

**CLIFFORD WOODSELL**

**April 22, 2005**

Interviewed by John Turner

Transcribed by Ryan Shearer

Transcription revised by Paula Helten (03/02/2012)

[audio begins]

I: Okay, I'm talking with Cliff Woodsell, and this is April the 22nd, 2005.  
Now Cliff, your full name?

CW: Clifford Woodsell.

I: And your birth date?

CW: Is two - seventeen - twenty-nine. [2/17/29].

I: And approximately when did your family come to the valley and--?

CW: Some time-- some place in the 1800's. Some place in the late 1800's.  
'Course I don't remember that, but of course had a long stretch of  
Doon Woodsell was my great-great granddad, and he was the one that  
came to the valley. And that's where the Woodells got started was  
from him.

I: And the name Woodsell Lane.

CW: And Woodsell Lane was after that because all the Woodells lived down  
that particular lane. And my folks, they owned a ranch out there for  
several years. And-- and then I had a couple of uncles and cousins  
that owned ranches down there. And there's still a couple still  
available out there that still they live on. And-- but most of 'em, they  
lost a lot of property during the Depression, and my folks happened to  
be one of those unfortunate ones that lost their property but through  
several reasons that they did. But they did. They had their-- they lost  
the property and moved to La Grande, you know, so.

I: Then, when you moved to La Grande, where'd your dad work?

CW: My dad worked at the mill for-- up until his death. That-- I guess he must have worked at the mill for fifteen years. I guess somethin' like that.

I: And you were how old when your dad died?

CW: I was nine years old when he was killed. He was accidentally killed down at the Greenwood's grocery-- grocery store right next to the Greenwood School where I went to school. And a bad accident. Drunken person come by and they mopped the curve and took him down the street about a half a block or so. And so my father died at that time. He was forty-eight years old when he died.

I: Yeah, it was a bad accident at that time.

CW: Yeah, it was. And of course there wasn't too much to be done about things at that time. I don't know if they knew how to sue anybody. And my mother, she didn't really understand what was goin' on, but anyway, it was a bad situation. And-- and, course we was all young kids then, you know. My mother-- I think there's still five of us at home, you know. And so it was-- oh yeah, my younger sister was six months old when my father got killed. But it was one of those tragedy things that happened, and so you can't do anything about that.

I: And you went down to school at Greenwood?

CW: I went to school at Greenwood through the fourth grade. Yeah, fourth grade. And then I went to Riveria School for the remainder of the time. And of course we moved up on the hill and went to Central School at that time. The junior high at that time, but.

I: Did-- when you were growing up as a kid, there was quite a designation between on the north side of the tracks and the south side of the tracks.

CW: There definitely were.

I: It more or less divided the town at that time.

CW: Yeah, it really did.

I: And what do-- what do you think about it now? Do you think that that division--

CW: I think--

I: clearly \_\_\_\_\_--?

CW: it's kind of sad. Oh yeah, I think to a certain percentage of it does. Yeah, I really do. I think it's equaled out a little bit better than it was at that time, but I still feel like there's the upper crust, as we might call it, you know. And-- and the lower, you know, but anyway, it just seemed like the people livin' on the north side of town just had a disadvantage of wasn't quite as wealthy, so called. Everybody walked to school and traded home lunches and stuff at that time, you know and that. And-- but I think it probably still exists a little bit. Maybe not quite as bad, but...

I: What did you think of school when you were--?

CW: I thought school was great. You know, I-- I enjoyed goin' to school. I wasn't the smartest pupil in the world, but I enjoyed goin' to school. I had a disadvantage. I had a-- I quit school in the senior year, and then I went back the next year and got a GED. But I had to quit because I needed to help my mother with the financial situation, so I had to go work early. And I started working early and so that--

I: What did-- what did you start doing when you first started work?

CW: I started working when I was eleven years old on farms. I was drivin' horses and bundle wagons and harrowin' and plowin' and stuff with horses that we didn't have a lot of tractors around at that time. But I started workin' when I was pretty young. Not much money, but lots of work.

I: Well.

CW: But I was-- I think it-- it was a good thing for me. It taught me a lot of things that I probably had-- wouldn't have gotten other places. Work don't hurt nobody, so. And I had lots of relations that-- that hired me

every year, so I always had a job, you know, so. And it had put me in school and put my mother a little bit better financially, but.

I: Well, what did you think when you got into high school? What-- what were the things that--?

CW: Well, I-- I think that high school, it-- it-- it-- high school was another one of those things, John. That I think that once again the lower class of people which I was, you know had to contend with the upper class of people. And so you really never felt comfortable in-- in some of the classes because there was more people that lived on this side of the town than there was on the north side that came to high school up here. But I got along in high school. I had some good teachers, and-- and I got along well with sports and stuff. So, I made my way through school, and-- and it was just one of those disadvantages that I had to leave before I really got a good graduation from it. But I did get it. Wound up with one anyway, but it-- it's not the same as graduating with the whole class.

I: Yeah.

CW: That was the disadvantage of it, you know, but.

I: Did-- was there anything you liked real well in high school?

CW: Well, I tell you what, I-- I did. I liked the-- a couple of-- of subjects that I liked in school is one of 'em is I liked-- I liked to-- I like Math, and I like English. Was two of my better subjects that I preferred to have was-- and I had some good teachers, you know. Mrs. Williams, she taught-- she taught me a class there. But I can't-- can't remember the lady that taught us English, but she was a little tough. But she was a good teacher. And I just can't think of her name. I usually--

I: That's all right.

CW: But anyway, she was a good teacher. But I had one of the best teachers I think I ever had was when I was in grade school. That man by the name of Conley was the sports coach, and-- and he also taught-- I'm not sure, but I think he taught-- taught math. But he was a good person, too.

I: I've heard of him.

CW: But I-- I enjoyed being taught by him.

I: With being the Depression and then the war starting in 1941, what did you think was going on in town at that period of time?

CW: Well, you know, I don't know, John. There was a lot of things going on that you just didn't realize. There was-- it didn't seem like there was any big problems with it, but there were still lots of things going on that you just didn't realize at that age, you know. That it was a big deal you know, but it was kind of a big deal for a lot of people. And of course, Depression was a really bad situation for lots and lots of people that just didn't have anything to go with. That's all there was to it. My parents happened to be one of those, but we, you know we salvaged the thing and we lived well. We didn't have anything out of the ordinary, but it was just one of the big things. If you don't have it, you don't have it. But we had a pretty good-sized family and my father, he done as well as he could by the work that they done, you know, but.

