

Ray Buckley

Place: Senior Center in LaGrande

Interviewer: John Turner

August 13, 2002

JT: When you were 5 years old ...

RB: When I was 5 years old and my aunt and uncle took my sister and I from Montana. We moved here in 1917. I was 5 years old.

JT: And your name at birth was ... ?

RB: Huh?

JT: Your name at birth? Your name at birth?

RB: Oh, Robert Raymond Buckley

JT: And when How come your family moved here, Ray?

RB: Well, it was a ... I guess you wouldn't call it a dispute but a breakup of the family. Dad, I guess, died. He was a miner. They came from Dakota over to Montana and he worked in the mine--copper mine. Anyway, there was a family troubles.

JT: Oh, well, don't need to go into that. Uh, what are the first things that you remember about LaGrande?

RB: Well, I can remember the war was goin'.

JT: That was World War I.

RB: World War 1 was goin'. The streets were gravel; the sidewalks were wooden. Everything was on Main Street. 'Course, everything was by train. There wasn't any highways then. It was gravel roads. Nobody drove 'em. Like goin' to Pendleton or Baker, that was, that was a real trip.

JT: And then you start to school?

RB: Central School, yeah. Boy, the winters were rough; you had to wear your clothes in the classroom to keep warm. They made ya take off your overshoes so you wouldn't get chill blains. We had some hard winters. You could walk over the fences and not know that you were even walkin' over. And I can remember the wind blowin'. Ya could hear it comin'--whirrrrrrr. Then it'd hit LaGrande, and ...

JT: Well now, LaGrande at that time was a lot smaller than it is today.

RB: Oh, yeah, out here where we are right now was cherry orchards and farms.

JT: And we're at the Senior Center

RB: Yeah, here at the Senior Center.

JT: Uh huh, so you went all your grade school at Central School?

RB: I went to grade school at Central and high school.

JT: Now was there anything that happened while you were in grade school that you remember particularly?

RB: Oh, yeah, the kids on this side o' the town were enemies of the other side o' town. I dunno. It was just ... Ya had to go home, ya had chores to do, things to do. Ya didn't get to run around uptown.

JT: The railroad tracks was the dividing line between...

RB: Yeah, the railroad tracks was the dividing line.

JT: And at that time, when you came to LaGrande, you moved on N Avenue?

RB: N Avenue. That was a gravel street. There was cattle drives in the spring and the fall. They come along and tell ya to keep your kids off the street the next day 'cause there was gonna be cattle comin' down from Deals Canyon and Beaver ...

JT: Mill Canyon.

RB: Yeah. Those kids thought that was great. [laughs]

JT: Do you remember what the address on N Avenue that you lived?

RB: Yeah, 1310 N.

JT: Uh-huh.

RB: That was a great day when they started pavin' that street. That was really a highlight.

JT: When you went into high school, what activities did you do?

RB: Well, unless you were big and husky, ya didn't stand a chance of doin' any sports because ya weren't big enough. Ya had to be pretty good size. The fellas that played football graduate, they would come back the next year for post-graduate so they could play ball again. [laughs]

JT: You had dances at school and activities?

RB: No, there wasn't much of that goin' on, no. Kids had to get home after school. They didn't have all that fancy stuff for kids to take part in.

JT: Was there anything that you ...

RB: Oh, boy, in high school... When you went into high school from grade school, they told ya what classes you were gonna take. You didn't get to pick out this or that. They told you. They had Latin class and we had a poor teacher. She was really cross-eyed. The kids made an awful lotta fun out of 'er, but, uh, I think it really hurt 'er, but she was a heck of a nice lady. She never failed anybody. The rest o' the kids got to take French or Spanish. Anyway, they had it all figured out what ya was gonna take.

JT: You said you ...

RB: I wasn't too hot in arithmetic, but then, when I went into high school, algebra and geometry and that stuff was a cinch. I didn't have a bit o' problem with it.

JT: Good. You said that the high school burned twice while you were going to high school. Can you tell me a little bit about that.

RB: Well, that was when the , uh.... Nelson--one of the Nelsons--was fireman--assistant fireman. The more calls they got, the more money they made. And then he worked at the school. He climbed up in the attic and he had it all timed out--how long it'd take a candle to burn--and get goin'. Come to find out, he'd been settin' fires off all over town. They caught up with 'im 'cause he was always the first one there to the fire--knew where it was.

JT: That was one fire. Now the second one?

RB: The next fire was supposed to 've been from off the stage when the kids were practicin' for a play, and somethin' was wrong with the wiring anyway, and it started the fire. Anyway, it took two fires to get us out o' school.

JT: When the fire damaged the high school, then you went to the churches?

