

George Fleshman

11/14/02, T1, S1

ES: Okay. Please give me your full name.

GF: Yeah. George Leslie Fleshman.

ES: And you were born in Union County?

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

ES: What had brought your parents here?

GF: My mother's parents came across on the covered wagon as the last organized covered wagon to come west and that was about 19...1878.

ES: Were they heading for the Willamette?

GF: They...they...they went down to Salem and they spent the first winter there and it's too wet and rainy so they went...went back to Walla Walla and stayed a year. And then they moved in to Wallowa County, which at that time still was Union County. Mother was born in '85 in Union County a year later, it was Wallowa County. And they had a hundred and sixty acre farm just as the valley opens up going towards Lostine. That's where Mother's born. They had a sod house there. She's born in a sod house. And then she lived there till she married Dad. Dad was born in West Virginia and his mother was a Carper, which was...still is a lot of Carpers in Union and Wallowa County.

ES: Is that C-a-r-p-e-r or p-a-r?

GF: Yeah. C-a-r-p-e-r, Carper. George Washington Carper was her father. They had about thirteen kids or somethin' other. And then she married my granddad Jimmy Fleshman in West Virginia. And my father was the oldest of eleven children. The Carpers decided to come to Promise land in Wallowa County in 1896.

ES: You mean the little town of Promise?

GF: Yeah. Little town of Promise out there.

ES: Yes. Yes.

GF: Dad...Dad was eighteen and so he got a homestead. Then he started teaching and he taught, oh, four or five years. And, uh, he taught one year at Wallowa, a country school called Liberty School and boarded with the Willetts, which was my mother's maiden name. She boarded with...with my grandparents.

ES: W-i-l-l-i-t or e-t?

GF: Yeah, W-i-l-l-e-t-t.

ES: e-t-t?

GF: Yeah.

ES: Okay.

GF: Dad was seven years older than Mother, but Grandmother thought he was a fine catch and saw to it that they got married. [laughs] So then the folks came out to La Grande and there was a saw mill up at Perry. And they lived in a little tiny house and I used to be able to see it as we came into La Grande. You'd look over the edge and I'd say, "That's where my folks lived." I don't know exact dates or things on them. Their first baby died of what we called colic now, allergic to cow's milk and they didn't know it and she died about seven months old. And

they moved back out to Dad's homestead and lived till one of my sisters born there. Then they came back to La Grande and...

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

GF: I...I don't know. I would image it was because of the work. And why they came back then I just never, you know, you never talk too much to your parents until...

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

GF: Yeah. They got married in 1903 so that...that was the...in 1904. And I know how long they stayed here. My brother was born about '7 they were living here and then a sister who was born in '12 was born back out at Promise, but then came back out there only a short time and sold the place.

ES: But you said you were born out toward the airport?

GF: Yeah. Then 1915 they bought eighty acre farm. The southern part of the valley was...was rich alfalfa land. They bought an eighty acre place. My dad and a couple of his brothers went into partnerships in an eighty cow dairy. And so I was born there at '24, but Dad had irrigated in the whole vall...that part of the valley and the alkali came up and they couldn't grow anything.

ES: Tell me about the alkali coming up. I hadn't heard about this.

GF: Hadn't heard about that?

ES: No.

GF: No, it was very, very fertile farm land just around Hot Lake and then north by the airport. Broshotti had the farm just north of where I was born. And that whole area it just became sagebrush practically, salt grass.

ES: Why would the irrigation do that?

GF: I'm not a scientist, but I understood the...the...by putting water on top and there's alkali down below and it raised up.

ES: Bubbled up.

GF: Bubbled up. And the way some farmers have done...dug big ditches, drainage ditches, and then...then drain\_\_

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

GF: Yeah, but they have got it back into product, but never like it was. Dad was doing quite well until, well, 1930 we moved into La Grande and I went to the first grade. My birthday was on the 7<sup>th</sup> September, which was a Labor Day, the 8<sup>th</sup> September I went to school. And I thought everybody went to school the day after they got to be six years old. And I went to Greenwood and my school teacher was...

ES: Why Greenwood? They weren't living nearby, were they?

GF: We moved into town on Maple Street of 2600 block of Maple Street.

ES: Was that the north side of the tracks?

GF: Yeah, north Maple. That side of the track.

ES: Was that because houses were cheaper there?

GF: It was right on...they...they knew the lady that had...Mrs. Millerine. She was the mother of Darny and Avery Millerine who were both very musical. Avery wound up as assistant school superintendent. They both died early of heart attacks. But we...her husband, who had died, oh, late '20s, had built two identical houses and she lived in one and rented the other. So we lived in rental.

ES: Did they move into town specifically so you could go to school?

GF: Oh no. No, no. No. Dad turned the farm over to one of my oldest brothers to farm and he became a Farmers Insurance agent of fire, auto insurance. And he was the Union County district agent. He had two or three salesmen under him. He came into town to be a salesman. So Greenwood is about six blocks away. And it was a big old two-story wooden building with sawdust on the floors. And they had huge wood piles of four-foot wood they burned in the big furnace. And the janitor out there was named...what was...Janet...married Jim...

DF: Isman?

GF: No, no. Janet Miller married Jim...? Anyway, he...he was probably about six-six or six-seven, very skinny. We always called him Mr. Longfellow. And I thought he was the poet until I got about...about seven...

ES: Hello Henry Wadsworth. [laughs]

GF: Oh, what's Mona's sister...youngest sister's name?

DF: Janice.

GF: Janice?

DF: Masten.

GF: Ma...

DF: Masten.

GF: Madsen.

DF: Masten. M-a-s

GF: Masten. Yeah. Yeah. Okay.

DF: M-a-s-t-e-n.

GF: Yeah, Mr. Masten was the janitor there.

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

GF: That's all I remember. Him being tall and haulin' in wood and stokin' the furnace. But I...my first grade teacher, Beatrice Young, was a widow lady. And one day at show and tell I took a tin type of...to school to show.

ES: Define tin type, would you please?

GF: Okay. Tin type was earliest days of photography. It was pictures put on tin. I don't know how they put it on there. I still got over there in my desk drawer. And it was of my grandparents, Mother's folks. And I took it to school and I went and I showed it and Mrs. Young said, "Oh, that's Tudy"...which my Granddad's nickname... "That's Tudy and \_\_\_ Willett, your parents...your grandparents." I said, "How'd you know that?" She said, "Your father was my teacher when I was growing up in the canyon between Minam and La Grande." And sure enough Dad had taught there. And she told a story of Dad...Dad was very, very religious and read the Bible all the time. And he was down by the river one Saturday walkin' and she was on a corral sittin' there watchin' him. And he was readin' the Bible and he walking into...into the Wallowa River up almost up to his knees before he realized that he'd...he'd walked into the river. [laugh]

ES: Maybe he was thinking about baptism.

GF: Maybe he was. Maybe he was readin' about that.

ES: What species of religion was he involved with?

GF: It...the Christian Church or the Disciples of Christ, we called 'em, that were down on...on Penn Street, 903 Penn. I've done a little research on it. My great-grandmother Carper joined the Christian church in 1859 back in West Virginia

and her whole family became members of the Christian church. They were called Campbellites when they first came west and they were supposed to be a little odd, sorta like \_\_\_ or somethin' other.

ES: Camelites spelled c-a-m-e-l?

GF: Campbell.

ES: Campbell.

GF: C-a-m-p-b-e-l-l. Campbell.

ES: The name of some leader?

GF: Yeah. Alexander...Alexander Campbell had formed a Christian church. And so they were...they were called Campbellites. And they were looked upon as...as bein' a little eccentric, but they weren't.

ES: Were the Christian beliefs at time very rigid?

GF: We couldn't play...growing up we...I probably went to maybe two movies in my life. The first one I ever remember going to was the story of the Dion quin...quintuplets.

ES: Quintuplets.

GF: Quintuplets. And we could not play cards.

ES: Did they think that you would be corrupted?

GF: Yeah. It was...it was evil to play cards. We could play flinch.

ES: What's that?

GF: Flinch is a game of fifteen cards and you build piles and...a kids' game. I doubt if anybody ever...you can buy a deck of flinch cards.

DF: They have numbers.

GF: They...they're just numbers, one to fifteen, and I don't know how many times they do that and you build... I don't even remember how you build it. But anyway, we could play flinch. And my brother who became a minister we caught him cheatin' once so you could cheat...[laugh]...same places where you could poker.

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

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

ES: What did flinch mean?

GF: I don't know.

ES: Usually it means do something to cause a negative reaction or to surprise someone in a negative way. You know, "don't flinch" Don't react...

