Edited Fleshman

Born and parents moved to NE Oregon

I: Please give me your full name.

GF: George Leslie Fleshman.

I: Were you born in Union County?

GF: I was born out near the airport on September 7, 1924.

I: What had brought your parents here?

GF: My mother's parents came west on the last organized covered wagon in 1878.

I: Were they heading for the Willamette Valley?

GF: They went down to Salem and spent their first winter. It was too wet and rainy so they came back to Walla Walla, Washington and stayed there a year. From there, they moved to Wallowa County, which at that time was still a part of Union County. They had a hundred and sixty acre farm just as the valley opens up going towards Lostine. In 1885, a year after they had moved, Mother was born. The family lived in a sod house and she lived there till she married Dad.

Dad was born in West Virginia, his mother was a Carper, and there are still a lot of Carpers in Union and Wallowa Counties. My grandfather was George Washington Carper. They had about thirteen kids. My grandmother then married my granddad Jimmy Fleshman in West Virginia. My father was the oldest of eleven children. In 1896, the Carpers decided to come to Promise, Oregon located in Wallowa County. **[too many grand dads here]**

Dad was eighteen when he got his own homestead. He started teaching and he taught for four or five years, one year at Wallowa in a country school called Liberty School. He boarded with the Willetts, which was my mother's maiden name.

Dad was seven years older than Mother, but Grandmother thought he was a fine catch and saw to it that they got married. My folks came over to Perry, where there was a sawmill. They lived in a little tiny house and we could see it as we drove into La Grande. I'd look over the edge and say, "That's where my folks lived." I don't know the exact dates when they were there.

Their first baby died of colic; she was allergic to cow's milk but they didn't know it and she died at about seven months old. They moved back out to Dad's

homestead in Promise, lived there until one of my sisters born. Then they came back to La Grande.

I: You think the sawmill was the only thing that attracted them to La Grande?

GF: I don't know, I would imagine it was because of the work

I: Would that be in the first decade of the twentieth century, perhaps?

GF: Yes. They got married in 1903, and my brother was born about 1907 when they were living here. My sister was born in 1912 at Promise; they sold the place and came back here. I was the youngest of ten children.

Union County -- Alkali

GF: In 1915, they bought an eighty acre farm out near where the Airport is now. That southern part of the Grande Ronde valley was rich alfalfa land. My dad and a couple of his brothers went into a partnership in an eighty cow dairy. I was born there at 1924. Dad had irrigated in that part of the valley and in doing so the alkali came up and they couldn't grow anything.

I: Tell me about the alkali coming up.

GF: It was very, very fertile farmland just around Hot Lake and north by the airport. That whole area just became sagebrush practically and salt grass.

I: Why would the irrigation do that?

GF: Well, I'm not a scientist, but I understand that by irrigating, putting water on top, the alkali that is underneath, bubbled up.

I: Is that still a problem in parts of the valley?

GF: Yes, but they have got it back into production. Dad was doing quite well until,**[what happened to bring him to LG?]** 1930, when we moved into La Grande and I went to the first grade.

Greenwood School

My birthday was on the 7th September, Labor Day, and on the 8th September I went to school at Greenwood. The Family had moved to the 2600 block of North Maple Street.

I: Was that on the north side of the tracks?

GF: Yes, north Maple.

I: Was that because houses were cheaper there?

GF: They knew Mrs. Millering, the mother of Darny and Avery Millering who were both very musical. The Millerings had built two identical houses side by side; she lived in one and rented the other to us.

I: Did your family move into town specifically so you could go to school?

GF: Oh no, Dad turned the farm over to one of my oldest brothers to farm while he became a Farmers Insurance agent of fire and auto insurance. He was the Union County district agent and had two or three salesmen under him.

Greenwood School was about 6 blocks from our house and it was a big, old two-story wooden building with sawdust on the floors. They had huge piles of four-foot wood they burned in a big furnace. The janitor, Mr. Masten, was probably about six-six or six-seven, and very skinny. We always called him Mr. Longfellow. I thought he was the poet until I got about seven years old.

I: Besides being tall what else do you remember about him?

TinType

GF: That's all I remember about him, being tall, hauling in wood and stoking the furnace. My first grade teacher, Beatrice Young, was a widow lady. One day at 'show and tell', I took a tintype to school to show.

I: Define tintype, please.

GF: Tintype was the earliest stage of photography. I don't know how the pictures were put on tin. I still have it; it was of my grandparents, my Mother's folks. I took it to school and showed it to Mrs. Young. She said, "Oh, that's Tudy"…which was my Granddad's nickname, "That's Tudy and Shady Willett, your grandparents." I said, "How'd you know that?" She said, "Your father was my teacher when I was growing up in the canyon between Minam and La Grande." Sure enough Dad had taught there. She told a story about him. Dad was very, very religious and read the Bible all the time. One Saturday he was down by the river walking while she was sitting on a corral watching him. As he was reading the Bible, he walked into the Wallowa River almost up to his knees, before he realized that he'd walked into the river.

I: Maybe he was thinking about baptism.

GF: Maybe he was, maybe he was reading about that.

The Christian Church and the Disciples of Christ

I: What church did he belong to?

GF: It was the Christian Church or the Disciples of Christ. They were there at 903 Penn Street in La Grande. My great-grandmother Carper joined the Christian church in 1859 back in West Virginia and her whole family became members. They were called Campbellites when they first came west, and were supposed to be a little odd, a little eccentric, sort of like holy rollers. Alexander Campbell had formed this Christian church.

I: Were their Christian beliefs very rigid at that time?

GF: I probably went to maybe two movies in my life, the first one I ever remember going to, was the story of the Dionne quintuplets. We could not play cards; it was evil to play cards. But we could play 'flinch', a kids' game of fifteen cards that you build on. They had numbers one to fifteen. I don't know how many times that you could you build, or how to build on them. Anyway, we could play flinch. My brother who became a minister, we caught him cheating at the game once.

Flinch Card Game

I: Was the reason for that name that some part of the game involved who would flinch first?

GF: If you made a mistake, you'd holler "flinch" and give them one of your cards. You had a stack of cards and the object was to get rid of that stack. You played them out on a board, going from one up to fifteen or from fifteen down to one. When it got to be your turn you'd build if you could. If you didn't play when you could, somebody would holler "flinch" and they'd give them one of their cards.

I: What did flinch mean?

GF: I don't know. They just called it flinch

I: How did these strict religious beliefs affect your behavior as a young man or young boy?

GF: I was a virgin when I got married, even after two years in the military.

