "That's...wheels are runnin' hot on that car back there we better set it out here." So I... We set it out. I always wondered how many ton of coal was missing when they got ready to leave it...[laugh] take it out of there.

JT: But they always...most generally furnished the section foreman...

DR: Yeah, they furnished it, but...

JT: ...and the signal maintainers with coal and ice during the summertime.

DR: Yeah, but sometimes they're pretty slow about gettin' it to 'em. Another time I thought maybe I was almost got fired. We had a trainmaster. He was a stupid little jerk. His uncle or somebody must've been a big wheel in the railroad or he'd never got a job. The roadmaster said...asked me if I would pick up two women that was at Meacham. They'd bought groceries and they had to get down to Huron. There wasn't any...couldn't run a car up and down ____. Must've been five, six feet of snow in there. I said, "Sure." So I __ the __ Elgin we had. Gonna go over to help a train. So I stopped in the front of it and I helped the women load their groceries on the edge and then __ got in and I took 'em down to Huron and let 'em off. The husbands come out there and they took the groceries off. So I got in and I notified the...go up to his office...trainmaster's office. I went up there and he asked me what the hell was I doin', runnin' a passenger service? I said, "No," I said, "I don't know what you're talkin' about." He said, "You hauled...you picked up two women at Meacham, didn't ya?" I said, "Yes, I did." I said, "I picked up their groceries, too." He said, "That's illegal. That... You can't do that." And I said, "It's already did." I said, "Those...are section men wives and," I said, "the tools that them guys work with wouldn't fit your hand because they're a tool for the hand of the man." And I was mad! I thought probably I'd get fired, didn't. So he said, "I'm gonna see how many demerits you can get." And the big wheel at Portland told him forget it. He said you can't do that, of course he hauled 'em. He was asked if he would. [tape interruption]...little things that was picky about, but it was a good job. Later, especially when I at the holdin' the regular job in these big diesels and it got so you went by a steam engine you rolled the window up, you didn't want to smell it.

[laughs] Good heaters, good shield wipers, good lights, yeah. And the radios, especially on the Idaho, there's so much fog over there in the wintertime.

JT: When you were over at Nampa?

DR: Oh yes. Oh yes. Just like lookin' through a wet blanket. When you do that's when you talk to your dispatcher. And they were real good about it, too, __ tell 'em... "Your right, we are real foggy and you're gonna meet a train at so-and-so and we're gonna head you in the pass...[tape interruption]...the engineer didn't dare miss a signal. That's the only reason why where you know where you was at because you knew all those signals.

JT: Right.

DR: And if you missed a signal you didn't know where you was at, you couldn't see. So we was very careful to watch __ just get in. Some of the crew would go to bed and go to sleep. The engineer was the guy that usually set up an hour of two after you got in to kind of let down. So, yeah, he was right on edge.

JT: Like you said, you're [tape interruption] almost when you'd see some of these almost accidents and you wondered if you'd hit somebody and there wasn't a thing in the world you could do about it.

DR: Nothing.

JT: And it...it kind of weighed on you.

DR: [tape interruption]...were awfully good about talking to you. And if you knew who was ahead of you, like if you was followin' a train, you would listen very careful because you wanted to hear what he was sayin'. 'Cause that way sometimes you found out just where he was at. And like I said, you didn't dare miss a signal. And that's when you'd yell at the brakeman. Didn't...got so we didn't have any fireman. Yelled at our brakeman, "You watch for that signal over there." __ yellin' at him. Afraid you'd miss one.

JT: [tape interruption]...didn't they?

DR: No, they had three brakeman and a conductor.

JT: Oh, okay.

DR: Yeah. They had a flagman, swing brakeman, that would be the..., and the head brakeman. [tape interruption]...rode up in the engine. After you had a...like a car or two out he did it alone. If there was gonna be a lot of switchin' the swing guy would walk up and do it. Ordinarily, though, most of the time you'd have...__.

JT: When you worked on a helper than the fireman had to get out.

DR: The fireman got the switches and...

JT: Because it was just the engineer...

DR: Yeah.

JT: ...and fireman out there when the helper was working.

