

**JOHN R. GRAY**

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Interviewed by John Turner

Transcribed by Ryan Shearer

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I: Okay, what is your full name?

JG: It's John Richard Gray.

I: And where do you live?

JG: I live at Hilgard, Oregon.

I: And where were you born, John?

JG: I was born on 1410 Court Street, La Grande, Oregon, on November the 30th of 1925.

I: And how come your family came to Union County?

JG: Well, my mother originally lived in Baker, and I think possibly that's where my dad probably met her. And he was a railroader at the time. She was quite young. See, I think she was-- when they was married she was thirteen and a half years old. And my dad originally came from over out of The Dalles, what they call the juniper flat country. And he rode horses and broke horses and rode in rodeos and done all that kind of a thing, but he didn't really like it over there too well. And he was out on his own. 'Course, ever since he was I think about twelve years old he was gone. And he-- evidently, came over to Union County and was workin' on the railroad over here.

I: Uh-huh, and then you moved from La Grande to Hilgard.

JG: We moved from La Grande to Hilgard on-- we got into Hilgard, April the-- around April of 1932.

I: Uh-huh, and living in a little community like that, did you have electric lights at that time?

JG: At that time we did not have any electric lights. We had-- we didn't have any running water. I know the outside privy was about, probably fifty yards from the house. We burnt wood for our heating, and I did live in just a log house that was good and warm house.

I: How did you get your water from the spring, or--?

JG: We got the water from the spring, but he had what they call the old pitcher pump. And that's the way we'd pump that. And it did come into the house.

I: And you were how old when you moved here?

JG: When we moved there I would have been I think six years old.

I: Right age for school.

JG: The right age-- gettin' close to seven, yeah.

I: The school that you went to, was that the school that's there today?

JG: That was the school that Hilgard-- it's the old school house is still there. That was school at in school district number 22. And I went to first grade there. And that was not the first time I'd gone to school though. I went there, and Mrs. Whiting was the teacher there at that time. But prior to that, I had gone to school in Duncan, Oregon. That's on the railroad. And I went to school at Greenwood School in La Grande. And I had gone to school. Well, of course I was just five years old. I didn't pass because I was really too young. But I went a year-- part of the year at least in 1930 at Perry, in Lower Perry.

I: Now, your school in Hilgard, was that a one through eight, and one room, or did they have it divided?

JG: Yeah, the school at Hilgard is a one-room school and it was from the first grade to the eighth grade.

I: As you were growing up, do you remember the CCC Camp being up there at the Starkey turnoff?

JG: Yeas, I remember that CC Camp. We used to go up there. I think it was, if I'm not mistaken it was every Saturday they showed a movie up there. And all of us kids would go. Whoever wanted to go up could go up to that movie, and they served punch and cookies, and we got to watch the movie.

I: That was a good deal! Not living in town, and it was Depression time.

JG: That's right. Otherwise we'd have never-- we'd have never probably got to go to the movie.

I: Well, I can appreciate that. Now, did you ever have a little money to go down to the store there at Five Points?

JG: Well, once in awhile we'd get a few cents. Most of the time to get a few cents to go down and buy something, we went around and picked up pop bottles. And you could get a penny apiece for 'em if you could find 'em. Which was-- you didn't find too many. Then we could go down and buy a little candy or maybe a pop or something like that. Not too often.

I: How many kids were living in Hilgard about that time?

JG: Well, during some of that time-- I may have some school records, a few of 'em on that. But I think possibly you'd find they range from goin' to school there probably about twenty-three to thirty.

I: That made quite a bunch!

JG: Yeah, it was quite a little place there.

I: Did uh-- then you uh-- say an evening when you had time, you played games. What kind of games did you play?

JG: Oh yeah. Most of us, well, of course in the winter time we was out tryin' to ski if we'd-- the only time we'd ski is when you find some old barrel staves. I guess you'd call it that. The wooden-- from the wooden barrels and make skis out of them and come down the hill. And then we had sleds, and we played with those, and on the hills right there. Summer time-- I don't know. Most of the time in the

summertime we liked to go fishin' with the creek right there. So, we spent our time fishin'.

I: And you were successful?

JG: Oh boy, I'll tell you fishin' was good that day and age. We was allowed thirty fish. You didn't have to go-- I wouldn't think over two or three hundred yards, you could have your thirty fish. And I mean, that they was nice ones.

I: When you said making your own toys, that's the way you-- you didn't have money to go to stores.

JG: No, didn't have money to go down like you do nowadays. We just had to make do with what you had.

I: What were some of the toys that you made besides skis during the wintertime?

JG: Well, in the summertime, we get an old barrel sometimes. I used to remember that. Get an old barrel and put ashes and stuff like that in it. Make it look like we had an engine going down the road, and we'd get in there and take a stick and hit the inside of that barrel. And all the ashes that come flyin' out there, and they look like an old smokestack on a steam engine comin'. And of course we did too, but then--

I: [chuckles].

JG: that's the way we done that. I think we done that mostly when Dewey and Louie Cling lived there at that time. And I think that's who we was with, my brother and me.

I: Well, besides playing around when you were doing that I'm sure you had a lot of chores to do. What kind of chores did you have?

JG: Well we had, every night especially, we had to go get the cows. My dad milked cows, and they'd be clear back in the mountains somewhere. And we'd take the old dog, and we'd head back every night going to find those cows. And it was quite a ways. And at

times we-- 'course we had to help get the wood in, cut the wood. And of course in the summer time, we didn't have a lawn, so we had pine trees and fir trees, so we had to rake the needles up and dispose of those. And, I don't know. We just 'bout everything like that. Sometimes we'd go up, and later on as time went, we got a little bigger, and we'd go up and cut some wood. And bring that down off the hill. So, I think that-- I'm not saying that's all of it, but then that's some of the things we done.