RB: Yeah we went all over town to school. That was in the winter time. We was goin' from building to building.

JT: It was kinda hard to get from one building to the next for the class for the time.

RB: We had a lot of fun goin' between ... Havin' snowball fights and whatnot. We were pretty well scattered around town. But the school was.... When you graduated, they had the Mormon temple where *The Observer* is now and that was a beautiful place, and it

held a big crowd, and we had a regular ceremony we went through for graduation. I hated to see that not take place anymore.

JT: What year was it that you graduated?

RB: I graduated in '31.

JT: 1931. And after you got out of school, what was your first job?

RB: Well, I had a job while I was goin' to school. Most of the kids had paper routes and whatnot but I got a job at the Piggly Wiggly store. I had enough credits that I didn't have to go to school a full day. You could graduate at midterm or you could go on and graduate with a ... But there wasn't any ceremony at the midterm, but there was at the end of the big term,. You had a nice ceremony. And so I went to school in the mornings and worked the store in the afternoons.

JT: Where was the Piggly Wiggly store located?

RB: Well, that's where Goss is now. Goss bought that building. That was the Mackie Building and that was built where Jerry's [?] horseshoe shop used to be. Mackie bought the ground and built the building for the store.

JT: Did you like working at the grocery store?

RB: Yeah, it wasn't bad at all. Ya kept working. Ya didn't fool around.

JT: What did you want to do after you graduated from high school? What was the ...

RB: I don't know. I really didn't have any plans. Ya didn't sail off to college like they do now. A lot o' kids didn't go to college. At that time, the Eastern Oregon University was in operation. A lot of' kids went to that--started college up there.

JT: Then after you left Piggly Wiggly, what was the first job you had?

RB: Well, let's see. What'd I do? I worked uh ... When I was at Piggly Wiggly, they moved me up to Baker. They had a store in Baker. I went to the store in Baker, worked there until they closed, then I came back to La Grande and my wife worked at the service station. Then I worked for the Railway Express.

JT: You married your wife, Maggie, when you were in Baker?

RB: Yeah

JT: You were there four or five years?

RB: Yeah, I went up there... came back in '35, I think it was, I came back down here. We were married in Baker.

JT: When you went to work for the Railroad Express Company, that was the major way of sending packages and things of that day?

RB: That was quite a business. They were in competition with ... Well, they didn't have all the truck lines and all the different things they have now. They came on the railroad. We had enough train service that ya could have four or five trains a day goin' each way.

JT: How many hours a day did you work?

RB: Well, it was 8 hours.

JT: Do you remember how much you were paid?

RB: [laughs] Well, no, but it seemed it was a good wage. [laughs] I know that. I don't remember exactly, but it was a good wage.

JT: I remember when I came back to LaGrande in 1940, you were working at Railroad Express Company.

RB: That uh ... What got me was when they were on the gold standard. I was workin' and I couldn't hardly wait to get paid in gold. They put a stop to that. I never did get my gold.

[laughs] When I was workin' at Piggly Wiggly on Washington and Depot there on the corner in the Sommer Building, J.C. Penny's was across the street. They paid their help in gold and a bonus at the end of the year. I thought that was the greatest thing in the world. I couldn't hardly wait to get paid in gold, but I never did—[laughs] never got it. Government put a stop to it.

JT: Jobs were pretty hard to find in the 1930's in La Grande.

RB: Yeah, that was before the war started. Just wasn't anything goin' on then. 'Course they had the mill—Bowman-Hicks Mill—goin'. That's somepn' else that happened. Where Boise Cascade is now was the fairgrounds, and the mill was over across the track, and they switched. Now the fairgrounds is over there and the mill is over here. [laughs]

JT: And August J. Stang started his mill in 1925.

RB: Huh?

JT: August J. Stang started his mill ...

RB: Yeah, they put him over here and put the fairgrounds over there where Bowman-Hicks ... Well, Bowman-Hicks went out o' business. That worked out all right. They had a beautiful well over there. I think the fairgrounds people are still usin' the well. The Hart... one of the Hart brothers ... They were construction people. When the Senior Center was over at the fairgrounds, he used to bring his jug and get a jug o' water 'cause he knew the well was still there. Ya didn't take all these trips across the mountain. Well, Cabbage Hill was quite a thrill. There was a few accidents on that hill.

JT: What was your first car that you owned?

RB: Model T Ford. It had to be rejuvenated and this fellow helped me do it. Got rid o' that, and our first real car was a Ford V-8 I bought in Baker. We had it for quite a while; in fact, we drove clear back to Chicago and back with it. Only had one flat tire.

JT: When you worked for Railroad Express office and then the war came along, how long was it before you went into the service?

