

KEN LILLY

November 19, 2004

Interviewed by David Watson

Transcribed by Paula Helten (06/12/2012)

[audio begins]

DW: This is David Watson, and I'm at the residency of Ken Lilly. I'm here to interview Ken about his memories and life in Union County. Okay, um, I guess we could start from here. Uh, I'd like to start first off just finding out a little bit about your family and where your family's originally from.

KL: Well, in family, my mother and father and I think it was three siblings came here in—from West Virginia in about, I want to say 1905.

DW: 1905? Do you know why they left West Virginia?

KL: Well, I think they left West Virginia because my mother had some of her folks were out here, and I don't know when they came out. But—but my mother and dad of course married before they came out here from West Virginia.

DW: Hm. So you would say family ties?

KL: Fam—family ties probably brought—brought them out, yeah.

DW: Brought them out to Union County? Um, so—

KL: Some of them were—some of them were located in Wallowa County, and—and—but I think my folks never lived in Wallowa County. I'm not sure of that.

DW: Okay. What was your dad's first employment when he came into this county?

KL: Well, [chuckles] I imagine it was—I know he worked at a flour mill, and I—I know he worked for P. J. Lilly, who also came from West Virginia, in construction. And oh, he—his main part in life was being the custodian at the old Central School.

DW: The old Central School. At that time, was it an elementary school?

KL: Oh yes, it was an elementary school. It's torn down now. It's where the middle school sits. It was built in 1899.

DW: 1899.

KL: But he wasn't there in 1899 of course.

DW: Mm-hm. Did he enjoy working with kids?

KL: Oh, he enjoyed—he enjoyed working with—being around kids and teachers.

DW: And teachers.

KL: Yes, he enjoyed that—that job, yeah.

DW: Now I'm not sure, but I heard a rumor that he was well liked by many of the students in the community and many of the people in the community. Some people even regarded him as a—like a counselor 'cause some of these kids and how he interacted with them. Do you—do you know if that rumor's true?

KL: Yeah, his interaction with the—with the children, I'm sure, students that were there when he was there have told me many times if it hadn't been for Mr. Lilly, they don't know what they'd have done.

DW: [chuckles].

KL: 'Cause he was a—he was good with kids, and he liked people. He was very active in the Eagles Lodge for a number of years.

DW: Hm. So, a very active member of the community?

KL: Well, he didn't—not so much in the whole community, but in that—that Lodge, yes.

DW: Yeah, well I just—now, I'm not sure if this is true, but I heard that he worked at the theater. Is that—am I thinking of someone else?

KL: You're thinking of someone else.

DW: Okay. I just wanted to clear that up. [chuckles]. Um, okay. What—when would—when were you born? What year were you born?

KL: 1920.

DW: 1920?

KL: Yeah.

DW: Okay. So—and I think we established this, essentially about nine years prior to the Great Depression, you were—

KL: Yeah, if it began in 1929. [chuckles]. I guess so.

DW: Uh-huh. And your dad—you'd mentioned—well, I guess before we go—before we step into that direction, I—I guess I'm wondering about your youth and growing up, your elementary years here in La Grande. What area of town did you live in when you first—?

KL: We lived on the north side of La Grande.

DW: North side of La Grande?

KL: On 4th Street.

DW: Okay. And do you have any vivid memories that—

KL: Oh, yeah.

DW: stick out to you though?

KL: It was a house that my dad built the house we're at. At least he did a major part of the work, and it was—must have been built, oh, about 19—in the teens, 1916 or '17. Maybe a little earlier and it was a thirteen room house.

DW: [chuckles].

KL: For some reason they took in boarders and roomers and ended up with an apartment upstairs in my—during my youth. But yeah, it was a—a big house. It's still there. It doesn't look like it used to. Used to be a—a beautiful home; my mother was quite a gardener. And it—she kept the lawn up, or a—and the flowers and the shrubs and whatnot.

DW: [chuckles].

KL: It doesn't look like that now though.

DW: What could you have possibly done with thirteen rooms?

KL: Well, like I say, the—they took in boarders and—and roomers.

DW: Ah. What kind—?

KL: At first when they moved into the house, they brought—they—I—see I had five sisters and brothers.

DW: Okay.

KL: And—

DW: You mentioned taking in boarders and—and different folks.

KL: Yeah.

DW: What kind of a—what kind of people generally stopped in and stayed there?

KL: Well, that was before my time. [chuckles].

DW: Before your time?

KL: But I imagine they were mill people and railroad people. I can remember one roomer being a—when I was home, he worked for the railroad. And—but I imagine they were—worked at sawmills and—and whatnot around here.

DW: Hm. Do you have any memories of your neighborhood, types of, I guess, how—how it looked, the lifestyle?

KL: Well, it was—right next door there was a fam—a family. Their name was Greene, and they had, when they lived right next door to us, they got up to I think it was eleven or twelve children. And—and so we had quite a few kids in the neighborhood. And then there was—there was children all around, and we played in the neighborhood and that sort of thing. And there was always a big field to go play on. It isn't like that anymore, but that's the way it was then.

DW: Empty fields?

KL: Empty fields to go play your—your ballgames and do whatever you wanted to. And then it wasn't very far from Riveria School, and we could go over there and play on the playground.