I: Well, was it a real treat when you got to go to town?

JG: Yeah, it was \_\_\_\_\_. But sometimes I didn't even wanna go to town, 'cause I liked to fish, and I'd rather fish than go to town. And sometimes I'd be up there like in the summertime when we weren't going to school. I might go to town maybe a couple times that summer. I'd rather go up, and stay up there and fish.

I: Well, you had so many places to fish, Five Points Creek and the Grande Ronde River, and--

JG: Yeah, and the fishin' was really good 'cause the gravity-- well, the Five Points Creek here, the trout was just-- there was a lot of trout in there. It run more water, I think than it does now, quite a lot. Steelhead came up. Salmon came up there, so--. You know, and it was just all this fishin' and all the game-- the game! Deer-- lots of deer in then, lot of deer.

I: When did you get your first gun?

JG: I got my first gun when I turned six years old. I got a .22 single shot bolt action rifle. It was, I think he called it a Springfield, I believe.

I: And when did you get your own deer rifle?

JG: Well, my first deer rifle, I think that's when I had a .22 special, 1890 .22 Special. And that's what I used for a deer rifle in that day and age. Golly, I probably wasn't over eight years old, nine years old when I had that.

I: Got your first deer!

JG: Went out to hunt. And I don't remember-- I probably got my first deer when-- I don't imagine I got that 'till I was probably about twelve years old, or thirteen. And I've killed my share of 'em since, though.

I: And elk.

JG: And elk. I've got-- I will say I've got a lot of elk in that country up there. Not so many later here in years. The elk just not-- not near as good of-- not as many elk, and it's harder hunting them. And of course, we used to hunt all day, I and my brother and my dad. And we may see one other person. And we'd be back above Five Points Canyon. But now you go back there, and it's different.

I: Well, there just aren't as much game in that area as there were.

JG: No. No. We were up there the other day and looked, and we probably seen close to a hundred head of elk in one bunch. But they're concentrated now. But then you go up there in huntin' season now, and you don't-- you don't hear 'em bugling like they used to. Used to hear them bugle all around you, that was the bulls.

I: Well, it's probably made some difference in that land across from you there that is owned by that Sherman where it's locked up and you hunt by permit only.

JG: Yeah. Yeah, that's true. And there is elk there. I just talked to a game commission the other day, two days ago. And they said that they went flyin' over there and they counted four hundred-- four thousand and some elk up there. And I don't suppose they seen 'em all. And that seems like they-- they're feedin' there. The elk just hang in there, and they don't come out on some of this other, but there is an awful lot of hunters though, a tremendous amount.

I: Well, we probably have seen the best--

JG: I've seen the best of all the huntin'. And not sayin' that there isn't some up there, but of course, they've changed the seasons around. It's just not like it used to be. Now we've got turkeys now. And that's why I went down to the Game Commission the other day talkin' to 'em because the turkeys are makin' my place look bad. Maybe got eighty

to a hundred turkeys right in my yard, and you know what happens then.

I: They're quite messy.

JG: And they've already caused me to have to call the guy that has a carpet business here to come up and fix one of my carpets, or fix the carpet in the living room. And we just put that thing in here, hasn't been I don't think, three, two months-- three months ago.

I: I've heard of other places in the valley here that they've had the same problem.

JG: I'm seeing about that, and they said it's too narrow up there at Hilgard to trap 'em, you know, net 'em. They can't net 'em in there. The guy was up there and talked to me, one of the fellas. So he give me a couple of boxes of twelve gun-- shotgun shells, twelve gauge, and told me to shoot and scare 'em, see if that did it. So I tried that and I scare 'em off, but I don't know, they must like it 'cause they come back. They-- most of the time they scare over to my neighbor's place instead.

I: When you graduated from the eighth grade then, that's when you had to go into La Grande. And there wasn't any school buses at that time, how did you--?

JG: No school buses at that time. We-- at that time we had to drive our own self in, and my dad brought us in. He was able to bring us in, and then at the times he couldn't, we used the car. 'Course, you only had one car.

I: Well, as soon as you were able to drive it legally--?

JG: Well, it's actually-- my brother was older than I was. About-- he's seventeen and half months older than I was, so he could drive. And then of course you could get a permit at fourteen to drive in here at that time. Well, what happened, he stayed out of school one year 'cause he was one year advanced from me. And he stayed out one year so that we'd both go to the same grade at the same time. And he drove us both in and back whenever we did.

I: When you moved into town after going to, you might say, a country school or small school like that, did you find it hard to be in town with all the students compared to just a few?

JG: Very true. I found it was pretty hard to go. And quite a few, well, different ones, and I really didn't know very many. Because at the school I went to there were just, you know, some of them there, of course, would still remain going up there, the ones that was under me. And I-- a few of 'em I did know. But I found out the hard part was that a lot of things that they were further advanced in here at the school in La Grande. And so it was hard for me to catch up, real hard.

I: Yeah. When-- now, what year did you start comin' in as a freshman?

JG: Probably in mid '40, 1940.

I: 1940. What, at that time, what was going on in the community and world affairs affecting this area?

JG: Well--

I: Can you think of anything?