Growing Up On The Farm

We always had to go to Sunday School and church. We never got to go to movies or to dances. But as Dad got older, he became less rigid, because I know my older sisters went to proms during high school. Dad was an elder in the church here for over fifty years and was highly respected. He taught Sunday School. In

fact in the earlier days, he was a lay minister and used to preach in Wallowa County.

The house we lived in out there had been a two-story schoolhouse, sometime before 1915, just one great big room two-stories high. I don't know whether my folks had it moved when they put in the east-west road. But they moved it back from the road, at which time they built a dining room, kitchen, and made it into a farmhouse.

We had a big dairy farm, a barn, and a big milk house. Our only heat came from a wood cook stove in the kitchen, and a big potbelly stove in the dining room. My folks' bedroom was downstairs and it had a living room. Upstairs was one great big room that they ran wires and hung blankets that made four separate little bedrooms for us kids to sleep in.

I: Were you living there with all nine brothers and sisters?

GF: Actually, Mother raised eight kids because two died as babies. My oldest brother, who died just a year ago at age ninety-four, started at Oregon State in the fall of '24. He always said he had to leave home to give me a bed, which is probably true.

The summer of 1931, the Depression hit and it really hit bad all over the country. My oldest brother lost his job as a chemist back in the coal mines of Virginia, so he came west. Another brother out on the ranch wasn't making any money; he was about to lose the farm and the farm land bank had the mortgage. A conference was held with the older brothers, sisters and my folks, and they decided we'd go back out to the ranch.

I can remember many times with fourteen people around the table. The oldest brother's wife went back to Enterprise where she grew up, and lived there for a year until my brother got a job. Then Dwight, the one running the farm, he had a couple kids by then, so there was four in his family and then all of us other kids. There were fun days and I have nothing but good, good memories of growing up with that extended family.

I: Could you give one or two examples of family interactions either indoors or outdoors, just to give a sense of what it was like to live in a large family like that at that time?

GF: There was a certain work ethic. They had eighty cows when they started out. With the bad times, Dad began butchering one cow a week and peddling the meat. The dairy herd got smaller and smaller, the bank foreclosed in 1935 and we had to move into town. Lost the place. I was only eleven years old.

I can remember milking up to seven cows, morning and night. Mother was a great gardener and we had big gardens and fruit trees. Us kids would go fishing with the neighbor kids, the Bates family and the Hicks. We'd go down to some sloughs and fish. I remember coming home one night just at dusk in the spring, seeing the chicken house on fire. We lost some five thousand baby chicks. Dad had climbed up on the roof to pour kerosene down the chimney to clean out the chimney, and burned down the chicken house.

We turned around and built another chicken house. They went over to Cove and probably got ten apple boxes full of plums. We spent days opening up the plums, putting them on screens in this chicken house, inside a brooder, a heating unit. They stoked that up and burnt that down. Lost ten boxes of almost dried prunes and the chicken house. We never knew we were poor because we always had food.

I: Most of which you had raised.

GF: Had grown or bartered. The only thing Mother ever bought was salt, pepper, flour probably and a little sugar. They grew everything from their garden, fruit and vegetables.

I: What about clothes? Hand-me-downs? Patched?

GF: When you had older brothers they were hand-me-downs. We usually always got a pair of corduroys that squeaked, you know, when you walked, squeak, squeak, squeak, and a pair of shoes in the fall. As an aside, the other day somebody asked me what my favorite holiday was and I said Fourth of July. They said, "Why don't you like Christmas?" I do not remember getting a toy for Christmas. I always got clothing for Christmas. Always got a present and it was always a practical gift.

On birthdays I never got any gifts. I was a junior in high school when Mother bought me my first bicycle.

I: While you were still on the farm, do you recall seeing printed materials in the house or people reading?

GF: I don't remember any books, though I know the Bible was read a lot.

I: Did you have forced Bible readings when everybody was told to sit around and listen?

GF: Sometimes, we'd get in spells. Sometimes Dad would say "We're going to read the Bible clear through." But after all the chores and the work was done, it didn't happen.

When I went to grade school at Greenwood my first year, they had just started sight reading. You looked at a word, and you said that's 'cat' or that's 'dog'. No phonetics, no sounding out anything. I must've had a poor memory because I couldn't read. My second grade was back out at the Liberty School. The Liberty schoolhouse was moved over to the Blue Mountain Grange there on the corner of Gekeler and Lancaster. It was a one-room school house, about ten or twelve kids. My teacher there for three years and also my Sunday School teacher was Mary B. Kale.

Learning to read

Her daughter still lives here in La Grande, Retha Bowman. Mrs. Kale was a very, very strict disciplinarian and she taught me how to read.

I: She used phonics?

GF: She used phonics and I can remember the fun of diagramming sentences. I can remember the potbellied stove. Lots of times us kids would have to walk four miles each way to school. We had an old gray mare named Babe and one spring we decided we'd try to ride it. If you slid off of it you couldn't get back on.

I: Back to newspapers, magazines, books. They weren't around the house at all?

GF: No, the folks never took any magazines or newspapers.

I: Was that because of your father's concern you might be corrupted?

GF: No, I think they didn't have money to buy them.

I: Were you aware that La Grande had a newspaper?

GF: Yes, I probably was. When I was a first grader and we lived in town that one year, I delivered *The Observer*.

I: But you never bothered to read it?

GF: I told you I couldn't read in the first grade. I do remember one event distinctly. It was when Roosevelt was elected president the first time, which would have been in1932. I would've been in the second grade. There was a family near the schoolhouse named Lindsey and we had current events at school. He got up that November day and held up a picture and said, "This is our new president." That's the first time I even knew we had a president.

I got a real good basic education from Mrs. Kale. We moved back into La Grande in the fall of '35, and I went back to Greenwood because we lived over there on Russell Street.

The house on Watson Street

A year later the place was sold and my parents bought a house on Watson Street that has been renamed 21st Street. The house was owned by the State of Oregon, the Veterans Affairs, because during World War I veterans could get loans to buy houses. When the Depression came along, a lot of people lost their places. Folks were paying around fifteen dollars a month to rent the house with the five acres. It was sold for seventeen hundred dollars and mortgage payments were fifteen dollars a month. After about two or three years, Dad got way behind in his payments; he couldn't dig up fifty cents a day toward the house payment. The State of Oregon wanted to foreclose, but a fellow by the name of Windy Bill Wilkenson, who was a Veterans Affair officer, convinced the state to refinance the loan. So they added the unpaid payments and the interest back into it, and Dad started paying seventeen-fifty a month. Within two or three years the economy changed, and within another year or so, they had it paid off.

The house is still standing there on Watson, on the edge of town. It was the original farmhouse and had a big dairy barn; it was part of a hundred and sixty acre homestead that had been subdivided.

