

RUSSELL ELMER
Tape # 1
April 14, 2005
Interviewed by Brenda Lawson
Transcribed by Micheal L. Minthorn

Side A

(audible portion of tape begins at counter number 119)

I: Did you have indoor plumbing when you were growing up?

RE: Uh, not, not when I was young, it was in the 30's before we, uh, before we had electricity and plumbing. The uh, the neighbor over here, in fact they are related. When, when electricity come to them first around foothill before we had electricity. They had a, a water system, a big thousand gallon tank in the basement with a gas or one cell _____. [127] A big heavy engine. And once a day they'd start that engine up and pump pressure and water into that big tank. Well that would last all day. Every morning that was part of the ritual was the start that engine and pump that water into the. And then of course we had a windmill that would pump water into the horse trough.

I: You had a hose the neighbors or for your house here?

RE: For ours.

I: For ours.

RE: Yeah.

I: So what about not having electricity? How did you do your homework and?

RE: We had a, had a carbide light system and it was the big kind that was buried in the ground prob'ly 12, 12, 15 feet deep and about 5 feet across. And in the bottom it took prob'ly uh, 200 gallons of water. And on the top there was a hot one that held 300 pounds of carbide. And carbide looked like small gravel. So then the top, top was put on and uh, there was a spring so that when the- first you'd start it- you'd, you'd push the plunger and get, drop some carbide in the bottom of it because it'd incinerated caused pressure and it would set the valve then. And so that made gas and there was pipes, small metal pipes that we piped it out to the barn and in the house. We had lights and also burners. Carbide. We'd and one a year- I think it was once a year we had to charge that thing- carbide then would make a- we called it whitewash. In the bottom would be that, that uh, uh, well anyway- kind of like, uh, was chalky. Chalky stuff but they had an agitator what

agitated it and then they'd pump it out. And then we'd uh, you like your barn and chicken house and whatever? We would spray that on the walls and ceiling to uh, uh, let- lighten things up and kinda' _____. [159]

I: So it was sort of like paint?

RE: Yes.

I: And it was sticky?

RE: No, no it dried pretty fast. No it dried fast. Yeah it dried fast. It was kind of chalky with white _____. [162]

I: So was this carbide light system, was that normal for the area?

RE: Yes it was- that, that was about the only option for lights. 'Course we had the kerosene lights and when we'd go to the barn in the morning, early, we'd carry a kerosene lantern to, to find our way around. But then when we got in the barn why we had- and those light, lights had a, it had a _____ [171] over the, over the globe to protect 'em from birds or whatever. And it had wires hangin' down; one wire would turn the gas on and the other would flu- it would light it. I don't know if _____ [173] or not.

I: So you turned it twice? Turned two different things?

RE: No you turn, turn, turn one that would turn the gas on- turn the valve. And the other one would _____. [175] To light it.

I: So where did the carbide come from?

RE: It's a commercial product. You bought it, we had to order it, ordered in, we'd order two 50 gallon- two 50 pound _____ [180] ...full size containers maybe they weighed like 75 pounds. But we'd take two of them to charge the _____ [182] each time.

I: Did that provide a heat source as well as did you use wood?

RE: We didn't-we didn't use it for heat, we used wood for heat. But I- it would be kind of expensive, I guess, to, to do much heating except for some cooking. That's about all.

I: But some- so she did- your mother used some of it for cooking, but?

RE: I think they had a two-burner that they used some just for, uh, for quick, quick cooking. But about all, everything was cooked with the wood stove and back then

and water was, water was heated from the cook stove. Had coils in the firebox that went to the water tank and it heated the water.

I: Um-hm. So you did get to have a hot bath? Once in a while?

RE: Yes. Yeah. You had to- that was a, that was, and 'course they had, they had a big uh, was a- they were uh, copper. Copper tubs that they heated for the washing, to wash the clothes in. But uh, we had a regular bath tub here, a cast iron bathtub for washing, uh, our Saturday night washing.

I: That's when it, when it all happened? Saturday night.

RE: Yeah. Yeah.

I: Everyone take turns in there? Did the oldest get to go first? Or did you ___ [207] water? (chuckles)

RE: (chuckles) A lot of little ones. One of those kids could double up in there.

I: You were talking about the severe winters. Do you remember what it was like as a young boy before you were even going to school? Do you remember, um, you know with all that snow were you out playing in it or were you trying to just stay out of it?

RE: I, I guess we played in some but I remember whenever back in the winter then we'd go with team, uh, team and pack or team and buggy. [?] [217] If we went to town or whatever.

I: Um-hm. That was your transportation was in a buggy?

RE: Yes. Um, I think it was 1917 when we bought the Model T Ford. I have license plates from '17 to 1928 out here in my shop. Model T Ford. And dad called it the "Ford 6." Three shoulders and three tires.

I: Do you remember traveling by car very often?

RE: We maybe wouldn't go to town only once a month. And before they came here they lived in ___ [230] Valley they'd go to town in the fall and they'd buy a thousand gallons of kerosene that would be the all winter lights. The kerosene lamps and.

I: Everyone would just raise all their food out on the ranch?

RE: Yes.

I: Not have to go back to town for?

RE: Well they'd buy; they'd buy beans and stuff like that you know, in town? And staples like that.

I: Where did they get their mail?

RE: There was a, an old route back as far as I can remember. I remember a fellow by the name of Bill Binford had a little Model A Ford roadster. In wintertime he'd make the rounds maybe once a week. He had a pair of fence players. And most of the country roads were fenced on each side, you know, and stuff. And the tumbleweeds'd catch in the fence so there was more snow on the road than there was in the field. So he'd cut the fence and drive around, around through the fields to uh, make the rounds. When there was snow. When the snow drifted there was, there was a lot more snow back then and it stayed all winter. Compared to nowadays.

I: You had mentioned earlier about, um, raising cattle on the ranch and having pigs and, and were there other animals that you had on the ranch?

RE: Just chickens and pigs and uh, and cattle. And then the horses. Dad raised the horses, the saddle horses and the workhorses. It took 30 head of workhorses to do farming. In 1934 he sent to Belgium [?] [258] for a stallion. And there were enough stallions at his growth he weighed over a ton. In the wintertime he, he uh, worked a stallion on the feed wagon to break the colt. So he'd tie a young colt beside the stallion and if he didn't wanna' pull he got drug. And if he tried to run off, well the stallion just dropped the anchor so it wasn't long until he was steppin' along getting' his part.

I: Um-hm. The horses that he raised then, were they just for working here on the ranch or did he sell them to other people as well?

RE: No they were just for our own use. Also he had raised his own saddle horses.

I: Um-hm. How many do you suppose he had at one time?

RE: Well, we'd have 30 head of working horses and then of course there were the young horse, the young colts. They'd be maybe a dozen or so of those. Colts coming up, you know.

I: So how long would those, the older ones work?

RE: Well a good working horse would live to be in his 20's. Yeah and after that uh, after that you uh, that's about the uh, the age of a good work horse. Saddle horse.

I: What, what happens to him after he's done?

RE: Well, we uh, I remember one time to bury they had to dig the hole by hand then. He uh.

I: Must have taken an awfully big hole for a thousand pound horse?

RE: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah that's quite a bit.

I: When did you become old enough to, what was the age that you could be out working with the men?

RE: Well that would be when I was like 14 or 15. Uh, first, my first uh was haul water for the steam engine. We had a 400-gallon tank on a wagon and I would drive to the river and pump by hand, pump water on and then drive to the field. The steam engine water for the steam engine.

I: What was a steam engine doing?

RE: It was powering the thrashing machine.

I: Okay.

RE: Granddad always had a sawmill and, and we powered it with, in the wintertime after the ___ [304] in the morning they'd go to the mountains with two, uh, ___ [305] four-horse teams. And bring logs and then in the spring he would sell lumber to build buildings and the slabs he would save to fire the steam engine from harvest time. Burn the slabs from the wood logs.

I: Um-hm. Where was your grandfather's sawmill located?

RE: It was here.

I: Right here on the property?

RE: Yes. My cousin has it now. He moved it over to his place and he; we still have a steam engine and thrashing machine.

I: Tell me more about that sawmill as far as the equipment that was involved and how it worked?

RE: Well the logs uh, the logs would come in on one end on a rollway onto a carriage. And the uh, the carriage then would run by the saw and uh, there'd be one person on the carriage that would run the lever that would push the log over to the saw. And then the, they had a cable that would ___ [328] the carriage by the saw, the saw. And so it was back and forth to saw a board off each time. And it was powered by a regular steam engine. Built it to a big pulley that run the big uh, steel ___ [334] that uh saw was fastened to. And then there was an edger. The

when you saw, uh saw a board the first one would be a slab. You wouldn't keep. The next one you cut through would be a board but there'd the bark on both sides so we put it over on the table and you had another saw that you'd run through to cut the edge, the bark off. We called the uh, edger. And uh, then there was the little elevator that took the sawdust out and we had a dump cart you pulled with the team. And we'd elevate the sawdust into this cart and then we'd haul it out somewhere and dump the sawdust.

I: Could have the sawdust been used for anything?

RE: No they didn't use it then. Uh, when we built this house we did. We, we had a wood furnace in the basement and we did burn some sawdust in the furnace.

I: And what about the plank, that first plank? Was it; were you able to use that?

RE: That was, that was cut up for wood to fire the steam engine at harvest time. And then of course we'd use some of when we were sawing. We'd have to have wood to fire the steam engine. It takes wood and water to make steam.

I: So did your grandfather and your father run this operation alone or were there other family members involved or employees?

RE: No it was my father and uncle, his brother and, and my grandfather and then of course the hired help. Usually we'd have two hired hands the year around but in harvest time it takes 16 men to do the harvest.

I: Where do those men stay?

RE: We had a bunkhouse. My mother and grandmother cooked for 'em. They all, you know, bunked, and it was right here during harvest.

I: Can you tell me about a typical meal that they would bring out to the men?

RE: Well they all come into the house.

I: Did they?

RE: On the table, big table.

I: So do you remember having a favorite meal?

RE: Our meals were pretty much standard back then. Breakfast was uh, biscuits and gravy and, and bacon. And of course we always had beef. We had uh, roasts for dinner. And uh, everything was all home cooked.

I: Did she do a lot of baking?

RE: Yes they baked. They always baked their own bread and pies cookies. They all used lard back then. They never heard of canola.

I: Um-hm. Now did you say that she did all the cooking on her own or did she have help?

RE: Sometimes there would be some extra help but not usually. My mother and grandmother, they all lived together there in the big house. They did most of the cooking.

I: When you say you all lived together you had grandparents, parents and, and kids?

RE: Yes. Yes it was our grandparents lived with us.

I: We've been talking about the hired help living in the bunks here.

RE: Yeah in harvest time usually they would be uh, ___ [413] workers that would come through from Oklahoma and Nebraska traveling through and so, um, working their way through. And they would uh, they would come and we'd hire 'em. And uh, they'd, they'd stay in the bunkhouse, sleep in the bunkhouse and uh, granddad fixed uh, by the windmill there was, the windmill was on top of a, of what they called the wash house. And in the back he built a platform and put uh, curtains around it for uh, showers. So he put a tank up on the roof and uh, the sun would warm that. So the hired help, they'd come in a little early in the morning or before lunch they'd pump. If the windmill didn't pump water into it then they'd have to pump water in by hand so they'd have water for the showers.

I: You, were you allowed to hang out in the bunkhouse with the hired men?

RE: Well the folks didn't like to me because they'd heard some dirty jokes and they used tobacco and uh, folks didn't like for me to hang around 'em.

I: Did you ever sneak out and see what it was like? (chuckles)

RE: (chuckles) Would have.

I: Curiosity got the best of you?

RE: Yeah it prob'ly did.

I: Do you remember what the relationship was like with those hired men? Was it, was it a friendly relationship or was there a definite separation?

RE: Well, usually a pair would come through and one of them would be just topnotch worker. And the other one he might not know too much. [?] [453] But you had to

put with him because you fired him, they'd both go. So there was some turnover and uh, in employment.

I: How long was the season?

RE: Well the harvest season wasn't all that long, uh, uh not over, not over a month or six weeks usually during harvest.

I: And, and tell me what you were harvesting?

RE: There was, there was wheat. Wheat and barley and oats. Mostly wheat.

I: And then was that used locally or shipped out?

RE: The wheat was; the wheat was all shipped out. Yeah oats we'd keep for uh, feeding the workhorses. And barley for, we had a, had a big roller mill that grandfather, granddad powered with a steam engine that would roll, roll the grain into a big bin in the pig barn. Give the pigs barley and versus oats. And we, the wheat was all sold commercially.

I: So you, you were really self-sufficient out here on the ranch. But do you remember um, going into town? Do you remember if that was an exciting thing or?

RE: Didn't go town really that often. Uh, didn't go to town very often.

I: When ya' did is, was there any favorite places? And would you go to La Grande or would you go into Cove or somewhere else?

RE: Well, anytime they needed supplies we'd go to La Grande. Uh.

I: Did that feel like a big city to you?

RE: (chuckles) Yep. Yeah it was, uh, yeah it was interesting. But uh, we did, we didn't have much, we didn't go to shows or anything. It was; the ranch was your life. You just.

I: You didn't go out to dinner or movies or anything like that there?

RE: No. No. I don't remember ever going to the movies.

I: Did you have, listen to the radio at home?

RE: Yeah they finally did have a radio after we ___ [513] radio. And we listened to Amos & Andy and uh, and uh.

End of Side A

Side B

I: So you didn't listen to the radio a lot and did you have television?

RE: We just didn't- television didn't come 'til the 50's. After we were married.

I: So your day was really spent working and doing chores and, and- what'd you do for fun?

RE: My dad would read in the evenings. He'd get, he'd get books- he'd go to town or whatever and he'd get books and he'd read. Yeah.

I: What sort of books?

RE: Oh I don't remember too much now. But uh, uh, history and uh, I just don't remember too much. I wasn't all that interested anyway, I never liked to, I never liked to go to school. And so I just kinda's hit the high spots.

I: Tell me about starting school. Where is the first place that you went?

RE: The school?

I: Um-hm.

RE: I rode horseback three miles across the field to Lower Cove Schoolhouse. After uh. They broke the new school. My mother went to the old school. They called it Hard Scrabble.