JG: I didn't know a lot about La Grande at that time. In fact, like I keep tellin' my wife, living up there at Hilgard we was almost kind of-- at that day and age, you might say we was just kinda hid back from anybody else. We didn't really know what was goin' on. It was for the simple reason, not havin' electricity or anything like that. We had a radio, but when the-- that radio we had took three or four batteries. And that's when-- it last so long-- when it run out of battery, we didn't have any radio then. So we done without a radio. We didn't have anything.

I: So the things that were going-- happening around-- you didn't know?

JG: We were really isolated. And we didn't have a telephone. We didn't have anything.

I: Now, when the war started in 19-- the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941, what was the biggest change you saw immediately?

JG: [chuckles]. I think the biggest thing that we seen that I can remember as a kid that we was drivin' then. And we had our car, and we heard gas was gonna be rationed and everything pretty soon, so we went down and filled the car up full of gas. We had a separate old gas tank. We went down and put gas in that. And gas didn't cost too much then if you had the money to buy it. And we did find out as to start with, they asked for everybody to turn in any old tires they had in. We gathered up all of our old tires and took them down and turned them in. And-- I don't know. We just couldn't-- after awhile 'course they rationed gas, you know, in there. And we had to have some gas stamps. And there was a lot of changes. All that-- but I went in the service here later on, you know, and I didn't notice so much then.

I: When it first started, did you feel the pressure that it looked like you were gonna go in the service?

JG: Oh, I knew it.

I: You felt that that changed your life considerably-- made it a little harder on you?

JG: Well, probably, except that I was gonna go in and whip the Japs myself if nobody else would, you know. I mean, that was about my thoughts then. I was wantin' to go in. And so my brother went in ahead of me. He went in the Navy. But I wanted to get in there, and to start with I was turned down. And then I got called in again, and on the thing, and so that time I made it. There was-- it did change things because I see up above Hilgard some P38's come in there. And they started divin' around and so on which draws your attention that they was-- what they were doin', probably practicin'. But it, then it brought a kind down where you knew somethin' really was goin' on, you know.

I: Your dad was section foreman at that time.

JG: My dad at that time worked at-- no he worked-- he went to work for Mt. Emily.

I: Oh?

JG: Mt. Emily. He was up there and went to work for what's called the Jap Camp. And he could be one of the fellas that was on the motor car. I don't know because he was up in there at that time. And he-- that's where he worked until he retired.

I: Well, it seems at times people got funny ideas that the Japanese that had been around went back to Japan and they were going to be saboteurs, and--

JG: Well, I can even relate to a little of that. When I worked-- see, I worked at the Jap Camp too before I went in the service. And I worked with En Kersu which was an old-country born Jap. And he was the one that some soldier boy took between La Grande and Baker, somewhere in that neighborhood, took him behind the gravel pit. He gave a ride him. He was gonna-- I don't know what he was headin' for, Ontario or somewhere. And he wasn't supposed to go. He was supposed to not go any further than La Grande from the Jap Camp back and forth. So they left him here. He didn't bother anything, but he decided he was goin' further, and he picked up this soldier, and the soldier took him behind a gravel pit and killed him. And I got along real good with him. He was pretty good guy, and then the other three of them there was Kichi Yamasaki, Bourbon Yamasaki and Tom Yamasaki. All three of those guys went in to the war, but they went in on fightin' the Germans on their side.

I: In the European Theater.

JG: I knew it was one of those there.

I: Really they were very nice people. People had ideas that were completely wrong.

JG: Yeah. Truthfully, you're right on that. These-- now these two guys, they was all good guys. Good workers and everything, but at the time, what they told us at the time-- I don't know truth about all of this. But they was puttin' a lot of 'em into concentration camps, they said, for their protection. Where that uh, people wouldn't kill 'em, because they-- you know, when the war comes on, you're lookin' at that particular type of people, whoever you're fightin', you're looking at that not with any-- not lookin' at 'em very good.

I: Well, it was too bad about that one that was killed.

JG: Yeah.

I: I heard about it. I didn't know the details.

JG: I'm kinda sorry that-- you know, a lot of times I'd get letters when I was in the service, and not from him, but him tellin' my folks to write. And then he did write, or did have them ask me if I was mad at him because he was a Jap. And I wrote back, and I said, "No." I said, "I'm not mad at him." I said, "This is nothin' personal." That's what I wrote.

I: Now, did-- out of La Grande, they had guards on some of the bridges.

JG: Yes they did.

I: Did they have some of the upper bridges--?

JG: Well, you know, you're probably right, and I don't recall who all was here. I think it might have been Louie Greenwell. Might have been-- I'm not sure whether he was a guard or not. But they did have bridges armed guards on 'em some of the places up here. I don't know which one because I-- prior to that I'd been over working in for the Union Pacific railroad, and I was over at Portland. And what they called the Steel Bridge there-- that's a big long bridge. They did have a guard there, and I got well acquainted with him 'cause I worked there at that time, too. I worked for Davenport Signal maintainer there working railroad \_\_\_\_\_.

I: Well, it could have been bad because really if they would have sabotaged the railroad here, they'd have tied up the traffic for clear across the United States!

JG: Yep. And it would have been-- well, it would have been real bad. This day and age we're in now, would-- it could happen. That day and age we were more isolated, this country, so we weren't as-- you know, wasn't as apt to happen then like it would be now.

I: When we had the flood in 1965, lot of people back in Omaha didn't even know that you couldn't drive to all parts of the railroad.