I: Is it your impression large portions of what is now La Grande were originally homesteads?

GF: I think so. Daniel Chaplin, an early pioneer, had a homestead of a hundred and sixty acres that was all of Old Town. There's a Chaplin addition now as well as the Chaplin County building.

Dr. Joe Ingall

There is another important early La Grande individual, Dr. Joe Ingall. He and his wife Margaret were both osteopaths. He delivered most of the babies in this county from the early 1920's. He delivered me and several of my nephews and nieces. He came out to the ranch to deliver me.

I: Tell me about your WW II experiences.

Pearl Harbor Day

GF: After I had graduated in June of 1942, mother would not let me volunteer in the navy B12 program. It was after Pearl Harbor. I remember Pearl Harbor Day, it was a Sunday. Mother usually went to church, but that day she had too much work to do at home and had to get dinner ready for us. We came home from church and Mother was crying. I said, "Mom, what's the matter?" She said, "Well, I just heard on the radio that the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor." I said,

"Why are you crying for?" She said, "I've got a seventeen-year-old boy that'll probably be going to service and fighting."

The next day we had an assembly at the high school. In those days the assembly was in a big gym with chairs on the floor level. The seniors would sit in the middle, the juniors on one side, the sophomores on the other side, and the freshman got to sit up in the balcony. We gathered for assembly with the radio on the loudspeakers, and listened to Roosevelt declare war. It was a sad time with a soldier or two killed from this area.

World War II

GF: In July of 1943 I got my letter from President Roosevelt that I had been drafted. On July 31, 1943 there were probably forty fellows from La Grande who were sent to Spokane by train. That was the first train ride I'd ever had in my life. We went up to Spokane, had our physicals and were inducted into the army. Then we were sent home for a month. Late August of that year, I was sent to Ft. Douglas, Utah, which is in Salt Lake City. There I took my IQ test and a physical. I was sitting there waiting for results when a sergeant came by and picked up my papers and said, "Hey, you got really a good IQ. You could be a pilot." I said, "I don't want to be a pilot." He said, "It won't make you an officer." I said, "I'll take it."

Don Ainsworth, who was a class mate from grade school through high school and I were picked for the cadet program and sent on down to Amarillo, Texas. We were there for about six weeks of basic training. I went to Missoula, Montana for six months of college training, and then preflight in Santa Anna, California. By your test scores, it was determined whether you were pilot, navigator, or bombardier. I chose to be a navigator because I really didn't want to be a pilot.

I: How closely were you paying attention to what was going on Europe and Japan?

GF: Very, very, very close because we would be sent to one or the other places.

I: Were you doing this by reading newspaper accounts?

GF: Probably just by radio and we would have assemblies in which they would give us news reports.

I: How were you feeling about what was going on?

GF: I never once ever felt I would ever be killed. I knew I would probably be flying in bombers, but I never once had a fear of death. I can't remember just when Europe gave up, but it was just when I got in training when Hitler resigned. That's because he heard I was coming over there, so he quit. Just before I was to

be sent to bomb Japan, Japan quit. They knew I was going to be there in two more days so that's why both wars ended.

I: Your confidence was fully justified, then.

GF: I had my nineteenth birthday in Amarillo, Texas. I was twenty when I got my commission in January 5th of 1945. I became twenty-one a month after I got out of the service. I look at twenty-year-old kids now and think, my gosh! I was talking to my pilot who lives in New York City last night on the telephone; he was twenty-two years old, in charge of ten people. I was twenty and the safety of the flight not running into mountains or anything was up to me, and I was only twenty years old. It's amazing the responsibility we were given.

I: Make a man out of you in a hurry. You were a second lieutenant ?

GF: Yes, I became second lieutenant. The war was winding down; Europe had shut down. I spent an awful lot of time at home on leave or coming home for weekends. I was an instructor at Hondo Texas Navigational School for about three months and then was sent to Boise, Idaho. I was going to be put on a flight crew and we were there five months in crew training. July came around and they still didn't know what to do with us so they sent us to Walla Walla, Washington. I was there a couple a months and then the war was over. We had orders to ship out on Saturday and VJ day was on Thursday. Friday got my overseas shots, and on Saturday we were told, "Guys, take off. The war's over." Within a month I was discharged in October. So that was my military experience. It was a delightful career and I have no unpleasant memories about the military.

I: Then what?

After the War

GF: It was too late to start fall term, so I started working for Montgomery Wards again and got sixty-five cents an hour instead of twenty-five. I registered at Eastern and went winter and spring terms. That summer, I worked over at Pendleton for Montgomery Wards. I came back to La Grande and went to Eastern for five terms, and got a junior certificate in business administration. I thought maybe I might be an accountant and I went on down to University of Oregon. By then, I had met Dorothy and we got married in December of '46. I went to the University of Oregon for four terms and graduated in June of '48. I'd worked for Montgomery Wards through both high school and college.

Montgomery Ward

I got an offer from Montgomery Ward to get into their management training program. They were paying the people on the floor about $165 a month and I was paid $225 a month, which was pretty good salary then. After nine months, I was

smart enough to know that Montgomery Wards was a dying organization, so I bailed out and went to work for the State of Oregon in the Employment Division. I wound up assistant manager in the Salem office. My boss at least once a week would say, "George, if I were a young man I would go to work for Social Security Administration. They're hiring. They pay so much better, so much more in benefits." So on January 5, 1955, I went to work for Social Security Administration.

I: Tell me a little more about Eastern Oregon State College

Eastern Oregon State College

GF: The student body was made up of probably three or four hundred GIs, a couple hundred women and a few civilian fellows. The student body immediately jumped from about three hundred to five or six hundred right after the war.

I: Was it generally assumed that you would go into teaching if you enrolled at Eastern Oregon State College?

GF: During the war they brought in nurses training and war related classes like radio operations. Carlos Easley, who wound up as vice-president of the college, came here as instructor in radio. They had chemistry, physics, and a small business curriculum with a junior certificate in business. I took accounting, business law, and salesmanship. I also became very active in student affairs; I always liked the job of never being president, but always being the vice-president.

I was vice-president of a church related group and a commercial club. I loved the theater. I never tried out for a part, but I got on the stage crew and worked on many productions at the college.

When Dorothy and I got married in December my parents went south for the winter, along with one of my brothers and sisters. So for that first term we lived in my folks' house. The college had a row of little twenty-six foot trailers next to the campus out where the football stadium is now. We moved into a trailer-house, and paid twenty-six dollars a month for the rent, including all the utilities. My GI Bill paid for my tuition and all my books.

I: What was your impression of the academic rigor of the college when you were attending?

