

Al Johnson

9/21/04, T1, S1

BL: Can you tell me your full name?

AJ: Alfred Edwin Johnson.

BL: Alfred Edwin Johnson.

AJ: Yes.

BL: Okay. And when were you born?

AJ: 3rd of March, 1915.

BL: Now you were not born in Union County.

AJ: No, I was born in Idaho.

BL: But you did have family who was living there.

AJ: In this area.

BL: Can you tell me about that?

AJ: My father came to this town in 1906. His family shipped cattle in Utah and wintered 'em up at Telocaset. My dad stayed here in town with his mother and the next spring they took the cattle... They had bought a ranch down in Idaho and they drove the cattle all the way back to Idaho in the summer after they'd wintered them at Telocaset. I can't see how they wintered 'em up there, if they have winters like they do now they would starve to death if it had been wintered, I guess. Grandfather stayed up with the cattle and my father and his brother and sister lived with their mother down here.

BL: What was your grandfather's name?

AJ: Johnny Johnson. He came from Sweden when he was about twelve years old with another family and lived in...around Heber City in Utah. He worked for twenty-five cents a day. But he had his board and room with that. Just a twelve or fourteen year old kid.

BL: So when your dad was living in this area he was living with your grandmother?

AJ: Yes.

BL: And what was her name?

AJ: Ida Victoria. Her maiden name was Smith.

BL: Do you know if her family was from the area?

AJ: No, they weren't from the area. At that time there was a lot of Mormons coming out of Utah with sugar beets and cattle and buying land in this valley. But they didn't find any land here that would accommodate the cattle they had so they went back into Idaho and bought a piece of ground down there. That's why they didn't stop here. I would've been a native then.

BL: Did your dad every tell you stories about what it was like to live in this valley?

AJ: No, he didn't. He didn't tell much about... He remembered the trip going back, how hard it was to herd the cattle down Burnt River canyon. Have you seen that road that road that's on the side of the hill? The road down Burnt River canyon, imagine herding a bunch of cattle down that road and meeting the traffic.

BL: I bet that was difficult.

AJ: Had to have wagons mostly in those days.

BL: What was your first experience in Union County?

AJ: I come into Union on a bus. My cousin was over there and when I got off the bus I said, "What direction is that?" And the guy says, "That's east." It was north and I've been turned around ever since. [laughs] I had a cousin in Union working at the Hess mill over there. I was heading for ___ looking for work. It was after the Depression begin to settle down and they were building those big airfields out on Wake Island. That's when I started work for Morris Kneetchum. I got to Union and my cousin said, "Where you going?" I said, "Out to Wake Island to go to work." "What you doing? You got a job?" I said, "Not yet, but I'm going out there and get one when I get to Portland." "Why go to Portland? That kid settin' over by the saw's going away to school in two or three weeks. You can get his job." I thought a job is a job as far as I'm concerned so that's what stopped me. That fellow was Dave Baum. Do you know him?

BL: No.

AJ: Heard of him. He was going away to college and I took his job in the sawmill.

BL: What were you doing in the sawmill?

AJ: I was running a swinging trim saw there. But I worked up to a grader in a few years. I was grading lumber in the sawmill when I got married and I was drafted into the Army.

BL: What was the saw that you?

AJ: A swinging trim saw.

BL: What did that do?

AJ: That cut the knots and the rough parts off of the...out of the board and sent 'em back out on the chain to be put in their right place down the chain.

BL: What was it like doing that sort of work?

AJ: It was a job. My father was...told us boys of his, "don't run around all over everywhere looking for a job you like. If you find a job the harder you work at it the better you'll like it." I found that to be a help all my life. I've had a lot of jobs, but the harder I worked at 'em the more I learned, the easier they were.

BL: Were they running only one shift in the mill?

AJ: Yes, just one shift.

BL: What would your day be like in the sawmill?

AJ: In sawing?

BL: Start early?

AJ: Yeah, I started about seven, I think, and got off at five, an hour off for lunch. Most of the time while I was in that swinging trim saw we called it the doghouse because you couldn't get out of there. But it was a lot of work ___.

BL: What year was that?

AJ: 1939.

BL: 1939. What did you think about the valley?

AJ: I liked it. I liked the mountains and timber. I'd worked in falling timber in Idaho, been in the mountains a lot on construction work. I like the mountains. I like my ___. I haven't found a better place.

BL: What sorts of things did you do after work for fun?

AJ: For fun? Dance.

BL: Dance?

AJ: I'd been... I worked in a dance hall all through high school. I played in a little ___. Much of the time I'd be out three nights a week doing to high school working. But most...nowadays kids don't think anything about having to work their way through high school, but I was batch'ing, living in a little one-room house. Our folks got it for me. It didn't cost anything. It was an old friend's house. Dad would bring me wood and Mother would bake me bread and bring it over every week when they'd come to town. That's the way I got through high school. My mother's cousin owned a dance hall. That's how I got the job checkin' hats to begin with and then I took some dancing in the Mormon church and was a good dancer. The fellow that run the dance hall he had me be a starter. In the dance hall you get a nice big ten-piece orchestra playing and nobody dancing. You don't want that. He'd give me the nod, get out there and get a girl. I'd go out and pick up a girl and get dancing with her. I wouldn't get halfway around the hall 'til everybody else was on the floor and we had a hall full of people.

BL: And that was called the Stardust?

AJ: Yeah. Get 'em going.

BL: So when you were here in Union County what were the hot spots?

AJ: What was the name of that hall? Zuber Hall was the dance hall.

BL: Zuber Hall?

AJ: Yeah. And then that new hall upstairs across the street from where my shop is now. That second floor is all dance hall in the old Sacagawea Hotel.

BL: Can you tell me more about Zuber Hall?

AJ: Zuber Hall was the place to be on Saturday night. They were like the hall that I worked in in Emmett. They usually had some big bands come in, ten-piece and that kind. Just once in a while, mostly they had a steady popular dancing. The crowd ___ Saturday night of young people.

BL: What did it look like?

AJ: What'd it look like on the outside?

BL: On the inside.

AJ: Oh, it wasn't... I don't remember much about... I was too interested in the girls and the orchestra. I liked to dance.

BL: Was it formal? Fancy?

AJ: No. The Jitterbug days were in those...just starting. The Jitterbug had been going on for quite a while 'cause I'd been cutting the rug in southern Idaho. But there wasn't too much of that around here. When you swing 'em between your legs and that sort of thing they didn't do that here.

BL: They didn't do that here?

AJ: Not this town. I didn't show 'em how.

BL: What kind of dancing did they do?