DW: Is that where you went to—

KL: That's where I went to grade school, yeah.

DW: grade school?

KL: And it—the grade schools then were eight grades.

DW: Eight grades all in that same building?

KL: All in that same building.

DW: [laughs]. So you had real little youngsters and up to—

KL: It was grades one through eight.

DW: adolescent kids all in the same building?

KL: Mm-hm.

DW: Do you have any memories of—of going through that school?

KL: Oh yeah, I have a lot of memories of going through that school. In those days they had what they called 1B and 1A. In other words you could enter the school in the middle of the year. I suppose that was one of the reasons for that. And so you'd—you'd advance. If you could—if you started in the middle of the year, why then, you'd spend the next year or half year in 1A and so on up through the—the grades. Every grade was that way. And I think I entered Riveria School in—in 1B, if that's what it was. I don't know what the number now whether it was 1A or 1B came first, but anyway I was always in the—I'd be in the first grade, or in one grade for half a year, and I'd be in the other grade for another half. And then they'd be the same way all the way through.

DW: So you would—you'd started off the first half of the year in first grade, and then the second half of the year, you'd be in second grade—

KL: Yeah, I—

DW: in theory?

KL: because—because they had each grade divided into 1B and 1A.

DW: So, you probably weren't there too long up to eighth grade then, not as long as kids today.

KL: Oh yeah, you were there eight years.

DW: Eight years?

KL: Yeah.

DW: Okay. Um, I guess, so—so you would finish out the first nine months of school in the first grade, and then would you have a summer break? And then—

KL: Oh, they had a summer break, yeah.

DW: and then go on to the second grade? Is that—?

KL: Well, you—one school year you could be—like I entered 1B, and that was in the middle of the year. I didn't start at the first of the year. So, you finished out that 1B, then next—the following year when you came back to school, you started in 1A.

DW: [chuckles]. Okay.

KL: And then you went from 1A during that school year to 2B.

DW: To 2B—

KL: So they could—

DW: just to catch you up?

KL: Yeah.

DW: [chuckles]. Was there any awkward, I guess, interactions, having such a wide age group in the same building?

KL: Oh, no. Yeah.

DW: No?

KL: No. It—and they had sports, and when they got up in the upper grades, why you participated in the sports and—and that sort of things, so.

DW: What kind of sports do you remember?

KL: Oh, we played football and basketball. We didn't have a gym. We had to go up to the high school and use their, what they call then the little gym. And that's where the grade schools played their games. And oh yeah, I remember having track meets in the spring of the year—all—against all the grade schools.

DW: [chuckles].

KL: So it was quite a—it was a good experience.

DW: Yeah, it sounds like it.

KL: But then, you went through eighth—eighth grade through grade school, and then you went in to high school as a freshman.

DW: High school as a freshman, ninth grade?

KL: Ninth grade.

DW: And the high school was where the middle school is now?

KL: Well, it was on that corner.

DW: It was on that corner?

KL: The old Central building sat where the middle school sits. And the high school was on the—was right next to it at the corner of M and—and 4th Street.

DW: M and 4th Street?

KL: Yeah, they—

DW: Is that currently where the high school is now?

KL: No, the high school now is on K and _____.

DW: Okay. So, it was—there's no more—there's no remnants of the old high school then?

KL: No, other than one of the classes put up a plaque.

DW: [chuckles].

KL: You can still see the steps that went up to it—

DW: Went up to it?

KL: from the street—the sidewalk.

DW: That's about it? Hm, okay. You mentioned in our last interview that I thought was really interesting about the stores. But you said there were little, general stores on the corners of the—of the neighborhoods.

KL: Oh yeah, their—

DW: Were there plenty of those back then?

KL: There were numerous little, grocery stores on—on a lot of corners, and in the city, both—on both sides of the track. In fact, one of 'em sat right across the street here. But I can remember over there on the north side where we lived, there was one, two, three of 'em just within blocks of the how—house.

DW: Within blocks of that? Were those stores used for everything as far—

KL: Oh, the—

DW: as produce and products?

KL: Well, yeah, but they wouldn't stock up like a Safeway does now with produce and meat. They might have a little bit of it in there, but I imagine most of their

sales were—were me—uh, canned goods, or like milk and bread and that sort of thing. You could even buy penny candy.

DW: [chuckles]. Now when you went into those stores, was this something you would—you could go in through the aisles and pick what you wanted, or was it an over a counter?

KL: No, they went and got it for you.

DW: They went and got it for you, oh!

KL: No, that was before the supermarkets.

DW: Before the supermarkets?

KL: I mean, those days there was larger markets downtown now. There was three or four larger markets there. It was in later years, why, here came Piggly Wiggly and Safeway and all those. But then they'd put—put these small stores around town out of business of course.

DW: Mm-hm. The—is that currently when you referred to those markets, were they in the buildings that are in the historic part of the downtown area?

KL: That's right. There was—yeah. Well, I can't tell you where they exactly set, but there's—I mean the Grande Ronde Market then was, oh, it's there where a bookstore is there now. There used to be Trotter's right in that area. There's one up the street about where a beauty shop is now around in that area. And—

DW: So, how often—I'm curious how often would you—would an average person go and shop at these markets? Were they more likely to go to the neighborhood markets or the big markets—

KL: Well, they weren't all that—

DW: I guess?

