

DORTHA VORUZ

Union County resident for 85 years

AN ORAL HISTORY



Interviews in April and May, 2003
at her home in La Grande OR

Interviewer: Eugene Smith

UNION COUNTY, OREGON HISTORY PROJECT

Affiliate of the Oregon Historical Society

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UNION COUNTY, OREGON HISTORY PROJECT

An Affiliate of the Oregon Historical Society

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In collaboration with Eastern Oregon University
Cove Improvement Club History Committee
Elgin Museum & Historical Society
Union Museum Society

Purposes

To record & publish oral histories of long-time Union County residents
&
To create a community encyclopedia

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Preface

Much of the history of a place is stored in the memories of people who have lived there. Their stories may be told to family members, but, unless someone makes a special effort to record these stories, they become lost to future generations.

Each of the historical societies in Union County, Oregon has begun to make that effort. Tape recordings exist in several locations, some of them transcribed in written form, others not. A more ambitious and thorough effort seemed necessary so that more of the oral history of Union County could be captured and preserved.

The Union County, Oregon History Project, begun in 2002, is making that more ambitious effort. One of its principal purposes is to collect as many oral histories of older Union County residents as possible and to make them available in both taped and written form. This edited transcript is part of the series of oral histories to be produced by that project.

About the Interviews and This Edited Version

The interviews with Dortha Voruz took place at her home in La Grande. At age 84, Dortha is alert mentally, active physically, and involved in community affairs;

The interviewer was Eugene Smith, volunteer director of the Union County, Oregon History Project. He completed a one-hour interview on April 30, 2003, a one-and-a-half-hour interview on May 7, and a final one-hour interview on May 14, 2003.

Heather Pilling's full transcription (available for research purposes) presents the literal contents of the interview. The edited version presented here differs from the literal transcription in the following characteristics;

- reorganization of content
- deletion of some extraneous comments
- omission of false sentence starts and other normal speech fillers that detract from readability
- normalization of pronunciation and grammar in conformity with standards of written English.

DV designates Dortha Voruz's words, *I* the interviewer's.

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Birth in Perry

I: Tell me when and where you were born.

DV: I laughingly say I'm not a La Grande-ite because I was born in Perry, which is about four miles out [i.e., north west], in 1919.

I: World War I was going on.

DV: Yes. It was about to end. When Mother and Dad married, he was stationed at Keyport, Washington. Mother went up there to Keyport, and when they came home following World War I, she was pregnant and I was born August 17.

I: At that time, it was common to be born in your parents' home, wasn't it? Is that where you were born?

DV: Yes. The doctor did come out to Perry by horse and buggy, and he was there when I was born.



Dortha as infant, 1919
Photo courtesy of Dortha Voruz

I: Did they tell you later what the circumstances were?

DV: No. I was ready to come so that was the main reason.

I: Were you a first child?

DV: Yes.

I: Where had your parents originally lived?

DV: My father was from Pumpkin Ridge [approximately fifteen miles north of La Grande] and my mother is from La Grande.

I: Where did your parents meet, do you think?

DV: My mother was very good friends of my father's sisters. My Aunt Ida, Dad's sister, married Charles Sander-son of Dry Creek.

I: Were they married fairly young?

DV: They were twenty-three, I think.

I: Had they been to school in La Grande High School?

DV: No. My mother went to school in La Grande but did not finish. She started working at the Grande Ronde Hospital [the former hospital at the west end of Adams Avenue] for pay.

I: Do you know why they went to Perry?

DV: When Dad got out of World War I, he got a job at the lumber mill there. I

think we only lived in Perry about five or six months before we went to Pumpkin Ridge.

I: Do you still retain memories from when you were living at Pumpkin Ridge?

DV: No. My Grandfather Lovely, Mother's father, built houses in La Grande and my dad worked for him on cement work--foundations--so we moved to La Grande.

The Move to Union County

I: What brought your parents to Union County? Why had they come here?

DV: My father was born in Joplin, Missouri. The family came to Union County and with many of their friends settled at Pumpkin Ridge. One section was called Missouri Hollow because so many of these settlers were from Missouri.

My mother's folks came from Council Bluffs [Iowa], though they didn't come on the Oregon Trail; they came on the train.

I: In the 1890s probably?

DV: Yes.

I: Were they headed for La Grande originally?

DV: No, the Lovelys were headed for Willamette Valley. When they got to Owyhee Dam [near the Idaho-Oregon border], they decided they needed to

work and earn some money to buy and a wagon and horses. They had heard many wonderful stories from the people around Owyhee Dam and about Smith Mountain in Wallowa County, so that's where they went instead.

The first four children were born at Smith Mountain; my mother was one of them. I remember the original road up Smith Mountain; it was steep and had many curves.

Grandpa Lovely built houses there for his mother and other family members, though they're all gone now. During the summer he lived with the family on Smith Mountain, and during the winter he worked in La Grande. Since he drove a team of horses, he couldn't go home at night; it was too far. He had planted a lot of potatoes up there, and, when they froze on July 4th, he said, "That's enough," and he brought his family to La Grande. That's how they got here.

I: What sort of work was your grandfather doing in La Grande when he came here?

DV: Whatever he could find. He built several houses, two of them still occupied.

A Dump in La Grande

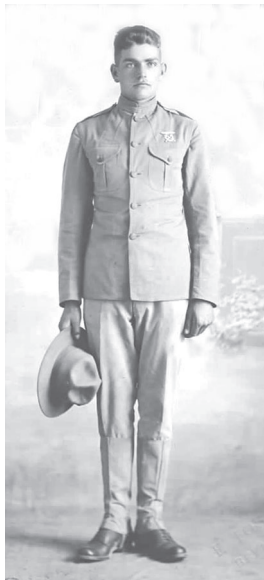
I: What are your first memories of living in La Grande? What stands out as noteworthy about where you were living?

DV: I had cousins who lived in the area; we did a lot of playing together

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W. Ray West as a young fiddler
Photo courtesy of Dortha Voruz



Dortha's father, W. Ray West, on military duty
late in World War I
Photo courtesy of Dortha Voruz



Dortha's mother, Bertha, just before
her marriage to W. Ray West
Photo courtesy of Dortha Voruz



Sarah Lovely, Dortha's maternal
great grandmother, who lived in La Grande
Photo courtesy of Dortha Voruz



Dortha's paternal grandparents, William & Emma Shafer West
Photo courtesy of Dortha Voruz

because we had to make our own entertainment. Grandpa ran a dump where people dump whatever they wanted to get rid of.

I: Was it an open pit?

DV: No, it was just on the ground between the house and the river [i.e., Grande Ronde River].

I: Why did he do that?

DV: People had to have someplace to dump stuff they wanted to get rid of. If businesses from town had items they wanted to get rid of, the owners called Grandpa Lovely. He got paid for removing them from the businesses. Once they were in the dump area, people could go in and take anything they wanted at no cost.



Dortha at age three with her mother
and younger sister
[Note chains on family car for driving in mud.]
Photo courtesy of Dortha Voruz

I: The city wasn't providing any disposal service?

DV: No.

I: Do you remember trying to play in it?

DV: Yes. We went down and looked through the junk, but I don't think we picked anything up.

I: This was old mattress springs and garbage, for example?

DV: No garbage. It was other things.

I: Worn out stuff that didn't smell bad?

DV: Right.

