

George Royes, narrator
Brenda Lawson, interviewer
January 20, 2005
tape 1, side 1

- BL: Will you please state your full name for me.
GR: George Edwin Royes Jr.
BL: And your date of birth.
GR: December 25, 1937
BL: Good, and do you go by George or do you have a nickname you go by?
GR: I normally go by "G" just the single letter "G".
BL: OK, so would you like me to call you "G" today?
GR: That'll be fine.
BL: Alright, [uh] lets get started "G" by telling me a little bit about [um] how you came to Union County.
GR: Well, my mother and father were born in Union County. My mother's family [um] had come here in [uh].....and settled on this piece of ground in 1868. And my father's father moved here before the turn of the century. The folks were in Klamath Falls during the depression because there was no work in Union County, and so I was actually born in Klamath Falls, Oregon, and then when I was about 8 or 9 months old dad came back to Union County to take over both farms, his father's farm and my mother's parents farm, and so that's [uh].....that's what brought us back here from Klamath Falls.
BL: OK. What details, if any were you told about [um] your mother's family and your father's family who had lived here in the 1800s'?
GR: Well, I.....I think that [um], just that my mother's family had come out part way on a.....on the wagon train and everything, and [um] had settled on this ground, and they were [um]they were early pioneers, and.....but not all of that family.....that was the Wade family, and not all of that family stayed here, part of them went on to Wallowa County in a few years, and some went to Walla Walla. They.....they weren't [uh].....they weren't totally happy here the whole family, the whole Wade family.
BL: Did you ever.....We're talking about [um] your mother's family living here, can you give me more details about that?
GR: Well, mom's [uh] mother, my grandmother [uh] was a.....a Brook, her.....her mother was a Wade, and [uh] Samual Brook, her.....her father would be my great grandfather, came.....came out and [um] married.....married one of the Wade women, and they.....they said at one time he had quite a bit of ground and would actually give an acre of ground to somebody if they plowed an acre of ground, because some of the ground that.....that was here was in the old native grass and was very difficult to plow and everything. [Uh] They [uh].....they had quite a time trying to keep the farm together in the [uh]..... in the first depression and so, because it had been split up among five different children, that [uh].....that kind of distributed things out and makes it very difficult when inheritance taxes and things come. So the.....the farm had actually shrunk down to [uh] not as large as it was [uh]

when Sam Brooks was farming it. And so my parents, when they came back here and started the farm, one of the things they did was put quite a bit of it back together into a.....into a unit. Not nearly as big as.....as what Sam Brooks had had at one time, but still [uh] a larger farm than it was when mom and dad returned here. So [uh] that.....that was something that the.....the folks did while they were [uh].....while they were alive. And that isn't to _____? _____ is it?

BL: No.

GR: I [uh].....I had a.....a grandfather on my mother's side then that.....that came along and he married into the.....into the [uh] Brooks family, which then my grandmother being a Brooks, and [uh] he'd always wanted to be a farmer, and was a medical doctor from [uh] the east, and I don't think anybody around here, most people anyway, did not realize he had a.....a degree and was a medical doctor, because all he wanted ever do was farm, so he never told anybody [um] that he was a doctor, and I.....,

BL: So he never practiced in this area?

GR: Not in this area no, no. He practiced for two or three years [uh] in Indiana after he [uh] [uh] got his degree, and then just came.....came out west to see some relatives of his and never went back and never.....never practiced medicine here, and I always, as a.....as a kid always found that kind of interesting that.....that [um].....[um] he..... [telephone or door bell interruption].

BL: We're just talking about your grandfather, who was a medical doctor, but never practiced because he had a love for farming.

GR: Yes, his name was Hugh Heron and [uh] as I said as a kid I found it fascinating that [uh].....that he never practiced medicine once he came out here and.....and none of my friends knew that he was a doctor and people, you know, just.....just didn't talk about it or anything like that.

BL: Now did your grandparents ever talk about [um] the trip here, the wagon ride, any?

GR: Well that would.....that would have been my great grandparents and.....and I didn't know them, so it was the great grandparents that came.....that came out, [uh] well actually it could have.....the great grandparents and my great great grandparents, so never.....I didn't know any ofany of those great grandparents at all.

BL: OK, so they haven't passed down stories about their arrival.

GR: No, not really, not really [uh] they're.....nothing that I ever heard about that, it's just that, you know, here.....here they came.

BL: Can you tell me about your grandparents on the other side?

GR: My granddad [uh] on my father's side came just before the [uh] turn of the century, and [uh] he decided to come west and go to Alaska, so he and another kid [uh] went down and.....and got on the train [uh], or were to get on the train and [uh] the other boy didn't show up, and my granddad said that his mother had made a big lunch for him and so he felt compelled to go ahead and come, so out he came and he got to Seattle and went down to the docks and was looking around and trying to figure out how to get on up to Alaska and he said that the people coming back were starving and so poor and so ragged, he said the were much

worse off than what he was and so he decided not to go to Alaska, so he went out and [uh] in the Seattle area, and started looking for work and he couldn't find work and couldn't find it, it was very hard to.....to.....to get a good job and somebody told him that if he could drive a team of horses that.....that people out in the woods were looking for [uh] someone that could drive horses. Well he couldn't that, but another fellow said "well, tell them that you can drive a team and when they get you out there they're so far out in the woods they won't bring you back, [uh] they'll show you how" and that's what he did, and he went out [chuckle] and.....and [uh] got a job in the woods [uh] up by Seattle and he didn't like that because of the danger so he moved down into the Walla Walla area and [uh] worked there for a little while and then he came over into the Grande Ronde Valley, went to work at [um] the box factory and [uh] said he was looking around and there were too many people with fingers and thumbs, and all of that, missing so that's when he went and [uh] he quit that and he eventually ended up [uh] in a saloon and owned a saloon and he was undoubtedly a saloon keeper until prohibition put him out of business [chuckle] and.....and that put him up into the farming and ranching business out of Summerville about.....about three miles.

BL: Where was the saloon located?

GR: The saloon was in Summerville, he actually owned two saloons in Summerville, [uh] I mean.....I remember him talking about the saloon, but I.....I.....I do not know for sure that prohibition put him out of business, I assume that's what happened, he.....he didn't talk about, you know, what.....why he quit the saloon business, but [uh].....but he did talk about the saloon and.....and what.....all of that in Summerville. Summerville was a pretty good size town, it was.....it was a big.....big place at one time.

BL: So all of the residents [um], most of the residents anyway, were they farming at that time?

GR: Oh, I.....I don't know [uh] with Summerville being as big as it is, I mean they had to have a lot of other [uh].....other things going on down there. I'm.....I'm sure there was plenty of farming going on, yeah.

BL: You mentioned the box factory, was that also in Summerville?

GR: I'm not sure whether it was Summerville or Imbler.

BL: OK

GR: I.....I don't know. They had a brewery at one time, and [uh] there were several saloons in Summerville. It.....I.....I don't have the history of it but I know it was.....it was pretty good sized.

BL: So he made a leap then from [uh] keeping a saloon to farming?

GR: Farming and ranching, he got.....Grandpa Mike had [uh].....he always had [uh] chickens, and pigs and sheep, [uh] horses, cows, he had everything. He was [uh] he.....he just.....just enjoyed a little bit of everything in the.....in the farming and ranching business. [Uh] I don't know that he.....I.....he was never a really superior farmer or anything like that, he would've.....he would've been considered more of a rancher I'm sure [uh] most of his ground was in pasture and [uh].....and livestock type.....type of thing, but.....but

he was never a big.....big cattleman or anything like that, he just had a little bit of everything [uh].

BL: What was his name?

GR: Mike Royes. He [um].....Dad told me one time that.....that grandpa Mike could always find some money in his pocket even during the worst of the depression, and he would go to the sale and buy [um] [uh] maybe some livestock that [uh] was on the bottom end of the [uh].....of the [uh] sale, not.....not the best stuff there, he'd take it home, and he'd fatten it up and they'd butcher it out and then they'd take the wagon and the meat and he'd go around to all the neighbors and.....and sale fresh.....[uh] freshly butchered meat, and that's one of the ways they.....they made it through the depression.

BL: Now the little bit of farming that they did do, [uh] was that with a horse?

GR: Well that would have been with horses at that time, yeah.

BL: Did you ever see pictures of that when you were growing up?

GR: I don't think so. I don't think [laughter].....I don't think anybody had a real desire to, [uh] you know, just show me a lot of pictures, they've very few pictures in the [uh].....in the family from [uh] from that era.

BL: Did they talk about that lifestyle, about farming with the horses?

GR: Well, my father talked about it a little bit because he definitely did not want to do that, and that was when he came back here from Klamath Falls, that was one of the things he insisted upon was that they not farm with horses or he wasn't going to come back here, because in.....in the Klamath Falls area.....in the Klamath Falls area where he was [uh] and.....and was working [uh] they were mechanized down there and he certainly did not like to come home to farming horses.

BL: So your father did [uh] sort of take over the farm then when he came over, or did he work alongside with your grandfather?