GF: Yeah, I know.

ES: ...that much to something that's...

GF: I never thought of that.

ES: But you don't know the connect to the game?

GF: No. They just called it flinch.

ES: We'll drop that then. [laugh] How did these strict religious beliefs effect your behavior as a young man or young boy?

GF: I was a virgin when I got married. And two years in the military. [laughs]

ES: That's quite a feat.

GF: We...we lived seven miles from town and we always had to go to Sunday School and church. And we never got to go to movies or couldn't dance. Dad...Dad became less rigid as he got older. I know my sisters, older sisters, went to balls or proms at high school. Dad was an elder in the church here for over fifty years and highly respected. Taught Sunday School, superintendent. In fact, early days he was a lay minister and used to preach in Wallowa County. And he taught school. But his first love was bein' a salesman and he wasn't very good at that, but... I was the youngest of ten children. The first baby and then during World War II flu epidemic, or right after...I mean World War I. During the flu epidemic World...1918-19 they had twins and one of the twins died during the epidemic. The house we lived in out there...we still call it the ranch...had been a two-story schoolhouse. Just one great big room two-stories high with... And I don't know whether my folks had it...when they put in the east-west road they had to move it back from the road. And it's moved back and they built a dining room and kitchen on it and made it into a farmhouse.

ES: Do you know what the school had been called?

GF: I have no idea what it was called. No idea. Just that it had been one. So it...it was earlier than 1915 that it had been moved there. We had a big dairy...dairy farm, big dairy barn, big milk house. Our only heat was in the kitchen was a wood stove cook stove. And the living room was a...or dining room was a big potbelly stove. Folks's bedroom was downstairs and then it had a living room. Then upstairs was one great big room that they ran wires both ways and hung blankets. Made four separate little bedrooms for us kids to sleep in.

ES: Were you living there when all nine brothers and sisters were?

GF: Actually...actually Mother raised eight kids 'cause two died as babies. Not really because my oldest brother, who died just a year ago at age ninety-four, started to Oregon State in...fall of '24. And he always said he had to leave home to give me a bed. [laughs] This is probably true.

ES: Yes.

GF: But then after about 1931 I can remember...well, summer of '31 Depression hit and it really hit bad and all over the country. My oldest brother lost his job. He was a chemist back in Virginia, coal mines. And he lost his job so he came west. And then my brother out on the ranch wasn't makin' any money and about to lose the farm and they had a loan on it and farm land bank had the mortgage. So they had a conference with the older brothers and sisters and my folks and they decided we'd go back out to the ranch. So I can remember many times with fourteen people around the table. The oldest married brother his wife went back to Enterprise where she grew up and lived there for a year until my brother got a job. Then Dwight, the one runnin' the farm, he had a couple kids by then so there was four in his family and then all of us other kids. But there were fun days. I have nothin' but good, good memories of growin' up as a child.

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

GF: I would say it was a work...work ethic.

ES: Chores for everybody.

GF: Oh, chores...

ES: Every day?

GF: Yeah, every day. They had...they had about...they had eighty cows and they started...Dad started butchering one cow a week and peddlin' the meat. So the dairy herd got smaller and smaller, but I can remember, oh, before I was...we moved off in 1935. The bank foreclosed and we had to move into town. Lost the place. So I would've been...I'd only been eleven years old. I can remember milking up to seven cows a morning and night. Mother was a great gardener and big gardens and fruit trees and... Oh, us kids would go fishing with the neighbor kids or the Bates family and the Hickses. And we'd go down to some sloughs and fish. I remember coming home one night just at dusk in the spring and the chicken house was on fire and we had five thousand baby chicks. Lost every one of 'em. And Dad had climbed up on...on the roof poured kerosene down the chimney to clean out the chimney and burned down the chicken house. Then we turned around and built another chicken house and they went somewhere, over at Cove probably, got, oh, probably ten apple boxes of prunes. And we spent days opening up the prunes, puttin' 'em in screens and puttin' 'em in this chicken house inside \_\_\_ a heating unit. And they stoked that up and burnt that down. Lost ten...both the chicken house and the... We never knew we were poor 'cause we always had food.

ES: Most of which you had raised.

GF: Had grown, yeah.

ES: Or bartered.

GF: The only thing Mother had ever bought was salt and pepper and flour probably and a little sugar. But they...they grew everything from their...from their...from their garden. And fruits and the meats and chickens and all kinds of chickens and...

ES: And clothes? Hand-me-downs? Patched?

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

ES: Practical gifts.

GF: Practical gifts.

ES: Sure. Best kind.

GF: And so I...I...and birthdays I never got any gifts. I was a junior in high school when Mother bought me my bicycle. And so we moved back into town...

ES: While we're still on the farm, you recall seeing printed materials in the house or people reading?

GF: I don't remember any. I know Bible was read a lot. But I don't remember...

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

GF: Oh, sometimes. We'd get in spells. Sometimes Dad'd think "We're gonna read the Bible clear through." But after all the chores and the work \_\_\_ it wasn't...we went...I went to grade school at Greenwood my first year and they just started sight reading. And you looked at a word and you said that's cat or that's dog. No phonetics, no sounding or anything. And I must've had a poor memory 'cause I couldn't read. Second grade was back out at school called Liberty School which is now part of the...they moved the school house over to the Blue Mountain Grange there on the corner of Gekeler and Lancaster. It was a one-room school house, about ten to twelve kids. My teacher for three years and she's also my Sunday School teacher was Mary B. Kail.

ES: K-a-l-e?

GF: K-a-i-l, Kail. And her daughter still lives here in La Grande, Reba Bowman. B-o-w-m-a-n. Anyway, Mrs. Kail was very, very strict disciplinarian and she taught me how to read.

ES: She used phonics?

GF: She used phonics and went back to...to...I can remember the fun of diagramming sentences. They don't know how to diagram sentences anymore.

ES: No, and that's controversial point.

GF: Yeah.

ES: I'm sort of an expert on that subject.

GF: Yeah, I know. But we used to do that. And I can remember the potbellied stove. Lots of times us kids'd have to walk four miles each way. We had an old gray mare horse named Babe and one spring we decided we'd try to ride it and if you'd slide off of it you couldn't get back on. So that didn't work out very good.

ES: Would you say that most of the learning at that level in the school was wrote? Memorizing things, answering specific factual questions, not very much in analytical thinking?

GF: I couldn't answer that.

ES: Okay. You don't remember.

GF: I don't remember.

ES: It's quite likely you wouldn't remember the teaching techniques.

GF: No, I wouldn't know the techniques.

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

GF: I...I...No. The folks never took...took any magazines or newspapers.

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

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

ES: I see.

GF: Yeah.

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

GF: Yeah, I probably was. Yeah, 'cause as a...as a first grader when we lived in town that one year I...I delivered *The Observer* and I sold...

ES: But you never bothered to read it?

GF: I told you I couldn't read in the first grade. [laughs] Lost my thought. Oh. I remember one event distinctly. It was when Roosevelt was elected president first time, which would have been what, 1932?

ES: Mm-hmm.

GF: So I would've been in the second grade. And there was a family near the schoolhouse named Lindsey and we had current events at school. And he got up that November day and held up a picture and said, "This is our new president." This picture of Franklin Roosevelt. And that's the first time I even knew we had a president. But I got a real good basic education from Mrs. Kail. Then we moved back into La Grande in, uh, fall of '35 and went back to Greenwood 'cause we lived over there on Russell Street. The house is still standing. And then a year later the place was sold and my parents bought a...a house on Watson Street which now they've renamed 21<sup>st</sup> Street. And it was owned by the state of Oregon, the Veterans Affairs, because during World War I veterans could get loans on house...to buy houses. Depression came along and a lot of 'em lost their places. And folks were paying around fifteen dollars a month...the house, the five acres, sold for seventeen hundred dollars and they were to pay fifty dollars a month. No, not fifty...fifteen...fifteen dollars a month. And after about two or three years Dad was way behind in his payments. He couldn't dig up fifty cents a day to pay...pay the payments on the house. And the state of Oregon wanted to foreclose on these people \_\_ but a fella by name of Windy Bill Wilkenson, in town, his son John just died this past summer...who was a Veterans Affairs officer and he convinced the state to refinance the loan. So they added the unpaid payments and the interest back into it and Dad started payin' seventeen-fifty a month. And within two or three years the economy changed and within a year or so they...they had it paid off. It had...the house is still standing there on Watson. It had a big dairy barn which was...I could find it, but I don't remember now...part of a big homestead of sixteen hundred...a hundred and sixty acre homestead had cut down, cut down and that was the original farm house and the barn of this original homestead down on the edge of town.