KL: big. But most of those places, in those days, I remember my mother calling in and ordering and they delivered.

DW: And they'd deliver it—

KL: Yes.

DW: really?

KL: And they'd run a charge account for a month and then pay up. And that's the way my folks operated anyway.

DW: So once a month they'd pay their grocery bill?

KL: Pay their grocery bill, yeah.

DW: [chuckles]. Interesting!

KL: Yeah.

DW: Did they haul them in refrigerated vehicles or—

KL: No.

DW: the—the—the products?

KL: No, no, no. They'd just drive around in trucks.

DW: In trucks?

KL: Yeah. I suppose it's kind of like a—well, I can't remember what their delivery trucks were now, but they delivered it and might have even delivered in them cars in times.

DW: [chuckles]. And what kind of products would you generally—you said mostly canned goods. Would you go to a butcher and _____—?

KL: Yeah, they'd have a butcher in those stores.

DW: In those stores?

KL: Yeah. And you could go in there and—and order your meat from the butcher, and they had vegetables—fresh vegetables, just everything you see wanted in those days.

DW: [chuckles].

KL: It hasn't been too many years ago that Hub City down here—was called Hub City where the Presbyterian Friendship Hall is was a—was Hub City. And—and they—they had a meat counter where they butchered the meat and sold it over the counter, got it out of the case for you.

DW: Hm. That's fascinating. Um, I guess bringing it back a little bit to—to your father and going through the—the Great Depression or that time, you mentioned in our last interview, a—a payment system that they used to pay employees during—during the time; some kind of a—a note?

KL: Yeah, they were called warrants.

DW: Warrants?

KL: And—

DW: Is that—?

KL: tax—taxing bodies, like the city and the school district, they paid by warrant. And then when they got to—enough taxes collected, they'd call those warrants in. And if you held those warrants, they drew interest. So there were people around town who had money in those days would buy those warrants at a discount, and then they'd collect the interest on some of them. Unless—and that happened to a lot of people.

DW: Would you have to be fairly wealthy to—

KL: But yeah—

DW: be able to buy—?

KL: you'd have to have enough money to do that. Yeah. And I think my mother cashed some in and had it. Well, she'd—she kind of handled the fine—finances; cashed 'em in with a certain party. And course, she took a discount, but at least she had cash for 'em. Course, wages weren't all that great in those years.

DW: [chuckles]. So, how would these—I guess I'm trying to picture these warrants. Uh, did they just write down what was owed then? Or what were the—the warrant—when they got it—?

KL: Oh no, it was a legal piece of paper that was given out. And I suppose the school clerk or their—whoever issued 'em, filled 'em out. And they probably had a seal on or something. And I—to be honest with you I never saw one.

DW: Hm.

KL: But that's the way they were paid. That went on for, oh, maybe a year or two, and then when the taxing bodies got on their feet, why they started paying like they usually do like they do today.

DW: And was that just a certain time of year they used the warrants?

KL: No, that was during the Depression.

DW: Well, as far as when you got your money, you'd hold onto those warrants until like—

KL: Until they were called in.

DW: like today?

KL: And then they had to cash them.

DW: Okay. So, it would be similar to getting your—your tax payments back now in that sense?

KL: Well—

DW: Your refund at the end of the year?

KL: Well, it wasn't at the end of the year. It's—they got—whoever cashed 'em in, drew interest on 'em, and—and—and the school district had to pay the interest.

DW: Okay.

KL: So.

DW: Did it—they ever come short on paying those back that you know of?

KL: Not that I know of, no.

DW: [chuckles]. So, I guess when you were going through school, did you go through school around the—did you go through school when your dad was working there at the school?

KL: Yes, yeah.

DW: Was that—was that awkward having your dad in the school?

KL: Well, he wasn't in the same building. No, it wasn't awkward at all. I was in high school over there, and those are two separate buildings. And he had to—they had the same heating plant, but they were two separate buildings—school buildings.

DW: Okay. I guess as far as bringing it back to his popularity amongst the kids, do you know of any incidences that you remember that might have drawn him, or drawn the kids to him to have liked him so much?

KL: Oh, I really can't answer that. I don't—he—he just liked to josh with them, as he called it, and then one of 'em would get in trouble, and he'd kind of see if they were in trouble and talk to 'em a little bit and that sort of thing. But I really wasn't around with him when he was doing that.

DW: [chuckles]. Now, I guess you mentioned go—going into high school in the ninth grade. On—you were into sports in high school. Uh, which sports did you play while you were in high school?

KL: Oh, I played football, basketball, and track.

DW: Football, basketball, and track. Um, any favorite one?

KL: Well, I suppose basketball was probably the favorite one, but I just played one year of football my senior year, so.

DW: Hm. Can you say why you might have liked basketball so much?

