

SHERMAN HAWKINS

June 28, 2005

Interviewed by

Transcribed by Ryan Shearer

Transcription revised by Paula Helten (11/03/2011)

SH: Hawkins

I: And when were you born?

SH: December [13, 1922] in La Grande Fruitdale about a mile north of
Riverside Park.

[recording clicks - 8 second interruption]

I: Were you born in a hospital or at home?

SH: I'm sure it was at home. I remember my brother talked to me about a
little excitement around in there.

I: And what kind of story did your brother tell?

SH: Well, I guess probably it was-- 'course he was five years older than I
was. And he didn't know what was going on excepting that there was
lots of excitement, I guess. So that's kind of the way it was.

I: And what were your parent's names?

SH: Well, my father was William Martin Hawkins. Mother was Annetta
Habersham Hawkins.

I: And were they native to La Grande or did they move from--?

SH: No, Mother was a native of Ogden, Utah, and Dad was a native of
Arimo, Idaho.

I: And what brought them to La Grande?

SH: Well, they got married in 1915, but Dad moved here in 1902. And his
mother had already moved here. Her daughter, Mrs. Claude, uh,
Wright-- not Mrs. Claude Wright-- Mrs. uh, Claude Wright's mother,

anyway was here. And he came, I guess, to help them. And they had a little place out where I was born in La Grande. And that was--

I: Was your father a farmer?

SH: He was a farmer before he came here. He farmed for awhile in this small area, twenty-three acres out there. And then he got a job for the Union Pacific Railroad, and he worked there for thirty-seven years as a boiler man.

I: Oh wow. And your mother was she a homemaker?

SH: She was a homemaker here. She was a school teacher in Utah. And she-- well, they were both fairly well in normal years before they got married. Mother was thirty-eight and Dad was forty, first marriage for both. So that probably accounts for some of the excitement when I was born. [laughs].

I: [laughs]. Probably so. So what was your home like that you grew up in? Was there running water?

SH: No. It was in-- out there in La Grande there was a little spring about a hundred and fifty feet from the house, and it was carried in in buckets. I don't remember that however. I was two years old when I moved away from there out to this road. We moved down here on Hawkins Road at that time. And we didn't have electricity or running water there, either. So it was pretty primitive, I guess, when you look back on it.

I: So was it one bath a week, two baths a week?

SH: Probably one or two, yes. In a number three tub set on the kitchen stove. [chuckles].

I: And you took turns, huh?

SH: Well yeah, I guess that way, or just seemed like it was the natural way to do it at that time. I didn't know anything other.

I: Anything different?

SH: And we didn't have electricity out here until 1946. After I got-- well, I guess during the war my folks got it. I was in the Navy. And they got electricity here.

I: Now where did you attend school at?

SH: In Union.

I: And you went to the high school there?

SH: Yes.

I: Did you play any sports?

SH: Track, and a year or two of football; nothing spectacular in either case. We milked cows out here. I had a few cows, sold cream. And it seemed like-- well, Dad was working nights at the railroad in order to work days here and pay for the place during Depression. And it-- it didn't seem like I had time, I guess, or something. I-- we rode the bus after about 1937. Before that, why, we rode with the neighbors to school and other, and through high school.

I: What do you remember most about the Depression? How did it affect your family?

SH: About the Depression? Well, it seemed-- I was young, and I guess we didn't know much different. We always had plenty to eat. But I'm sure there were a lot of days when my folks had a lot of worry on the debts that was owed on this farm out here. I can remember Dad used to try to get night work at the railroad, three-thirty to eleven thirty. And then he'd get up about seven in the morning and start farming until time to go back to work at three-thirty. And that was the way it went on through.

I: And are your parents buried around here, then?

SH: Yes, here in La Grande.

I: In the La Grande Cemetery? So after high school what did you do?

SH: Joined the Navy. Well, right after I got out of high school, the day after I got out of high school, another fellow and I took off in a car and we went touring down through Utah and California and Idaho and California. We had a number of jobs there, some of them kind of interesting. I got a job cooking on a dining car.

I: Oh wow.

SH: [chuckles]. Yeah, I was good at dishwashing. They called it a fourth cook, but it was a dishwasher.

I: [laughs].

SH: We cooked a little bit, but very little. It was an experience. In those times they hadn't hired white people. They had colored cooks all the time. Well, in about 1940 they decided they were not gonna to hire colored cooks. They were gonna hire white people _____ resentment among the colored's. Well, they had chef and second cook and third cook, and I was the dishwasher, a white, and the only white in the kitchen. So I knew exactly what-- there was quite a bit of resentment at that time. I worked at that for about three months, and we just started out to have fun and see what the world looked like when we got out of high school. Oh, I say three months-- no, I didn't work that long. It probably was closer to two months. And then I got a job, I guess, goin' door-to-door selling silverware and _____ recipes--

I: [laughs].