GR: No, he.....he came home and basically took over. He took over on Grandpa Mike's place the first year [uh], and then about the second or third year he was home [uh] he took over on.....on my mother's family [um].....took over their ground too and farmed.....farmed both places at that time. And [uh] they had a Caterpillar, they [uh].....my granddad and another fellow.....Grandpa Mike and another fellow had gone together to [uh].....and they bought a Caterpillar and [uh].....and so that's what they.....what they used then to.....to farm with, put the horses away.

BL: So at that time then when he kind of took over for both places, then was he involved in more [uh], I'm not sure what you would call it, but more.....you mentioned he had a lot of different animals and he was doing ranching.

GR: My.....,

BL: But when he consolidated the two was there more ground involved?

GR: Well, there would have been the ground at both places and my dad never did take over the.....the livestock, I mean he helped out with the livestock that my granddad Mike had and things like that. But Grandpa Mike kept his hand in on.....on the.....on the stock end of it. [Uh] Dad just took over on the agricultural farming end of it. And my Granddad Huge [uh] he never had a lot of [uh].....a lot of livestock in.....in my lifetime that I remember him, he had

two or three horses and some milk cows [um] and that was about all I remember him having. I.....and I don't.....they never.....they had sheep, my granddad Huge, this is on my mother's side, [uh] had sheep when they were younger, but that was long before I was born.

BL: What did their crops consist of?

GR: The crops would have been, and.....and were talking now in the.....in the 1940's, and the crops would have been mostly wheat and peas, hay and I.....I.....that would have been.....there might have been a little bit of grass seed early.....early in the 40's, but it.....I don't.....it, grass seed did not become a big crop until the mid 1940's, and then late 40's and early 50's is when the grass seed really got [uh].....really got going.

BL: Where would the sale their.....their products too? Was this locally?

GR: No, that.....I think locally [uh] there were some.....there were co-ops [uh] and then when the grass seed came in then that went nationwide. That.....that became a crop that [uh] went nationwide, and actually the Austrian peas, I.....dad had said a time or two that the Austrian peas were the first cash crop that he could remember coming into the valley, and the Austrian pea was different than.....than the edible pea, [uh] they used it as a nitrogen fixing [uh] crop, and.....and they raised the seed and.....and shipped that out of here for other areas that wanted to.....wanted to raise that.....that crop.

BL: Would that.....Would it have been shipped out by the railroad at that time?

GR: It would have, yeah, yeah, most everything that left here in.....in those days would have been.....would have been on.....would have been with rail car.

BL: Tell me kind of about [um] kind of growing up, now that your father has taken over both places and.....and you've moved out to this area, what's it like for you to grow up?

GR: Well it was just free and easy as a child because [uh] the closest neighbors, [um] my grandparents, and they lived almost a mile away, [uh] any other neighbor would have been [uh][uh] a full mile away, so we didn't have any neighbors, you didn't have any [uh].....you didn't have any restrictions, once you'd learned to swim you could go just about anywhere you wanted around here and have a good time, and if you had a bicycle then that was good. A.....a horse.....I never enjoyed the horses too much because grandpa Mike would always bring by one that was just a little bit wilder than what I wanted to ride, so [laughter]so I.....I mean at the time it was fun I suppose, but.....but I certainly got bucked off.

BL: Was that for his entertainment?

GR: No, I think it was just whatever he had at the time, and [laughter]he.....he'd.....he enjoyed livestock, grandpa Mike [uh] really enjoyed livestock, and riding and a good horse, and all of that, and.....and I was probably the grandson that [uh] he.....he just couldn't figure out why I didn't enjoy those things too, but [uh].....and.....and I did have.....I did have fun some with.....with that, but [uh].....but not as much as I think Grandpa Mike always wanted. So he'd just come by some days and take my horse and it'd be gone and maybe another one would show up.

BL: OK. Did you have siblings?

GR: I did, [uh] a sister, [uh] nine years older, and then a little brother that was seven years younger.

BL: OK. So you were right in the middle.

GR: I was.

BL: So tell me, [um] your parents were involved in running the farm. What did that involve?

GR: Well, I think.....I think in the [uh].....in the 40's and the 50's, as everything.....as everything became mechanized, [uh] that things changed as you went from the horses to the [uh].....to the tractors, [uh] and.....and the crops changed a little bit, not a.....not a lot at first, but eventually [uh] the.....the grass seed was.....was the crop that really came in and dad started into that [um] early on, and that became basically the.....the crop of choice because that was where there was some money to be made [uh] as things.....as things developed.

BL: We're talking about some of the daily chores of dad and mom and you, and so can you just continue on with your dad's work?

GR: Sure, I think that.....that the generation ahead of me, my mother and father and all the people that came out of the depression, worked extremely hard to get ahead because they had.....they had lived through [uh] some very hard struggling time, and I know that dad said when he was in Klamath Falls, I talked to him about it once, and I asked him about how much he was getting paid and some of the working conditions down there and he told me that he worked for the man in Klamath Falls on a potato ranch for a year before he asked him how much the man was paying him, cause all dad cared about was he had a job, he had a roof over his head, and they had food on the table, and that was kind of the.....and he got one day off, he got Christmas Day off, and so he worked 364 a year. So that was the work ethic and the.....and.....and everything that.....that came back, that I grew up under.....I mean, you know, underneath, that was.....that was how the family worked, and dad worked most of the time seven days a week [uh] and he.....and they worked from daylight to dark, especially in the.....in the farming season, which here we.....we farm from March [uh] to December that's.....and then.....and then winter can set in and run through the other months. But that didn't mean that.....that dad didn't work from December back to March, because they.....they went into the shop and worked on equipment and.....and got things ready to go again. So the work ethic on.....on the farm was you just worked, I mean that.....that was it [uh] and I can remember that [um] it was [uh].....you.....you never knew if you were going to take Easter off because my dad.....if there was work to do my dad was gonna to go out and do it, and not that he wasn't religious and all of that, but it was just work.....the work came first, so he worked extremely hard, and my mother was working she was raising me and then later raised.....my [uh] little brother came along. But during the.....during the summer [uh] when they had harvest crews and things in, and.....and you have to realize that we weren't as mechanized as we are now, so there was still a lot of manual labor through harvest with the way the [uh].....the equipment was, and she would take hot meals out at noon, because you didn't eat a sandwich for your main mid-day meal, you had to have a hot

meal in the field. And so she fed the entire crew, which would run from fifteen to maybe twenty-five people, you know, just depending on how big that summer.....summer crew was.

BL: So she would pack that meal and take it out to you?

GR: Put it in the.....put it in the back of the car and drive to whatever field the men were working in. If they were close to the house the men would come to the house, and we had a big table set up on the.....on the [uh] back porch [um] that we would feed them there, if they were close to my grandparents house, on either side, [uh] they would go to that house and eat, but if they were over.....if they were over a mile away from the house they wouldn't stop long enough to come to the house, they would [uh] expect my mother to show up with the.....with the car loaded with.....with hot food.

BL: Now what was a typical meal to fix then?

GR: Oh it would be [uh] [um] meat, bread and potatoes, and [uh] salads, your.....your typical old.....old fashioned heavy farm meal. [Uh] You know it would be roast beef or fried chicken, or.....or what, you know, ham, or something like that, with.....with mashed potatoes I suppose almost all the time.

BL: All home grown?

GR: Well, some of it was.....was home grown, but [um].....the.....a lot of it they.....they purchased too. About half and half I would think, yeah.

BL: Did she do a lot of her own baking?

GR: She did some baking and did some canning, [um] probably not as much as other people, [uh] my gran.....my grandmother [uh], on both sides, would.....would have done more canning and baking maybe than my mother did.

BL: What about other chores for your mom, [um] did she work outside of the home or was her work all on the farm?

GR: No, that would have all been.....all been on the farm. Mom worked [um], before mom and dad got married mom was a school teacher and [uh].....and taught school, but the minute the folks got married that came to an abrupt end because married people, you.....you could only have one bread earner [laugh] and [uh].....and so that wasn't.....that wasn't gonna be that she was gonna continue teaching, [uh] you know way back, that would have been in the 30's.....early 30's. So.....and she never went back.....she never went back to teaching or anything, she stayed home and raised the kids.

BL: So tell me about some of the other responsibilities, as you.....as you got a little bit older.

GR: [Uh] give me a.....give me a date, or an age [uh].

BL: Well, when.....when were you responsible for some of the.....the chores on the farm?

GR: Well, seeing as how dad was not particularly fond of [uh] livestock, and [uh] the chickens, I don't know what time the chickens went, but [uh] as.....as I got older the only.....only responsibilities I had as a youngster were probably when I had to milk cows, and I.....I did have to go up to my grandparents and milk cows. That probably didn't happen until I was [uh] twelve or thirteen years old

and then I.....I did milk a couple of cows for them [uh] up until I was about eighteen. So that was about the only responsibilities I had with stock, [uh] of course there was always the same things all kids yell about and that, you know, take out the garbage, or do something with the trash and all of that. [Uh] During the summer of course dad always had.....there was always something then to do in the field and I probably started on a tractor when I was twelve. I would guess somewhere in that.....in that age, [uh] and then once.....once you got to that age and could do something, there was always a.....a field or something that.....to do something in.