I: Did your grandfather scavenge--try to get useful pieces among these things?

DV: I don't remember that he did.

I: In later years what happened to those things?

DV: In 1964 we had the flood. Some items washed away to Troy [approximately seventy-five miles northeast of La Grande as the crow flies]. The house went down the river, too.

Playtime and Suitable Clothing for Girls

I: You said that, as far as play was concerned, you had to make up your own play. You didn't have tricycles

and roller-skates and all those kinds of things?

DV: Oh, heavens no! Some had roller-skates, but I didn't so didn't try skating.

I: Climbing trees, playing tag, Red Rover Come Over--games like that?

DV: Tag and all of those things. In the snow we played Fox and Geese and Kick the Can.

I: What do you remember about the clothes you wore at that time? You were four or five years old, right?

DV: Yes. My father had younger sisters, and, when my aunts got through using the clothes, Grandma West gave them to my mother and she cut them down to make my dresses.

I: Was she cutting down old dresses and blouses?

DV: Yes. Old dresses, any fabric--hand-me-downs.

I: Did you always have to wear dresses, or could you wear pants some times, too?

DV: I don't ever remember having pants.

I: Is that because no little girl would wear pants? It wasn't very practical to have a dress all the time, was it?

DV: If we wore slacks or pants to school because of the weather, we had to take them off when we got to school. We couldn't wear them in school.

I: That was the dress code. Did you ever question that rule?

DV: No. That was a rule that we were told and that was it.

I: When little girls wanted to go over the climbing bars and go up on play equipment, that was a little bit of a problem.

DV: I suppose so. Girls didn't do that; at least I didn't.

I: You weren't in any situation where your underpants might be exposed?

DV: No. That would have been terrible. But I didn't play a lot with dolls. I was out playing softball and other sports from the very beginning.

I: Were you good at softball?

DV: I thought I was.

I: Did you play soccer?

DV: No. We didn't.

I: What other kinds of games besides hopscotch and tag?

DV: We jumped rope.

I: You said you played softball. Were there other kinds of games that required a team and that you played with? Were boys and girls together on a team?

DV: We played with girls and boys on separate teams in school, but in summer boys and girls played together outside.

I: Was that an iron-clad school rule also?

DV: I don't know. But we always had enough girls to play, so we didn't need the boys.

I: Do you remember having the feeling as a young girl that the differences between what was appropriate for boys to do and girls to do were very clear?

DV: Yes. I'm sure I did. And I never questioned it.

I: Were you conscious of the fact that the rules for behavior for boys and girls were quite different?

DV: I never gave that a thought.

I: But you knew it was true?

DV: Sure. I knew my place.

Washing Clothes, Dishes, and Bodies

I: With all this outdoor activity, I imagine you did get dirty fairly often. What did you do about baths and washing clothes?

DV: That was my mother's job.

I: What do you remember her doing?

DV: She had to wash on the washboard.

I: That made her knuckles raw and her hands red. It was painful, wasn't it?

DV: Yes. It had to be.

I: Was she able to use hot water for washing?

DV: Yes. We had a reservoir in one end of the kitchen stove to heat water.

I: How many gallons do you think it might have held?

DV: Quite a bit.

I: Would that have been enough hot water to last for a full day?

DV: I don't ever remember their having to refill it. But I didn't pay much attention.

I: Did you ever have to help with the washing as you got a little older?

DV: My mother had to wash dishes as a young girl. She had to stand on a bench before the sink to wash the dishes because her mother was ill. At that time she said, "If I ever have a daughter, she'll never have to do this." And I never did.

I: Why do you think she said that?

DV: Because she was so young when she had to do that. She said sometimes it took her all morning to wash the dishes.

I: She seemed to think it was unfair

for a young girl to have to do that kind of work?

DV: I don't know that she thought that, but she just made up her mind. I never did have to really get in the kitchen and clean it up. I stayed out of the kitchen. So did my sister and two brothers. I worked in the other rooms, however.

I: Tell me about family baths.

DV: We used a metal tub with two or three buckets full of water. How nice it was to be the first one to take a bath! They just added hot water for each person.

I: How did they decide on who was going to be first?

DV: The folks just said, "Dortha, go take your bath." The tub was next to the kitchen stove, so it would be warm. After the baths were over with, they took the tub outside to dump it.

I: Was this arrangement still going on when you were ten or twelve years old?

DV: Yes.

Outhouses

I: I don't suppose the house had any other form of indoor plumbing.

DV: No.

I: Outhouses?

DV: Yes. We had one outhouse that had to do for everyone. Thinking back, I wouldn't want to do it again--especially when I had to go out in the middle of the night. But that was just the way of life for many people.

I: Do you have some memories of it that were unpleasant?

DV: The smell wasn't the most pleasant. My uncle on Halloween let us play jokes. We went to the next outhouse in the neighborhood and moved it over about a foot. Here came some kids that were going to tip over that outhouse. What did they do? They fell in.

We always lived where plumbing wasn't easily available. Most of our houses didn't have plumbing, even when I was in high school.

Greenwood School Memories

I: When it came time to go to school, what was your choice?

DV: Greenwood School. All of my mother's family went to Greenwood, so naturally I wanted to go there, too. When my mother's family first moved to La Grande, she had to go to the White School in Old Town, I think, which was quite a walk.

I: Was Greenwood a two-story building originally?

DV: Yes. It was grades one through eight.

I: Most of the schools in the Union County at that time were grades one through eight, weren't they?

DV: That's correct except for Willow, which had first, second, third, and fourth--just four grades when it first started and then they added more rooms so people in that part of town didn't have to go to Greenwood, Central, or Ackerman.

They built the new Greenwood School around the old one, which they then tore down.

I've always loved school, so I was happy to go. At that time if you were six years old before November 15, you got to start school in September. But if your birthday was after that, you had to wait until January 1.

We had students half-way and then the other half. I don't know how they got them all sorted out.

I: Was a rubber hose used for discipline?

DV: Yes.

I: How frequent was this kind of severe corporal punishment at the time? Almost every day?

DV: No, not every day.

I: But often enough that everybody knew what was going on?

DV: Yes.

I: It never happened to you?

DV: Heavens no!

I: Where did the principal take the unlucky children? His office?

DV: He took the boys to the furnace room. I never heard of a girl being taken there.

I: Why there?

DV: He had more room down there, I guess.



Greenwood elementary school, 1920s
Photo courtesy of Dortha Voruz

I: It doesn't take a lot of room unless the boys ran around and he had to chase them.

DV: I don't ever remember hearing about their leaving the furnace room when they got their spankings.

I: I would have thought he could do it in his office just as well.

DV: They would be screaming and that would be too loud in the school.

I: What did the boys say when they came back from one of these episodes? I'm thinking that some boys would be extremely angry and take it out on other people. Other boys might have been extremely embarrassed and almost cringing.

DV: I never heard them say anything.

I: You said earlier that you always liked school. What particular aspects of school did you like or dislike during those early years at Greenwood?

DV: I didn't like to have to make reports before my class, though I think I was an outgoing child. They started a student-body organization in Greenwood School; Jean Burke was the first president and I was the second president.

I: Did you have to be elected by all the other students in the school?

DV: Yes. It didn't bother me to get up

before the student body and lead but to get up before my class--terrible.

I: Did this have anything to do with the way the teacher responded to you?

DV: No, I always got along with my teachers.

I: What did you look forward to when you went to school?