SH: for the Halverson Jewelry Company in Ogden. And oh, we got-- get out and work in the hay field and tend dates. We'd get a few dollars and take off. We had a 1937 Ford, a Model 409. And I think if I remember right we left home with about thirty-five dollars apiece. And we were gone for-- oh, we came back in October, probably four or five months.

I: Wow.

SH: And we were broke when we got back, of course. [chuckles]. But we'd just work and get a few dollars. And it was before the war, and there was quite a bit of work around at that time. And we went down

to Los Angeles. Probably a few grey hairs came to my folks.
[laughs].

I: I'm sure, while you were gone! Now, when did you-- did you join the Army then?

SH: I joined the Navy.

I: The Navy, okay.

SH: Yes. I wasn't drafted. I got-- I came back from this trip, and I got a job as a boilermaker apprentice here in La Grande working at Union Pacific Railroad. And I worked there for-- let's see, that was in 1940, one, 1941. I worked there for about a year and a half, and of course in December 1941 the war started. And I worked there until September, and then I enlisted. I wasn't drafted. I just wanted to go. I guess I could have got deferred. A lot of the fellows that worked there did. It was a job that the boss could get you deferred. And then, of course I was helping to farm here too. But at that time I just wanted to go. So, that was-- we went down to Corpus Christi, Texas and started boot camp. And that was quite an experience. Everything was full at that time. We started out with a troop that enlisted in Portland. There was about four hundred of us at this time that went at the same time. We were supposed to start for Chicago, and we got out to somewhere in Kansas, and they said Chicago was full up in their boot camp. So, then we were headed back for San Diego, and this a-- just a troop train with nothing but troops on it. They headed us back to San Diego for about a day, and then they found out that was full.

I: Wow.

SH: So, there was a new base just opening up in Corpus Christi, Texas. So, they headed us back down there. And of course, it was just barracks. And we spent most of our boot camp paling around-- around the barracks. [chuckles].

I: [chuckles].

SH: And that was about the extent of that. Well, I was in Corpus Christi then about to _____ boot camp. There was a Naval Air Training

Station _____. But I wanted to get sea duty because at that time there was lots of ships that had boiler steam. But it just seemed like it never worked out that way. They just put you wherever you happen to be when time come. And I was in Corpus Christi for about a year, eleven months, I think-- a little over a year. And then I got transferred to California to ship out on a transport ship, and went to Australia. That was in '41-- no. Yeah, that was in September of 1941. And we went up to Cairns. If I were heading for New Guinea that was the direction we were going. And it-- this again was a troop transport. We were in _____ ships accompanying everything. But we got up at Cairns, Australia, and they went to turn the ship around. Well the tide was real high there, and it was a ship about-- probably three hundred feet long. There was a bay, kind of a river and a bay combined. Well, the tide went out and the ship got stuck crossways. [laughs].

I: Oh no.

SH: So the captain unloaded everybody. And then they wanted to get the ship lightened up soon as they can. Well, we hiked out down through the woods there to a race track, I guess it was. An old Australian race track and spent the night. Well, in the meantime, they got our orders straightened out. There was a new base going in at Mackay, and that's where twelve of us got assigned to that. So we caught a train back then to Mackay. But that was just kind of the way it was all the way through. I never got much sea duty, actually. I wanted it, but I never did get it.

I: Never got it.

SH: And then we got back to Brisbane and was there for awhile; got assigned to Naval Air Transport which was the old Pan-American seaplane flying boats. And that's where I spent most of my time overseas. In the islands, we went-- oh, from there I had time in Brisbane, Australia with them. And then we went to _____ [sounds like Coagula]. And from there back to _____ [sounds like Palau or Hawaii]. And from there back to California, and-- outside of San Francisco there.

I: So when did you end up back in La Grande, after the war?

SH: Yes. I was discharged in 1946. I was a store keeper, and they kept them in later and longer to kind of take care of getting rid of things. I got out about 19-- February of 1946 and went home; went back to railroading, a boiler man serving my apprenticeship. That was in February. Then, well, there was stock show dance in Union. I went to a dance over there, and I met Hazel. And that was-- I had never met her before. That was in June just prior to the Eastern Oregon Stock Show. And in October we were married. And that, by the way, is fifty-nine years ago.

I: Wow! That's a long time. Tell me about your boiler apprenticeship.