BL: Do you recall [um] how you learned how to drive a tractor?

GR: Well, they just stuck you on it [laughter] and [uh].....and gave you a little lesson and.....and [uh] turned you lose, and.....and you have to realize this was a Caterpillar that [uh].....that we.....wheel tractors were not [uh] really being used as.....as big farm equipment yet to.....to work the ground, and so when I talked about being twelve, that would have been on a Caterpillar where you just set on it and pull the two levers in front of you and turn her from one go around.....go back and forth, back and forth like that, [uh] not the big wheel tractors like we have now.

BL: OK. So where did you go to school?

GR: I went to school at Imbler, started there right of the bat in the first grade, they didn't have kindergarten, and about half way through the first year they consolidated with Summerville, so here came a whole new group of young kids, practically ruined my whole year because I was very very shy and it just.....just kind of got settled into this whole thing of going to school and having other kids.....my closest neighbor, you see, when I was that age [uh] there was only one boy that was very close, and he was a.....a mile away, so I hadn't really probably had the opportunity to play with a lot of kids like.....like children do now. There.....no way were you gonna get sent off to [uh] any kind of a [uh] kindergarten or a [uh] situation like that, so here came a new group of kids out of Summerville in the first grade, and.....and [um] then.....I.....I settled down after a while, and away we went. I still have good friends that were in that group.

BL: How many students do you suppose were in you class in the.....in the early years, first, second, third grades?

GR: OK, we.....we were probably thirteen, fourteen, fifteen in a class, [uh] maybe.....maybe not even that much to begin with because the teacher had [uh].....had two classes put together [uh] I.....when.....when I was a first grader we were with the second graders, and [uh].....and then the next year we were with the first graders, the class behind us, and that lasted up through about the fourth grade when we had two combined classes, and then the fifth grade [uh] was the first year that I remember being alone and we ran about eighteen or nineteen kids from there on 'til I graduated, and we graduated eighteen students out of high school.

BL: Also graduating from Imbler then?

GR: I did.

BL: OK. Were you involved in any type of activities in school?

GR: I was involved in most activities, [uh] the.....the sports were [uh] baseball and football and basketball, and then I was involved in [uh] FFA, and there was.....I.....we had one other club [uh] future.....future business leaders, or something like that.....that [uh] that I was involved in for one year [uh] as a senior. Can't think of anything.....any others that [uh] were outstanding.

BL: Were you able to travel at all with the sports team?

GR: Locally, we.....we never.....we never were good enough to make it off to state, or anything like that, but in the FFA [uh] we.....we made it off to Portland a couple of years, and down to Medford once [uh] in.....in FFA activities.

BL: So what did you do for fun when you were'nt in school and playing sports?

GR: Well, fun would be [uh] as a.....as a kid fun would have been fishing and just walking the.....the hills with.....with my good friend Jim McKinnis. [Uh] We covered a lot of ground over on the Punkin Ridge, which is off to the north, and things like that, this is all before.....before we got a car that I'm speaking about now this is. [Uh] Once we had wheels then it was a different story, but [uh] I liked to fish, I really enjoyed fishing and [uh] like I say once you learned how to swim then I had free reign to go any where on the.....on the place I wanted and the.....and the creeks only about [um].....it'd only be about three-eighths of a mile away, so we got to go down.....or I got to go down and fish all I.....all I wanted to. [Uh] Got a twenty-two when I was probably, I don't know....., [END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

George Royes, narrator
 Brenda Lawson, interviewer
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GR:, And I probably started hunting with my father when I was about twelve. Dad did like to hunt that was one of the few [uh] recreational things that he enjoyed was hunting birds. He never hunted elk or deer or anything like that, I don't evenhe had a twenty-two rifle but I don't think he ever had a bigger rifle that I remember in his life, but he did have shotguns, he liked to trap shoot [uh] he took me trap shooting quite a bit when I was.....when I was younger and.....and [uh] he really enjoyed bird hunting and things, so I did a lot of bird hunting in the Fall for recreation [uh].

BL: You said it changed a lot when you got wheels. In what way?

GR: Well, once you had wheels then you could travel just a little bit further away from home than the.....than the local creek.

BL: So where would you go?

GR: We would probably [uh] go to La Grande mostly.

BL: The big city!

GR: The big city, the big city of La Grande, yep.....we would [uh],

BL: Did you have a favorite hang out spot in La Grande?

GR: Up and down Adams Avenue [laughs]. They called it.....,

BL: Cruising?

GR: No they didn't call it cruising then, it was "dragging the gut".

BL: Oh, dragging the gut!

GR: You haven't heard the expression "dragging the gut"?

BL: I don't think so.

GR: OK, well [laugh] I explained it to one of my daughters one time and said, Oh yeah we would go to town and drag the gut, so she didn't remember the expression, and I found her one day using the.....the, "they'd drag the cat" she thought I'd said, [laugh] she didn't understand "the gut", but [um] [uh] for a..... you know a.....a boy from out [uh] out at this end of the valley [uh] La Grande was the bright lights and that's [uh] that's the direction you'd go, and [uh] I suppose that the [uh] La Grande girls were always the.....the [uh] big temptation because they were the unknown, you didn't know who they were or what they were but they always seemed to have a little bit of shine in their hair, you know, and a.....and a faster step than these poor girls out here at Imbler [laughter]. By the way, now I have to tell you, the girls.....the girls from Imbler [laughter] were always trying to date the La Grande boys, so this was.....this was an equal opportunity situation here.

BL: OK. [laugh] So did you have a.....a favorite spot though, besides cruising, did you go to the movies, or go.....

GR: Oh sure, yeah we [uh] there was always.....that.....that was about [uh].....you, you'd like to go to the movies, you'd like to go, you know, out and get a hamburger and a milkshake, [um] it.....it was a lot different then because the.....you didn't have.....you didn't have television. There.....when I was in school there were no.....no television at home and [um] [uh] you know listening to radio was not all that exciting, it.....it was when I was a kid, you'd listen to the radio quite a bit more [uh] and listen to the programs. So.....,

BL: Do you recall any of those programs?

GR: Well, some of the, you know, would.....would be [uh] [uh] Jack Benny, and [uh] Amos and Andy, some of those [uh], what was the one.....The Shadow Knows, whatever that one was [uh], Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, some.....some of those.....those programs like that. But I read a lot too, I think that's one thing that [uh].....that the kids now days, they play a lot of games on TV, which I would assume I would do the same thing now, but.....but when I was growing up I read.....I read a lot of books, enjoyed reading. Mom had a terrible time getting me to go to sleep at night sometimes, I'd.....in fact I'd actually take a flashlight and get under the covers and.....and then read by flashlight because she'd yell at me if [uh].....if she thought I was still awake up.....up stairs.

BL: Did you [Um].....did you have a sense of taking over the family farm because you had come from a long line of farmers, did it ever occur to you that that's what you would do?

GR: No. Definitely not, I did not.....I did not enjoy farming, I had a lot of allergies as a.....as a child [uh] I couldn't even hardly go past a hay field and.....and hay was one of the things that the kids always worked in first off, you know you go out an buck bails when you're a young guy. I couldn't even hardly do any of that, so because of the allergies and all the problems I'd had I always worked the

summer follow, and [uh] which is just plain dirt without any.....any [uh] weeds or anything in it. But [uh].....but I didn't enjoy it, didn't like it and.....and never ever thought that I would farm, it was just not to be. So that wasn't there, that thought.

BL: OK. What happened after you graduated?

GR: Well after.....after getting out of [uh].....out of high school I.....I went to Oregon State and really didn't know what I wanted to do. So I.....I think I majored in Geology, and [uh] didn't find that attractive, and switched off into Liberal Arts, still wondering what I was going to do, [uh] and stayed at Oregon State the first year, [uh] came home, worked on the farm again, [um] and [uh] then the next year decided to go to Gonzaga, which was up at [uh] Spokane, and went to Gonzaga for half a year, started the next semester, had a problem with getting thrown out of the dormitory due to an excessive amount of alcohol within my system, and at that time at Gonzaga University you could not be a.....a new student, which I was as a transfer student, and not live in the dormitory, so the folks came up and we had a meeting with the President of the college and I assured him that I would not do such a thing again, and they.....he.....he wanted me back in the school, but the Prefix of the dormitory would not accept me back, and he had authority at that dormitory and so there was no way I could stay in school. I have.....somewhere in all my belongings there's a very nice letter from the President stating that I would be welcome back the next year. [Uh] but anyway I came home and [uh] went.....the folks wanted me to go on to.....to college. Dad had always dreamed of going to college himself, but it didn't work out. I mean they.....they didn't have the money [um].....he.....in fact the.....the things got so bad that he.....he was down at Mt. Angel going to school down there and because there just wasn't the money he had to come home, and he'd always dreamed of college, so he wanted me to go to Eastern Oregon, because it was right here close and I, by this time was totally [uh] burned out on the whole situation and didn't know what I wanted to do with my life, when you are sitting on a farm and you don't want to farm and you don't know where to go it.....it's a difficult situation. So anyway I.....I entered up here at Eastern and [uh] didn't like it, just did not do any.....any work and basically I would imagine I probably drew all F's, I don't.....I just walked away from it and [uh] so I was down at the [uh] Stampede, [uh] which is a rodeo at Elgin, and another fellow and I were having a sip of whiskey out on the creek bank and we decided that the best thing to do in this world was to join the Army, and by the thirtieth of July that year I was in Uncle Sam's finest down in [uh] Fort Ord, California, and [uh] there I was in my new experience.