GF: To me, a teacher or anyone who was an adult was smart, and they never did anything wrong. I didn't know you could question an adult. I might not agree with what they're doing, but for some reason I thought they were always right and I had to be the wrong one. To me teachers were the law. Nowadays it seems to be the reverse. I think they had a good comradeship at the college here. I enjoyed it very much.

I: In most of the courses that you took in the 1940s did you have to work very hard in order to succeed?

GF: Studies came easy to me. I rarely ever studied over the weekend because I was always up to date; I was self-disciplined. I was in the honor society here and also at the university.

I: Did doing well involve any more than reading the textbooks carefully and taking adequate notes in the lectures?

GF: Well, my theory was never miss a class; always sit in the front row; be very attentive, ask questions, and participate. There was a Dr. Zabel here that my sister disliked, because she was so strict. Dr. Zabel taught World Literature, but she was on sabbatical when I began. I got my two terms of World Lit before she came back. I was dreading Dr. Zabel but I got an 'A' from her.

The school at that time was expanding. One term of English I had to take didn't have an English teacher. Dr. George Nightingale taught the English class even though his area was not English. It was very poor, duck soup to get an 'A' out of it.

Interesting tidbits from College

A couple of other things that happened there I'll always remember. There was David Clark who had sailed around the world. He was kind of an active child, always into trouble. He'd been on the ski patrol with the Mountaineers during the war. They were talking about a major battle in the Alps of Italy. Dr. Al Kizer was the speech and the drama teacher then, and he would always demonstrate something in his class. David brought his mountain climbing rope with him once and told about it. When he got through, he tied the rope around the teacher's desk, opened the window, tossed it out and rappelled off the second story of the administration building.

Another student I remember was named Jimmy Hool, who wound up being a dentist. He'd been in the submarines during the war. His demonstration on the blackboard was how to flush a toilet in a submarine when you're three hundred feet deep in the ocean. There were about twenty GI's in the class and maybe ten girls. Some of the things that he talked about were a little embarrassing to the girls. When he told what happened if you turned one valve before the other valve, it was a little disturbing to them.

I: Since you were a town boy and now you were at the college, you probably had some observations to make about the attitudes of most townspeople toward the college. What were some of those?

College relations with Union County

GF: I don't know if it was then or later, but there was some drinking and carousing among the football players. The college tried to get the townspeople and the college to live in harmony. I had no exposure to it myself.

I: Had you heard that at least in some periods many townspeople regarded that college on the hill as high-faluting, aloof?

GF: Well, I'm sure that was felt with the professors, a bunch of people with doctorates. I was always on the outskirts of society so I didn't know of any real resentment. I've never actually lived, other than as a small child, in the city of La Grande. My parents' house was outside the city.

I: You had the big disadvantages of being poor and coming from a large family. So you weren't socially acceptable, is that what you mean?

GF: No, I'm not saying I wasn't socially acceptable. I felt I was very accepted. I always felt the people that lived up on N Street and that area we called it Snob Hill, were a bit higher on the social ladder. Even today it's the doctors, the dentists, and attorneys who have their social circles. I've always said I was in the upper-middle class financially and socially. To me, the church was my social life. There were seven of my classmates that went through grade school, high school and Sunday School together. That was my social life was with those seven kids. I never mingled with the people up on Blueberry Hill.

I: Were there any kinds of activities going on at the college that might've attracted townspeople to attend? Plays, concerts, football games?

GF: We had plays; there were basketball and football games. I think they were better attended than they are now. The Grande Ronde Symphony was well attended and they had lecture series.

Grande Ronde Symphony

I: Since you mentioned the Grande Ronde Symphony, do you have any knowledge about how and why it was formed?

GF: I know they celebrated their fiftieth anniversary a while ago. Before Dorothy and I were married, we went around door-to-door, trying to sell memberships to it. I remember that very well.

I: How did you get enlisted in doing that?

GF: I don't know. Dorothy said, "We are going to do this". We've never been involved in any of the administration of it. In fact, we don't even go.

I: But, I wondered in those early years, because I think it was established in 1947, you were still there as a student.

GF: That's the first year that we were trying to sell memberships. Then we left town for about fifteen years.

Local Transportation

I: What sort of transportation were you using in those early years before you left La Grande?

GF: My father had a Model-T Ford. I wouldn't buy a Ford for about thirty years of my married life because his Ford was always breaking down and had to be repaired. Mother was always mad at him, spending all that money to keep that Ford running. That was one of the sore points between Mother and Dad was that car. My Mother bought me a bicycle for my birthday the beginning of my junior year. I fell in love with bicycles then; I'd buy one, fix it up and sell it, buy another one, fix it up and sell it. I lived two miles from high school and I'd ride my bicycle all the time to school. Even when I was dating Dorothy, I'd go up to her house on a bicycle and we would walk to the movie, or whatever we'd do for entertainment.

I: Walking to and around town was rather common at that time, wasn't it?

GF: Oh yes. When I grew up on Watson Street and went to Greenwood School, it was probably three-quarters of a mile, and I walked. We cut through the Mt. Emily Mill. They had an old burner and in winter we would sneak inside there to get warmed up. They had an executive seven car garage with steam heat. We'd sneak in there and get warm again and then go on to school.

When I got married, I did not have a car; I hadn't bought one yet. Since my folks were gone those first three months we were married, I had my dad's old Dodge. A fellow named Jim Bolts had a 1942 Plymouth Sedan that he sold to us at a very reasonable price. We had that for several years. Then when we moved back here for nine months in 1956 and 1957 we lived again at my folks' house. We had a boy in school then, the school bus would stop right in front of the house and take him to school.

Downtown Businesses

I: Since you were a part of the La Grande business community when you were still in high school and then for a while after that, could you give me your impressions about the nature of the business community in La Grande?

GF: The main thing I have seen is the deterioration of downtown La Grande and the lack of being able to buy anything. Montgomery Wards was the earliest complete hardware. You could buy anything in the way of tools or parts there. The old Bohnenkamp family had everything. J.C. Penney's, Woolworths, and Payless were downtown, they were a thriving business core. The farmers would always come to town on Saturday, that was our biggest sales day. As far as interrelationships between the businessmen, I was never exposed to it.

I: Do you think it was a quite competitive business atmosphere?

GF: I can remember just before going into the service, the manager of Montgomery Wards got mad at *The Observer* and refused to run any more ads. They were one of the big advertisers. They did everything on radio station KOBM, the only station in town. For a month or so, the store manager did a hundred percent of his advertising on the radio and wouldn't support *The Observer*. What the friction was I don't know.

I: Why do you think there were so many drugstores?

GF: I have no idea.