JG: I remember that well because they had us-- they had me up here at Perry. That washed out right there at Perry, and they called me in. Everybody was doin' everything they could to, you know, to try to stop everything, but the track was washin' up. They had me to get a load of ties in a truck, in a flatbed truck, and take up there one evening. And I was backin' up, and the water was comin' down. And the next thing I looked behind and the water was-- the road was cavin' in right behind me. And man, I put that thing in gear and took off goin' forward. And it kept-- it was cavin' in as I went, but I got out of there. I made it out which otherwise we'd have been down in the river.

I: I remember the railroad cars went down in the river.

JG: Yeah. Yes, and they did put some in on their \_\_\_\_\_ too.

I: Oh.

JG: That was the only way they could get it blocked off. They sent me out later out to Island City at that bridge. It crosses right there at Island City. And wanted me to go out there and watch that one, so I watched it for awhile. I was by myself. I come back in, and I say, "Ain't nothin' I can do." I said, "You don't-- can't send a train here. It's washed out at one end up there. There's nothing you can do."

I: That's the one when the gable ended at Ludley's house and hit it.

JG: Yes.

I: When it washed out the--

JG: Yeah, that washed that part out. And let's see, it was several places it was washin' there. I know that. I can't remember. There was another time I guess when I was up at the ranch up towards Wallowa that we got stuck up there, 'cause it was washin' out. And I had to come back down. I did make it through. My boss, Gilbert Marland, you remember him probably. I don't know, but he was a road master.

And he was out there, and he sent me down to go to Huntington. And I went to Huntington callin' everybody out that I could call out on the railroad to uh, get out there on the tracks. And get everything you could think of to work with you know 'cause the thing was washin' out all over at that time. And I can't remember that's the same time though.

I: Well, when you came back from the service, were you a little lost what to do? What did you think when you came back?

JG: When I came back from the service, course, I was still pretty young guy. And when we was in the service, we used to talk about-- well, one thing about it, we didn't like what we was at we'd just quit. We couldn't do it in there while we was in the service. And we knew that, so I bet that was a big thing. So I came home, I put that into practice. I quit. I'd get a job, and if I held a job for three or four months I was doin' pretty good! 'Cause I'd quit. I'd been a long time on that job I'd get disgusted with it, and I'd quit. Finally, I hit a bad winter. Fact is, they hit a couple of bad winters. No work. And one winter I couldn't even find a job except I'd pick-- I'd walked-- well, I sold everything. I didn't have a car finally. I got rid of that. Just didn't have anything. And I had to walk from Hilgard to La Grande. I was married by then. I walked from Hilgard to La Grande, and I'd get-- maybe get a job and make a dollar. That's all. I had to-- end up havin' to-- I, my wife, and one kid-- and that's what we lived on, a dollar a week. One dollar a week, and lucky we was able to live in my folks' log house. So we had to burn green wood and everything else to get through the winter. It got forty-eight below zero up there that winter. It was cold. And we had a lot of snow. But I went through, well, another winter wasn't too good. Well, I got on the railroad, and I stayed after that. I had about all that I could handle on that. That taught me a lesson to-- you get on there, you stay from there on. And then I got to where I was afraid to quit.

I: Well, you had a family, and--

JG: That's it. I had the family then. 'Course, the oldest daughter was born after that. And then, 'course, younger one later on \_\_\_\_\_ first time went.

- I: Well, people don't know a lot about concession. What are the real important things that you're doing out there to make sure that train stays on the tracks?
- JG: Well, about everything you can think of. I'll tell you, people-- and you're right. People see two rails and some ties out there that's hooked onto 'em, and they think that's it. But you're working in the engineering department. And you've not only got equipped to have good rail, you've got to have decent ties. But you've got to keep that track. You've got to keep it in all your curves, all your curves on that. You have your elevation in your curves according to the speed of the train that's going across that. It all depends on whether goin' uphill or downhill. You gotta kind of imagine how the-- probably figure out an average on that. But you've got your compounds on your curves. You've got to have your elevations. All your spirals you gotta put in, correct. And it's a lot more than just lookin'. And nowadays they've got machines that you can set 'em. They're electronic. They can do this for you.
- I: Now, you said a compound and a spiral. Can you explain what that is?
- JG: Well, you-- uh, curve-- you go around a curve, let's say a curve that's, oh, I'll just use one that's probably four hundred feet long. I don't know. I'm just-- that's just kind of a guess. But anyway, when you come onto that curve, if it's-- oh, let's say it's a five degree curve. Then you're goin'-- you've got raise your elevation up. And it raises up there so many-- well, say a half inch to every thirty feet until you hit the full elevation which you're maybe, say, three and a half inches. We'll just use that. And then you'll maintain that three and a half to the full body. Now this is all on the spiral to start with when you raise your elevation. And then when you get to the full body of the curve, it will keep that three and a half inches 'til you get to the other end. Then it's got to come back down. So then that spiral you come back down like, say a half-inch to every thirty feet. And it can vary a little bit there. The compound when you go around that, you may go through the spiral on one end, bring it up to full elevation. Then you go around 'til it compounds again. Then it's gotta come up again in that full body a little bit. And then go back down, and come back down, and then go on down.

I: All the time maintaining that same distance between the wheels so--

JG: And you've got to have that-- you've got to have your right--  
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I: To run through the gauge.

JG: Yeah, you have to have your gauge there. And it's uh, got to maintain your gauge within a certain tolerance all the time. That's gotta be maintained throughout the whole curve and of course on the straight track also.

I: It uh-- while you're out there workin' on the track, I think we mentioned earlier that you had to keep in touch with the dispatcher to know where the train is gonna be at all times. And how long you could be on the line, or if you had to take your problem to get out of the problem, so that the train could go through without them having a problem.

