

Narrator: Helen Butler

Interviewer: Vanessa Clemens

I: The first thing that I want is your full name, when you were born, then how old you are and where you were born?

HB: Okay, my full name is Helen Marie Butler. And I was born February 18, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri.

I: So that makes you how old?

HB: Seventy-four.

I: What was your mother's maiden name?

HB: My mother's maiden name was Josephine Henderson.

I: And what was your maiden name?

HB: My name...Manuel, Helen Marie Manuel. My mother's maiden name was Henderson before she married Manuel.

I: When did you move to La Grande?

HB: I moved to La Grande in July, 1956.

I: Were you married then?

HB: Yes, I was married, and I had five kids.

I: What was the reason you moved to La Grande?

HB: My husband died and that's why I moved to La Grande.

I: What made you choose La Grande?

HB: My mother lived here.

I: A very good reason. Did you have brothers and sisters?

HB: No, I was the only child.

I: Your mama kind of wanted you back, didn't she?

HB: Yes, she did.

I: What are some of your earliest recollections as a child?

HB: Growing up? Oh, let's see. When I was a child I lived with my aunt because my mother wasn't able to take care of me. She wanted to, but she had to work. So I lived with my aunt till I was about three years on up until I graduated from high school.

I: Do you remember some particularly happy times in your family?

HB: Oh yes. I remember that growing up, going to school, especially in high school, I was on the cheerleading team, and I played in the band when we would have a Thanksgiving football game. I would go to them and sometimes, not all of the band, but some of the band people would come over to the house. We would roll the rugs up so we would dance. The band would be there to play. It wasn't all of the whole school band, but it was some of the band leaders. We would just have us a good time.

I: Is that by any chance where you met your husband?

HB: Yeah, I met my husband when we were in school together.

I: How old were you when you got married?

HB: I was eighteen when I got married and had my first child at nineteen.

I: Has religion always been important to you?

HB: Always, always. I was raised up in the church and I belonged to the Union Memorial AME Church.

I: What church do you belong to now?

HB: I belong to the LDS Church.

I: Are you happy there?

HB: I'm happy, very happy.

I: Do you remember any religious experiences in your youth where prayers were answered or special blessings?

HB: I would sing in the choir, in the junior choir.

I: As you have talked with your children and others in the county about the quality of public education, what stands out as the most important changes in the way students learn in these county schools?

HB: The schooling of today is different from when I was coming up. When I was growing up, we had to learn and, if we didn't get it, we would have to repeat it again.

I: After your husband died, did you remarry?

HB: Yes, I did. I married J. C. Hawthorne--Johnny Clayton Hawthorne.

I: Did you have more children?

HB: I had six boys by him.

I: And what about the other five? Did they all stay with you?

HB: Yes.

I: So did you have eleven children at home for a while?

HB: For a while. Then the other five went back because they didn't like it here.

I: Was that pretty hard on you?

HB: Yea, it was pretty hard on me. My aunt wrote me to ask if she could keep them. So she did, she kept the five kids.

I: So you you and Hawthorne--how many years were you married?

HB: We were married in '56. I think we were married about fifteen years. But he left me when after Johnny graduated from high school. He was here when Johnny graduated from high school.

I: Is Johnny the oldest or the youngest?

HB: The oldest of the Hawthornes. Johnny went off to college.

I: So what did you do to support them?

HB: I worked in different homes and then I worked at the Royal Motor Inn as housekeeping. Then I worked up at the Tropicana for Lou Carpenter; I did her upstairs. I cleaned all upstairs for her. And then I worked at the Sacajawea [Hotel, cleaning it--just something to keep the food on the table. I never was on welfare.

I: Raising kids by yourself is not easy, especially that many children. But, I know for a fact that all of your children went on to college.

HB: And they were on the athletics. They were pretty good athletes, the boys were. Some were in wrestling and football.

I: They never got in any trouble with the police or no one?

HB: No. No. No.

I: And didn't most of them get scholarships?

HB: Yes. Johnny got a scholarship. Glenroll got a scholarship; I think he got a half scholarship, if I'm not mistaken. This is the Hawthornes I'm talking about that got the scholarships. And Clarence got a scholarship and

he won the Heisman award for being the best athlete and whatever.

I: What are some of the professions that the kids have gone into?

HB: Well, let's see. Are you talking about the Hawthornes?

Josephine--she's

not a Hawthorne, though, she's a Rines--worked in Los Angeles as a probation officer. Mary Lee is with computers for the 7-Up bottling company, but she's no longer with that service. Josephine now is working for the Attorney General's office; she lives in California. She's in the Air Force Reserve now.

I: The five children that went to live with the aunt: do you see them pretty often?

HB: All the time.

I: Did they all get to go to college?

HB: All of them. Albert is a professor in biology at the University of Missouri.