I: Were they popular hang-outs?

GF: There was Red Cross, down the street was Graham's, then Lynn Wright's which was right across the ally from Montgomery Wards. Oftentimes I would go there and grab a sandwich; they had a nice soda fountain. I didn't patronize Graham's much, but they had a soda fountain too. There was the Moon Drugstore which was the social center. I drank my first Coke there at age six. I'll always remember that, it was served in a glass with ice.

I remember Avery Millering who had a reputation of being kind of a wild little kid. He was about four or five years older than I. I'd gone to town with him when I was just a first-grader. On the way home he said, "Hey, I'll buy you a Coke." We went in there and ordered a Coke. I thought it was an alcoholic beverage and I just wondered why I didn't get lightheaded. I didn't know what a Coke was. They had a free telephone as you walked in right by the door. There was a counter and it was quite busy.

The Sacagawea Hotel was a big loss for this town. It had a huge lobby and mezzanine with davenports. It's where you picked up or met somebody in the Sacagawea. They had two ballrooms. Rotary Club met every week in one of the dining rooms. It was the hub with a free phone across the street. We miss the Sacagawea.

Criminal Activity

I: What knowledge did you have during late teens, early adulthood, of criminal activity in La Grande or any other part of the county?

GF: I wasn't aware of much criminal activity going on. The biggest trial that encompassed the whole county was a young man who had accidentally killed his father. He was tried for murder and was acquitted. The jury made a decision about nine o'clock at night, and everybody was waiting for the outcome. He was found innocent and the news spread across the whole county.

I: Were public sympathies generally for him?

GF: Towards him because they knew his father.

Union County Towns

I: There was life in other parts of Union County in places like Union and Cove and Elgin. What information or perceptions were you getting of what was going on in those places?

GF: The only contact I had was later in high school. One of my best friends had a car and a popular place to go was Cove swimming pool. There was the park there; you'd go over there, swim and then have a weenie roast. Sometimes we'd go through Union on the way to Cove. La Grande was the big school and so we never had any athletic competition with the smaller schools. We always looked at Elgin as being the lowlife. There were lots of jokes about the Elginites being dumb, illiterate and uneducated.

I: Any truth to that, do you think?

GF: I think there's a little. There's Sammyville near Elgin. When I was in Rotary, we had foreign exchange students, and we'd get two of students a year. One year we sent one to Elgin. There was a lot of dissension among some people saying, "Why would you send them to Elgin? That'd be the worst place to expose anybody to what America is like, to live in Elgin." Elginites were always socially looked down upon by La Grandites.

I: Do you think that might have been because most of the work that was available for men and maybe women too, was mainly blue collar?

GF: All they had there was the sawmill. They did have a 3C camp there, Civil Conservation Corps. They were fellows out from Brooklyn or New Jersey or somewhere, and their reputations with their drinking was not too good.

I: Did it seem that those town were more self-contained as far as all the necessary services were concerned, and that therefore they were these little pockets of people who didn't interact much?

GF: I'm sure that was it. They had a bus service to Enterprise from here, the Wallowa Stage Line. But if you wanted to go to Cove, you either walked, rode your bicycle, or drove your Model-T Ford. I think there was less interaction between the small towns. When the Safeway store opened up here, people would drive in from the other towns once a month, and buy their groceries because they were cheaper. I think there was quite a bit of resentment among the local merchants when this occurred.

Social Security Career

I: Going back to your career for the government at the Social Security Office, what were the attitudes toward Social Security in the1950's?

GF: In about a year and a half I became a field rep in Salem. Two or three nights a week we would give talks to farm groups consisting of self-employed people and farmers. There was quite a bit of resistance, but I always said I never saw a widow that didn't like Social Security.

I: Do you know what the basis for the resistance was?

GF: Oh, it was a tax that they felt wouldn't work and a government program. We had never heard of over-time in those days. We'd put ten to twelve hours a day and never got a cent of over-time. When I was a field rep in Salem, I'd go down to Corvallis, maybe have a dinner at a grange hall, give a speech and get out of there at ten. I would drive back to Salem and it'd be midnight when I'd get home. I would go back to work at eight o'clock the next morning.

I: As a field rep were you essentially promoting Social Security?

GF: Yes. We were both enforcing, promoting and taking claims. There was a huge mass of people coming under Social Security, and if you were sixty-five years old in 1960, you only needed six quarters of coverage. My three communities were Newberg, McMinnville and Corvallis. We'd get there in the morning and maybe work on to five or six o'clock at night. They'd have huge lines of people waiting to sign up or getting social security cards. The biggest problem was getting farmers to get social security numbers from their employees. I was at a contact station two days a week going to the farmers and seeing if they'd gotten a social security number from their employees, so they could get credit for it. The farmers would report wages because they had to and pay tax on it, but they wouldn't have the guy's social security number so I couldn't credit them. We spent a lot of time educating the farmers how to report. I always had a feeling of accomplishment

helping people in social security: educating them, signing up the widows for widows' benefits and children when their fathers died. Public relations was our number one key.

When I retired in 1983 they cut out all the contact stations. They don't even have phone numbers listed. If you call Social Security office you may talk to some Southern gal in Atlanta, Georgia. After I worked four years in Salem as a field rep, I moved into management, supervisors' training. I became a supervisor in Portland in September of 1961. My regional manager had been a manager in La Grande, Oregon and loved it. I said to him, "How do I get to be where I want to be?" He said, "Anybody has a stripe more than you, tell them." I said, "Okay, John. I want to be manager in La Grande, Oregon someday." He said, "I'll do my best to get you there. It's a wonderful place to be."

I had worked as a supervisor nine months in Portland when the boss came out to the house and I thought, "Gee, that's nice. He's come to see me." He said, "Don't unpack. You're now the new assistant manager in La Grande, Oregon." I was teaching a training class of new employees so I said, "Well, I'll finish this training class and then I'll go." So six weeks later we came to La Grande and I was assistant manager here for ten years. We had eighteen employees covering Arlington to Milton-Freewater to the Nevada border to Ontario.

I: Where was the office at that time?

GF: It started out there in the medical clinic on J and 6th Street, right across from the University. There's a little building on the property that we had and we outgrew it.

When I came here in July of 1962, they were in the process of building a new building at 1804 Fourth Street. I helped design that building. We moved there on January 1, 1963. There was an insurance and optometrist office in the same building. It's the white building that now has the physical therapy center.

I: I believe Elmer Perry built that building.

GF: No, he didn't. The contractor came out of Salem. Elmer might have worked on it though.

I: He gave me the misleading impression that he had main responsibility.

GF: Well, I don't know. He could've. In ten years the manager there retired and I became the district manager.