AJ: It was two-step and foxtrot, waltzes. We called it two-step, we knew how to two-step, we called it, kind of a shuffle with one step on one foot and then two on the other. There was a number of ways of dancing it. All you had to do it listen to the music and turn your feet loose as far as I was concerned.

BL: What kind of music did they play?

AJ: Good dance music. You don't find any good dance music now. I call it jungle stomp now. [laughs] You can't tap your foot to it so how can you dance to it? But we don't dance. My wife can't dance anymore. The last time I went to a dance when my wife wasn't there and my son got real angry at me because I was out there with women of my age really cutting a rug. We had a lot of fun so he told me off. "Mother's home and you're out here having a good..." I didn't go to anymore dances.

BL: So you went to the Zuber Club...

AJ: No, it was a dance hall.

BL: Where else did you dance during those days?

AJ: At that time I was living...a place around before that. There used to be a dance hall in Baker and it was called The Covered Wagon. They had a ten-piece band usually every Friday night. We'd go there. We'd get our dates and go over there and dance. It was bigger than Zuber Hall. It had a lot better facilities, round and hi-tech. And then there's another one down at Ontario. I can't think of what the name of that one was. There was a big one in Boise.

BL: Now you said you also danced at the Sacagawea Hotel?

AJ: Once in New Year's Eve there was a dance up there. But then on New Year's and holidays the church always had events for your people at church.

BL: What church was that?

AJ: The Mormon church up where the paper office is now.

BL: The Observer.

AJ: It was a big building there, a big tabernacle and a recreation hall behind it. That's was a big dance.

BL: Was the dancing the same whether you were at the church or at the club or at the hall it was the same?

AJ: Yeah. They were all in dance in those. In fact, we had the Gold and Green Ball there once a year. That was one of the main events of the city. They had a big balcony all around the top of the basketball court and that would be full of people just watching the dancing. And the kids in the church would put on a floor show. We danced formal dancing and everyone of us would do the same thing at the same time. __ quite nice.

BL: Was there a dress code?

AJ: Oh yeah. I don't know...good dresses are all. We always had white shirts...usually most of the people wore white shirts to the dance, slacks.

BL: And a tie?

AJ: Oh yeah. Sometimes Zuber Hall wasn't too formal. You could go there without a tie. At the church we always...we were in the church and so we would dance formal. My wife and I were in one of those contests, shows, before we was married. We had fun.

BL: So after you worked at Hess's mill you were actually gone for a while during the war?

AJ: I was there from '41, I think it was.

BL: Do you recall any sort of a farewell party for the people who left for the war here in La Grande?

AJ: No. I never heard of anything before I left or when I got back. I was quite disappointed because I got back about four months, five months after the war had ended. I was in occupation troops in Germany for a while and they couldn't get us out of Germany that fast, couldn't get boats enough to haul us home. When I got here there was never a parade or nothin' to recognize a GI coming back. I don't know whether there was right after the war or not. I never heard of it.

BL: When were you married?

AJ: I married before I went in the Army on December 24th, Christmas Eve. I never can forget that. I have to have two presents. ____

BL: What year was that?

AJ: 1941. Virginia!

BL: That's what I have, 1941. You mentioned that before.

AJ: Yeah, it's '41.

BL: How did you meet your wife?

AJ: I went in for ____ Shank's Café in Union with my cousin. He didn't smoke, but I did. __ that way and that was it. He introduced me to her and about two or three days later him and I were across the street and he and his girlfriend was getting ready to go to a dance and he said, "You going to the dance with us?" And I said, "No, I don't have a date. I don't think I will." "There goes Virginia Anderson. Go catch her." I had to run two blocks to catch her the way she walks. She really took off. She was going home after work. But we started going and I haven't gone with anybody since.

BL: So Virginia Anderson?

AJ: Yeah.

BL: And was she from the area?

AJ: She was from Union. She was born in Union.

BL: Had her parents been from the area as well?

AJ: Anderson Shoe Shop been in business since 1921 in Union and then they moved the shop here in '97, I think.

BL: So you were married in 1941. Did you have any children?

AJ: No. No, we didn't have children __ back another two years after I got home. I came back and went to work for Hess and they wanted me to work up again. They didn't give me my old job back. I was supposed to go back grading lumber, but they gave me a common labor job. I stayed there about three months and seen I wasn't going to go anywhere so I quit and went to a feed store over there where a fellow said I'd get a raise every six months until I was making __. That was in a feed store where we made feed for cattle and ground grain. I did quite a bit of that when I was a kid. I could sew sacks. I was there for about a year and I never got a raise. Then I went... That was after I came back from the Army and I talked to the boss about it and he said...it was a co-op...they decided not to make the automatic wages until they all got on the wage. So I decided I was gonna do something else. I always like to tinker with watches and clocks when I was a kid and I saw an ad in the Popular Mechanic or somewhere the American School of Watchmaking in Los Angeles on the GI Bill. I talked it over with my wife and she said, "Yeah. I've got two aunts and an uncle living down there and we could live with them and go to school." She went down and called 'em or something.

We decided to go to school in Glendale, California. But they lived over in West Los Angeles. We had an old... I bought an old Studebaker car and we drove that down and went to school there for two years, almost two years.

BL: When did you come back?

AJ: I don't remember exactly the date we came back. I think we... I can't remember what it was. '49, I imagine, 1949.

BL: What did you do when you got back?

AJ: I worked with a kid here in town for a while. He had a small jewelry store up there and a gift shop across the street from where the old First National Bank was. Then I decided I'd start a store up in Union. So we went over there and I started a little store to set my bench in. I bought some watches and some jewelry and had a showcase. We stayed there that winter and that spring our boy was born, our first boy. That was the hardest winter they went through in this valley. The snow was about almost three feet deep on the level and it was ten, fifteen below for ten days straight and the wind blew everyday. It was mean. The highway was plugged on both sides of the valley. You couldn't get out of the valley. Union had a snowplow that got stuck and before they could get it out it was drifted all over top of it and they went and got the big ___ gonna dig it out and that got stuck and it covered it up to. They just couldn't do a thing. This big consolidated trucks here in the valley. They hauled the gasoline in tankers then and those tankers in Union lined up two at every corner waiting to go on the highway and go on down the road. The hotel in Union was plum full and people took 'em in their houses and everything. What a winter!

BL: What was the name of your store in Union?

AJ: Just Anderson's Watch Repair. I didn't have a... The next year I come over here and went to work at a jewelry store here.

BL: Which one?