I: Aren't you proud? To have so many children all turn out good. You must have raised them with a rod of iron.

HB: Oh, I tried. [laughter] I tried.

I: Probably lots of love and discipline both.

HB: Mm hmm. Then Ilee, Jr. is employed by the Veterans' Administration. He was in the Army for five years.

I: Have you run into any prejudice much here in Union County?

HB: Oh, no, I don't think so. If I did, I didn't pay it no attention. No, I never ran into no prejudice. The reason why none of the kids are here is because of jobs. The jobs are not the kind of jobs that I think two of them wanted; they wasn't here.

I: Did any of them go to college here?

HB: No, none of them. Johnny went to Western Business College because he figured why go to college for four years and then after you graduate in four years or whatever, then you may not get that job. So he went and got a business and management college work; that was his profession. That's what he wanted to do, just go to a business college. So, when he got out, he started working at Nordstroms in the shoe department. Now he lives in Boston, Massachusetts because his job transferred him there. Now he's the president of Nordstroms.

I: Did you continue to do housekeeping jobs?

HB: These little jobs I had wasn't bringing me in enough money. So I decided to see if I could get a job working somewhere. My son he said, "Mom, we're getting ready to leave and we're all going off in different directions and going to college and what need is a job that is stable--that whenever you retire you have benefits.

So, I said, "Well, I think you're right." I went up the high school and put in an application. I put down everybody that I was working

for at that time and handed it to the secretary. A week went by and the telephone rang and one of the secretaries said, "Helen, you better come down to be interviewed." So I did.

I came back home and I said, "I don't have it." I thought I didn't have the job. The telephone rang again. "What time are you able to come to work?" I said, "No!" [laughter] It was a Thursday and so he said, "Let's wait till Monday." It was in 1980 when I first got the job. I came in and I celebrated. I took the kids out for dinner. Boy, we celebrated!

I: Did you have to let everybody else know that you wouldn't be working for them anymore?

HB: Yes. What they did--they were so good, "Since you don't have to work on Saturdays, we can still have you work for us on Saturdays." I said, "Okay, then." I did. I worked for the Strands over twenty-some years--Sheldon and Alice Strand. When Alice died, I worked for Marianne Baker until she died.

I: You've worked mighty hard for a long time.

HB: It was hard. It was hard. It wasn't easy. It was very, very hard.

I: Have you gotten into art things of any kind? Painting or music or different things like that in your life?

HB: Well, I was in painting, oil painting with Maxine Myers. I was in her class.

Some of the art pictures that I have finished I have given to some of my kids. They couldn't believe it that Mommy did this.

I: I know that you sing well. Is that one of your favorite things to do?

HB: Yeah. And I like tap dancing. I remember we had a talent program up at the Stake Center and it was in the gym and I tap danced. Then I went over to the school in Union and I tap danced there in the high school. That's the farthest I went. [laughs]

I: Do you drive, Helen?

HB: Mm hmm. Oh, boy! That driving was something else! You see, I started driving before I retired.

I: How old were you when you finally got your driver's license?

HB: I was sixty-one when I got my first driver's license. One day I was going up to the church to get my temple recommend, and I didn't know I was driving on the left-hand side. I was just a-going. Something said, "Move over." I kept going. Three times and the fourth time it was a policeman coming behind me. [laughs] I thought, "What is this man ... what is he doing?" And I realized that I was over on the wrong side and when that thing said "Move over" I whipped over quick. [laughs]

I: Did you get a ticket?

HB: I kept going and I went on into the church to see the bishop to get my temple recommend. When the bishop and I were talking, somebody at the door said, "There's a good-looking man here to see you." They were just playing. I said, "Now, that's embarrassing. I wonder who could that be?" So he came in and I looked down at his shoes and thought, "Oh gosh, it's the

police." He asked me, "Helen, do you know what you just did?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Now what did you do?" I said, "I was driving on the wrong side of the street and it just came to me that I was on the wrong side of the street and I saw you coming towards me and I just ducked over and got back on the right side." That's all I could tell him, exactly the truth. He said, "Well, I won't give you no ticket, but I advise you to take your driving license over." [laughter] So I said, "Okay, I will." I went down to the place to get and have them to have me to start my driving test. You know, that was hard. Oh, it was hard! My friends they helped me. Dorothy Trice helped me. Sigrid Jones helped me. Just, everybody was helping me. I said, "You know, this is a shame." So, I just kept at it and then I would go in and they would tell me to drive. And then I said, "Now you want me to drive fast. You get me for driving too fast and now I'm driving too slow." [laughs] I finally got 'em. Sigrid, one day she was in the car with me. She said, "We're going on Mt. Glen Road." I said, "Oh, no." It would go up on the hill and it looked like my car was going up like that and I was just shaking. She said, "Don't put your foot on that pedal because if you do, boy, I'm going to take your foot off." I said, "No, no, no." She said, "Well, you scared."