Assistant manager for Social Security

I: Would describe some of your daily duties in the role as assistant manager?

GF: I supervised the field, did all the reports, wrote all the memos, and supervised the employees in the office. I would spend a lot of my time out on the road in public relations. I would go with a field rep to Ontario and help him at the contact station. I knew every accountant, CPA, every funeral director, every newspaper editor in my five counties. I spent probably half my time out of the office on the road. We did a lot of radio programs at that time too. KOBM would carry a five minute spot announcement; we would pick one small topic and explain it in detail. I was going out to the radio station and maybe taping a month or two for them in advance. We did that in La Grande, Baker, Ontario, and John Day.

I: What kind of information about social security were you taping?

GF: Just a variety of topics, like the responsibility of a home owner if they have hired a housekeeper, how to report their social security. Or maybe just getting your social security card, or the type of benefits payable.

I: What made you think that you needed to supply that kind of information?

GF: If you remember in the past few years, people being nominated for some high political position, and they found out they never reported social security for their housekeeper or their yardman. They didn't get elected because of that violation.

One nice thing we did, we didn't have to collect the taxes. Internal Revenue Service's responsibility was to collect the social security tax. If we'd find a violation, we would get the wage slip. An employee would come in and file for benefits, but there'd be a gap in his employment record. "I worked for so-and-so." They hadn't reported it. So we would get his W-2s, make photocopies and fill out a form and mail it to IRS. We would immediately give them credit for that work if they had proof. The IRS was responsible to collect the taxes. We gave out the money, but they collected it. So we were the good guys.

I: Were you encountering a lot of angry people, or people with complaints?

GF: Basically, no. The Social Security Agency was government, and in those days, the '60s and '70s, government was respected and I ran a friendly office. In my office on Fourth Street I had two windows, one that looked out into the work area so I could keep track of what's going on, and one that looked out at the reception area. If there'd be more than two people waiting, I'd get up, go out and work with them. I filed many a claim myself. I remember one day a woman walked in past the receptionist, came in and sat down in my office. She said, "Well, I'm here." I didn't even know her. I said, "Oh? Who are you?" She told me. "Oh yes,

you're Charles' older sister." "Yes. I'm retired and I want to draw my social security." So I pulled out an application and I signed her up for social security.

I: The operation was somewhat informal?

GF: I would say it was informal. I tried to run a very democratic office. When I became manager, we had shrunk in size and in territory. We opened branch offices in Ontario and in Pendleton. We were responsible for four counties from La Grande. We went from eighteen employees down to ten.

I: Was this primarily because the population shifts?

GF: No. It's because having the smaller branch offices.

I: They wanted the offices to be closer to the people who needed the service?

Medicare and Medicaid

GF: Yes. When Medicare came along they felt that the need for more employees would double and it didn't happen. Computers came along and the method of processing claims changed. We would take a claim, teletype to Baltimore where the records were kept. Baltimore would mail out their records. We would put the record together, type up the award notice, and send it to San Francisco to the Payment Center. There, they would approve it and notify the Treasury Department to issue a check. Now all that's computerized. They call a record up on their computer; they answer the questions on the computer, make a print out, have the person sign it, hit the button and it immediately goes to the Treasury Department. Instead of a month to get a claim started, you can get started after a one-hour interview. A lot of my work was in training the staff, especially during the time when Medicare came in.

I: Did you handle Medicaid also?

GF: We never handled Medicaid as such. I think it was January 1973 that the Social Security Administration took over welfare-type payments to the aged and the disabled. We got the disability program, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), which was a huge program. It took all the records from welfare offices and converted them over to federal benefits.

At that time we had primitive computers and a teletype machine that cut a tape and sent the records. As of January 1973, those on SSI were supposed to start getting checks from us. Out of my two thousand SSI beneficiaries, five hundred did not get a check in January, about four hundred of them didn't get a check in February, and about three hundred and fifty of them didn't get one in March. Finally, they sent me a whole bunch of hundred dollar checks that I personally endorsed and had counter endorsed by another employee. As manager, I hand-

delivered these interim payments to the people who weren't in the computer. A year later on the 2nd of January, I had I think, five people who didn't get their checks and I went skiing that day.

This is a side line, one of the funniest stories. One of the managers in New York City walked out of his office that morning. People had come to his office because they hadn't gotten their checks. The line was about three blocks long and he walked to the end of this line of people. He kept on walking, went home and sent in his resignation; he quit. It was a mess!

So, it was training the staff on how to do new procedures. I was always good at math and I enjoyed entering into the computer age. I got on a committee of five down at the regional offices, to prepare documents to train people in new computer systems. I thoroughly enjoyed that.

I: How did you yourself learn how the computer systems worked?

GF: Oh, I just read it. The managers and one employee were sent off to Portland or Seattle for training. I put together a training film, slide and audiotape presentation, and I got a hundred dollar reward for it. It was a graphic demonstration on how to do learn computers.

I: You make it sound as though your service to the U. S. government was mostly enjoyable?

GF: I enjoyed it thoroughly. One part of social security I did not enjoy was the disability claims. It's like the little boy who walks down the freshly cemented sidewalk, making tracks. The cement man bawls him out and someone says, "You don't like kids." He says, "I like them in the abstract, but not in the concrete." Social security is very, very, very concrete. You have this much earnings, you are this age, and this is your benefit. It is black and white.

When you got into SSI you had to prove your needs. You had to have less than fifteen hundred dollars income. You could own a house; you could have a car that wasn't worth more than two thousand dollars. We were constantly checking up on their assets. We would go to banks to make sure they didn't have more than fifteen hundred dollars. We found a lot of fraud and a lot of innocence.

One of my favorite examples happened about five o'clock at night in Mt. Vernon, Washington. I was there to help this woman fill out a report and she had something like two thousand dollars in the bank. I said, "Lady, you're not supposed to." "Well, I'm saving money to pay for my funeral." I said, "But you can't have two thousand dollars. I'm not going to fill this out this time, but I'll be back in two weeks. You go down to the funeral parlor and buy your funeral plan." When I went back she had five hundred dollars. She bought a fifteen hundred dollar funeral plan. I had compassion for people. My field reps and I

were well-known. There aren't more than five people in La Grande, Oregon that know who is the manager of the Social Security office. They're invisible. You never see them.

I: What has caused that?

GF: I think it was that they went away from educating the public about what they did because they felt everyone knew about it. We left that mode. Partially it was the use of electronics and the tele-service centers; you can pick up a phone book with an eight-hundred number, call them and conduct your business. Secondly, cutting back on the service.