I: You had three sisters and one brother, so there was five of you.

CW: No, I had five sisters and one brother.

I: Is that right?

CW: Yeah.

I: Oh, well I--

CW: Five sisters and one brother.

I: Well, I strike at the two of your sisters.

CW: Yeah, yeah right. Two of the-- two of the youngest sisters.

I: Oh? Uh-huh.

CW: But, yeah. And then after-- after my mother-- she had to go to work, you know. But anyway after that, during-- during this bad situation in finances, you know, well then my mother, she finally-- she just had to go to work and raise kids. And so anyways, somebody had to be around to help raise the kids, and so I happened to be the one. And so I-- I-- like I said, I quit school so I could help her out for that year 'cause she was in a bad situation, but anyway, I'm not sorry of it. It was one of those things that had to be done, you know. But we had a-- I had a good life, you know. I don't have any problems with the way I lived, you know. I remember a lot of things and-- and-- and had a good family to be with, and so.

I: Do you remember rationing, and--

CW: Oh, boy. I'll say, yeah.

I: you couldn't get any gas because--

CW: No.

I: it was also rationed and with the war starting. And a number of people live and moved from La Grande to be where the--

CW: Oh boy, I'll say they did. Lots of people.

I: Went to the shipyards.

CW: Yeah.

I: And the airplane factory in Seattle.

CW: And lots of 'em never returned. You know, some of them, but lots of people didn't come back. You know, they stayed wherever they were, you know, but. And then when I got my first automobile you know, I thought I was the king of the roost. You know, because that-- I saved and scrounged for that vehicle, and I finally got it, you know. But partly-- and I got it during the time that the gas was rationing, and so he didn't get to use it too much because you don't have any way to get any gas, you know, so.

I: What kind of car did you have?

CW: Well, it was a Canadian Model A, 1931-- A Canadian Model A. And I bought it from Orville Marshall. And we run around together as good friends, and I kept tellin' him I wanted to buy that car if he got it. He finally-- he decided to sell it, and finally I bought it. And it turned out then that it was a pretty-- pretty good deal that I finally had to quit walkin' and could drive, you know, but.

I: Do you remember what you paid for it?

CW: I gave three hundred dollars for it.

I: You could always get for a Model A--

CW: Oh, yeah!

I: a good price because--

CW: Yeah, we always-- always.

I: it--

CW: At that time, you know I-- 'course I thought it was a lot of money which it was, you know. But it really for an automobile-- to get an automobile for three hundred bucks was still a pretty good thing, you know. Anyway, I had it for several years then. And-- and then-- then of course I got married, and then I had to change automobiles and such. But I had it for-- had it for quite awhile.

I: Was that one that you took me to Union for--

CW: That's it.

I: to bring my watch?

CW: That's the one.

I: [chuckles].

CW: That's the one that you needed to look for a watch in, yeah! Yeah, we knew a--

I: Here we were at midnight out there--

CW: Lookin' for a watch.

I: in the \_\_\_\_\_ lookin' for a watch over in Union.

CW: When in doubt, we'll never forget that one.

I: [laughs].

CW: I mean it, yeah. That was a-- the trouble of it is we didn't find it that night though, did we?

I: No.

CW: Yeah.

I: Found it the next day.

CW: Yeah, we did. We found it the next day.

I: About that time, was that when you went to work for the freight company?

CW: No, I-- see, I-- I went to work for-- I was seventeen years old, and I worked for a River's Egg Company during the summertime. And then when I got out of school, finished my school and got my GED and stuff, why, I worked for Rivers Egg company for about, oh, two and a half years, I guess-- three years. And I delivered and-- and picked up and delivered eggs out of Idaho. And we could bring them to town and kettle 'em, and then I'd deliver 'em to hospitals and such. But I worked for him, and then I went to work for the freight company.

I: \_\_\_\_\_?



CW: And I thought when I went-- went-- left him, you know, I went to the freight company. And Portland Pendleton Freight Company at that time, and man, the difference of salary. I thought I was a millionaire! And--

I: What did you do them?

CW: I drove delivery truck for the first-- the first two years I was there, and then I drove load trucks after that. But I worked for them for about five years, I guess, and then I decided to go into the service station business.

I: That's when you bought the one down on Fir where Commercial Tire is now?

CW: Right, uh-huh.

I: Mm-hm.

CW: Yeah, where Chinatown used to be.

I: Yeah.

CW: And-- and I-- I just took a wild shot in the dark, you know. I was making--

I: You and Myrna were married?

CW: Yeah. Yeah, we--

I: And--

CW: Yeah.

I: you also delivered groceries that Homer Lockwood had passed away?

CW: Yeah, when I-- when I moved down to this service station that old George \_\_\_\_\_ had a TV station right there in them buildings where the-- and there was also an apartment behind his place. And so we decided, between Myrna and I. She was waitin' tables at the time at

the Royal Cafe. But we decided at that time we had to get closer to that station if we was gonna make money at it, you know. And so anyway we start-- I put a buzzer on a deal so that truckers could buzz me and get me up, and I'd go out and service 'em at night, you know. But then later, why, of course, we went into the delivery service business; deliverin' groceries and drugs and for restaurants or the drugstores and pickin' up blood plasma for the hospital at the bus depot. And then I got a PUC permit so I could deliver furniture from Montgomery Ward, from Sears and Roe, and-- and-- and then, of course, then we got the ambulance service on top of that.

I: How did you happen to get the ambulance?

CW: Well, I'll tell you. [chuckles]. Really John, I really don't know how I got that, but I was a volunteer fireman. And Bud Snyder was the chief at that time, and they just came over and asked me one time. He said, "You know Cliff, you're pretty active. Why don't you just take over the ambulance service?" And I said, "My, gosh! What would I want with an ambulance service?" You know? And he said, "Well, we need somebody to operate it. They want it out of the fire department." And he said, "You got a good place here. You got a place to park it and everything." And I said, "Well yeah, I have." Well, anyway, I got the ambulance service. It was given to me through the City of La Grande, and-- and so we operated the ambulance service for, I don't know, two and a half--

I: What kind of training did you have to go through?

