

Lavelle Butler

3/02, T1, S1

LB: ...I think I'm just going...going to tell you Georgia Lavelle, but no, I don't want to put the Georgia in, Lavelle Butler. Now am I talking into this, or...?

JT: It'll...it'll pick it up. It'll pick it up. Now what was your maiden name?

LB: My maiden name was Ritchie, r-i-...do I have to spell it?

JT: No, I don't think that's necessary.

LB: I was born in La Grande.

JT: Uh-huh.

LB: I'm not gonna tell you what year.

JT: Okay, that's fine. You're family came here...

LB: My mother and father...let's see, I don't know exactly when they came. I think they came about...they'd come in 1919 because my sister was born in Kansas in 1909. And so they must've come in...did I say 1919? No, that's not right. It'd be 1908, wouldn't it? Because Ellen was born...I hope I'm not getting this all mixed up. Ellen was born in 1909 and they came in 1910 and that's...1909 or 1910, I don't know when, but they came... Anyway, my great-uncle, my father's uncle, was...he came earlier, much earlier, in the 1800s and he was one of the founders. He was a postmaster...one of the first postmasters in La Grande and he...his name was George MacRitchie and he was quite a...he was piano salesman and I think... And his ___ was that everybody...every person in...in Union County that had a child should have a piano and he made an effort to put a piano in every...every... He'd even take a pig as the down payment. He was a wonderful man.

JT: That's a nice thing.

LB: And then in going to school...for me going to school we walked from Oak Street to the high school...to the middle school which was then the Central School. And I can't really quote anything too much about because we moved to Cove in 1919, '18, I don't know when. That... We lived on a farm and that was the five...five years of the most wonderful education I believe I've ever had. Because we...my sister and I learned everything about farming and cows and pigs...

JT: And you went to school in Cove?

LB: We went to school in Cove.

JT: Graduated then from Cove?

LB: No, we were only there for five year...we were only in La Grande for five years...I mean over in Cove for five years. And then we came back to La Grande and I graduated from high school. Let's see, I graduated I 1930. My desire at that time was to be a schoolteacher and then my sister the last year of my...last year in high school my sister died from a kidney infection...kidney ailment...and right then and there I decided I wanted to be a nurse. So in 1932 I went in training at the Emmanuel in Portland. And that was a wonderful, wonderful experience. I think I loved every day that I was there. I had... I could tell you some very interesting experiences that I've had there.

JT: And you graduated from nurses' training and then did you come back to La Grande?

LB: No, I stayed in...I stayed in Portland and worked there for...well, I worked there till, let's see, 194-...I graduated in '35 and I worked in it till 1945, or it was about '46 I should say.

JT: The end of the war.

LB: What?

JT: The end of the war.

LB: Yes. My... I married my husband in '41 and he immedi...he was already in the Service because...we planned on being married in January and then he was drafted in February so...I mean we were planning on being married in...in February and we were...he was drafted in January so as a result we put our wedding off until July when he got his first leave from absence. And then he went to New Guinea within the...over there for five years. And when he came home then we moved to Chehalis for a very short time. He worked for his brother in a huge, huge farm that had beautiful horses and beautiful cows and everything. And then we came back to West Linn and found a place that we just loved. There was lots of trees, lots of...wonderful pears trees and apple trees, ten or fifteen apple trees and they were all different and it was just a wonderful, wonderful place. We loved it. And we lived there...my husband got a job at Crown Bellerback Paper, he was a paper maker. I worked for a while. I did private duty most of the time.

JT: A nurse can always find work.

LB: I always had a job. I would go on-call and I'd get called before the day was out. And we did private duty then, there was no such thing as an ICU so we did our own...we gave our own IVs and we gave our...we did all of the things that you'd get...that they do in the ICU department now. And I...I had a very interesting case, a Dr. Sedman from Santa Cruz, California was in...he had...he and four other doctors...four other doctors had been up here in the Wallowa Mountains hunting and they had a doe in the back of the car and on the way home somewhere around The Dalles the tire blew out and it flipped the car completely over and he was paralyzed...Dr. Fellman was paralyzed from the waist down. And I was called on the case and we worked so hard with him. He was so intelligent. He wanted to know...he wanted to tell us what to do because he couldn't move. So finally Dr. Dilihunt had the iron lung brought from medical school down to the Emmanuel and we put him in the iron lung. And the poor man he couldn't...he wanted to get well so badly, but he fought against the pressure...he would breathe against the pressure there of the iron lung and so he was only in for two days then we had to take him out. And he just couldn't make it, he just finally died. His wife came and she was so good to him. She just helped us so much. Dr. Dilihunt had said to me, "Do anything he wants. If you... If he wants to have hot packs on his stomach, do it. Don't call me, just do anything he wants." And he was such a nice man. And I've had very, very nice patients. I don't think I ever disagreed with anybody, with any of them. I had...