AJ: Where Laurence's is now, but Donley's Jewelry Store. They were from Pendleton and had a store like Laurence's there. There had two watchmakers. One of 'em quit, the other one was an apprentice so Jack Robinson was the manager and he came over to Union and talked me into going over to his store, he'd give me a hundred dollars a month. I said, "Okay, sure." My wife and I moved here to town and bought us a house up on Eighth Street, I think it was. Right below the college we bought us a house there and were making payments. I got on a GI Bill pretty good deal, \$40 a month and only four percent interest and that's not bad. I was making \$75, \$100 a week at Donley's. That went real good. Just kept saving a little money and got furniture bought and started to settle down to work. Come the middle of the summer, why, Donley's Jewelry Store decided to sell out. So they sold the store right out from under me. I didn't... I didn't want to go back to Union and start up again so a friend of mine I was working with at church he was the railroad water gang man, you know, them steam engines they did have. He was over all waterworks from the other side of Idaho going to Seattle. He lived here in town. So he put me on the water gang up town. I was making more money than I was fixing watches. So I worked there until the next spring. The manager of that store, Jack Robinson, he went down to the Willamette Valley and he went into the oldest store in the state of Oregon, ___

Jewelry Store down there. ___ called me up, they didn't have a watchmaker. He said, "Al, I need a watchmaker and I need him right now. How soon can you get down here?" I said, "I'd have to quit the railroad and move." "I've got a job here and I'll pay you \$100 a week. I've got a house for you. My boss owns the house. It's only \$50 a month. How soon can you get here?" I talked it over with Virginia and she said, "We might as well go." The railroad wasn't no place for a future and I was still a watchmaker so I should stay with my trade. So went out to Woodruff's ranch out here and I'd worked for them right after the war for a little while 'til I went back to the mill. They'd taken a load... They'd come down and get a load of war surplus in Portland on a big truck, they had a big truck. So we put all our stuff in the back of that and I drove it down to Albany and unloaded my stuff and come back to Portland. They went down with me, Doug Cooper did, and brought the truck back. Then they loaded up and come back to the ranch with it. We lived down there five years ___ Jewelry Store. My eyes went bad on me. I woke up one morning and I was seeing two of everything. I told my wife "the crazy world we live in, everything's two." I said, "You want to go back to La Grande?" "Why?" "I'm not gonna let my eyes go for any job. I'll go back there and do something." She says okay. We'd saved up about a thousand dollars, that was megarich. We thought we was pretty solid. We had another car and two little boys by that time. One boy was born down there. We came back and bought this place. We've been here ever since.

BL: What place was that that you bought when you came back?

AJ: This one.

BL: Oh, you bought this house?

AJ: Yeah. This house and two acres.

BL: What's the address of the house?

AJ: This is 611 18th now.

BL: 611 18th.

AJ: Yeah. And 618 Highway Avenue then. It stopped right down here. It was just three houses then. It wasn't an open street. A dead-end street.

BL: What did you do for work when you came back?

AJ: My eyes were bad so I went to looking for a store to buy, a small business. I had to work... See, I was running from three to five railroad watches across my bench everyday and that's a lot of fine work. I'd run 1500 watches a year across my bench for five years and they were all railroad watches. My apprentice did the other watches and I helped him with 'em and I taught 'em how to fix watches. But my job was the responsibility for three railroad lines down there. So I got plenty of experience fixing railroad watches. I come back up here... Oh, I was looking for a place to buy and we went all over Pendleton down through...we kind of liked southern Idaho and Boise area. Went down, looked around Meridian and Nampa and Caldwell, Ontario, all the small town down... Couldn't find anything that would be what we wanted to jump into and go in debt for 'cause they were wanting too much money for it. They wanted me to buy their business plus their inventory. You can't do that and buy a business. You can just buy the inventory and take it from there because you've got to make your own business. But anyway, I came through here and Mr. Anderson had said, "Al,

you've helped me here in the shop quite a bit. If you don't find anything I'll sell you half of this for twenty-five." I said, "Okay, if I don't find anything I'll have something to go for." Then I went on... I quit down there and we went on down and back and I decided to buy in with him. I went back and worked about two weeks and Virginia had the boys here at her folks' place. She found a place and she thought it would be a good place for kids and it's off the main drag. This was outside of city limits then and you could do anything, you could have a cow and you could have a horse. So we figured this would be a good place to raise boys. We made a downpayment on it. I talked to Woodruffs again at the ranch and I says, "When you want to take a load to Portland?" He said, "We're leaving tomorrow with a load of hogs. Why?" I said, "I want to haul my stuff back from down at Albany." "Hey, you drive that truck and Bill will drive the other one. When we get 'em unloaded we'll wash the truck out and you can go down to Albany." I had a trailer I'd borrowed down there and they'd build a frame above the pigs and put the...lifted the trailer up on top of that. I hauled that... That big truck was an old Army truck and they had lengthened it out about four feet and they'd put a big, huge engine in it and it would just cruise at seventy with a load on. [laughs] We hauled them hogs down there and dumped them and I went down to Albany all alone. We was living upstairs over the shop then because the boss in the meantime had a chance to sell that house. We got rent free over the top of the...five room apartment above the store, no expense to me at all. That saved some money that way. That's when we bought – it's not there now – there used to be a piano over there. We bought a piano and a washing machine and stove and everything else that you'd buy when your kids start coming along. I loaded that truck up and it was over twenty feet long and it was...[end tape]

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- BL: So you moved back here and then decided to go to work with your father-in-law?
- AJ: Yeah. I'd bought half interest in a shoe shop. I don't remember how much I paid him down, I think a thousand dollars. There wasn't enough work to keep the both of us busy so I went up to Laurence's Jewelry. Harry Laurence had just bought...just moved into that store where they are now. He'd been there a couple years. He wanted to get out and hit the road. They wanted to go down to ___ so he wanted to know if I'd go up there and handle the railroad watches for him and all the pocket watches. His wife she said she'd fix little watches. I said okay. I'd go up there sometimes at six o'clock in the morning and work 'til noon then I'd go down to Anderson Shoe Shop and work until the work was all done, sometimes it'd be ten, eleven o'clock at night. I got the place paid for at that time, earned the money at Laurence's to pay for Anderson's, pay for the shop.
- BL: Tell me about railroad watches.
- AJ: A railroad watch? I can show you one. The railroad watch is a twenty-one jewel watch and they'll run it in three minutes a month. You wind them regularly. I've had some railroad watches that they never set year in and year out. It run perfect year-round. I had several of 'em down there in Albany. They'd come in every Monday morning and check it against the regulator and they were always right on.

BL: So you had the regulator in your shop here?

AJ: Yeah, in Albany.

BL: So what's the significance of having a regulator? Why was that so important on the railroad?