SH: Well, 'course all-- at that time all the locomotives were steam. There was a lot of repair to them, especially on these mountains. They'd have broken spade bolts, and they ran with a pretty high pressure steam. And boiler making was quite common in those days. However, when the diesel locomotives came in it did away with boiler making. And about then, of course, I served that apprenticeship before the war and after the war. I had about three and a half years in. And I was set up as a boiler maker there for awhile. However, I started out at thirty-two cents an hour. [chuckles]. But uh-- boiler-making--

I: Wow.

SH: But that was about half, or about a third of what a regular boiler maker was getting. If you go back a little bit, talk about wages and boiler making, my father was a boiler maker. And I remember probably, oh, 1940-- oh, I think it was before-- I know it was before I was in the Navy. But probably about the time of high school they got a raise. And he was just as proud as could be. 'Course, he still had a lot of debt on this farm, or seemed like a lot of debt. He came home one time, and I remember it so well. He was just so happy. "Well, you got a raise?" And he says, "I'm getting sixty cents an hour!" He said, "Just think of that!" He says, "That's a penny a minute!" He says, "Nobody's worth a penny a minute!" [laughs].

I: [laughs].

SH: But anyway, after I served this apprenticeship the diesel started coming in about that time and boilers went out. Well, that's-- I was set up with a boiler maker for a short time. And then it was-- I didn't have my apprenticeship filled, so when they started laying off boiler makers, I had to go back and finish that apprenticeship. And I served the tail end of my apprenticeship cutting up these steam locomotives for scrap! [chuckles].

I: Oh, wow.

SH: So that was about the end of my boiler making career. And that was probably the best thing that ever happened to me because I got out and went to work at the-- fellow called, Paul Bunyan Company here in La Grande. He made logging trailers. And I was welding and working in there for several years after we got married. And that kind of slowed down, and then I worked at Consolidated which Hazel was also working there with me.

I: And they were a shipping company, is that right?

SH: Well, yes it was freight company, hauling freight. You know, at that time they were one of the bigger freight haulers between Portland and Seattle and Chicago, I think. And they operated all the small towns, and I was just working for La Grande delivering the freight from when they'd drop it off at the store.

I: Now when did you start farming, then?

SH: Well, after we got married-- we got married in October. And there's a little place come up for sale in February of '47 outside of La Grande near Fruitdale. We got an apartment there on-- in La Grande when we got married. And about February of '47 this place came up for sale about-- pretty close to where I was born out there. And we bought it. Ten acres and a little house that wasn't modern. [chuckles].

I: So, no running water?

SH: Huh?

I: No running water?

SH: It did have running water, cold water, just cold. No--

I: No hot?

SH: No hot water.

I: And electricity?

SH: That house had three, just three rooms, one right behind the other. And this was-- at that time, there was lots of people coming out of the service, and they were looking for small-- anything to live in. I mean, they were-- we felt real fortunate to get it. I got a GI loan, and it was forty-seven hundred dollars for ten acres and a house.

I: Wow.

SH: [chuckles]. But then again, we were still working for less than a dollar an hour. So, I'm quite a bit less than when I got-- well, at that time, I think-- well, I was with this Paul Bunyan Company first. Yeah, I think the wage there was a dollar an hour. And I started working running the wrecker at nights. I'd get two dollars an hour for working nights which I thought was just great. But that's the way it went on through there. And of course Hazel at that time was working for Consolidated. I'd quit them and went to work for Paul Bunyan. Excuse me, I went to work for Paul Bunyan, and then I went to work for Consolidated. But, I quit there. 'Course, the railroad laid off all the boiler makers, and that was--

I: So when did you start farming full time?

SH: Well, in 1950 I was still working for Paul Bunyan Company, and I'd made arrangements to rent a place from my father. He had-- well, the one I was born on around Fruitdale. It was twenty-three acres. I was gonna rent that and see if it worked. And in July, he had a hundred and sixty here on this Hawkins Road. And he fell over dead with a heart attack.

I: Oh wow.

SH: So I decided that was the time I had to start farming. Mother was still living here. They had a place in town, but she was reluctant to move into town. And so I farmed. And we-- well-- but after he died, why I started farming full time, then. But in order to make ends meet, I would work in the winter time. I went back to work for the railroad as a laborer, wipin' grease off the diesel locomotives and cleaning diesel, fueling. Well, that was-- _____-- I delivered oil around town for a year or two, too, in the winter time when I wasn't farming, and burnt _____ and Mobile Oil up there.

I: So, you're delivering oil for homes for heat, or--?

SH: Home heating, yes.

I: What did you-- what do you farm? You still farm, correct?

SH: Oh, yes.

I: And what did you start out farming in the beginning?

SH: Start out? Well, I always liked cattle, which is a very small part of it. And we had wheat, and pretty much that was it at that time, was just wheat and cattle. Then from time to time, we'd pick up another piece of ground. We went in later on to hay, and we raised it for awhile. And-- well that's--

I: When you-- by the-- I mean because of wheat, when you-- what type of wheat? Was that all the same kind of wheat that you planted?