I: Was she talking about the brake?

HB: Yeah, that's what she was talking about, the brakes. She called it a pedal. Anyway, I was just nervous. But anyway, we finally got over it. As long as it was nice and smooth and straight I was okay. But when it started looking like it was going uphill and then you down and you go uphill again...the hills is what got me scared.

I: So, have you driven out of town?

HB: No. I drive right around here in town. So I told the lady at the DMV was the only thing I need my car was to go to church and to the store and to the doctor or the hospital. So, she said, "Maybe we can do something about that. I want you to show me where you go." I prayed, I just prayed for a whole week and the next day it was time for me to get my driving test. When I got in I was as calm as a cucumber. The lady came out here and said, "Now you take me where you generally go to the store." I drove to Safeway. Well, that was fine and she checked that off. Then I said, "Sometimes I go

here to Albertsons." I drove to Albertsons. Check, she checked that off. She said, "Now, what about going to your doctor?" I said "Well, I go and get my eyes checked." I drove right here and I parked. Finally, I did all of that. And then I said, "I go out here to Wal-Mart." She said, "Show me where you go to Wal-Mart." I drove and said, "Lord, don't fail me now!" And I just drove off to Wal-Mart just as easy. "And now, what about your church?" I said, "That's right up here." I drove down to the church and parked/

5/27/2002, tape 1, side 2

I: Tell me about your last husband, Willie [Butler]--how you met him and a little bit about him.

HB: I met him because my husband Hawthorne were good buddies. They went fishing together and I be knowing Velma way before I met him. My mother knew Velma. Even when she lived in St. Louis she knew Velma Butler. And, the way they knew each other was during that time when the war was they had to go and work for the government. They would wash the cars, these big trains and things.

HB: In Vanport. They went to Vanport [on the Columbia River near Vancouver, Washington]. They were called to work up there. And, they was working for the government there. I was married and was expecting a new baby. That was in December. Velma and her they came here to this little town here because somebody told them, "Maybe if you go to La Grande, Oregon, you could find a place." At that time Velma wasn't married to Willie. But, she got a place and my mother got a place. That happened in the '40s. So, well, anyway, she came out here and got settled. And, so, by that time Willie was living in Omaha, Nebraska during those days. He finally got on the railroad. They moved him to Baker and then he stayed in Baker for a while. I don't know how that happened, but he finally met Velma and married her. During those days my husband, J. C. and them, they were all friends. And my mother. They all went fishing. Hawthorne walked off and left me. I finished raising the children--seen to it that they went through grade school, high school, and college, all of that. I'd say about, let's see

twenty years--a long time before I ever remarried. When I married Willie I had retired.

I: Did Willie work for the railroad?

HB: Yea, he was working for the railroad.

I: Did Willie have children?

HB: No, he never did have any children at all. He never did, no.

I: So, I bet he enjoyed yours!

HB: Yeah he did! He'd seen them grow up as little tiny things in the neighborhood. Been in that neighborhood ever since they were babies. They went to Greenwood School. They all went into middle school and then they graduated from high school and they all went to college.

I: So, were you able to get a pension from the railroad, then?

HB: Yeah, now I do.

Narrator: Helen Butler

Interviewer: Eugene Smith

5/6/03, tape #1, side 1

I: When you said that you came to La Grande first I believe you said that it was because your mother lived here. Do you remember her saying exactly what she heard?

HB: Well, uh, let's see now, I don't know whether it was Esther Wilfong that lived here way before she did. And then some other people lived here: the Lowes lived here. You know how people talk.

I: Did she ever say anything about the fact that maybe African-American people could get along better here than they could in a metropolitan area like Portland?

HB: No. I never heard her say that. At that time she lived on Madison and Hemlock durin' that time.

I: She was completely on her own?

HB: Yes.

I: How did she support herself when she got here?

HB: She got a job doin' housework and a job workin' at the La Grande Clinic as a cleanin' lady. And she stayed on that for years until they changed hands.

I: Do you remember when you first arrived in La Grande?

HB: Yes, I do. My mother came to visit me in St. Louis, Missouri; that's where I was livin' at the time. My husband had died and we were havin' a hard time. She asked me did I want to go back. I said no because I already had a job there, what's the use in goin'...leavin' my job. She said, "No, not leave your job, but you can go on a vacation." I got an arrangement with my employer and we came on out here.

I: By train?

HB: No. In the car. She and my dad.

I: This was in 1956?

HB: 1956.

I: I'm interested in knowing your reactions to La Grande when you first saw it.

HB: I didn't know how large the place was. I was twenty-five years old when I came to La Grande. There was a lot of black people here at that time and they met me and got acquainted with me.