DR: That's right. That's right. Just the way it was. The fireman... If they had to get the switch or anything the fireman did it. [tape interruption]...the brakeman was out there. If he was in the rear of the train the conductor and brakeman was out there to hook you up. [tape interruption]...but they've got a stool pigeon on the rear of that train, you know, that tells 'em, oh, there's a broken rail or anything else on along on the track.

JT: A stool pigeon, how does that work?

DR: I don't know because it was just startin' to get that when I retired.

JT: Oh.

DR: But I really don't know.

JT: But it was a mechanical device that...

DR: Yeah.

JT: ...gave off signal.

DR: Yeah, red light and a signal. It probably worked part of the time.

JT: Is there anything else that you would rather have done?

DR: When I was a kid you didn't have all these chances to go to college, that your dad had to finance it and everything ready so you didn't get that schooling where you would like to have been. I woulda liked to have been a lawyer. But that wasn't even possible because like I said, if you got through high school you was doin' good and I did. But there's no way in the Depression unless your folks was wealthy people that you got to went to school. They didn't have... They didn't pay you to go to school then. You didn't borrow the money from the government to go to school and stuff like that. That was a different proposition.

JT: You're family had to have it...[tape interruption]

DR: Outside of that the railroadin' is what I'd rather of done. Very fascinating, the railroad is fascinating. All those cars come from different places and different railroads and it's amazing if you look at a consist of [tape interruption] a train's made up. Maybe some of those big trains now you may have a hundred-and-twenty, a hundred-and-thirty cars. And just think where all those cars are out of everyplace.

JT: And that hundred-and-twenty cars would be how long?

DR: Oh, mile-and-a-quarter or further, yeah. Way back there. [tape interruption]...got so that some of the passin' tracks was...wouldn't hold those big trains like that. It wasn't... There wasn't room enough so they'd usually hold some short train for a big train like that to get by. Of if she didn't, why, then you ___ by it and that's when the shorter train pulled up in the passing on up clear to the main line and then opened the switch to back and you pulled 'em on through. That's the way that was done. But we were lucky because most of the time it was...there was several tracks would hold a lot of cars. Durkey would hold a string of cars. In other words, it was a B2 passin' tracks, you might say. And it would hold...hold all those big trains...[tape interruption]...caset you'd get in with a hundred cars ___.

JT: What did... What did you think when they changed over...[tape interruption]

DR: ...thing that there was because those train orders was a pain. You know, you got train orders ___ 538 and ___ so-and-so ___ place, that place and things like that and you had to watch your time card all the time, your time card, because when the passenger trains were runnin' you had to clear those passenger trains. And it was just a lot more thinkin' than a-workin' at it then when your Central Train Control that was the dispatcher.

JT: We took...what was it...twenty-seven side tracks out between La Grande and Huntington.

DR: Yes, right.

JT: You know, it wouldn't have been too much to have had double track.

DR: No. They're gettin' a lot of double track anymore, I guess. I don't know what they've done on the mountain. Do you know what they've done on the mountain...

JT: I don't.

DR: ...out of Hilgard? Then on... Forty, fifty years ago I heard they was gonna run a tunnel to Huron. And I heard that again, you know, oh, a few years ago just before I quit is what they were gonna do and then later on. I told the guys, I said, "I don't get excited about it," I said, "We was gonna... I heard about that," I said, "thirty years ago." ___ they was gonna do this and I said, "They haven't done it yet and," I said, "I doubt they will." I said, "That's a hell of a tunnel."

JT: Yeah, a long ways.

DR: Of course it would save 'em a lot of money and a lot of bigger trains and everything, but I don't think they'll ever do it.

JT: You were working when they had the tunnel at Tele...[tape interruption]

DR: The tore that out, you know, took it all out. Yeah, when I was firin' steam engines that was...tunnel was in there, sure bet. Yeah. Darn right. They had a tunnel at...between Huntington and Weatherby.

JT: Yeah.

DR: I guess it's still there.

JT: Still there.

DR: As far as I know it is, yeah. [tape interruption]...bridge there at...below Meacham.

JT: Uh-huh.

DR: That's quite a sight, you know. A wooden bridge. [tape interruption]...big Jacks and think of the weight that was on those, run on by 'em, right on. Must've done...they done a real job of bridge work.

JT: Real engineering feat.