DV: Learning. Avery Millering and Betty Hendrickson Waite were the two smart ones in my class.

I: Smarter than you, you mean?

DV: Yes. The three of us would go to the blackboard and do spelling or arithmetic; it was the light of my life when I could beat either one of them. I didn't do that too often, but I was glad when I could. The three of us competed.

One time, when they reassigned teachers, we got some teachers from Central, who didn't like Greenwood. I don't know whether it was the kids or what. They had been teaching at Central for years and to be moved to Greenwood--in that section of town--didn't make them very happy.

I: Do you mean "that section of town" has generally had the reputation over the years of being lower class and less well-off?

DV: I guess that's right.

I: And I suppose the Central teachers may have associated behavioral problems with that class of children.

DV: It could be. They were so unhappy. I got along with them because I was taught they were teachers and you kept quiet and respected them.

The Hoyt sisters taught there. I remember they went to Florida in the summertime and came back and told us about Florida. I think that started my thinking of travel, which I have done.

I: So at least they helped to stimulate your curiosity about the world.

DV: That's right. They were wonderful teachers.

I: Do you recall doing writing activities--not penmanship but composing in writing?

DV: We had to write stories. And we had Palmer method--round, round, round, up, down, up, down.

I: Did you come out of that experience being pretty good at penmanship?

DV: Everyone said I did. After Palmer method, I wrote fairly large, and now I write smaller.

I: What other activities were offered at Greenwood at that time? Plays? Music?

DV: I started to play the violin in Greenwood.

I: Was there a music teacher who came around to the schools?

DV: Mr. Nusbaum.

I: Was that just for the children who wanted to do it and could somehow get an instrument?

DV: My dad played the violin and mandolin, so we always had a violin. When I got to high school, I was more interested in sports than music. Now I wish it had been different.

High School Experiences

I: Tell me about the transition between eighth grade at Greenwood and freshman year at La Grande High School. For one thing, you had to go a considerable distance. How did you do it?

DV: I walked every day. I never missed.

I: Did you usually go with a lot of other kids?

DV: Yes. I was the first one and picked up kids as I went along.

I: Carrying your lunch buckets?

DV: Yes.

I: What would a typical lunch be? Your mother made it, I suppose.

DV: Oh, sure. I remember being so embar-

rassed when Mama didn't have bread one day, and I had to have a biscuit. That was terrible. Everyone else had bread sandwiches and I had a biscuit.

I: There was nothing wrong with the biscuit, was there?

DV: No, it was good.

I: Was it like a sandwich? Did she cut the biscuit open and put something inside?

DV: Yes. If we had a roast, that is what would be in it. We had chickens so we had fried chicken sometimes.

I: Were lunches being served at the school at that time?

DV: No.

I: So all the kids had to bring their own lunches?

DV: Yes.

I: At that time in La Grande High School could you leave the school grounds at noon?

DV: Yes. I never did, but one time I heard some girls talking about skipping a class. So I said to myself, "I'm gonna try that." I went out under the bleachers. That's all I did. I said to myself, "This is for the birds!" So I went back. It was study hall that I skipped, not a class. I never did it again--no place to go, nothing to do but hide.

I: I'll bet that was the naughtiest thing you ever did in school.

DV: I hope so.

I: When you got to high school, you were entering what we would now call teenage years.

DV: Yes. Thirteen, fourteen.

I: Did you call yourselves teenagers, or did other people call you that?

DV: I don't remember.

I: When people use the term *teenagers* or *adolescents*, it seems to suggest a unique stage of life: early childhood, adolescence or teenage years, young adulthood, and so on. If you weren't accustomed to terms like *adolescent* or *teenager*, how would you characterize what it felt like to be at that stage in your life? I don't suppose you felt like either a child or an adult.

DV: No, I was in high school. I was a high school student and proud of it.

I: Was there anything that you thought was special about being that age?

DV: We went directly from elementary school--eighth grade--into high school, which was an entirely different type of life. We had more privileges in high school than we did elementary school.

I was interested in sports, going out for every sport that I could and generally making first string. That sounds

like bragging, but it's true. We had three or four teams and competed between classes--a tournament with freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors.

I: I'm guessing that for girls the sports might have been basketball and softball. Anything else?

DV: Also track and kick pin, which they don't play anymore. It's like baseball, with a pitcher, catcher, and first, second, and third bases. We threw a big ball.

I: Like a soccer ball?

DV: Yes, and we kicked it instead of hitting a ball with a bat.

I: You stood at home plate to kick it?

DV: Yes. And then we ran the bases to home. The person who got the ball out in the field always had to throw it to first base.

I: Throwing it overhand, not kicking it?

DV: They had to throw it. In the meantime the runner was running the bases, trying to beat the ball to home plate.

I: Why was it called kick pin?

DV: You had a pin at your base.

I: About a foot high?

DV: Yes.

I: What was the pin for?

DV: The first baseman had to catch the ball, kick the pin over, and throw to second base. The second baseman caught the ball and kicked the pin over. In the meantime, the runner tried to stay ahead of it.

I: What did kicking the pin over mean?

DV: That was just one of the rules.

I: Did somebody set it upright again for the next runner?

DV: Sure. The pin had to be up so that they could kick it over--catch the ball, kick over the pin, throw it. The runner made it home more times than not ahead of the ball.

I: Did you have innings, the way you do in baseball?

DV: Yes. I think three and you're out.

I: Was this a common game in La Grande?

DV: It was then but only in high school, as far as I know.

I: Did the boys play it?

DV: No.

I: So we've isolated a game that was unique to high school girls. Were there kick-pin tournaments among several different high schools?

DV: No. It was competition within the freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior classes. We started out with soft ball, then went into kick pin, basket-

ball, and track--so many weeks to play each one.

I: What track events were you engaged in?

DV: I wasn't a very good runner, but I was good at throwing so I did the basketball and softball throws, as well as broad jump.

I: Were those track events?

DV: Yes.

I: Was the ball the girls' version of throwing the javelin?

DV: It could have been.

I: Did you do hurdles?

DV: Not I.

I: But some girls did hurdles?

DV: Yes, some did.

I: Tell me about the basketball playing.

DV: I loved basketball.

I: Was that your best sport?

DV: I went hog-wild for all sports.

I: Where did you play basketball?

DV: For the boys the school district rented the LDS [i.e., Latter Day Saints, or Mormon] gymnasium [formerly at 4th Street and N Avenue]. The girls used the gymnasium in the high school; it was very small and downstairs, with bleachers on each side. The seniors sat on one side, the juniors on the other. There were balconies, with freshmen in one and sophomores in the other.

I: Why do you think it was divided up that way?

DV: So we'd each have a place to call our own. There was no particular reason.

I: At that time there wasn't as much emphasis on equal opportunity as now, especially in athletics, for boys and girls. So you always sort of had the left-overs as far as space and audience were concerned?

DV: That's right. But we never felt that way. I was glad we had a place to play.

I: Did you have a female coach?

DV: Yes, believe it or not. Our P.E. teacher was in charge of everything and selected girls to be the head of each sport.

I: Describe the uniforms you wore.

DV: We didn't have anything in particular.

I: Did you use street clothes?

DV: No. I had a one-piece that came down to the upper part of my thigh, and I rolled it up--like bloomers with rubber around the bottom.

I: Had you bought it?

DV: Yes. It was not the school's. You had to have money to buy it.