AJ: They run the railroad by watches then and not by electrical switches. If you hit the switch at the wrong time there's be another train settin' there. So they had to be accurate. You couldn't have a seventeen jewel watch, no way. You had to have a twenty-one jewel watch and it had to be rated within three minutes a month. If it ever was three minutes a month you had to take it in and have it fixed. That was my job to make 'em run within that three minutes a month. I had a lot of that run real good. There's six position a watch can get in by daytime and you have to regulate them in each position. You got to know what you're doing. I really enjoyed the challenge. But now one eye is not so good so it's not so much fun anymore. The railroad watch was a pocket watch and it had to be sixteen size or eighteen size, but they had to be twenty-one jewel.

BL: Did each person who was working on the railroad have one?

AJ: Everybody on the railroad had a railroad watch.

BL: So how many watches... When you were in La Grande how many watches were you in charge of?

AJ: I didn't never keep track of 'em. See, I was working for Laurence's Jewelry and that went through their books. I never had to deal with __ here. A lot of times I didn't do them then I'd work on wristwatches or help __ on her watches. There wasn't near enough...near as many... See, we had two railroad lines going through Albany and you had to take care of 'em from both ends. When you get a reputation like French's Jewelry had you had to be good to work there.

BL: So in the meantime you were also working at Anderson's.

AJ: Anderson's Shoe Shop?

BL: What kind of work did you do there?

AJ: Shoe shop...fixing shoes.

BL: Can you tell me about that work?

AJ: Work, it's work. It's a lot harder than fixing watches, I can tell you that.

BL: It's harder than fixing watches?

AJ: Oh yeah, because it's manual, you're manual. You're tearing the soles off of shoes and hand stitching them and sewing the w__ on by hand. There's a lot to it, fixing shoes. Nowadays they don't fix 'em, they just throw 'em away.

BL: What kind of equipment did you have?

AJ: We had __ and equipment that's up there now. We had two big stichers 'cause there was two of us workin' and we had two big shoe machines and two of us could sew on soles at the same time. We handled a lot of shoes. We had cattlemen bring up truckloads of shoes from as far away as Glenn's Ferry, Idaho. They'd come through here with a load of cattle going to Portland and they'd drop off a big box like this full of shoes at the shop. "We'll be back in three days, can you have 'em ready?" "We'll have 'em." So we'd fix 'em up, but half-soles or whole soles on 'em.

BL: Who's shoes were they?

AJ: Cowboy shoes from down around Glenn's Ferry. Cattlemen down there'd bring 'em up. We had fellows bring 'em in all the time from over in Redmond and Burns. We sold the McCona bootline in there and they were a real good boot. Cattlemen liked 'em. Of course the leather is tanned so commoner won't like it. We sold a lot of those over around Redmond and Baker. We drew from three and four counties out. One time I had a route going clear to Halfway and from here to Joseph. After it go so I left Laurence's then I organized these routes up there. The fellow that run the bread trucks would pick up these shoes at wherever they delivered bread I'd have 'em collect shoes, put 'em in a box and he'd just put 'em in his cab and bring 'em down and give 'em to me. I paid him four bits a pair for hauling 'em down here and back. I'd go up once a month and collect. ___ up the branch and down to Halfway, but I was just trying to expand the business and get more in there. I had three boys coming along and they were getting underfoot by that time and they started to learn how to fix shoes.

BL: So you taught all your boys how to do it?

AJ: Oh yeah. When they were nine years old they'd come in the shop and they would shine shoes. No, they started in washing windows. They'd got a dollar for each window. If they did it on the inside and then trimmed it they got two dollars. Keith's boys run it now. He could wash...put in a window and people would stop and look at it. I don't why, he just had a talent for windows.

BL: Now by trimming a window do you mean fixing it?

AJ: Putting merchandise out and putting new merchandise on display in a way that people would stop and look at it. There's an art to it. You see a lot of people go down the street and they never even look at a window. Other people go down the street and they'd see something that catch their eye. My best eye catcher I've got an old single action six-shooter my grandfather gave me. I put that in there somewhere in the display and that stopped everybody. It had a barrel about this long on it. It's down in the basement locked up.

BL: So the two of you repaired shoes, your partner and yourself?

AJ: Yeah, Mr. Anderson. I don't know what ___. He had a... I was an Explorer advisor and I took a bunch of Explorers down to Brigham Young University for Exploring...a little church conference on Exploring. We was gonna be gone a week and have a lot of Explorers...Exploring...what we called it was exploring into life, teaching 'em...getting 'em headed toward a career somewhere. So I took a bunch of boys down. I had a big station wagon that year. I went down and the day I got down there... It took us two days and we stopped in Salt Lake and the boys looked all over Salt Lake and had a lot of fun running around. I just turned 'em loose and said be back here such-and-such a time. They had fun. Then we went on down to Provo and checked in. I just got checked in and went to my room and there was a phone call come for me. Mr. Anderson had a stroke ___. My wife called me and said, "Get here as quick as you can. ___ I can't run the shop and take care of Mother and Dad." There was another carload with us from La Grande and so I just turned all the boys over to them. My son didn't want to stay, he'd come home with me. So we drove all night and got here the next morning. Didn't go down anymore. Well, we did, we went down a lot of times for Conference. My wife and I worked in the church ever since we...all our

- married life. I was an Explorer advisor for fourteen years in the Boy Scouts of America.
- BL: Can you tell me more about the Boy Scouts?
- AJ: Boy Scouts? I was on the __ committee, which was the organization of new troops and getting them chartered. That was my job as far as the district was concerned. But in my Explorer post we were exploring into manhood. The objective in the church was to get boys started in the direction they wanted to go. So I took 'em out to the mill, took 'em through the mill on Tuesday night. I took 'em up to the hospital twice a year, went through the hospital, talked about...they showed us the operating room, recovery room, first aid and everything up there. You'd just be surprised what little things I got them into. Out of that bunch of boys I've had six doctors.
- BL: Were the Boy Scouts a part of the church or was it separate?
- AJ: Boy Scouts...the church was one of the first churches that adopted and went with the Boy Scouts of America as sponsors. They sponsored... The Mormon church was one of the first churches to help Boy Scouts of America charter. In fact, we had more Boy Scout troops than another organization. Each ward had a troop and they are always sponsored and taken care of all the...help the district... Brother Nelson lives down the street here he's off at camps this summer three or four times to teach at these big Scout camps around the country. He's done that. I used to go up to Wallowa. There's a big Boy Scouts of America campground up above the lake. Have you ever been up there?
- BL: No.
- AJ: Last time I was up there there'd been a flood down through and it took everything out. But they've rebuilt it, I think, now.
- BL: Did you have weekly meetings with the Scouts?
- AJ: Oh yeah. Lots of times I'd go to Walla Walla at the headquarters for training meetings and then I'd come back here and go to all the wards and train them. That was what the Boy Scouts of America do, they train...good training. If a fellow would follow the Boy Scouts' rules you can give the boys a lot of advantage. In fact, I don't know how many...none of my boys got Eagles, but most other kids that would do their work would get their Eagle. This is quite an accomplishment for a boy. We've got two in our family that are Eagles, one that's on a mission in North Carolina and I think Steven went to Germany. I don't know whether he got his __ or not, but he's working on it.
- BL: How did the rest of the community view the Boy Scouts during that time?
- AJ: At that time we had the Methodist church, Presbyterian church, one of the lodges and the city, some department of the city was sponsoring. There was about twelve to fourteen troops in town. I don't know how they are now. I said I'll be in Scouting as long as my boys are there, but when my boys are out of Scouting I'm gone, and that's the way it was.
- BL: So you were doing that about sixteen years?
- AJ: Sixteen years, yeah. Tuesday nights, every Tuesday and some other training nights.
- BL: And where were the meetings, the weekly meetings?