ES: Is it your impression...this is a little bit to the side...large portions of what is now La Grande were...was originally homesteads?

GF: I think so. I think it was. The...what's the name of the addition up here? Is it Chapman? Yeah. Chapman had a homestead a hundred and sixty acres. And that was all of Old Town.

ES: Chapman or Chaplin.

DF: Chaplin.

GF: Chaplin.

ES: Chaplin.

GF: Yeah.

ES: There's a Chaplin addition now.

GF: Yeah. The Chaplin addition and the new county building is called the Chaplin, the Daniel Chaplin.

ES: Yes. That's right.

GF: And they get him mixed up with Daniel's Chapel.

ES: Yeah.



GF: And they...I think still they'll bring ballots in...in to the funeral parlor and they say, "We seem foolish, but we've been told to drop off our ballots here." [laughs] Oh, I didn't mention one name which should be put in there which is very important to the history, was Dr. Joe Ingall. He had been an osteopath. And his...he and his wife Margaret was also, I suppose, an osteopathic physician. Delivered most of the babies in this county from the '20s and...I don't know when he started practicing. He delivered me and he delivered several of my nephews and nieces. And he would go to the home. I was born on the ranch. Dr. Joe...and Dr. Joe always liked me. And when I came back to La Grande and joined Rotary he was a member of the Rotary Club. And he always...when he broke up housekeeping he gave me his copy of my birth certificate that he and filled...[end tape]

11/14/02, T2, S1

ES: I was asking you about your sense of student-teacher relationships and sort of the general social and academic climate at La Grande High School. And then we talked about you were working at Montgomery Ward. Was it right after you graduated from high school that you went on to the college here?

GF: No. I...\_\_ said on tape on not... Mother would not let me volunteer. I wanted to volunteer for the navy B12 program.

ES: 'Cause you graduated in 1942.

GF: '42. June of '42.

ES: And the war was really heating up then.

GF: Yeah, it was after Pearl Harbor. I remember on Pearl Harbor Day, which was a Sunday, Mother sometimes had to go to church. She had too much work to do at home so she stayed home that day to get dinner ready for us. We came home from church and Mother was crying. I said, "Mom, what's the matter?" She said, "I just heard on the radio that the Japanese just bombed Pearl Harbor." I said, "Why are you crying for?" She said, "I've got a seventeen-year-old boy that'll probably be fightin' and goin' to service." And then the next day we had an assembly at the high school. And in those days it was in a big gym and there'd be chairs put up in the...on the floor level and the seniors would sit in the middle and then the juniors on one side and the sophomores on the other side and the freshman got to sit up the balcony. And we gathered for assembly and had radio turned on loudspeakers and we listened to Roosevelt declare war. It was a sad day and there were soldiers or two killed...Burt Sayer would be at Pearl Harbor... from here. It was a sad time. But anyway, I figured that when I graduate from high school I'd soon get my greeting from President Roosevelt to become a soldier and so I did not start to college that fall. And it drug on and on and on and it was not till July of '43 that I was...I was finally drafted. I went in and aviation cadets and went all the way through and time got my colition in January of '45 and went through crew training and war was winding down. Then in October '45 I was discharged. So I...too late to start fall term so I went back and started workin' for Montgomery Ward's again and got sixty-five cents an hour instead

- of twenty-five. [laugh] Then registered winter term, I went winter and spring term and that summer I worked over at Pendleton. \_\_\_ and came back and I met Dorothy and we had a whirlwind romance and got married in December of '46. I went on to the full year, got a junior certificate. About five hundred students, most of 'em were GIs and some...lot of good...there was probably three or four hundred GIs and a couple hundred women and a few civilian fellas goin' to school there.
- ES: It seems a considerable bulge in enrollment for the college.
- GF: Yeah, immediately. It immediately jumped. Yeah, from about...I don't know...I suppose three hundred to five or six hundred.
- ES: At that time was it generally assumed that you probably go into teaching if you enrolled there?
- GF: It had until then, but they...they...during the war they brought in nurses training, they had radio, war related stuff like radio operator. Carmus Easley, who wound up as vice-president of the college, came here as instructor in radio of all things. But they had...oh, they had chemistry and physics. And they had this small business curriculum, you get a junior certificate in business. Took accounting and business law, salesmanship. I became very active in student affairs. I always liked the job of being...never being president of something, but always being the vice-president. And there was a...a church related group I was vice-president of and then there was a commercial club I was vice-president of. And I went to work on the...I mentioned about my love for theater. I never tried out for a play part, but I got on the stage crew and then worked on many products at the college. When Dorothy and I got married in December my parents went south, I had a brother and a sister in there \_ house for the winter. So for that first term we lived in my folks's house. And then they had little twenty-six foot trailers just right next to the campus out where the football stadium is now, had a row of them. We got a trailer-house there. Paid twenty-six dollars a month for the rent of it, which included all the utilities. And GI Bill paid for my tuition and all my books. \_\_\_ went to college.
- ES: What did you have...what impression did you have of what I will call the academic rigor of that college when you were attending there?
- GF: You mean their...their level of...what do you mean by rigor?
- ES: The academic expectations, the ease of getting a high grade.
- GF: I...I had a lot different feeling toward...I meant to mention that when talkin' about high school...toward teachers. The...the relationship between students and teachers than what they have now. To me a teacher, anyone who was grown, was smart and they never did anything wrong. I didn't know you could question. I might not agree with what they're doing, but I did know...did not think...for some reason I thought they were always right and I had to be the wrong one. And we had no student rebellion or, or questioning teachers or... to me the teacher was the law. Nowadays it seems to be the reverse. I think they had a good comradeship at the college here. I enjoyed it very much.
- ES: Let me put it this way. In most of the courses that you took in the 1940s did you have to work very hard in order to succeed?

- GF: Studies came easy to me. I rarely ever studied over the weekend 'cause I was always up to date, self-disciplined. And I got...I got good grades. I got in honor society here and also at the university.
- ES: Did doing well involve any more than reading the textbooks carefully and taking adequate notes in the lectures?
- GF: My theory was never miss a class, always sit in the front seats, front row. Very attentive, ask questions, participate. There was a Dr. Zable here that my sister was a schoolteacher just like Dr. Zable 'cause she was so strict. She taught World Literature. And so she was on sabbatical when I started. So I got my two terms of World Lit and she came back and I was dreading going to have Dr. Zable. I got an A out of her. That I think was mainly [laugh] I took good notes, like I say, and I read the text and I did good on my tests, but I think it was because I sit down front there and I was attentive and participated. That was \_\_\_. In military we called round-ups and I was a master at \_\_\_ my professors.
- ES: Yes.
- GF: And yet the school was expanding, exploding, and one term of English I had to take didn't have an English teacher. So Dr. George Nightingale taught the English class. He was not an English teacher. It was very poor, just basic, you know. \_\_\_. It was elementary. Oh, other thing about...two...two things that happened there I'll always remember. There was David Clark who you saw and heard who sailed around the world. He was kind of an active child, [laugh] always into trouble. And he'd been a...in the mountain...Mountaineers in the service, ski patrol and the mountain... They were talkin' about in private all this and they...they had a major battle with them in the mountain Alps of Italy. His...his speech...Dr. Alkizer was the speech teacher and the drama teacher. And he...one of the...one of the...speech I'd give would demonstrate something. You'd bring somethin' and demonstrate. So he brought his mountain climbing rope with him and told about it. When he got through he tied the rope around the teacher's desk, opened the window, tossed out and rappelled off the second story for the administration building. Then the other one...
- ES: A bit of an exhibitionist.
- GF: Yeah, exhibition. Another one was named Hool, Jimmy Hool, who wound up to be a dentist. He'd been in the submarines. And his demonstration with blackboard and pencil was how to flush a toilet in a submarine when you're...when you're three hundred feet under. [laugh] There'd be about, say, twenty...twenty GI's in the class and maybe ten girls there. And some of the things that we talked about were a little embarrassing to the...
- ES: To the girls?
- GF: To the girls, yeah.
- ES: Did they embarrass easily if they heard coarse talk?
- GF: They...they probably did. They probably did. Jimmy...I know Jimmy's...when he told what happened if you turned one valve before the other valve what would happen was a little disturbing to them.
- ES: Since you were a town boy and now you were at the college you probably had some observations to make about the attitudes of most townspeople toward the college. What were some of those?

GF: Uh... I don't know if it was then or later the football players that came in and there were...there were...there were some drinking and carousing and this kind of stuff. I think there was... It was emphasized of tryin' to get the townspeople and the college to live in harmony. I had no exposure to it myself.