CW: I had-- well John, you know they didn't have a lot of training. They sent me down to Salem, and I went through-- I'd call it a FIR-D training, you know. And-- and the training I got down there was basically through the state police. That really where I got the training of how to handle patients with busted backs and-- and lacerations and things like this, that-- that you would normally have with a \_\_\_\_\_. But anyway, I had to take one associate with me down there because I had to have two people on the ambulance every time I left. But anyway, I took one of the firemen went down with me. And so we got down there, and we had what was down there for four days. And we took training down there in emergency situations, but it's nothing like today's, you know.

I: No.

CW: But anyway, I lost the ambulance service because I moved out of town to do the truck stop, and the city didn't want it out of the city limits. Which was a bad situation I thought they made, but anyway, 'cause I'd already had plans to buy a new ambulance, up-to-date and then more like what they're drivin' today, you know? But in the old Cadillac I had-- that they had was-- it done the job, you know, but it was still--

I: That was the old Amos Helm \_\_\_\_\_ truck?

CW: That's right, it was. That's exactly what it was. The biggest-- the biggest thing we had with the ambulance service was, at that time Hot Lake was the-- the situation where the county had for older people, resident-- to a rest home. And our biggest thing was transportin' them back and forth from there to the hospital for the county. Which was a-- was a good deal for me because it was a county-operated thing, and they just paid me so much for every trip out there and back. But you know it was a good experience. Of course, I don't think I'd like to be in the ambulance business. But you know, when you was in the ambulance business and people would ask you, "Well, what happened when you got up there?" Well, you don't know what happened when you got up there. Your stomach is full of butterflies 'til you get there, and when you see these people that's in these accidents, you don't pay any attention what's around there. You only have one job to do, and that's to pick the people up and get 'em to the hospital. And of course, we didn't have lots of training and medics at that time, so you had to do it as quick as you could and to get 'em to the hospital. But it was a good experience, and I wasn't sorry that I done it. But there would probably better things I wish I had of done, but-- but once I got it, why, it was-- it was okay.

I: And it was through your experience with the service station, and what have you that this came about for this truck stop?

CW: Oh yeah! Well, it was. You know, I had-- I had a good business, and-- and so anyway, I had the opportunity to go out to the truck stop. And-- and we thought it was a good move, Myrna and I did. She had already quit workin', and she was runnin' the delivery service and all

the-- the other things. And so anyway, we thought it was a good move to go out there. It was where the \_\_\_\_\_ used to be, and there was not the truck stop that's there today. But anyway, we-- we operated it for two and half years, and we had a couple of bad things happen to us, unforeseen, you know. So, I had-- I sold it out to Glavis Reed is who I sold it to. Glavis operated it for about a year-- a year or two, and then he sold in-- Marvin Moe, the person that owned it, he got his brother in to operate it. And that's-- well, we had a little laugh, but it was a good experience and we done a good business. And-- and-- and we were knowledgeable in the cafe business anyway, so the cafe was a good thing. Then when we left there we came to town and bought the Fountain Café from--

I: Charlie Carther.

CW: Charlie Carther, yep. And so we operated that for fourteen years, I guess. And then Myrna went to school when she's forty-one years old and got her GED, and then she went to college and-- and got her teachin' to the young. And then she went to college, and then she went over to Union and taught Spanish and English in Union until she got-- became sick. And then of course you know about that, but anyway, then we got out of cafe business, but.

I: You, in the meantime had come to work for Hand Ford Sales--

CW: Yeah, and I just--

I: as a car salesman.

CW: 1958. I was the best car buyer in the world, and-- and-- and when Claude asked me to come to work, you know, I said, "Yeah, I don't know about this." I said, "I can buy, but I don't know about sellin'." So anyway, in 1958 I went to work for Hand Ford, and of course you were there. And we stayed there a long time.

I: Did-- during that time you did other things beyond the day's work. You, in the summertime, mowed hay along the right-of-ways of the highway.

CW: Yeah.

I: How did you get into that?

CW: Well, I tell you what-- how I got into was I had a-- I had a few cows and horses. And anyway, I-- when they started it-- when they bought the property for the freeway down behind the-- the mill and around, and I felt well-- well, there's some awful good fields down there. So I went down to the state highway and asked Hiatt, who was the engineer here at that time. I asked him what I could do to get those-- to cut the hay off of those party balloons up off of the property down there. He said, "Well, nothing. You just go cut." And he said, "By the way," he said, "Why don't you just-- why don't you just take all of it?" And I said, "What do you mean by all of it?" He said, "Well, hold on. They're not gonna get their freeway in for awhile so why don't you just take all this property, lease it from me?" And I said, "Gosh! I don't know about that." But anyway, there's a hundred and sixty acres of ground that the state had bought, see. And so anyway, I leased it from him, and-- and so I finally all the way from, oh, down around the mill, all the way up to the top of the hill. And I had it clear to North Powder, but I didn't want to go with him. But I had--

I: Ladd Canyon.

CW: Ladd Canyon, yeah!

I: Yeah.

CW: Well, then \_\_\_\_\_ puts a freeway in, why, I just continued to lease and-- and I farmed all their right-of-ways. And I done that for a lot of years. But anyway, that's how I got involved in it. I was--

I: Then you got involved in music. You had--

CW: Yeah, I got involved in music, and then--

I: How did you get involved in music?

CW: [chuckles].

I: Because you played--

CW: Yeah, I had-- I--

I: before school, or--?