AJ: Some of 'em would be at the Mormon church and the Methodist church uptown, we had a lot of training sessions there. The Episcopal church, we used to go in there. Overall they all had troops, good men at the head of 'em. You worked for a lot of good people in the Scouting.

BL: Was there competition between the troops?

AJ: Only at camps usually there was quite a bit of competition.

BL: And that was for fun?

AJ: Yeah. Camaraderie. But as far as this troop trying to be better than that troop you're all working for Eagle. That's what everybody in ward committee and Scout committee everything's encouraging every boy to get his Eagle. You can go through...most of the presidents of the United States have been Eagle Scouts. A lot of the leaders have been Eagle Scouts. It counts a lot on a resume. Two nephews they were Eagles, but they were in the Catholic church.

BL: So there was no difference between the troops as far as what church they were affiliated with?

AJ: They usually went where their parents went and their parents would pay their dues. Sometimes the boys could get jobs and pay their own dues. Then one time I was having quite a bit of trouble with some of the boys. They were bringing their friends in and that's where the friction come because their friends didn't know what discipline was. I had some trouble with 'em one time and I put in a merit system. If they lost all their merits they got to run the strap line.

BL: What's the strap line?

AJ: The fellow with the most points would take their belt off and use it on everybody as they went across the room. I don't know whether you know Ivan Hibbert? He's a boss out here at the mill. He was in my troop and his little brother was the one that caused most the trouble. He's now a doctor. I can see where I had some positive influence in the kids. You can't force them to do something. ___ they knew the rules. If they obeyed the rules there wasn't any trouble, but if they step out of line they're gonna get the trouble. I don't know whether ever approved of it or not, but none of 'em every had to run the belt line.

BL: They didn't have to?

AJ: They straightened up before it got that far. It was fun to see the... I'd been a sergeant in the Army for forty months, you know, and I'd bark an order at them and they usually shook up. It was fun.

BL: You talked a little bit about your involvement in the church, but that's been a considerable part of your lifetime here in Union County.

AJ: Yes. If you're in the Mormon church and raise your family in the Mormon church you're gonna be busy because it's a way of life. Actually, Mormonism is religion, yes, but it's a way of life. As far as I'm concerned it's God's way of life here on the earth. It keeps you clean. You don't drink and smoke, you don't swear. You try to live a good clean life. You work for other people.

BL: Can you tell me about some of the projects that you were involved in?

AJ: Mostly Scouting. I've been in genealogy work quite a bit, that's tracing family. I was chairman of a committee for several years. Do you know the Bean boys? They're both school teachers, but retired now. I'm thinking forty years ago because all of 'em was working in the Scouting I was.

BL: Did you teach Sunday School?

AJ: Oh yeah. I taught Sunday School for a while. We have a priesthood class for the men. I taught the seventies when they were officers in the priesthood. I taught the high priests for a bit since I've been forty. I'm a high priest now. In fact, right now they put me out to pasture. I worked with... Do you know Wendell Rock? He owns a service station up here in La Grande. He was totally inactive when he came to town. He was member and his folks were out here and they were inactive. They gave him to me as a hometeacher. We'd go and teach them, take a lesson to 'em every month, check on 'em, see if they're alright, see if there's anything the church can do to help 'em, anything like that. I've been working with him for fifteen years and finally got him. He's now took my place in the high priest group and he's very good at it. In fact, he came down here yesterday and pulled weeds for me for three hours just to help me out 'cause I can't do it. See, I've been sick and I told him I don't know what I was gonna do about my garden. "Oh, I'll come down and pull weeds." That trailer out there he put over half those weeds in it. He just worked like a mule. I don't know how I'm gonna pay him back. Him and his wife both was inactive for years and I just stayed with him, stayed with him and finally I got him into activity. One thing that swung the deal I think with him was his wife got sick, real seriously sick, six to eight years ago, maybe ten years ago, and he thought he was gonna lose her. In the church we can – I don't know what you know about the Mormon church.

BL: Not much.

AJ: We believe that if we live clean enough and righteous enough we can get a recommend to go into the temple and be married to our wife for time and all eternity. There's not very many divorces after you go through that temple. So this is what I worked for before I went to the Army. I was only in the church less than a year, but was in the temple and married my wife and I'm so glad that I did because I made covenants with the Lord that I'd be true to my wife and keep my covenants that I made in the temple. Then I went into the Army and the environment there and I had no trouble at all living my church...living my religion all the way through the war. I couldn't see women. I had that little...you seen my heart, did you?

BL: Yes.

AJ: I packed that around my neck. I had my wife at home and that's all that...didn't have eyes for nothing else. I only went to one dance and there was a girl there dancing and she had two friends with her and the one I was dancing with she was a good little dancer. She __ GI 'cause she knew how to jitterbug and have fun. Her boyfriend had just left the infantry when I got there and we went to this dance. So I took her home that night and there was four of us walking. I think we had three boys and three girls, walked out to their apartments and told 'em good night and come back. That's the only time I danced with a girl the whole time I was there. She was a lot of fun.

BL: Has there been opposition to the Mormon church here in La Grande?

AJ: Not for a long while. Not for a long while. I haven't ever seen any recently, no. The only place you find opposition is where people don't know anything about it. The Mormon church works with any church in town if they need 'em. It's the

same way all over the world. In fact, we have a welfare program and when they ___ like there is in Africa now we were some of the first ones to get food to those people. We fly it out of Salt Lake City. We've got a huge welfare department down there and stores come in from everywhere. You've seen these two big trailers sitting up here at the church for DI? Stuff goes in there, that goes to Boise and people there work on it and fix it and sell it and that makes money. If it's clothes they fix 'em and send 'em to Salt Lake and they're all cleaned and pressed and they send 'em all over the world to people. This has been going on for fifty years that I know of.