RB: Well, we had an exemption; workin' for the Railroad you had an exemption. I gave up my exemption and went into the service. The troop trains used to come through by the dozens.

JT: What part of the service did you go into?

RB: Went to Marine Corps. Ended up in the 4th division-- transportation in the 4th division.

JT: And then where did you serve?

RB: I just had one invasion. That was the Iwo Jima. We were on there in the first seven minutes and was there for 30 days. You didn't take your clothes off, except to change your underwear and your socks. That was somepn' else. I got a purple heart out of it. I got hit with a motor shell; I got a purple heart out of it. I don't think I'd do it again. [laughs]

JT: Then they sent you home after ... ?

RB: No, I was there for pretty near 4 years before we come home. Then I signed up with the reserves. We got called back to the Korean War, and I was in there for 3 months and then they sent me home--too old to fool around with 'em.

JT: When you came back from the service, what job did you have?

RB: I went back to the railroad for the Express Company. Worked there till they done away with the Express. Then I went over to the car department--the railroad. We had a big car department over there—repaired cars, inspected 'em. I stayed there until they wanted me to move to Hinkle. I had a short time to go for retirement, so I couldn't see goin' over

there and then in a couple years comin' back to LaGrande. So I got a job with the school district--in charge of old Central School--head custodian at Central School till I retired.

JT: And that kept you in LaGrande?

RB: That kept me here in LaGrande. [laughs] I didn't have to move.

JT: What year did you retire, Ray?

RB: Oh, '75, I think. I think it was that--'75.

JT: And then when the ...

RB: That was a great day. I always told 'em if I retired and the retirement come at midnight, I was through right then and there. I wasn't workin' another hour.

JT: Best job you ever had? Retirement is the best job you ever had?

RB: Yeah, that's the best job. [laughs] You do what you please when you please.

JT: I don't know. You got very active in the senior program after that

RB: Yeah, well ... The seniors were down the Salvation Army--the old building--before they moved. Then we moved over to the fairgrounds. Then we moved here to the new building. I had plenty to do--go to the hospital and call on people, do different things like that, haul people around.

JT: And you worked hard on trying to raise money, like all the seniors did at that time.

RB: The Senior Center has grown into quite an activity in the last few years

JT: After you moved here and they built the new building, you worked 21 years, helping serve meals and things like that.

RB: I was in charge of the dining room for all that time.

JT: But you really haven't quit. You're still doing it.

RB: [laughs] Well, show up anyway. There's still a lot to do. There's still a lot of changes I'd make, but I'm not in charge anymore. [laughs]

JT: Back when you were working at the Railroad Express Company, how many men were employed there?

RB: Let's see. Must've been the 4 of us, outside of the boss, assistant boss. About 4 of us. I had a pretty good-sized route to deliver every day. You had to be good to the people, or you'd lose their business. Wasn't like just runnin' to the door and drop somep'n, say, "Here's your package," and run out again. You had to give 'em a little service.

JT: You had a delivery truck that you drove?

RB: Yeah, we had two trucks. You know clear back in the early days Depot Street was the main street 'cause it come right up from the train depot and everybody traveled by train. Had a lot o' Chinese Restaurants, different things around town like that. I can remember the Sommer Hotel dining room had their big window on Washington Street. Us kids'd go by and look in that window. Tables were set with linen and fancy silverware. Boy, we thought that was great. If you got to go out--your parents take you out to lunch--that was really a treat, 'cause that didn't happen very often. [laughs] Yeah, there was a lotta things ... Baker and La Grande, they were enemies in football. After the football games in the old stadium over here, there was always two or three good fistfights goin' on. [laughs]

JT: A lot of competition during that time.

RB: Oh, yeah, there was a lot. I don't know how ... It all kinda melted together. When you got out of 8th grade and went to high school, then those kids came over from the other side o' town, but they all seemed to melt together and get along then. [laughs] That one

Mormon gentleman, he was quite a businessman, and he had a dream of havin' a mall from the depot right straight up Depot Street clear to the library. It fell through, it never came ... never happened, but he had... He was ahead of himself, ahead of the times, but he had a good idea.

