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I: Ben Brown: he was your great-grandfather?

LD: My great-grandfather.

I: And you mentioned the fact that he was well respected.

LD: Yes. I never got to even see him.

I: He was dead before you were born?

LD: Mm-hmm.

I: I didn't know that.

LD: I always feel like he belonged so much to my father because he was Dad's idol. I remember a time or two someone said, "You're sure a lot like your Grandpa Brown." That was the biggest compliment that could be paid to him, really.

I: So what kind of man was your father?

LD: Arch Conley. He had been raised to respect your elders and your grandparents. He didn't ever say that he respected all of them, but Grandpa Brown was different. You just knew that that was the person he wanted to be like. In the diary [i.e., published diary of Ben Brown, one of Union County's first settlers] that he wrote he was the one that was chosen to do several things. He headed the group for two or three different reasons. He was appointed the judge of the group when they tried the couple that was wanting to get a divorce.

I: Do you have any stories about that?

LD: I just know that they held a court. And then it went overnight, I think it was. That he did ponder it and named a verdict to the effect that they would just have to continue living together and get along the best they could because the houses and the food and all that there just wasn't enough to break it all up. He had different words for it. He kept a good deal the diary as they were crossing the country--the plains, some call it--coming out here.

I: Was your father a farmer?

LD: Yes. My dad would farm all of the time, but we lived in town in La Grande so us two girls could go to school in La Grande.

I: So you went to school mostly in La Grande then?

LD: Yes. Practically all of the time. I went my sophomore year in Union and the folks stayed on the farm. That Depression was a beginning to change a lot of things.

I: I'll bet.

LD: I was almost sixteen 'cause I drove my sis and I to Union and from then on I drove my dad everywhere because he hated to drive a car. A horse knew where to go and a horse you could just tell him to ge'up and always come back. He liked the horses much better than the car.

I: How did you get a license to drive the car

LD: Oh, you just sent in for one. At that time you just wrote in and my father lied and said I was sixteen and I wasn't quite sixteen. And you know, that's one of the funniest things because my dad was a stickler. He told the truth on things. But that didn't fit into

anything he knew. And I certainly was an experienced driver when I started out by myself because Dad didn't like to drive and so he took me out of the kitchen, I know, a lot of times when my mother needed me a whole lot more than he did to drive him into La Grande to get a spare part. 'Cause he could've done it. And the kinds of roads they had; they had washboard, I think was what they called 'em.

I: Rough and narrow probably.

LD: Yes. It's the same road as the main road to Cove now.

I: So you were the chauffer for the family. Your mother didn't drive?

LD: Oh, my mother drove. But sometimes I would drive instead of her even after I had gotten my license 'cause she was tired or something.

I: So now you talked about a fire in Cove. Was there a big fire in Cove?

LD: Cove had at least two and maybe three; Cove had been practically wiped out with fire two or three times.

I: Did you see them?

LD: No, we didn't go or see them because we lived two miles out of Cove. They got word around really rapidly, though, because you had those crank phones. There was more than one line; when they would ring you, it went into several homes. There was one lady that they swore up and down that she had to just sit right by that telephone all day long. Mrs. Martin was the lady's name who was the operator in that time; some of 'em said she was always listening in. And she said, "I have to listen in. I have to at least find out who's on the line because some of 'em will call back and say 'What time was I supposed to go and meet them?' and this and that."

I: So she just listened.

LD: She just listened. Of course I don't know if she needed to as much as she did. That's the way you got the news around. Our ring was two longs and a short. And if I hear anything that's like it, why, it just flashes through my mind.

I: When we were first married we had that kind of phone, too, and it was fun in a way. But you didn't say anything you didn't want everybody to know.

LD: In the summertime there was a line ring because if a fire started in the place, they needed all the men to come and help fight the fire.

I: So if it rang that way then they knew that there was a problem?

LD: An emergency.

I: Tell me about your family gatherings--the kind of food you had, the gifts, the clothing, what you talked about.

LD: If we went to Grandma's and Grandpa's, they furnished a big part of the meal, and I know my mother was always bakin' pies. Oh, it was quite thrilling when you got old enough that your mother taught you to bake cakes. And it was the burnt sugar they called it, burnt sugar cake. But it wasn't made with brown sugar--just iced with some of that brown sugar. That's the only thing they wanted me to take some places, like to the church, because most of those people had never tasted it.

I: What do you remember about the stock show in Union?

LD: My dad was one of them that helped organize it from the start.

I: Was it always been a stock show with people taking their animals in to show to be judged?

LD: Yes. He showed Chester white pigs and he may also have bought the first Clydesdale horses.

I: What beautiful horses!

LD: Oh yes! Others preferred the lighter horse--didn't like those big feet on the Clydesdales, but that's part of what made a Clydesdale look so pretty. They had those long, golden-type, wide hair around their feet and all. In fact, I thought of the other horses as ugly for the longest time. My dad had Clydesdale horses.

I: And you farmed with 'em, of course.