BL: I want to ask you something [uh], you can certainly decline, but you've mentioned alcohol just a couple of different times.....,

GR: Uh-huh.

BL:, and I wonder, growing up in the small rural area, do you think that contributed to your use of alcohol?

GR: Well, I.....I don't know that growing up in the small rural area would.....would contribute to that anymore than maybe anywhere else. It.....it's.....at.....when I was growing up I.....I.....it was a macho

thing as much as anything else, you know, but [uh].....but then I think it's [uh] probably hereditary [uh] and.....and who knows why.....why young people, you know, would.....would drink and.....and get wild and [uh].....[uh] my granddad that had.....I mean, had the saloon in Summerville and.....and he always said you never.....never will you feel better than two drinks and so there is no sense in drinking more than two drinks, and [uh] that just didn't sink into my little head for a long long time. It [uh].....it.....it was.....it was just the group I ran around with. I think.....I think a lot of times we're influenced by the people we.....we are with at any particular time and I noticed with my kids and other people I've been around, if you're in with a really good solid group of people your chances of being really solid and good are.....are going to be better than if you're in with a bunch of no goods, and.....and we.....I had two nephews that came and lived with us at various times and the one nephew came and there were four other boys, or five other boys that were just outstanding citizens and that nephew just breezed along in school while he was here. The other nephew came, same type of situation, except there were six hooligans going through Imbler High School when he came to live with us and he was just like'em and they were into drugs continually while he was here and I think it would have been reverse, I mean I don't think it had anything to do with the kids, I think it had to do with the.....with the people they associated with while they were up here going to school.

BL: OK, I appreciate your answering that.

GR: Yeah. [laughter]

BL: [Um] I think something special happened after your came home from the military, can you tell me about that?

GR: Well I went back to work on the.....the.....around, I worked.....I worked on the.....when I came home [uh].....I.....I assume what your talking about is meeting my wife, that [uh].....,

BL: Yes I am.

GR: Yeah, well Ok. You know when I came back, let me throw in some stuff about the military because that.....that shaped where I went and what I became, and so I'll just interject it right now.

BL: OK.

GR: I.....I hadn't been in the military a week I don't think when I was sitting down trying to figure out exactly how many years and days and hours I'd signed up for. I knew it was different than anything I'd ever run into before. And it really shaped my life, because I had [uh].....I had been exposed to the military when I was in the eighth grade, and being a.....a young hooligan, the folks had sent me off the Hill Military Academy after I was just a little too difficult to handle, and my mother had been pretty sick, she had antibiotic poisoning [um] in the.....in the early 50's, they gave her too many.....too much antibiotics and [um].....and it really hurt her health and so she couldn't handle this young eighth grade hooligan she had, so they sent me to Hill Military Academy in Portland and I actually graduated from the eighth grade down at Hill Military Academy. Well, that exposed me a little bit to the military, so when I went to Oregon State I took [uh] one year of ROTC. OK, so now I've got all of this

background in military that kind of made.....let me understand a little bit about it, but I didn't know everything about it, but when I got off and into the Army I knew how to get along in.....in the.....in the military, because I knew the discipline and the chain of command and how to say "yes or no sir" and I knew how to march, so I fit in pretty well. And I went.....they.....I.....I went in as an.....a Military Policeman and went to Fort Ord, and then I went to Fort Gordon, Georgia, and then I went to Brooklyn, New York. Now here's a kid from Summerville, Oregon, never been, you know, out and about, except when I was in the eighth grade, which when you're a..... a kid like that, you.....you don't really learn a lot, but anyway, so now I'm in Brooklyn, New York, and I learned about the dangers of the big city and the world, and it was.....it was interesting. Well then I headed off to Korea for thirteen months and I was in a foreign country and I saw things that you don't get to see in the United States, so I'm.....I'm really being exposed to a lot of different things in the.....in the three years that I spent in the Army. Well when I came home, I've told people it.....it was a year before I was fit to be around, it.....it was.....it was a year. I had to watch what I said when I was around my mother, because when you're in the Army and you're gone, especially overseas, your language changes, your whole being changes, I mean you become a totally different person than you where when.....when you left and when you went in. [Uh] and until you've been there and done that you can't imagine the change that can come over you, that you can always look back on and.....and see [uh]. I feel sorry for.....for the things that are going on in the military right now, because I know that some of those people, that's not the people.....the people overseas, some of those people, that's not the person they really are, it just isn't, but anyway I went through all of that, came back and was trying to readjust my life, and they tell you when you get out of the Army that you.....you.....you're gonna have problems, some people don't even, can't readjust to go back to civilian life, but I was here on the farm and when I came home, here I am a young husky, you know "go get'em" and [uh] I had decided when I was in the service that the farm life was not too bad, but I still didn't think I wanted to be a farmer, it was just not [uh] something that I'd every really planned on, so I came home and worked on the farm that summer, [uh] drove combine, dad had bought a [uh] big new combine and the equipment had changed with how the operation went and everything, and so that was.....it was all new and.....and things were just making a big change there. Then about [uh].....well I guess it would be [um] almost [uh] two years, a year and three-quarters, after I got back and out of the service, I met my wife to be and [uh] took her out on a date, and I'd dated some other.....some other people in the mean time, and things, but I.....I had a lot of settling down to do before [uh].....before I met her because [uh] I would have scared her to death if [laugh].....if I'd met her when I first got home, and [uh] so then that was.....that was another changing [uh] point in my life right then.

BL: Was she from here?

GR: She.....she was living in Imbler [uh], she had gone to school in La Grande, and grad.....she graduated from La Grande High School and she came here when

she was twelve, she'd moved here from Kansas, so she did.....she did not go to Imbler High School, [uh] her little sister was going to Imbler, but [uh].....but she did not, and [uh] like I say I'd a really.....I was totally different then.....than any.....anybody that she'd probably have ever wanted to go with when I was younger. I had to make a change.

BL: What was her name?

GR: Valarie.....Eisiminger was her last name. But [uh] Val.....she was called.....called Val.

BL: Eisiminger?

GR: Eisiminger.....E-I-S-I-M-I-N-G-E-R.

BL: Hum.

GR: Good German name.

BL: OK. So you married?

GR: Yeah, after [um] [um].....a brief courtship I guess [um]. When I met her, my brother lined us up, and [uh] he [uh].....he had met her somewhere, and [uh], and, you know, told her that he wanted to line her up with his brother, and [um] he lined us up. We had a blind date [um], on a Saturday, and then the next Saturday night I took her out again, and then we had a third date, and she had to leave then, she had a job at.....at [uh] Crater Lake [uh] for the summer. So she headed of to Crater Lake, and I, of course start.....went.....went back to.....to work on the farm. I went down to see her, oh about mid-way through the summer, and told her that.....that I would come down and.....and [uh].....and pick her up and bring her home at the end of the summer, and I was just kind of checking her out, see, 'cause we.....that.....that would have been the fourth date. So when I went down to get her and bring her home at the end of the summer I proposed to her, because I'd come home and [um] I'd given it a.....a lot of thought and.....and just decided that there wasn't going to be anybody that I ever met that would be better than [uh].....than she was, I mean it was [uh] just one of those things [uh] she's [uh] very attractive, [uh] she's extremely smart and [um] there was enough of a spark between us that [uh].....that I just decided that was [uh].....that was gonna be it, so that was at the end of that summer and [uh] we got married the next March. She was.....Val was in school at Eastern and [uh], she's five years younger than I, and she was finishing up her.....she was in her Junior year that next year and so [uh] we waited 'til Spring Break and [uh] got married..

BL: So that was March?

GR: March 16, 1963.

BL: OK. So then tell me [uh].....tell me sort of what happened once you got married and settled in and were not going to be a farmer.