JG: Yes. Before you start-- before you start on the job out there where you render that track unsafe, you have to either-- years ago you put flags up and then recorded that. Now, you call the dispatcher. And you get a certain amount of time on that track, whatever he'll allow you. And that's your track for that length of time, but it better be back together at the end of that time. And be passable by trains without any-- well, back in good condition, in other words. And if you do have to keep it longer, well sometimes something will happen and you can't get it back. 'Course, they-- that's not appreciated very much, so you try to do it, you know. At times, something will happen. But that's the general procedure. And it changed a little since then. Now they've got-- they've got what you call-- well, we had red-yellow boards later that you had to put up. And when the train comes up to that they cannot go into that area until you release it.

I: Railroad's very strict. If there's an accident, or something happened out there, they look out, and they fire everybody in sight! Then they decide who was it their fault.

JG: Yeah, it's uh-- occasionally something will happen. But then it can be really technical on that, because you can get fired quite-- pretty easy

you know in that. I pulled out a search twice. And uh-- but actually what you get, you get pulled out. Or you know, I got thirty days one time, and sixty another. And both times though, I will say the railroad was real good. They-- some of the officials come and saw me at my house. And they told me, said, "Well, we ain't seen anything too bad what you done brought us out." You know, from what they could see. But the Union-- Union didn't help me a bit. I was--

I: Well, the trainmen had job insurance.

JG: I had job insurance when I was in there

I: On your part also.

JG: You bet I did. I kept job insurance, and I collected that. In fact, the time they pulled me out for two months, I told 'em-- I said, "It made me feel so bad I went out and bought me a brand new automobile!" [laughs].

I: Well, it's an interesting way to do business sometimes. [chuckles].

JG: Well, you know, I didn't-- I really didn't feel it. And of course like I say, one of the officials is back in Omaha, Nebraska right now. He's high up. He come up to my house and he said. "Well." He said, "I don't really see anything that's so bad that you--" He didn't even figure I should have got pulled out. But then that's the way it happened, and they called me back.

I: When you were working as a section foreman, how long was your district? It uh--

JG: Well, let's see, I'll give you the last one I had. Of course I had at various times that \_\_\_\_\_ run from-- well, the last place I was at was La Grande. I run the section here in La Grande, and before that, Hilgard, and before that, Kamela. Well, the one at La Grande came from about the east on this side of La Grande up in, let's see, that'd be about-- can't remember the mile post. But from La Grande anyway to Motanic, and I can't really \_\_\_\_\_. Been awhile since I've been home that I can't remember the mile post of those right now, but I would say that probably about twelve, fifteen miles anyway in \_\_\_\_\_. Plus you

have double-track on some of it and sidings, and I had the yards here in La Grande too on top of that.

I: But you lived out at Hilgard. Do you feel that that was an advantage, having that district? Because then there were, like if you had-- how far did Kamela run? Did it go down to Duncan?

JG: Kamela, Kamela, no. When I was there at Kamela at that time went from Motanic-- it went from east Motanic, let's see, to, I believe about east Meacham, right close to east Meacham. Not-- didn't quite make that. And they had a lot of double-track up there and a center-track too in that. That was center-siding.

I: Well that area from Meacham down through Duncan and \_\_\_\_\_ and down there, that's pretty unaccessible--

JG: Well, you can get in there--

I: other than by rail.

JG: You can get to it now. But there's a road in now. It's not what you'd call a good road. And it's a tough one in the winter time, but you can get through there. You can go all the way to Gibbon now that way, and come right out.

I: I've been down to \_\_\_\_\_.

JG: Yeah. You can go all the way through that. I used to take care of-- when I was up at Kamela I had machinery. And we probably worked day and night up there in the winter time. And a lot of times I was off my section, on it and off it both. And I would leave, I may never get back. I'd leave maybe sometime that day after going to work that morning, and I would go down into almost to Gibbon. And I may not get back until the next day. And we'd be down there for plowin' snow. We'd plow snow, and then I'd-- a lot of times I'd come clear to Hilgard doin' that. I'd be up on my section and both adjoining sections.

I: Workin' all the time because there wasn't any motel or hotel or something to stay in!

JG: Well, we were working a lot like that. And lots and lots of hours because the road master, he was-- hadn't been on long. This was a new one that came up and he said, "I want to go with you guys down the track. He said, "And see what you're doin' there." Alright, c'mon we had a machine, see. I had other men workin' out, and I left them, but they knew what to do. And we took off. When we got back was the next morning and he said, "Now," he said, "See, if I ever go with you guys anymore!" He said, "I'm never goin' with you guys again!" It was good money, but it was a lot of hours, lots of hours. I had one fella runs a Broadway Garage. It's an old garage there in Baker. He worked with me. He got one hour of sleep one night, and not good at that.

I: I can appreciate it.

JG: He was runnin'-- I had machine operators of all kinds up there at that time. But they-- we did-- we done a lot of work in there.

I: Well, in those old days you had to put heaters under switches.

JG: Years ago-- years ago, I worked up there for Dick Hokum. He was a section foreman. I came work for him one time, and we had for the-- what we call the pots, you know. You put 'em under 'em, and you fill 'em full of-- I believe that's kerosene, or whatever you could put in it. I think it's kerosene or number one diesel. But put 'em in there, and they would-- you had to clean 'em all the time. Put 'em under and let 'em run. You had to keep 'em filled up and cleaned out. Half the time the wind would blow 'em out the train come by.

I: You didn't dare get that on your gloves or on your shoes 'cause you're encrusted!