I: You mean they came to the house?

HB: Yeah, to visit.

I: What were they saying to you?

HB: I guess you know how people do, they want to see what you look like and, well, "Anytime you need anything just come on down." They talked about the church. And so I started going to that--to the Boyd Memorial Baptist Church.

I: Do you know why it was named that?

HB: I believe it was named after a preacher named Boyd. I used to go there a long time ago and the reason I quit goin' because there wasn't enough people there. They left La Grande. When kids graduate you know how they do--they leave. And a lot of 'em died away. It got down to that, three or four members.

I: Can you remember some of the activities in connection with that church?

HB: We would have our services--the morning services--and we would have birthday parties and weddings and funerals and just a whole lot of different things.

I: Were all the members of the church black?

HB: Some were and a few whites.

I: There were a few whites?

HB: After they got to know Boyd Memorial, where I used to do a lot of singing and they heard it. And I sang on the radio quite a bit. They heard about me and then I got to sing at the Presbyterian Church and the Christian Church and the United Methodist Church here in La Grande.

I: You mean you were invited as a soloist?

HB: Yeah, a soloist. And I got to sing at all these different organizations--the World Day of Prayer and Salvation Army—"The Lord's Prayer" and "I Believe For There's the Drop of Rain that Falls." Also non-religious music like "Summertime" from "Porgy and Bess."

I: That's a hard one.

HB: Yeah, it is.

I: Where'd you learn to sing?

HB: In St. Louis, Missouri. At school when I was in the high school--sang in the choir.

I: When you sang at these other churches in La Grande, were they paying you?

HB: No, I didn't get no pay for it. Then I sang at the funeral chapel--it was Snodgrass, then Daniels.

I: So you became rather famous around La Grande, I'd say.

HB: I guess so. [laughs] I never got no pay.

I: Did it occur to you that you should perhaps ask for some money?

HB: When you're doin' it for God, I don't think you should ask for money. That's the way I feel. I wasn't destituted, either--singin' for a livin'.

I: Did you ever tape-record any of your singing?

HB: I did.

I: Do you still have the tapes?

HB: But I don't know where my tape is. Some of my accompanists were Elaine Livingstone, a lady named McManus, and Betty Crampton.

I: Tell me about some of the reactions you got when you did the singing in churches and at the funeral homes.

HB: The reactions were very good. They thought I did a very good job when I sang. And every now and then at church I do singing. I'm seventy-five years old now. But in my younger years I would sing.

I: Think more if you will about those first few days or weeks in La Grande when you came here. You said a lot of the black people who lived in La Grande came to offer their assistance and their welcome. What other reactions?

HB: That's about all.

I: Did you have to look for work right away?

HB: I did, but I couldn't find a job here.

I: You didn't have any money, did you?

HB: I had a little bit I brought with me.

I: So you weren't desperate.

HB: I wasn't what you'd call out in the street or nothin'. [laughs]

I: And those five kids were all fairly young, weren't they?

HB: Yeah. Yes, they were. My mother she did a lot of work and I would work along with her when she did the La Grande Clinic. And we used to clean the Tropicara restaurant [on Adams Avenue]. Then after Mother left and went to Baker to live, I had the job of working in the upstairs of the Tropicara for Lou Carpenter, the owner of the Tropicara building.

I: That's the part that burned recently?

HB: Uh-huh. I did that and then I would clean in the kitchen--wash dishes after hours. Then I had job I used to work at the Nazarene Church--used to clean it. That's how I got my jobs: I did housework, I worked for Mrs. Strand. For twenty-three years I worked for her. Then I worked for Marion Baker; she used to be the secretary for the Union Pacific Railroad. And I did her home and her mother's home.

I: How did these people treat you?

HB: Real nice. I had more trouble with my own race. I don't know whether it was because I came here and then began to work myself up. I had a lot of trouble.

I: What kind of trouble do you mean?

HB: I mean jealousy.

I: Hard feelings?

HB: Hard feelings, yes.

I: Were you doing something they didn't like?

HB: No. I wasn't doing anything bad or nothin', just ... When you're workin' and after you get your place to stay, then you start to buy little

things you need for yourself and your home and your children and then advancin'. "Oh, she got her a new car. Boy, she thinks she's rich!" You know, little ... not bad things, but little naggings.

I: Do you think they saw you as uppity?

HB: Well, I guess that's what it is. Yeah, uppity.

I: You thought of yourself as better than you were? I don't imagine you felt that way, but they thought that?

HB: They thought that, uh-huh. And it was kind of rough for me a while, but it wasn't with the white people; it was just with my own color. But I never was in any trouble or anything.

I: In your experience with the white people you met at the churches and that you worked for, did you think that they had no trace of feelings of prejudice?