BL: How has your involvement in the Mormon church affected your lifestyle here in La Grande?

AJ: It hasn't bothered... Everybody knows that I'm a Mormon and they don't offer me drinks, they don't ask me to work the bar. I never go in the cigar store unless it's on business. Most the Mormons they're pretty good Mormons. A few of 'em drink coffee and have a beer now and then, but that's their life, you know. If you want the blessing keep the commandments. I'm a shining example of that. Look at me, I'll be ninety next spring and perfect health. That don't come by accident. That's because I eat right, I live right, I haven't killed myself for alcohol. At one time I was smoking five packs of cigarettes a day and I quit. When I left Rome ___ in Italy it was thirty days and I had three hours of sleep a night for thirty days. I lived on cigarettes and coffee, one right behind the other. I had to stay awake. I had fifteen men, two guns...two big guns and two big trucks loaded with supplies and they had to be certain things every time I stopped. You had to... I was with a big – maybe you've seen 'em...heard of 'em – long__ rifles, artillery pieces. They're 155 __ . Shoot a shot that big around and about that long. 180-pound shell. But I was with them from the time we left Rome 'til we got to Pisa, Italy. They assigned me the first gun because I was the best gun sergeant, I guess. The colonel put me on that first session, this gun. So when that gun moved I had to go with it when it was day and night, middle of the night. So I had to keep my eye on that gun twenty-four hours a day 'cause if it started folding up and that big truck...ten-ton truck comes back and hooks onto it my boys had to get my ammunition on my truck, all their gear. I had 'em trained so when I'd blow a whistle three times and say "mortuary" everybody dropped what he was doing and went and got their own personal gear and wrapped it up and tied it up and hung it on a certain post on the truck. Then they had another job, one of would go for ammunition, one of 'em 'd get the gun. Everyone of 'em had everything. One guy's job was to get the toilet. [laugh]

BL: Sounds like you ran a pretty tight ship.

AJ: You bet. When you're one the front you're so close to getting people killed that if every man doesn't do exactly what he's supposed to when he's supposed to somebody's gonna get hurt. I never did get such a shock as when we left Rome the colonel called all the sergeants in. He said, "We're going on the front. We'll be on the front for the next thirty days. How far we'll go I don't know. But when we get there I want every one of your men to have everyone of your men. These are the rules, I'm giving this commandment. If any man in your gun section disobeys an order, you shoot him." That stuck in my craw. I told ___ anytime I

tell you to do something do it because if you jepordize this mission or these men I'll have to shoot you. They believed it. I don't know whether I could've or not. Some of 'em I'd had for a year-and-a-half and were buddies. They weren't buddies, a sergeant can't have a buddy. [recording stopped]

9/29/04, T1, S1

BL: Today I would like to talk about the Mormon Church. You told me before that you've been involved in the Mormon Church about sixty-two years, is that correct?

AJ: 1941.

BL: What I'd like to know specifically today, though, is about the building.

AJ: The tabernacle?

BL: Yes.

AJ: That was built in 1906. My grandfather was living here then. They moved to southern Idaho and bought a ranch down there. I wasn't active in the church here until I moved back into the valley and married my wife in 1941.

BL: What do you know about that early church history?

AJ: The early church history, as far as I know, is there's been Mormons here for a long, long time. The church sent two different groups in here to help colonize the valley, I think. They raised sugar beets out around where the county shops is now. That's where the Mormon sugar beet factory used to be. I think that's the location. Then they owned a lot of property out around the base of Mt. Emily. Then the little town of Nibley – I don't know whether you've ever heard of it or not – but it's just... Do you know where you come through Cove go across Catherine Creek and go up on top of the hill? On top of the hill is a monument. The Eagle Scouts here in town put it up a few years ago. I helped him and Elmer Perry cement it in. There's was a little town, Nibley was the name of the town.

BL: Was that N-i-b-l-e-y?

AJ: I think so. They shipped a lot of people up here from Utah and bought the land and then let them buy it from the church. I think that's what it was. I'm not sure. They had a church in Cove at that time, or the town of Nibley. When this valley grew and headquarters went to Union and then came to La Grande the church members moved out all over the valley and became quite a __ of wards. This was known as the Union Stake then. It's now known as the La Grande, Oregon Stake. A stake takes in at least six to eight wards. When they get over eight wards they usually divide 'em. When they get over twelve wards in a stake then they divide it. This stake is so big now and so scattered that they can't get enough to make two stakes out of it.

BL: So where was that building... When the church moved to La Grande where was the building located?

AJ: Right where... They built it in... They had a little church down on...it's still there down on...where the church library. That church was one and they had one up here. But when they built the tabernacle – that was about 1906... My wife can tell you more history than I can. When did they build the new stake center, hun?

O: It was after '65. They were working on it then, but I couldn't tell you the date.

AJ: I can't either.

BL: So the building where The Observer is now was that where the first building was located?

AJ: Was that the first chapel in La Grande?

O: Where it is now?

AJ: No, where the old tabernacle was.

O: Where The Observer is? As far as I know that was the first one. That was an old one. It'd been there for years and years.

AJ: It was built in 1906.

BL: Did you attend that one?

AJ: Yeah, when we lived in the First Ward.

BL: Can you tell me more about what that building may have looked like?

AJ: Where's a picture of it, hun? Have you got a picture handy of the tabernacle?

O: We've got one, but don't ask me if it's handy.

BL: Okay.

O: We've got such a stack of albums I have no idea.

BL: We can add in the photo later.

AJ: They've got a record of it.

BL: Do you recall what it was like on the inside?

AJ: It would I think seat over five hundred. It had a huge balcony that went all the way around on the inside of it. It had an organ. In fact, the organ is in this new building up here now, but you can't see it like you used to up here. It had pipes out in front. I think there were seventeen pipes around the front of the...in back of the stage on it but only five or six of 'em that played. The same organ and they rebuilt it and they put it in this building up here. The ___ said they wouldn't build another building unless they put that organ in it. They had to change the plans on the building to get the organ in it because it was too big.

BL: So did you hear the organ often, then?

AJ: Oh yeah. It's been part of the church ___ big organ up there had pipes eight inches square and twenty feet high.

BL: It must be a magnificent sound.

AJ: It is. You can just make that old building go like this with it. I've never played it. My wife has, but I've never played it.

BL: So only a few people could play the organ?

AJ: You had to have a calling to play it because you have to know what you're doing with it.

BL: Is there anything else about the inside that stands out to you?

AJ: It had huge glass windows on each side of it. Then when they tore it down we saved all the glass in it.

BL: Was it stained glass?