I: Hard Scrabble?

RE: Hard Scrabble. It was tough times. And uh, she walked three miles of, uh; it was two and half miles, I guess, to school. Before, before I was ready to go to school they built a new school. Called Lower Cove School. And uh, they built two rooms. One they thought they might have high school in one room but they never did. So the just used the one room. All eight grades in one room.

I: How many students were there?

RE: I don't remember if there was ever over 15 or 20. It was all eight grades and there were three in my class with me.

I: So where did you keep your horse?

RE: They had a barn. A lean-to barn. It was open on one side back of the schoolhouse. And uh, the schoolyard was uh, prob'ly three- three acres. And then one, back of

the schoolhouse was the girl's outhouse and then next to the barn was the boy's outhouse. And in the back of the school was a woodshed. 'Cause it had, only wood to- woodstove with a jacket around it to heat the schoolroom.

I: Mm-hm. Whose responsibility was it to haul in the wood for the school?

Re: Well, usually some of the, some of the father's, some of the father's, the school board, school board members would. And uh, I, I think they, I think the district and board uh, bought wood from people at the woods, in the woods hauling business. I think most of it was, was bought for the school. And people it was in the wood business.

I: How long did you attend that school?

RE: All my, all my grade school.

I: Through the eighth grade then?

RE: It was just, yeah, the eighth grade.

I: And then where did you go from there?

RE: Cove- well, high school- you see we were, we weren't in a high school district then. So we went to La Grande. Well after they consolidated and did away with the country school and put the school bus, bus the uh, students to Cove then uh, we- my senior year I went to Cove. If I'd a gone to La Grande I'd a had to pay tuition then. Because we were, we weren't in the high school district.

I: Mm-hm. How did your responsibilities change as you went into the school years. How did your responsibilities at home change, if at all?

RE: Well I just, I just uh, did more, more work. Uh, as I, the things I was able to do why I, I worked into, I worked on the ____ [055] but it was, it was all hand labor back then. We didn't have any, we didn't any modern equipment then it was all hand labor and horse cart.

I: Did you notice then a difference between the type of chores a male was expected to do and the types that a female was expected to do?

RE: Well the ladies always did the uh housework, the yard work, and my mother, grandmother they tended the chickens. They always had setting hens in the spring and would hatch off the chickens, you know, and raise the chicks. And then they would butcher, they would butcher chickens and canned- canned them. They uh, canned some chickens for _____. [066]

I: Now was your sister involved in those chores as well then, and then the brother involved in the chores you were doing?

RE: Well somewhat. Yeah somewhat, yeah. They were younger than myself.

I: So at the time did you notice that that was the difference between male work and female work, or, or was there any thinking about that at that time.

RE: Oh, (chuckling) everybody just kinda', everybody just kinda' did their thing, you know, what had to be done.

I: Where did you get your clothing?

RE: Some of it was bought and some of it was made. My mother, my mother and grandmother did quite a bit of sewing. Or repair, you know, uh, they always was patching clothes or socks.

I: Did they have a machine or did they sew by hand?

RE: Yeah they had the machine. They worked with your feet, the old treadle machine. Didn't they call it the treadle?

I: When you were involved I school, were there after school activities? Um, activities that involved school that you were involved in?

RE: Not very much. Not after school. About the only sports we had was uh, baseball. We did, we did play, I think Alicel was the only other school we played to. Competition was baseball.

I: Tell me about playing baseball then?

RE: Well I was the pitcher. And uh, it uh, recess, recess and noon hour we'd have a little time to practice. But uh, we prob'ly wouldn't only have two or three- I don't remember havin' more than two or three games with any other school. And I wasn't, there wasn't much sports activity.

I: Were you interested in what was going on outside in the world as far as baseball went?

RE: No. No we didn't, we didn't get it. Uh, we didn't get that much news. Radio wasn't very, wasn't very, there wasn't a lot of stations even back then, you know. When the radio first came on. And there wasn't any TV stations, either when they first started.

I: So you just weren't interested in what was going on out in the world? Just, were really focused in on what?

RE: Well there wasn't near as much news back then, there is now. No, there just wasn't, uh.

I: You love to ski?

RE: Pardon?

I: Did you ski?

RE: Boys skied, uh, behind their saddle horses with lariat rope. They'd pull each other with their lariat rope behind uh, saddle horses. The biggest black eye I ever had was from a, snowball with a horse flipped off a foot. I was, she was pullin' me along and I was in the ditch and I was really havin' fun and this little mare that the neighbor was ridin' was pigeon-toed. She flipped this big snowball it caught me right in the eye. Biggest black eye I ever had. And I just went a tumbling.

I: Did you ever have any other broken bones or injuries from play time?

RE: Well, I never had only broken ribs. I've had broken ribs from _____. [116]

I: Getting kicked by the horse or getting thrown?

RE: Well, part, uh usually thrown and uh, falling on something. But I never had any major bone broken.

I: Did you have any run-ins with wild life in the area? Or rattle snakes or anything of the sort?

RE: No there wasn't uh, there wasn't any rattlesnakes sittin' around here in the valley. They were usually around the foothills. In the sagebrush country. Our early cattle range was over back of Craig Mountain back of Union. And uh, there was some snakes but I don't remember ever killing snakes. It was, no cattlin' up there, uh wood rats lived in the, overhead and the, the uh, groundhogs lived underneath. The woodpeckers pecked, pecked holes around so they could come in and out.

I: You had a cabin there?

RE: Yeah.

I: What was the purpose of that?

RE: That was for uh, looking after the cattle when we had 'em there. In fact, we'd go; we'd go on the first of April up to fix fence. The snow would always break some of the fence down and we'd have to go and make the rounds and patch the fence. And uh, so we'd, you know we used the cabin and then if we were up there

looking about the cattle, why we used the cabin for cooking and sleeping. We had a big cabinet in one corner; it was tin, covered with tin. So the rats couldn't get in to our bedding and our, uh, what grub that we'd leave. Canned stuff, why they were to keep the rats from getting to it. And we had a cook stove there and one of the first thing you'd take the stove lids off and, uh, dig the rat's nests out. Was the rats that liked to build a nest in the stove.

I: Tell me more about the process involved with running cattle.

RE: The uh, wintertime was spent here. And then when the calving time, we had uh, corrals down in the river bend. And we had a little, a little sleeping bunkhouse down there. And dad would sleep down there and every two hours he'd get up and look about uh, we would, cows that we were getting close to calving. And he'd cut them into a small corral in the evening after feeding. And uh, we fixed up the stove so that if he had to help with a calf I kept a old car light and uh, ___ battery [158] fixed up so we had a light to work on a cow if he needed to in the night. And uh, we had feeders that we would drive, drive along and put the hay in. And every week or two we'd have to move those feeders if it was muddy so that the cows wouldn't be in the mud. The calf, calves- if the calves uh, if the cows got mud on their tits, why the calves would get scowers [?] [165] And uh, we'd, we'd have to doctor cows sometimes. But after.

I: What did that do to the cow if they got that?

RE: Well, if they, if they got uh, scowers too bad they would die. It uh.

I: That would be diarrhea and?

RE: Yep.

I: Okay.

RE: Yep. They had big white, big white pills about the size of your thumb that you'd shove down his throat. And uh, to doctor 'em. But you keep 'em on uh; on clean ground it wasn't near as much problem. But if you had feeders, around the feeders why that was there they'd get mud. And uh, so, through this early summer they'd run on our early range over in the sagebrush country.

I: What does that mean, early range?

RE: That was, that was over back of Craig Mountain back of Union. Took two days to drive over there. We'd corral 'em over at the Woodruff Ranch overnight. And then in June we'd take 'em to the Minam. To the Forest Service. On the forest grazing, had grazing permits. And that took two days then to drive over there. We had a cabin in a log barn over there. We'd hire a rider to stay there all summer.

- Put out salt and look about the cattle and then October we'd go in and stay in the cabin. Ride and gather, gather 'em up to bring them out.
- I: What was required in looking after the cattle? Um, were you trying to keep them all together or were you trying to protect them from wildlife, or?
- RE: Well, we'd try to, we'd try to keep 'em, we'd try to keep 'em on the, spread 'em out on the range so they wouldn't all be in one place and eat the grass out. So they'd have salt, different salt stations different places. So that where they could, they could uh, go to water and then go out to salt to graze.
- I: And by placing the salt further apart that keeps the cattle spread out?
- RE: That would spread 'em out. And 'course the rider that was, that we had staying, hired to stay at the cabin. He would take salt out and he would, would uh, if they congregated too much in one place he'd, he'd rive some of 'em to another area. So, it was distributed them for the, so they would be on good grass all the time.
- I: And is that better for the grass to do it that way?
- RE: Yes, the, the grass you know, you eat it down about so and it doesn't grow fast enough you have to, you have to, it takes more area to, to range cattle in the mountains like that than it would out in the valley where ya' had uh, good pastures growing.
- I: How many cattle were there at one time?
- RE: We, we would run like 150 cows, mother cows. And we had a little association. There was, I think, four, four stockmen. We had a little association that we would, we'd hire a rider to help to ride for the summer and with that uh, help us round up in the fall then.
- I: And then did you have bulls in another area?
- RE: Well through the winter, no uh, we would yeah keep the bulls separate. And then, uh, I think in May is when we turned the bulls with the cows so that uh, that it would just depend on when you wanted to do the, have the calving, calving. Dad liked to calve in January and February so that by fall there was calves, those steers would be five or six hundred pounds to take to the sale.
- I: Was that risky to calve them in January and February?
- RE: Was it?
- I: Was it risky to calve in January and February? Maybe I misunderstood you. Did you say that he, that he liked to have them calve in January and February?

RE: Yes, that was it. Yeah.

I: But was that risky because of the weather?

RE: Well it took a lot more chores to look after 'em. My cousin now, he's still uh, in some cows and he calves like in May and June when there out on pasture. And they, they get along better, but his calves are small. You'd have to let 'em through. Run 'em over in winter, you know, and then sell 'em the next year. So you have to feed those calves all winter.

I: Takes longer and takes more of your profit? To run longer.

RE: Right.

I: Um, tell me more about Minam.

RE: The Minam, uh, range was uh, it was all in Union county on the west side of the Minam River. On the other side, the Wallowa side there was uh, there was some Wallowa stockmen run but they was sheep range on the west, or on the east side. And our range was on the west side of the Minam. There's Little Minam and Big Minam and our range was kinda' between, between Big and Little Minam. A big area we called Mud Springs area. And there's a big open meadow up there where was the best, was the bet part of the range.

I: Can you drive in there?

RE: No. No it's, it's uh, you go horseback trails til it's all, it's all a trail. There, there's no roads in that area.

I: Um-hm. It must be beautiful in there?

RE: Well it's nice; it's a nice canyon, country. That- it isn't the best range. We lost quite a lot of cattle. The last three years we run we lost 23 head of cattle. Most of 'em were died from poison weeds. Larkspur. And it was rough country, and uh, there was, some of our other ranges was, was better range or more productive than that rough country.

I: Did you have poison weeds down in the valley?

RE: Not very much, you know.

I: How would you handle that if you did?

RE: Well, you'd, you'd uh, ___ [276] it out or spray it out.

I: Um-hm. So you did have access to sprays in those early days, too?

RE: Well not like they do now. They had some but usually, uh, there's a patch of weeds you'd dig it out by hand. It got started. Lot of other weeds now that we never heard of back then.

I: Did you do any burning then to?

RE: Not, no, not much. It was.

I: Can you think of any other, um, aspects of farming that we haven't talked about in those early days? We've talked about running the cattle and what that process is like and, and running the wheat? Did we talk about what happens to the wheat after you harvest it?

RE: The wheat, our wheat was all sacked from the stationary thrashing machine. And uh, had two wagons and four-horse teams. We'd load; we'd load the sacks on when they, sacks on that weighed about 140 pounds. And we'd, we'd take 'em over to the Connelly warehouse, which was uh, like 12, 12 miles from here. Unload the, the sacks and then drive down to the river on the _____. [300] Eat our lunch and shovel on gravel and we'd haul gravel home to, to build, to build a house out of in the 30's. And we, folks built the house down here. So that's where the wheat went. And then it was in that warehouse over there it was loaded on the rail cars and taken to the flourmills and whatever. Portland, prob'ly a lot of it went to Portland.

I: With uh, Catherine Creek coming right by here did you do any fishing?

RE: Not very much. Our boy, he was in during early summer he'd keep us in catfish. Uh, but.

I: What about swimming?

RE: Didn't do much swimming. They did, my grandmother she liked to fish and they was catfish. She, she, she'd us fix these for us.

I: Were there any other types of fish there?

RE: Catfishin' was the main one, uh, the rest of it was mostly carp or suckers or things.

I: How deep was that water? Has it changed?

RE: It varied. In August I've seen times when there wasn't any water going by. You go up Union way you could take it out in ditches and use it to irrigate.

I: Mm-hm. Did your family use it to irrigate?

RE: We did a little. But uh, we had floods sometimes in the spring when the snow, the snow come off too fast. Then we had flooding here. '65 was the worst flood I remember. And when we were, we were surrounded here. We didn't ever crawl out for three weeks. And uh, I was, I had an airplane and our three daughters why we flew 'em over the foothill to meet the school bus that morning. That was uh, that was the, the worst flood that. And it seems like earlier years when I was growing up earlier we didn't have as much flooding. And I don't know, uh, I think what's happened is that uh, the lower end of the valley has silted in uh, when the runoff comes it brings quite a lot of silt. And as it gets to the lower end of the valley it uh, the current slows up and it drops and so it, the bottom of the channel is ____, [350] it's filled up so that that's caused flooding to back up in the valley.

I: I wanted to ask you but first, um, you said that that wasn't your primary source of irrigation. How did you water everything? Did you have, did you have to have an irrigation?

RE: Well, we didn't, we didn't really irrigate any fields in the early- we didn't start irrigating, really, until uh, in the 60's. It was in the 60's. Uh, Smith Canning- we, we grew uh, freezer peas for Smith Canning. And uh, we had a vining station here at the mailbox. That's where the, I put the scales. The scale house. And that's when irrigation really started here in the valley.