DR: Oh yes, yeah.

JT: You know, like you said earlier in this interview, the section...[tape interruption]

DR: Oh yes.

JT: And more important.

DR: The section men and the...a bunch of these Navajo Indians stampin' ties. The railroad...the track was a lot better...a lot better shape when they had those big gangs like that with a...doin' it by hand than it does with this machine that they punch the rail 'cause they're not near as smooth, near as nice.

JT: [tape interruption]...then did you work...

DR: Tie gangs.

JT: ___ very much?

DR: Oh you had...you had to... Like I said, you're an extra board you'd probably catch a lot of work trains. They had a Pilot Rock branch, too. And you'd run out to Pilot Rock and get at that mill there and get materials. Also that they had a...you go down to Robinet from Huntington down there. I remember that ___ that you used to haul out of there sometimes, yeah. A hat full of them, a suitcase practically full, you know.

JT: How far did that line run down there?

DR: Oh, I don't know. Cornucopia?

JT: I've come there along the river...

DR: Oh, you can drive now. You know, you can drive down there. You can drive clear to...to Brislet, yeah. But the railroad track used to run...

JT: It's kind of narrow, isn't it? If you'd meet somebody?

DR: Oh, not too bad. Just a gravel, dirt, gravel road. It's not too bad. There's places you __ trailers and big campers and motorhomes and stuff. [tape interruption]...all that fast anyway, you know. It was right by the river.

JT: Yeah.

DR: [tape interruption]...1976 when I was sixty years old. So you's...

JT: You were working during the time of the flood in 1965.

DR: Oh, you bet. I was the first train over that snow when they first got that...the big train through, the wouldn't run a little one, they run the big train. I remember lots of the track was five miles an hour. Just try to hold six, seven thousand ton. It was tricky. And I [tape interruption]...Gibben and told me to go there and get something to eat. I went in the car and they had a cook in there, a regular...and we ate and I...they said you're to...have to haul crews. So we'd go back and take the engine back up the river, Meacham Creek, and pick up crews and take the fresh crews back up until we...just give us time to hook our train and get down to Hinkle. And there...it was [tape interruption]...house down there. He outranked all the officials, too. And __ layin' that...puttin' the...doin' that...[tape interruption]...asked me how long would it take me to go to Hinkle and I told him. He said, "We'll let you go then, but you haul crews. Anytime you want coffee, you want somethin' to eat," he said, "go and do it." He said, "The radio's all hooked up so they'll notify you." So I know we all went in and had steak dinner. And later on before we left, why, I went in and had some coffee.

JT: You remember Buck Daniels...[tape interruption]

DR: Yeah. Yeah, quite a guy. Buck was quite a guy, yeah. I remember a maintainer, his name was Style, but I can't remember his first name.

JT: Jess, Jess Styles.

DR: Jess Styles. I couldn't remember his name. Isn't that awful!

JT: Not necessarily.

DR: I knew the man, too. He gave me signal one time 'cause I was...used to do a lot of huffin' and shootin' and everything. ___ that you ever seen because you couldn't freeze it up, the signal oil. He give me a bottle of that, a little bottle of it, several times.

JT: The story about Jess Styles that I think's fantastic...[tape interruption]...and his wife paid for that house...[tape interruption]

DR: ...yes. [tape interruption]...money, too.

JT: Oh yes. Yes.

DR: I've heard guys makin' __ marks about 'cause those __ and them, them guys earned their money.

JT: They were out there...

DR: ...any time of the day or night whether it was warm, cold or whatnot.

JT: Every time a rock hit the rock fence out there they would pull it out. They were out there in the cold with nothin' but a little skater.

DR: But those rock fences was really a great thing.