ES: Had you heard that at least in some periods many townspeople regarded that college on the hill as high-falutin', aloof, they wanted to feel superior to people in the town?

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

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

GF: No, I'm not saying I wasn't social acceptable. I felt I was very accepted.

ES: I mean you weren't in the upper-levels of La Grande society, whatever they were.

GF: No, no. I always felt the people that lived up, oh, you go up 'N' Street and that was...we called it Snob Hill. Yeah, we...we felt a social barrier. And even today it's the doctors and the dentists and attorneys who have their social...social circle and then... I've always said I was in the upper-middle class financially and social. Never been a real social person. To me the church was a social life. We had seven of my classmates that were...went through grade school and high school together and then Sunday School. Seven in the same class. That was our own social life was with those seven kids, primarily. Never mingled with the people up on Blueberry Hill.

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

GF: Yeah. We had plays. There were...there were basketball, football games. And I felt they were better attended than they are now. There...the Grande Ronde Symphony was well attended and that was college oriented. I suppose they had lecture series and this kind of thing.

ES: You thought that many townspeople felt comfortable about going there for events like that?

GF: I have no...no\_\_.

ES: Since you mentioned the Grande Ronde Symphony, do you have any details about...or knowledge about how that was formed and why it was formed and what impression it made?

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

ES: How would you get enlisted in doing that?

GF: I don't know. Dorothy was \_\_.

ES: Right, right.

GF: She was...

ES: So she said, "We're gonna do this."

GF: Did you ever play in symphony?

DF: I don't know if I was just in \_\_, but we's the college band and orchestra.

GF: Yeah. I just don't know how...how she...we only did it once. I remember...

DF: Was Jenny here then? Jenny Mammon.

GF: Pardon?

DF: Was Jenny Mammon here at that time?

GF: No, no. No, no. That was before we were married. We've never been involved in any of the administration of it. In fact, we don't even go.

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

GF: Yeah, that year. That's the first year that we were tryin' to sell memberships. And then we left town.

ES: Getting a symphony started in a small place like this is unusual, at least, and I wondered if you'd heard any reverberations about that?

GF: No, no. 'Cause we left for about fifteen...or thirteen years.

ES: But I meant at the time. Maybe you weren't tuned in enough to know. What sort of transportation were you using in those early years before you left La Grande?

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

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

GF: Oh yeah. Yeah. When I lived...when I grew up on Watson Street I went to Greenwood, which was probably three-quarters of a mile, we walked. We cut through Mt. Emily Mill. I mean they would...they would shoot us if we did that now. They had the old burner and in winter we would...we would...we'd get to the burner and sneak inside there and get warmed up and then go on through the mill. And they had executive garage there, about a seven-car garage, with steam heat. So we'd sneak in there and get warm again and then go on to school. Then when I got married I...I did not even have a car. I hadn't bought a car yet. Folks were gone the first three months we were married so I had my dad's old Dodge. And then a fella named Jim Bolts...still here, lives over on Fruitdale...he had a 1942 Plymouth Sedan he sold...he sold very reasonable. And we had that for...for several years. I had two neighbor boys, the Sinners, Johnny and \_\_\_\_, who...they in one hour they'd walk the two miles home from school for lunch...had an hour for lunch. They'd walk home, eat lunch and walk back. They walked back and forth all the time. When...and then when we...when we moved back here I fairly shortly...nine months in '56, '57 and lived my folks's house. And we had a boy in school then and the school bus would stop right in front of the house and take him to school where I had to walk. Then they built

'em a gymnasium so he could get some exercise once he got to school. I thought it was a big waste of money.

ES: Since you were, in some sense, a part of the La Grande business community when you were still in high school and then for a while after that, could you give me your impressions about the...broadly, the nature of the business community in La Grande? How...certain business practices, relationships among business owners, attitudes of people toward what they could buy in the businesses here.

GF: The main thing I have seen is the deterioration of downtown La Grande and the lack of being able to buy anything. Montgomery Wards was the earliest complete hardware. You could buy anything. Bohnenkamps, the old Bohnenkamp family, there's nothing that you...in the way of tools or parts or anything you couldn't go in there and they had it. J.C. Penny's and Woolworths and Payless was downtown and it was a thriving town core was the business. And Saturday was their big day. Most places slow down on Saturday. The farmers'd always come to town on Saturday. Our biggest sales day was Saturday. But as far as interrelationship between the businessmen I...I would never exposed to it.

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

GF: Oh, I would think so. I can remember just before going into the...into the service the manager of Montgomery Wards got mad at *The Observer* and refused to run any more ads. And that...they were one of the big advertisers. The did...did everything by radio...we had just one station, KOB\_. And so for quite a while, I don't know what passed, a month, but he...but he did a hundred percent of his advertising with the radio and wouldn't support *The Observer*. What the \_\_\_ was I don't know.

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

GF: I have no idea.

ES: Were they popular hang-out places, do you think?

GF: There was Groiter's...Red Cross? Or were they Glass? They were...

DF: It was Red Cross.

GF: Red Drug Cross. Then down the street was...was Graham's drugstore. Then on down the street was Lynn...

ES: Wright.

GF: ...Wright's. And it was right across the ally from...from Montgomery Ward so I've oftentimes go to there and grab a sandwich. They had a nice soda fountain. I didn't patronize Graham's much, but they had...they had a soda fountain. And there was some...well, Moon Drugstore was the almost a social center. I drank my first Coke there at age six. I'll always remember that.

ES: Served in a glass?

GF: Yeah, served in a...

ES: With ice?

GF: With ice. And I...I mentioned this Avery Millering and he had a reputation of being kind of a little wild kid. He was about four or five years older than me and I'd gone to town with him when I was just a first-grader. On the way home he said, "Hey, I'll buy ya a Coke." We went in there and ordered a Coke \_\_\_. I thought it was an alcoholic beverage and I just wondered why I didn't get lightheaded or somethin'. I didn't know what a Coke was. But they had a free

telephone right...as you walked in right by the door there's a free telephone. So if you want...if you're downtown and you want to make a phone call you'd step in there. And they had a counter and it was quite a social. And then the Sacagawea Hotel was a big loss for this town. Huge lobby and mezzanine with davenport and... It's where you picked up or meet somebody it'd be the Sacagawea. It was a social center. They had two ballrooms. Rotary Club met every week in one of the dining rooms. It was the hub with free phone across the street. We...we miss the Sacagawea.

ES: What were your...what knowledge did you have during that period, late teen age, early adulthood, of criminal activity in La Grande or any other part of the county?

GF: I didn't feel there was much criminal activity going on. I wasn't aware of any. The biggest trial that just encompassed the whole county was a...in self defense a young man had accidentally killed his father and he was tried for murder and was acquitted. And the jury came...made a decision about nine o'clock at night and it was...everybody was just waiting and it spread all the whole county that he was...he was innocent.

ES: Were public sympathies generally for him?

GF: Towards him, towards him, yeah, 'cause they knew his father. And, you know, that's where he \_\_\_ affected his total life.

ES: There was life in other parts of Union County in places like Union and Cove and Elgin. What...what sorts of information or perceptions were you getting...you lived in La Grande, or nearby La Grande...of what was going on in those places?

GF: The only contact I had...and this is later high school when some of the kids had cars. One of my best friends had a car. One of the popular things was Cove swimming pool. And they had the park there and you'd go over there and swim and then have a weenie roast. And you'd go through Union on the way sometimes. But as far as any...we had no...La Grande was the big school and so we never had any athletic competition between 'em. We always looked at Elgin as being the lowlife. Lotta jokes about the Elginites and being dumb and illiterate and uneducated.

ES: Any truth to that, do you think?

GF: I think there's a little. [laugh]

ES: At that time.

GF: At that time, yeah. Yeah, there's Sammyville there now. I remember later we had Rotary and Rotary Club we had foreign exchange students. And we'd get two of 'em and one year we sent one to Union...I mean to Elgin. And there were a lot of dissension among some people saying, "Why would you send 'em over to Elgin? That'd be the worst place to...to expose anybody to...to what America was like to live in Elgin." But they were always socially thought...looked down upon by...by La Grandites or the people...

ES: Do you think that might have been because the work...most of the work that was available for a man, and maybe women too, was of sort of low level of skill?

GF: Yeah. It...all they had there...was the sawmill. They did have a 3C camp there, Civil Conservation Corps. They were fellas out from Brooklyn or New Jersey or somewhere and they had not too good a reputation with their drinkin'...