I: So was it necessary then to, the way the season were?

RE: Well, to uh, uh, the peas, peas and grass seed, uh it increased production to have water. And that was when they started uh, we started uh, building wheel rolls and 'course they was hand pack. We started with hand pack and then we got the wheel rolls and that was to have a pivot for the run. But when we started irrigating we pumped with diesel engines. Diesel was uh, 20 cents a gallon back then. Well then in the 70's when fuel prices started rising, why we, we couldn't even look at motors to pump water. And now that electric keeps going up and uh, well in this area, our area here if I, if I had to do over I woulda' bought more land and wouldn't irrigated anything. I'd a just had summer fall, rotated summer fall in alfalfa. 'Cause I think the times coming when uh, uh, to grow peppermint. And it takes lots of water to peppermint. It's a shallow, shallow root. And uh, it takes, it, it takes the ____ [399] water to and grass, grass seed for the production needs to, needs irrigation. ____ [403] why one or two water ____ [403] wheat. And uh, alfalfa does well. But uh, through the years this valley we've had moisture that, and the sand ridge. We, we can hurt our self down here on this other ground with water. If you get too much water it doesn't go down, it just kinda' water logs. The sand ridge, if we get too much water it's fairly rolling it'll go down. If they don't get enough water the roots can go down __ [416] it. But this, this heavy ground it's, it's not as well adapted to irrigation as, as the sand ridge. In the center of the valley.

I: Do you miss anything about those early days?

RE: Well I have some good memories. Some good and some bad. It's a mix.

I: Did you have any pets?

RE: Any what?

I: Pets.

RE: Oh just a good dog. Good country dog.

I: Anything else about the early days that you wanna' talk about?

RE: No I think it was, we've kinda' covered it, the school days. We uh, recesses and uh, and lunch time. If we had time we'd drowned out squirrels. [?] [438] There was lots of squirrels in the valley then. ____ [441] And we had uh, well uh, pump, we had to pump, pump water. We had a couple buckets that we'd carry and we'd all get sticks and get around the hole and we'd pump the water in and the squirrel come out why we'd, we'd beat him. One time we got the bucket in and it went down the hole and the squirrel didn't come out so we dumped uh, the other bucket in and it filled the hole, just left a puddle. Once the squirrel stuck his head up why ever'body reared back and just another big whack and it just splashed muddy water over the whole bunch. Well the teacher was a town girl and she put a stop to that. She said, "It's inhumane to be beating on those little animals. And besides, it's getting' messy." So she married a country boy and they lived over on the foothill. She prob'ly wished somebody'd beat on all those squirrels after farming out there.

End of Side B

End of Tape #1

Transcription completed on Friday, December 07, 2007

RUSSELL ELMER

Tape # 2

April 23, 2005

Interviewed by

Transcribed by Micheal L. Minthorn

Side A

I: Today is Saturday, April 23rd and I'm here with Russell Elmer for my second appointment. And today Russell is going to start by giving me some history of the local school.

RE: The uh, country school would start the Little Cove and come around, uh, the foothill area. The ___ [007] below Cove a couple miles north was uh, because Shanghai. The story goes that when they were building the schoolhouse, a fellow come along who was a carpenter, He'd been in the Orient building. And uh, they hired him on to help build the school. Well when it got fairly well constructed he, he spent uh, a little time cutting out a rooster, a wooden rooster. He called a Shanghai rooster. Evidently, from the orient this rooster so the story is that that's how they named the school. The next one down the road on the foothill, prob'ly about three miles was Frosty. The Frosty School. And uh, I had some cousins that went to Frosty School. The story is that how the Frosty School was named was uh, Dr. Koger, he lived over there and uh, I think he donated land for the school. But anyway he had a ___ [025] cow he called Frosty. And the story is that they named the school after the ___ [026] cow. So come on around the foothill another three miles and uh, one school was Hard Scrabble.

I: Hard Scrabble?

RE: Hard Scrabble. Times were tough. And it was, the community effort to build that school. My mother went to, to grade school there. But getting back to Frosty. We used to go to the, I had some cousins that attended there. And uh, we'd go to the Christmas program. And there was an old maid from the south, Miss Roberts, was teaching there. And every Christmas program they had a curtain and a little stage. But the heating stove was out in the corner of the room. And she always had to have Negroes in it, in the plays. So she'd come out with a little rag and she'd open the stove and get blacking on and she'd black up those kids to make Negroes. They always had Negroes in the Christmas program. So when hard Scrabble School was discontinued they built the Little Cove School where I went to school. And I would cross the field three miles and uh, there was usually two or three gates to open getting through the, the fields. And my father fixed the latches on those gates so that I could ride up and unlatch the gate and ride through. Turn my horse around and shut the gate and latch it without getting off. So and '39, I think it was '39 these little schools were all discontinued and the district was combined with Cove and they started a school bus. And then on around a couple miles further was, I don't know what the original name of that school was but they, they called it uh, uh, I think, oh, oh I'll come back to it when I think of it. The next one over was Riverside. That was on Carter lane between Carter Lane and uh, and uh, Woodruff Lane. And that school was moved up to Cove and it was uh, remodeled for a dwelling. It's still being used. Uh, I'm tryin' to think of the school down here. They called it Red Pepper.

I: Red pepper?

RE: Red Pepper. The story was that they were havin' a party in the wintertime. They had the stove fired up and got warm and they were havin' a good time dancing. And there was some rough ones poured red pepper on the stove and it run ever'body out. So that was the end of the party. Getting back to, to my uh, Lower Cove experiences. I done some trapping for the winter catching muskrats and made some things like that. But I always wanted to catch a raccoon. And uh, have a Daniel Boone raccoon cap with the tail hanging down the back. So, it was at least ___ [076] snow and over in the field they was a ditch that run through and a culvert. And I'd noticed the tracks had been going in and out of that culvert. So I took a trap with me one morning and coming home in the evening why I set that trap in the culvert. So the next morning I was anxious to see if I'd got me a coon. So I rode around where I could see the end of that culvert and sure enough I had, I could see his right front foot in the trap. I could just see his foot in the little. So I tied my horse up to the rail fence there and I got down there and I pulled the trap stake out and I got hold of the chain and I thought now I'm gonna' just, I'm just gonna' pull ___ [085] and hit him over the head. And uh, so he came out a little easier than I thought and I hit him in the middle of the back but it was a skunk. And I got stunk up really bad. Fact I had trouble getting on my saddle horse. And of course I was late for school. So there was three in my class of boys sittin' in the front seat. And the old neighbor girl sittin' behind me. And those seats uh, they were uh, they weren't attached the three together. They were individual seats. Your seat had to just fastened on the front. Well, when I set down the boy in front he slid out took across the room. And I heard a little commotion back of me and I looked around and that girl was about to roll over backwards in her seat. And the next thing the teacher send me home.

I: How long did it take to get that smell off of you?

RE: (chuckles) Well that's, that's a little process all right. So, that's about uh, the story about the school history in this neighborhood.

I: So when those schools closed you had not graduated at that point? Right? Or had you?

RE: No I hadn't graduated- well, yeah I graduated from uh, grade school.

I: Uh-huh. And then where were you in high school?

RE: So then my high school, the first three years I went to La Grande. We boarded, my brother and I boarded in La Grande because uh, we weren't in a high school district. So we didn't, so we didn't have to pay tuition. But in the last year after they consolidated why then we were at the ___ [114] School because we woulda' had to pay tuition to go to the La Grande. So I graduated at, at the Cove.

I: Tell me more about your boarding experience. Where did you stay?

RE: Well, my, my cousins- their folks bought a house in town for them to and their oldest daughter she did most of the cooking and looked after us. And so we boarded with them. Was kind of a partnership thing to board and school. And of course we'd come home on weekends.

I: When you came home on weekends was it back to work as usual or was it different?

RE: Well it was chores. It was chores. Kind of, kind of the regular thing on the farm.

I: Did you find that that was difficult to be away from your family during the week? Or did you welcome the ___? [127]

RE: Well, I never, I never did like school too much. And uh I just learned to adjust to it.

I: While you were boarding were you involved in any other activities in town?

RE: No. No I never, uh, I never was too great for sports. I liked baseball. When I was in grade school we had, we played baseball but I never. A big school like La Grande I, uh, I didn't get into it.

I: Was it difficult to make friends in a bigger place like that where you had come from the one-room schoolhouses?

RE: Well it was a little different because then the town, big town school why they was kids, town kids, and course us country, we were country hicks. So we were kinda' a different breed.

I: Did they refer to you in that way?

RE: (chuckles) I don't remember if they did.

I: But you could definitely feel that separation?

RE: There was a lot more activity with sports and all but I didn't participate in.

I: At what point in your life did you realize that you'd be staying on the farm?

RE: Well that's all I ever knew. And you know, like, my folks didn't really encourage me to go to college so my sister they sent her to college. But I wasn't interested. And in fact they made me go to high school but I wasn't interested in school. I liked to, I liked to farm. And like living out here on a dead end, you know, and no

- close neighbors. I never buddied much with anybody and so I guess I was kind of a loner.
- I: But you did in fact go on to, to um, a trade school.
- RE: Well, I went one winter and learned to weld. Went to welding school in Portland. But that's the only other uh, formal training that I had.
- I: Was that the first time that you had traveled to that area to see the real world?
- RE: Well it was the first time I'd been away from home all winter. But that was in 1941 and that's when the war started. And I, well, I, I, I went through welding school and then I worked the rest of the winter in the shipyard welding on those uh, ships, you know, they were building for the war. And then when it come time to farm, why I, I came home. And then of course the draft started. And uh, I was called up about ever six months to go to Portland for a physical. And I'd come back and get ready to go and the draft board then they deferred me for farm. Farm deferment. And so I never did, my brother, my brother went. He, he wasn't as involved as much in the farm. And uh, so I never was.
- I: Was that frightening for you at that time to be kind of on call and waiting for the draft board?
- RE: Well it was kind of frustrating. But uh, you just kinda' make up your mind to take what comes.
- I: So once you had finished school and finished your welding program and then came home on the farm, were you living in the same home as your parents at that time?
- RE: Yes I was livin' with my parents.
- I: How long did you do that?
- RE: Well it was, til 1946 is when I married. So from my high school there was six, seven, six or seven years there that I worked on the farm.
- I: Tell me how you met your wife?
- RE: Her uh, one of her cousins out of Elgin. She was kind of an old maid. She taught school. She was in her 30's I think when she met this fellow and they invited me to their wedding. And that's, and that's where I met my wife was at the wedding and then, then they would line up uh, something. A date or something for us. And I wasn't very interested yet in girls. But uh, finally come around and uh.
- I: Was she from this area?

RE: Elgin, out of Elgin. She was a ranch girl. She rode three miles to the country school, too. She and her brother.

I: So you had never met previously?

RE: No. No. Didn't.

I: Did you marry right away?

RE: Well we dated for two, three years, I guess. And, I was busy here on the ranch. Fact I didn't have a car then. I guess I bought one car before we were married and then I got rid of it and then was, we were, before we married I bought a new car. The first car we were _____. [217]

I: Do you recall what kind of car you bought?

RE: But it was a nice, nice Ambassador. They uh, when they quit making those. Four years later they quit making those. And I don't whether they merged in to another or really just what happened there.

I: Did owning a car change your lifestyle on the ranch? Did you get out more and did you move around the valley more than you had with your horse, for instance?

RE: Not really. Not really. I, I dated a girl going to school with here at Cove some. I went through the motorcycle mode. And uh, I, I graduated from that.

I: It didn't, it didn't take you too far away then? Getting a car.

RE: No. No I never was much for traveling, going places.

I: So when were you married? In 1946?

RE: Yes.

I: Okay. And then where did you settle with your wife?

RE: Well, I first worked for a ranch out of Imbler for four years. And then my uh, my dad and my uncle they farmed together. A partnership and I never got along too well with my partnership; so that- we decided to divide up the land. So I farmed then with my dad. And.

I: By this time you had mentioned things ere changing on the farm and you were no longer with horses but with machinery.

RE: Right.

- I: Can you tell me more about that transition?
- RE: Well it didn't, it didn't happen all at once. After we got a tractor why we still used the horses for some of the work. And then uh, then when we bought a combine why that did away with the stationary thresher. So we didn't use all those wagon and horses then. And it didn't take only two or three people to run a threshing crew with just the combine. And.
- I: And at that point what happened to the team of horses?
- RE: Well the horses were sold. They were sold off. But we still kept the saddle horses, you know, for cattle operations.
- I: When you started, um, in the partnership then were you still living in this place or were you living on that other ranch.
- RE: No. No I left there, I left the other ranch as soon as we found this other one. Partnership with my father and then I built, then we built this house, two or three years building this, this house. I rented a, we rented a house in Alicel for I guess three years anyway while we were building this home.
- I: So how long have you lived in your home now?
- RE: Since 1953. Yeah.
- I: At the point when you built this home and then settled here when you were back working on this, in this ground? Were you working alone or were you working with your father still?
- RE: Yeah I was working with my father here while I was building this. They uh, they got the logs; logs off the mountain up here and my granddad had the sawmill here. We sawed the, we sawed the logs, the lumber and uh, it was all homemade except the finish plywood and finish-work like that that we bought. But the uh, the south side logs and the framing lumber why we sawed here. Is all. And I hauled the gravel, hauled gravel and, then the neighbors helped pour the concrete for the foundations. It was just kinda' one step at a time built.
- I: How did you come up with the design and the, the plans for your home?
- RE: Oh we just talked about it and drew, drew, uh, uh, sketches and uh, and we prob'ly changed some things when we were building. And uh, the family increased we built another bedroom upstairs and finally ended up with three bedrooms and a bath upstairs. And uh, _____. [299]
- I: Go back the other way?

RE: Yeah.

I: How many children did you have?

RE: We have four daughters and, and a son. Now we had kids at home for 36 years. They were four years apart.

I: Oh wow. Each one of them was four years apart?

RE: Yeah. And when uh, my first daughter was born in uh, '48, our son, our last one was born in '65.

I: Wow.

RE: My daughter started going to school on college, although it was high school. We found the La Grande AOC and they stayed at the dorm. We weaned 'em away just a little at a time. And then the second year we sent 'em down to BYU. And uh, we bought a, we bought a Volkswagen Van and uh, they'd load their stuff in and away they'd go. Another four years come along they were graduatin' the next one would take it. So, we got pretty good use out of that old van.