HB: Everyone that I worked with treated me real ... just ... hospitality. You know what I mean? They really did. When I lived in St. Louis, I lived around a lot of white people because my aunt lived in a white neighborhood. When I was growin' up, we played with white kids, and sometime they would come over, especially at dinnertime. They'd look in the screen door when we'd be gettin' ready to set down and eat. So Aunt Max said, "Come on, come on, come on in." And so they would eat. [laughs] Everyday looked like at dinnertime. Then sometimes we would have a little spat with the whites and they call you names and, well, forget it. Then the next two minutes we back playin' again. When I came out here in '56 that was when in St. Louis white and blacks were mixing, begin to go to school together. After my husband got out of the Army and we moved into the Projects, it was mixed white and blacks. And we played together --even lived next door and across the hall from each other--and we got along real good.

I: It wasn't until the 1960s, though, that the rules for segregation really started to crumble. Of course, there were civil rights demonstrations in the South at that time. I'm sure you were hearing or reading about those.

HB: I was here then and very seldom you heard all of that.

I: You mean it seemed far away?

HB: Yeah, but I wasn't connected.

I: Did you have reactions to it, though? Were there no effects at all in La Grande that you could tell from what was happening in the South?

HB: Here they didn't show no remorse ... just went along like everyday doings. But the blacks here they could tell what was happening, but we didn't do anything about it--didn't cause no confusions or nothin' like that. But in Portland there was a lot of stir-ups goin' on.

I: What were some of their reactions to the Greenwood school?

HB: I used to walk with them because I didn't have a car then. I would walk with him to school 'cause my husband was a logger then and he would go and do his logging.

I: Which company did he work for?

HB: Bates I think it was. I know he worked out in Elgin.

I: When you say he was a logger, do you mean he went out in the woods and cut trees?

HB: Yeah, cut trees. J. C. , yeah. I did most of the raisin' the children because he was gone all the week and then come home on weekends. I was with the children. I would get 'em up and and take 'em to school. When Johnny went for his first year, you know how little kids they'll cry, "Mama, Mama!" didn't want to go. And I said, "Well, you got to go to school." He was school ready because I taught them before they started to school--first their ABCs and learnin' 'em how to write, print their letters, and learn how to count and all that stuff.

I: What were some of the things they told you about their school day?

HB: After they come home from school?

I: Yeah.

HB: Well, let me see if I can remember all that. I ask 'em sometimes, "How was school today?" "Oh, it was all right." And I say, "Anything excitin' happen?" "No." And then they start sayin', "One little white boy he did so-and-so-and-so." I say, "Well, just go ahead and don't pay it no attention."

I: You mean something they didn't like?

HB: Yeah.

I: What? Calling them names or fighting?

HB: Yeah, they would call 'em black, nigger and all that. I say, "Well, just don't think it nothin' like that." So I had to go down to the school and talk with one of the teachers about it. So it got quiet, everything was fine.

I: What did the teacher say?

HB: Well, the teacher would tell me, "If he did we didn't hear it. We'll watch out for it again."

I: Did you believe the teacher?

HB: Well, I guess I did. I don't know. [laughs] 'Cause I didn't want to get in no disagreement 'cause I heard all of that before I even came to La Grande.

I: Did these kinds of stories continue over the years at Greenwood?

HB: No, no. At Greenwood they all liked the children; they begin to like the kids. I had trouble with Edward not learnin' 'cause he used to disrupt the class, the teacher would say, so I had to talk to him about how to act in the classroom and all that. So he got the place he did and then everything was okay. And in their sports they won a lot of trophies in their sports.

I: What sports were they active in?

HB: Little League baseball--and Boy Scouts. I was den mother of the cub scouting. I had nine little boys and they were the only little black kids that was in Cub Scouts durin' that time.

I: If it's not too personal a question, why did you have that many children? Having so many children made it more difficult for you, didn't it?

HB: Yeah, it was, it was. It was hard. And then finally, he left me with six boys to raise and then I had to do it all by myself.

I: Were you at all resentful about that?

HB: About raisin' the kids alone? It hurt. Yeah, it hurt, but then I got over it and went on. You can't...really you got to look to the future. You can't look behind ya and you got to just keep on goin'.

I: Besides what you could earn through your own work, were there any other kinds of assistance you could get in La Grande as a single mother with so many children?

HB: Welfare, but I didn't want to be on welfare, no.

I: There are other kinds of assistance you can get.

HB: Like what?

I: Various organizations sometimes provide whatever help a person in need requires.

HB: No, nobody didn't come to me for nothin'.

I: The church: was there any help from the church?

HB: No. Not from Boyd Memorial, no. I had to work and then through the years I worked for different white people in their homes.

I: What kind of wages did you make doing these kinds of jobs?