- ES: Transportation, of course, wasn't quite as swift as it is in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, but did it seem that those towns were more nearly self-contained as far as all the necessary services were concerned and that therefore they were these little pockets of people who didn't interact much?
- GF: Yeah. I'm sure that was it. They had a stage...a bus service to Enterprise from here, the Wallowa Stage Line. But there's no...no...if you want to go to Cove you either walked or drove your Model-T Ford there.
- ES: Or rode your bicycle perhaps?
- GF: Yeah, rode your bicycle. I...I think they were...there was less interaction between 'em. With Safeway store coming here people would drive in from the other town and buy because they were cheaper and drive over once a month and buy a month's supply of groceries and back. Which the local merchants would resent. I think there's quite a bit of resentment. And I think there had been at one time a resentment...[end tape]

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[voices inaudible]

- GF: ...12 program said, "No, if they want you, they'll take you." So in July of 1943 I got my letter from President Tru...Roosevelt that I had been drafted. And on the 31<sup>st</sup> of July of 1943 there were probably forty fellows from La Grande were sent to Spokane by train. And interesting thing that was the first train ride I'd ever had in my life. And we went up to Spokane and had physicals and then were...then were inducted in...in...into the army. Then we were sent home for a month. Late August I was sent to Ft. Douglas, Utah, which is in Salt Lake City, and took my IQ test and a physical. I was sitting there waiting for results and a sergeant came by and picked up my papers and, "Hey, you got really a good IQ. You could go in to...and be a pilot." And I said, "I don't want to be a pilot." He said, "\_\_ make you an officer." I said, "I'll take it." So I went in to...there was three of us from Union County, Don Ainsworth, who was a grade school through high school classmate and I...he and I were two of the fellas that were picked for cadet program and sent on down to Santa Anna for two...or San Amarilla, Texas. That's where I went. Amarilla, Texas. And were there for about six weeks basic training, went to...I went to Missoula, Montana for six months college training, preflight in Santa Anna, California. And there you could, by your test scores, determine whether you were pilot, navigator, or bombadeer and I chose to be a navigator because I really didn't want to be a pilot.
- ES: How closely were you paying attention to what was going on in the European war? And the Japanese war?
- GF: Very, very, very close because we...we would be sent to one or the other.
- ES: Were you doing this by reading newspaper accounts?
- GF: Probably just by radio or we would have, oh, assemblies in which they would give us new reports.
- ES: How were you feeling about what was going on?



GF: One thing, I think most young people do, I never once ever felt I would ever be killed. I knew I would probably be flyin'...flying in in bombers, but I never had once...once a fear of...of...of death or... I can't remember just when Europe gave up. I think it was... I can't remember. But anyway, it was just when I got in training Hitler resigned and that's 'cause he heard I was comin' over there, so he quit. [laugh] And just before I was to be sent to...to bomb Japan, Japan quit. So they knew I was going to be there in two more days so that...that's why the war...both wars ended.

ES: Your confidence was fully justified, then.

GF: Yeah, it was, yeah. The...the...I...I look now and a eighteen...I was just barely eighteen...no, I was almost...I was seventeen when I was drafted because I...or was I eighteen.

ES: Usually it's eighteen.

GF: Yeah. Okay. I was eighteen. I was almost nineteen, that's what it was, almost nineteen. I had my nineteenth birthday in...in Amarilla, Texas. And then I was twenty when I got my commission in January 5<sup>th</sup> of 195.. '45. Didn't become twenty-one until a month before I got out of the service, so I was twenty. But look at twenty-year-old kids now and think, my gosh! I was talkin' to my pilot last night on the telephone, he lives in New York City, he was twenty-two years old, in charge of ten people. I was twenty and the safety of the flight of not runnin' into mountains or anything was up to me and I was only twenty years old. And the responsibility we were given. It's amaz...It's amazing.

ES: Make a man out of you in a hurry.

GF: Oh yeah. \_\_

ES: You were second lieutenant \_\_?

GF: Yeah, I became second lieutenant. They...the war was winding down, Europe had shut down, and so they had flight crews runnin' out figures, didn't know what to do with 'em. I spent an awful lot of time at home on leave or comin' home for weekends because I was instructor at Hondo, Texas Navigational School for about three months and then was sent to Boise, Idaho Gouwa to be put on a flight crew and we were there five months in crew training. July came around...that be March, April, May, June...be about three months flight training. July came around and they still didn't know what to do with us so they sent us to Walla Walla. I was there a couple a months and the war was over. We orders to ship out on Saturday and \_\_ was on Thursday. Friday got my overseas shots and Friday...or Saturday said, "Guys, take off. The war's over." And within a month I was discharged in October. So that was my military.

ES: Not bad. Not bad at all.

GF: It was...it was a delightful career and have no...no unpleasant memories about military. Then I came back to La Grande, I said, went to Eastern for a year and a half, five terms, then got...they gave certificates, junior certificates, and I took business administration. I thought maybe I might be an accountant and I went on down to University of Oregon. By then I met Dorothy and we got married in December of '46 and we went down to the University. I went there four terms, graduated in June of '48. I'd worked for Montgomery Wards to work my way through both high school and college. So I got an offer from Montgomery Ward

to get into the management training program. And they were paying the people on the floor about \$165 a month and I was paid \$225 a month, which was pretty good salary then. And in nine months...having gone to college I was smart enough to know that Montgomery Wards was a dieing organization so I bailed out and I went to work for the State of Oregon in the Employment Division and wound up assistant manager in the Salem office. And my boss at least once a week would say, "George, if I was a young man I would go to work for Social Security Administration. They're hiring. They pay so much better, so much benefits." So in January of 5<sup>th</sup> of 195... '55... '48... '55...I went to work for Social Security Administration.

ES: What...what were the attitudes that you were aware of toward Social Security at that time?

GF: It was a matter of...of education. In about a year and a half I became a field rep there in Salem and two or three nights a week we would spend giving talks to farm groups who had just brought the self-employed people and farmers. There was...there was quite a bit of resistance, but I always said I never saw a widow that didn't like Social...Social Security.

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

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

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

GF: Yeah. That...that was, uh...we were both enforcing, promoting and taking claims. There was a huge, uh, mass of people coming under Social Security and if you were sixty-five years old in 1960 you only needed six quarters of coverage. So in two years we had a huge... And we would go to the different towns... My two...three communities were Newburg and McMinnville and Corvallis. And we'd get there in the morning and maybe work on to five or six o'clock at night. They'd have huge lines of people waiting to sign up or getting social security cards. The biggest problem was getting farmers to get social security numbers from their employees and spent days I wasn't at a contact...two days a week goin' to the farmers and seeing if they'd gotten a social security number where this person was and so they could get credit for it. The farmers would...would report wages because they had to and pay tax on it, but they didn't have the guy's social security number so he couldn't credit 'em. So we...we spent a lot of time in educating the farmers how to report and... Always had a very, oh, what's the word...feeling...feeling of accomplishment and helping people in social security. Educating them, signing up the widows for widows' benefits and children for...when their fathers were... And we had public...public relations was our number one key. Then when I retired in 1983 they cut out all the contact stations. They don't even have phone numbers listed. If you call Social Security office you may talk to some Southern gal in Atlanta, Georgia. They cut...they...from...

After I worked four years in...in, uh, Salem as a field rep I'd gotten into management, or supervisors' training and I became a supervisor in Portland in September of 1961. And my regional manager had been a manager in La Grande, Oregon and loved it. And I said to him, "How do I get to be where I want to be?" And he said, "Anybody has a \_\_\_ more than you, tell em." I said, "Okay, John. I want to be manager in La Grande, Oregon someday." He said, "I'll do my best to get you there. It's a wonderful place to be." I only worked as supervisor nine months in Portland when boss...in fact, we were moving from Salem to Portland that day and he came out to the house and I thought, "Gee, that's nice. He's come to see me." He said, "Don't unpack. You're now the new assistant manager in La Grande, Oregon." So we...I was teaching a training class of new...new employees so I said, "Well, I'll finish this training class and then I'll go." So six weeks later we came to La Grande and I was assistant manager here for ten years. We had eighteen employees, we had everything from Arlington to Milton-Freewater to the Nevada border to Ontario.

ES: Where was the office at that time?

GF: The office was always in La Grande.

ES: Where?

GF: It first started out there in the medical clinic. There's a little building on the property that we had it there and we outgrew it.

ES: What property?

GF: Of the...of the 'J' Street medical clinic there where Dr. Allen was and \_\_\_ doctors \_\_\_. But they had a little building there that...

ES: Across from the university?

GF: Yeah. Right across from the university.

ES: On Sixth.