AJ: All stained glass. Big windows all over. They were ten, twelve feet across on each end of the main auditorium.

BL: Do you have any idea where those may have come from originally?

AJ: They were made for that building.

BL: They were made for that.

AJ: Yes. There's another building just like it if you ever happen to be in Ogden, Utah. It was patterned after that tabernacle down there. We always called it the tabernacle because it had a basement under it where one church could meet and the other church could meet upstairs, two wards could meet at the same time. It had classrooms downstairs and then over in the recreation hall behind it. We had the first big basketball floor in this town. In fact, when this college...the first basketball this college played they played in the Mormon... They didn't have any basketball court.

BL: It was full-sized court?

AJ: Oh yeah. It had a balcony around it where you could set people and they could watch it. We'd have the Gold and Green Balls there and they were the social event of the town, dancing. We put on a floorshow in formal ballroom dancing.

BL: And that was called the Gold and Green Ball?

AJ: Yeah.

BL: Why Gold and Green?

AJ: That's the young people's colors. All of the decorations was ___.

BL: You mean at the school, it was the school colors, or the church had it's own colors?

AJ: No. The church had it's own gold and green, young people's organization. They don't use the gold and green anymore. In fact, they don't have Gold and Green Balls anymore.

BL: When did that stop?

AJ: During World War II, I think. I know ___ and I danced in a Gold and Green Ball in 1941. Had a dance for couples.

BL: Were there cooking facilities in the first church?

AJ: Oh yeah. In the recreation hall was a kitchen. They'd hold banquets on the basketball floor all the time. Lots of evenings the whole stake would come in and have dinner there. Lots of fun, lots of programs, lots of entertainment.

BL: In what ways would you say the Mormon church was significant to this county in those days?

AJ: To the town? It was the social center of all the piano recitals and like that were put on at the tabernacle, have pianists come in and they could put six hundred people in there. They used to have recitals.

BL: Were these recitals exclusively for the people of the Mormon faith or were they for the whole community?

AJ: No. They were for the whole... The whole town was invited to those, all of the activities. Lots of activities went on in the Mormon tabernacle for the whole town because it was the biggest hall in town everyone could get into. They don't have the piano recitals anymore except at the college.

BL: How many services were being held in that building?

AJ: There were two wards and one stake meeting. That was ___ for two wards, First and Second Wards and the stake center. This building up here is the First and Second Ward and the stake. The stake holds a lot of meetings in there usually Sunday afternoons or something like that. It's big enough they have their own area to use and then the wards use the classrooms. They just keep swapping

rooms around in the ward. But they've got three wards in there now. We have a youth ward, but they meet early in the morning.

BL: Do you know why the building wasn't changed?

AJ: The building was old, 1906, and the church didn't want to keep it up. It wouldn't remodel it. They wanted to build a new one like this. This was the style of church they were making all over the world now, similar to this one. They built one style of church and I forget how many thousand churches there are now they've got throughout the world. I know the church has advanced...has exploded in population the last twenty, thirty years. I can remember when it was just a million members in the world.

BL: A million?

AJ: Yeah. Now there's nine million.

BL: That's quite a change.

AJ: Close to eleven million now. The biggest growth is outside the United States. There's more Spanish speaking people in the church than there are English speaking now. Africa is just exploding over there. I don't know, I think they've got three temples in...three or four in Africa now.

BL: So the new one was built in the '80s?

AJ: I think so, somewhere in there.

BL: I want to back up just a little bit, can you tell me about some of the activities that you were involved in in the old church?

AJ: Nothing but Mutual. I was in mostly in Mutual, working with young people. The church was one of the first churches to join the Boy Scouts of America. We sponsored... Each ward still sponsors one Scout group. I was all the time my boys from the time they were in Cub Scouts until they went on their missions I worked in Scouting. Most of the time I was an Explorer advisor, boys twelve to seventeen.

BL: Did you teach Sunday school?

AJ: Pardon?

BL: Did you ever teach Sunday school?

AJ: Yeah. At that time I had to teach because I was Sunday school president. I was over the Sunday school for eight years in town, in the First Ward. But then they pulled me out of the ward and put me in the stake Sunday school presidency. But I served longer in the Mutual, young people's stake organization than any other office I've held. That was the stake MIA there, young people's organization. Our stake then ran from Halfway to Pendleton. We visited every ward every month. Those of us who were over Mutual – we had a president and first and second counselor and secretary – and the women's and the men's and we would go visit the wards and bring them any Mutual events we had or any ideas that we'd had for teaching. In fact, I was a teacher development director for about six years on the stake level.

BL: Were there other buildings in the county?

AJ: Oh yeah. Union has one.

BL: There's a building in Union?

AJ: Yeah.

BL: When did that become in existence?

AJ: I don't remember when it was dedicated. I wasn't around here. She was only about ten or eleven years old.

BL: So it's been around quite a while.

AJ: Yes. That building in Union... Have you been down the street in Union?

BL: I haven't.

AJ: It's katy-corner across from the Methodist, that big stone church there. In fact, my wife and I helped build the recreation hall on the back end of it. She was pregnant with our oldest son. We lived in Union that year.

BL: So you did attend the Mormon church in Union as well then when you lived there?

AJ: Yes, when we lived there. I joined the church in Union.

BL: Can you tell me anymore about that building? About what it may have looked like inside?

AJ: That one over there?

BL: The one in Union.

AJ: It's a nice little chapel. It's made of stone. It seats over two hundred, I think, and it has two aisle up the side, stage in front. Behind the stage is a bishop's office. That's what you see when you go by is the round part of the building, that's the bishop's office. Then you have a basement underneath it with classrooms and in the back you've got a recreation hall, full-sized basketball floor with rooms under that, classrooms under that.

BL: Is it typical to have a recreation facility in a Mormon church?

AJ: All churches have... Most all churches have a recreation hall. They teach dancing there... They used to teach dancing. They don't teach anymore. Everybody just gets out and wiggles. Kids don't know how to dance now. You don't see... Ballroom dancing... Not ballroom dancing __ I used to teach ballroom dancing. I love it. I really love to dance, but I can't do it anymore.

BL: Did you ever teach those dance classes in La Grande?

AJ: No. That was when I was younger. My mother's cousin owned a dance hall. That's how I got into dancing. I got a job working checking hats at first. My sister and I always danced together at home and at school dancing and all like that. When I got into high school I was a good dancer and I really enjoyed it so I went right along with one girl who was a tap dancer one time. We had a lot of fun tap dancing. We danced ballroom dancing with taps everywhere we went. We stopped the floor two or three times people watching us. It was fun.

BL: As you think about you're years living here in Union County what would you say are some of your most memorable experiences here as far as maybe events that happened in La Grande or in the area?