- JT: In the early pictures it does show all the window displays facing Depot and not too many facing Adams.
- RB: If you was a merchant, you didn't think of gettin' off o' that. You have your business on Adams Avenue, you'd have your business ... You just didn't go to the side streets like they do now. Of course, the highway came right down through town. That was a big thing to ... People got to see your store, see if somep'n's goin' on or get some business out of it.
- JT: What do you remember about the Depressionor the ... not the ...well, about the Depression?
- RB: The Depression? Well, the county had a welfare program goin'. 'Course I was in the store then. They'd bring in their warrants from the County and you'd fill their order.
- JT: A warrant was like a check..
- RB: No, it was just a slip of paper entitlin' 'em to so many dollars worth o' groceries.
- JT: Well most generally, warrants were discounted weren't they, by the store? Like if it was ...
- RB: Teachers were paid in warrants. That's where L.C Smith showed up and he had the Dodge Garage. He had enough money that he would cash their warrants-- the teachers paid in warrants—he'd cash their checks without takin' a discount. They all came back to 'im and bought cars from 'im when things ...
- JT: The Eppplings discounted them, at their grocery store.
- RB: Some of those places did, yeah. Some of those places did. Farmers'd bring in their eggs; we'd give them ten cents a dozen for eggs and sell 'em for twelve cents a dozen. [laughs] Bread was a nickel a loaf. Oh, man, I'll tell ya. Things were ... Things were different.
- JT: What happened during prohibition that you remember?
- RB: Well, they had bootleggers [laughs] all around. Fact is, we lived next door to a taxi man that done the peddlin' for the bootleggers. We found out where he used to hide 'is little suitcase o' liquor on his back porch, and then the people would drive up and get it. We found that out ... I guess they'd leave their money in the suitcase there, and us kids took part o' that. [laughs] One time the folks had us bring the bottles over to the house, and they dumped the liquor out and they put tea in the bottles and put 'em back in there. Then the taxi man the next day or two was complainin'. He said, "Those fellows wouldn't pay me for that liquor. They said it was nothin' but tea." Oh, boy. Good times.
- JT: Do you remember when George Noble hit Cast Iron Mary?
- RB: Hit Cast Iron Mary? Well, yeah, it was on 4th street there. Used to be down on Adams Avenue. Then they moved it over to 4th Street and Depot.
- JT: Almost in your front yard now where you live.
- RB: He was the town bootlegger, and Cast Iron Mary was put up by the ladies against prohibition—or against liquor--and he's the one that hit it--broke it all to pieces. I guess they're goin' to try and rebuild it from what I hear.
- JT: That would be a nice project, I think.

RB: Well, one fellow was told me that 4th Street was one of the first paved streets outside of Adams Avenue when they started pavin' streets. I guess that was quite a thrill to the people drivin' automobiles. Everybody had wagons or horses; they delivered groceries for Eppling and different stores. They had their horse and buggy. They had the China Garden up there in Old Town. Chinaman used to come down the alley with his little cart, stop at your back door, and peddle you vegetables. We'd switch the reins on the horses; he couldn't figure that out for a long time-- what was goin' on. And o' course, the iceman used to come down the alley, too, with the ice wagon. People had refrigerators. They didn't have electric refrigerators.

JT: They just had an icebox.

RB: Iceboxes, they called 'em, yeah. Deliver ice to ... We kids, we' would try to sneak in the back of the wagon, get a chunk of ice just to chew on. We had one ice man that was really ornery, boy. He had 'is whip that he had for his wagon, and he'd take after us kids ... "Get out of that ice, get out of there, get away from there."

JT: Do you remember when the Chinaman was shot and killed on the post office steps?

RB: Yeah. They had Peg Leg Pete, the colored gentleman that washed windows for all the different stores; he had his little dog with 'im. He'd leave 'is equipment stuff, the bucket, and the dog. Boy, you didn't go near and touch that; that little dog would getcha. Then one night Peg Leg Pete got in trouble with the Chinaman, chased him round and round the old post office building. That's the City Hall now. There was Peg Leg goin' around and around, Chinaman after him ... The tailor shops. They used to have a lot o' tailor shops. The tailors would set in the front window, have a mouthful o' pins, and be sewin', and us kids'd be in front of the window, makin' faces, doin' all kinds of stuff--teasin' 'em. [laughs] Didn't make the tailors very happy.

JT: Was that Bill Wilson and... There was a Zweifel that was a tailor, wasn't there?

RB: Yeah. And then the ladies, of course, they had a millinery shop. There was a lady there she could just take a piece o' cloth and make a hat out o' nothin'. She had quite a business. 'Course the ladies had their big hats and they had their hatpins. Their hat pins were their protection. They would carry those, and if anybody approached 'em and they had trouble, they'd pull that hat pin out. [laughs] I guess you know what would happen.

JT: Well growing up, was Stuart Opera House, was that going when you came to La Grande or ... ?

RB: Stuart Opera House, yeah. I think ... Didn't the National Guard end up up there?

JT: Didn't they have the Rex Theater after that?

RB: Rex Theater?

JT: And then the national guard?

RB: We had three theatres in the end--had Sherry's and the Arcade and then ... called it the Star ...

JT: Where the Granada is today.