SH: Well, mostly soft white wheat was about all we raised here at that time. Yeah, it was summer fallow about half. And tried to re-crop once in awhile but with the wheat we had at that time and fertilizer was not used very much at that time. Summer fallow was pretty well on the custom of doing things.

I: And who did you sell the wheat to?

SH: Well, Pioneer Flouring usually took care of it, and they would sell it to Portland. They'd ship it to Portland. Of course, it would go overseas or in channels where it would happen to go. But you'd just

sell the wheat to the mill, and then they would in turn sell it to whoever wanted it.

I: Now did the price of wheat fluctuate every year, or did it pretty much stay even?

SH: Oh, it fluctuated. Yes, it still is. But, oh, I think probably about a dollar and ten cents was-- after World War II was what it ran, as I remember. We'd get a dollar and a quarter and back down. Then of course as time went on it raised a little bit. Not as much as a lot of everything did in proportion though. It still hasn't really.

I: When you first started planting wheat did you use-- how was-- how was the planting done? Did you plow with horses? Was it--?

SH: Well, not after I started farming full time. But when I was a kid we plowed with horses out here. I started out when I was probably ten or twelve years old mowing with horses. And then later on, why we'd bind. Dad was still working nights at the railroad, so we had a little binder and three-horse, what you'd call that--

I: Now what's binding?

SH: Well, that would put the wheat in bundles.

I: Okay.

SH: And then the bundles would be shot in about twelve or fifteen or whatever it was. And then the threshing machine would come later on, and they'd pitch the bundles on a wagon, take 'em to a threshing machine, and thresh it. Then they had to pick the wheat up in sacks, load it on wagons and haul it to Union where the mill was. And all hand labor, all hard hand labor. When they first got combines, why, they'd have a sack sewer up on top. And they'd get five sacks which would weigh about a hundred and thirty pounds--

I: Wow.

SH: or forty pounds apiece. They'd drop five of 'em off out in the stubble. And then go on until he'd get five more and drop it. Well then people

had to come around, and it was usually just one man _____ from that. He'd pick those sacks up and put 'em on a wagon and haul 'em to Union. And you'd make, maybe two loads a day from here, lots of times only one. But that was hard labor. I wasn't in on any of that. I was too young for that I'm glad to say.

I: And when they did them was it by the weight of the wheat? Is that how prices were determined how much the wheat weighed, or--?

SH: Well, wheat yes, in a way. It was sold by the bushel.

I: Okay.

SH: And the number one wheat had to be sixty pounds to the bushel. And that would be your bushel price if it-- oh, if it had something wrong; it was shriveled or anything like that it would weigh less than sixty pounds. So you'd get docked a quarter. But that was usually the way it was sold. And barley was raised here too quite a bit, and other things and oats.

I: Now, when the combine came into the picture, was there less farming accidents, you think, or did it cause more accidents, or just different types?

SH: I couldn't--

I: Did you have any accidents farming?

SH: Well, I suppose they did. I mean, yeah, sure they had accidents. But I don't remember of anything serious at that time. The worst I ever had was after I started farming I had a fellow break a leg, and that was kind of nasty. I had kind of a serious accident later on when I was here about ten years ago.

I: What was that?

SH: Well, we were moving cattle down here. I'd bought a horse that was for sale, just a half-broke colt. And 'course I was seventy at that time. We were moving cattle, and there was an old cow and had a calf right under this big _____ willow tree. And she was kinda snorting. And

this colt was green as could be, and I was tryin' to get him to go in there. Well, about the time I got part way under this tree the old cow took after this colt and goosed him in the ribs. And he started buckin'. And my dog took after the cow. [chuckles]. And then anyway, that horse got _____ on my saddle horn, and I couldn't fall off. I couldn't do anything.

I: Wow.

SH: He pounded the dickens out of me. And I finally got off out there. And I thought well, I knew I was hurt some, but I thought a half a day in my easy chair will take care of it. The other fellas took the horse. And I took the pickup on down and headed the cattle the right way and drove it on around out here. When I got out of the pickup, why, I felt kind of loose in the middle. Felt a little bit shaky, and well, real shaky, in fact. Hazel looked out the window, and I went over and set down on the porch steps there. I told her I was gonna come in and rest for awhile, and she says, "No, you're going to the hospital." So anyway, I went to the hospital. But it had just split my pelvis. It was-

I: Ow!

SH: And anyway, I-- they-- I had to _____ it _____ they opened me up, well, it was bruised up so bad they couldn't put a plate in so then they sent me to Boise. And _____, I look around, and _____ sure I had pins and re-bar pullin' me together. [chuckles]. I had to lay on my back. I couldn't turn on my side for sixty-four days--

I: Oh my goodness.