JG: Yes. And later on, they put heaters under 'em, uh propane heaters. And trains would come by, and those things would set the ties on fire a lot! And then it would be pure ice out there, and cold as the dickens. And everything froze down, and you had to chip them old ties out and put new ties under. And the only light you had most of the time was what they call a Coleman settin' on the signal house there. And if you was right there, it would show a little light. That's all you could see at night. And you was out there workin'.

- I: I noticed that up in Hilgard area they put a number of concrete ties up there. How did that work out?
- JG: That's evidently workin' out pretty good. Now, that came just as I retired. They was puttin' those in, and if I understand, as long as they keep 'em tamped up good and good ballast, the rock under there, that they're all right. That they get 'em-- let 'em get down it'll put an abrasion on them ties like. And if the-- they'll just cut 'em to pieces.
- I: Well right pretty close to your house here I noticed on a few ties, the concrete ones, that there were some deep gouges in the center of the ties.
- JG: Well, they do come down to in there. They come down-- they come kind of concaved in there some.
- I: But these look like a piece of metal-- it chipped a groove right-- suppose something's come loose?
- JG: Well, that's possible. Now, there's-- see, there's a big steel plate inside that also, inside that thing. And so that-- that's too-- I suppose to reinforce it too.
- I: Yeah. Well, I didn't know whether a draw bar hit it, or--
- JG: It's possible. But it really hasn't-- haven't had much troubles up there for a long time. And there's no spikes anymore 'cause they use what they call a-- I think it's a clip that goes in there. It's kind of like a wedge. You just wedge everything in now.
- I: Well, one day I know I talked to you, oh it's been four or five years ago, I was up taking pictures east of your house there where it goes through Hilgard.
- JG: Oh yeah.
- I: But I was curious about that scene.
- JG: Yeah, it's-- they've upgraded it a lot now. And then of course, they have their tampers they go out there and tamp with now. It's not hand

work like we used to do. Used to be hand work, you know. We had what we called the Idiot Stick, you know, and that's what you tamp with. Or a shovel, but shovels was kind of done away with mostly. But it was the tampin' bars, and no matter what you done out there, you couldn't do, go too far in a day doin' that. And it just wasn't like it is now. And then \_\_\_\_\_ have all the jointed rail then. With jointed rail, every joint would start batterin', and then they take a service bend on 'em you couldn't get 'em-- they wouldn't straighten up then. But now they're-- it's CWR rail on there now, quarter mile steel.

I: A quarter of a mile--

JG: Yeah, a quarter of a mile.

I: long rail put in.

JG: Yeah, and then they weld down. They weld down back to the-- we've unloaded that quarter-mile rail, you know. And you just hook on to the existing track, and you put a cable on it, and you pull it all.

I: I see some of these trains with those rails on there. That's really something when you think that they go around curves and what have you.

JG: All around that, and that's real limber. That there it was-- the length of it like that is limber. And it's dangerous work, real, real dangerous work all of that. Now that stuff \_\_\_\_\_, I see those engines start-- when they was loadin' it, it seemed to me that was worse. When they started loadin' some rail they start pushin' to bring it in, you know, and it just roll comes up on the rollers. And if it hangs up any, it's just like pushin' a wet noodle. They can just bend that stuff and break it all around. I bet-- you know, I've worked with that some quite a bit there. And then of course derailments, you know, we used to be lots and lots of derailments. And I spent days and days until I'd end up on derailments, you know. And nights just workin' just for seemed like forever on 'em, you know. There, I know down at \_\_\_\_\_ in east \_\_\_\_\_ I built a-- I built a switch down there, put a switch in after they had derailment on it. And I just got it all. And I had other guys I was in charge of. And we had several crews up there. We got the switch all back together, everything fine, went home, turned right around and

something come through and derailed again. Wore 'em out again. So, did that-- they tore switches out up and down there for a few years. We-- we was runnin' on derailments all the time. Now, there's nothin' bad though. They've been pretty good on it. But I think it's this new CWR rail and concrete ties. And it's a lot better material now.

I: Then they had that rail car that comes along and checks the rail. It--

JG: They have the rail car. They used to-- well, they used to bring it on up to \_\_\_\_\_. 'Course I've been retired for awhile, but they still do. And they have a rail, a car that checks for the defects in the rail. And then they've got another one that comes through and can travel right along, and tell you all the gauge, how-- whether if it's right, or what the gauge is, actually is. And it tells-- and it says-- then it gives you-- it can set on the mile post and everything.

I: Gauge - would you explain that because--?

JG: That's the width between the two rails where the flange fits. But they'll come through, and they can travel right along. And they're-- I suppose the best word to say is probably more like computer because they can-- when they find a spot that we'll say needs correctin', it'll show that right there on that mile post where it's at. So there's-- and you'll get a copy will come out from that thing, and you can look at that you can go trace that down.

[phone rings - recording clicks - no interruption]

So, well I'd be out there workin' on derailments, and it'd be a kind of a snowin' rain, little sleet-like. And you'd be so wet and cold. And you'd-- it'd just right down you-- you'd feel the water tricklin' down your legs and everything. Your gloves were all wet. And I had men out there that I had to keep busy. And we had to keep things goin' and get this back together because we had to run trains. And to be out there way all night long workin', and you just couldn't get colder. And that's how come I really appreciate being able to stay inside now when it gets cold--

I: [laughs].

JG: 'cause it was really so bad. And I had spent many a night out in-- well and days too, but you know cold weather. In fact, summer time wasn't so bad, but the winter is. It's terrible.