JT: That's nice to do something...

LB: I had a patient that his name was Mr. Mailing and he was a heart case and he lived at the beach at Depot Bay out there now where there's a huge condominium. But at the time he had a beautiful home there 'cause he was a millionaire and he...he had built this beautiful home before he got sick. He also lived in Forest Grove, I think, where he had...he took care of vegetables, he canned. Anyway, he was a very nice patient. But I...there was...I went down there with him for three months down at the beach and that was the thrill of my lifetime. Pretty nearly every day we'd walk down to the beach and look down and watch for whales. So that was another experience that I had that was very great.

JT: And then when did you move back to La Grande?

LB: My husband retired in '73 and we moved back to La Grande in 1973. And we built our home out at Alicel and lived there for ten years. Then we moved...we had such a terrible weather that we came into town to play pinochle with a friend of ours and the people next door was moving out in two days. And Chester said, "Let's move...let's rent it for the winter. Let's get out of there." 'Cause we were having to go from one place...had to drive our picnic...pick...our pick-up to get wood just about three or four feet. We couldn't...it was so...the snow was so bad we just...

JT: It can blow out in the valley.

LB: So anyway, we...we moved into La Grande and we liked it so well we stayed. And then my husband got very ill. He had a stroke and he just didn't ever recover completely from it and he had removed...I put him in the nursing home here, which he was very dissatisfied because he got rotten service and I'll admit it. And so then I finally I called his sister in Portland and she said, "We've got a place down here for him. Just bring him down here." So my niece came up and got us and we moved down, I took him down, and he only lived five days after we got there, but we moved to Canby. And he had such a wonderful trip down. He sat up and looked at the ocean...or at the river and had a wonderful time. When we got down there he had the nicest service and nicest rooms and everything, but he only...

JT: And then you decided to come back to La Grande after that?

LB: I came back... I lived down there for three years and then I fell and broke my hip and so then I came back to La Grande. I didn't break my hip, I broke my femur, but right close to the hip.

JT: What's the most outstanding thing you think about living in La Grande?

LB: In La Grande?

JT: Yes.

LB: Oh, it's home for one thing. It's just absolutely home 'cause this is where I was raised. I like La Grande. It isn't...it isn't the town that it used to be because so many buildings have...have burned, but it's...I don't know. I just... I have lots of friends here and so...

JT: Sure. It's nice to have friends.

LB: Oh, I have wonderful friends. And I've always gone to the church, I go to the Methodist church, and I have always loved that building, the organ and everything.

JT: You were very satisfied in the occupation that you chose as nursing.

LB: Oh, I loved it! I loved it! I just wished that I had continued on, kept up with it a little bit all the time so I would've kept in touch with the medicines and the treatments. 'Cause everything is so different now than it was. Just everything.

JT: I can appreciate that.

LB: The medicines and everything are all different.

JT: What do you think of the weather we have?

LB: Oh, I love it. I just loved the rain...the snow storm this morning. That was just beautiful.

JT: You know, when you're used to La Grande. Some of the people like to move south.

LB: I... I liked Portland. Portland was fine when I was in training in 1935 and along in there. It was very nice, but then it got bigger and bigger and bigger and the street cars disappeared and the...what do you call...what are the other things?

JT: Trolleys?

LB: Trolleys. And then it got to the place where I just didn't like it anymore.

JT: A lot of people don't. In looking back at things is there any part in your life you'd like to live over again?

LB: Yes. I'd like to live over my years in training, I really would. I just loved 'em. And I...our experience at Cove. I didn't ever want to go back to Cove, but my experience there was so...it's just...I just felt like I got a whole lot of education there.

JT: Then there's nothing that you would like to do differently?

LB: Yeah, I would. I wished I had continued on with my training. Not necessarily the training, but...no, I...I've...I wish my sister could have lived because we were very close, but...

JT: There's still some of your classmates?

LB: Oh yes.

JT: Went to school with you still living.

LB: I... The gal that lives down the hall is Genevieve Tarter, she and I were in high school together. And we still are...we're good friends yet.

JT: Her husband was my schoolteacher.

LB: What? Was she your high school teacher?

JT: Her husband...

LB: Oh, your husband.

JT: ...was my schoolteacher, Harvey __.