GR: Well, we.....we got married in '63 and, course she had another year of.....of college, she was [uh] not finished yet and so she.....the next year she went.....went on and.....and finished up her schooling. I was working in [um].....in the fertilizer plant in Imbler. Dad had [uh].....dad had decided that [uh].....that we needed a plant to.....to handle bulk fertilizer because in the grass business you.....you apply a lot of fertilizer and we'd been using sacked fertilizer which came in on railroad cars and [uh] by the time you unload a

lot of sacked fertilizer off of a railroad car and onto a handtruck and handtruck it into a building and unload it and then take it out and handtruck it onto a truck and haul it out to the farm and you pick up the sack and you put it into the fertilizer spreader and cut the paper sack open you've handled it a lot and.....and it's.....way too much, so dad put up a bulk plant to where you could drive in and dump it into a box, take it to the field and put it straight into the fertilizerinto the fertilizer spreader, and [uh] so I was working there because that was not [um].....not a dust that bothered my allergies as much as.....as the dust on the farm, and the fertl.....the [uh] fertilizer [uh] dust didn't seem to cause any problems with me and when I'd come back from the service my allergies were actually worse than before I went in. The grass dust was.....it just knocked me flat part of the time, I was really bad, and when you're in the grass seed business and the grass is one of the biggest allergy problems, well you know it's kind of tough to [uh].....to get around. So anyway that's where I was working.

BL: Where was this?

GR: In Imbler, the grass.....the fertilizer plant was in Imbler.

BL: Uh-huh.

GR: And, I.....I'd helped out on the farm a little bit [um] but.....and I was still trying to decide what I was gonna do. There were opportunities in the fertilizer business [um] that.....that I was looking at. There were things that could be done to promote fertilizer.....bulk fertilizer in the.....in the valley and then there were things outside of the valley, there were a couple fertilizer opportunities to go sell fertilizer and work with it. But in July of 1964 [uh].....with the equipment and all the combines and everything was ready to go to the field and we hadn't.....we hadn't started yet [um]....., ["Cut her off for a minute"].

BL: OK, you're telling me about [uh] a day in 1964 I believe.

GR: Right, [uh] in July, and the reason I remembered about when it was, is because I was once again down at the Elgin Stampede, seems like a couple changes in my life happened at the Elgin Stampede, I was not drinking whiskey [uh] out on the creek bank this time though. [Uh] They called and [uh].....and said that [uh], actually they announced it over the speaker system, that [uh].....that I was wanted at the box office and I went out and dad had had a heart attack. Now dad had had a couple heart attacks earlier [uh] in.....in his life, but this one was.....was pretty bad and [uh] the others had been a little milder. They didn't know if he was gonna make it or not and [um] so the.....the unfortunate thing about all this was, well of course his heart attack, but.....but the equipment was lined up in front of the shop ready to go to the field the next day and [uh] they.....it.....it just fell upon my shoulders at that time to have to come out the next morning and....., [pause tape]

GR: OK, it [uh] with.....with the equipment out there and ready to go and dad not here, I.....there I was the next morning, I had to come down and tell the men what to do, because we were ready to go and I apparently was gonna be the boss at that point in time, and so I had to shift from not knowing what I was going to do for a little while [chuckle] into knowing exactly what I was gonna do and.....and I was gonna have to take care of the farm because dad was up there

and.....and didn't know if he would live, die or what, and so that was a major shift right at that time and I came down and I was extremely lucky, we had.....we had a good person working on the farm, for dad, and he knew what to do and he helped guide me through that first day [uh], and then the next day came and.....and I had to go back out and do it again, and your.....your thought patterns change a lot, and this is where the military came in and helped me a lot, because I was very organized with knowing that as the top person you had to have everybody lined out the next day exactly as to where they would be and what they would do and who would be working for them or under them or around them, and so I really appreciated what I'd learned in the military, but I was probably a snot-nosed kid out there also from the perspective of some of the older people that.....that were working for us. So within the first week [um] I had told one of the men that he could no longer drink while he was on the job and [uh] this was the man that was running the cleaning plant, because we did our own cleaning also, and so he had quit me and said [uh], you know, "you can't talk to me that way," but that was a standard that I set, that you could not drink while you worked for me and I held that standard myself then, from then on, [uh] anytime, the rest of my farming time that I took a drink that was the last hour I worked on that particular day, and I stuck by that even though, you know, and.....and I know a lot of people that don't stick by that when they take.....take a drink and then they go off and keep farming. But it was.....it was a really difficult [uh] time to settle in. I was very uncomfortable with that thought and yet it was a time of [uh] change with.....within me because once you start to run the organization, whether.....I don't think it makes any difference what the organization is, whether it's a farm or a business or whatever, and once you start making the decisions and you like to make decisions and you like to control things it takes on a whole new perspective and I loved the farming from that year on, it just.....it just became something that I loved to do. [Uh] It.....it's so much different than.....than when you're just sitting out [um] in a field somewhere _____? _____, now not that that work didn't become pleasant too, because it did, I mean I enjoyed the.....that part of it, but the.....the control and running of the farm became very very enjoyable, and that all started right.....right that.....that time in July, but the [uh].....the pressure and the stress and the tension also started at that very moment, that.....that I'd never had on me, and [uh].....and that you.....you learned to live with, and I'm not sure that you ever realize how much [uh] pressure and tension you're under in any job until you get away from it, so if people would have come up to me then and said, you know, "Oh, you're under a lot of stress"..... I'd of never thought....., always you know you can handle this. But that.....that was a change that [uh] came into my life right then and [uh].....and away I went running the farm, and I was very fortunate because dad [uh].....dad survived the heart attack and he came back and, [uh] he did not come back and take over the farm, he, at that point in his life made a shift in his life and went and started to build a new cleaning plant, because we.....he had always cleaned his own grass seed and enjoyed that. He actually.....dad actually enjoyed cleaning seed more than he enjoyed the.....the farming

operation. He [uh].....he enjoyed the [uh].....the combining or the thrashing [uh] operations where you.....where you clean the seed and separate it from the chafe and from the straw and so he had a cleaning operation and had had [uh] since he started, and he expanded that and we went the next year into bulk grass handling, which was a.....was another shift in the farming operation, and he went to Imbler.....dad [uh] went up into Imbler and got some ground and started another phase of the.....of the cleaning operation.
[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

George Royes, narrator
Brenda Lawson, interviewer
January 27, 2005
tape 2, side 1

BL: OK, I'm here with George Royes [uh] for our second taping, and we left off on the last tape discussing the death of your father, and what that meant for you was that you'd be stepping into farming, which you had not planned on doing before. So I'd like you to [um] sort of let.....fill me in on the details of how that exchange took place between stepping back and you stepping forward into the business.

GR: Well, with.....with dad in the hospital the [uh].....the entire operation had to keep going and my mother and my.....and I decided that [uh].....that I would run the operation that summer at least, and so off to the field I went [um] with a.....a crew of men ready to [uh].....ready to run the combines, and dad also had a seed cleaning operation that he had built up for several years.....cleaned mostly for himself, but also for some outside people, and that was an operation I knew absolutely nothing about, but we had a cleaner man that [uh].....that was pretty good there and so we felt comfortable with that. We had a manager in an office in Imbler that took care of the [uh].....of the [uh] buying and selling and then we also sold chemicals and fertilizer a little bit. But the first.....the first concern was getting out and getting the machines going in the.....in the [uh] grass fields and [uh] the.....the operation had changed a little while I'd been gone and we were just incorporating combines into the grass operation, [uh] when.....when I had left and gone into the service they still used [uh] the thrashing machine, which was a.....a machine that you took the bundles out of the field and in, and pitched bundles into the thrashing machine, the same.....it was the same operation that had been used in wheat and you had to have a binder of course that put the.....the grass into the.....into the bundle and wrap the string around it and everything, but the.....but those had, the.....the year before I came home from the service they had started in with.....with combines and so [uh] this was all new, hadn't done a bit of it before, and I had [uh] excellent help to.....to help me through that.....that first summer. Dad had had such a bad heart attack that they didn't allow him to even go to the fields.....couldn't even drive out and take a look for the first thirty days, and then after he did start going out, I said.....he decided I think that it was time to let me take over on the operation if I so desired, and so that.....from that time

on I.....I pretty much ran the.....the farm. [Uh] I.....I don't know if I told you the other day about the man that drank alcohol [uh].....,

BL: You did.