CW: I hadn't played any particular place other than I had a guitar, and I knew a few chords. And anyway, I had a person by the name of-- gosh, I can't think of his name now. Joe Electric, I think it was. I knew he had a dance band, and he's playing at the Eagles. And-- and so, he wanted me to come up and sing for him. So, I went up and sang for him for about six months, and-- and I didn't play the instrument at that time. Anyway, he told me one day, he said, "You know, Cliff," he says, "I just about have to have somebody that can play besides singin'." And I-- and I said, "I understand that." So anyway, I didn't get-- I got fired, if you want to call it that. But anyway, that's just in 1955-- '4 or '5. And I was-- told Myrna one day, I said, "You know what? I think I'd just like to start my own band." And she said, "You're out of your mind!" And I said, "No, I think I will." And so anyway, I put an ad in the paper, and the first Sunday that I had these people come out, I had thirty-five people show up for a-- to tell me how they could play music, you know. And John, I didn't have the least idea what I wanted to do about a band or anything else, but anyway, that's when I started playing music in 1955. And it was kind of interesting. I had lots of people that showed up and good musicians. And I wound up at Dorothy Brown doing-- I'm still playin' music right now. And her husband and then it was two or three other people. When we started out, I had an eleven piece band when I first started, and there was no amplification. It was just acoustic, I think. And so we done that for a couple or three years playing public dances and stuff, you know. And I had-- I got involved in the music business, and--

I: Just what kind of money did they pay for--?

CW: You didn't make much money. You know, we played in-- played in all these outskirts grange halls and stuff. And we charged a dollar a head I think it was for people to come to see-- in. But they brought kids and everybody with 'em, you know. And the kids would be around these old fire woodstoves and stuff, and they'd bring sandwiches. And it was a kind of an interesting thing, but it was--

I: But you had fun.

CW: Well, we had fun. We didn't make money, but we had fun. That's about the-- when I had an eleven piece band, we lucky if we'd make five bucks a night. And of course we had to have expenses, too, to get there, you know. But it wasn't the best money in the world, but it-- it never went-- went into night clubs. Well then that was a different story, you know 'cause you-- you could kind of name your own price at that time.

I: You played down at the Eagles quite a lot.

CW: I played at the Eagles a lot, yeah. In fact, the first place I played was when I-- when I went to play music, I went up to the Eagles, and I told the-- see, I can't remember who the trustees were at that time. But I went in, and I told 'em that I'd like for 'em to listen to my music. And they said, "Well Cliff, we already have a band." And I-- I was a smart aleck, you know not really smart, but I said, "No, you haven't had a band 'til you listen to mine, you know." And so they said, "Well, we still got Joe playin' for us." I said, "I realize that." But I said, "Why don't you just let me come up and play for you Friday night, and you listen to my music then?" So anyway, I did, and two weeks later I had the job. And I played there for-- I think our first set in the Eagles, I think we played there for seven months. And then I got involved later-- you know I got involved in the rodeos and stuff playing rodeo dances and such. But in the twenty four years that I had the band, I-- I missed eleven Saturday nights, and then I made those up in between, you know, but.

I: Wor-- workin' the whole time at the garage sellin' cars and--

CW: Playin' music.

I: hayin', wasn't it, in between--

CW: Yes, as far as--

I: playin' music? I don't know how you did it.

CW: Well, you know, I don't either. You know, when you stop back and think about it, you know I don't know how we done it either. But we done it, and it didn't interfere with my job. You know, I still worked, you know. But-- and Myrna of course, she run the cafe at the same time. And-- but you know, I don't know, you just do things when they come. When they--

I: Then we got involved in the car races.

CW: In the racing business, yeah.

I: And what-- what the name of the car that you and Myrna had that--?

CW: The Pink Lady. Is-- I went to the JC's, and of course you know about this. The JC's are the ones that built the racetrack out there, and-- and of course I wasn't even interested in racing cars. It was just one of those projects that we had. And then the next thing you knew, I got to thinkin' about racin' cars. And so this friend of mine, he knew of a car over at Pendleton, so we went over and bought this car.

I: What kind of a car?

CW: It was a '34 Ford. It was all cut down, but it was-- anyway, we had to put a motor and stuff in it. And then of course I raced them onto the Rainbow's End Truck Stop, you know. But I had five racecars, and I had cooks and waitresses and everybody else drivin' em. And the one thing about the-- the Pink Lady is it got barred off the track the second year because they thought that it was cut down too far. And Myrna, she was givin' me a bad time about racin' cars, and what it turned out to be she wound up to be the top Powder Puff driver out there. And two years that in a row she had the worst wreck on the track out there was done by her, you know. And she got into this racing business, and there was no way of stoppin' her. But I raced my car for speed, and-- and of course she had to drive my car so she always started in the last, you know. And but she thought that last was ended at the first curve, you know, so she took everybody off the track. But anyway, she turned out to be a good driver, and-- and we enjoyed doin' it. But it was-- it was kind of an expensive hobby to get into. But then the next year we put-- I bought-- I bought a '34 Ford just almost brand-new. And took it down to the shop and two hours later



you just couldn't have told that it was a '34 Ford, but anyway I called it a Party Doll. And we drove it for the rest of the remaining time we raced cars and then sold it to a guy up in Baker. And he came down and bought it and took it up there. But we enjoyed the racing. But the thing of it is, I'd race-- I'd play music at the Flamingo Club on Saturday night and be out there Sunday morning racin' cars. And-- and would-- the light-- when I quit playin' music, I was playing music up at Enterprise. I played up there five consecutive years for the same person. And when I would leave to go on rodeo situations, why, I hired the music for to take my place, and I just made sure he had good entertainment when I left, you know. But-- and that's when I quit playin' music was up at Enterprise was the last year I played \_\_\_\_\_.

I: Well, during that time, they started the Blue Mountain Boys.

CW: Oh, yeah.

I: In what--?

CW: I don't know what year that really was, but it was--

I: About 1958 'cause \_\_\_\_\_.

CW: Yeah, that's what I thought it was too. Yeah.

I: And it seemed at that time the fact that you didn't know who the Blue Mountain Boys were made it so much more.

CW: Oh, interesting--

I: And they--

CW: entertainment.

I: they did a lot for the community.

CW: Yeah, they did.

I: And--

CW: Good entertainment.

I: went to Pendleton to the Round-Up, went to Salem.

CW: That was a-- that was a one thing I was going to mention about this music. I was the first one that had--  
[audio clicks - no delay]

I: \_\_\_\_\_,--

CW: Right.

I: music.