SH: in the hospital. And that was the worst accident we had. That was my own fault. And after I was in the hospital back up here recuperating, why, a fellow come in to talk to me. "Well," he says, "It kind of sounds like that colt was acting his age and you weren't." [laughs].

I: [laughs].

SH: I think that just about--

I: Summed it up, huh?

SH: That sums it up in a nutshell.

I: So how many head of cattle did you have?

SH: Well, we used to run cattle we rented--
[END OF SIDE 1 - no interruption]

SH: from Boise Cascade up here. And I also had a government permit to run cattle on-- we bought it from the Davis Cattle Company which we eventually-- well, they were retiring, and we got their permits. Bought their permits by buying cattle and transferring, and then we ran cattle up that way for about eighteen years in the hills. And went in down here in the valley where we live now.

I: Now who'd you sell them to, then, when you were--?

SH: Who would we sell to?

I: Did you sell any cattle for meat, then?

SH: Well, we sell the calves to the auction sale here. And _____ about them. We did that several times. That was an interesting deal. In the hills you were riding quite a bit. And you take 'em up in May and you wouldn't see a whole lot at times until-- lot of 'em until October when they start coming down. They would naturally kind of come by their selves. Most of 'em, but there was always lots of hard cold days riding looking for the last few that were straggling. [chuckles]. It was in the snow. And a few of them bulls would get off in the brush pasture and didn't want to come home. It was interesting, and the kids were young when we started out. It was good experience for them. They both really liked it. And it was an experience that other kids should have really.

I: Did the price of cattle fluctuate a lot over the years?

SH: Oh yes. Yes it has. I sold calves-- well, for seventeen cents a pound, the heifers. I think it was about nineteen for the steers one year. And it fluctuated right on up-- up and down, of course. But now they're

about a dollar thirty, thirty-five for the steers, and a dollar thirty for the heifers _____ which is sure lot of difference!

I: Yes, it is.

SH: We fatten the cattle there for awhile. We bring the calves in and put 'em in a feedlot and feed 'em grain for about a hundred and twenty days-- all the grain they could eat. And then sell 'em as fat cattle. And they'd be butchered at that time. Now of course we just sell winter calves, and they take 'em to feedlots. It's changed in those days. You-- you couldn't probably find a place now to sell a calf-- calf products here without taking a drop because there's the big huge feedlots have thousands here now where we used to have seventy-five or a hundred and fatten 'em up and sell 'em to the same place. But--

I: Tell me about farming. You said you farmed mint?

SH: Beg pardon?

I: You said that you farmed mint? Is that correct?

SH: Yes, peppermint.

I: Peppermint. And tell me about that.

SH: Well, there's still doing a lot of it here in the valley. It's a real interesting crop. It's an expensive crop to grow. You have to fertilize it real regular, lots of water. Probably irrigate about once a week and fertilize it about three times during the summer. And it takes quite a bit of hand labor, usually Mexicans to weed it, hand-weed it sometimes. And of course they got lots of sprays, too, that will take care of that. The reason we don't grow peppermint now, I didn't ever buy the machinery. I just hired people that have the machinery to come to the farm.

I: They took special machinery, then?

SH: Oh yes. It takes-- you have to have a still and boil the peppermint to get the oil out of it. That's what they want.

I: Oh, okay. So after the crop is done, you have to--?

SH: Yeah, I think they crop up green. Run it through a still, and feed it with steam, and the steam and the water comes out. Well, the water will sink and the oil will come to the top. And it's quite a process. But in the last few years we raised it they started raising peppermint in India and China with hand-labor that was a lot cheaper than this. So it got down that there was a surplus of American mint oil, and it was just a kind of a process of whether it was worth it. I didn't really have an awful lot of machinery to worry about. I didn't have a still. So we just got to-- started going back to the wheat and the hay and the cattle and alfalfa.

I: How much hay did you harvest every year?

SH: Well, we raised quite a bit there for awhile. We raised probably twenty-five hundred acres of alfalfa which would go anywhere from three to four tons to the acre. And a lot of that was sold overseas.

I: You _____ alfalfa used for?

SH: For feeding cattle. Of course, Japan buys a lot of alfalfa in this country. They would compress the bales and compress it even more than the baler, and then they'd ship 'em overseas. And they're still doing a lot of that. They're pretty particular. They've got to have it just about right in order to do it. And then there's lots of people that run cattle in the hills, and they buy hay. And they don't have the land to get up there.

I: What is the process of haying? Walk me through the process of when you start to the finish.