GR:, and of course he quit the first week, that was the cleaner man, and [um].....and so we had a big replacement to.....to do there. We had to find somebody that could clean the seed in the warehouse, and at the end of the first month the manager of the [uh] warehouse and the office and everything [uh] he presented an ultimatum to us of what he thought he deserved to have if he was gonna have more [uh] responsibility and [uh] so the first thing we know he's down the road too, and gone. Well dad came and.....and started concentrating all his effort on the seed cleaning and then he started to put up a bulk fertilizer plant because the [uh].....the grass seed takes lots of fertilizer and we had all these sacks that you had to open a hundred pounds at a time, and that was just more work than we wanted to do, if we were gonna expand the grass seed, which is what.....what we planned on doing, raising more grass seed. So dad concentrated on everything in.....in Imbler, building a.....a new bulk warehouse, so we had bulk seed by the second year I was on the farm, instead of sacks, [um] up.....the first year when.....when I took over it was all sacks, all the.....the [uh] field runs, grass that was coming in out of the field and going to the warehouse, but by the second year we'd started into bulk.....bulk grass seed. So there were a lot of changes in the industry in the valley right at that time, as.....as dad and I made this change on the ranch also, and.....and [uh].....and I took over. He stayed out of my way quite a bit [um] in the.....in the beginning and.....well all the way through from then on, he pretty much let me run the farm and it was totally different than when you just are out there and somebody's telling you what to do. [Um] Dad had had the.....that good foreman, he stayed with me about two or three years, and about the second year out [uh] when.....when I was farming [uh] my wife's father, who was working at the mill in La Grande, and had always wanted to farm, he came out and he and I worked out an arrangement with dad, and my father-in-law, [uh] Doyle Eisiminger, put all of his ground in with our ground, cause he had.....he had some acreage that.....that he owned, and he and I ran the farm together, and that lasted for about four years, the two of us together, and then he branched off onto his own after.....after about four years. But he.....but he was an excellent farmer, just an outstanding farmer, and so between my dad watching what I was doing, the foreman for first two or three years, and then my wife's father coming in and working with me, I had some of the best guidance that a person could ever want, even though I hadn't planned on farming and had never really, you know, prepared myself, I guess, for that.

BL: Tell me about the process of grass seed, what does that involve?

GR: Well, when you plant an acre of grass you.....you plant it in rows and you.....the reason it's planted in rows is so that then you can manage the off types and weeds and any contaminants that might be in it in the early.....early years of the stand. It.....we.....we plant in the spring here because we've.....we've tried fall planting and.....and we just can't get a good.....a good stand, so we plant it in the spring.

BL: What do you mean by "stand"?

GR: [Um] [uh] whenever.....as it grows and come up, the.....the [uh] [um].....a stand would be.....I.....the.....the emergence of the plant in the row and [uh], so we plant in the spring, we weed it, spray it, fertilize it, baby it along the first year, and then the second year of the establishment we get a crop, and then we get about five years out of it total, so that.....that would be about four years that we get a crop without reseeding. It would be just like your lawn or something like that, I mean, you know it's.....it's there and it's established and each year it re.....it reemerges and.....and comes up and.....and produces seed.

BL: OK, so when you harvest the grass it.....do you say harvest the grass, or grass seed?

GR: Well, you harvest the grass for seed [uh].

BL: So how does that work?

GR: Basically as.....as the changes came we.....and we.....we went away from the.....the old way of doing it, we.....it works about like you would [uh] work with hay, you put it in a sloth row, and of course.....but then you don't bail it. You [uh] have a combine with a special attachment on the front, a belt pickup, that comes along in about a week or ten days, depending upon the variety of grass, and picks the.....the [uh] swath row up when it's dry and it goes into the combine and through the combine just like wheat or any other crop and you separate the seed from the straw into the bulk tank and out of the bulk tank and into a truck and the truck goes off to the warehouse and dumps the [uh].....the seed and.....and the chafe and the weed seed and everything you got collected [chuckle].....,

BL: OK

GR: and [uh].....and dumps it at the warehouse.

BL: Now how many types of seed are you talking about? How many varieties?

GR: Oh, the varieties [uh] changed over the years. Our.....our biggest crop was bluegrass and fescue, and [um] there.....there were two types of fescue, a creeping red fescue and a chewing fescue, and then a lot of different named varieties.

BL: Can you spell fescue for me?

GR: F-E-S-C-U-E

BL: OK

GR: And.....and when.....when we first were starting [uh], when I came back [um] there.....there were not a lot of varieties, a half a dozen, now you could.....you'd have to go get the book out.....the diction.....I mean the.....the.....they have literally hundreds of varieties now. The plant breeders all breed up their own variety and put a name on it and try to tell everybody it's better than something else, which some of 'em are, but [uh].....but when I started there weren't that.....you know, there weren't a whole.....whole lot of varieties. We.....Marion Bluegrass was one of the big.....the big bluegrasses that started that got a big name, so.....,

- BL: So once the see is [um] harvested then, you.....you tell me how it's [uh] put into the tanks and went into the trucks and it's been sorted and all that kind of stuff, did it sell locally?
- GR: No, no most everything would sell on the internal market. [Um] We.....we would just raise the.....the seed for.....well, let.....let me back up. When we first started it was all on the open market when.....when I first started it was all open market seed. You would have a variety and you would raise it, clean it, have it.....or have it cleaned, have it cleaned at the warehouse, and then you would put it on the open market and see if somebody would buy it, but later, in the.....in the late 70's companies started coming in with a.....with a variety and they would ask you if you would raise their variety, their name and their seed, and then they would guarantee you a price before you every planted it or put it in the ground, I mean it was.....the.....it was a totally different concept and at first we resisted that because we.....we thought, Oh we'd like to be independent and we'll just do our own thing, but the companies that.....that were doing this a lot of them had really good varieties of bluegrass and fescue and so if you were going to get the better yield and.....and, you know, just.....they.....and they paid good money, a lot of them, to do that, especially if you were a good farmer and gonna raise really good.....good stuff for 'em, so [um] we eventually ended up to where probably 70 or 80 percent of our production was already contracted before we ever planted it.
- BL: [Um] Tell me about.....tell me about the different seasons and how your day would changed, depending on that season.
- GR: Ok, well the.....the spring we always figured we had to be ready to go by March 15th, that was pretty much [uh] kind of a deadline as to that would be about the time we would normally get into the field, and you would start your planting, you.....of course you had all your ground preparation, your plowing and your spring tothing and harrowing and then planting, and get the crop started growing, and then.....,
- BL: Can you back up a little bit and explain a "spring tooth"?
- GR: Oh it's just a tool that bounces over the top of the ground and drags a little dirt around to pack it and level. You really need things level and packed, it would be the same as if you were working out in your flower garden and had it all shoveled up, you know, and it'd be kind of lumpy and.....and [uh] not pretty and not smooth, and a spring tooth and a harrow were both tools that would go across the ground and move ground like a.....like a garden rake, only in a.....in a little different mode [laugh] and.....and that would smooth it out. You.....you needed smooth because later on in your process when you're harvesting you want everything as smooth and level and even so that.....that [uh] if the crop were to have a storm come through and lay down you could go along with your.....with your swather and pick it all up, so.....so level was important, and that's.....that's part of what we were doing there. [Uh] then once.....once you got things going with your new crop, you had your old crop, maybe you know, the one from the year before, or the year before that, and you started with your spray programs, take care of weeds, and insects, and you started with a fertilizer program on some crops, and then you had, on the ground that was

- irrigated, you had to get your irrigation going as soon as things started to dry out too much. So that.....that was what the spring amounted to [uh],
- BL: So was this set-up in a rotating basis, where in.....for one year you may have some things that are in a different process than where they are on another field?
- GR: Very definitely, because that's how you protect yourself, [um] you don't want to.....I guess the old saying "you don't want to put all your eggs in one basket" because, you know, you drop the basket you're in tough shape, and that.....that would be what would happen with.....with [uh].....if.....if you had everything in the same crop, you could.....you could yourself in trouble, and [uh].....and timing wise too, you know, I mean if.....if all your ground was in the same thing then next Tuesday morning everything would be ready to.....to go at the same time, but if you've got different crops and different stages and [um] a different ground maybe in a little different part of the valley, you know, because one part of the valley would be ready to go and another one might not.
- BL: Uh huh.
- GR: So that was the.....the diversification was a.....was a must if you were gonna.....gonna do it.
- BL: OK, so then from the spring, [um] after you do the planting, then what was your next season bring?
- GR: Well it.....normally along about June you're.....you're starting to finish up with the watering, with the irrigation, [uh] the first or the second week in June all that's tapering off. There used to be a little bit of break right in there when.....when we just had the grass and the wheat and the peas, there would be a little bit of break right there in the first part of June, we wouldn't be very busy, still had something to do, but not really busy. Then towards the end of June and the first of July as we'd get.....we'd start preparing for the grass harvest, and when we were raising peas, [uh] the peas would really take a lot of water right through that time too, so that was going on. So we were normally not quite into the field by the 4th of July, there was always a big "ifey" were we gonna get the 4th of July off or were we gonna work on the 4th of July, and normally we got it off, and then right after that the grass harvest started and the swathers would go to the field and we'd start swathing the grass, and then before we'd finish the grass some of it would be ready to combine, and the combines would start up and at that point in time you're just about as busy as you can possibly get because basically we'd be running two.....two crews and the swathers would be running night and day sometimes and then.....and then you were trying to get a crew together to run the.....run the combines.
- BL: How many combines were going at one time?
- GR: Oh, just depended on.....on how many you had [um], anywhere from [um] three to six or seven probably, depends on.....I mean it varied over the years. [Uh] we ran four combines for a long long time and then eventually went up to five and [uh] then we had six or seven. As some of the.....some of the newer combines got bigger, and the old combines we.....we kept them going probably longer than a lot of people, but [uh] they're all out now and.....and we run.....we run five combines now, my son does.
- BL: Can you tell me about the irrigation system?