LD: Yes, but I cannot remember when they used just horses to do the farming. Dad used to get kind of put out with the kids--younger ones, his son and brother--always havin' to have the newest thing that was out. But he got so he didn't mention that anymore 'cause Mother said, "Now who was it that had to have a new ..." Let's see... he bought a Caterpillar, one of those with the tracks around. And you certainly thought that you had to have that. You should have it. It was newer; it would do more of this and more of that." So that's where I found out that he'd bought the first Caterpillar over there. It was because she threwed it to him every once...

I: What did you do in 4-H?

LD: I didn't do much. Vernon [her husband] was the one and I helped him. I took kids here and I took kids there. I wasn't the actual leader of it, but I put in a lot of time. He wanted the kids to be in 4-H. Sometimes he had to farm so then I'd load the kids up and take off for whatever it was that they were wanting to attend.

Phyllis had a pig and she stayed in just long enough.  
She didn't like the animals.

I: I think just because you grew up on a farm doesn't mean you love animals or want to do all that stuff.

LD: No. Neither Phyllis or I were fond of horses or of animals to that point.

I: You didn't ride a lot or do stuff like that?

LD: Neither one of us did. We would have girlfriends come up from La Grande and of course they were thrilled to death to get to ride the horses.

I: When did you get married?

LD: Honestly I got married too young.

I: So you were married fairly soon after you graduated from high school?

LD: Yeah. I was nineteen when I was married and twenty when Phyllis was born.

I: There was a train between Union and Cove. Would you like to talk about how it looked?

LD: It had to have a regular engine and went by pretty regularly because that's how they got the mail into Cove from Union.

I: So you could hear the train coming, then you knew the mail was coming?

LD: It was at a certain time 'cause it went at regular times. We would have to go upstairs where we could look out over the place in case the engine on train had started a fire, which it had done at times. And then if it did, we started ringing a big dinner bell up on

a pole; we'd dash for that. Then if the men would hear it, they'd come rushing in and take care of the fire.

I: So you were the warning group--you girls were the warning. One of your jobs was to watch for that. Did they use coal or wood in the engine, do you know?

LD: I haven't any idea.

I: Did it have passengers on that train?

LD: Not regular passengers. Sometimes someone that would like to go, but I don't know.

We had a woman that worked for us one summer and she'd hurry and get dinner at twelve o'clock. And when you worked for Dad, you better be there on time to eat. During haying and harvest they would. I can't think how many we used to feed during the heavy times. I don't know how many you could seat; they'd stretch out the dining room table. So it held a lot.

I: Your mother must've cooked a lot.

LD: If he could get someone that was good, both the husband and the wife. We'd have the same couple from Cove that worked for the folks several summers. And then they'd stay there, too.

I: Oh, they stayed at the house, too?

LD: Yes.

I: So then you helped with the cooking, of course.

LD: Yes, but we often had the wife help Mother cook and the husband in the fields.

I: That was a good arrangement for both of them.

LD: Yes.

I: There's a lot of work to cooking that much food.

LD: It was different than the kind of foods than they have now. You didn't buy anything frozen. And here you were tryin' to can for next winter and feeding the next crew.

I: Yeah. If you had chicken you had to go kill the chickens.

LD: Oh, and I thought I was so smart when I got so I could chop that chicken's head off! [laughs] And it didn't bother me a bit. I don't know how 'come I got interested and thought I was goin' to show 'em I could chop that chicken's head off.

I: It was just the way you got your food, huh?

LD: I guess. I found out one day that I could do it. I don't know how come 'cause Mother could always chop that chicken's head off. She never would wring their necks, but she would chop their heads off.

I: And then clean 'em. You had to clean 'em and draw 'em and get 'em all ready.

LD: Yes. Oh, that picking!

I: It sounds to me like you weren't a real shy little retiring person.

LD: Oh no. No. I never was. [laughs] I think they had more trouble shutting me up than ...[laughs] I always liked to do things. My mother was that way. I don't know, but she was this deliberate



about it. Mother could hitch the horse up and drive. I guess when she was young she rode. And yet I know I had it easier than a lot of them did.

I: Did you milk cows?

LD: No. My mother did. Dad had had rheumatism as a child. And his hands were very stiff. And Mother wouldn't let Dad milk that cow because he said you dry 'em up in no time. You see, his hands were so stiff he couldn't milk them dry.

I: So your mother milked the cows then.

LD: They only had one or two.

I: Just enough for their own use.

LD: Yeah. Sold a little cream or milk to the neighbors or some such thing.

I: You just did the things that needed to be done.

LD: I didn't do the tractor bit, but then I hauled a good deal of grain a lot of the time; from where we lived we took it to Union. But every once in a while, there'd be for some reason or another that they had all they could take care of in Union and we had to take it to Island City--not as much as some of the women did, but I did. They always knew if somebody had to run and do it in a hurry that I could to it. I always liked to drive a car and the trucks. I liked to drive the trucks even.