I: So the van went through every class?

RE: All but our son. Now let's see, it seemed like one of 'em we got a car _____. [324] But that was the way it started.

I: I notice there's still a Volkswagen van on the property. Is that the same one?

RE: No. No, that's a, that's a different one. Yeah.

I: Was it intentional that you spaced your children four years apart or is that just the way it happened?

RE: (chuckles) Well kinda' both.

I: What was it like raising children in the same place where you had grown up?

RE: Well, actually I didn't have that much to do with the, my wife raised the kids uh, uh, home was just kind of a filling station for me 'cause I was in the field and out runnin' the ranch.

I: Tell me more about what running the ranch meant during those years.

RE: Well it's kinda' like cookin', washin' dishes, and makin' beds. It's just kinda' the same thing over, year after year. You, you plowed, you cultivate, you seed, and

you harvest. And uh, next year the same. However, later years it, it's become more intensified. It's more of a business, uh; you have more regulations all the time. There's more weeds, there's more diseases you have to deal with. When I was growing up the only weeds we, we have a, worried about was ___ [354] weed in the alfalfa. 'Cause if you pick up a hay that had ___ [355] weed in it fed to the milk cows it'd taint the milk. So we'd pull the cheat grass, we'd pull the cheat grass and we'd pull the ___ [358] weed. But now there's a dozen other kinds of weeds that are in the in, uh.

I: As things changed and you had these newer diseases and newer weeds coming along where did you get your information with how to deal with that?

RE: Well we looked out with our son in-law, uh. He was in the Navy. Fact he, he was a Philadelphia boy. He grew up in Philadelphia but he was in the Navy six years and uh, he was uh, stationed on a atomic cruise- well he was on the Forestal when they 'bout sent that over to Viet Nam. And then after that he was on an atomic cruiser and they were testing it out of San Francisco harbor. And our oldest daughter was teaching school at Fairfield and uh, he didn't live in the barracks. He and a buddy of his rented an apartment and it happened to be next to where our daughter's apartment was. And that's how they got acquainted. So when he got out of the Navy he, he wanted to be a veterinary. He took his pre-med down at Davis in California. Now when it come time to enroll for vet school they were, they were all filed up. He couldn't, couldn't get it. So he didn't wanna' sit around and wait so they moved up here and he thought maybe he could get in at Pullman. They have a vet school there. Well the same thing. They were enrolled. So he, he got his teaching certificate up at the college and he taught. Well, but he didn't like it, he come around, he come out on the farm and he liked what was going on and so that's when he decided to work. And then so he had this, this med training and he salvaged these chemicals and all this paperwork. So, he takes care of all that. And I'm allergic to paper. So uh, I just try to look busy and stay out of the way.

I: So you don't like all that paperwork then?

RE: No. They come and was doing some spraying this morning. And it, it's a- he had- he has to take a course every two years to be able to buy some of these chemicals.

I: How come- uh, that's a big difference then from the way it was when you were growing up?

RE: When I was growing up there wasn't any of those weed sprays. The only thing, that's uh, I remember the first Canadian thistle we ever saw here. My dad, he was really onto that. He had a little hand sprayer and he fixed a spot where you carry it on your saddle. Hook it onto your saddle horn, and he'd go out lookin' for those. And I remember there was patch down the river bend there. And uh, just a little patch the first that we'd seen. And uh, we was still doing the top of the stationary threshing machine. He says, "I'll fix that." So he set up there and he made the

straw stack, made a straw stack on top of that Canadian thistle patch. Well, it smothered it out. But on later years it kept blowing it, blowing in from other places. And it's all over the country now. But all I had as a chemical then was uh, what they call atlacide. [?] [430] And it was a selene-solution of some kind and it wasn't very potent. But we'd never heard of all these other herbicides that we have now days. Pesticides and all that.

I: Did you continue to maintain a crew after you took over and things like that?

RE: Well we didn't have to hire very much help. Uh, just seasonal, seasonal help. We never, oh when after my father died we got rid of the cattle. We didn't have any more livestock, so we didn't have to hire anybody to help in the winter. And uh.

I: Were you happy to see the cattle go?

RE: To which?

I: Were you happy to see the cattle go?

RE: Well, I wasn't all that enthused. You now we, we ran- in April we'd take 'em over to our early range. Sagebrush country back of Craig Mountain, back of Union. Took days to drive over there and we'd corral 'em up at the Woodruff Ranch overnight. And then in June we'd take 'em herd 'em to the Minam. We had forest permits. My family and a couple other families had built a cabin and nice barn, log barn. And we'd hire the rider to stay at the cabin all summer and take out salt and check on the cattle. And then October why we'd go in, stay at the cabin and round up. Well then, in uh, along about '64 the Forest Service decided they were going to make some changes. They, there was more sportsman and hunting pressure and so they felt that the, that country was worth more for hunting, uh, sportsman than it was for ranging. So they cancelled us off and made us move our cabin and barn. And so we bought some pasture land out in the valley here between Cove and Union here and we, we run a few years until my father died and then we got rid of the, the cattle. So we don't keep any.

I: When did your father pass away?

RE: In 1980. Yeah it was 1980.

I: Was he ill?

RE: No. He'd a lived another ten years if he'd stayed off the, the young horses. He got bucked off and a brain concussion and, and. My uncle lived to be 90. His dad was 80 when he died.

End of Side A
Side B

I: A couple of things I wanted to mention, um, that you had been telling me before. You were, had quite the career as a pilot. Can you tell me when you first flew and what led to that?

RE: Well I always interested in uh, in flying but I never had, I never had time and couldn't do it. I had a friend, had a friend had a little airplane and he'd fly and land in an alfalfa field and want me to fly with him. And I didn't feel comfortable.

It was hot weather and, and it was turbulent. And I didn't uh; I couldn't afford to take the time anyway to do it. And then finally, later, later on in the, I guess it was the late 50's, and 50's somewhere I guess I had two cousins that was, that had airplanes. One, one of my cousins flies for FEDEX now. That's all he's ever done. He flew in the military and he flies for FEDEX now. And my other cousin's a rancher out of Condon. He, he has a private airplane. He and his wife both flew. So anyway finally I, I decided I wanted to get into it. And so I bought a little Piper and that was the, that was the one we flew to, our children over the foothill to meet the school bus when we had the floods. And then from then on why we bought a Cessna 4-passenger. And uh, I built a landing strip here. If I'd a had to go to the airport I'd never owned an air, I would have never owned an airplane. _____. [024] But we enjoyed uh.

(tape inaudible and high-pitched whine from 025-082!!!!)

I: You mentioned something else in there that we haven't talked about and that's mules. [?] What can you tell me about mules and what is your connection with them?

RE: We didn't have mules until later years. Uh, my dad didn't, he farmed with horses and I don't remember ever having work mules. But how I started the mules, I uh, a pack of, that uh, well he and his wife built the Minam Lodge on the Minam River. And uh, when he retired why he sold his mules and I, I bought two of his best mules to start pack- packing. We were, we were hunting. We would hunt in the fall. My dad and uh, one of the other stockmen and I bought a couple of mules from him just to pack. I hadn't thought about riding. Well then later I raised some, and had a fellow, fellow on the Snake River break for me. And I got a couple good riding mules now. Mules is, is come around here in later years. It used to be mules they just uh, they wanted big mules to pack. And early days in the mines they packed their equipment with mules, you know? But uh, I just, I just use them for pack. But now I have some uh, to ride. They when they started uh, raising mules from Tennessee Walking ____ [104] and Arabian and thoroughbred mares and one a Spanish Jack. [?] [106] They were, they were uh, nice bodied mules. And with a Spanish Jack their head and ears were more in proportion. The uh, the bigger mules with the Mammoth jacks they were bigger. And if, if you bred a, a uh, Tennessee Walker or a thoroughbred with a big jack their head and ears were all proportionate to their body. So a Spanish jack took uh, they were nicer, nicer mules. And so those are the kind of mules that I've had _____. [114]

I: What's the difference between the ride on a horse and a mule. Is there any difference?

RE: The mules, a mule is more sure foot and, and smoother. Especially the pack and they learn, they learn you can lead 'em through, through trees and they'll learn not to bump the pack on the tree much faster than the horse will. But their ____, [120] they're tougher. I don't, I don't ever have to ____ [120] my mules on the trail,

these Minam trails. And uh, but, uh, a mule they, they can move fast if they want to. But for roping and uh, breaking stock a horse is, horse is better really.

I: Mm-hm. Because they're quicker and they're, they're not?

RE: No they can jump off and uh, like the roping like that _____. [126] Little faster.

I: Did you ever use them mules commercially?

RE: No.

I: Just for your own benefit?

RE: Yeah. Yeah.

I: How many of those did you have at one time?

RE: Well I had a half a dozen. Then down to two now. And we had our last saddle horses, _____, [132] my daughter has the last Arabian saddle horses.

I: And you're still riding today?

RE: What?

I: Do you still ride today?

RE: Yes. Yes.

I: Just for fun?

RE: Yeah. Yeah.

I: And do you take them still into the Minam to go camping?

RE: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

I: At what point did you decide to retire from farming, ranching?

RE: We lucked out with our son in-law, oldest daughter's husband when he rooked him into it. _____. [146] He had the experience you know with the medical training and uh, he was uh, I guess better organized in some ways than I was. But anyway he worked in it _____ [149] real good. And uh, there was times when we had to slow down and I thought we really lucked out 'cause he could take over and and run the place. The way things have changed, you know, so much other things that you have to contend with. So uh, he's doing a better job than I did in some ways.

I: So you, how old were you then when you retired?

RE: I was, uh, prob'ly about 70.

I: So how have you filled your time? What kinds of, of uh things have you done here?

RE: Well, mostly tinker around and then building, uh, I built that entrance out there in '85. That was uh, that was ____ [164] Those bridge frames I'd picked up. I was on the county commission back in the early 70's and I, I bought those bridge frames and then those ____ [167] were from Boise Cascade chip plant. Those ____ [168] made horizontal and they tumbled the chips, they had a case around outside and they tumbled the chips through and they had a, that fan on top there was part of our motor. And the hot air blew through to uh, dry those chips. And about ever 12, 15 years they had to replace 'em. They, the uh, seams would get to leaking and so I got some out of the salvage yard. And uh, and the bridge frames I, I picked up from the county. So I built that. This wooden bridge here is, is built to, oh that's been prob'ly 70 years ago and about ever 15 years we have to put a new deck on it. So when I was, I guess it was before, maybe just before I went on the county commission they paved the both lanes. [?] [184] And they required it to have a wider bridge. So I bought this bridge from the contractor, this steel bridge. And in 1988 I installed that, that bridge. I had a fellow that uh, worked for me. He was a contractor. Uh, he helped me put that bridge in. And I got tamarack logs from off the mountain to slide that bridge across. We'd had a concrete deck on they had they'd broken the deck off to move it. And uh, so I jacked it up and put logs under each side and put a cross log under the center and on each end so it'd fit down on those side logs to slide it on. And I rented some cable, a couple thousand feet of cable and some pulleys and I buried the, buried the concrete anchor on this side of the river. And uh, pulled that slid, slid that bridge on these logs halfway across. And I had to put staging out in the center of the river to support it. To guide it on across. And uh, I had to put a new deck on it. There's uh, 12, there's 12 sections of concrete deck. And there's five ton of rebar and we poured, we poured size sections on one side and six sections on the other side of concrete. And then I had to hire a big crane to come in to lift 'em on to the, the bridge. So there's 120 tons of concrete deck and 60 tons of steel bridge. So that was a project and in '88. And then about seven or eight years ago I built this hangar building out here. So that's been our last, our last project since I retired.

I: Well you're certainly keeping busy in retirement.

RE: Well, I've been fortunate to be able to do some things while I'm waitin' to die.

I: And you're healthy and strong and still able to do a lot of those things.

RE: Well I don't know whether I told ya' before someone asked me about how I was doin', and I told 'em, "I, I have a." What do they call it, people that work on your feet? Po-

I: Podiatrist?

RE: Podiatrist works on my feet. I had a, a uh, what is a bone specialist?

I: Um, I think it was.

RE: Well anyway I had a new bone put in my knee and I've, I've got shingles. And I have bifocals and hearing aids and two fillings.

I: That's pretty good. A pretty good track record I would say.

RE: And I'm still breathing.

I: But you also mentioned to me, though, that when you were a boy you had your tonsils out. Can you tell me more about that? We'll kind of go backwards for a minute.

RE: I had uh; I had a earache a lot when I was young. And uh, so, we'd seen the doctor and he, he, he said that I had bad tonsils. So I had my tonsils taken out over at Hot Lake ____ [246] Hospital over at Hot Lake. That's been 70 years ago. I was 15. And uh, the doctor he set me up in a chair and he reached in there and nipped out those tonsils. I thought I.

I: No anesthetic?

RE: No, I thought I'd choke to death. I never had, I would never recommend that. I'd want to be put out if I was gonna' have that process. So that's a, that's about all the experiences uh, doctoring through the years.

I: Was that the only time you had been in Hot Lake?

RE: Yes.

I: Do you recall the surroundings and what it looked like, what it smelled like?

RE: Well, it was, the building was in pretty good shape then. In fact they, I don't know how long the doctor practiced there. For several years prob'ly and then later when there wasn't uh, when they weren't uh, doctoring and having the, the hot baths they had a restaurant going there for some years. And then finally it was, it was all shut down. And then later maybe about ten years ago there was Dr. Griffith and another fella' bought that building and was gonna' restore it. It was bad then. And uh, I was on the bank board and they come to the bank to borrow the money to

restore it and when the loan committee met. Around the table come my turn I told 'em that all I saw there was a lot of used brick. And they didn't even smell good. The roof was bad then. And so now these folks that, they've really got their work cut out for 'em, I think in restoring that thing and make a payin' proposition. I'm a little skeptical about that.

I: I remember the name of the bone doctor: orthopedic surgeon. Is that what you were thinking?

RE: Yes. Yeah. Dr. Sanderfer over at Baker.