CW: I was talkin' to George \_\_\_\_\_-- George \_\_\_\_\_ about this, and-- and-- and I said, "I'd just-- I'd sure figure-- I'd like to figure out how I could play live amplified music on this-- on the parades and stuff." He said, "Well, I think I could figure that out for you." So, he did. He built this amplifier from changing it from a twelve volt to a hundred and ten. And first time we tried it out was right here in the La Grande. And-- and so, then when the rodeo came up over there we went up over there. And we had the first live music on in a parade in the Pendleton Round-Up, and I put it in there. And George \_\_\_\_\_ had to follow me along behind in his thing because the cord had to be up from his pickup up to the truck. But it was kind of interesting. People were really surprised that they could hear this live amplified music in a parade, you know. But then after that, why, he built me one that I just took with me wherever I went, you know. But it was kind of interesting. I got involved in music, and I would-- and I really enjoyed playing music. But Myrna done a lot of stuff in music business with me, you know, advertising--

I: Did somebody show you how to play the chords and--?

CW: No. I'll tell you what, John. I knew a little bit, but when I first started playing music, Dorothy Brown played the piano. And I'd stand by her, and she'd tell me what chords to move to from the ones I didn't know. And-- and so-- and I done most of the singin', and so anyway, we always had the-- the microphone next to her and everything so that she could tell me how long to go to a flat or a sharp or whatever I

needed to go to. And anyway, she's really the one that-- that brought me into to that. Uh, [background music is playing]. Oh--  
[audio clicks - no delay]  
About--

I: Talking about Dorothy Brown, how she told you what chords--

CW: Yeah, she did. She told me what chords to use at a certain time in the - in the deal. And so, really when you get right down to it, she's really the one that-- that helped me the most in the music business and her husband. He was a good person too, you know. But-- and he played the guitar. But she wanted me to-- to play music with her when she came back, and-- and I'd have like to have done it, you know. But of course-- and you don't have vocal chords now, you know, once you quit usin' 'em, and you can't get 'em back. And so anyway I tried it, and it just didn't work. So I-- just like my voice right now, it isn't-- I'm not doin' what it should be doin'. But anyway, I couldn't get the vocal chords back, and so I just decided not to get involved in it. But she was a wonderful person to play with. She must have-- we'd play music together probably for fifteen years, I guess, before she-- she and Jim left here and went to Idaho. But I had some awful good musicians, and that's what made the music was the musicians that I had behind me. And that was the number one thing. I knew the music, and I knew the sound I wanted, and I had to find of guys that could do it. And even though I-- I didn't read music or anything else, but I just knew that sound that I needed for western music. And so anyway, it-- it turned out pretty good. We enjoyed it.

I: Well, when you bought the restaurant from Charlie Carther, did he teach you how to cook, or--?

CW: Well, not really-- not really, John. 'Cause, see when we owned the-- when we owned the truck stop, we had a chef that taught Myrna and I how to chefs.

I: Oh?

CW: I had-- we had to do that because people you have that work for you are older that type of people that cook. And they liked to do things their way, and we wanted it done our way. And-- and so, we had-- we

were fortunate some gentleman came through shortly after we bought the restaurant. And he was out in New York, and he taught us how to - how to cook. Myrna was basically the cook out there. I was the fill-inner, but actually I had the truck stop to run. But anyway, she basically knew pretty much about how to cook. But Charlie Carther, he-- he showed us a lot of the things about a restaurant that we didn't know otherwise.

I: Shortcuts.

CW: Shortcuts. And he knew how to do things and make a plate look good to a person, and so-- no Charlie, I-- we admired him. He stayed with us for about a year after we bought it. And-- but he was a good cook and a good chef, and-- and he showed us a lot of tricks of the trade that we didn't learn out there, you know. But yeah, we learned a lot from Charlie. He was-- well, that was a good business, you know, to have. We had a friendly type business there. And people like Dick Staub and people'd come down, and if I wasn't there early in the morning to get the thing open, why, they'd wait while I was tryin' to get things going. They was makin' coffee and everything else. It was a family affair, you know, but.

I: In the meantime you were sellin' cars! [laughs].

CW: And in the meantime I was sellin' cars, yeah! Yeah, it was the meantime. It was-- that was probably one of the finest jobs I had as far as the person I worked for and the people we worked for and with, you know. But-- 'course George Lorenzen, he was nice person to work with.

I: He was. It-- what was-- then you got to a clientele of people who came in.

CW: Just--

I: And--

CW: Just automatic.

I: It was important that you knew who they were and you called 'em by name when the--

CW: Exactly.

I: they came in. And--

CW: You go have coffee with 'em as soon as they sold a car and you didn't have-- you're not ashamed of anything, you know. And when \_\_\_\_\_-- when they sold out, well of course, George, he wanted to retire. And so, I had an opportunity to go to the railroad, so I decided I was-- I was gonna try that. So, that's where I got-- I went to the railroad for eight years. Then I got a buy off there.

I: When you say you went to railroad, what did you do at the railroad?

CW: I was a train dispatcher, a crew dispatcher and a train dispatcher. I give orders out of the boardroom and out of the operator's room, and we brought trains into the yard and worked 'em and on a computer. And take the ones out we didn't want to go out of the yard and put the train back together, and it was kind-- it was an interesting job. 'Course, it was to me because-- probably because I wasn't raised by the railroad. But it was really an interesting job for me because I-- I learned computers, and I learned how you give orders over a-- over the radio to the train runner. And then I worked up in the train master's office for a period of time, and-- and that got me into a timekeeper out on the-- the work trains. And I got hooked into that, and I traveled with work trains for about seven months. And I traveled from Huntington to Portland, from Portland to Spokane, from Spokane to Fairview and Tico. And that was really an interesting job was timekeeper for thirty to forty people on a work train, you know. And-- and-- but with everything I done at the railroad, I enjoyed doin' because it was interesting to do it, you know. But-- but then, the change-- time changed and finally all of us got bought off. And-- and then of course, I went back to sellin' cars for years and years, but.

I: Do they still make things out in five copies?

CW: All still.

I: [chuckles].

CW: Yeah. Yeah, you know that too, yeah. But they still did at that time, you know. And I had a bad situation up at the train master's one time. I tell the bad stories about it too. I-- I was givin' train orders over the-- the-- the computer to the work train for the next day, and I fouled up the times on it. And I had trains runnin' into the work crews and everything else. And-- and finally they got me on the phone the next day, and he said, "Where did you get those orders, Cliff?" And I said, "Well, I had 'em layin' right there in front of me." And they said, "Well yeah, you did, but you just reversed 'em!" I said, "You're kiddin' me!" I said, "No, we got-- we got the passenger train runnin' right into the work crews." And I said, "Naw, you can't be!" But anyway, I did. I got the-- I got the orders reversed and where the passenger train should have been shut down for twenty-five minutes, why I was lettin' it run. And the-- the work crew wasn't ready for it to go through there, and it got solved all right, but I kind of made a blunder right there. It could have been a bad situation because I reversed the orders, but.