LB: Harvey, uh-huh.

JT: Did you ever know Harvey?

LB: Oh yes, very well. We played pinochle all the time.

JT: Nice man.

LB: Yes, he was.

JT: And nice woman.

LB: And so is Genevieve. Genevieve knows everybody. She knows practically everybody here and she knows everybody 'cause she she'll say, "Oh, he was my second grade. He was my... I taught him in the second grade." [laughs]

JT: I can appreciate that. Being new at this I don't know how many things to ask, but hopefully I have covered the basic things. It'd be interesting... Is there anything about La Grande you'd change?

LB: No, I don't think so. I just wish that they had better shopping in La Grande. For instance, you can't buy a pair of...a good pair of shoes, I mean the kind that you want, in La Grande and you can't...you can go to some of the stores and get things, but don't have...you can't buy nice clothes. I won't say nice clothes, but I mean something that fits ya.

JT: The days of maybe French's Shoe Shop, do you remember that on Adams?

LB: French?

JT: French, uh-huh.

LB: No. No, I don't remember that. See, I was...

JT: Trotters.

LB: What?

JT: Trotters.

LB: Trotters, oh yes.

JT: Harry McCarthy.

LB: Yeah.

JT: I'm trying to think of some of the older stores.

LB: Oh. N. K. West and...let's see...and Joel's...Joel's Grocery Store. We used to live real close to them and we traded there quite often.

O: _____

LB: Yeah. Let me see. What were some of the other stores? Montgomery Ward. I don't mean the Montgom...there was a Montgomery Ward, but...

JT: There was a Montgomery Ward.

LB: Yeah. But there was kind of a cute expression that we learned when we lived at Cove. There was a man by the name of Mr. Thelton and he brought his girlfriend into La Grande to get married. They went...where did they go to get married? Anyway, after they were married they went out to...I don't remember that part of the story. Anyway, the story is that he came home and they said, "Where's Nell?" And he said, "Oh my gosh! I left Nell in Port...in La Grande! I forgot Nell and left her in La Grande." So he had to go back to La Grande and get his bride.

JT: Do you remember when they built the Sacagawea Hotel?

LB: Oh yes!

JT: And the La Grande Hotel?

LB: Yeah. And we had our senior prom, yeah, senior prom in the La Grande Hotel. And I used to take tap dancing in the Sacagawea when it was...let's see... We did a lot of display...I mean we did our tap dancing in several different places after practicing. I was trying to think of the teacher's name, but I can't think of her name. But we had a lot of fun. We had a... We danced at a Midnight Matinee one time and we danced for the Odd Fellows Hall...at the Odd Fellows Hall. There was some other place, I can't remember what it was, that we danced. We used to have just a wonderful time.

JT: It sounds like it's been a real nice life.

LB: I've had a very, very good... I've had lots of surgery, lots of illnesses, but they never lasted long. I was always healthy right afterwards. I didn't ever have any

children, but we had tried to adopt children several times and it seemed like...I think God didn't want us to have children. Because he...my husband was so lenient and I was so firm so I think we probably would have ended up in the divorce courts if we had children. [laugh] No, not really. 'Cause we just...we got along beautifully. I had a very nice, generous husband. He loved to build things and he was always...he built three homes for us while we were married...after we were married. Built a brick home in West Linn...well Canby...I mean Willamette was West Linn. It was Willamette and then it...they incorporated it into West Linn and so we lived in the same places, the same...at that time.

JT: It was interesting that you went into nursing at the time you graduated Eastern Oregon College was here... Of course that was teacher.

LB: I went... I went to college for...for about eight months and then I got this...I got the report from the Emmanuel that I was accepted in training so then I had to quit and go in training. But I...I went to Amanda Zable and Roy Skeen. I took science...let's see...child psychology from Roy Skeen. And Stevenson I took, oh, anyway we...he had a creature that he sat on my desk and we went on hikes and that darn creature all went along. What was it? A muskrat? No. Anyway, I can't remember.

JT: I knew both Roy Skeen and Amanda Zable.

LB: Yeah. Who else? I had three teachers. Who was the other one?

JT: Keizer?

LB: No.

JT: Keizer?

LB: No, no. Skeen and...Stephenson was his...was the science teacher __ and Amanda Zable. Yeah, that's right.

JT: I think that...you can't think...I can't think of anything more to ask you. You've done very well helping me along.

LB: I can't think of anything else to say because I've just...just had a wonderful...I...

JT: Where did you live on Oak?