RB: Where the Granada is, yeah. I got to go into the show for free, because the piano player lady was ... She was our neighbor. She had a couple little kids. She had to take 'em with her because her husband was on the railroad, so I 'd get to go set with the kids, [laughs] watch them, and I 'd get to see the show. The show was silent those days. We had one

young fellow from Old Town ... He stuttered quite a bit. I can remember one of the pictures—this Tom Mix picture. He was going along. The fellow jumped up. [in falsetto voice] “He’s right behind ya, Tommy. He’s right behind ya.” [laughs] Ah, boy. Then the Legion had a convention here, too. They had a state convention and they had all those drum and bugle corps. I don’t know how many they had—must’ve had a dozen of ‘em.

JT: “Member what year?

RB: Oh, golly, what year was that? I don’t remember the year, but they had a big contest up on the old high school football field--the drum and bugle corps. They would get up in the middle o’ the night and go down the street—the drum and bugle corps--and durin’ the show time, they’d come into the show and go down the aisle and around and back out, playin’ their drum and bugle corps. They were a pretty welcome sight.

JT: Some real activities.

RB: Yeah, a real ...

JT: Do you remember when the La Grande Hotel was built?

RB: Yeah, the high school class--junior and senior banquets. That was where we had our banquet was La Grande Hotel. Boy, it was a beautiful building. That was the first time I ‘d ever seen ... And the backend o’ the building was raised up, and they could drive their cars and park ‘em underneath the building there.

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JT: _____[?] Sacajawea hotel, and the first hotel was the Foley Hotel.

RB: Yeah, that was the oldest that was the first one I think, to have hot and cold water, running in all the rooms. It was the older hotel, was a beautiful building there on the corner.....La Grande Hotel was supposed to have been one of the nicest between Portland and Boise.

JT: Do you remember Pat Foley? Owned the Foley Hotel?

RB: I just remember him is all, not much about him

JT: I heard that he dropped nickels and dimes down to the kids.

RB: Oh, I don’t know about that, I missed that I guess. The _____[?] Building now, across the street from the old hotel, that was the railroad offices. That was quite a sight at quitting time, all those people pouring out of that building getting ready to go home, they had quite a sizeable office there.

JT: When they built the depot, didn’t they have a lot of offices there too?

RB: Well they did upstairs, yeah, but they finally gave that up and moved it over into Portland.

JT: Didn’t they have a time keeping department there, where the checks and stuff were made for the Railroaders?

RB: Yeah they had quite a business office.

JT: When you were working at the Railroad Express Office about how many people worked at the Roundhouse? Just across the tracks.

RB: Oh gosh, quite a few, cause they had the Water Department, they had their Electricians, they had their Roundhouse Foreman that repaired the Engines. Had a turntable there.

Well, La Grande was mostly Railroaders. They had a lot of.....That's where they changed crews, changed engines, had the helper engine.

JT: It's safe to say that most every person in La Grande had somebody who at sometime worked for the railroad.

RB: I'd say pretty close to that, yeah.

JT: When you were working on the rip track, wasn't you, what things did you do on the rip track?

RB: Well, you had to inspect the cars, whatever was wrong with them, you had to fix.

JT: Like what in a day?

RB: Well, if they needed new wheels, or if the brakes needed fixe in, the inside of the car needed repair so it would be fit to use for shipping. All the safety hazards on the car, the handrails and footsteps and all, had to be in good shape. Course, this is the terminal here..... I finally got out of there and got over to the yards. We had to inspect every train roll by that came to town, they had to be air tested before they could leave town.

JT: Now in an air test, what does that do, for someone who doesn't know about railroads?

RB: The Engineer pump the air through the train and it registered in the caboose, it had to be at least 70 pounds before you could give an air test.

JT: They had air, like brakes on each car?

RB: Yeah and that would set them up, then you would give your signal and he'd release it and if everything was ok, you'd tell him to leave town. Yeah the Railroad employed a lot of people, the time they had their coal boys and all. The old time telephone too wasn't like it is now, you'd pick it up and Central would ask you, number please, and then you'd have a signal, whether you was red or green, red number so-and-so, or green number so-and-so, b or lack number so-and-so. Then she'd ring it for ya.

JT: What were the red, green, and black?

RB: Well that was a signal for the phone company. Whatever they had that...whether it was your part of town or whatever. I have no idea why they had that, but you had it. Things aren't like they used to be, that's for sure.

JT: And the mail used to go, that was onne of the jobs of the Railroad Express was to pick up the mail?

RB: Pick up the mail at the post office, take it to the depot, get the mail off the train and take it back over to the Post Office.

JT: There was a box on either end of the depot?

RB: Yeah, there was a box...you could mail there, or you could wait till the train would come in and mail it right then.