I: And if you didn't, you didn't play?

DV: You wore what you had.

I: So everybody wore something a little different?

DV: That's right.

I: But did all the girls wear bloomers of some kind?

DV: I think some of them wore shorts. And I don't even know where I got my outfit. I was lucky to have it.

I: Did you have the money, or did your parents give you the money to buy such things?

DV: If I needed it. Where my mother got the money I have no idea. If I needed it, I would mention it to her and she saw that I got it.

My whole family loved sports. My father was a pitcher for the Eagles club. I was the first one in the family who loved sports. Not only did I play, but I was a leader. Then my brother Norman came along, four years younger than I, and he was very good in sports. When I was eighteen years old, I had a little brother, who was athletic all the way. I know he got the merit trophy for outstanding athlete for the senior class. My son, who is just five years younger than my little brother, wanted that trophy, too--and got it. So our whole family was interested in sports.

I: You were in high school from 1933 to 1937, weren't you?

DV: Yes.

I: From your point of view at the time, the years you were in high school, was athletic activity a major interest of many people around here?

DV: It certainly was mine and for the girls I ran around with. We had baseball teams in the summertime made up of young people from La Grande. Which brings to mind that we didn't go many places when I was young. We went up to the park just beyond Meacham--Emigrant Springs [approximately twenty-five miles northwest of La Grande]. My dad went up there with my family and he pitched. I was excited because I had been "all over Oregon" and that's as far as I went. I didn't travel much when I was little. When I was a senior in high school, I had a very dear friend who was president of Girls' League; we went to Yakima, and I thought I had been all over the United States. My traveling was limited when I was young.

I: And you weren't alone in that, were you?

DV: Of course not.

I: It was normal not to travel much.

DV: We only had one car, and my dad took it.

I: And not a lot of money to spend on trips.

DV: In order to get gas or anything, no. But I was never aware that we were poor. I know that now. I was just glad for anything I got to do.

The Bowling Alley

- I: Some people bowled at that time, didn't they?
- DV: We had one bowling alley. When I started going down to bowl and if my dad had known that I was going down in that "hole," he would have curled up.
- I: Too many bad influences, you mean?
- DV: When I was growing up, I thought it was a den of inequity.
- I: You mean beer and lascivious behavior? Smoking?
- DV: Oh, yes. Young people who did whatever they wanted.
- I: Where was this hole?



Young women's bowling team at a basement-level alley below West Jacobsen Building on Adams Avenue, 1940s (Dortha second from right; sign reads "Zimmerman's"), ca. 1952

Photo courtesy of Dortha Voruz

- DV: It was across from Bohnenkamps [corner of Adams Avenue and Elm Street]; there's a little restaurant there now. You had to go down some steps into the bowling alley, which had four lanes.
- I: Did you go down there despite your father's cautions?
- DV: When I went down there, I went on my own; by that time my father had left the family.
- I: Could you describe a little more of what it looked like there? I know what bowling alleys look like, but this might have had some distinctive features.
- DV: They had a pool table down there. I never tried to shoot pool. I went for bowling.
- I: What kind of characters did you see there?
- DV: I never did see anything out of the ordinary there. The Shepards owned the bowling alley at that time. They were a lovely, young people. I'd heard a lot about it before we started going down there, but I never saw it. Maybe I didn't know what to look for.
- I: At that time bowling alleys didn't have automatic pin setters. How did the pins get set?
- DV: Boys down at the end. After you threw the second ball, the boys set them up. They had a little something to go by.
- I: A little wooden or metal triangular frame?

DV: Metal, I think.

I: Were there some other girls who bowled, too?

DV: Oh, yes! I had friends. I'm thinking now of when I came back in '52. In high school I don't remember bowling much. I was so involved in the sports in high school I didn't have outside activities.

School Dress Codes

I: At that time how did teachers dress typically?

DV: They didn't come in slacks or jeans.

I: What did they come in?

DV: Dresses for the women; most of the men wore suits.

I: What effect do you think that had on students?

DV: It was a good example for all of us.

I: Of what?

DV: When you saw teachers, you knew that they were smart; they just looked it in their clothes.

I: Their clothes were different from what most students wore?

DV: The girls never wore slacks or jeans; we wore dresses.

I: Then you looked rather like the female teachers, didn't you?

DV: Right.

I: Was it the men's clothing that was different from what the boys in the school wore, giving them more of a feeling of authority?

DV: I don't know that. But the boys always wore pants.

I: They didn't wear their farm overalls?

DV: Oh, no. In the wintertime we had to walk to school, so we could wear slacks under our dresses and, when we got to school, take them off. That was what we were supposed to do.

I: Was there ever any need, as far as you can remember, of sending home someone who dressed improperly?

DV: I don't know of anyone who had to go home. We had a standard and we followed it. I don't know what would have happened if we didn't.

Attitudes toward Administrators

I: What was the attitude among most students toward the principal and maybe toward the superintendent? Did you ever see these men often?

DV: We saw the principal all the time but not the superintendent.

I: Did the superintendent have his office in the high school building?

DV: Yes. It was on the basement floor of the high school.

I: What would other kids sometimes say

about the principal? I don't mean about the principal's personality but his role or influence.

DV: The kids respected the principal. Whenever he said something to you, you took it to heart. Whatever he asked you to do you did.

I: Do you think the principal was involved in disciplinary matters?

DV: Yes.

I: By the time the kids got into high school, what were the disciplinary measures that the principal might hand out?

DV: About the only thing I can think of was to make up time after school. When I was a secretary in the high school, school was out at 3:00. When the teachers left the building, they brought students down to my office. I had to baby-sit them because the teacher either had other obligations or wasn't around. There could also be detentions in the study hall after school ended.

I: There was a room called a study hall?

DV: Yes. It was a big one.

I: Presumably, if you had one period a day when you weren't taking a subject, that's where you went. You studied there?

DV: That's right.

I: How about a school nurse or someone in the building who could handle emergency illnesses or perhaps provide in-

formation about health matters to students? Was there such a person at La Grande High School?

DV: I remember having a nurse at elementary school, though not every day.

I: At the high school was there a nurse's office?

DV: No. I don't remember one. The P.E. teachers took care of a lot of these problems.

Sex Education

I: Was there any opportunity while you were at La Grande High School for learning about sex?

DV: Oh, heavens no. That was a subject you didn't think about, let alone talk about.

I: You mean **supposedly** you didn't think about it?

DV: Right. I wouldn't know what the boys talked about, but we girls didn't.

I: Did you take a biology course? Was it included in there?

DV: Not sex as such.

I: Did you study the reproductive processes of plants?

DV: Yes.

I: Cats?

DV: No. In biology our teachers talked very little about animal reproduction.

I: If not cats or other four-legged animals, then probably not humans. So was sex taboo--both talking about it and doing it?

DV: Yes, when I was growing up. Those I ran around with never talked about things like that. I don't know what the others talked about.

I: Can you explain why that subject was so secretive?

DV: I have no idea. We just never talked about it. We knew about what was going on, but we never talked about it. Or I never did.

I: I suppose at the time the only possible means of exposure to sexual activities other than what someone accidentally witnessed now and then would have been some of the magazines like *True Story* or *True Romance*.

DV: We had those.

I: Maybe some pornographic books that were passed around?

DV: I would never have known anything about those. *McCall's* was another magazine that I would look at.