GF: Yeah. It was there. I came here in July of '62...'62, yeah...and they were in the process of building a new building. So that was at 1804 Fourth Street.

ES: Who's they?

GF: The government, Social Security Administration, was. GSA. I helped design the building. It now...we moved in there January 1<sup>st</sup> of '63 and were the main tenants there. There were insurance office and optometrist office in the same building. It's the white building there that now the physical therapy center is.

ES: I believe Elmer Perry built that building.

GF: No, he didn't.

ES: No?

GF: No. It was a...

ES: Maybe I'm thinking of a different one.

GF: No. The contractor came out of Salem and he got most out of town...Elmer might have worked on it. I don't remember Elmer...

ES: This is the building on Fourth?

GF: Fourth and Main. Corner of Fourth and Main.

ES: Yes. Yes. He said he worked on that building.

GF: He might have, but the main contractor was from out of town.

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

GF: I don't know. He could've. [laughs] So anyway, then ten years I was...the manager there retired and I became the district manager.

ES: Would you pause there for a moment and describe some of your daily duties in that role as assistant manager?

GF: My manager was an older fellow and I pretty well ran the office. I supervised the field, did all the reports, wrote all the memos, supervised the employees in the office. And then when we would get...some would be off I would spend a lot of my time out on the road in public relations. I would go with...we'd send a field rep, say, to Ontario. I'd go with him and help him at the contact station. Then I'd go visit...I knew every accountant, CPA, every funeral director, every newspaper editor in my five counties. So I spent probably half my time out of the office on the road. We did a lot of radio programs at that time. KOBM would carry a five minute spot announcement and we would pick one small topic and explain that part of it. So it was...it was going out the radio station and maybe taping up a month or two tapes for them. And we did that in La Grande and Baker and Ontario and John Day.

ES: What kind of information about social security were you conveying that way?

GF: Oh, just a variety of...like the responsibility of a home owner if they hired a housekeeper, reporting their social security and how to do it. Or maybe just getting your social security card, or the type of benefits payable.

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

GF: Because, um, if you remember past few years people being nominated for some high political position and they found out they never reported social security for their housekeeper or their yard man and they didn't get...they didn't get selected because of that violation.

ES: Trouble, yes.

GF: Yeah. One nice thing we did, we didn't have to collect the taxes. All we did...Internal Revenue responsibility was to collect the social security tax. And if we'd find a violation, someone who had not, we would get the \_\_\_... The employee would come in and file for benefits, there'd be a gap in his employment. "I worked for so-and-so." And they didn't report it. So we would get his W-2s and make photocopies and fill out a form and mail it to IRS and we would immediately give them credit for that work, but they had proof. Then IRS was responsible to go collect the taxes. We gave out the money, but they collected it. So we were the good guy.

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

GF: Oh, some. Basically, no. Social Security was government...in those days, '60s and 70s, government had a good respect and I ran a friendly office. Thing that bothers me is the post office here. Have you ever met the postmaster there?

ES: No.

GF: No, I haven't either. When I...my office there, there on Fourth Street, I had two windows, one that looked out into the work area so I could keep track of what's going on and one that looked out at the reception area. If there'd be more than two people waiting I'd get up and go out and work on people. Filed many a claim myself and I remember one day a woman walked in, she went past the receptionist, came in and sit down in my office. She said, "Well, I'm here." I

didn't even know her. And I said, "Oh? Who are you?" And she told me. "Oh yeah. You're Charles' older sister." "Yeah. I'm retired. I want to draw my social security." So I pulled out an application and I signed her up for social security. [laughs] And...

ES: The operation was somewhat informal?

GF: I would say it was informal. I tried to run a very democratic office. I would...if I would...and a lot of my work as assistant manager, and also as manager... When I became manager we had shrunk in size, shrunk in territory. We opened a branch office in Ontario where we used to go every week. Opened a branch office in Pendleton where we went. So we only had...I had down to four counties left out of La Grande. So we went from eighteen employees maybe down to ten.

ES: Was this primarily because the population shifts?

GF: No. It's because opening the smaller branch offices, cutting out... they cut out like Malheur and Harney county and opened a independent office in Ontario.

ES: They wanted to office to be closest...closer to the people who needed the service?

GF: Yeah, yeah. Their...when Medicare came along they felt that...that the number of employees would explode and it didn't happen. Computers came along and the method of processing claims... We would take a claim, we would...we had teletype. We would teletype to Baltimore where records are kept. They would mail out their record. They'd put the record together, type up the award notice, then we'd send it to San Francisco to what they called the Payment Center and they would approve of it and then start...then notify the Treasury Department to issue the checks. So...but now all that's computerized. They call a record up on...on their computer and they answer the questions on the computer, make a print out, have the person sign it, they hit the button and immediately goes to the Internal Rev...or to Treasury Department to, say, start issuing this person the check. So the...instead of a month to get a claim started you can get started in one-hour interview. But a lot of my...lot of my work was in training the staff. We had during my time we had Medicare come in. I was in the ground workup of getting statistics for that, interviewing people on the medical need.

ES: Did you handle Medicaid also?

GF: We never handled Medicaid as such. In about 1977 I think it was January '73 the Social Security Administration took over the welfare-type payments to the aged and the disabled. And we got the disability program which was the...a huge program and then the...it was called and SSI, Supplemental Security Income, which we took all the welfare offices from all...on the records from those people — 'em. And convert 'em over to federal benefits. And we had primitive computers then. We had a teletype machine that cut a tape and send the records. And all...all these records are transferred and that January 1<sup>st</sup> they were supposed to start getting checks from us. Out of my two thousand SSI beneficiaries five hundred did not get a check in January and about four hundred of 'em didn't get a check in February. About three hundred and fifty of 'em didn't get 'em in March. And they finally sent me a whole bunch of hundred dollard checks. And I personally had to endorse them and counter endorsed by another employee and I personally as manager had to go to hand-deliver these, this interim payments, to the people who weren't in the computer and getting them automatically. And a

year later on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January I had I think five people that didn't get their check and I went skiing that day. Where only a year later we had five hundred that weren't being paid. This is side line, one of the funnies stories. One of the managers in New York City he...that morning he walked out of his office. People'd come 'cause they hadn't gotten their checks and they were about three blocks long and he walked to the end of this line of people and kept on walking, went home and sent in his resignation, he quit. [laugh] It was a mess! So it was training the staff on how to do new procedure. I always enjoyed as we went into the computer age. I was always good at math and I got on a committee down at regional offices about five of us that our job was to prepare training documents to train people in new computer systems. I thoroughly enjoyed that.

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

GF: Oh, just read it. We would be sent to...the managers and one employee'd be sent off to Portland or Seattle for this training. And I put together a training film, slide, tape presentation and I got a hundred dollar reward for doin' it. [laugh] It was a graphic demonstration on how to...how to do it.

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

GF: Yeah, I enjoyed it thorough. I enjoyed it thoroughly. One part of social security I did not enjoy was the disability claims and I didn't enjoy it as a sign. It's like the little boy that walked down the fresh sidewalk, concrete sidewalk, made tracks and the cement man bawled him out and someone said, "You don't like kids." He said, "I like them in the abstract, but not the concrete." And social security is very, very, very concrete. You had this much earnings, you were this age and this was your benefit. It was black and white. Then you got into SSI and the need...you had to prove your need. You had to have less than fifteen hundred dollars income. You could own a house, you could have a car that wasn't worth more than two thousand dollars. And we're constantly every year checking up on their assets. We go to banks to make sure they didn't have more than fifteen hundred dollars. We found a lot of fraud in that and a lot of innocent. One of my favorite examples, I stopped by, oh, it was about five o'clock at night in Mt. Vernon, Washington to help this woman fill out a report and she had something like two thousand dollars in the bank. I said, "Lady, you're not supposed to." "Well, I'm saving money to pay for my funeral." I said, "But you can't have two thousand dollars." I said, "I'm not gonna fill this out this...this time. I'll be back in two weeks. You go down to the funeral parlor and buy your funeral plan and I'll come back." When I went back she had five hundred dollars. She bought a fifteen hundred dollar funeral plan. So I had...I had compassion for people. My field reps and myself were well-known. There isn't more than five people in La Grande, Oregon that know who's the manager of the Social Security office. They're invisible. You never see 'em.

ES: What has caused that?

GF: I think it was to...they...they...they went away from the education because they felt everyone knew about it. We...we came out of that mode. And it was the using of electronics and the teleservice centers, phone book is an eight-hundred number, you call them and then it'd have teleservice centers that they felt it was

economy...economy. Cutting back, cutting back on the service. You know how much service we get out of Portland. They're my pet peeve. I sent a post card from Portugal a month ago to Dr. Lynn Harris corner of Third and Washington. That's where he is. It came back to my mail box after I got home saying, "Undeliverable, bad address." That's where he is.