JT: I bet they were.
DR: See, they just...when that knocked that fence down it threw the signals. You's rocks in it'll go red so then you stopped. And that's why they was there and it was really a great thing.
JT: And in the wintertime when Harry Hewitt's men got there and...[tape interruption]
DR: Oh yeah. He was...that was the foreman, section foreman.
JT: At Telecaset.
DR: Yeah. And later on I think he got down to Union Junction.
JT: Lilly was down there for a while.
DR: Yeah. Hewitt...I knew who Hewitt...[tape interruption]
JT: ...crooks and segal put heaters under switches to keep the snow out...[tape interruption]
DR: That was a wonderful thing, too, because they were automatically...they could relight those...dispatcher got to relight those automatically those...
JT: Yeah, when they...
DR: ...propane.
JT: ...put in propane.
DR: They was propane, yeah.
JT: Days when you put the old kerosene heater...
DR: But sometimes you would have to tell him to. 'Cause I know that I used to call the dispatcher and, "Hey dispatch, how are those signals up there? Do you suppose they're froze up at Meacham?" or where I's gonna go up there. "No, I think they'll be alright." That's when he turned 'em on, see. My... My brother-in-law was a dispatcher, Ray Wilson.
JT: I think I...isn't he...[tape interruption]
DR: ...Thompson. He ended up in...in Nampa.
JT: Nampa. And Felix Travalvo.
DR: Oh, Felix is here now.
JT: Yeah.
DR: He lives here.
JT: Just retired. And...[tape interruption]
DR: ...old, old-timer.
JT: Yeah.
DR: He was the chief dispatcher. Right, he was the chief dispatcher. And other old guy that was at...
JT: Lefebber?
DR: Old Dave Lefebber...Dobetter later. I nicknamed him that because you'd ask him about, "How long are you gonna be in here? What's gonna take place here?" "Well, you'll wanta be there __, but I'll tell you what," he said, "I can do better later." So I got to callin' him Do-better-later. [laughs] But we did have good dispatchers and that Indian...Thompson...I knew him when we were little boys.
JT: Is that right?
DR: I knew his dad, __ Thompson. That just... That Indian was the best dispatcher that'd ever been on this railroad.
JT: He was good.

DR: He had nerve and he was...knew his engineers. He knew that you's gonna make it.

JT: And everybody respected him.

DR: Oh yes, sure. And Glen Thompson. Thompson he was a...[tape interruption]...there was a store down there at Gibben for a while. I think his dad had the cattle and stock, too. I think he was financially pretty well fixed.

JT: Eldon...[tape interruption]

DR: Yes, yeah. [tape interruption]__ was a good guy. I was tryin'...[tape interruption]...worked out in the... He worked there in the Borden Chemical.

JT: Oh, Wayne Drummin.

DR: Wayne Drummin, yeah. Good guy, too.

JT: Real good.

DR: Hmm?

JT: I say good.

DR: Yeah. He was...

JT: He lives next door to me.

DR: He was a... Him and Thompson were great cronies, great friends. Yeah, Wayne Drummin, good guy. I like Wayne.

JT: We all three hunted together.

DR: Yeah. I know he was...he would've loved to...that old 300 H & H magnum. I went moose huntin', you know.

JT: You did?

DR: Oh yeah. Killed a big moose.

JT: Oh.

DR: [tape interruption]...was in school. My son was in college and my daughter was...I think a senior in high school and I [tape interruption] "gonna go...I'm gonna take that huntin' trip."

JT: Where did you go?

DR: She said, "Go ahead." I said, "You know, it's gonna cost...it's gonna cost probably more than a thousand dollars." She said, "Go ahead." [tape interruption]...off a Stuart Lake. We went to __ James, that's an Indian village. And we took a float plane off of Stuart Lake and flew back north into Grassum Lake. [tape interruption]

JT: ...did it once.

DR: That was all I cared about. [tape interruption]...all over.

JT: All over.

DR: Hell yeah, yeah.

JT: Up in the Starkey area.

DR: Oh yeah. A lot of hunters...a lot of 'em in that Starkey area on __ Jim Ridge and Park Saddle and the Beaver, Dry River...

JT: Up to the old Beaver...

DR: Oh yeah. All over that country. Old Winter's place and clear through all that __ elk horn and... Yeah. [tape interruption]...four-wheel drive rigs. Ever since I got out of this army I had to get me a jeep, you know, right away. [tape interruption]...passed away in 1995. I've lived alone...well, it's kind of lonesome sometimes, you know. [tape interruption]

JT: That's great.