HB: I made two dollars and fifty cents an hour. That's what it started off.

5/6/03, tape #1, side B

I: What hours did you work?

HB: From eight to three.

I: Everyday--five days a week?

HB: Five days a week and then I had janitorial jobs in different doctor offices.

I: Could you work at more than one person's home during that eight-to-three period?

HB: Sometimes I would work three hours here, three hours there.

I: Did you have a car to get around?

HB: I walked. I was livin' on Fir and I walked from Fir Avenue up to Modelaire Drive. I worked for Lester, I worked for Decker, and somebody I worked for a lot of ladies up there.

I: If you had to walk, then I suppose they supplied all the cleaning equipment.

HB: Oh yes.

I: I can imagine you vacuum cleaning the rugs.

HB: Yeah.

I: Did you have to wash the toilet bowls and clean the sinks in the kitchen?

HB: Oh yes, cleaned all of that. I did all of that.

I: Did you wash dishes, too?

HB: Oh yes, yes. Did ironing.

I: Take garbage out.

HB: Take the garbage out. I sure did, yeah. Mop... Some wanted you to mop on your hands and knees. I did that because I knew I had to make a livin'. And some wanted you to mop the floor. And then I worked up at the Grande Ronde Hospital.

I: Where did you have to clean in the hospital?

HB: I was a nurses' aide up there. It was helpin' with the sick.

I: Working directly with patients? Had you had training for that?

HB: I had it when I lived in St. Louis. The reason why I had to stop work was because havin' children and then you have to have somebody to take care of your kids while you work. I waited until the kids got into school and I would go on to work and then by the time they would be out of school I would be comin' home.

I: What were some of your duties as nurses' aide?

HB: I would have to make the beds even with the patient in it; you roll the patient over and then you took the sheets and all that up under them and then you rolled 'em back over ... make sure that the sides were up so that they wouldn't fall out. [laughs] And then I would give them their temperature and I would give 'em water. I worked from 11:00 at night to 7:00 in the morning.

I: How did you sleep?

HB: After the children would go to school, then I would take a nap. But sometimes while in between that time I would go right quick and do housework. Before the kids would be comin' home from school, I'd be home, I'd cook dinner. I don't know how I survived it, but I did it.

I: You must've slept only two or three hours at night.

HB: Yes.

I: Was the hospital job better than the housecleaning jobs?

HB: Well, they're both about the same thing, but you don't be around the nurses and the doctors.

I: Was the pay better at the hospital?

HB: Then it was sixty cents and hour. [laughs]

I: I thought you said you got two dollars and a half an hour.

HB: That was doin' housework. And at the hospital nurses' aide work was sixty cents an hour.

I: You would've been better off doing more housecleaning. Where were you spending the money?

HB: The way I would do I would take out some, you know how women do, they have a little slot they put the money in, and I would take out a little bit and save some. When the kids if needed their school lunches--I think they were twenty-five cents then--each one would have a quarter. They would stand in line, I'd give them their money, and they're out the door. And then sometimes what I would do I would just write out a check for the whole week. would work, see, one, two, three, four jobs before I went to the hospital and that would give me enough money to pay my house rent and buy food 'cause I would have a garden.

I: Raise vegetables ?

HB: Yeah, raise vegetables like greens and potatoes and carrots.

I: That's okay in the summertime. What'd you do in the winter?

HB: Along about August, I would can that stuff and then we would eat off of it in the wintertime.

I: I imagine your meals were fairly simple.

HB: Yeah. We'd just have beans for dinner 'cause even you can raise beans.

I: Beans and nothing else? Were you ever able to buy meat?

HB: Oh yes. I would get some ham hocks to season the food and flour and stuff where you could make your bread. And if the kids were gonna carry their lunches to school I would, you know, buy lunch stuff for their school lunches.

I: Did you have any money for any kind of treats or desserts?

HB: Well, if you knew how to bake a cake.

I: That was your treat.

HB: Yeah. And then we would have ice cream maybe now and then.

I: When the kids got to be early teenage years, did they have any jobs?

HB: Yes, they did.

I: Did they contribute the money to running the house?

HB: Oh yes they did. I used to work at the Sacajawea Annex cleanin' the

hallways and emptyin' the garbage. I would make a hundred and ten dollars a month. I was there for two or three hours a day workin'. And then when I got the job workin' up at the high school, I said, "Yippee!" That meant more money.

I: What sort of a job was that?

HB: Custodial work. I was workin' at the administration building
...

I: The old high school building [corner of 4th Street and M Avenue].

HB: Uh-huh. And I would be in there all by myself, nobody but me, and I would clean that building from top to bottom. And when I first started off was six hundred dollars a month.

I: Was that more money than you'd ever made before?