JT: Right in the slot?

RB: Yeah. If you get a letter out of Portland on the train in the morning, you could have your answer back in the mail, going back to Portland that night. Trains comin and goin.

JT: There was a man right on the train that sorted the mail?

RB: Oh yeah they had a mail car, with mail sorters in it right on the train, two or three of 'em was to a car, sorting the mail.

JT: It was an interesting time.

RB: Island City that was out of town. It's nothing to get to Island City now but us kids would hike out to Island City, and it would take us a little while to get there and back.

JT: Having lived in La Grande as many years as you have Ray, what's the things you like the best about La Grande?

RB: Well, it's just a nice town. A lot of nice trees, and the town is pretty. Just seemed like a nice place.

JT: The thing that I noticed the most about the Depression years and things is that people helped one another.

RB: Oh yeah, of course it isn't like now, you could go out and leave your house unlocked and never worry about anybody bothering your house. But you don't dare go across the street now without locking your house.

JT: And that's something that's bad.

RB: Well the kids had things to do after school too, they had chores to do and they didn't run around the streets like they do now. I look out our kitchen window and it's getting dark, and here's these little kids 5,6,7,8,9, 10 years old walking down the street, all by themselves; I don't think their parents have any idea where they are or what they're doing. In those days, your parents wanted to know where you were and what you were doing. They had a curfew, they ran a curfew at night, the kids would get off the street. Boy, the old fire department too, they used to have fire boxes that covered certain districts. Then they had the big bell there on the City Hall that would toll. If it was box 42 they'd ring four, then they'd ring two, that was 42. Us kids, away we would go to see what the fire was. 'Course there was a lot of roof fires in those days, because everybody burnt wood or coal and a lot of sparks from the chimneys caused a lot of fires. In the wintertime, the city would plow the streets. They'd have a horse and a V-shaped plow they'd go up and down the sidewalks clearing it off. At the end of 7th street there was a stairway going up the hillside you'd go a little ways and then turn, go a little ways.....There's a lot of changes.

JT: What do you remember about the Ku Klux Klan?

RB: Well, they used to burn the cross up on the hillside. And they would march downtown and they'd have their outfits, their hoods and sheets they covered themselves with. We, us kids didn't quite know what it was all about.

JT: You really didn't know any of them?

RB: Yeah I knew some of them, but you didn't dare tell anybody who they were.

JT: Well, did they demonstrate against people?

RB: Well of course they were mostly against the colored people as near as I could figure out, what it was all about.

JT: How about the Chinese? Was there...

RB: I don't know about that. We had a pretty good-sized China Town back on Jefferson Street.

JT: That was Jefferson and 4th street there behind the La Grande Hotel, back in there?

RB: Yeah, they had quite a little community.

JT: Did you know any Chinese personally?

RB: Oh Yeah I knew a couple of Chinese Gardeners they were around town.

JT: They were pretty nice people?

RB: Yeah, real nice. They were pretty prosperous in their restaurant business.

JT: One that comes to mind is Pork Chop, do you remember Pork Chop? Pork Chop, the Chinaman that used to go down the alley.

RB: I don't remember too much about him, no. I remember Peg Leg Pete more than anybody. Everybody knew Peg Leg Pete, he was quite a guy.

JT: He washed windows like that, and was drunk every Saturday night.

RB: You didn't dare go near his outfit with that little dog there I tell ya. Take a leg off ya. The good ole' days.

JT: What activities, did you like to hunt and fish in this area?

RB: Well fishin' was probably the most important. Ladd Canyon, had a nice little park up Ladd Canyon there, you could go up there and catch crawdads. The wheels on the cars in those days had wooden spokes and in the summertime they would dry out pretty bad; the summertime you'd drive up there with your folks, they would drive right into the creek and let the wheel soak up the water and get swelled up again. Shame they ever done away with the Ladd Canyon Park, it was a nice little park up there.

JT: Did you ever fish for Salmon on Catherine Creek?

RB: I never fished, but I went with a fellow that did. He used to, would take tennis balls that came in a long narrow tin, and he'd cut the bottom out and put a piece of glass in, then he'd lay on his belly and put that in the water, and they could spot the salmon down there, and they'd yank them out, they weren't supposed to but they did.

JT: Little bit against the law.

RB: Yeah. The Indians used to come up there every year, pick berries and fish salmon.

JT: I haven't seen any of that go on for years.

JT: Do you remember before the war, when the Indians came over to pick camas out on Gekeler lane?

RB: I don't remember that. They had a sugar beet factory here you know, at one time. They gave that up, cause they didn't have the water I guess. Then there was supposed to have been a flax factory out there at the foot of Mt. Emily. I don't remember much about that, but I know there was supposed to been a flax factory. People used to be able to go out around Mt. Emily around in there and dig up arrowheads.