AJ: The sled we had here was the most fun.

BL: Can you tell me more about the sled?

AJ: We had a __ how much. I can't remember what year it was, but '60 or somewhere in there. We had a foot of snow. The snow was real big and wet snow just everywhere piled up a foot of snow around here on the hills and everywhere around. It snowed all night and all day and I think another night. We had a foot-and-a-half of snow around town and the hills were just loaded with it. There come a warm Chinook rained, all of Eastern Oregon. You can imagine

what the snow at Anthony Lake is ten foot deep at that time of the year. The Grande Ronde River... All the way up... Everything in the Grande Ronde River ___ when the warm rain hit it. It just come down. This creek, Bull Creek, was running right that garage across the street. It never got up on my place here. But the valley... It drops fifteen foot...I think twelve or fifteen feet from where the river comes in here 'til it goes out of Elgin. All that water came down from all around the valley. You couldn't get out of the valley. Think of how many houses were under water. Fully half the valley was under water.

BL: How did the community respond to that sort of a disaster? Lifted their pant legs? [laughs]

AJ: Waded around it. There was water running right down Adams Avenue and come over the curb right into my store. I put sandbags in the door to keep the water running out from right down Adams. See this trailer court over here? There wasn't a trailer court there then, it was a pasture.

BL: Were the businesses forced to close?

AJ: They were all busy pumping water out of their basement. The sewer come right up in the basements. You had... I went down in my basement and plugged mine solid so the sewer couldn't up in there. I had to mop up the basement and clean it out. Quite a day and a night.

BL: I was just going to ask how long did it last?

AJ: We were fighting the water in town all night taking it out of businesses and like that. And then there was a typhoid scare after that. We had to go to Union to get shots for I think typhoid. I can't remember what it was.

BL: Was that because of the water coming up and getting in with the sewer?

AJ: Yeah. The surrounding area our water service was coming from a lake up here then. We didn't have the wells in town, they do now.

BL: So then you were vaccinated for the typhoid?

AJ: Yeah, I think it was typhoid. My wife and I ___ we had to go to Union to get these shots. They didn't have the serum or something, I don't know what it was.

BL: Did everyone have to go to Union, or there was so much available here that ran out and then you had to go?

AJ: Yeah. I guess there was an area that went to Union, I don't know.

BL: Did they cancel school?

AJ: Yeah. Busses don't run in that much water.

BL: Right. So everything was closed down.

AJ: Yeah. Everybody was just wondering how it was going to go. They just didn't know how deep the water was gonna get.

BL: What kind of damage do you think was done to the area businesses?

AJ: I don't know. I never heard an estimate. It didn't hurt our business any 'cause we didn't have anything in the basement to damage except some hardware and we just set that up high. Took the leather goods and like that and brought it upstairs and dried it out. There were some stores, like J.C. Penny, I don't know what happened to them because they had a big basement. And the underpass was full of water, just solid with water. You couldn't go down in there. You'd have ___. So we were using these two junctions, the one going over Fir Street up there to get across the railroad tracks.

BL: So how many days did this go on?

AJ: It took them about a week to pump that out there. It had to be pumped out. The pumps were in the bottom and you couldn't get to 'em. I think the power was off, too, and that didn't help.

BL: I would imagine you've seen some other extreme weather conditions in La Grande over the years.

AJ: Not so many here. I've seen... The year we spent in Union was the coldest winter actually. The snow was up about almost three feet deep and it went ten below and the wind blew for ten days straight. Everything froze. In fact, in Union – you haven't been over there – but there's a hotel over there, an old hotel. The street in front of that hotel the water main broke six feet down, froze and busted. That water came up and froze up and froze up and froze up. A pile of dirt and stuff in the middle of the street that high. Couldn't do anything to it 'cause it was coming up like a volcano from the bottom. Union had a limited...they took water out of Catherine Creek then. They filled their water system. But their pipes were so old – they had an older plumbing __ in town – they were wooden pipes like this with steel wire around 'em to hold the old wooden pipes together. They've replaced them all now.

BL: Were the pipes in La Grande that way as well, the old wooden pipes?

AJ: I didn't see 'em. They didn't have wooden pipes here, not that I know of. They had wooden pipes bringing their water down from the intake up on top __ using that years ago and put in a big four-inch main. They didn't use that since I've been here, the old wooden pipes up there. Some places you can see 'em like you go up Mill Creek and ____. I don't know anything else particularly drastically exciting around here. I know one friend out in the valley he was watching TV and they was laughing about everybody in the valley was here out on the sand ridge between here and Cove. They still live in the same house. Here he was, people was having a bad time in La Grande, water was flooding their basements and everything and they heard something bump, bump, bump. Went downstairs and the fellow opened up his cellar door and the beet trees were floating and bumping the floor. [laughs]

BL: So he thought he has escaped the flooding, but he hadn't.

AJ: It was in his basement. He was up high on the sand ridge between here and Cove. But that's how high the water was. It was up over the sand ridge. Over there around Cove you could look...the river was perhaps a half-mile wide coming around to Cove and going around and trying to get out of the valley. The Grande Ronde River used to go to Cove then back out the other side of the valley how flat the valley was. It just come down like that.

BL: Do you recall if there were any deaths because of the flood?

AJ: No, I don't recall. I don't think there was. I don't think there was any emergencies. There might've been, but I don't have any memory.

BL: I would imagine the emergency personnel here were not really equipped for flooding, to handle flooding.

AJ: Not that bad. There wasn't too many boats around. People didn't have a boat setting in every yard. There was a few World War II rubber boats that the war surplus was around. They had to rescue people with those.

BL: Was the temperature cold during the flood?

AJ: No.

BL: It'd warmed up quite a bit.

AJ: January, it got up to around sixty, fifty-five and sixty degrees. We don't have too cold of winters anymore. Used to be we never thawed out until April. It's not that cold anymore. Virginia said she can remember when there was snow until April in Union when she was a kid going to school. I remember the same way in southern Idaho where I was raised. You'd walk from our ranch, from our home, two miles to school and going clear up on top of snow drifts and walk right over the top of fences to school. The roads were all snowed over and you could just cross it over and cross the next creek to our country school. I never walked less than two miles to school in my life. I went seven miles to __ High School.

BL: I bet that kept you out of trouble.

AJ: We lived on a place we called Willow Creek and it's called __ Creek now. __ a couple of miles. I'd walk from home down to the schoolhouse and catch a bus that the school district – there were three of us going to high school – and that lady'd drive up and pick us up and take us to high school and then she'd bring us home at night. They paid her I think. It was forty hours a month driving that. Couldn't __ now for that. How long's that thing...[end tape]