SH: Well, of course you have to plant it first, and you never get much of a crop the first year. The second year, and for about the next three or four you get good crops. It has to be swathed. And now they put it up in big bales that weigh probably twelve hundred pounds each. It used to be small bales. In those days, you'd hire kids to pick the small bales up and take 'em and stack 'em. But that's kind of a thing of the past now. The big bales-- they do it all with machinery. They-- if they do a lot of it-- if they do ship it to Japan or Korea they cut the big

bales back down and re-bale 'em to small bales again, but not here in the place. They take it in the shipping plant.

I: What kind of machinery is used now, for baling?

SH: Well, they use swathers.

I: And what's a swather?

SH: It cuts the alfalfa or the hay, runs it into a windrow, and most of 'em have a set of rolls that crushes the stem to make it dry quicker. Then it has to be left out in hopefully dry weather. If it rains, it cuts the quality of it real fast. And it has to dry 'til it's down to about twelve percent, and then they bale it and stack it. And then of course it's ready to keep for the winter or ship in whatever the ____.

I: Do you do much haying anymore, or is it just mostly wheat?

SH: Well, we still raise quite a little bit of hay. It's not for our own use. We still run about a hundred and twenty cows which takes about 300 tons of hay a year. Then I'll have hay to sell to _____. We usually have, oh, a thousand, fifteen-hundred tons for sale.

I: Keeps you busy?

SH: Hm?

I: That keeps you busy?

SH: Well, yes. 'Course there again in the last few years I've been hiring a lot of my work done with people who have the machinery, and we just custom-work it. And then we sell it or use it ourselves, part of it.

I: What is your favorite aspect of farming?

SH: The future, you mean?

I: No, what's your favorite aspect of it, of farming?

SH: Oh. Well, I always did like cattle, but they doin' awful good with wheat because you can turn right after you harvest the wheat. And they came up, and we have a quite a few miles of creek bank, and one thing I knew that would grow weeds and grass and you can't-- can't get out and farm it with machinery. And so I have that fenced pretty well so that the cattle can clean the banks. We have the creek banks up to keep high water from flooding us pretty regular out here. I always did like the cattle pretty much, but the combination of the two works pretty good. We _____ together _____.

I: How has the affects of spraying, you know, chemicals and that type of stuff? How has that affected, well, the farming?

SH: Well, it's gone from you might say none when I was a kid to a terrific amount of it now. You thin down chemicals even to do your summer follow-up. A lot of people are. They just spray that Roundup that takes care of the weeds, and you spray 2, 4-D to take the broad-leaf weeds out of the wheat. And of course, with mint, why they had spray that you take-- takes broad-leaves out of _____. And then of course American mint take the weeds and stuff out of it that way. It's amazing the amount of things they can do with spray now. Whether it's altogether good or bad, I still have a few doubts about some of it. It's getting kind of spooky the things they can do with it. They have a chemical that they can spray on wheat that they take the broad-leaf weeds out of it. It works real good. But if you have soil that's alkaline it stays in the ground, and it keeps hurting the same place where you put it on for a number of years. And then if it's a neutral soil, it doesn't seem to hurt it. But with any alkali in it that will stay there, and broadleaves for years afterwards will come up. They'll sprout, but then they'll die as soon as they get out of the ground.

I: So then it affects the soil, then, for years to come.

SH: Mm-hmm. It does.

I: What major changes have taken place in agriculture in the Grande Ronde Valley in your time of farming?

SH: Major change? Oh golly. Well, from before I was _____ in it, there was not many sugar beets here. And they raise sugar beets here with

horses. And the farmers would take them in. They had a little beet factory in La Grande. But then they went clear out of sugar beets. And from the time, oh from the 19, I guess, '20's up until ten years ago they never raised sugar beets. Now they're coming back and raising 'em again. There raising quite a few here now. Mint was never heard of when I was young. It was just strictly wheat, oats, and barley, and alfalfa hay, and cattle. But farms were small. There used to be several houses on this road, and everybody had a few milk cows. They'd milk 'em mostly by hand and sell cream. You had a cream truck come down and make a delivery or pick-up. About twice a week they'd pick up the cream. And they had a creamery in Union. They made butter and cheese and everything. And of course they had one in La Grande, too. But now nobody sells cream. You couldn't sell a pint of cream if you had it. And you just-- they just don't do it!

I: Don't do it.