ES: I've had that experience numerous times.

GF: Yeah. And at that time I was so well-known in town that my brother came to town once, we'd just moved up here and he didn't know where we lived and he stopped at grocery store and he said, "Where's George live?" And he stepped out and said, "He lives up that canyon there." He didn't have him put my last... [laugh]

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

GF: They're more efficient, but as far as making government favorable...the social security office here has five employees now and they're harassed and behind in their work and snowed under. I think they've got more work than they can do. And the public is very... I used to not... When I first started Social Security someone'd say, "What do you do?" I didn't like telling 'em I worked for Social Security 'cause they were...it was new and people getting benefits and they had questions about and how do I get it and how much will I get and all this. Then my last year or two I wouldn't tell anybody where I lived because they would practically swear at me. "That blankity-blank government," you know. The government had lost faith...[end tape]

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GF: Yeah, I think there should be more professional type, maybe high-tech, jobs in...in Union County. I don't...I wouldn't want to see Microsoft come in and hire, say, a thousand people or ten thousand people. But we raised three sons, two of 'em went in computer field and they both would love to live in Union County. And where do they live? The live in Salem because that's where the computer jobs are. They could not find employment. And how many...out my high school class there was a hundred and fifty in 1942. How many people stayed in La Grande? Maybe twenty was all. So we...we educated them here and then we ship 'em off somewhere else.

ES: How do you feel about attracting more tourists?

GF: That's a sore point with me. People come to town, or they have family come to town or relatives that want to do some hikin'. They came and try...try...try to get a little day hike out of La Grande. We don't have any marked trails or hikes in La Grande. I worked for the Chamber of Commerce three or four years ago and we developed a little pamphlet with a list of these places like go up and walk around Morgan Lake or there's an old Indian trail going up Mt. Emily. No one knows it's there. It'd be a beautiful hike. When...specifically when we were in Switzerland and the small towns there on the desk of the hotel would be a list of places and maps of where you'd go for day hike. They don't have 'em here. They

don't have that many. But we're not a destination. I think tourism is a great industry and it could \_\_ bring some \_\_. We're not a destination place. No one says, "Oh, let's go to La Grande and spend a week." What would you do in a week in La Grande? I saw that coming back from \_\_\_\_. You'd see about three...three places in La Grande you've seen it all. They have no recreational...Wallowa Lake has the lake and fishing and hiking out there. We're...we're a stop-over of people going somewhere else. I think Baker County has outshone us enough that... Why didn't we get a big interpretive center? La Grande was an important on the Oregon Trail than Baker was. But there...there's no...no commemorative or anything that even... There's a sign up on 'B' Street that says "Oregon Train." Ezra Meeker put it up there in about 1910 or somethin' or other. Gerta Brouten every first Saturday in June, which is National Hiking Day, makes a trip over the Oregon Trail from La Grande to Hilgard. I've been on it many times with her. She's a walking encyclopedia on that section of \_\_. This is where they camped and \_\_ Bonneville \_\_\_\_ Bonneville's \_\_ camp. It took 'em a whole day to get from 'B' Street just up behind Table Mountain.

ES: Is part of that hike over private land?

GF: That...that's the trouble with it. In Switzerland if you have a farm a trail goes through there you cannot keep people from going through them. Markers on it, it's public domain where the hikes are. Gerta got permission from the two or three land owners. We sign a waiver when we go on the hike. And one part of it we...we actually go up to Morgan Lake and start from there because there's...there's just as you leave La Grande the people that own that land won't let you go through it. So you can't walk \_\_. I think it should be well marked. It's a nine mile hike and it's beautiful.

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

GF: Another sore point. Tore down the Sacagawea Hotel, the courthouse, the high school. I'm all for it. I know it's expensive, but we try to keep a little \_\_

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

GF: Hmm. Do you have any idea?

DF: \_\_

ES: For restoration. Or a place put on the Historic Register, or both.

DF: The depot.

GF: The depot. That...that's one thing. If...oh, and the library. Number one, the library. We don't want to see that Carnegie library torn down, no way. I'd lay down in front of the bulldozers. That's about all that's left much on it.

DF: There's the Bohnenkamp castle.

GF: Yeah, the Bohnenkamp castle on Second Street. That's a \_\_. And I suppose where it was Mack jewelry store here in town. That used to be a U. S. National Bank. What's gonna happen to it?

ES: I hear he has several offers for buyers.

GF: It's a shame that downtown has moved out. Wal-Mart comin' to downtown, Bi-Mart, the mall used to be more of influence in this town. But if you want to buy a screw hammer or a \_\_ you can't find 'em \_\_\_\_. They don't have 'em.



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

GF: I don't think they have too much, you know. There's the Historical Society. There's about two dozen old people go to it and you can't a young person. Young people aren't interested. They don't care.

ES: But if the motive were to promote tourism would that potentially be a way of involving people who could bring about more affect for historic sites?

GF: Oh, it probably would. You gotta have somethin' for people to look at and things to do. There could be a trail that'd start out right up going through our property up through the canyon. Her father built a road through it, which the fire of 1973 caused erosion and it's hardly visible anymore. There should be a hiking trail from our place up to Morgan Lake and back. When we were kids we had to...there wasn't even a road up to Morgan Lake then \_\_. Three or four times we went there you'd go up the old canyon, get up on top, then cut over. You're lucky you \_\_.

ES: The Liberty Theater, what used to be the Liberty Theater, what...what is it's potential for restoration?

GF: That where we had... When I was a kid and there was \_\_ before that one time there was four theaters in town. There was the Liberty, which carried the middle class movies. And the real good ones that would come, like Gone With the Wind, would be shown in the Star Theater...was it Star?

DF: Liberty.

GF: No, Liberty...

ES: I thought the Liberty was the top theater?

DF: The Granada was the western.

GF: Yeah, The Granada was always the western, shoot-em-up. \_\_ could go to the movie. What was the theater next...

DF: \_\_. I think \_\_ was Granada and then State.

GF: It was the State Theater about two or three buildings next door to The Liberty. And they would be open, oh, maybe once a week or somethin' other. They \_\_

ES: I mean the building itself that used to be the Liberty Theater. It's still has most of it's interior structure the way it was.

GF: Yeah. The...where the, um, Tropicdara was. That was a monstrosity before they had the fire and burned off all that. The plastic front to it. It was a disaster. They hired architects and experts come in to do up \_\_ downtown La Grande. That was a number on your list get rid of that. Take off all that \_\_.

ES: I'm think specifically about the Liberty that if it were restored inside the way it used to be with a stage and seating and balcony it could serve for theatrical purposes and a number of other community functions.

GF: Oh yeah. Yeah.

ES: Is that within the realm of feasibility in a place like this?

GF: I would think it would be. With the college we have the McKenzie Theater and Loso Hall where...which seems to be adequate in all the... I don't think anybody else could run plays there. But when I first got out of the service Youth for Christ

- was a big movement here and we would have rallies and meetings there in the Liberty Theater and use their facility. \_\_\_ It was excellent place.
- ES: It would need to be reinforced for earthquake protection now so it would be an expensive operation.
- GF: Oh, we'll never get an earthquake.
- ES: [laugh] Have you ever been an activist in any respect to, let's say, do the kinds of things that would draw toward?
- GF: That's probably one of my faults is not being a...being an innovator of this type of thing. I'm a supporter of it, but to get a project and say, hey, I'm going to see that we restore and go out and drum up funds and interest. Mainly because there's always \_\_\_. One of my newly things I didn't mention was my involvement with the Christian church. My ancestors went back to 1856 when my great-grandmother joined the Christian church. I was a deacon there and an elder there and then finally when I got to be seventy-two they said, "You're too old," made me emeritus. Put me out to pasture. I'd been...Dorothy and I were younger we were \_\_\_ to high school groups. When we first came our kids were in junior high we were \_\_\_ and then the high school \_\_\_. Then we had college \_\_\_ college young people. Our house used to have a nice round fireplace downstairs in the living room down there. And every once in a while some person who's now about fifty years old says, "Oh, yeah. You live up there. I remember sittin' around your fireplace roasting marshmallows, you know." They have found memories of our involvement as their \_\_\_. And we'd take them camping, high school groups, \_\_\_ week long church camps in the High Lakes. We'd go in there and find God in nature.
- ES: What is your opinion about the potential of Hot Lake as a tourist attraction?
- GF: That's another sore spot. I think it's deteriorated to the point now that unless some Bill Gates come along it's pretty well gone.
- ES: But suppose somebody did have the money and the right attitude. What would you suggest that it become?
- GF: Like I said, La Grande lacks some of the destination features. I've looked at Hot Lake as being a tourist resort. There's the hot water, the tubs, the baths. There...it's located out there pretty desolate. I grew up out there. There could be horseback trails up on Craig Mountain behind it, but there's no real fun there. There's really no...no hiking facility. The mountains aren't...aren't wooded or lakes to hike to. There's no place to go from there. I suppose they could get tennis courts and badminton courts and this kind of sports activity. But when it was...before it started going downhill every room was full of antique furniture. And that would be a real selling point for people coming. They were...they were the nursing home and there were the beds and tables and \_\_\_ were...was antique furniture. Well, the guy that bought it sold it all off. And then the lobby there was tiled lobby, a beauty. It's gone. Torn up. Deteriorated. I don't know if it ever could be restored. One time...I know once our Eastern Oregon church group held a weekend conference there and they were able to use it as a hotel and meeting rooms there. \_\_\_ community center, conference center.
- ES: But to bring people in they would probably have to capitalize on quality that you can't find somewhere else.