LB: 20...1102...1102...anyway, it was just two...two...two or three...three houses off of Adams towards the river. Cherry's Florist was just across...they...their home lived just across and they used to have a florist there...greenhouses back behind.

JT: Yes, I remember there on Adams and...

LB: And the __. The old...the old...or the first hospital was there and my uncle, Uncle Mack, George Ritchie, my great-uncle, but my dad's uncle...we always called him Uncle Mack...anyway, he...he and Mr...Dr. Richland were real good friends and he always helped him out every...it was financial every once in a while.

JT: That's before Dr. Gillstrep went in...

LB: Oh, I know Dr. Gillstrep. Dr. Gillstrep I could kill him. Every time I came home for my vacation I came home to see my folks and he'd see...he always ran into me and he'd say, "Be up the hospital at such-and-such a time. I want you to help me in surgery." And I helped him more times...I would say three times I'd come

home and I'd say, "I haven't got any uniform, I haven't got anything with me." "We'll furnish you. We'll get...put a uniform on ya" so on so forth. He always took advantage of me, I think.

JT: ___ our family doctor.

LB: Oh, was he really? I guess he was my family doctor before we went to La Grande...before I went to Portland. But Dr. Richland was my doctor when I was born.

JT: Now the hospital has moved.

LB: What?

JT: The hospital's moved.

LB: Oh yes.

JT: St. Joe used to be.

LB: Yeah.

JT: And is no more.

LB: Yeah, and I don't know whether I should mention Emma McNeash or not, but Emma McNeash, McAnish, was the postmaster in Alicel. And we...I've known her for years and we knew...we both...see, they moved to Cove the same time we did and then they moved back to La Grande the same time we did. So we've just ___ all...we've been friends for a long while. And she...she was the one that we came in to play pinochle with the night that we decided to move in. She was on...lived on one side of the duplex and we...and so we lived on the other side. So we took...kind of took...looked after her for a long while.

JT: How come you picked Alicel to build a house?

LB: My husband is from Arkansas and every time we'd go...my father's sister lived in Joseph, bless her heart, she was the dearest little lady. And she...we'd go by...up to get her every year to bring her back down through the winter after her husband died. And Chet just loved that...the drive he'd say, "I just wish I could live here sometime." And we came up for Christmas to visit Emma and she had invited us to come up to spend Christmas vacation with him...with her. She was standing at the kitchen window and she said, "That darn Clark Rookman! He's selling all this property around here." And Chester just said, "He's selling?" And that was the clue. So he went and looked and we built...you know, Emma was here and he bought this...we bought this property right there on Alicel Road, but anyway, the 82, and

JT: That was over at Cove or 82?

LB: Yeah. Yeah. And we bought that field of wheat and built a house on it. And lived there very happily, had a wonderful, wonderful place there because we had a real good garden spot and I had lots of flowers and it was nice.

JT: That's one of the better parts of the valley as far as growing.

LB: Yes, yes. I can agree. But that's why...we even made a down payment on the house...property before we left that Christmas. Chet was so in...he just thought "that's just what I want."

JT: That's nice. When you went to Central School was that...that junior high school or the high school?

LB: It was a grade school and high school. It was just...it was a grade school and a high school. And I was tryin' to think who the principal was. Anyway... Miss...Miss...

JT: Then when did they build the high school next to it?

LB: The high school was already there when...when I...when I went to school.

JT: When the two of them were together?

LB: Yeah, the two of 'em were together. And I still have a brick from the old high school.

JT: Was that about the time that the third story burned off?

LB: That it burned? Uh-huh. It burned and we went over...we had...we had been there earlier in the evening, I think, or been someplace and we came back and helped take all the books out of the library. We worked like mad tryin' to save that building. But it burned...there was a play there, that's what it was. There was a play and the cyclorama behind somebody thought they had maybe smoked back there or something and anyway, apparently, at least that's my understanding, that the cyclorama caught on fire and that's where the fire started. I don't believe the play was that night. I think it was...we were just there practicing or something.

JT: Then did the students go to other places to finish out the year?

LB: That was the year that the snow was way high deep and we had classes in the...we had to walk from the Presbyterian church to the Methodist church to the...what was the Mormon...

JT: The LDS hall?

LB: Yeah.

JT: Recreation hall.

LB: Yeah, the recreation hall. We had... I had two classes there. That's... We went from place to place, from church to...you did too? You're about my age then.

JT: No. Younger, but we used the building.

LB: Do you want something?

O: _____

LB: Oh.

JT: I'm sorry, I can't...[tape interruption]

LB: ...forgetful anymore that I can't remember things and so I...[recording stopped]