I: And then I wanted to go back just a little bit, too, when we were talking about the entryway that you built. Uh, I know that there are a man and a woman on a mule. Does that represent you and your wife?

RE: Yes. When I was on the county commission our road master that I worked with called them camels. He's quite an artist. He, he painted some real nice pictures. But anyway, he drew; he drew those out on a piece of paper. And I sent it up to Moses Lake to a shop and they cut those out. This three- it's uh, I think it's 3/8 steel plate. And I mounted 'em on the ___ there. [298]

I: I'm not sure that we mentioned your wife's name. What was her name? What *is* her name, I should say?

RE: Norma Jean. Yeah. Norma Jean. Her maiden name was Roulette.

I: Roulette?

RE: French.

I: Hm.

RE: Yeah her family both, on both sides were pioneer people in the early days. All ranch people.

I: So as we have got together the last couple of times and we've been taping and you've been able to reflect back. Are there other things that you feel like you wanna' share about your life here in Union County?

RE: Not much that would be legal. (chuckles)

I: (chuckles)

RE: I have some favorite jokes.

I: But they're not legal. (chuckles)

RE: Well, I've got, I'll give you one and you can tell it in church. This doctor, this was back in the horse and buggy days, and this doctor had a nice buggy and drivin' mare that he'd go out and make calls on homes. Well his teenage son got to takin' the mare and buggy on Sunday afternoon takin' his girl for a ride. Well he got to racin' with the other boys and he'd bring the mare in all, he, battered up and hot. So his dad, he out a stop to that. He said, "Son, I've bought you a horse and you can abuse him or you can do any running or whatever you want. But you take care of him and you can name him." So he named his horse "Closer." So he'd, he'd put the harness on Sunday afternoon and hook the buggy and drive across town to pick up his girlfriend. So he helped her up into the buggy and then he'd get up, ready to go, ____, [335] he'd say, "Get up, Closer." (chuckles)

I: Did it work? (chuckles) I'm sure there are plenty of other things that happened over the years but.

RE: ____ [342] and I've kind of run out of room. (chuckles) And uh, so.

I: Are you pleased with your time in Union County? Would you do it any differently?

RE: No I really, uh, I'm really happy that my parents and my wife's parents, the sacrifices they made to come here and live in this valley. It's, well it's been good to us through the years.

I: How would you sell Union County to someone who was looking?

RE: Well I like this valley the way it was 50 years ago better than now. These outsiders from California and other places you know, they're just, they just, they've outvoted us on anything. They voted, uh, ____. [359] And now they want wolves. And uh there's more regulations all the time. As the population grows, you know, yeah. No, we've seen the best of it. It's, it's, you know the world isn't a very friendly place and it seems like the world gets smaller all the time and the population grows. And uh, there's been a lot of, a lot of new things like medicine like that can keep people a lot more comfortable than they used to be. And that's a blessing. That we have these uh.

I: Is the trade off worth it in your eyes?

RE: No. I have mixed feelings about that. Uh, I wouldn't wanna' go back to, to the early times. But back then everybody had the same, you know. Now it seems like there's more extremes both ways. The richer get richer and the poor, oh. I think that, I think this fuel thing is stranglin' this country. I don't know what's gonna' happen comes cold weather and a lot of people. This fuel thing is gonna' be a hardship on a lot of people. I, the truckers that trucked that lumber in for this

dorm up here at the college. He was tellin' me, he said, "I'm not makin' any money." He says, "I have my rig paid for. It's, it's just somethin' to do."

I: Well, Russell I've certainly enjoyed talking to you. You are a very interesting man and I appreciate you sharing your stories and sharing the experiences for us on tape.

RE: Well I'm sure there's a lot of other people can give you some other perspectives about their lives.

I: Well I certainly appreciate your perspective.

RE: Okay.

End of Side B

End of Tape #2

Transcription completed on Thursday, December 06, 2007

RUSSELL ELMER

TAPE #2

November 1, 2005

Interviewed by Eugene Smith

Transcribed by Micheal L. Minthorn

Side A

RE: Well, we- they had the circuit judge. The circuit judge and the judge that, that did all the trials. This is just, just pertained to the county.

I: Okay. He, he shouldn't really have been called a judge then.

RE: No.

I: Because it was a different job from judging.

RE: No he had to have been just a chairman, really.

I: Okay.

RE: But the- they called him the county judge. (Wife: But you did go out and do work.) What? (You did work on roads and things yourself some, didn't you? And maintained.) Well, I'd, I'd go out with road master and we went to one, one trip we- after the freeway was finished in the early 70's there, the uh, had some gravel left up Ladd Canyon. And uh, Alvin and I went up to talk to Gordon Bull. Uh, representative. Made a deal to buy that extra gravel. And uh, and be things like that. Go out and look at road projects, what- but uh, line up jobs for the next month or whatever.

I: You must have had other topics to discuss besides roads.

RE: (Wasn't there the garbage disposal thing that came up?) Yeah that thing come along. You know the DEQ? They got active along about that time and they was gonna shut down the, the city dump.

I: Fox Hill. Is that right? Fox Hill?

RE: Yes. Yeah,

I: Because it was getting full?

RE: Well they claimed it was and that it uh, had outlived its usefulness. So anyway, Meisner and uh, Shodd decided they'd heard about this uh, uh, garbage uh, uh, recycling system. Somebody had started one down Eugene way or somewhere. And they thought that, that's the- DEQ said, "Your gonna' have to shut this one down up here." Well I took him up out between Union and North Powder, some of those old dry, those old dry canyons up there. They could have buried garbage forever. Places like that. They coulda' hauled it up there. Well they didn't go for that. Meisner he said this Shodd, this uh recycling that's the way to go. So, I told hi I- I said I think we oughta' wait and see if it's gonna' work. "Well, we're gonna' - we're gonna' do it." Well it was about time, my time was about to expire. And so I could see the writing on the wall and uh, so I didn't run again. I went to Ralph Robinson to see if he would- be interested in running and he, and he did. Well they went ahead- they went ahead and got into that thing and they spent uh, I think it was something like six million dollars for a white elephant. Bob Davison that was on the cit council- he told him it wouldn't work. Well, Meisner said, "We've got it, we're gonna' make it work." But it didn't.

I: This depended upon trucking the garbage, didn't it? For it- was it- was if the recycling would be done here?

RE: No it's gonna' be here. They set up a plant out there. Spent \$6,000- six million dollars. Was gonna' segregate it you know and sell- oh, they said, we can sell- we can uh, recycle it and sell that stuff. It'll pay for itself. Well if it cost more to recycle something than it does to go get new you haven't gained anything.

I: Did you suggest maybe a pilot project would be a good idea?

RE: Well I suggested to- to close the dump up here and make a new one up North Powder way.

I: Yeah, yeah. But that wouldn't have involved any new technology?

RE: No. No.

I: Uh how, how were uh budgets determined for the county?

RE: Well that was kind of a- it's kind of like your personal income tax thing. You're all set up one year and the next year you gotta' use the same form. And if there's something else comes along, why you have to make uh, room for that.

I: Well, did, did the budgets usually consist of items that had to be done routinely? Like rod maintenance? Garbage? Uh, what other responsibilities did the county have for running things?

RE: Well, you know as time evolved we got all these other- DEQ and all these other things to come in with new regulations. Those are the things they have to deal with nowadays.

I: So the county had to respond to the regulations that they were told about?

RE: Yeah. (Did the county have anything to do with the airport?) When I was on the commission the city was running the- they were in charge of the airport. But the county, they appointed me to be a representative from the county. To uh, to represent the county in the- on the airport with the city. And along about that time they, they appointed us an advisory committee of people that were interested or pilots and interested to give them input as to things that needed to be done out there. Well the city was kind of bullheaded and they never paid much attention to them, so they just disbanded. The committee quit. And uh, so the would, they would lease the airport to an operator. And it was some good people come in and they spent their own money and helped build the airport up. The business. And when the city see they were gonna', gonna' make a go what they do? They jerked the rug out from under 'em. And the last one they tried to do that to was Bill Knight. And he was smart enough that he didn't go for it. And so the policy had to change then. And uh, so it uh, uh, I forget just how it evolved then. But when I was involved there if the city- if the city wanted snow plowed or if they wanted weeds sprayed they'd ask the county. Well the county'd send 'em a bill and they'd say, "Well, this is, this is a, a, this is a service to the county." So there was conflict there. The didn't wanna' pay the county. So now it's uh, the uh, airport is run by the county. And uh, I don't know just how, how well it's going. I know there's some- there's some- they use some of the equipment over at the golf course, you know? The county got into that golf course thing and I think that was

a mistake. But anyway I really haven't kept up- I really haven't kept up with the thing, but I supported Lamoreaux. I thought that uh, well the thing with really- the thing that really disturbed people was when the got into that railroad thing.

I: Mm-hm. While you were, uh, on this county, county commission. Was there any discussion of having a county-wide library system?

RE: Never discussed. No it was never discussed.

I: Did you have some ideas occasionally about what needed to be discussed that nobody else had thought of?

RE: Well, that garbage thing that was one of the.

I: Well, you were opposing what they wanted to do? Did you, did you have any positive ideas about what you should- what the county should be doing?

RE: Well, that, that other garbage thing would have been the best option.

I: Yeah. You probably wouldn't have thought of that unless they decided they were gonna' close down the Fox Hill garbage dump, would you?

RE: No. No.

I: I just wondered if when you have the opportunity even though you didn't ask for it to be on the county commission. You stated having ideas about what you'd like to see done in the county that wasn't being done. And maybe if you were on the county commission you could see that they did get done.

RE: Well it was kind of a new bag for me 'cause I hadn't really followed the county- the county thing. And uh, the main thing back then was the- the roads. You know back then the oil was cheap? And uh, we did quite a bit of oiling paving some roads. This was before I got on the commission, why they had uh, Shodd and Hudd decided they oughta' have an oiled road that went east and west through the valley, and one north and south. Well they went there on Peach Lane and they didn't put a base- build it up, they just threw that, that asphalt down in the dirt and the same way with Woodruff Lane. There wasn't anybody that loved on it. They should have did- they should have been the, uh, Hutchison Lane. But they didn't like Bill cooper. Bill lived on Hutchison Lane. So they threw that one down in the mud. And now it's gone to pieces and so they've had to gravel. Just gravel. Things like that happened. Well now, since fuel uh, diesel and everything is so high they can't afford to buy asphalt. All they got money for now is to fix potholes. And they have bought new gravel and, and uh, resurfaced a lot of these gravel roads in the county. That's been the mainest thrust here in the last few years. But as far as all the other things that come, I haven't kept, I haven't kept up with it. (You did work on the school board, too, ____.) [155] Yeah.

I: Which one?

RE: Cove. Yeah. Yeah.

End of Side A

NO Side B

End of Tape #2

Transcription completed on Thursday, November 01, 2007

RUSSELL ELMER

Tape # 3

November 1, 2005

Interviewed by Eugene Smith

Transcribed by Micheal L. Minthorn

Side A

I: Please, please tell me your, your uh full name and um, where we, where we are right now.

RE: Uh Russell W. Elmer. I was born January 19th, 1921 right down here on the riverbank. When I was ready to be born called for Dr. Gilmore. He lives just north of that edge of Union.

I: Um, was it your grandparents or your great-grandparents who came first to Union County?

RE: It was my grandmother and grandfather that came the Oregon Trail.

I: From where?

RE: From uh, Kansas and uh, Oklahoma.

I: Mm-hm. Did any, did either of them or both of them tell you what made them decide to come here?

RE: Well they starved out in Oklahoma. My grandmother said that the grasshoppers come one year and eat everything but the broom handle. And so they came here, they homesteaded north of Elgin. Granddad.

I: Well why did they choose here?

RE: I, I don't really know why they came here.

I: You think they might have read in the newspapers what the opportunities were in eastern Oregon?

RE: No I really don't know what attracted 'em here. Whether there was any of the, uh, earlier family here.

I: Norma Jean, your parents, was it your grand- great-grandparents came to Elgin?

NJ: Yes, my grandparents came to Elgin.

I: Do you know why they came there?

NJ: Um, yes, they uh, heard that there was good land and that they could raise good crops there. They had relatives who had come first and settled around Summerville and had very good soil and.

I: Would they have heard then by letters? There wasn't a telephone.

NJ: Yeah. Yeah. It would be by letters.

I: And probably not much visiting back and forth.

NJ: Well, sometimes uh, sometimes they'd travel with the wagons and teams. And of course those who came first would, uh, would send back word to the others and they would.

I: Did you ever find among your grandparent's things any of those letters?

NJ: Uh we have a book called uh, 100 Years of Hugs by Beryl Hugg in Elgin.

I: Yes. Yes I've seen that.

NJ: That has my relatives in it, too 'cause my father was- my grandfather married a Hugg.

I: And was his name Roulette?

NJ: Yes.

I: R-O-U-L-E-T-T-E?

NJ: Well it was to being with and then they dropped the T-E and just said Roulet (rule-it). And actually, first of all it was “Rou-lay.”

I: Oh yeah of course. In French.

NJ: From France. Uh, Switzerland actually is where they lived.

I: Yes. So the letter or letters in the Hugg Book are the only ones you know about?

NJ: Uh, mostly. Uh, I have had a few letters that I, that my sis- my uh, my grandfather wrote to his, to some of his relatives.

I: Do you think that might be how Russell’s grandparents learned about it?

NJ: I don’t know if they, I don’t know if they communicated with anyone here.

RE: It seemed like granddad came to California first but before grandmother. And uh, ‘course the railroad was in operation then so they could uh, travel better. They didn’t come with the wagon train.

I: Railroad came through here in 1884. So they came after that?

RE: Yep. Prob’ly about that time.

I: Mm-hm.

RE: ‘Cause they, they homesteaded in the 80’s out of Elgin so they came just pretty soon after the railroad time.

I: And was, was all of the land that was available in Union County at that time under the Homestead Act?

RE: Uh, I, I’m not sure.

I: Because the Homestead Act was earlier, about 1860-61.

RE: Yeah.

I: And I don’t know how long it was in effect but my understanding is that land and the main part of the valley here was snapped up fairly fast.

RE: Yes, I, I’m sure it was. Like Connelly’s, you know. Miller’s and Gray’s.