GF: That's right. And the qualities was the...was the antiqueness, turn of the century.  
ES: And, of course, the hot water.  
GF: Yeah, and the hot water.  
ES: Not many places had that.  
GF: Yeah, you could drink the water and lay in it and... The Union Pacific Railroad had a stop there. People'd come and...  
ES: Union Junction.  
GF: No. It's before Union Junction.  
ES: Before?  
GF: It stopped right there...  
ES: Called Hot Lake?  
GF: ...right across the highway from Hot Lake. It stopped there. They had a little station for her. People coming out to \_\_\_ the doctors and health benefits. The train made a regular stop at Hot Lake.  
ES: By the way, did you talk to anyone who know the original Dr. Fie personally?  
GF: Oh, my folks knew him. Yeah, my folks knew him. In fact, I had a brother that because of a brain injury was probably there maybe six months as a patient.  
ES: What did you learn about his personality and his technique?  
GF: Nothin'.  
ES: Nothin'.  
GF: Other than he was a great organizer and doctor. I think Walter Pierce, governor and congressman, he and two of 'em \_\_\_\_. I knew nothing about him. \_\_\_\_  
ES: Do you know any of the stories about his son, who apparently was partly responsible for it's decline?  
GF: No, no. But the old...I've seen the old antique operating rooms \_\_\_\_. He had early x-ray machine, really, all the latest at that time medical equipment.  
ES: Is it your understanding that they were able to start it because they had the right combination of ambition, vision and money?  
GF: No \_\_ about it. Why they picked Hot Lake.  
ES: I think that was very obvious.  
GF: Well, the hot water.  
ES: Yes.  
GF: The mineral water. Yeah, that's why they picked Hot Lake.  
ES: That was at a time, of course, when that was a preferred form of medical treatment...  
GF: Oh yeah.  
ES: ...for almost any ailment.  
GF: Trouble is you couldn't ice skate on it in wintertime.  
ES: No.  
GF: 'Cause if you'd break through you'd get scalded.  
ES: Yeah. [laugh]  
GF: No, I...I knew little of the history \_\_\_\_. Before my time.  
ES: How much potential does Ladd Marsh have as a...an attraction for tourists?  
GF: It does have...and that's one that's listed as a walking tour...it has a very nice nature...which would be \_\_ greatly. I would like to see blinds put up across the highway from it and the big pond. 'Cause we get...I have \_\_ there's elk come in

- \_\_\_ elk and deer and all the \_\_\_. I think there's a great potential for nature walks. \_\_\_ spending now \_\_\_ more of that land.
- ES: And in connection with that, is there potential for somehow recalling or exploiting the Native American presence in the Grande Ronde Valley?
- GF: I don't think too much because actually no Indian tribe ever lived in the Grande Ronde Valley.
- ES: No, but they came here for eating.
- GF: They came here and...the Valley of Peace, they called it. They couldn't...the didn't fight each other when they were in the valley. Our huge camas fields. They would come over fall and pick camas. There is a...there is a Indian heritage here.
- ES: You know...have any ideas about how that might be recaptured in a way that tourists would like and understand?
- GF: No. [laugh] [tape interruption] A p.s. on my community. It's a personal story to me. I mentioned I didn't particularly like the disability program. I don't like to hear people tell about their illnesses \_\_\_. And I have a cousin who something about the genes between her and her husband could not have a normal child. Most of 'em died at birth. Their third child was moved down in \_\_\_ and she lived to be nine months old. Her father played basketball and we'd go to church basketball games. Little Mandy loved me. She'd sit on my lap. \_\_\_ girl. That's a lovely little girl. And then she died. It turned me around on thinking of disability. So I got into Special Olympics, working with them. For fourteen years I taught cross-country skiing. And I...she...one of my ex-students into Safeway will come running over and give me a hug and "here's George" you know. And it just...just turned me around completely \_\_\_. My greatest success, my first two \_\_\_ cross-country coach was Debbie Knight. And I could not get her any further away from the ski lodge than what she could see it. We got her further than the ski lodge she...she started crying, she wanted to go back. She didn't want to get away from it. And by the end of the ski season I had her skiing, she'd ski around Anthony Lakes down the ski runs. She became one of the better skiing...skiers. And every year all the Special Olympic winter sports go to Bend for State. And there'd be one first-place on \_\_\_ team. And now she works with \_\_\_. She is now a coach. She takes...teaching instructor and teaching kids cross-country skiing.
- ES: How is the Special Olympics program set up in La Grande? Just through volunteers, very informally?
- GF: Since I left I'm not quite sure...
- ES: I mean when you were involved.
- GF: Yeah. Yeah. There was a teacher, you know, in the high school they had a...they have a special needs program and Kaye...she was \_\_\_ daughter...was named teacher of that program and head of it. What is her name? I can't remember who she...she remarried. But she was head of it and she was the organizer in charge of it. And her dad, Budge, was a great skier and a ski instructor and he was in charge of the...the downhill ski and Kaye was in charge of cross-country. Then she left...I can't remember last names...a woman named \_\_\_ became the administrator of it. And now a fella by the name of Brian Fisher has that. So there is an organization. They have a...they have not only skiing, but they have

swimming and bowling and track. I've worked with track. It's a state organization out of Portland and then goes down to the various \_\_ Blue Mountain Chapter of it and \_\_\_\_ They have...I think it's not too well run. You hear very little of it anymore. They had monthly committee meetings and there'd be somebody in charge of publicity \_\_. It was well organized. I just don't know how it is now.

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

GF: Yeah. It was complete a hundred percent volunteer. I don't think...I don't think the administrator was \_\_\_\_. Like with Kaye she \_\_ another part of her job. \_\_\_\_ [tape interruption] When the bicentennial of United States came there was a...Union County had a committee. I was headed by Glen and Jean McKenzie and there was a large committee how to celebrate bicentennial. So Dorothy and I took up on ourselves to put together a slide tape program on the history of Union County. And we...we would put people...we had Glen McKenzie read a poem, we had Ezra Martin, who was the historian at that time...too bad you didn't \_\_\_\_talk. It took us a whole year to...she wrote the script and I took the pictures and then put it together. It's about a half-hour tape presentation. And for the next year then I showed it to every school, every school children...child from first grade to senior in Union County during that...probably that two year period I showed that two hundred times. Unfortunately, I didn't make a back up tape so my sound track is not all that good. I still got...I'll show it to you. [tape interruption] Back in the Rotary some of the things we done we have a very active in the drug free program at the high school, we sponsor it. And Boy Scouts we pay for the badges when a Boy Scout gets to be...

ES: Eagle.

GF: ...Eagle Scout. They have to buy their badges and then mother gets a badge. And it's a ... what the package is...twenty-five dollars, fifty dollars. But any Eagle Scout we...we \_\_ that for them. We're active in helping the United Way. And other thing with Rotary like when they started in working with United Way went to the first board meeting and eleven out of the twelve people were Rotarians. Our project now this coming year we're going to put some kind of a covered pavilion, a small one, out at the Riverside...no, it's going...I think it's going to be at the Pioneer Park. And that'll be done within...probably by next spring. At one time we took over Gangloff Park \_\_ we cleaned that up. We put up a huge sign there that said, "Welcome to La Grande, Rotary Club." The guys were too late to get in and do the weeding to keep that up so we turned it back to the state, or I think the city may own that. What is somethin' else?

DF: \_\_ [tape stopped]