KL: Well, I don't know. I guess I was more suited for it for a while by that time. And played it in a—you play—work your way up, you know. And you played on the—the junior varsity or the B Team, probably in your sophomore year. And—and freshman, you just played class basketball and developed a knack for it in those years. And—and then played it in my jun—in junior and senior years. And La Grande at that time had a string of—of five consecutive—well, four consecutive going to State, and we made the fifth team to go to State. So, I don't know. It was just—just a thing to do, I guess.

DW: A major form of entertainment—

KL: Well—

DW: that you did?

KL: Yeah. Well, yeah, it's a lot different than—it used to be they—in those—basketball in those days was—I think I told you the first time that we—

O: _____.

KL: They—it was during that last year I played in high school, that was the last year that they jumped ball every—after every basket. And if you had a hail ball, it was jumped anywhere on the floor. It wasn't—wasn't take the ball out of bounds.

DW: [chuckles].

KL: So, it was a—that was a kind of a milestone. Then in track, why, I ran the dashes and kind of specialized in the quarter-mile.

DW: The quarter-mile? So you were fast?

KL: Well, fairly fast.

DW: Fast and short?

KL: Went to—went to the State track meet and participated there.

DW: Was that a big event at the times _____?

KL: Oh, yeah. It was all—it was all the schools in Oregon.

DW: Including the—was there division 3A and—?

KL: No, it wasn't any divisions then.

DW: So, everyone was there?

KL: Everyone was there.

DW: [chuckles]. So that is a pretty big deal—

KL: Yeah—

DW: from here.

KL: Later the divisions came in. In fact, we competed against all of the B schools and the A schools—what they are now, the B schools and A schools.

DW: Mm-hm.

KL: And we're all in one pot.

DW: [chuckles].

KL: In fact, the year I won the—went to State basketball, the championship team was a little B school that—called—what was it called? Uh, heh, I can't think of it right offhand. Uh, Bellfountain, it was down by Salem. It doesn't even exist anymore. They had about a dozen boys in school, and they won the State Championship.

DW: So, it was possible for a smaller school to—to come through and win—

KL: Yeah.

DW: against some of the bigger schools?

KL: Yeah.

DW: Hm. That's—

KL: In fact, they beat Lincoln High School to Portland.

DW: [chuckles]. That doesn't happen—

KL: For the championship.

DW: very often over there.

KL: Well, it couldn't happen anymore.

DW: Yeah, that's pretty difficult in that sense. Um, I guess I'd like to come back to and touch on baseball, I guess, as a form of entertainment. You mentioned how the field, there—there was a field put in, and then there was a lot of baseball games.

KL: Well, I never personally played baseball for—on a team myself, but except in a sandlot, so to speak. But the high school base—baseball field was up there in the northeast corner—north—southwest corner of the—what is now the soccer field. And the high school had a team, and they competed in—well, they competed against Imbler and Elgin and all those places. And that was the start of high school baseball.

DW: [chuckles].

KL: Uh, and that—that field was put in up there when I was in high school, a grass field. And they had lights. They—they aren't there any longer. And so, we—well, our football team dedicated that in 1937.

DW: They had to—dedicated the field?

KL: Dedicated the field. And then that southwest corner was where the baseball part of it was.

DW: Hm. And that's—was there city leagues involved in playing and?

KL: Not in baseball.

DW: Not in baseball?

KL: But there was in softball.

DW: Okay, softball. And was that a big, fun, time for a lot of people?

KL: Well, that was a city—that wasn't—that was adults and whatnot played the—played the softball teams, yeah.

DW: Played the softball teams? You mentioned something about the CCC workers—

KL: Yeah, it's just—

DW: and would play.

KL: in those days, well, it was just what? In the '30's there was a CCC, Civilian Conservation Corp, up at Hilgard and they participated. A lot of those players are from back east if I remember right.

DW: Mm-hm.

KL: And they participated in the softball league.

DW: And how would—?

KL: I wasn't—I wasn't playing at that time.

DW: [chuckles].

KL: But I was just watchin'. But just—well, like the mill and Island City out here had a team, and the Elks had a team. And I can't remember all of the teams, but they competed.

DW: Were these games pretty competitive?

KL: Oh yeah, they were real competitive in a lot of cases.

DW: [chuckles]. Was there any, I guess, competition against the—real big competition against the CCC workers versus the local players, being that they're from the east coast and outsiders?

KL: Well, they were in the league like anybody else. I can remember they probably had one of the better teams.

DW: Really?

KL: But every—the city _____ people, or the ones in town or around the county were very competitive with ‘em.

DW: Hm. And would they drive in from Hilgard? Is that how they—?

KL: Oh, I suppose they trucked them in, yes.

DW: Trucked them in all together on the back of a truck?

KL: Well, they just had a team then. The whole, everybody that was at the CCC’s didn’t play. It was just the fellows that—

DW: That wanted to?

KL: that wanted to was probably the better ball players.

DW: [chuckles]. Were they—these men—I heard that often times these CCC workers were sometimes criminals or—?

KL: Not in those days.

DW: Not in those days?

KL: They were just—they’re just a result of the—of the times during the Depression. That was one of the programs that they—to get young people off the streets and get ‘em to workin’, they’d join the CCC.

DW: Do you think it added some spirit to—to Union County or La Grande?

KL: Oh, it did—

DW: Yeah?

KL: at the time I suppose, yeah.

DW: Do you have any memories of that?