SH: But they used to sell it. Hogs or anything, everybody used to have a few hogs, and they could sell 'em pretty easy. Now, about the only buyer there is in Klamath Falls, and that's a Japanese owned company I understand. And so hogs are pretty much a thing of the past. There's a few still raised here, but very small numbers in comparison to what they used to. Beef cattle seem to be more than there used to be. But dairy in this valley is not. There isn't even-- there isn't even one dairy here in this area. There is still up in Baker County, but that's Grade A, and of course they're, well, inspected a lot more than the old cow cream. We didn't have inspectors. You'd sell cream, and they'd make butter out of it or pasteurize it and make butter. Now of course, the dairy has to be up to real high standards in order to sell whole milk, and to keep it that way they have inspectors to make sure they do. But--

I: Do you think the smaller farms are finding it harder and harder to make a living over the years?

SH: Yes, I do. 'Course the price of oil has raised so much, of course. So has the city property as far as that goes. But a small farm, you've got to have a certain amount of volume in order to make a living. And if a-- there's quite a few small farms, well usually they work out part

time, and just maybe have them put a bunch as a hobby farm and work out how they get there bread and butter.

I: So there's less family farms than there were at one time?

SH: Well, there's lots of family farms, but they're bigger-- bigger than they were, by far. The small family farms went out. And the bigger ones kind of incorporated, took them in and bought them up. And, well, it's-- out here I heard here the other day that during the '30's, during the Depression a third of the population lived on farms. And now it's probably one or two percent is about the size of it. I'm not sure what percentage, but I know _____ about a third of the people lived on farms at that time during the--

I: Were you involved with any farm associations or cow associations?

SH: Well, yes. We belonged to the Wheat League, and we belonged to the Cattle Association. Oh, I guess that's about-- well, the Farm Bureau of course. And that's about it.

I: About it?

SH: I get to thinking back when I was in school how much difference there was. Maybe this is turning turn back.

I: That's okay. That doesn't matter.

SH: [chuckles]. I was thinking here the other day how much difference there was. When I was goin' to high school there was a bus come around and pick us up. They'd come up through Ladd Canyon around this way, and they'd have probably twenty-five or thirty kids by the time they get to Union. And I liked to hunt pretty well. So I'd take my shotgun and shells and get on the bus to ride to Union. [chuckles]. Leave the shotgun on the bus, and when we'd come home at night, why I'd get off over here a couple three miles, and there were lots of pheasants in those days.

I: You said quite a few _____?

SH: Not like there was. You could always get your limit--

O: On my own?

I: [laughs].

SH: But it seems too funny. Nobody thought a thing about it. You take your shotgun on the bus, and that was fine. They wouldn't approve of that I don't think--

O: Yeah, I don't think you get on the bus with a gun.

SH: No.

I: Yeah, times have changed a lot when it comes to that.

SH: Yes, it has.

I: How big was your graduating class?

SH: I think there was about twenty in it, eighteen to twenty. It was small. It was one of the smaller ones for Union.

I: And have you all pretty much stuck around here?

SH: No, hardly any of them.

I: Just you, huh?

SH: Well, there's a couple three. Marian Stencil up here went to Union. Yeah, I think that's about the only-- oh, Martin _____ worth. I don't know if you're familiar with him or not.

I: It sounds familiar.

SH: Yeah, he was in that class.

I: How has the city of Union changed over the years? Has it changed?

SH: What?

I: How has the city of Union changed over the years?

SH: Well, they used to have a theater. The bus used to stop and feed the passengers at a restaurant in Union about three times a day, three different buses a day. They had three or four filling stations and a couple of garages. Now they don't have a theater. They don't have a bus stop. They don't have a bus.

I: No they don't.

SH: And it's changed quite a bit. I don't think-- well, there's probably a few more people live there. In the morning you see why because they're all working in La Grande, and this is quite a busy highway here about eight o'clock in the morning.

I: What do you remember about Hot Lake?

SH: Well, I remember a time or two in the wintertime I'd stop there for some reason. It was always a nice warm building. They used to have a train that stopped there, a depot. Passengers would be four trains a day stopped there, probably more than that. But there'd usually be at least two each way, and they'd all stop there, the passengers, if they wanted them to. I remember when it burnt down. It was about probably as much on the west end that burnt as there is left there now. They used to have lots of people there. When I was small, I'd-- of course, I heard the older people and the bigger kids talking about dances they'd have over there, you know. There was lots of activity. 'Course it was a hospital, but it was also-- transportation wasn't so good and imagine most of the people that worked there lived there in that area. And they had a dairy. And they had large chicken houses. They were two-story chicken houses, and they were heated with warm water.

I: Wow.

SH: And they used to have a little slaughterhouse. We used to take a pig over there when we wanted to butcher it for the home use every once in a while. And the water was coming out of the ground. It wasn't right at the lake. It was over, probably as I remember, probably a quarter of a mile east of where the building is now. And there was about an inch and a half pipe running with water, hot water into a scalding run. And you could take your hog over there and butcher it.

Scald it and butcher it and do it yourself as long as you cleaned the place up that's alright.

I: Wow.