- GR: Irrigation [uh], our irrigation was mostly from the creek in.....in the early years [um], dad started the irrigation system in the late 40's and it was really simple and small, and he had a field of grass that was dying.....it was a brand new field and it was dying and he thought if he could just get some water on it he could save it.....it was because it was a real dry spring, so that's what started the.....the irrigation for us, and [uh] I suppose he probably had one.....if not the first irrigation system in the valley, he had one of the first to [uh].....and [uh] it.....,
- BL: Did you ever have any issues over water rights?
- GR: Oh, minor ones, [uh] people.....people always have water right issues and [uh].....and over the years sure, there've been time that.....that [uh] there've been, you know, arguments and most.....but most of the time you just go to the Water Master and he straightens it out and sez who can do what. We didn't have a lot of issues because with dad being one of the very early irrigators our water rights were some of the first, so [uh] there might be issues, but we didn't.....we didn't have problems because we were some of the first to irrigate and they held up.
- BL: Now was there any [uh].....any policy.....any specific thing you had to do to maintain your water rights? Or was it a matter of first come first serve so you don't lose what you already have?
- GR: You have to put water on the ground once every five years to maintain water rights. You have to cover the.....cover the ground and.....and [uh] show that you are still using that water right once every five years and that's.....that's about it. Which when you are in a farming operation that isn't any big problem because, you know, you're going over the ground two or three times anyway, so.....yeah, that's never been a problem with us.
- BL: OK, so along towards the end of the summer you're heavy into the harvest time, can you tell me about a typical day during harvest?
- GR: Well I don't know that you could find a typical day in harvest, [uh] like I say, that when.....when you were running both crews you were out night and day quite a bit and you just try to catch what sleep you could, and [uh].....and each year would vary and differed, [uh] when.....[uh] some of my easiest years are when the kids were growing up because they were excellent operators of the swathers and machinery, and that took a big load off of me, I mean if your own family's out there doing it you know they're gonna be doing the best job they can. If you have somebody out there that just doesn't care, then you have to.....you have to be there more, I mean you have to be out there where you can see what their procedures are and what they're doing and.....and [uh] that makes a lot of difference, so.....so it.....it's really difficult to say what a typical harvest day was because there was a lot of variety in the.....in the number of hours you put in. I.....I would guess that most of the time in harvest you're probably there fourteen hours a day, seven days a week, right.....right through that.....that really.....about a month, at least a month.....month and a half, and the reason I can say that is because I know some of the men that turned in time, you know, hours on their.....their time, they were working just as long and hard as I was

and then there were a lot of fourteen days, twelve would be.....twelve would be a.....a pretty much of an average I think.

BL: You had mentioned earlier in our taping about your mother coming out to the fields when you were growing up and [interrupted by doorbell chimes].....,

GR: I don't know where you are going, but we'll find out.

BL: I was asking about [uh], you had told me before about your mother who would go out to.....to the crews and take them hot food, so now as things have progressed and several years later you have all of these crews working day and night, did your wife do the same thing?

GR: Well, no, it seemed like we went to sandwiches [laughter], and [uh] the.....the crews had changed a little bit, the [um].....the type of people that we hired.....when.....when mom was taking the.....the [uh].....the hot food and things out there were.....there were older men that would probably follow the harvest, and they'd be hobos or they'd be people that just traveled everywhere just looking for summer work and things like that. By the time.....by the time I took over we had a little bit of that but not nearly as much and.....and so most of the people were local or kids, we started hiring a lot of young high school and college kids that came out and worked and.....and they just brought sandwiches with them and.....and furnished their own lunch, and so that.....that was quite.....that was a change also. There.....there were so many things that changes right at the time I took over that it.....it's hard to remember 'em all, it.....it really is.

BL: You'd often mentioned [um] that you hired a lot of young people and before that you mentioned you hired your kids. or you said they worked, you didn't say you hired them.

GR: I didn't hire them, no, they were not on the payroll.

BL: When did they start being old enough, growing up like that what is the appropriate age to get out there on the combine and.....?

GR: Well I think the age is a.....is just whenever they felt they could do it. [Uh] by the time they were twelve or thirteen they were.....they were undoubtedly doing some things, but they.....they started on swathers, swathing the grass [uh] [um], by the time they were twelve, thirteen, fourteen years old, and.....and they were really good, and I'd just take 'em out, [uh] they'd ridden with me as they were.....when they were young, you know, they'd come out as most seven, eight, nine year olds will do, and ride around with dad for a little while, and so when.....when I thought they were ready to go [uh] I just [uh] would.....would pick out a field that was in good cond.....good condition and the grain was all.....the grass was all standing up and I'd go around with 'em and then I'd just turn the controls over to 'em and make a round or two and then I'd step off the swather and say "you take it around, take it around the field," because if you're sitting there watching them they're too nervous to.....to do anything, and there wasn't much they could mess up on really, so.....so away they'd go and they all became really good at.....at operating machinery.

BL: OK

GR: The girls were better.....better than you'd ever imagine.

BL: [laugh]

- GR: I'll tell you a story right here. We had.....we had a local.....local girl [uh], she was about six foot tall, that was running a combine one.....one year for us, really nice gal, and we had some visitors from Turkey come in, a man and his wife, and.....and they came in with a neighbor and looked at our operation and everything, and I asked them if they would like to ride on one of.....one of the combines and they were thrilled to do that, well you should have seen the look the woman's face when the combine pulled up and a girl stepped out of the combine, and that was the combine that was gonna let the woman ride around the field on, because in Turkey that was.....I mean it would never happen, a woman working and driving a big piece of machinery like that and.....and I've never forgotten the expression on her face when [uh].....when she saw that young girl crawl out of that combine.
- BL: [Uh huh]. Did you find that [uh] that there were a lot of young women in this area who were doing that sort of work?
- GR: Oh I think so, in.....yeah, the [uh].....starting in the.....in the 1980's [uh] girls started doing way more.....way more work in [uh].....in the fields [um], and.....and they'd always hoed grass, with a hoe, to hoe out the weeds, and things like that, and they'd done a lot of work, but they took over and.....and started on the machinery. And I always felt that probably girls were better than boys because they were more conscientious, they were a little more scared, and I don't think, at least in the 1980's and early 90's that the girls had the idea in their head that they wanted to be a hotrod, drag racing queen, or something [laughter]. Which the boys all.....all had that whenever they.....time they got around a piece of machinery they.....they had these big thoughts in their head about "oh boy here I am" you know, but the girls.....the girls were very careful with the equipment.
- BL: Tell me about some of the [um] problems or issues that would have come up during.....during any part of this process [um] as far a weather or any sort of thing like that.
- GR: Well yeah, your weather, of course, is something you have no control over whatsoever, and [um] so you.....you can really get hurt by weather, you can [uh].....rain at the wrong time, not enough rain at the right time, [uh] hail storms can totally wipe you out or close to it, so that weather is always hanging there just, you know, your always watching the hill, waiting to see what comes over the hill next. [Uh] if your.....we're in a drought cycle now and [uh] that means you have to irrigate more [um] on the ground that you can irrigate, [uh] your expenses go up, if you happen to hit the other side of the coin and you're into a rainy summer when you.....you can't get the crop to dry out, and then if it doesn't dry out you can't get it harvested, [uh] or at least you can't get it harvested on the time frame that you like to.....to get it done. The grass crops one that.....it runs on a pretty tight cycle [uh] and it seems like if you can get everything done about two days before you think it should be done you're.....you.....you're in good shape, but if you're lagging on the other end and you're a week or two behind you're not gonna raise near the grass that.....that you should and [uh] so that always caused stress within my life I'm

- sure, it's just the fact that.....that I like to be ahead of the game a day or two rather than.....than trailing along behind.
- BL: Who did you depend on for your weather information? Was this done locally, or did you ever depend on the Old Farmers Almanac or.....?
- GR: No, I didn't do any of that [um] in fact, I mean even locally, you might.....you might try to know what the weather was gonna be for the next little bit, but in a lot of cases you just had to take it as it came anyway. The only thing that might have made a difference would have been during harvest, if [uh].....if you thought it was going to rain you.....you might have worked a little later one night or something like that, or you might have harvested a crop that was more susceptible to rain damage a [uh].....a little.....a day or two quicker, something, you know, but.....but most of the time you [uh].....you know, you just get up and take whatever comes over the hill the next day.
- BL: Did you ever have any severe, persistent occasions of bad weather?
- GR: We had rain five weeks in a row either Wednesday or Thursday afternoon one summer right during harvest. Every week it rained and.....for five weeks, not steady but.....,
- [END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1]

George Royes, narrator
Brenda Lawson, interviewer
January 27, 2005
tape 2, side 2