One of my pet peeves is the Post Office and lack of service. I sent a post card from Portugal a month ago, to Dr. Lynn Harris, corner of Third and Washington. That's where he is located. It came back to my mail box after I got home saying, "Undeliverable, bad address."

I: I've had that experience numerous times.

GF: At one time I was so well-known in town. We had just moved here and my brother came and he didn't know where we lived. He stopped at a grocery store and he asked, "Where's George live?" The clerk stepped out and said, "He lives up that canyon there." My brother hadn't even given my last name.

I: Is it your sense that in the effort to cut costs and get better efficiency, these agencies have become so impersonal that they function less well?

GF: The social security office here has five employees now, they're harassed, behind in their work and snowed under. I think they've got more work than they can do. The public is not very favorable towards them. When I first started working for Social Security, I was asked, "What do you do?" I didn't like telling them I worked for Social Security because the agency was new. People getting benefits had questions about how much will they get and when will they get it. During my last year or two, I wouldn't tell anybody where I lived because they would practically swear at me, "That blankety-blank government".

Jobs Needed in Union County

I: What kinds of jobs do we need here in Union County?

GF: I think there should be more professional, high-tech, jobs in Union County. I wouldn't want to see Microsoft come in and hire a thousand people or ten thousand people. We raised three sons, two of them went in the computer field -- both would love to live in Union County. Where do they live? They live in Salem because that's where the computer jobs are. They could not find employment here. Out my high school class in 1942, there was a hundred and

fifty who graduated. How many people stayed in La Grande? Maybe twenty was all. We educate them here and then we ship them off somewhere else.

Tourism

I: How do you feel about attracting more tourists?

GF: That's a sore point with me. People have family or relatives who come to town and want to do some hiking. They come and try to get a little day hike out of La Grande. We don't have any marked trails or hikes out of La Grande.

I worked for the Chamber of Commerce three or four years ago, and we developed a little pamphlet with a list of places like to hike around Morgan Lake, or there's an old Indian trail going up Mt. Emily. But no one knows the pamphlet is available. There are beautiful hikes around La Grande.

Specifically when we were in Switzerland, in all the small towns, there on the desk of the hotel would be a list of places and maps of where you'd go for day hikes. We don't have them here. One of the problems is that we're not a destination. No one says, "Oh, let's go to La Grande and spend a week." What would you do for a week in La Grande? You see about three places in La Grande you've seen it all. They have no recreational facilities. Wallowa Lake has the lake, fishing and hiking. We're just a stopover for people going somewhere else.

I think Baker County has outshone us with their big Interpretative Center. Why didn't we get a big interpretive center? La Grande was a more important spot on the Oregon Trail than Baker was. There is no commemoration or anything about the Trail. There's a sign up on 'B' Street that says "Oregon Trail," that Ezra Meeker put up there in about 1910.

Gerda Brownton, every first Saturday in June (National Hiking Day), makes a trip over the Oregon Trail from La Grande to Hilgard. I've been on it many times with her. She's a walking encyclopedia on that section of the trail. "This is where they camped; Bonneville stayed here; it took a whole day for the pioneers just to get from 'B' Street up behind Table Mountain", etc.

I: Is part of that hike over private land?

GF: Yes, that's the trouble with it. In Switzerland, if you have a trail going through your farm, you cannot keep people from going on that trail. There are markers; it's public domain where the hikes are. Gerda gets permission from the two or three land owners and we sign a waiver when we go on that hike. We actually go up to Morgan Lake and start from there because just as you leave La Grande, the landowners there won't let you go through their property. I think the trail should be well marked; it's a beautiful nine mile hike.

Restoration of Historic Buildings

I: What's the potential for restoration of historic buildings?

GF: That's another sore point. We tore down the Sacagawea Hotel, the courthouse, and the old high school. I know it's expensive to restore, but we need to keep a little of our heritage.

I: Of what exists still, what would be the most likely candidate?

I: For restoration, or placement on the Historic Register, or both?

GF: The railroad depot and the Carnegie Library. Number one is the library. We don't want to see that Carnegie library torn down, no way. I'd lay down in front of the bulldozers.

There's the Bohnenkamp castle on Second Street, and the old U. S. National Bank Building which was Mack and Son's Jewelry Store.

It's a shame that downtown has moved away. Wal-Mart, Bi-Mart came to the area, but not to town. The Mall used to be more of an influence than it is now. If you want to buy a screw, or a hammer or yardage, you can't find them in town, you have to go out.

I: This may be an overgeneralization, but does it seem to you that during your lifetime in Union County, the citizens generally don't have a high respect for the historic significance of what is here?

GF: I don't think they have too much respect. There's the Historical Society with about two dozen old people who are members, but you don't see any younger people there. They don't seem to care.

I: If the motives were to promote tourism, would that be a way of involving people of all ages who could bring about more concern for historic sites?

GF: It probably would. You got to have something for people to look at and things to do. There could be a trail that would start out going through our property up through the canyon. Dorothy's father built a road through this property. The fire of 1973 caused erosion and the road is hardly visible. There should be a hiking trail from our place up to Morgan Lake and back. When we were kids there wasn't even a road up to Morgan Lake. The three or four times we went there, we'd go up the old canyon to the top, then cut over.

I: What used to be the Liberty Theater, what is it's potential for restoration?

GF: When I was a kid there were four theaters in town. There was the Liberty, which carried the middle class movies. The real good movies that came like *Gone With the Wind* would be shown at the Star Theater. The Granada had westerns, and there was the State, about two or three buildings next door to The Liberty. The State Theater would be open maybe once a week.

I: What about the building itself that used to be the Liberty Theater. It's still has most of it's interior structure the way it was. If it were restored inside the way it used to be with a stage, seating and balcony, it could serve for theatrical purposes and a number of other community functions.

GF: I think it could be. At the college we have McKenzie Theater in Loso Hall which seems to be adequate. When I first got out of the service, Youth for Christ was a big movement here, and we would have rallies and meetings in the Liberty Theater. It was excellent place for those kinds of meetings.

I: It would need to be reinforced for earthquake protection now so it would be an expensive operation.

GF: Oh, we'll never get an earthquake.

I: Have you ever been an activist in doing the kinds of things that would draw tourists?

Christain Church

GF: That's probably one of my faults, not being an innovator of this type of thing. I'm a supporter, but not to take on a project, drum up funds, and interest to restore one of these buildings. One of my new projects that I didn't mention, was my involvement with the Christian Church. My ancestors go back to 1856 when my great-grandmother joined the Christian Church. I was a deacon and an elder there, and then when I got to be seventy-two, they said, "You're too old," and made me emeritus, put me out to pasture.