I: The way the railroad used to be, you could get fired for--

CW: Yes, you could.

I: something like that quite easily.

CW: No question about it, yeah.

I: But uh--

CW: Yeah, I got called up to the-- the Road Master's office about it, you know. Said, "Boy, you know, Cliff, you don't make mistakes like that!" And I said, "I realize that." "But," I said, "I just-- I just flipped the orders around, you know. Instead of tellin' the work crew when to get off the track, I was lettin' the train run into it, see." And so-- but it all came out at the head, you know. But you make blunders, you know. But anyway, I enjoyed that job. And I enjoyed selling cars. Really the best of everything other than the fact that after I went to work for the-- the other company, it wasn't-- you didn't have the same

connection with your customers as you did when we worked for Hand Ford, you know, so.

I: Yeah.

CW: They didn't want you to have too much contact with the customers, and that's-- I sold more cars at somebody's table on empty contracts than I did in the business, you know? And of course, you realize it 'cause you had to type 'em, but they wouldn't let you do that at Summers. You had to--

I: Yeah.

CW: They wanted you in the-- in the store, you know, so.

I: Things change.

CW: Yeah, they really do.

I: Yeah, you go right out in the field and talk to the people right at the-- the source, and--

CW: No, that's right.

I: that is good.

CW: I went out at-- I went out to this one farmer's place, and I had a suit on and-- and a necktie. And I go out there, and he's runnin' this CAT out there. And he said, "You wanna talk to me?" He said, "You gotta get on this CAT." And I said, "Okay." So, I got up there in this suit, and I'm ridin' around in this dirt out there. When I got all done, I sold him the pickup all right, but then he said, "You know, Cliff, when you go out to the farmers, probably what you ought to do is dress in work clothes in case you have to ride another CAT." [laughs]. So anyway, when I went out to the farmers, why I-- I-- I wore Levis and stuff and looked a little more presentable, but.

I: How many trucks did you sell Cooper that time?

CW: That I sold--

I: Those-- those big trucks that he used up at--?

CW: See, I sold him a total of five trucks at one time. They were the big ones, and that's when he changed over from-- to his own name, you know. But the-- the one-- we sold him eleven or twelve of those Econoline vans at one time too, you know. But anyway, he bought those trucks, and-- and-- and that was another customer I had that'd just call you up and tell you to buy something, you know. But that's when they had confidence in you, and you had confidence in them, you know. But to just do things over the telephone, you know. But he was a good customer. It's just been one of those bad situations, you know. But he bought those five trucks, and-- and I don't know how-- Murphy or somebody went back and got those for us, I think. I'm not sure who it was. I think it was Howard Murphy, wasn't it? Anyway, he went back east and picked up those trucks out of the truck shop for us. Anyway, he changed his mind so many times on those trucks, but they're still runnin' around town. Three of them a couple of farmers still got. And then the other one-- I had a good customer was Homer Collins in logging business. Sold him lots and lots of vehicles and he was a good customer. And-- but I really enjoyed that.

I: You sold \_\_\_\_\_ .

CW: Oh yeah, \_\_\_\_\_, yeah. Yeah, they'd just call up and-- and wreck a pickup or whatever and says, "Hey, we got a pickup." And so ten o'clock at night we're deliverin' pickups to him, you know. But in fact, Gene \_\_\_\_\_, he's still a good friend. He's-- he quit the logging business, but he's a-- I see him quite often. He's a good customer and a good friend. Then after we got out of that, well then, of course I went to-- I retired at the store, at Ford. And then I kinda bummed around for two or three months, and I didn't like that retirement program. And I went to work for the habitat up here on twelfth street for about six, eight months and-- and janitorial'd that place, and it was a good job. And then I went to work for Coast-to-Coast. And now, I would up out at the DMV. I been out at the DMV set-- formally eight years now.

I: Well, it seems like you could find a job most anytime that you wanted to work.



CW: Well, I think so, John. I don't know some of us from a little bit of experience, and some of it's from knowledge of people, you know. And-- and-- and that's one of the nice things about it is the people you know appreciate when you can help 'em do something, you know, so. And I-- I enjoyed workin' so.

I: And they come in and ask for you.

CW: And that's the main thing, yeah.

I: Yeah.

CW: But--

I: 'Cause they know that you're going to--

CW: yeah--

I: give them that full service that-- that quit your working at.

CW: Yeah, I just walked into the store day before yesterday just to-- to see what was goin' on and somebody's standin' there, and I'm talkin' with the boss. And they said that, "If you ever get done talkin', I'd like to talk to you about something." I wasn't even working. And anyway, it was Mel over here, the heating outfit. And anyway, I just had some knowledge on what he wanted to know about something, and so I got that straightened out. But no, I enjoy people comin' in and really askin' for me too, in a situation where you know you can help 'em do something, you know, so.

I: Now, it's-- it's good that people care about things.

CW: I think it is, too.

I: What do-- what do you think of the prices of cars today compared to when we first were working?

CW: My gosh, John, I can't hardly believe the prices of cars today. When we go back to the time that we got into the car business, and the prices that are today, I don't understand where they get all this money into

these vehicles. When they start talkin' thirty-five, forty thousand dollars for a pickup, you know, my gosh, I'd just about choke! 'Cause you know that was somethin' when I went back to work from the railroad and Bob Wyland was there, and I was sharpenin' myself up on gettin' back into the business again. I had-- I went in and had him figure up a car deal for me. And he got this all figured up, and so I go out and tell this young couple. I said, "Well, I can actually do this, but your-- your payment, I thought, was ridiculous!" Three hundred and sixteen dollars a month! And I didn't even want to tell the people it was that much money. And they said, "Oh, that's fine." And you know, it just shocked me to find out that people had to pay that kind of money for car payments, you know. 'Cause when I left there, a hundred and sixty dollars was an enormous kind of payment, you know. And-- [chuckles] it was-- it's-- it-- Bob Wyland told me. He says, "You know, Cliff, you'll have to get used to this because you'll be up into the four hundred dollar bracket here pretty soon, you know." But it did, it kinda shocked me to have to tell these people that that was what they had to pay for a car, you know.