I: When I worked for Harry Hewitt up there at Telocaset putting heaters under switches at \_\_\_\_\_ thirty-five-below zero.

JG: You bet. Wind could be a howlin' you know, goin'. And it was bad. And, well I'd-- even back when I was track inspector, now I didn't have to do some of the work like that, 'cause most of mine was travelin'. But I'd go across this mountain on a motor car, and I had a top on it, but I didn't have any sides or no heaters, or anything. I took a fellow over there one time. He was inspectin' switches. He had to go through-- sent out from Omaha. And lucky there was a \_\_\_\_\_ little shanty down what they call Ross, down below Kamela.

I: \_\_\_\_\_ about that, yeah.

JG: And that-- I stopped there, and I went in. And I set off for it, and we couldn't even see the railroad. It was snow all over it. We was still able to go for some reason. Cold I tell you, terrible. We went in there, and I built a fire. I don't think that fella would have made it. He was so cold and so froze. Well they-- we finally got down to Gibbon. And the road master-- he come along and brought another guy out and relieved us 'cause the weather was so bad that we just-- we just-- actually it was freezin' out there. And I was dressed pretty good for it myself. The other fella wasn't too well.

I: Didn't know what it takes to do a job like that.

JG: Yeah, and I used to run that. I used to run the track from La Grande to Huntington, one week, and from La Grande to Hinkle the next week. And that was the way I went every week. And then up the branch, up the Pilot Rock branch. And then up to the Joseph branch.

I: \_\_\_\_\_.

JG: And all that had to come in under this time, you know, winter or summer. It was kind of-- kind of rough. I never really liked that job so well after I'd been on it for awhile. Because you know it's better if

you're out there if you can do a little work, stay warm. And it's-- otherwise it's kind of bad. But I'd seen a lot of that. High water, lots of high water-- I've got some-- a few pictures of high water up on the Joseph branch. And that was probably in about 1957 or '58, somewhere in there when that track washed out.

I: Well, it'd be very helpful on this interview if you did have a picture showing a particular area that you've discussed. And I will show you in some of the interviews that we've done how it enhances the-- what we're talking about by showing a picture.

JG: Yeah, I'll see if I can-- I'll see if I can find some of-- some of that stuff. I'm not a very good photographer so you probably won't see it like it should have been done. I did get a picture or two of a \_\_\_\_\_ or two you know, around. And I've been on that track when we've had a few runaways, too. Not that my-- one time we had a runaway from Kame-- let's see, we got on the track at Kamela with a track tamper. It was a service-- to service the track. And anyway, for some reason the brakes that-- they had a disk brake on 'em. And the travel on that wasn't-- it wasn't takin' up or something happened to it. I don't know exactly what happened there, but we got-- and it was some of the first ones. We got comin' down the track to come into Hilgard, all the way down off that mountain. And we got goin' along there, and the guy puts the brakes on, the fellow that's running it, and it didn't go down.

I: You were goin' down the track at a high rate of speed!

JG: We were goin' down, and we were supposed to come in to Hilgard then go into a house track, and there was some box firs sittin' on the house track. And we were comin' down through there, and I told him, I said, "Well, I don't know." And it's-- machine we had wasn't loaded to be hangin' on that rail. You weren't supposed to be able to run 'em very fast down there. And I imagine we was doin' about fifty miles an hour. And we come down through there in the west woods of Hilgard they had a blind over for the passin' track. And then on further down it would-- they was a hand throw. And those guys would have a hand throw at someone who went ahead of us to put us in on the house track. And I was hopin'-- I told the guys that, "Boy, I sure hope we get that! We'll never make that switch at this speed!" But we did. I don't know how it happened, but we made that switch and got to it just

right on through that thin. And got on down and I said, "You know." I said-- I hollered at him 'cause that's the only way 'cause we were pretty noisy. And I said, "If they've got that hand throw into that boxcar," I said, "We're gonna have to jump!" I said, "That'll kill us if we hit that boxcar!" And we got down there, and some of my men were down there with the road master at the switch. I started to-- we started honkin' on the horn there. And I told him to start blowin' that horn there. And he didn't know how to blow emergency for some reason. I don't know why. And so he's honkin', and this road master says, "Look at them \_\_\_\_\_!" He said, "They're playin'!" And this one guy that worked for me, he says, "They're not playing you darn fool!" He said, "Those guys have a runaway!" He said, "Throw that switch back!" And the guy looked, and finally he threw the switch back before we got there. And we went right along by. We finally got stopped just down near the East, which is Hilgard. We finally did get it stopped 'cause it leveled out down there. That was dangerous. But I have been on three, four, five runaways like that on the road track, real bad ones!

I: Now you mentioned the house track. What is the house track?

JG: That's a little track where they just store the stuff. Where the old-- where the old corrals were-- the cattle and sheep corrals were at Hilgard. That's a house track that's over near them. And they'd load-- used to load cattle out there when they had the \_\_\_\_\_.

I: Oh, that's for somebody that doesn't know what--

JG: Yeah. They used to load there. Tony Vey used to loan cattle there, or load cattle there a lot, years ago. And I know that-- well, when I was going to school they-- out there at Hilgard they'd load cattle there. I don't know when they quit that. 'Course, see I owned that school house for several years. I bought that, you know.

I: Oh.

JG: And I owned it for several years there. And I sold it to a guy name of Pence.

I: And they're using it a residence now.