I: *McCall's* wasn't very racy.

DV: No.

I: But *True Story* was being published at that time, I'm pretty sure, and that's where you could come close to fairly explicit talk about sex.

DV: It gave you some information, right. I didn't have time to read things like that.

I: There were at least three theatres going in La Grande then, weren't there? But the movies in the 1930s were pretty well censored.

DV: Right.

I: If there were married people in their bedroom, they were always in twin beds--and probably had one foot on the floor.

DV: That's about right. You didn't see anything.

I: As you look back on those conditions, so far as facts of life are concerned, do you regard that as a benefit to your growing up? Or is there any sort of downside to it?

DV: I don't remember regretting anything that I grew up with. If they told me something, I accepted it as true. I never questioned them. They were adults, and they knew more about it than I did--right or wrong.

Winter Sports: Skiing

I: What about skiing? There was certainly some skiing going on during that period at Tollgate, for example. Was that something you participated in or knew anything about?

DV: I didn't have skis, in the first place. I only went once, when I was in the eighth grade. We had a contest be-

tween the boys and the girls. The boys lost, so they furnished the refreshments and we went skiing.

I: Was this skiing down hills in La Grande?

DV: Up on Table Mountain [in western part of La Grande].

I: Did you go up through Deal Canyon or Mill Canyon?

DV: Mill Canyon [now Morgan Lake Road], back of where the hospital is and toward Table Mountain.

I: What kind of skis did you use? Were they wood?

DV: Yes. I ran into a tree and that was the end of skiing for me. I didn't get hurt, but I knew I wasn't a skier.

I: Did you have any instruction and or practice?

DV: No, I had nothing.

Editing a School Newspaper and Taking Game Tickets

I: When you were a junior and senior in high school, you were the editor of *Tiger Highlights*. Was that the school newspaper?

DV: Yes.

I: Can you remember some of the responsibilities you had?

DV: One boy in my class liked to write

editorials and I didn't, so I gave him that privilege. I wrote about the different activities that had occurred.

I: You mean school activities that needed to be reported?

DV: Yes. When those came in, it was my responsibility to see that I had enough material. We had many reporters.

I: Did you have to check all the articles for clarity and correctness?

DV: I read them, but I don't know if I ever corrected many of them.

I: Were there lots of errors that got published then?

DV: I wouldn't be surprised, but I hope not too many.

I: Did that affect your pride in your job?

DV: No. I also got the job for my senior year, so evidently someone liked what I did.

I: Was this a weekly or monthly paper?

DV: Monthly. I remember one time we worked in the evening after school, and the janitor had locked the outside doors. We tried the study hall, and the teacher had forgotten to lock the outside door. Since it was on the first floor, we unlocked one of the windows and crawled out. Of course, we called the principal, who immediately came to see that all doors and windows were secured.

I: Over the two years what reactions did you get to the newspaper?

DV: I never had any bad reports, at least to me personally.

I: Why did you think it was worth spending your time on?

DV: I don't know. I never gave it a thought. I was glad to be the editor and did my best both years.

I: How did you duplicate it? At a downtown print shop?

DV: I believe *The Observer* printed it.

I: How did you manage circulation?

DV: It went out with *The Observer*.

I: Isn't that unusual for a high school newspaper?

DV: That's the only way we had of getting it out.

I: Did you have to think about the budget?

DV: No.

I: Often that's a responsibility of editors. Did you try to get advertising to help pay for it?

DV: We had advertising, yes, but the business manager was the one who got the people to subscribe.

I: How difficult was it to get other students to help with it?

DV: I don't recall that it was difficult. We always had people who were willing to write for us.

I: I suppose you made sure that there was plenty of coverage of athletics.

DV: Oh, sure.

I: Were you tempted to write some of those articles yourself?

DV: I don't recall that I did, but by the time I got all the articles out and back, I didn't have time to do a lot of writing myself.

I: Did the editorial writer discuss the subjects with you before he wrote about them?

DV: No.

I: Did he ever express opinions in an editorial that you disagreed with? Or did he write about very bland subjects--nothing controversial?

DV: He was so good I didn't pay that much attention.

I: You mentioned that, when you were a senior, you were a part of the student police. What did that involve?

DV: The student police went to all the games and took the tickets, but we didn't police anything.

I: Why would you want to do that when you were so busy with other things?

DV: That was in the evenings, and I wanted to go to the games.

Secretary in a Doctor's Office

- I: Shortly after you graduated you were working in the office for two doctors. Why did you try to do that kind of work?
- DV: I had a girlfriend who worked at Dr. Moore's office and who was quitting to go someplace else.
- I: What was the nature of your work?
- DV: I was at the reception desk, keeping track of people who came in.
- I: You didn't have any connection with the doctor's actual work?
- DV: No. It was entirely secretarial work.
- I: Was there an office nurse--someone who helped the doctor?
- DV: Dr. Moore's wife worked there, but she wasn't a nurse.
- I: This was your first paid office job?
- DV: I got a dollar a day.
- I: What sorts of office skills did you acquire during that time?
- DV: Typing, of course, and meeting people.
- I: Which you learned in high school, along with shorthand and bookkeeping?
- DV: Right.
- I: You did transcriptions. That brought you fairly close to what was going on in the doctor's practice, didn't it?

- DV: Yes.
- I: Did he dictate?
- DV: No.
- I: Write out in longhand?
- DV: Right. Then I typed it up for him.
- I: When you said you worked five-and-a-half days a week, I suppose that means Saturday mornings. Was it common at the time to have most offices open five-and-a-half days a week?
- DV: I think so.
- I: Montgomery Ward and Penney's and other stores were open all day Saturday, weren't they? That was probably the biggest shopping day of the week for many of them.
- DV: Right.
- I: And it was eight to five everyday? An hour off for lunch?
- DV: Yes.

From a Doctor's Office to the High School Office

- I: You didn't stay at the doctor's office for very long, did you?
- DV: No.
- I: Tell me about your next job.
- DV: It began a year after I graduated in 1937. Lois Robertson was the secretary at the high school when the secre-

tary in the superintendent's office was going to take a six-month leave of absence. So Lois went from the high school job to the superintendent's job, and they needed someone in the high school. Lois was going with Bob Webb, who lived across the street from me; she came and talked to me about the job. That's how I got it.

I: Your duties would have been considerably more numerous and difficult in the high school than at the doctor's office.

DV: Yes. I had so many more duties, and I had students in there working for me. As I recall, I made about \$57.50 a month at the high school, working five-and-a-half days a week. I had to go back on Saturday to get out the bulletin for the next week. That was my main job. I typed it and ran it off with the mimeograph. The sheets would fly off the machine, and I had to go pick them up.

I: Was this a one-page bulletin usually?

DV: It was whatever the principal wanted but mostly one page.

I: What were two or three of the main duties you had on the other days of the week?

DV: Waiting on teachers and students who came in. Even though I can't even fix anything at home, whenever a teacher needed something fixed, she always brought it to me and I had to fix it. Also, the teachers brought their test material in for me to type up and run for them.

I: What did the teachers call you?

DV: Dortha.

I: You looked like a student, didn't you?

DV: I was almost.

I: Just a few months before you'd been a senior there. And they all knew you. Did any of them ever call you Miss West?

DV: No.

I: I should think that, in the more dignified environment schools had then, calling employees by their last names, plus Mr., Miss, Mrs., would have been customary. Did you ever call the principal Bob or Joe or whatever his name was?