KL: Well, no. I was just a young punk then, so.

DW: Yeah? [laughs].

KL: They—they were—that was just a program. It was during Roosevelt's—one of his programs.

DW: I guess one of the things I was trying to draw in last time was I was picturing that these baseball games being almost like a centerpiece of drawing the community together in—

KL: Oh, they—

DW: a form of entertainment and—

KL: The softball part of it. Not—not the baseball.

DW: Okay, we ran out of tape on side A, and this is side B now. And we're picking up the interview talking about the softball and the baseball kind of being the centerpiece, possibly for the community, drawing in the community during hard times. And you were—you were talking about the baseball and softball when we left off.

KL: Well, the—the softball would be—I can't remember how many teams, but several teams. And they'd play certain nights up at the—what—what is now the soccer field. And—and—and they had the bleachers all around the field at that time, and the bleachers aren't there any longer. And a backstop, of course, and I think they charged a nickel to get into the game. And they just had this regular scheduled softball. It was during the summertime.

DW: Hm. Now you said those bleachers—was this like a stadium made out of—out of wood, or was this just similar to what we have now, the portable, steel, bleachers?

KL: No, the—they were all wood, and of course, they became in disrepair over the years and had to be disposed of. But I think they even took one over to the new college field over there—had one or two of 'em. And there was just sections of 'em up here on the soccer field not—not too long ago. I think they had to be replaced, but they were there for up until just two or three years ago. And they encircled that field up there, the soc—what is now the soccer field in those days. And they were there for years.

DW: How many people would come and watch these games, do you think?

KL: Well, they'd fill those bleachers, particularly if there was like a playoff game or something. They'd fill those. They were just in that one end of the field they'd fill 'em. It wasn't all the way around.

DW: All the way around? Um, how—if you can take an estimate, what do you think would be the—the number of people that would come to these games and?

KL: Oh, I wouldn't have any idea of what it was, but it would be—

DW: In the hundreds?

KL: maybe it would be in the hundreds, yeah.

DW: Hm. And do you have any type of—something that brings you back to these games, certain smells, or—or maybe a sound, or something that could bring back a—a memory of them for—? You said you were young, obviously, and.

KL: Oh, I'm kind of reminded of 'em, how we—how they did it in those days, going to see the Little League and all that that we see now. And so—but they're—I just got memories of going to those games, that's all.

DW: [chuckles]. Now, after you—you graduated from high school, what was your next step in life that—that you decided to take?

KL: Well, I went to Willamette University.

DW: Right out of high school?

KL: Yeah, right out of high school. In Salem, and graduated with the class that made that school a hundred years old. And it's one claim to fame is it's the oldest university west of the Mississippi.

DW: Hm.

KL: Its _____, I guess it would be.

DW: Yeah. [chuckles]. 'Cause it's not getting any younger.

KL: No.

DW: [chuckles].

KL: So, it's—the school was a hundred years old when I graduated.

DW: What was your interest? What were you—?

KL: Oh, I more—more or less took kind of a business course.

DW: Business?

KL: Played basketball and track.

DW: Did you have any dreams of what you wanted to be once you graduated?

KL: No, that was a liberal arts college, and—and it just so happened that the—the war was on. And recruits—recruiting officers came to this—to the school and recruited people, and so I joined up. But you had to graduate before you could get into it. I got into the V—V-7 Program as they called it. Got sent to Chicago to Northwestern University and came out of there with an Ensign's—as an Ensign and then went to war. I went to sea. [chuckles].

DW: [chuckles]. Was there a certain excitement, I guess, at the time when you got—with this war going on and—and—?

KL: Well, everybody—it was a war that everybody was—was into it. They knew that we'd—they knew that we'd been attacked, and they—they were gonna—we just had to win it. And it was dif—altogether different feeling than the one we're in now with Iraq.

DW: As far as you—could you make a comparison of—of the attacks? How—how people felt after the—our most recent attack and how people felt at the time, or how you felt at the time when—?

KL: Well, Pearl Harbor was a—was a real surprise. And—and it just so happened, the Atlanta football team was over there at that time, so you had a lot of memories of that. And I wasn't with them, but then of course, I knew a lot of the players in the—the—but this was entirely different attack, I think. But in—in a—well, not maybe so much different because they—they used suicide

bombers and whatnot in—in Pearl Harbor. And so, people were—in the other side were committing suicide. You just—but it really drew the—the nation together.

DW: Mm-hm.

KL: And—

DW: Did you have a certain sense of duty that you felt you just—you needed to do?

KL: Oh, no. You either—you either joined up, or you got drafted, so.

DW: [chuckles].

KL: In those days. And that hasn't happened today—today yet. But so, it was better to enlist than it was to get drafted, and at least you had a little choice.

DW: Mm-hm. Now, when you got out of the Navy, right?

KL: Yeah.

DW: When you got out of the Navy, did you return right back to Union County, or was there—?

KL: Yeah, I returned to Union County and spent a—took a job down in Portland working for Portland PGE in the customer service department. Well, I could see there wasn't any future in that, so I came back here and went to school up here and got a teacher's degree. And that's how I got into teaching profession.