I: Mm-hm. Is it possible then that your grandparents got some of the last land that was available by the Homestead Act?

RE: It prob'ly was. They are the last. Because it was out north of Elgin, you know. I suspect all this main valley had been taken up.

I: How much did they get? 160 acres?

RE: Prob'ly.

I: Mm-hm. Did you ever hear them talk about how good the land was or what troubles they might have had?

RE: Well, it was just timberland. There wasn't a, I think they had a little acreage with hay ground, a little hay ground. But uh.

I: Nothing was arable then at all?

RE: It was mostly timber.

I: Did they have to clear that and, and plow in order to ___? [073]

RE: Not much. He, he worked for the railroad. He was section foreman at the railroad when they built the railroad on up to ___. [074]

I: Oh, I see.

RE: Were Chinese and Jap labors then. And he put a steam engine on a handcar. My cousin has that steam engine in the boiler that he had on the handcar.

I: Did your grandfather previously have experience with railroading?

RE: Not that I know of.

I: Just picked it up? As needed?

RE: Yeah.

NJ: He was always an inventor.

I: What, what stories- you knew your grandparents didn't you?

RE: Oh yes.

I: And were they, were they of sound mind when you knew them so they could remember pretty well?

RE: Oh yes.

I: Well, do you remember some stories they told about the early days here?

RE: Well, there's uh, when he, uh, when he left the railroad he bought a little ranch in High Valley. And uh.

I: That's where the line was completed?

RE: Start, started farming.

I: Was that when the branch line was completed?

RE: Yes. So it was along about nineteen eight or ten when they came here. Bought this section here. And then they, uh, let me see, there was two boys. My father and Howard. My dad went to the war. He was a, and so when he came back from the war they were, oh, farming together here.

I: But you don't remember stories your grandparents told?

NJ: Well how 'bout the one about the Indians out at Elgin when they were living there?

RE: Yeah. Yeah there were still Indians, some Indian families livin' down north.

I: Cricket Flat?

RE: And uh.

I: Would it have been?

RE: No, no it's down towards Looking Glass. This one would come and go to town with grandfather different times. Uh, but he came riding in one day.

I: Town being Elgin or La Grande?

RE: In Elgin. Granddad always had a blacksmith shop and a forge and he was always makin' things. Well anyway this Indian come riding in. His horse had fallen with him and bent his gun barrel. And so he headed to granddad and said, "Can you fix him?" And granddad said, "Well, I can straighten it but I don't know how accurate it will be." So he laid it across two blocks and he took another block and a heavy hammer and he'd hit it and then he'd raise it up and sight. I think he said he hit it three times. And he handed it back to the Indian and he said, "You'll have to uh, you'll have to try it and see how accurate." A day or two later he come ridin' back in, handed it back to granddad and he said, "Hit him again." He went to town one day and the, went into the butcher shop. And they was a lady buyin' some meat and they'd just come out with these slicers? You had to turn by hand and it'd make a slice. And he was lookin' over her shoulder. He was intrigued

with that slicer. And he sliced through a little thin piece. "Huh. Damn near missed it." He thought there shoulda' been a, been a thicker slice went through that slicer.

I: Slice of what?

RE: Meat.

I: What does that have to do with the shotgun?

RE: Well that was a different story from the shotgun.

I: Oh I see! I see. You lost me there for a moment.

RE: Yeah. Yeah. He went to town.

I: He said, "Hit her again." And that the end of that story, huh?

RE: Yeah.

NJ: Yeah.

I: What did it shoot better after that did he say?

NJ: That was the end of the story when he told that.

RE: No that had happened out at the place. The meat deal happened in town.

I: Yeah. Yeah. So they, you don't remember the stories they told about the trying to raise hay or what they did with their timber, or how they lived?

RE: Granddad always had a sawmill. And a threshing machine and a steam engine. And uh, when they lived in High Valley he, he did uh, threshing for other people. In fact he had two steam engines and threshing machines. And when he left there he sold one to the Alexander's and brought the other one here. But uh, no, I don't remember. I was 21 when, when he died. He died in '41. And grandmother lived another 12, 15 years. She was in her late 80's, I think when. Granddad's birthday was the 29th of February and grandmother's birthday was the 1st day of March. So he just had a birthday every fourth year. But uh, no I don't- they weren't, they weren't big storytellers.

I: And you didn't push them?

RE: No.

I: Did he every write any of their memories?

RE: Yeah I think granddad kept a ledger. But I don't know where, I don't know prob'ly Harvey, Howard may, may have it.

I: A ledger would be mainly numbers, wouldn't it? Not like a diary.

RE: Well, uh, he would uh, no I think he'd, he'd put note things, them important happenings. Things that happened.

I: Russell's dad kept a ledger and he would say, um, maybe, "Sold hay for how much today," or, then he'd say, uh, well, "We rounded up the cattle." And things that they did daily. And usually put a little notation on what they did.

I: I've read Bernal Hugg, Senior's ledgers of his farming experiences. Very, very detailed. Of course he was always experimenting with new ways of raising crops or new kinds of trees to grow. And he kept detailed records of all those things.

RE: Yeah, Bernal. He was, he was pretty exact with everything.

I: He was a remarkable man.

RE: He uh.

I: Did you grandparents know him?

RE: I suppose they did, I expect they did. But back then, you know, they travel, they had a, 1917 to 1920 I've got the license plates from the Model T Ford. Of course the roads weren't graveled. It was muddy. In the wintertime we'd go with a team and a hack. A team and a buggy. Roads weren't fit to travel. Ford, they called it their Ford "Six." Three tires and three cylinders.

I: Yeah. I remember you said that. Did you get, did you ever get from your grandparents, um, any sense of whether they had regrets about coming here?

RE: No, I never, I never heard anything about them looking back.

I: Did they make comparisons with how it had been in Oklahoma?

RE: (chuckles) Well, only what I told you about grandmother. How the, and they all had, uh, they all had storm cellars for tornadoes, you know? And uh.

NJ: I'm sure they were happy to be here and have this god land and be able to farm and do what they wanted.

RE: She, she said her and her sister would go out and gather cow chips to burn in the cook stove. Said they burned good.

I: In Oklahoma or here?

RE: In Oklahoma.

I: They didn't have many trees.

RE: No.

NJ: And in Kansas didn't they have uh, Indian raids and things like that?

RE: They had Indian scares and there was a fort they'd go to. And they was a, they got word that the Indians may be comin' and so they packed up and went to the fort for two or three days. Her mother had some flat irons and that was really something in those days to have flat irons to iron. Well she run with her flat irons out to the garden and hid 'em under the cabbage leaves. When they came back home the pigs had got out and eat the cabbage and the irons was layin' out there. I don't know why an Indian would have wanted a, you know to what to do with a flat iron. But she, that was one of her prized possessions.

I: It sounds as though you're saying that when they were in Oklahoma they had a fear or maybe a hostility toward the Indians.

RE: Well they had been, they had been problems with the Indians.

I: Right. But in, in Union County north of Elgin they lived.

RE: No they were all friendly.

I: Friendly, friendly ways?

RE: Yes, no problem. Yeah.

I: Do you remember your grandparents talking about any, any of their relationships with Indians?

RE: Not, nothing there more than what I've already, uh, been reminded of. Yeah.

I: But that almost suggests that maybe the Indians didn't have much to do with the whites unless they had some kind of a need like straightening out a shotgun?

RE: (chuckles) Yeah, I, I don't think there was a lot of interaction, uh.

I: No socializing? No having dinner together?

RE: Not, not, not much. Uh, the Indians they kinda' lived their style. Were still pretty primitive. Yeah.

I: Well primitive is a sense of they had lived the way Indians had lived for thou- uh, hundreds, probably thousands of years?

RE: Yeah. Yeah.

I: Shouldn't mean having a refrigerator or an indoor toilet or anything like that.

RE: No I remember when we ran cattle in the Minam. We had, a cabin, nice cabin and barn in the Little Minam. And uh, in the fall, the summer, late summer why we'd, we'd go in dad and mother and stay at the cabin. We always hired a rider to stay there and to take salt out. We'd go in and uh, and down below the cabin, uh the creek. The Indians would come in. Some Indians from Pendleton and they'd be, the old gentleman riding ahead and have his rifles across the saddle. And they'd be two or three young fellas behind. And then the squaws would be coming behind, uh, a leading horse with the squaw cart and their tents and stuff on the poles. Draggin' the poles. Would come in and they'd camp down, down below the cabin on the river. That was kind of an annual thing for 'em and then they'd dig, they'd dig roots and stuff.

I: You remember your grandparents ever showing in any way that they understood the treaties with Indians?

RE: No. No I, I don't remember any, that they ever mentioned that. That's pretty much most of that happened earlier.

I: 1851 I think was the last treaty.

RE: Yes.

I: And that one was supposed to have kept all whites out of eastern Oregon. It was to be entirely for the Indians.

RE: No I never heard that.

I: That idea didn't last long, of course.

RE: Yeah.

I: Yeah it was quickly, uh, overruled by uh, people who saw too much value in eastern Oregon to leave just to the Indians.

RE: I guess, uh, Indians really didn't uh; winter much here in the valley. I think they mostly went.

I: Stopping place.

RE: Yes. The summer, summer activity.

I: Spring and fall, I think mainly.

RE: Yeah.

I: Okay, well, have we got everything you can remember about what your parents said early life was in, in Union County?

NJ: You might tell about your parents, uh, honeymoon.

I: Honeymoon?

NJ: Mm-hm.

I: Oh. Where were they married? In Elgin?

RE: Well I don't remember where they were married but after the war they, they uh, got married. They went on their honeymoon packed into the Minam for their honeymoon. Camped in the Minam below the horse ranch down um, the old Trepier [?] [267] Homestead.

NJ: Riding horses to the Minam and camping out. That was fun for them. That was a nice way to celebrate.

I: I think you said that uh, your father decided that, or was it your grandfather who decided to, to buy land in this part of the valley.

RE: Yeah granddad.

I: And so your father was born in this part of the valley rather than near uh, Elgin or Looking Glass?

RE: Where was dad born?

NJ: Uh.

RE: (to wife) Can you, do you have the record? I, I can't remember now whether, whether he was born in, I think they lived out of Imbler a little, little while.

I: Well at any rate they'd lived here long enough to get you born here? Right?

RE: Yeah.

I: Um, for me uh, memories, fairly distinct memories of things in my early childhood I guess start around age five or six. Is that about right for you?

RE: Uh, prob'ly.

I: Okay. So what can you remember about the place that was called home when you were five or six years old. What kind of a building was it?

RE: This uh, the original house here that uh, was here when my grandparents came here has belonged to Scofield family. And uh, I remember we had, uh, tough winters. Cold! 30 below zero back then. And my dad would get up in the morning and build a fire in the cook stove to warm the, the uh, irons. The ironing irons on the stove so he could, could melt the frost away from the door 'cause it wasn't; it wasn't uh, double windows or anything. You had to melt the frost away from the door to get the door open.

I: Was this a one-room house?

RE: Oh no, no, there was uh, there were two. There were two bedrooms and uh. Then there was a cellar underneath the back of the kitchen. There was a, a storage pantry room and then the cellar underneath where they, root cellar, you know.

I: Had your father built the house?

RE: No. No the house was original here.

I: He bought it from the Scofield's perhaps?

RE: Yes. My grandfather did.

I: Yeah. Uh, do you remember when whistling through the boards, the walls, or window, around the windows and through the, under the door. Was it that kind of construction? Pretty rickety?

RE: Well it wasn't uh; it wasn't tight like they are nowadays. 'Course we had, we had a good stove to heat in the living room. A stove and of course a cook stove in the kitchen that had that part of the house. But the bedrooms there wasn't any heat.

I: Did you stuff newspaper in the cracks?

RE: Well, I expect they did underneath the, the doors.

I: Was the house painted on the inside or outside?

RE: I can't remember now. I can't remember.

I: What kind of furniture did it have in it?

RE: Well pretty rustic.

I: Hand made do you think?

RE: Yes. Yeah.

I: Can you describe the bed you slept in?

RE: No I don't remember just how, how it was. I know it had a frame so it was up off the floor.

I: Maybe two pieces of uh, lumber on one side and uh, some, some two-by-two's for posts?

RE: Yeah.

I: Something simple like that?

RE: Yeah.

I: Yeah.

NJ: ___ moved when your grandma? [340]

RE: No that was a, that was another, another house. The house down there was moved out to the sawmill shed.

NJ: Okay.

RE: I don't remember that house. I don't remember, maybe that was part of the house.

NJ: The house that ___ moved over there for grandma?

RE: Yeah.

I: Tell me more about the routine in that house.

RE: Well my dad, my dad always whittled shavings at night before he went to bed. He whittled shavings to start the fire and the cook stove.

NJ: Pitch. Was it pitch?

RE: Well if he had pitch he would. He wanted something that was soft so he could whittle. And we had kerosene lanterns that we'd go to, and I, my job was helpin'

milk the cows. And my dad and my brother they'd prepare the horse, the horse barn part of it. And I, I was, I and my uncle the milking. Separating the cream and feeding the pigs. And then of course I rode horseback to school three miles across the field.

I: Uh, before you get to that: um, one of the first things you had to do after you got up was milk the cows? Is that right?

RE: Yes.

I: Okay well tell me about your clothes. A pair of pants and a wool shirt?

RE: Well there's some clothes like some jackets- my mother was quite. Uh, she and my grandmother, they liked to sew. They always had a sewing machine. The old treadle machine and they did quite a bit of sewing. But, most of our clothes were store boughten. 'Course they'd darn the socks, you know. Make the socks.

I: Uh-huh. It wasn't jeans then, was it for pants?

RE: Yeah they were, they were bought. I don't remember they ever, that they ever home made jeans.

I: Like these?

RE: Yeah.

I: Home made.

NJ: No. I don't think so.

RE: I don't think they did. I don't remember that there were any home made. They were all store boughten.

I: Did you have a belt?

RE: Oh I don't think I wore a belt that much when I was.

I: Suspenders? Suspenders?

RE: I. I guess I did wear belt. No I never did wear suspenders when I was young. I uh.

NJ: Hm-mm. (No.)

I: A flannel shirt?

RE: Yeah, just flannel shirts.