SH: But that's dried up. And they finally-- well, Alan Courtright said he used to rent that place and here in about 1960's or 70's they had a big earthquake in Yellowstone Park. They had a-- I remember it was quite a severe one because there were some landslides. A mountain slid out, and I think there's some people killed in 'em. But I think there was thirteen days after that earthquake in Yellowstone Park this well at the slaughterhouse, well, it dried up completely.

I: Really?

SH: And it's been running there--

I: Wow.

SH: so there must have been some connection between the two.

I: Some kind of connection. What caused the fire on the west side of that Hot Lake building, do you know?

SH: I have no idea.

I: _____?

SH: I don't think-- well, I've never heard that there-- what finally caused it. I know it happened in the daytime, in the afternoon because it was quite a spectacular fire.

I: Right.

SH: It was three stories high, and it was one who was all _____. But they used to have people comin' from all over the United States to bathe. They had mud baths, and they had mineral baths. And they just-- it was just a busy place.

I: Are they-- they referred to it as the Mayo Clinic of the West _____.

SH: It was a Dr. Phy owned it. And he was well thought of all over the United States, I guess. And he also had a little cabin up in Ladd Canyon that's just about where the Ladd Canyon exits, where you exit off of Highway 84. No, right about in that _____. I say a cabin. It was probably a three-story house down on Ladd Creek. And they said when pressure gets too much, why he'd just get his horse and buggy and go up there and stay for a day or two. And he didn't have a telephone, and that's where he got his relaxation. But he was a real well thought of doctor. And he was a good neighbor. I remember he used to-- oh, he'd buy hay for his dairy and the local people. And he was a real down-to-earth. I don't remember him, but I remember my folks talking about him and a real down-to-earth sort of a fella. Well, you were talking about pheasants around here now. There used to be actually hundreds of pheasants compared to where there at now. But there's something else that's changed. When I was probably _____ in high school, or maybe in junior high, why the Fish and Wildlife had a deal to get rid of the owls and the hawks and the crows. And they had a contest one time, well, for two or three years. And you could go and kill crows and hawks and owls and take their legs, and the one that had the most legs, of course, would win. Well, there was a twenty dollar-- twenty dollars or a twenty-two rifle was the plan. Well, there was another young fella that lived over here on Davis, worked for Mr. Davis and his cattle company. His folks did. And we came up, and we'd just climb trees. And 'course, eggs was another thing.

I: Yeah.

SH: If you could get the eggs that is half as much as a pair of legs were, I think they call it. But the first year we did pretty good, but we didn't think we had enough. So we put 'em in salt and kept 'em the second year, and the second year we won the twenty dollars. [chuckles].

I: [laughs].

SH: But I think we had-- and of 'course at that time why they wanted you to kill hawks and owls because they were getting the pheasant eggs. They still do, of course, but it's a completely different thing now. I mean if you killed an owl, why you'd get in trouble.

I: They frown upon that these days.

SH: Mm-hmm, they do. But these kind of things, I get a kind of a kick out of thinking aback on the things that-- salmon used to come up Catherine Creek by the hundreds.

I: Really?

SH: Oh yeah. And of course there was always a lot of what we call trash fish, too. There was carp and suckers and bullhead catfish and all that kind of stuff. It was lots of fun for kids to catch, and lots of 'em. And even up until our kids were in school there was lots of that stuff. And then Union used to be on septic tanks, and they switched over. And they had a sewer, but they dumped their sewer into Catherine Creek. And now you can't even see any carp where there used to be lots of 'em. They don't really-- they don't really want to say that's what caused it, but as far as I'm concerned it's pretty obvious. You just-- there's just no fishing, nobody fishing down there or anything. There is salmon go through now, a few. They go up Catherine Creek to spawn, but nothing like it used to be.

I: How about the population of deer? Has that changed a lot?

SH: What?

I: The population of deer?

SH: What's that?

I: Deer?

SH: Deer?

I: Yes.

SH: Oh. Oh, yeah there's, well, when I was small there was probably not as many as there is now. But there twenty or thirty years ago-- well, twenty years ago there were lots of them. Well, then they had the-- what they call our doe season, killing the female deer. And they really wiped them out pretty good after awhile. Well, there's quite a few deer now, but nothing like there was then, either. When we first started running cattle in the hills we'd go up fixing fence in the spring,

and of course the kids would see how many deer they could count just on the open pasture up there. And they'd lots of times get two or three hundred that they could see in a day. And it's not like that now, even in the spring. But now there's lots of differences.

I: I think we've covered about everything.

SH: Oh?

I: Unless you can think of something else?

SH: Well, no. Not that I can think of.

SH: Well, if I think of anything else I'll give you a--
[END OF TAPE]