DR: Yeah. She was just a fine, fine...[tape interruption]...guy in the world and great girl. Trust me when I say that, he is a marvelous guy. I think the world of him. I think...[tape interruption]...was that...the old store was up there at Starkey. In those days Tony Vay had a lot of cattle and a sheep ranch. And by the way, that's what they called those days, sheep ranch. They called it Tony's Meadows now, but when I was a kid and a young fella we all called it Sheep Ranch. I know that Tony's dad, Antone, they...[tape interruption] I like Tony because when they used to bring their cattle in and they'd stay at the Starkey store overnight when they's bringin' the cattle out. I like Tony because he was always...you meet Tony he'd say, "Dave, how's your mother?" He knew my folks, my dad and mother. [tape interruption]...think so. We were on the Sullivan place, Andy Sullivan's. Dad had...took that place over. I know that he had...[tape interruption]...a good orphus. He didn't like Cayuses.

JT: Cayuses were Indian horses.

DR: I remember we had...[tape interruption]...the government put out some stallions to breed up the sort because they used a lot of horses, the army did, so they put out these great, old, beautiful stallion, New Guard...[tape interruption]...for a long time, quite a...[tape interruption]...__.

JT: With?

DR: With...

JT: Winnie, Lester.

DR: Winnie, Lest...[tape interruption]...les, Jess Plunket, Jack __, Shawn Welch, [tape interruption]...Glen Thomas. Now they lived up there, those people I'm namin'. The Hageys.

JT: Yeah.

DR: Uh...[tape interruption]...mail currier when I was a kid. Had them team and wagon...[tape interruption]...a lot of 'em are gone now. Most of those guys that I used to work with and guys that hired out when I did, they're gone. Harold Hillary...gone. He died here a couple weeks ago I guess. I had...felt...[tape interruption]...about that. Harold and I were friends for sixty-five years. Yeah. [tape interruption]...gonna go, you know. My daughter don't like to hear me say those things. I told her I had my funeral arrangements all...[tape interruption]... "I don't want to hear about it." I said, "You might...better listen." [tape interruption]...the way, this is a marvelous country. This is a marvelous country. And I have a...had a wonderful life. I had a good family, a good home, a good job and I treated it well...right. I had a wonderful life.

JT: The weather, you know, what we used to have we had real...

DR: We had real winters.

JT: ...winters, but it...changed.

DR: Yeah, but I was young then and them winters didn't...didn't...hate 'em near as bad like I do now. Gets a little down to zero and now I...I think it's terrible.

JT: Think how much warmer now that we are than we were in the old days.

DR: Oh yeah. How much better off we are. Now here last year I got to worryin' about my furnace. I got a big air...forced-air furnace in the basement. Got to worryin' about it, it was forty-five years old. [laughs] You pick up __ told my __ put me

in a new one. Now I didn't have to worry about it. But I was worried about it because...I guess when you get old you worry about things.

JT: When you would come back to work for the railroad in 1940 and...[tape interruption]...dollars. Three thousand dollars you could buy most anything in town.

DR: Let me tell you just where I made a mistake. I could've bought a beautiful home one time for a little of nothing and I just laughed and said I don't wanta...what do I want to be saddled with somethin' to pay taxes on? Mr. Bank... Mr. Lunz is in that...__ and Dr. Lunz's dad was the manager.

JT: Uh-huh. I remember him.

DR: You remember him, yeah. And...[tape interruption]...and I said, "I think I had...I think I had seven or eight hundred dollars." He said, "No, I don't want __." But I bought this place here in 1950. I paid \$7500 for it. Now it's worth a hundred...of course I got another house in the back, a little cottage...now it's worth I suppose \$100,000 or more. I don't know, but [tape interruption]...I used to, but I'm havin' a new steel roof put on both my houses. In fact, they've ordered the metal now and now I got to pay for it, I suppose...[tape interruption]...and then I'd never had to done it again, see.

JT: True.

DR: But I wouldn't spend that much money, see.

JT: They last a long time. Well, you know, you were cautious because you know...[tape interruption]

DR: ...yeah, I was a Depression kid. Although I can't truthfully say that I suffered very much because my dad was a farmer and he had...they had lots of hogs, chickens and they had beef cattle, big gardens. And they both knew how to handle things. But I remember when if you'd ever give me a dollar it was as big as a wagon wheel. [laughs] You remember those days, don't you? [end tape]