DV: No way. I called him *Mister*.

I: But he called you *Dortha*?

DV: Yes. I remember one boy calling me Miss West. This boy either had to do school work or make up time by sitting, and he was from Perry [six miles northwest of La Grande].

I: This was some form of punishment, I suppose.

DV: Right. This boy missed his bus because he had to stay until 5:00 p.m.

I: In 1938 or several years after that?

DV: 1938 or one of the three years I worked at the high school. This boy had missed his bus and it was storming

outside; I just couldn't stand to see him sitting there, knowing he was going to have to walk to Perry. So I said, "Ed, gather up your things and you go home." It wasn't 5:00 yet, and he was supposed to stay in my office till 5:00. When he went out the door, he called me *Miss West*. He said, "Oh, Miss West, I'll think of you tonight when I'm milking my cow."

I: In that case you were disobeying a rule?

DV: That's right.

I: You were putting your job at risk, I suppose. What would you have said if the principal or some other person at the school had called you on it, saying, "Why did you do that?"

DV: I would've told them, "Because of the weather and he was going to have to walk about four miles to get home."

I: And then suppose that person had said, "But that case was not yours to judge. You should not have done that."

DV: I would've stood there and taken it

because that person would've been right. I had no right to let him go early.

Another thing on the school: if you got married, I guess you could finish out that year, but then you couldn't work for the school district because you were married, unless you were head of a household.

I: Do you assume that rule was made primarily because the relatively few available jobs were going to the people most likely to need the money? Wasn't the assumption that married women didn't need to make any extra money?

DV: Right. They had a husband to take care of them. But when World War II came along, they were just lucky to have a warm body in the chair. So that changed everything. Then the women teachers could marry and still work.

I: This job as secretary at the high school was really your first opportunity to look at schools from an adult perspective and to begin, perhaps, to understand how schools are set up and what the relationships are among school districts. Is that true?



Former La Grande High School building (now demolished), where Dortha worked as a secretary for many years
Photo courtesy of John Turner and Richard Hermens

DV: Yes.

Secretary to the Superintendent

I: In 1941 you became secretary to the Superintendent of Schools and the Board of Education.

DV: Right.

I: Was that because that position had become vacant and you were right there ready to fill it?

DV: I told you that the secretary for the superintendent was taking a six-month leave, and Lois, who was in the high school, took over for her. The lady who took the six-month leave never returned, so Lois stayed in the superintendent's office and I continued in the high school. Then Lois got married, left town, and that's when I moved to the superintendent's office.

I: How was that job different from the high school secretary job?

DV: In the high school I was interrupted by students and teachers. In the superintendent's office it was entirely different. I dealt mainly with patrons and administrators.

I: You were also aware of the board meetings and, through the superintendent's communications, of what was going on in the La Grande school system, weren't you?

DV: Yes. I had to attend all the board meetings of the school system.

I: Were budget problems severe then?

DV: Always. Budget was always high priority.

I: What would the superintendent say about the budget problems?

DV: He had his fingers on the problem, and each school didn't spend beyond what the superintendent thought they should. Directors, too, would have just so much money to run their departments.

I: What were the sources of the money for the budget?

DV: From the people. Taxes.

I: Were there special levies?

DV: Yes, for different things.

I: And what sort of process would the superintendent and the principals go through to decide when there should be a special levy and for how much?

DV: When they ran out of money.

I: Which was how often? Every year?

DV: No. They kept a tight rein on their spending.

I: What would cause them to run out of money if they had all the budget established at the beginning of each school year? Some unexpected expenses?

DV: Yes, but I can't think of any right now.

I: Maybe some damage to buildings that would have caused additional expenditures?

DV: Yes. Right.

I: But probably not for instruction.

DV: No. The thing that always amazed me was that, when they were talking budget, maintenance was low priority.

I: Yes. That's distressing.

DV: All of a sudden things started falling down, and then they had to come out with it. But maintenance was always the last thing.

I: Where were they shortchanging maintenance? Janitorial services? Or do you mean things like fixing water drains and painting outside?

DV: Things that were wearing out inside didn't get fixed until they had to be fixed. Painting would also be one thing that was low priority.

I: Do you remember teachers' complaining about low salaries?

DV: No. Nothing like they are now.

I: Maybe they just kept it to themselves more. They didn't have a union then, did they?

DV: No. Most of them were glad just to have a job, as all of us were.

I: Were there any times when the superintendent needed to call a teacher in for some kind of disciplinary action for misbehavior or incompetence?

DV: I suppose they did.

I: They kept it from you if they did?

DV: Yes. They had to go by my desk into the superintendent's office and they closed the door.

I: Did you have the impression at the time that everything in La Grande schools was, as we might have said then, hunky-dory?

DV: Just the best that it could be with what we had.

I: Do you recall anything about relationships with the local newspaper as far as school matters were concerned? Did you ever get reporters from *The Observer* up to the superintendent's office? Did reporters cover school board meetings?

DV: Very seldom, but they were welcome.

I: Do you think most people in La Grande were seemingly satisfied with what was going on in schools and maybe thought it was none of their business to come and complain about anything?

DV: No, I think they knew they could come if they had something to talk about. The superintendent's door was always open, though sometimes it closed after they got in there.

I: How many superintendents did you work for?

DV: Fred Patten was the first one. I dearly loved him. I think I worked for eight superintendents.

One-room Schools and School Records

I: At that time, what knowledge did you have about one-room schools in Union County?

DV: I didn't have much.

I: How would you get any sort of information about what was going on in one-room schools?

DV: I used to go out and visit my grandparents on Pumpkin Ridge; they took me to the school programs. That's all I knew about them. I don't believe I ever visited a one-room school.

I: Were you hearing stories about what it was like to be in a one-room school?

DV: I probably did, but I don't recall any.

I: The one-room schools were closing in rather large numbers in the 1940s and '50s. Is that right?

DV: Yes, in the '50s.

I: I suppose whatever records they generated--minutes of meetings, budget, and the rest--they kept in their buildings. Had there been any effort at all to collect those records before each school went out of existence?

DV: Not to my knowledge. Whenever a school district closed, students came to La Grande schools, and the records were given to La Grande. Some of them kept better records than others.

I: Did they bring them in cardboard boxes in no particular order?

DV: I don't know. We didn't do too much with them. We wrote on the box the name of the school district and put them in the vault.

I: Did anybody in the La Grande School District have any reason to look at them when they came in?

DV: I don't think so. I don't recall having to go get them.

I: Was it your understanding that the records came into the La Grande School District because there was a law to that effect?

DV: I don't know whether there was a law, but La Grande High School had a vault; on the right, just inside the front door was the superintendent's office and the vault was across the hall. It was quite large and that's where the La Grande school records were kept. Whenever we got anything from any of the school districts, we put them in there.

I: Was that your job?

DV: Yes.

I: Did you look through them at the time?

DV: No. Then we put them all on tape [i.e., microfilm].

I: Had other records been put on microfilm?

DV: I think all of the La Grande High School records were put on micro-film--school board minutes and things of that nature.

I: To save space?

DV: That's right.

I: So as soon as they were put on micro-film, the originals were destroyed?

DV: Sometimes some members who had been very prominent on the particular school board could come get them if they wanted them. All records were reviewed, and, if they had anything that should not be published, it was removed.