DW: Now you—now you said that there wasn't a future in—in be—in working in customer service, and you came back over here out of—I guess I'm curious out of all the possibilities you could have had, you—you were wanting to get into teaching. And your initial major when you were in college was business. Is there any particular reason you decided on teaching?

KL: Well, you had to have something to—to nab onto when you graduated. And that seem—and the school up here was a good education school, and—and I just felt more at home. And—and of course, the GI Bill was in effect so that paid for it.

DW: Hm.

KL: And I just wanted to come back here.

DW: Did Union County, and I guess La Grande in particular, did it—was there a change after you got back, or was it pretty much the same place for you? Did you have a—was there a different feeling when you came back after traveling—

KL: Oh—

DW: and going to sea and—?

KL: Course, a lot of your friends and whatnot have probably left the community, but not really ‘cause my—well, I started teaching school even before I finished school up here. I got a job over at the old Central where my dad was a janitor previously. He wasn’t there then, but then I just felt more at home.

DW: Was it the same school building that—

KL: The same school building—

DW: your dad worked at?

KL: yeah. The same one.

DW: Was there still people there that remembered your dad and—?

KL: Oh, yeah. Yeah, there—in fact, I taught with three or four of ‘em in the—

DW: College teachers?

KL: No, they were—they were grade school. In fact, I taught with two of there that taught me in grade school.

DW: [chuckles]. Wow. So um, I guess I’m curious as to the—the teaching in Union County at the time after you came back. And—and did—is there any, I guess, positive memories that you had when you were teaching that you can remember? Or maybe even some—some bad memories that stand out of your career? You had—obviously had a very long teaching career, and there’s got to be some very amazing events that occurred throughout that time.

KL: Well, there's probably a lot of 'em. But first year was a seventh grade teaching assignment, and there were about, close to thirty-eight kids in the room. And that particular group of kids had their high school reunion here just last summer.

DW: Hm.

KL: Or last—summer before last. And I went down to that and saw those people that I taught the first year I taught school--

DW: [chuckles].

KL: a good share of 'em. And from there I went into the—they put me in the science. Downstairs in the—in those days, they had all the eighth grades go to the old Central building, and they were down on the first floor. And I was in that job two years. Well, that's where I taught with Miss Mager and then Mrs. Hester who taught me in grade school. And from there, they assigned me a principalship down at Willow School, and I was there for several years. And then spent as a principal at Central and Greenwood all of them except Island City. In fact, I was even at the Junior High School for three years.

DW: For three years, and how long did you teach before you moved into administration?

KL: About three years.

DW: Three years? And was—was there any particular reason you decided to go into administration, or—?

KL: Well, they offered me the job, and I took it.

DW: And you took it?

KL: Yeah, it was different in those days. It—they—there wasn't so many hoops to jump through. And they—they took me out of the eighth grade at—at—at the Junior—or at teaching eighth grade science and—and assigned me to Willow School, and—and so I took it.

DW: So you took it? While you were teaching here in the—in the County, were there other—other activities you—you partook in besides the—the teaching forum?

KL: Oh, I—I officiated for several years, basketball and football at the—around the area at the college and whatnot. So that was of interest in those days. Course, you get too old for that pretty soon.

DW: You have—

KL: [laughs].

DW: a lot of running around, isn't it? [laughs]. Did you coach at all?

KL: Yeah, I coached them in grade school my first year, and—and oh, probably the most coaching I did was the eighth grade basketball team.

DW: So when you say grade school, you're still referring to the first through eighth grade?

KL: No. In the—in the seventh grade, the schools in those days—when I started teaching we were going one through seven. And I happened to have the seventh grade at Central—the old Central. And I coached the football and the basketball and the track and whatnot. And they paid you a hundred and eighty dollars a year for it. And a—

DW: [chuckles]. For all of those to get combined?

KL: They all—all—all of 'em combined.

DW: [chuckles]. The—the volunteer thing essentially.

KL: Well, more or less, but anyway.

DW: Yeah. [chuckles].

KL: I did that, and then when I was in eighth grade, I coached the eighth grade basketball and helped with the football.

DW: For eighth grade as well?

KL: Well, they combined the football eighth and ninth, and I helped there. But in basketball they separated them and had eighth and ninth, and I did the eighth grade.

DW: Did you have any memorable moments coaching—

KL: Oh, yeah.

DW: that standout? Maybe—

KL: We—we almost won all of our games, and—and went to Hill Military to a tournament. I think we took third.

DW: Hill Military? I wa—I'm not familiar with that.

KL: Oh, that's down in Portland. I don't think it exists anymore, so.

DW: You took a trip over there to compete?

KL: Yeah, so.

DW: Did you enjoy your coaching experience?

KL: Oh yeah, but once you get to be in administration, you can't do both of 'em, so.

DW: Were you involved in any Veteran's organizations while you were here?

KL: No, I really didn't. I never did join the Legion or the—well, I joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars, but I didn't keep up with the membership.

DW: Mm-hm. Is there any particular reason?

KL: No. No [chuckles].

DW: [chuckles]. I know of some peep—some—that'd be fine. My grandfather's very into that and adamant. I'm just curious, not—'cause not everyone is, and why you might have—

KL: Oh—

DW: might not have been some—

KL: No, I didn't have anything against either organization. I just never joined.