When Dorothy and I were younger, we were advisors to high school groups. When we first came back to La Grande, our kids were in junior high and we were advisors to that age, and the high school kids, and then college aged people. Our house used to have a nice round fireplace downstairs in the living room. Every once in a while I met someone who is now about fifty years old saying, "Oh, you live up there. I remember sitting around your fireplace roasting marshmallows." They have fond memories of our involvement as their advisors. We'd take high school groups camping. I led weeklong church camps in the High Lakes where we would find God in nature.

Hot Lake Hotel

I: What is your opinion about the potential of Hot Lake as a tourist attraction?

GF: That's another sore spot. I think it's deteriorated to the point now that unless some Bill Gates comes along, it's pretty well gone.

I: Suppose somebody did have the money and the right attitude, what would you suggest for them?

GF: Well, like I said, La Grande lacks some of the destination features. I've looked at Hot Lake as being a tourist resort. There's the hot water, the tubs, the baths. But it's located in a pretty desolate area. There could be horseback trails up on Craig Mountain behind it, but there's no real fun there. There's really no hiking facility. The mountains there aren't wooded or are there lakes to hike to. There's no place to go from there.

I suppose they could get tennis courts, badminton courts and that type of sports activity. Before it started to deteriorate, every room was full of antique furniture. That would be a real selling point for visiting tourists. It became a nursing home full of beds, tables, chiffoniers and a lot of antique furniture. Well, the guy who bought some time ago, sold it all off. The lobby was tiled and it was a beauty. It was torn up and it is now gone as well. I don't know if it ever could be restored. I know once our Eastern Oregon church group held a weekend conference there, and they were able to use it as a hotel, meeting rooms, and a conference center.

I: But to bring people in they would probably have to capitalize on qualities that you can't find somewhere else.

GF: That's right. The qualities were the antiques from the turn of the century and the hot mineral water. You could drink the water and lay in it, the Union Pacific Railroad had a stop there

I: Union Junction?

GF: No. It's before Union Junction. The Union Pacific stopped right across the highway from Hot Lake at a little station. Hot Lake was known as the Mayo of the West, with doctors and all the health benefits of a spa. The train made a regular stop at Hot Lake.

I: By the way, did you talk to anyone who knew the original Dr. Fie personally?

GF: Oh, my folks knew him. In fact, I had a brother because of a brain injury, was probably there maybe six months as a patient.

I: What did you learn about his personality and his technique?

GF: Not much, other than he was a great organizer and doctor.

I: Do you know any of the stories about his son, who apparently was partly responsible for it's decline?

GF: No. I saw the old antique operating rooms, downstairs. He had an early x-ray machine that was very modern at the time.

I: Is it your understanding that they were able to start it because they had the right combination of ambition, vision and money?

GF: The mineral water, that's why they picked Hot Lake.

I: That was at a time, of course, when that was a preferred form of medical treatment for almost any ailment.

GF: The trouble is you couldn't ice skate on it in wintertime, because if you'd break through you'd get scalded. I knew little of the history of Hot Lake; it was before my time.

Ladd Marsh

I: How much potential does Ladd Marsh have as an attraction for tourists?

GF: Well, it is one place that's listed on a walking tour. There is a very nice nature trail that could be extended. I would like to see blinds put up across the highway from the big pond. I have videos of swans out there, elk and deer and all forms of wildlife come in. I think there's a great potential for nature walks. They're expanding now the old sewage treatment plant, using the treated water for a lot of the marsh.

I: In connection with that, is there potential for somehow recalling or exploiting the Native American presence in the Grande Ronde Valley?

GF: I don't think so, because actually no Indian tribes ever lived in the Grande Ronde Valley.

I: No, but they came here for eating.

GF: They came here and called it the Valley of Peace. They didn't fight each other when they were in the valley. They would come over every fall and pick camas in this valley. There is a lot of Indian heritage here.

Other Comments – Special Olympics

GF: A p.s. on my community service, a personal story. I mentioned I didn't particularly like the disability program part of Social Security. I don't like to hear people tell me about their illnesses. I have a cousin whose genes were abnormal, something between her and her husband, and they could not have a normal child. Most of their babies died at birth. Their third child lived to be nine months old. Her father played basketball and we'd go to church basketball games. Little Mandy loved me. She'd sit on my lap and I thought what a lovely little girl. Then she died.

This turned me around on thinking about disability. I got involved with Special Olympics. For fourteen years I taught cross-country skiing. I see one of my ex-students in Safeway and he will come running over and give me a hug, "here's George". It just turned me around completely. My greatest success story was teaching Debbie Knight. At first, I could not get her away from the ski lodge area; if she could not see it, she started crying and wanted to go back. By the end of the ski season I had her skiing; she'd ski around Anthony Lakes and down the ski runs. She became one of the better skiers. Every year all the Special Olympic winter sports go to Bend for state competitions. Debbie is now a coach. She became a teaching instructor for kids in cross-country skiing.

I: How is the Special Olympics program set up in La Grande, just through volunteers, very informally?

GF: Yes. There was a teacher in the high school, Kaye Fulton, who heads the special needs program. She and her dad, Buzz, worked together on the ski program. Buzz was a great skier and instructor, he was in charge of the downhill ski program and Kaye was in charge of cross-country. Now a fellow by the name of Brian Fisher has that program. They have not only skiing, but they have swimming, bowling and track. I worked with track at one time.

I: It was heavily depended on volunteers to keep it going, I assume.

GF: Yes. It was completely, a hundred percent volunteer. I don't think even the administrator was paid.

US Bicentennial

When the bicentennial of United States occurred, Union County had a large committee, that was headed by Glen and Jean McKenzie. So Dorothy and I took it upon ourselves to put together a slide-tape program on the history of Union County. We had Glen McKenzie read a poem, and Ezra Martin, who was the county historian at that time, talked. Dorothy wrote the script, I took the pictures and then we put it together over a whole year. It's about a half-hour tape presentation. Over the next year, I showed it to every school kid, from first grade through senior in high school. Probably during that two year period, I showed the film two hundred times.

Rotary

Back in the Rotary some of the things we are proud of is, we sponsor a very active drug free program at the high school. We pay for the badges when a Boy Scout gets to be an Eagle Scout. We're active in helping the United Way.

When Rotary started in working with United Way, I went to the first board meeting and eleven out of the twelve people on that board were Rotarians. Our project this coming year, is to put some kind of a covered pavilion, a small one, out at Pioneer Park. At one time we took over Gangloff Park and we cleaned that up. We put up a huge sign there that said, "Welcome to La Grande, Rotary Club." The guys were too late to get in and do the weeding to keep that up so we turned it back to the state, or I think the city may own that.