HB: That I ever made here in La Grande, yeah. But I kept those other jobs because I didn't have to be at work until 3:00 'cause I worked from 3:00 to 11:30 at the administration building in the wintertime. And then in the summertime we would have to be at work at 6:00 in the morning and got off at 3:00 and come home.

I: Now that leaves the kids after school alone almost all the time.

HB: They were teenagers then when I first started workin' there at the high school. But when they were little Mrs. Torrance would sometimes would take 'em and keep 'em until I came home.

I: What did you tell the kids about what you expected of them while you were gone at work?

HB: I'd tell 'em, "Now, you can look at TV, no playin' with matches. Don't let nobody in, I don't care who it is. Don't let nobody in the house 'cause you don't know what people'd do." And they did. I never had no trouble at all.

I: What about their going out?

HB: They didn't go out because I would have a lady to watch to see if they would go out. But they didn't think about goin' out.

I: That's unusual for teenagers.

HB: When they was teenagers, they would have sports after school. Verl Miller was the athletic director at that time, and he was a wrestling coach and the oldest boys did wrestling. Rodney and Linroe and Johnny played in the band--the symphony band, the jazz band, and in the marching band. Johnny played the saxophone, Linroe played the drums, and Rodney played the trumpet. And I played the piano. [laughs] Not at school, though. We would have our own little music.

I: You told me the other day that all eleven of your children went on to college.

HB: Yes.

I: How can you explain their determination to do that?

HB: Well, I believe it's their teachers. If the kids have faith in their teachers and the teachers would encourage the children and me right along with 'em--tellin' 'em what education is and tellin' them that if you don't even graduate from high school you'll be out in the street; you wouldn't know how to work. I started workin' at thirteen years old 'cause it used to be a little restaurant across the street from when I lived in St. Louis. It was a black restaurant and this lady hired me to work behind the counter.

I: Were the teachers all telling them that they were smart enough to succeed in college?

HB: They were. Clarence he won the Heisman award and Linroe was on the honor roll. But their dad was pretty smart, too. I say that's where they got all the smarts. From him. 'Cause he was valedictorian.

I: And he told 'em that it was important to go on to college even though he hadn't?

HB: He did. He talked a little bit. Anyway he encouraged them, too, but I did the most of the 'couraging because I used to tell 'em that if you don't do somethin' for yourself you'll never amount to nothin'.

I: And amounting to something was important to you.

HB: Yeah. After they seen their friends goin' through college, that encouraged them. And goin' to church really was a help to them, too; the preacher would encourage the kids to go. All this drugs and stuff wasn't comin' out then like it is now, thank goodness for that. And they never was

on drugs, none of 'em. Never, never, never.

I: There were, however, in La Grande in earlier years gangs, gangs of kids from different parts of town. Did they ever ...?

HB: But they never ran with that, no. When I felt like they were gone too long, I'd get to steppin', get to walkin', 'cause I knew just exactly where I thought that they would be. But they would be down there at the high school wrestlin', and they're doin' their thing that they supposed to do. Sometimes they had curriculum after school and then they would come home when it's over. They would go to school dances, go to the prom, and different things at school.

I: How do you think they selected the colleges they wanted to go to?

HB: I don't know how they did that. They didn't want to stay here. "No, I don't want to go to Eastern Oregon." I guess the teachers had them to look at their books to see what college they would like to go to.

I: And then when one of them decided on a college away from La Grande, what kind of a discussion did you have with them about how they could pay for college?

HB: They always worked and I had them to open up a savings account and I would tell 'em, "Now, don't touch it because someday you'll have to use it. I don't care how bad you want money, don't touch that, and when you get your little pay you go and put so much in each month until you graduate from high school." Then when they did graduate from high school they had enough money. Clarence and Rodney went to Oregon State University. And James went to the University of Oregon. The other kids they went back to St. Louis and went to St. Louis University. So I had all graduate but two from college.

I: Now when the children were young and, in fact, before you had the second family, how did you get the health care assistance you needed--for instance, in childbirth? Did you go to the hospital?

HB: Oh yes. I went to the hospital each time and my husband's job he had the Blue Cross.

I: So you had full coverage for health care.

HB: Yeah. We didn't have no welfare to do nothin'. I never did.

I: When you went to the hospital as a patient rather than as an employee, how were you treated?

HB: Good. Very good. Very good. Very, very good.

I: Nothing you would've improved?

HB: They were very good. Everybody was very good.

I: Aside from going to the hospital for bearing children, I suppose you occasionally needed some medical assistance--going to a doctor's office, for example.

HB: The insurance paid it...my insurance paid before we separated—Hawthorne. With the job I had at the school they had all kinds of benefits, but it was very seldom; I wasn't a woman would ever go to the

doctor 'cause I stayed well all the time. I guess 'cause the Lord knew I didn't have nobody to take care of me, so that's what happened. And the kids they weren't sickly--them big old boys, they weren't sickly. They very seldom had to go to the doctor and when they did had to go to the doctor for their eyes, I would take them.