JT: Did you ever go out to Hot Lake at any time?

RB: Oh yeah, Hot Lake was quite a place, pretty popular place. They had their own train station, mail station. Trains would stop there, pick people up and let 'em off. Doctors from Seattle and around would send people to Hot Lake for treatments. That's a shame that it's setting out there like it is now.

JT: Did you ever go out for dinner out there?

RB: Well yeah, we had dinner out there.

JT: What would a dinner cost out at Hot Lake?

RB: Only a couple of dollars.

JT: Pretty nice dinner wasn't it?

RB: Oh yeah. Then the other half of the big building burnt one year so.....

JT: That was 1934.

RB: Yeah, that was a shame. They had a little railroad too, a narrow gauge railroad that run out of Union, around across through the valley, back to Cove. Cove had their own packing plant for cherries and fruit; they had big prune orchards, cherry orchards. Then the Union Stock show that burnt down one time. Lost a lot of animals and stuff in it. Oh boy did that ever stink. Them they had that fire run out....

JT: You've been a lifetime Episcopalian.

RB: I started at the Episcopal Church here when I was five when I moved here. Been there ever since.

JT: You would go out to Cove to the Ascension School?

RB: Cove Ascension grounds out there was quite a bit different than it is now. They first started out with tents, then they ended up with little cabins. Course there wasn't any water in the cabins or anything, just light bulbs. We would go out every year, clean them up, get them ready for camp.

JT: Do you remember Bishop Remington?

RB: Oh gosh yeah. He was quite a guy, quite a guy.

JT: Very well thought of.

RB: Then they had one Bishop that came here, I guess he came here from Idaho; he was really a nice guy. He used to ride a motorcycle. In Boise I guess, he said he had a lot of fun he'd ride his motorcycle and go calling on people in the church.

JT: Motorcycles were a lot different in those days than they are today.

RB: Well yeah, there were motorcycle clubs here; they had Indian Motorcycle, and the Harley Davidson Motorcycle. At one time they used to have quite a 4th of July celebration out at the park and they'd have these motorcycle races that went around the backcountry and back around to the park. They sold buttons, pretty good-sized buttons; they'd sell them all year, to support the races. Decoration Day, they'd have quite a celebration out at the park. Biff Nelson would make a boat and take it up the river a ways, it had flowers on it, he'd float it down to Park.

JT: That would be Riverside Park.

RB: Riverside Park. I think the women, it always seem to me like it was always a women's group that put that on. They had a real celebration...

JT: You say the name Biff Nelson, who was he?

RB: He was quite a machinist that worked for the railroad. He could make all kind of little things. Things aren't like they used to be with celebrations and what not. We'd go to the Roundup in the fall, to Pendleton Roundup, that was always a big deal. Later on up in Baker, they had the Miners' Jubilee on the 4th of July, that was a big celebration.

JT: I think one of the nicest celebrations was in '85 when we celebrated La Grande for 100 years. The railroad. I was real proud, because people really took part in the parade.

RB: Well, at the time that Harding was at Meacham, they ran special trains to go up to shake hands with President Harding.

JT: That was in 1923.

RB: Met Jack Dempsey when I was working the grocery store, he come down and stayed over night at the Sommer Hotel.

JT: When they had the dedication of Immigrant Springs, when President Harding was there, didn't they build kind of a little city there with false store fronts, and there was all kinds of businesses represented there?

RB: That was up at Meacham yeah. I guess the stone monument is still up there. But the highway don't go by there anymore, you have to go round into Meacham to see it, the highway bypasses all that.

JT: But there were hundreds and hundreds of people there.

RB: Oh gosh yes. The railroad ran special passenger cars up there. Everybody dressed up like old-fashioned...like pioneers, it was a real celebration. They had some times too when they had railroad wrecks. They had one out here by Hot Lake one time. People were running up there with buckets getting gasoline that was leaking out of the cars, wait till it was leaking out of the cars. They had some pretty rough times.

JT: The price of gasoline, I can understand it today. What do you remember about when the war started about the bridges out of town being put guards on them?

RB: That was necessary I guess they thought, to protect everything.

JT: Well we've seen the railroad stopped. Had they've sabotaged the railroad that would have tied up traffic all over the country.

RB: Well I don't know what else I can tell you.

JT: Well Ray, I thank you very much.

RB: There's a lot of history I tell ya. Things didn't move fast, everything moves fast now. Everything took its time in those days. People knew who their neighbor was, helped their neighbor out, you don't see much of that anymore. One time they had... Spruce street was changed to Victory Way. They planted trees on both sides of the street all the way down to the Park, in town here and it was called Victory Way.