NJ: I think grandma made a lot of their shirts. Their flannel shirts.

I: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. What kind of socks?

RE: Well they were homespun some of 'em. But 'course they were store boughten, too.

I: And shoes?

RE: Yeah they were, they were store boughten.

I: Did you wear boots most of the time for farm work?

RE: Well, mostly we wore lace, lace shoes. I remember my grand, my grandfather had a, a uh, shoe stand with a horn so he could repair and he had a, a uh, hammer and the nails that he could repair the soles.

I: The kind of shoe stand that has uh, the outline of a foot upside down so you could put the shoe on it to work on?

RE: Yeah, it was a metal thing. You slipped, slipped the shoe over.

I: You saw those at old shoemaker shops, too, didn't you? Yeah.

RE: Yeah.

I: So when the soles got worn out he put new ones on that way?

RE: Yeah.

I: Did he have pieces of leather around that he could just cut out the sole?

RE: Oh we always had leather. Grand, uh, my dad always repaired the harness and we had a harness shop out from the barn. In the wintertime he'd uh, he fixed a barrel, a barrel with a grate in the bottom and a lid that he could fasten tight. And a little oil burner to warm that oil. And he's put the harness in there and then he fixed so he could turn it or tumble it to oil the harness. And he, 'course he had, he'd buy a leather hide of leather to repair. And he had, 'course he had the, the uh, the sewin', sewing thing you sit on and had the jaws that come up to held the leather and on and clamp the leather in there. And then he had it all; he'd punch through to repair a tug. He'd punch the roul [?]; oh he had a little rail that run through that'd mark the stitches.

I: Roul, did you say?

RE: Yeah a little, like a little spur roul that, that would mark the stitches and just this.

I: I've heard that called an awl.

RE: And they had an awl that would stick through and then you had linen, linen thread with beeswax and you'd have a needle on each end. And you'd stick through the hole and put one needle through this way and another this way. Punch another hole. So it's _____. [441] Repair harness that way.

I: Mm-hm. And same with shoes? I mean similar process for shoes?

RE: I suppose. Prob'ly.

I: Did you usually have uh, one pair of pants and one shirt and one set of underwear? Was it a long john underwear usually?

RE: Oh I think, I think we usually had a change. Yeah we had an extra pair.

I: Two sets to last you?

RE: Yeah. Mm-hm.

I: How often did they get washed?

RE: (chuckles) Uh, it just depended how, how much dirt we got into.

I: (chuckles) Well was it up to you to decide? "Mom, these need to be washed."

RE: (chuckles) Well if it wasn't comfortable why I was wantin' somethin' better.

I: Did she look you over and say, "You're not supposed, you shouldn't wear those dirty clothes anymore. I need to wash them."

RE: Prob'ly did.

I: Uh, I- did you usually wear a hat? A straw-hat maybe?

RE: In the summer a straw hat. In the winter we'd wear a cap, you know, and we cold pull down over our ears.

I: Oh yeah. Oh maybe a, a wool cap? Cover your whole head snugly?

RE: Yeah. Yeah we had cold winters and lots of snow.

I: Yeah I know.

NJ: I remember his mother telling about, um, when she put the children to bed for an afternoon nap. She had the two boys and a little girl. And the little girl, the girl was rather mischievous. And when the boys'd get to sleep why she'd sneak around and put- one time she put Mercurochrome on their faces, painted them up. And just little things like that, but she said before she put her to bed she took her clothes and washed 'em and dried them on the line while she was sleeping. So in the summer her clothes'd be ready to put on when she got up. And so they didn't have too many clothes I don't think, but, you know, kept 'em washed up.

I: Yeah. I suppose washing was in a big tub with, uh, soap that your mother might have made?

NJ: Lye soap.

I: Lye?

RE: Yeah they had uh, copper, a little copper tub about so wide and so long and so high.

I: And a metal washboard?

RE: Yeah a washboard.

NJ: You oil 'em, too. Oil 'em on the stove.

I: How about haircuts? How often did you get a haircut?

RE: Yeah, my mother always cut, cut our hair.

I: How often?

RE: With hand clippers.

I: Oh boy I can feel the pinching now.

(chuckling by everyone)

NJ: That, too.

RE: Yeah, sometimes they.

I: Once a month maybe?

RE: Yeah.

I: So um, if you got dressed in the morning, didn't have time for breakfast before you went out to milk the cows?

RE: No we'd go out and do chores before breakfast.

I: Yes. Did you get anything to drink or nibble on just, just, or just hold it- not eating or drinking anything until you got in for breakfast?

RE: No we didn't do much snacking. It was a pretty, always had biscuits for...
End of Side A

Side B

RE: Yeah it was always biscuits and gravy for, and uh, they would make jerky and they'd hang it on strings behind the, the stove on a rod by the warming oven. And they'd chip that jerky in the gravy for breakfast. And 'course we always had, uh, oatmeal or- my granddad had, had a little, uh, grinding machine that he ground wheat and made uh, our cereal. And it had, it screened out, it screened out the ____ [010] for flour and then the little larger stuff that you use for, for uh, cereal. But that pretty much was our breakfast menu.

I: Just one, one other little aspect of the, but a fairly important one, part of the morning routine. Um, you have a uh, chamber pot under your bed upstairs or did you run out I the cold to the privy first thing?

RE: Well, I think everybody had the pot. Yeah that was pretty standard. And of course.

I: Better than running out in the middle of the night probably?

RE: ____ [017] was out. Yeah.

I: Yeah. Whose responsibility was it to take care of the contents of the chamber pot then?

NJ: Oh mother. Mother always had.

I: Mother had to do it all?

NJ: Yes.

RE: I think so.

NJ: Yes.

I: How come it never occurred to any of you boys to do that?

RE: Well.

NJ: Just part of housework.

RE: Yeah.

NJ: Cleaning up the chamber.

I: Maybe she could keep track of the condition of your innards that way? Find out if there was anything wrong.

RE: Yeah.

I: So uh, you came in after the milking the cows, which took what? A half an hour? 45 minutes?

RE: Yeah it'd take; it'd take usually 45 minutes to an hour.

I: Did, what kind of a container were you milking into? A pail?

RE: Oh yeah we had uh, three gallon pail and we'd carry it down to the, to the house and the barn and run it through the separator for cream. And then you'd take the skim milk and carry it up to the hog's barn.

I: Yeah. You didn't have a milking machine then?

RE: No.

I: You had to use your hands.

RE: Yes.

I: When you were seven or eight years old, or were your fingers big and strong enough that you could milk well?

RE: Yeah a cow that didn't uh, milk too hard I, I could milk. Yeah.

I: Do you remember feeling the pain?

RE: Well you just kinda' build up to it, you know? Yeah.

I: Did you sit on a three-legged stool?

RE: Yes.

I: Did you have, did you put up your head against the cow's body?

RE: Yeah.

NJ: Mine wasn't a three-legged stool. Mine was just a one legged stool! You had to balance yourself while your milking.

I: Really?

NJ: Yeah.

RE: Uh, string hangin' down from the top to tie their tail to so she wasn't swtichin' you with her tail.

I: Uh-huh.

RE: And they were in stanchions, you know, we'd feed, feed 'em hay and grain in their stanchions.

I: Were they, were they standing there when you were milking?

RE: Yeah.

I: Yeah. So that's how they constrained them?

NJ: Yeah. Weren't supposed to move too much.

RE: Yeah.

I: You had, one or two favorite cows did you? Because they were easier, easier to milk?

RE: Yeah they was some variation there all right. Uh, we didn't, we just kinda' picked out of the herd. See we had the, we didn't really have a dairy. We never used a dairy bull; we just take a cow out of the herd that had good teats. We'd tame so, it's, that's how it worked out.

I: Uh, was, these early experiences with cows and I suppose horses around, too? Were there? Horses?

NJ: Lots of 'em 'cause they went fix the- had lots of horses because you worked horses in the field.

RE: Yeah, it took 30 head of horses to do the farming. And then of course, we raised, dad raised our saddle horses then, too. He always had a stallion. He sent, in 1934 he sent to Belgium for a stallion.

I: Yeah. You told that story.

RE: Okay.

I: Yeah. Um, it's often been said that uh, kids who grow up on farms learn the facts of life pretty quickly and without very much uh, hemming and hawing. I mean everything's pretty, pretty clear as to how, how things work. Was that your experience?

RE: Yeah.

NJ: Sort of natural.

I: Yeah. And it's, it's not a cause for embarrassment at all is it?

RE: Not that I remember.

I: No is just how things worked.

RE: Yeah.

I: Yeah. Uh, so you talked about breakfast. This uh, jerky that's chipped into gravy. That sounds good to me. I, I, I used to have something my, my mother made called "dry beef" that she put in to a, a white flour gravy and, yeah.

NJ: Um-hm. Be the same thing.

I: Yeah. I, I really liked that. (chuckles)

RE: Yeah well that's the same thing. Jerky.

NJ: 'Course they always had their cured bacons and hams besides. And eggs, you know, and potatoes and.

I: So there was never a question of getting up from the table, uh, hungry?

NJ: Oh no.

I: Eat all you could eat?

RE: In the late fall they'd butcher maybe four or five hogs and uh, ___ [071] them up, render the lard. Had a big, one of those big cast iron kettles in the basement. Render the lard and cure the, the uh, hams and bacons and hang 'em in the smokehouse. And then bury 'em in the oat bin in the barn to keep mice out of 'em.

I: Keep the mice out of them?

RE: Yeah bury 'em in the oat, in the oat bin. That kept 'em dry.

I: How deep?

RE: Yeah. Well the mice wouldn't dig down very deep. You know, we.

I: Six or eight inches?

RE: Six or eight inches deep. Yeah.

I: How long would they keep there?

RE: Yeah they kept well.

I: How, how long?

RE: Well, I, I, they'd keep all winter. Yeah. I suppose maybe they'd get a little bit, uh, oh like, like you call it freezer burn now but they had little prob'ly, uh, little.

NJ: Dry. And then they'd prob'ly take the dry part and cook that.

RE: Little _____. [083]

I: So you just leave them all there and then take them out one at a time, as you needed them?

RE: Right.

I: And how many, how many might there be that would last all winter.

RE: Well if we, if we butchered a half a dozen hogs, why that would, that would last clear through. Maybe, yeah and prob'ly through the summer for harvest time, too, even.

I: You got several hams from each hog, didn't you?

RE: Yeah, you'd have two hams and two bacons from each hog. And then they, they, they cleaned the pigs feet. Pickled the pig's feet and ears.

NJ: Made headcheese. Didn't waste any part of 'em. Maybe the ears, I don't think we used the ears. We always used the feet.

I: So from the, the time you were about six I suppose once you had done the milking and had breakfast it was time to go to school?

RE: Yep. Dad would have the horses saddled up.

I: Yeah. That, so that took you to what? Three or three-thirty in the afternoon? Is that when you were done from school and back home?

RE: Oh seemed like school was out four o'clock. I think four o'clock.

NJ: Four o'clock always.

I: Yeah and it took what? Half an hour, 45 minutes to get back home?

RE: Yeah.

I: What did you have to do when you got home?

RE: We'd have to milk; have to do chores, milk cows.

I: Same ones you'd milked in the morning?

RE: Yeah. Yeah. Separate the cream out. Feed the pigs.

I: While you were milking, was your brother or anybody else also milking at the same time?

RE: Well, my uncle, uncle used to help to milk.

I: Did you have conversations while you were milking?

RE: Yeah sometimes, whatever needed to be.

NJ: We had cats around that were waiting for the milk when we were through.

RE: Yeah.

I: Give 'em a saucer of milk?

NJ: You'd always give the cats some.

RE: Yeah. Always had cats.

I: Okay. So uh, you might be done with the milking at five-fifteen or five-thirty?

RE: Um-hm.

I: Then what?

RE: Come in for breakfast.

I: No. This is night now, late afternoon. Evening.

RE: Oh in the aft- evening.

I: Yes.

RE: Yes, well after the chores was all done come in and have.

I: Well what other chores besides milking?

RE: Well there were the horse chores. My dad took care of that. Feeding the horses.

NJ: We always had to carry in wood for the, for the woodstoves. And.

RE: Yeah. Yeah we had the wood box for the, for the heating stove and the wood, the cook stove.

I: The daily supply?

RE: Yes.

NJ: We'd have to get the lights ready for night. Get the lights ready to, kerosene lamps or whatever.

RE: Yeah. We always had a woodshed back of the kitchen for the, store the wood.

I: Did you have to split it when you were a little older?

RE: When I was older I split some wood. I don't remember real young splitting wood.

I: Okay then uh, while you were doing the chores mom was cooking the dinner?

RE: Yes.

I: Mm-hm. And by the way had, had you taken sandwiches to school for lunch?

RE: Oh we always, yeah we always carried our lunch.

I: So she, she was making those after she finished the breakfast?

RE: Sure.

I: Yeah. All right, so, dinner would usually consist of what? Meat? Potatoes? A vegetable? Milk? Pie?

NJ: Fruit. Always fruit.

I: Oh was fruit?

NJ: We had canned fruit, dried fruit, uh, there, there was always fruit. Canned fruit.

I: Mm-hm. And again, eat, all you can eat?

RE: Yeah we always had plenty to eat.

I: Uh, did the whole family eat together?

RE: Yes.

NJ: Always.

I: In the kitchen?

RE: Was a combination uh, dining room. It was the dining room off the kitchen.

I: Oh. That's a little unusual I would think n the early days. A round, a round table?

RE: Yeah I don't remember. Seemed like it was kind of oblong.

I: Mm-hm. But everybody could see everybody else?

RE: Yes.

I: Did you have assigned seating?

RE: Have what?

I: Assigned seating.

NJ: Sit at the same place every time?

RE: Oh yeah pretty much.

I: Dad at the head?

RE: Yeah.

I: Mom at the other end?

RE: Yeah.

I: Yeah. And the kids on the sides?

RE: Yes.

NJ: They had prob'ly made their table. They prob'ly built the table to fit the house.

I: Mm-hm. Were your grandparents living with you at that time? Or near?

RE: They were the younger years. Grandparents, we all lived together in the house down there.

I: Oh yeah, you all lived in the same house?

RE: Yes.

I: Yes. Okay. Dinner would what? Take a half an hour or so?