- BL: We were talking about persistent severe weather and you were saying that it had rained for five weeks.
- GR: And.....and [uh] so it'd dry out and normally by about Sunday we'd go again and Monday it'd be real good and Tuesday we might get something going, and then who knows, here it'd come again. That was a very frustrating summer, very frustrating for me [uh] and that's when the stress level goes up. I think that was one of the first years that we brought in [um] some propane burners to help burn the grass, because after the grass seed is harvested, [uh] in the.....in the 60's, 70's and 80's we burned all the straw off of the.....off the grass crop, and then as the [um] anti-burning environmentalists became more vocal we slowly had to start cutting.....cutting back [uh] to.....and we try now only to burn just what's absolutely necessary, and this has cost us [um].....a.....a pretty good percentage of our production, [uh] I.....I don't know that anybody can come up with just an exact figure, but the percentage there of.....of seed that is lost, because we cannot burn, is substantial, it's part of the problem we have now with.....with making a.....a profit on raising the grass.
- BL: You mentioned some of the environmental issues. Were you ever involved in any sort of legislative movements or.....or protests?
- GR: [Uh] I've.....when.....when the burning issue first started it.....it was more so in the Willamette Valley than up here, and at the time that started I was on the Fine Fescue Commission for the State of Oregon, and I was involved in the.....I guess I.....I guess you'd just say the [uh].....the Fescue Commission gave

money to try and fight that, and.....and keep burning as long as they could, but they also gave money to the college and to [uh] people that were trying to find an alternative way to raise the grass without burning it, and.....and there was a lot of money spent in that arena, and so [um] it wasn't just fighting trying to keep burning it, it was trying to find the [uh], another method, and [uh] not any of those turned out successful, [um] the cost and the problems there were all such that [uh].....that.....the propane burnings about the.....about the only thing that.....they bail.....bail everything off and then propane burn, it's about the only thing that came out of all that. There were a lot of experimenting done though. I don't think I was on any other [uh] environmental, you know, committees or anything, just.....just that one on the Fescue Commission.

BL: Did you find that there was [uh], kind of a networking of all of the small farmers in the area, as things sort of changed over the years and.....and farming sort of ended up with the bigger, [uh] what am I trying say, you no.....commercialized?

GR: Well I don't know.....I don't know what.....what [uh].....describe networking, [uh] give me a thought what you're looking here.

BL: Just sort of banding together, or.....or looking to each other for help and,

GR: Oh, well they.....I think they'll all.....all farmers will probably try to [uh] help their neighbor a little bit, but also farmers, you have to understand, are so independent that [uh], I mean they'll band together kind in a Red Cross situation if a farmers in trouble, they'll probably take their machinery and go down and help him do something, but they're so blooming, you know, they're.....they're so independent that [uh] they might have the best crop in the world and make'n, really make'n a good thing and they'll tell their neighbor, "well that's not too good out there this year" [laughter], because they just, you know, they always want somethin' that they've got tucked away that they.....only they know about, so I don't.....I don't know to answer you other [laughter] than [laughter].....,

BL: It sounds to me like there's a little bit of competition then going on.

GR: Very much so, yeah, always has been, yeah they [uh] always like to have a big crop and a little better than the neighbor, always want to [uh], you know, just shine a little bit, they want.....they want there [uh].....they want there place to look a little better than what it does across the road.

BL: Uh-huh. So tell me about your own personal view of commercializing farming?

GR: You mean getting bigger?

BL: Uh-huh.

GR: Well I think that that's.....it's [uh].....it's probably the.....what's going to happen [uh], be.....I.....I've swo.....I took over for about [um] three or four people that were living on a hundred and sixty acres that had come down through their family, and they'd made a living on a hundred and sixty acres, and that lasted until about the 1970's, some of them.....some of them are gone by 50's and 60's. But people could not make a living on a hundred and sixty acres, so the sons and daughters of those people went off somewhere else and there were several of those people came to me and said, "will you farm my ranch" and some of those I did farm and that's where my rented ground came from. Most of the

ground I rented came in in hundred and sixty acre parcels. Well now we're going through another change that's happening now and the farmers are getting bigger and they are going from the, oh I don't know, fifteen hundred to two thousand acre farms and they're just going to get bigger, and the reason for that is because of the cost of equipment and the.....just the fact that they have to farm more acres to make a profit, and I'm not sure, I don't know if it'll ever end, [uh] I'm not sure where it'll end or how it'll end, I.....I don't.....I'm not able to pencil out a profit on the farm the way I farmed it anymore, I mean, you know, I just.....its just not there, I couldn't do it.

BL: Are you willing to share the amount of acres that you.....that you have to.

GR: [Uh] In what way?

BL: [Um] I in just how many acres do you have in all total and then how many of those acres are being utilized?

GR: Well, when.....when [uh].....when I quit farming we were about two thousand acres.

BL: Uh-huh

GR: And my son took over at about.....at about that, and then he grew a little [uh] from there. And I don't know where.....I don't know where he's, you know, where his.....what his thoughts and plans are. I never owned that many acres, never wanted to own a lot of ground, I could only farm so much and.....and I owned enough to [uh].....to be satisfied with how many I owned, I couldn't tell you how many I owned, I never.....I figure it up every now and then.....then forget about it.

BL: Uh-huh, OK. [Uh] I'm sure there are hundred and thousands of untold stories about all the years that you've been farming, but as.....as you sit here and sort of reflect on what we've discussed already, does something else just pop out in your mind that you want to share about.....about the whole industry? And about your experience specifically?

GR: Oh gosh, that's.....that's pretty difficult. I.....I think if.....if I had something that.....that I would do differently, it would be I would.....I would definitely keep a diary of the things that have happened and the people that have been here, [uh] especially [um] when [um] I was [uh] first starting [uh] there were a lot of kids that came out and worked for me that I run into twenty, thirty years later and they'll say, "Do you remember when I worked out there?" Well I don't, I should have written down names and places and dates and events and all of that [uh] because that.....that would be something that [uh] would be fun to go back and read now, so.....so I'm.....I'm sorry that I didn't [uh] be a little more careful about recording that. The.....one event that [uh].....that I think probably is.....is something that [uh] you don't.....you just don't have happen in your lifetime was.....was the time [um] when myself and two of the people working for us, two young.....two young men working for us, and my son were over by Summerville and we saw this bright light streaking across the sky and couldn't figure out what it was and I said, well it has to be a UFO, because it was moving too fast, and it was just brighter than bright, couldn't even look at it, you could.....it was so bright you could not describe it. So I said UFO, has to be, and I said, look back there, you can see where the vapor trail was

and I said that's.....that's got an engine running in there and it's.....it's a jet because it just left that vapor trail clear across the face of.....of Mt. Harris and we could see where it was below the top of Mt. Harris and went blazing through, and there were people in the valley that saw it, we talked to other people. Nobody could describe it, but we heard that they thought a meteor had come through, and of course we poo-pah'd that because we could see where it was lower than the top of Mt. Harris by hundreds of feet, and I said, well it couldn't have been a meteor, it would have hit the earth, and [uh].....because it was so low, no way! Well about fifteen years later my son came whipping over and said, dad there's a special on PBS about the meteor that came through the valley, and so we turned on PBS that night and a man had video taped it, it went from Nevada clear up through Canada, and a man had video taped it, and it looked and sounded just identical to what we had seen go through, and so that was an occasion that [uh] I think was.....was pretty special, [uh] they said if it had hit it would have been like three of the Hiroshima atomic blasts going off if it had hit the earth anywhere, so that's how close.....Mt. Harris, if it'd.....if it'd a been just a little bit east [uh] it would've been like dropping three atomic bombs in the Grande Ronde Valley. So that.....that's something was.....not everybody sees.

BL: Do you recall from the special about [um] why it didn't hit? What causes it not to?

GR: [Uh] There's something about a.....a slingshot type of deal, as close as I could remember, I mean, that it.....it came down and because of the angle it was coming in, it comes in and it picks up speed as it goes out and.....and they gave a very detailed description of how this happens and they convinced me that I had seen a meteor and had not [laugh] seen a UFO, which I'd a.....boy there was a long time I told people, oh you gotta believe in UFO's cause I saw one, but that wasn't true, it was a meteor.

BL: I want to ask you about another thing, [um] I'm not sure we mentioned it on the beginning of the tape, but you don't go by George.

GR: No, go by "G".

BL: How did that come about?

GR: Well, when.....when I was young [uh], of course dad's name was George and mine was George Junior, and I had a neighbor lady that was calling me Georgie, little Georgie, and I for some reason did not like that, and [uh] so my mother said well what about "G G", two "G's," and I said, well maybe. But that's what the folks started calling me was two "G's," "G G", and [uh] that lasted until I got.....until I probably got into the eighth grade or so and went off to Hill Military Academy for a few months, and I think they probably called me by my given name of George down there, and when I came back and entered High School you're.....you think you need to be a little more grown up, you know, here we are we're going into Freshman and High School, and so I started going by George, and I continued that [uh] through High School and some college, and in the military of course you had to go by your.....your first name, and then when I came back and I lived with mom and dad the phone would ring and people would want to know if George was there, and mom would answer, "well junior or senior", you know, well pretty soon, the folks were still calling me "G," and so

pretty soon I just picked up the name "G" again and [uh].....and that's what I continued on with and it.....I.....I liked it.

BL: OK.

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2]