JT: That was a dedication to WW2

RB: World War 1

JT: World War 1, excuse me..

RB: Then they finally done away with that. Course when you went out to the park most of the time, there wasn't all that traffic, you walked out to the park. There wasn't all this ...that was something else.

JT: In the early days when the carnival used to come to town, didn't they block off Jefferson Street?

RB: Yeah, they took Jefferson Street, that's where the carnival was. The circus used to be up on the hill where the College is now. The circus trains would come in, unload and go up what street is that? Greenwood? Then onto 8th street, then onto N, then up the 6th street hill. That was nothing but grass up there then....dried out, there wasn't any buildings up there.

JT: Did you get to go to the circus?

RB: Oh yeah that was quite a thrill to go to the circus. Side shows in the tent there.

JT: I think you told me it was the Ringling Brothers?

RB: Ringling Brothers, ?

JT: Barnum and Bailey?

RB: Barnum before he combined with the other circus.

JT: Did you ever go help set up and take down?

RB: No, I was never big enough to do that. You had to be pretty good sized and husky, carry water for the elephants.

JT: How did you ever get in the Marines? You're not that tall.

RB: They were taking anybody I guess. Anybody that was dumb enough to sign up.

JT: When you were in Transportation, when you were in the Marines, what did you do in Transportation?

RB: Well for a while we drove gravel trucks, they were building another section of the camp. Then they finally put me on driving officer of the day. You drive, you was on 48 hours, then you was off 48 hours. Drove the officer of the day, whoever he happened to be.

Had quite a few privileges. You didn't have to stand at inspection, except on Fridays at the officers' quarters at inspection. You got out of doing a lot of stuff when you got to be driver for the officer of the day. You'd get some funny calls boy; one call we got was to get over to the Officers Club on a Saturday night. There was a woman running around over there naked. Oh Boy. One time I got a call, somebody was down in the shower rooms in the camp, there was an officer and a woman down there taking a shower.

JT: That was in the United States, before you went over seas.

RB: That was in this country, yea. We were called out on a fire call too, one time on a Saturday when they had a brush fire and they didn't have all the help they needed, they would call the soldiers or whoever they could get a hold of. There was 110 of us that went out, they had us strung up the hillside, one fellow would have a shovel, the next guy would have a pick, the next guy a shovel, the next guy pick all the way up and down the lines

JT: You were making a fire break.

RB: Yea, making fire breaks. You couldn't tell there in California, the wind would blow one direction one minute, the next it was going the other. We got trapped, they had us lay down in the ditch we'd made, pull our caps, coats up over our heads to trap whatever air we could. Hundred of us went to the hospital and ten of them died, got burnt to death. One kid from Texas, there was a scrub oak there, he climbed that, they pulled him down got him off, said "you can't, you'll get burnt to death". He said "oh no" and he climbed back up there, and he got burnt to death too.

JT: What camp was that?

RB: Camp Pendleton in California.

JT: Well we've had some pretty good fires right here in La Grande

RB: Yeah, we've had those.

JT: Was it in the 30's when the fire started up in South La Grande up there?

RB: Yeah, at night you could see the flames and the colored sky. Then they had, they would sprinkle the streets in town; they had the water wagon with the horses going down the streets, the gravel streets.

JT: Do you remember when we used to have the street sweepers in La Grande?

RB: Yeah. What they need nowadays is a CC camp again. Boy that was quite a deal. I went to Chicago on a train for the fair and they had these CC kids, they were moving them back and forth all over the country. They done a lot of good.

JT: They had that one CC camp up at Hilgard.

RB: I don't know whether you get kids to go out an' camp or work or not.

JT: They did a lot of good, they built roads and they built buildings. You remember the Art Center where the VFW is now?

RB: Yeah they had the Art center that used to be the Garland Hotel. It's gone through a few changes, there was a plumbing shop there, and there was a wood working shop there, electrical shop before we got a hold of it.

JT: What you're talking about is the Veterans of Foreign Wars bought the building. They had started a basement over there at Chestnut and Jefferson.

RB: It turned out to be the Ford garage, later

JT Later, but they went broke trying to build the building.

RB: We bit off more than we could chew. Yeah they tried to build a building there, they finally sold it and bought this other building from C.J. Shorbe.

JT: So you have been very active in the Veterans of Foreign Wars for many years.

RB: Oh I've been fifty some years in the Veterans.

JT: Your wife helps out at the Senior Center when the American Legion ladies serve. When they serve out here, how many times a month do they serve?

RB: Well, it's divided up, a lot of churches are involved and the Veterans organizations involved.

END OF TAPE