RE: Dinner?

I: Dinner.

RE: Yeah it take half, three-quarters of an hour.

I: What did you do next?

RE: But as the harvest, uh, harvest our hay. Crews. They, we'd always cook for them. And they had a bunkhouse.

I: That would have been in August?

RE: We had a bunkhouse. Well in May and June when haying. July. Uh, always had hired men, even through the winter and there'd be one or two hired men to help feed. And do things.

I: Uh-huh. They came in and ate with the family?

RE: Yes.

I: Mm-hm. Some of those were rough characters, weren't they?

RE: Yeah. You had all kinds.

I: I think you said that your mother didn't want you to associate too much with hired men because they cussed and told dirty stories.

RE: Yeah. Yeah the bunkhouse, they didn't want us kids out in the bunkhouse around.

I: Yeah. So they were a little concerned about your being um, contaminated maybe?

RE: Yeah.

NJ: Mm-hm.

I: Your morals being corrupted.

RE: Yeah.

I: Mm-hm. That's why it surprises me a little bit that the hired men would be allowed in to eat dinner with the family.

RE: Well, they, there never was that I remember any problems.

I: Were they reasonably polite?

RE: Yes. Mostly. I remember, uh, granddad, you know back then these preachers had to, they had to work to make a livin'. The church couldn't support 'em. And granddad, I don't know how he got acquainted with 'em. But I remember one year there was three different preachers on the, on the crew. Come and worked on the harvest crew. And one of 'em he was a cowboy preacher. And uh, sometimes he'd get started and ever'body else would be through and go up and leave and he was still talking.

I: (chuckles) Whether anybody was there to listen.

RE: Yeah. He was an interesting guy.

I: Well after dinner what did you say you did next, usually?

RE: Depend on what was, uh.

NJ: If it was winter it was dark and the summer.

I: During the school year, let's say.

RE: It was wintertime why we headed out to school. And she rode three miles to country school.

I: No this was.

RE: We headed out and then of course the folks would go out, feed the cattle. There was always snow through the winter and they'd feed uh, with bobsled. And uh.

I: I was told to make you stick to one day, typically during the school year. After dinner what did you, did you have homework to do?

RE: Uh, not much. My dad always read. He had, he'd usually have a book, he'd get it.

I: And did he insist that you listen?

RE: Did what?

I: Did he insist that you listen?

RE: Yes.

I: So you had to sit there quiet whether you liked it or not?

RE: Well, it always didn't last all that long, you know.

I: Was he reading, um, bible stories, for instance?

RE: I don't remember as much bible as uh, as other, as other history books or, I don't remember where, where they got 'em.

NJ: My dad had a lot of history books. He loved to read history and that's the only kind of books he'd have.

I: Uh-huh.

RE: And then of course when they finally got a radio. After he got a radio we'd always listen to Amos & Andy. Yeah. That was quite an attraction.

I: Yeah. I was probably listening on the east coast at the same time you were listening here. I listened to Amos & Andy, too. I think most Americans did if they had access to a radio.

NJ: Mm-hm.

RE: Sure.

I: Sure. Uh, do you remember new- hearing news broadcasts?

RE: No I don't recollect.

I: Were you aware of what was going on in the world in any way?

RE: Not a, not a lot. Not a lot. There wasn't much, uh, I don't remember what publication, paper, if there was a, a local paper.

NJ: Uh we always had the Elgin Recorder. I don't know whether you got whatever the La Grande.

I: The, The Observer, The Observer was being printed at that time.

RE: Yeah I suppose we got The Observer.

I: And some people got the Oregon Journal came in by train everyday.

RE: Yes.

NJ: Yeah we did. We got the Oregon Journal.

RE: In the wintertime we'd get mail maybe be here once a week.

I: Well do you remember seeing books or magazines lying around the house that you could pick up if you wanted to?

RE: Yes.

NJ: Sears Roebuck Catalog mostly.

RE: Yeah.

NJ: Montgomery Ward catalog.

I: That's the, that's the wish book.

RE: Yeah. Yeah.

I: What time do you have to go to bed?

RE: Well, we had to usually a regular time. Pretty much a regular time. By nine o'clock.

I: Nine o'clock. Mm-hm. And did you say you were in an upstairs bedroom that was very cold in the winter.

RE: No. Uh, well this new house in '35 was built while we had, uh, slept upstairs. But the old house the bedrooms were all on the, it was, it was just a single floor.

NJ: One story.

I: Did you take off all your clothes and put on some kind of pajamas, or?

RE: We usually had pajamas. Yes.

I: And did you take off your clothes downstairs or upstairs? Upstairs would be mighty cold; you'd have to do it fast, wouldn't you?

RE: Well, the uh, this house down here had heat that went upstairs, so the bedrooms weren't that cold.

I: Oh. Well people talk about uh, heated bricks that they had in their beds. Did you use that device?

RE: The only ones I remember is when we'd go with the team and uh, buggy. Had a big, had a big ___ [236] we'd put a bricks or something at our feet.

I: Yeah. Well did you wear socks to bed?

RE: Prob'ly. Mm-hm.

I: It was mighty cold when you got into the bed, wasn't it?

RE: Yeah.

NJ: We had a hot water bottle.

I: Oh you did?

NJ: Mm-hm. Yeah. Way back then.

I: So was it- you'd just take that or keep the hot water bottle down next to the stove and fill it up and bring it up?

NJ: Mm-hm.

I: That's a good system.

NJ: 'Course we never did have an upstairs; we just had the one, one level. Our house was always snug and warm and well built. We didn't have lots of air coming in. We didn't have lots of wind out there I don't think. It seemed like the snow got so high in the winter that we'd walk over the fences and everything and it didn't blow away like it does now.

I: When you finished elementary school. That was eighth grade here at Lower Cove. Right?

RE: Yeah.

I: And then, then you went to uh, boarded in La Grande for three years by that time you were 14, 15. Prob'ly you were 14 when you graduated from eighth grade?

RE: Yes.

I: Uh, when, when you were boarding in La Grande you were home here during the summer and, and on weekends. Uh, did you have assigned duties the way you'd had before when you were younger?

RE: Probably. On weekends and through the summer, why.

I: It would be more than milking the cows, wouldn't it?

RE: Yes.

I: What else did you have to do? Pitch hay and do man, men's work?

RE: Oh through the summer, through the summer, yeah. I'd drive teams, wagon and we'd fork, fork the hay into the barn or with the Jackson fork, you know. Drive derrick. We had a big hay shed down here that'd hold 200 tons of long hay. And uh, but uh, and then the barn up here held 80 ton.

I: Did it, did it seem to you at that time that moving from being a boy into being a man didn't take very long?

RE: Well you just kinda' evolved into it.

I: But did it, did it seem to you to happen quickly?

RE: From one July 1st, July 1st experienced driving a teams I. I drove a team and hauled water to the steam engine. Had a tank 400 gallons and I'd drive to the river, put the hose, suction hose in the river and pump on 400 gallons of water, haul to the steam engine. And then a couple years later, uh, I was runnin' a bundle wagon or a, or a tinderbox [?] [282] wagon. I was big enough to pitch into the threshing machine.

I: Do you think it would be accurate to say that because there was so much work to do on the farm, and especially if you were male, you had to do outside work all the time? It never let up. Therefore you didn't have time to be an adolescent? Adolescents are fairly irresponsible typically.

RE: We didn't have time to, to recreate much. Fact when I went to high school I never was on the, the ball teams 'cause I had to get on the school bus and come home. And the town kids they could practice after school, so they made the team.

I: Well what I was getting at, I guess, a little more explicitly is uh, many adolescents are known, known for being pretty rowdy and irresponsible say between the ages of 13 or 14 and 17 or 18. I have the impression that if you were a boy growing up on the farm in those times there was no time for that?

RE: No. In fact my dad never let me have a bicycle. Said it was ruination for a kid to be lappin' around on a bicycle when you had a good saddle horse.

I: You had to agree, of course. It wasn't a good place to ride a bicycle around here, anyway, was it?

RE: No. Not very.

NJ: We never even had a sidewalk.

I: Yes. Do you remember when you were moving into the middle of the late childhood, early manhood years being um, well maybe more conscious about what you wore and how you looked?

RE: We didn't uh, go to town or socialize very much in those days. Uh, there was uh, at the schoolhouse the American Sunday School Union organized a Sunday School. And my folks, we'd go to Sunday School fairly regular on Sunday. If it was in the wintertime it was with team and, team and hack or buggy. And if roads were good in summer why it was the Model T Ford. And then in 1928 we bought a Chevrolet.

I: But I asked you if you were, if you became more conscious of how you looked or what you wore?

RE: Well you certainly, yeah you eventually kind of work into that, you know? And you get into high school why you.

I: Did that happen to you?

RE: I suppose it did. Yeah I.

I: I have the impression from what you said that maybe you didn't care much about that aspect of your life.

RE: Well it seemed like that back then ever'body was dressed about the same, you know? You just pretty much on one level.

I: Mm-hm. You did say though that uh, when you got to La Grande High School there were the farm kids and the city kids. And they were different.

RE: Yeah they, yeah they were. Yeah they were more, yeah they were more segregated, I guess you'd say.

I: Do you think the city kids kind of looked down on you farm kids?

RE: Oh I don't remember. I don't remember.

I: I guess you would have known. I've heard that said a number of times that, that the farm boys coming into la Grande High School were regarded as dumb, didn't know anything. Uh hardly worth of respect.

RE: Well I suppose there was a certain amount of that all right.

I: It wasn't true but that's the way that, that's what they thought.

RE: Yeah.

NJ: Well most of the town kids had access to a car, or uh, and they would court and date and um, all that which these kids had.

I: Go to the movies every Saturday.

NJ: Right.

RE: Yeah.

I: You don't recall any feelings of uh, maybe envy about the city life?

RE: Just didn't have that much contact uh, with the city people.

I: Well if you were boarding in La Grande five days a week you had enough contact to know, notice that what they were doing was different from what you'd been doing.

RE: Yeah. We did with the school, school kids but uh, we, we didn't, I didn't participate in the sports and later had to come home and do my homework and. I didn't want this county, county job. I didn't, I didn't.

I: You didn't aspire to it?

RE: I didn't aspire to it but Roland Shod, Roland Shod was on the, and Meisner, and uh, Vernal Hugg. And uh, it seemed like that uh, I don't know whether Vernal just kind of burned out or what. But anyway Shod come to me and he wanted me

to run against Vernal. He said Vernal's just kind of a yes man. He's uh, interested in other things more than, uh. (chuckles) He said that he has a hysterectomy every year. (laughter) He was into history and all that. But uh, no it wasn't my bag. I, well, I didn't uh.

I: Well what you concept of what the county or county commission did before you were on it?

RE: Well I guess one of the reasons that uh, Roland was anxious was to get somebody on. They were havin' quite an upheaval with the uh, the Road Master. That the uh, the road people, employed road people, they were havin' uh, havin' conflicts with the Road Master. They'd hired a guy he come from California. He was an equipment salesman. And Roland thought, Roland thought he was really, really okay.

I: What decade was this?

RE: What?

I: What decade was this?

RE: That was in uh, 1970's. Yeah, early, I just served one, one term.

I: A three-year term?

RE: So uh, four years, yeah.

I: Four.

RE: So. I knew several of the road people that worked for the county, you know. They'd be out here on the road and I'd visit with 'em and they come along and graded and whatever. And the rock, they run the rock crusher up then, the county did. And I know with those boys some of 'em are Cove boys. And they'd come a runnin' to me and bitchin' about how the county, the road management was. They didn't like it.

I: What, what were the problems?

RE: They didn't like the Road Master. He.

I: Just his personality or some of the things he did?

RE: Well the policy and all, you know. And they just, they just wasn't organized. They just couldn't get things.

I: Was this building new roads or maintaining old ones?

RE: Well mostly maintaining. Maintenance. So anyway, Shod he come and wanted me to run. And uh, so I guess if I accomplished anything we didn't have a shake-up when we got, we got an outfit uh, the uh, service outfit. He came out of Chicago and did an evaluation of the county. The whole system. And he said, "You, you need to get a new Road Master." So we put applications out, we had, there was three, finally shook down to three and Alvin Campbell was one. And Alvin had been, he'd been the head of one of the departments in the Road Department. He knew the county and, and he got along with the people. So, anyway, we fired that Road Master and put Alvin Campbell in. And things smoothed out pretty good. But before we did they uh, the employees had started to organize a union and that was a mistake. If the, if they'd a got rid of that Road Master and had somebody that could work with them they would never have got into that union thing. That was.

I: What was bad about the union idea?

RE: Well it was just, it just caused more contention, you know? They wanted, they thought they could pressure the county for more benefits and whatever, you know, and working conditions. And uh, so uh, when Alvin uh, Road Master thing smoothed out pretty good. And Alvin knew the county and all, and I was, I was supposed to work with him. And uh, so I didn't to, I didn't need to look over his shoulder much 'cause he knew what to do. He got along with the fellas. But not it uh, it's entirely a different ballgame. You know what they pay ___? [476] \$3,000 a year. And a little mileage. Well now there's, there's three of 'em and a couple secretaries. Their budget is up towards 200,000 a year.

I: I suppose you saw the job as public service mostly, didn't you?

RE: Well that was what it was expected.

I: Yeah. Yeah. What other responsibilities did you as a commissioner have?

RE: Just mainly go to, go to meetings maybe once a week. And uh, paperwork that come through we just approve.

I: Who, who decided what you were going to discuss?

RE: Well that came to the, to the uh, the Judge. All that paperwork. His secretary would come to the judge and then we'd have the meeting and he'd run it by and we'd approve or disapprove of it.

I: The, the judge was the chairman then?

RE: Yes.

I: Do you think that's the way it had been earlier? That seems unusual to me.

RE: Yeah the judge, the judge would, would be the chairman. Yeah.

I: Was he the, the uh, judge for the whole county? Or? Was he hearing or conducting trials and hearing evidence?

RE: Oh no, no, he was just. No this was just pertaining to the, to the road.

NJ: County commission.

I: No I mean did he have in addition to his job with the county commission, the, also the job.

End of Side B

End of Tape #3

Transcription completed on Wednesday, December 05, 2007