I: I get the impression that nobody had any very strong sense of the historical value of these records. What was your responsibility in relation to the micro-filming?

DV: Putting them on.

I: You mean you had to operate the machine?

DV: Yes. We put them all on.

I: That's tedious work.

DV: Yes.

I: How long did it take? Months?

DV: Thereabouts. A former teacher, Mary Lou Gayman, helped me.

I: Did the administrators explain to you why you were doing this?

DV: No. I just knew that we were preserving the records of the various school districts. Every five miles there had to be a school in Union County. So we had a lot. We had about two pages of names of school districts, but we did not get all of the records. When a lot of the schools closed, kids went to Union and Cove.

I: So they sent their records to whichever school the kids were going to?

DV: I would assume. I never heard that the county tried to preserve anything, but I don't know. E. A. Sayre was the county school superintendent for years and years and years.

I: Did you have any dealings with him?

DV: If he came in the office, I answered his questions and got what he needed. He was knowledgeable about the county.

I: Do you have any thoughts now about how those records that you put on microfilm might best be used?

DV: Just the books of minutes would give so much information.

Marriage and War

DV: In 1942 I got married to Herb Voruz.

I: Tell me who Herb Voruz was.

DV: He was a La Grande boy.

I: Had you known him throughout your earlier teen years?

DV: No. He belonged to the Baptist Church and we met there After I graduated from high school.

I: Was considerably older than you?

DV: Three years.

I: Why wouldn't you have known him in La Grande then before you married him?

DV: Our paths didn't cross.

I: Wasn't he at the La Grande High School when you were? Or was he was old enough so you didn't have anything to do with him?

DV: He was a senior, and I was a freshman.

I: What do you know about his background--why his parents came here and what they did?

DV: The Voruzes came here from Switzerland. Mr. Voruz was a railroader, working in an office where there were a lot of smokers, and he didn't smoke. So he went out and did switching in the yards to get away from the smoke. I remember walking across the railroad tracks on Fir Street and seeing Pop way down there with his lantern. He always waved.

After high school, I started to go to the Baptist Church. Herb's Sunday School class sat in the choir pews, and my Sunday School class was in the back of the sanctuary. He told me later that, when he saw me, he made up his mind he was going to marry me. I didn't know that until it was all over. We went together four years before we were married.

I: Where was he working after high school?

DV: He went to Eastern Oregon College, and during the summer he worked for the railroad.



Wedding photo for Dortha and Herb Voruz, 1942
Photo courtesy of Dortha Voruz



Major Herb Voruz, crew member of a bomber which crashed during the Korean War, killing all aboard

Photo courtesy of Dortha Voruz

I: To be a teacher?

DV: He just went for sports, really. After he got his degree, he transferred to Pacific University; then when the war came along, he joined the Air Force.

I: You were married shortly after the United States declared war on Japan and entered the war with Germany. Was he drafted?

DV: No. He enlisted because he had a low draft number and he knew he'd be one of the first ones to go; he wanted to select what he wanted to do so he enlisted in the Air Force.

I: What else were you hearing or learning about the war at that period? Were you reading reports in *The Observer* or possibly *The Oregonian* or the *Oregon Journal*?

DV: *The Observer*. But I didn't have much time to read the paper.

I: Were you just getting fragmentary reports about the war then?

DV: Right.

I: Were you worried?

DV: No. I don't remember being worried.

I: Was the war topic of conversation around town?

DV: It could've been, but not where I was in the church.

I: Did you listen to graphic accounts of Pearl Harbor on the radio?

DV: Right. And that's all.

I: They didn't impress you very deeply?

DV: I don't know that they impressed me enough to really understand what it meant to us. When you're younger, you just take it and you really don't worry too much about it. You think, "Well, there's not much I can do about it."

I: Were you getting a sense in La Grande that people were paying attention to the war and its consequences?

DV: Yes. More young people were being drafted. The war was touching more lives.

I: Was there anything visible around La Grande connected with the war, like rationing--getting coupons to purchase just about anything?

DV: Sugar would be about the only thing. I don't ever remember running out of anything. I always had enough coupons.

Soroptimist Activities

I: Tell me about the Soroptimist group that you've been involved with for how many years? Forty?

DV: Yes. A long time.

I: This is a national organization, but you were principally involved with the local group, right?

DV: La Grande.

I: Is there more than one Soroptimist group in Union County or has there been?

DV: No, but Baker City and Wallowa Valley have clubs.

I: Tell me about your experience with it.

DV: [reading a document] “Mr. Stuart Morrow, an enthusiastic professional organizer of men’s clubs, stopped in the office of the Parker-Goddard Secretarial School in Oakland, California. To his surprise he found not a man but a woman sitting behind the desk. Mrs. Goddard said she would be interested only if he were organizing classified service clubs for women. The seed thus planted, it was on October 3, 1921 when eight executives and professional women formed the first Soroptimist Club. In 1927 the clubs decided they wanted to obtain full control, so they convinced Stuart Morrow to sell all the rights, titles, and interests in the name Soroptimist. The word *Soroptimist* is formed from two Latin words, *soros* meaning sister and *optima* meaning the best. Literally translated it means the best for women.

“Soroptimist clubs are organized to provide and promote community, area, region, federation, and international programs.”

The La Grande Soroptimist Club was chartered by the Baker City Club on October 16, 1941 with twenty-one members. At that time the clubs in eastern Oregon were in the Oregon District Number 2. It was my privilege to serve as secretary of District 2 one term. Since Oregon had so many

clubs and eastern Washington had less than Oregon, it was decided that the clubs in eastern Oregon would be transferred to eastern Washington. That was a hard pill for us to take. We fought it, but we didn’t win. Of course, this included the La Grande club.

It was my privilege to serve as District Number 3 director for two years. The director was to visit every club in her district at least once during the two years. The club has changed meeting places from time to time but always met during the noon hour at various restaurants, members’ homes, or the Triangle Park. Can you imagine holding a business meeting in the Triangle Park? That’s where the credit union building is [corner of 4th and Depot streets]. They brought sack lunches and held their meetings outside.

I: Was that because many of the members worked downtown?

DV: Yes. Most of them did. I’ve always wondered how one could conduct a business meeting with cars and people coming by. We also met in the Sacajawea coffee shop [in former Sacajawea Hotel on Adams Avenue, now demolished] for many years; that’s where we were meeting when I joined.

The oldest and the best known fund raiser is the Soroptimist Annual June Breakfast. Have you ever been to that?

I: Yes.

DV: It’s held at the Riverside Park pavilion.

I: When did that start, do you think?

DV: The breakfast was started in 1942. At first we had it in the last of May, when it is often windy. Everyone was seated in there, and we didn't have anything to stop the wind from whistling through. But people came regardless --staying only long enough to eat. The rest of us had to work so we were there four hours, at least. Since then we've changed it to the first week in June when we have better weather.

I: Has the menu always been pretty much the same [scrambled eggs, ham or sausage, pancakes, fruit juice, and coffee]?

DV: Yes.

I: Is this a tradition in other Soroptimist clubs or is it unique to La Grande?

DV: It's unique to La Grande. Each club does its own thing.

I: And it's primarily to make money for club projects?

DV: Yes. Some of the activities we do include supporting the Salvation Army, the Academic Excellence Program at the middle school, American Red Cross, Shelter from the Storm [a support center for battered women], the Union County Children's Choir, scholarships, Youth Citizen Scholarship, and training awards especially for college students who need money to continue their education. And, of course, we support the International Program. I'm a firm believer in that because it supports literacy programs in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Philippines.