JG: Yeah, it's a-- yeah, Tom Hosey owns that now. Yeah, he's got that. But I had-- well, 'course I bought several places there. Two or three places there at Hilgard, you know at one time I rented 'em. Bought here in La Grande, and well I-- I think I bought three houses here in La Grande; bought one on Oak and one on N Avenue, and the last one down on Y. And it's still down there. My daughter, youngest daughter you know-- I got tired of it. I gave it to her. I told her she could have that one 'cause I didn't wanna mess with the thing, you know. But yeah it's-- there's-- it's-- I don't know. We-- out there at Kamela we've had several times that we were pretty fortunate, faith you know. You're it-- workin' with heavy equipment, and it gets-- it gets kinda-- it gets kind of dangerous at times, especially in the winter, you know.

I: I can appreciate that.

JG: I know that I was cleanin' a switch there one time myself, and then other places. And it was at night time. I run what we called the center pass there at Madras, one right in the center, two of the main lines at each side. And anyway, I was cleaning on the-- they had a Nordeen. Well, right there at the center just on the other side of Nordeen. And I thought the train was comin' up the hill, and anyway, this-- I thought he was comin' up on the main track, you know. But somebody that had throwed that switch down at Nordeen, they come in on where I was at. And I had my flashlight settin' there on the rail, and next thing I know he was right there right near me, you know. And it was dark and noisy anyway you know around in there it seemed like. I jumped up, and the guy said-- he told me later-- he said, "You know," he said, "I thought we'd got you!"

I: I can appreciate that.

JG: But you know you're out there for hours and hours.

I: You can't stop one of those things.

JG: No, they don't stop.

I: People don't understand that. That's why so many people get hit!

JG: They do, and then--

I: They can't see you. They can't stop within a mile.

JG: No. No, it's-- I've been places there where they've had derailments, and somebody would say, "Well, why didn't they stop?" And I said, "They don't stop." In fact, over at Portland, we was workin' on a switch over there, train come by and hit a woman with a car and killed her right there by us. And you know, she-- I don't know if she just didn't see the train, you know. And it was just things-- it happened, and there wasn't a--

[recording clicks - no interruption]

I: Know of one, those lines-- I had a friend who was a railroad engineer who had an accident over there in Idaho. And there was a fatality in it. And this one town official came in. He says, "Can I look up in the cab?" And the engineer said, "Yes." He says, "Where's the steering wheel?" He says, "You don't have any steering wheel. You see those two rails out there?" He says, "Oh!" He says, "You mean you couldn't have swerved and missed her."

JG: Well, you know, a lot of people don't think about it, but you get up in that engine, and especially some of 'em, and you look down that track when you're goin' along you're doin' pretty good speed. Way out East of La Grande here, you're right out there rollin'. That track-- them rails down there look pretty small. They don't look very wide. And you're going through there. Then you watch and see people drivin' across in front of you on those crosses. And it absolutely-- it really kind of gets you. It kind of makes you mad because you know that they're taking chances, you know. They'll drive right across in front of you a lot of them. They can't stop!

I: It-- oh, it really worries the trainmen.

JG: Oh yeah. Well, it would-- it would bother you there. But I've-- you see, I've been around this railroad for a lot of years. Well, ever since I was born my dad was workin' on the railroad. And I've been around it for a lot of years. And I've seen, you know, from like it was years ago, and it's in some ways its way better now. In some ways it's-- it's not as good. You know, working conditions-- as far as the work

nowadays, they go out there, and they have to have a--they have to discuss what they're gonna do for each job they do. And if they quit this job and go to another one, you got to have a little talk about that. And then they got to do their exercises. They gotta do that exercise when you go to work in the morning, do the exercise that they have through lunch, you know. Like we did in the service, you know, a little of that. And we used to, years ago, never do that. Never had to tell anybody for sick people \_\_\_\_\_ don't. You go out there, and you got some old hands in there. You're going to do a certain job they've done it a thousand times, so they know. But now you've got to tell 'em. And so you-- all this is done before you ever work with it. It takes you-- no matter how long it takes you to do it.

I: I can appreciate that. Living in Hilgard, what has done in the property values, say in the last four years?

JG: Well, I can give you a little clue on that. 'Course, we moved there like, say in 1932. It was a log house there, and not too much of anything else. And a chicken house, pretty good size. My dad bought thirty acres up there at that one place at that time. He paid five hundred dollars for it. He sold his house here in 1410 Court Street for two hundred and fifty dollars on that one. And but he bought this thirty acres and that house for five hundred. Well, now there's a A-Frame on that house, and a barn, little barn. But there's only eight and a half acres on it because they sold off the other part. But that that they've got right now it is for sale right now, two hundred and fifty nine thousand. That's what they want for it.

I: Boy.

JG: That's a slight difference in what it used to be. I think this one place-- I think-- and I'm not positive, but I think this one there's about five hundred and eighty acres my dad had bought, or eighty three acres, or something like that. And I think he was-- he paid fourteen-hundred for it. And that's probably more within keeping 'cause it-- all that is just grazin' land, you know. Was some timber on it, though, and timber's much more expensive today. But then I think that one time sold for a hundred and sixty-two thousand, five hundred. And it's sold a couple times since though, so normally they go up. It's hardly--

hard to say what it is. That's one where the people dug a-- built a new home up there. You've seen that up there.

I: Yeah, up on the hill.

JG: Yeah. That's-- that belongs to--

I: I've wondered who that house belonged to.

JG: Yeah, that-- you know the people, don't you, Chris down there that has Chris Colors out here that paint?

I: I know of the business, but I don't-- don't personally know \_\_\_\_\_.

JG: Nice house, nice people. It's uh-- you put my home inside of it and can't find it.

I: [laughs].  
[END OF TAPE]