I: Did you get a prescription for lenses?

HB: Yeah, for eyeglasses. That's where the health nurse stepped in and they provided me transportation to Portland for Linroe for eyeglasses and I got them through the Elks.

I: That's because health policy didn't cover that?

HB: No, I wasn't able to pay at that time for eyeglasses so it went through the Elks.

I: As you think about the time that you've spent, which is really the major part of your life, in La Grande, what might be the most satisfying aspects for you of living here?

HB: After I joined the Mormon Church and I was baptized into the church ... The church I was goin' to [Boyd Memorial Baptist] wasn't nothin' but just older women in their eighties and nineties, and there wasn't much activities durin' that time. So I decided to leave. I prayed first and asked God to guide me to a church.

I: But you'd sung in the Presbyterian and the Methodist and other churches. Did you consider joining any of them?

HB: I didn't think that they wanted blacks in their choir. Because I know the First Baptist church they didn't want blacks in their choir.

I: How did you know that?

HB: Because one of the members in the choir sayin', "We don't want blacks in the choir, but you can come and participate like we ask you come and sing for us or somethin' like that." I did.

I: What did you think about that?

HB: Well, it kind of hurt. I didn't say no more about it I just took it and swallowed it, as you would say.

I: Were you able to come up with a reason inside yourself?

HB: I thought about it and I say, "I wonder why." And so...well, its no blacks don't even go there, that I know of. And I didn't ask no questions so I eventually got out.

I: You took the hint. Are you the only black member of the Mormon Church here?

HB: I'm the only black member, uh-huh. Maybe one or two have joined, but they're not as active as I am.

I: What else was there about the Mormon church that appealed to you?

HB: It's their fellowshipping. Their fellowshipping is good. And in the Relief Society everybody has something to do. I learned how to direct the music in the choir and in the congregation. Then I taught eleven and twelve-year olds in Sunday School. My husband, Willy Butler, taught kids in Primary--kids seven and eight-year old and nine year old.

I: He was already a member of the church?

5/6/03, tape #2, side 2

HB: When I first met him he was a member of the church. I joined the church January the 25th, 1979. So I've been a member of the church about thirty years. And bein' in church I know I'm the only black woman in church among the Relief Society, and that's what got me through everything was the Relief Society. They asked me, "How do you feel bein' in the Mormon church?" and I would tell 'em, "Well, at first I felt kind of funny." At that time I didn't know that they didn't allow blacks in the Mormon Church and I said, "well, maybe they just put me here, let me come because I wanted to come." But they just treated me so good.

I: The Relief Society is oriented to help other people, isn't it?

HB: Yes. I didn't know what the set-up was. I just went into the church blindfolded.

I: You don't need the relief, but other people might. So what is it you do in the Relief Society to help other people?

HB: They have a store here in La Grande. If something should happen,

like your house would catch a-fire or you're destituted, they have their own welfare.

I: What do you do to help the Relief Society--you yourself.

HB: Once a year we give clothing and food and things like that and money.

I: Do you go out delivering these things?

HB: No, we bring it to the church. It's along about in July and August they have a free market--not a flea market. Anybody that got good clothing or furniture or beddings, we would take 'em down to the church and outsiders or anybody could come in and if there's anything they want just pick it up and take it. They don't want no pay. But if you need it, take it and if you don't need it, leave it.

I: What is there about the Relief Society that especially satisfies you?

HB: They show you how to manage your money, how to cook. They have speakers to come in, even have the police to come in and talk about women that are alone, like me and a bunch of other women, singles, and they talk to you about how to be safe. And then we have the Blue and Gold Ball, dances, and amateur hours, and all kinds of nice things there at the church.

I: Apparently, then, much of your life revolved around the activities at the church.

HB: They keep us from goin' out and gettin' into trouble, you know. [laughs]
Everything is involved around the church. Willy and I got to work at the

temple.

I: When your children visit here, or when you communicate with them on the telephone maybe, do they have memories about their lives in La Grande that they share?

HB: Oh yeah. Some things that they have done and they just now tellin' me. I said, "Why didn't you let me know that?" And they would say, "Oh Mama, we did a lot of bad things you didn't know." [laughs] And I said, "See, I'm thinkin' you were real good boys." But I mean not real bad and stuff, just a little mischief things, yeah. All the girls liked my boys because they say they were nice boys; they would take the girls to the prom and make sure they'd get home all right, then they would come home.

I: Do any of them tell you about aspects of living in La Grande that they're sorry about?

HB: They seem to like it, I mean when they were growing up 'cause they said they had a good time when they were in La Grande.