DW: Hm. What about other forms of activities? Did you—that you took—took part in when you weren't working just for entertainment? You and your wife—

KL: Oh gosh, that's hard to answer. I don't know. She had some social groups, and we participated in those. And we belong—I belong to the Elks, and I belong to the Lion's Club. So, really we were kept quite busy 'cause we were both teaching.

DW: Mm-hm. And yeah, it is a busy job for sure. What kind of things did the Elks, Elk's Lodge do? Do they—was it pretty much the same type of functions that they do today, or do you have any memories of that?

KL: Oh yeah, I still belong to the Elks, and it's a good organization. It's just like every other organization, they hard—they have a hard time keeping members. It's just a sign of the times. But the Elks give more scholarships than any other organization in the United States. And they promote youth activities, and—and of course, have their own social events and that sort of thing. And they do a lot of good things.

DW: Now you mentioned in, I guess, back in your youth, attending theaters—going to the theater. Where was that theater located?

KL: There were three—three theaters. One is where Domino's Pizza is now. That's a theater. In fact, the stage is still there, I understand.

DW: Hm.

KL: There's one—there was one about where the nightclub is there, the Tropicana. And there's one—and then the Granada, and that's still there.

DW: Is that still there?

KL: Yeah.

DW: Was the outside theater—

KL: Oh, the—the—well, that came in in later years that a—

DW: In later years?

KL: Yeah.

DW: Do you have any memories of those theaters? I guess, how—how often—?

KL: Oh, yeah. Used to—used to have down at the Granada, we used to go, I think there was one night a week you got in for two for fifteen cents or something like that. And the Liberty was the—the more plush one. And they had ushers and women that—or girls that ushered and whatnot and had a balcony.

DW: Which one was the Liberty?

KL: The one where Domino's is.

DW: Okay.

KL: The—

DW: So—

KL: The—

DW: the balcony—?

KL: The high school used to have their operettas down there 'cause they didn't have a place at the high school. And the State Theatre wasn't—didn't function too many years.

DW: The State Theatre?

KL: Yeah, it was called the State Theatre is where the Tropidera is.

DW: Was it—why would they call it that?

KL: I don't know why they called it that.

DW: [chuckles]. Was it based on the state of Oregon?

KL: No, it was just—all I know, it's called the State Theatre.

DW: The State Theatre, that's interesting.

KL: As far as I know. I don't know why they called the Liberty, "Liberty" or the Granada, "Granada."

DW: So you would go—would you go almost every night to a theater?

KL: Oh, no, no.

DW: Okay. [chuckles]. I thought you'd mentioned—you said that once a night.

KL: Well, one night a week. That was when we was—

DW: Oh, one night a week.

KL: Yeah. That was at the Granada.

DW: Two for—two people for fifteen cents? [chuckles].

KL: Yeah, one night a week.

DW: [chuckles]. I heard there was sometimes pranks that went along with the—those theaters in the times.

KL: Well, their—their shows weren't—they—they'd have a newscast, and—and then a comedy, and a—and a—and a—a—what do you call 'em where—like Mickey Mouse—cartoon, and then the previews, and then the main feature. And a lot of 'em picked there at the Granada—what kept you going back was each week was—they had us what they called a serial. And then it ought to be a cowboy show of some sort and some—something dangerously would happen at the end of one episode, and you'd have to come back the next week to see what—what took place. How they got out of that.

DW: And it'd just be a continuation?

KL: Yeah, they'd go on for twelve or thirteen—

DW: When you say serial, I guess, how would you spell that?

KL: S-E-R-I-A-L.

DW: I-A-L? Do you know why they called them that?

KL: Well, it was a series that—

DW: Series? Okay.

KL: series of events.

DW: And they were usually westerns or—?

KL: Yeah, most generally westerns. In fact, they were all westerns.

DW: [laughs]. That's cruel! [laughs]. Keep you waiting all week until the next— [chuckles] the next episode. Is there, I guess, any other memories that stick out about the theaters and maybe how they looked?

KL: Well, like I say, the Liberty was the more plush and—

DW: They would usher you?

KL: They'd usher you to your seat, and there was a balcony and—and a—and a downstairs.

DW: What was the downstairs?

KL: Yeah, just like seats you have, they'd be soft seats and that sort of thing.

DW: Oh, okay. I see, there's an upper—did those seats up above cost more?

KL: No.

DW: Just whoever got 'em first?

KL: That's where you took your date.

DW: [laughs]. That was—was that often what it was used for?

KL: Well yeah, the young folks sat up there more or less.

DW: [chuckles]. So, did you meet your wife here in Union County?

KL: No, I met my wife in the service.

DW: In the service?

KL: In Chicago.

DW: Okay, I think you were mentioning that in the last interview, and at what point did you get married and—and decide that—?

KL: Oh, we got married in '44, and we got married here in La Grande. She came out here, and so we've lived here sixty year—we've been married sixty years plus now.

DW: So—so, did—was she originally from Chicago?

KL: Well, she's from Illinois, yeah.

DW: From Illinois?

KL: Yeah, she was not—she's working in Chicago at the time.