Another major fundraiser now is our Festival of Trees [i.e., auction of elaborately decorated Christmas trees]. We haven't done that too long, but it's a good money-maker for us.

I: Say a little more about the working side of the pancake breakfast.

DV: When we started, we had to cook outside, and we had to carry water.

I: That building originally had no cooking facilities within?

DV: That's correct. I never did hear any of them gripe or complain because people liked it and they appreciated it. We have made improvements at the Riverside Park pavilion. The first one was the fireplace. The chimney didn't work so that we couldn't start a fire in it. We had that fixed. Then we purchased a new stove for the kitchen so we could cook our pancakes inside.

The Soroptimists do most of the work. with some men helping with coffee makers and washing dishes.

I: Am I correct in thinking that all the members are women who have employment in some job?

DV: That's how you get there. You have to be employed. It used to be, when it first started, that not only were you employed but you were the owner or head of a business.

I: Why do you think Soroptimist had that kind of restriction on membership?

DV: That's just how it started with Morrow and Mrs. Goddard.

I: Was there something in the charter or the constitution that stated that as a requirement of membership?

DV: At one time, yes. When I went in, I was the head secretary of the La Grande Public Schools.

I: Some members are professional women, aren't they? What do you think are the benefits to members as far as their jobs are concerned? I've always wondered why women who are so busy in those jobs and probably have families to take care of would want to put the amount of time that I believe they must into Soroptimist activities. They must be getting some benefit.

DV: There's no financial benefit, of course. I think when the community knows you are a Soroptimist they look up to you. They have relaxed some of the requirements for Soroptimist membership. At one time if you had a business and you had a friend who also had a business of the same type, only one of you could belong and hold office. So they limited the membership, but they don't do that anymore.

I: Could it be that they wanted people to think they had selected the best person from each business field?

DV: That's a good way of putting it.

I: Would you say that over the years most of the women who have been

Soroptimist members have done about the same amount of work on Soroptimist projects?

DV: They should, but like any other organization, you have very good workers and some who are proud to be a Soroptimist but don't have the time for all the extra work.

I: Can you be asked to leave as a member if you don't participate?

DV: At one time if you missed so many meetings, they could ask you to resign.

I: I think Rotary Club does something like that or has.

DV: The Soroptimist Club is based on the Rotary. If I remember correctly, Morrow started the Rotary. [fact correction by Dorothy Fleshman: Paul Harris started Rotary in Chicago.]

I: Now, of course, Rotary Club admits women. So what will it take to get the Soroptimist to admit men? Change the name?

DV: No, they can admit men. You have to be invited to belong, and a lot of clubs don't invite men to belong, La Grande being one.

I: Might Soroptimists find, in addition to other benefits, something they need from the professional companionship of other women?

DV: That's right. It's only been the last several years that men have joined. As I say, you have to be asked to join,

and, if no one in your club asks a man, then he can't join.

Knife and Fork Club

I: Have you also been a member of the La Grande Knife and Fork Club?

DV: The La Grande Knife and Fork was chartered October 27, 1947; I joined in 1962. The La Grande club elects a board from its members. Then the International Knife and Fork sends a list of speakers who would be able to come or would like to come to this area to speak at a Knife and Fork meeting.

I: Would you say that the membership of Knife and Fork has been a cross-section of La Grande people?

DV: Yes, very much so.

I: Has it always has been?

DV: Yes.

I: Why do you think people want to join Knife and Fork? I'm sure there are many reasons; they probably vary quite a lot among individuals, especially since it's a cross-section of the community.

DV: I'll tell you why I like it. You go to the meetings and you don't have a place you have to sit. You can sit with people you want to talk to and become acquainted with.

I: Why did they choose that name?

DV: Well, you go and eat. You always have your meal.

I: Why not Knife, Fork, and Spoon Club?

DV: I never thought of it that way. Each speaker is paid, most of the time, about \$2,000--some less and some a little more. The International gives us the cost for each speaker to come here.

I: They have an annually updated list?

DV: Yes, they do.

I: When the board looks over a list, I suppose they select all the speakers for the next year at one time.

DV: That's correct.

I: How many speakers do you have each year? Five?

DV: We used to have five. We're lucky to have four. Regulations from International say that you can select one person from your community if they send five.

I: Is there an annual assessment of each member? Is that how you make up your budget?

DV: Right now we pay \$15 for each meeting; the dinner is probably \$12.50 and the rest goes into our kitty.

I: You'd have to have a lot of members to get five speakers at \$2,000 each.

DV: That is correct.

I: Is there an additional payment that people make beyond the fee at each meeting?

DV: Yes. We have dues.

I: The Knife and Fork Club reminds me of an activity that I know went on in Union County and in a lot of other places too. It was called Chautauqua. Riverside Park, where Soroptimists have the annual pancake breakfast, was the location for it. People traveled from all around, bringing their tents and staying there for a week to listen to speakers on various subjects.

DV: I went to those. To my knowledge we have only had one speaker from La Grande: Professor Bert Wells from the college, who was also connected with KLBM radio station. He was on the International list of speakers.

I: Is there any special reason that the Knife and Fork club would want to meet at the Elks Club?

DV: Because of the space. We used to have a lot more members than we do now.

I: Several hundred?

DV: Yes.

I: Are most of the members, as we say, getting on?

DV: That is correct. And it's hard to get the younger people in, not only with Knife and Fork but with a lot of organizations.

I: Does it seem that Knife and Fork is going to die soon?

DV: If we don't get more members. We are hanging in there, but who knows what's going to happen.

La Grande Chamber of Commerce

I: Have you been involved in other community organizations?

DV: I am a member of the La Grande Chamber of Commerce, but I don't have a business so I'm an associate member. While I was a regular member, I served as an ambassador, letting people know what the organizations are all about. Whenever someone needed help in putting on a program or needed decorations, they called the ambassadors and we'd do what we could. It made me active with the community.

I: You thought it would be fun to do those things?

DV: Absolutely. It was my privilege to serve as an ambassador. We were very busy taking tickets at various activities held in La Grande. We were present at the ribbon cutting for new businesses and helped at the registration table of many events. A lot of times the organization didn't have helpers to do these things; we were there to do them. The ambassadors were greeters at functions such as the Chamber banquet and the Farmers-Merchants banquet. We helped decorate and welcomed people as they came. We made

decorations for the community Christmas tree. We participated in many parades--that was fun--and were available to help with events if needed.

The event I really enjoyed was serving members of the Cycle Oregon [a long summertime bicycle trip involving hundreds of cyclists] when they came through. One time we went up to Hells Canyon [100+ miles northeast of La Grande] and served lunch up there for the cyclists. They said that was one of the toughest travels they'd ever had. But they were so appreciative; they didn't have to pay for their lunch or anything; the food had to have come from the Chamber.

- I: What do you think, over the years, are the most important contributions the Chamber has made to Union County?
- DV: The Chamber lets everyone in the community and around us know about La Grande and Union County.
- I: Would you say that the La Grande Chamber of Commerce has been very successful in promoting business activity?
- DV: If you look at the downtown, it needs more. Nevertheless, I feel privileged to have lived here, both for the lovely terrain and the people I've enjoyed working with.

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