I: And then long payments?

CW: And long payments, yeah.

I: Yeah, we were--

CW: We had got out of the twenty-four and thirty-six months, you know.

I: Yeah! Thirty-six months was a long time when we first started. Then all of a sudden here you're talking about five years!

CW: But you know that was the advantage, John, for salesmen. George and I, when we were sellin' contracts on twenty-four and thirty-six month contracts, and the parts of the automobiles, you could go out every two years and park a car in a person's driveway. And you automatically sold it because you could sell 'em a brand new car two years newer, and for ten to fifteen dollars more a month. And they didn't have to have-- worry about tires or anything else on the old car. So, you can actually just automatically sell cars on a twenty-four to a thirty-six month contracts. But then when they got into the forty-eight and the seventy-twos and all this stuff that eliminated that.

I: You know--

CW: But the best few that we had in our-- I think in the car business, was in the '70's up through into '78 or '79. We had good years in the car business at that time. But that was when you could do this, see.

I: Well, I remember you and I talking about when they were talking about so many miles per gallon, and the '73 LTD was gettin' 23 miles to the gallon.

CW: Right.

I: And they came out with these small cars, that didn't get any more--

CW: Mileage!

I: mileage,--

CW: Oh.

I: and you couldn't put your family in it!

CW: That's right.

I: They were made for four or five people at the very most!

CW: I want to-- I want to bring up a story because I don't know if you remember this or not because this involves you in the car business. When I first-- first went to work for Hand, why, they had about nine salesmen at that time. Gee, I want to think of the guy's name, but George was there and-- and Oscar--

I: Oscar Irwin?

CW: Irwin, yep. And anyway, there's several settin' in the store when this guy come in the front door, a farmer lookin' person, beard and stuff. And they-- of course, I was the new one, and they said, "Well, this is your turn." I didn't even know what they was talkin' about, "my turn," you know. But anyway, I go out there, and I walked up to this guy and asked him if I could help him. And he walked right on by

me. You know, and I thought, "Oh man, this is a good start, you know." But anyway, he goes over and he looks at this Lincoln on the floor, and I can remember the price was \$4,167.00 dollars for that Lincoln. And so he said, "What-- what would I have to pay for this?" And I said, "Well, the price is right there." But I didn't know what you done about prices, you know? And he said, "Well, how long would it take you to get it ready?" And I didn't have any idea. I had to go over and ask you, how long would it take me to get the car ready off the floor, and so you told me, "Well, probably thirty minutes or so." But anyway, this guy comes over, and he says, "Well, what do you need to find out?" He says, "I'm gonna be gone for an hour, and I'll be back to pick it up." And so anyway, he said, You could call \_\_\_\_\_ Bank in-- in Baker to see if my check is gonna be any good, so you call them." And they-- and I think you told me to ask, "How many does he want to buy?" But anyway, he lived up at Richland. I can't even think of his name now. But anyway, these guys, they would've got a big blowout about that. The first car I ever sold and you had to be the one to help me do it, but.

I: Well, funny things happened during that period of time. It--

CW: Boy, I'll sure say.

I: And we worked for a very nice man in \_\_\_\_\_ Hand.

CW: We sure did. Course as you know, everybody has their ups and downs, but I don't think you can find a better person to work for than he was, you know.

I: I remember him saying that one of our salesmen one time didn't make enough money to live on during the month, and he said, "We owed it to our employees to see that they earned a living wage."

CW: Yeah, he did do that too. Yeah, he sure did, yeah. Well, I-- he took a-- he took us his employees as part of the family, you know? And it was, really. Everybody looked out for everybody else, and you know, it was-- and of course, you knew him a lot longer than I did, but he was still a good gentleman to work for. Everybody was good to work for though. All of us got along good.

I: Well, people tried to help one another.

CW: Yeah, they did, and that's no kiddin'.

I: We cared and--

CW: Yeah! Sure did, and that's--

I: I've always thought if you treat your employees right then it comes back.

CW: Yeah, yeah.

I: And the guys out in the shop were--

CW: Same thing.

I: same point.

CW: Yeah, same thing. Then, when I got in the cattle business, you know, I done that over-- I had horses I was takin' care of. But this cattle thing I-- I never could figure out how you could make enough money in the cattle business to own a ranch out here. It didn't pencil out for me, but anyway, I was-- I was home one time and Myrna's mentioned. She says, "Gee, you know how much I spent for milk?" And I said, "No." She said, "Well, I spent thirty dollars for milk for you and Doug." And I said, "You're kiddin'!" And I'm readin' this paper, and here's a cow in there for three hundred bucks. And I said, "Gee, I could buy this cow here for it, and pay it off in ten months!" And she said, "What?!" And I said, "Yes! I could-- I could milk this cow right here." Anyway, I went over and bought that cow, and that got me into the cattle business right there. And we-- we were-- we were in the cattle business about seven, eight years then. And-- and we just got too big for our britches and no place to go where they went. It was hard to find pasture, and I was doin' twice as much hayin' as I should-- had to do because I done it for shares to get my cows fed. And anyway, I just woke up one day, and I decided I'm gonna get out of the cattle business, you know. But that one cow went from-- and oddly, at the time went from one cow to a hundred head when I sold out. And Myrna wasn't too happy with it, but we looked

at different places. And it was just too expensive to try to run a ranch out there to handle that many cattle and you to make it pay off, you know? So anyway, we got out of the cow business at that time. And decided just to quit and go back to work. So that's what we done. But we enjoyed it, but a lot of work. It was a lot of work. We done most of it all at night you know, and Sundays and weekends and.

I: And then-- and Myrna would have started into the lawnmower business.

CW: Well yeah, she did. She got started in that, and she done that accidentally. Doug had the business. And him and his wife, and-- and they had a good business. And Myrna was helpin' 'em 'cause he got a little more than he should have, and his wife decided that she wanted to leave. So, they just up and left and left the business. They had everybody callin' wantin' to know, and the next thing you know Myrna's in the yard business. And so, we-- we took care of it for a couple or three years until I had the heart attacks, and then I couldn't do that anymore. So anyway, then she just automatically stayed in it, and she's still in it. And-- and she enjoys doing it. It's hard work, but she likes it, so.

I: She don't have to repair the lawnmowers anymore?

CW: No, no.

I: Good.

CW: But the lawnmowers, there's-- she-- she probably-- she does one day of what people do a whole year and with one lawnmower, so. It takes quite a bit to keep 'em up, you know, keep everything on pitch for 'em. Between me and my brother-in-law, why, we keep 'em going for her, but she's-- she's just an ambitious person. And she likes to work, and she enjoys it. And people admire her for the work she does, and I think that's what greased the whole thing, you know. But-- but I don't chase lawnmowers anymore.

I: She does a good job.

CW: Yep, she does, and she has a good snow removal business too in the wintertime. But she has lots of things goin'. She's an active person

and she's-- she-- she has a cleaning business, and she has a window business and.

I: With her health, that keeps her going.

CW: Well, she says that if she ever sits down, it'd probably be the end of her, and it might be too. You know, she-- she's-- she just keeps her mind off of everything else, you know with workin'. So, it's a good thing. We enjoy workin', and so I guess that's the name of the game. But that's about all the stories that I know, John.

I: Well, most everybody else is retired by the time they're your age.

CW: Well yeah, yeah. But you know the thing that surprises me, I mean of my age of people have passed on, and-- and-- and none of 'em were very active.

I: Yeah.

CW: They retired and they just kind of sit down. And I still contend, and I think you would know it as well as I do, you gotta be active to keep yourself physically and mentally fixed to-- to make a good life out of yourself, you know. I-- I just don't believe in sittin' down, so. And of course all through life people make mistakes and you have to live through those. And of course, I had a bad mistake at the truck stop, and you know about that, but you can't sit down. You've gotta live through it, and-- and some of it was mine-- but my fault and some of it was other people's fault. But anyway, you just make life the way you want it to be. So-- but we had a good life. Myrna and I are satisfied with what we've done. Maybe some changes some time down through the life, but I don't know what it would have been.

I: Another project that you and I talked about when we were in the Janger-- Junior Chamber of Commerce was the Christmas program where we talked with all the kids.

CW: Oh, yeah. Boy, that's most enjoyable thing that was.

I: Might tell about how that happened and what we did.

CW: Well, the-- the thing that happened that started it out, we would just-- we was helpin' the needy type of people, and one thing led to another. Next thing you knew we were in a Christmas shoppin' spree for these young people that couldn't afford their kids to have a Christmas. And we all got involved in that, and it really went over well, and we stayed with that for several years. I know that everybody got involved in it. That's one thing that-- that I think we got more out of JC's as a group of people doin' somethin'. We got more people involved in that than we did any of the other activities that we had.

I: Well, we're-- what we did we collected money and took the kids out shopping--

CW: Right.

I: for their whole family.

CW: Yeah.

I: And then we brought 'em back to our homes, and our wives helped--

CW: Helped 'em wrap 'em and--

I: wrap their presents. And--

CW: just one's that did.

I: felt good about themselves.

CW: Yeah, they did because they were buyin' it. They were doin' something on their own and doing it for their family, not just the kids enrolled. We done it for the whole family. I-- they got that better. That was one of the nicest things I think we ever got involved in was that. But today it isn't like that. Yeah, I don't know why. People just don't get involved with things like that now.

I: I've told somebody that when you and I were kids, you used to go down to the Elks, and there'd be a--

CW: Oh, yeah!



I: line a block long. And the Elks would give you an apple and an orange and a sack full of candy and some nuts, and--

CW: Yeah.

I: now it's hard to get twenty-five kids at Christmas down there.

CW: Yeah. I-- I couldn't hardly understand that when you mentioned that, but I realize that that's the way it was, you know. And it's-- but you know in those days, it was you own a sack of candy was-- was worth a million to most kids. So, even an orange was somethin', you know. But by gosh, I'll tell ya, the-- the kids aren't that way today, so.

I: When you were a kid, and you used to like to go to movies and things on Saturdays, did you get a chance to go and see Buck Jones and--

CW: All of \_\_\_\_\_.

I: Dick Tracy and--?

CW: Yep, all those was number one, you know. At that time John, when I was workin' for the farmers, I got-- I don't know. I probably got paid a dollar a day or something like that, and I got paid every Saturday. And I'd give the money to my mother, of course, but we could go to the picture show for ten cents. You'd buy a hamburger for fifteen. And you know, it was really amazing, you know. Myrna and I have stopped and thought about this, you know. When we first started in the-- the Fountain Café, we couldn't hardly believe that coffee was ten cents a cup. And our-- we looked up some of our menus and our hamburgers was fifteen cents, and then we-- then we finally went to twenty. And-- but everything was so inexpensive at that time, you know. It just-- it just amazed me. And I picked up a menu from the old Noodle Parlor that used to be up there, and the prices that they charge was, you couldn't hardly believe it. I don't know whether you've seen that or not, but I have a copy of that. And Mrs. Vanderbilt gave it to me. And I ought to bring that down and let you take a look at it because it's the old Noodle Parlor that was-- I think it was above up above-- what was there, Chris' Food?

I: Han-- Han Johnson's.

CW: That's right. That's where it was. And anyway, I have this menu of what they charge for their service up there, and it was you know-- it was just--

I: A bowl of noodles--

CW: a bowl of noodles

I: for a quarter?

CW: For a quarter, yeah!

I: Yeah.

CW: Yeah, it really was for twenty-five cents. You could buy just about anything on that menu, and I think the highest priced thing I looked at was thirty-five cents, you know. But I just couldn't hardly believe when she gave that to me. She sent it down here with Vern, and do you remember the-- how inexpensive things were at that time, you know.

I: Everybody liked to go to China Mary's.

CW: Yes, always.

I: Everybody.

CW: Yeah, they sure did.

I: And you had to go up that steep stairway up their way that--

CW: And steep stairway to get up there, yeah. But they done a fabulous business. I just-- even as kids you know, I can remember how the people went up there, you know. But-- and then of course, you know I'd be gettin' into the music.

[audio ends]