DW: Was there a hard time—a hard adjustment for her coming out west as far as a different culture and being that far away from family?

KL: Oh yeah, but she couldn't—she's still not used to all the mountains. [chuckles].

DW: [chuckles].

KL: Well, but she's made her—

DW: What do you mean by that—

KL: made her friends. Well, she just—

DW: not used to the mountains?

KL: Well, they don't have mountains in Illinois. It's all flat. And here you're enclosed in mountains more or less.

DW: [chuckles]. Was there, I guess—what was her perception of Union County when she first moved here?

KL: Oh, I think she missed being back where—with her folks. We took some trips back there, of course, but over the years, why she's adjusted and been very active in several organizations and whatnot.

DW: Mm-hm. Well, you oftentimes hear the, I guess the myth of—of the west and what the west represents, and did that fulfill her expectations? Did La Grande fulfill her expectations, maybe of what the—the west was?

KL: Oh, I don't know. [chuckles].

DW: [chuckles].

KL: You'd have to ask her.

DW: [chuckles].

KL: I don't know about that, but it wasn't all that wild then.

DW: Hm. Okay. I appreciate your time with this interview and—and setting down with me a second time. And I think we got most of the information I came to collect, and I appreciate it.

KL: I appreciate you coming.

DW: [chuckles].

KL: Hope it [chuckles] solves a problem.

DW: [laughs].

[audio ends]

[audio begins]

DW: So, your father during the Depression would—would get—they were called warrants?

KL: Warrants, yeah.

DW: How would you spell that?

KL: W-A-R-R-A-N-T-S.

DW: W-A-R-R—?

KL: A—A—

DW: A?

KL: N-T-S.

DW: Warrants. The employer—the employer would give those out or—?

KL: Well, the—this is true—this is true of the school district, and I assume other governmental places. Each of these—their salary each month with a warrant, and in order to get your money out of it to live on, you'd have to cash it in by people that had money that buy these warrants, and they would draw the interest then, the people that purchased it. See, it was a good investment because they knew they were gonna get their money.

DW: Eventually? [chuckles].

KL: Eventually. And that went on for quite a few years.

DW: It did? I could imagine some people saying, “Well, I’m not gonna accept that ‘cause I want money right now.”

KL: Well, they had to have it to pay their bills.

DW: Yeah.

KL: But somebody that had a little money, why, they could clean up real well.

DW: So, when—when would they come through on these warrants?

KL: Well, the—if you held onto them, they'd become—you could cash them in when the tax—they collected enough tax to distribute to the various governmental groups.

DW: They'd get a little bit?

KL: They'd—they'd—they'd buy—buy ‘em off and pay the interest.

DW: Hm. So, your dad, I would imagine, had a pretty good job being a government employee.

KL: Well, he was gettin' paid by warrants, but he—he—he wouldn't have money unless he cashed in those warrants.

DW: Yeah.

KL: And he couldn't—he wasn't in a position to hold 'em.

DW: Mm-hm.

KL: So. And then that—during the Depression the banks all went broke.

DW: Here in La Grande?

KL: And _____, maybe not all of them, yeah, no.

DW: Hm.

KL: And—but I don't know if my folks had a tidy sum in there or not, but I know they lost some money when the—because of the bank, and there wasn't anyone in the world to get that money right.

DW: So what were the other folks, and then you'd have to leave the county, or how did they—?

KL: Well, that was true all over the nation.

DW: Yeah.

KL: It wasn't just in La Grande.

DW: Wasn't just in La Grande, but particularly this county and La Grande? What kind of—the town must have really shrunk or—?

KL: Oh, I can't remember it shrinking. It was probably around six thousand people, or seven thousand then.

DW: Even then?

KL: But that's when F.D.R. came in with all these new programs. That's how we got everything with a label on it, and WPA was one of 'em.

DW: Yep, which built the gym at the school and—

KL: Yeah.

DW: and what oth—what other—?

KL: For all I know, they probably did other things, but that was all over the nation that take that money that way. Course, somebody had to pay for it sometime down the road.

DW: Yeah.

KL: We probably went in debt for it—

DW: Yeah, I'm sure.

KL: nationwide.

DW: [chuckles]. Did it seem like a real big relief at the time, or—

KL: Well, I ride—

DW: how did your father feel about that?

KL: Well, I don't know. See, Dad didn't handle the money. My mother handled the money.

DW: Ah, really? Wow.

KL: And he—at least he had a job. There's a lot of people that didn't have a job. So we never went hungry or anything.

DW: There's always food on the table?

KL: Yeah. Oh, another thing on that field up there that was mentioned earlier, in the summertime, La Grande back in the '30's had men's softball teams. Now they have Little League, you know. But there was men's softball teams, and that

used to draw people up there to sit in that southwest corner of that field to watch those—those games. And I think they charged a nickel to get in, something like that. And—

DW: _____ a game?

KL: But there was—one of the—there was a CCC Camp up at Hilgard, Civilian Conservation Corp. And that was another thing that was—that was going for the De—during the Depression to get people back to work. So they'd come out and these fellows, particularly here, probably came from the east. And they had 'em out in the woods doing work and that sort of thing. And they got their board and room out of it and probably a little stipend. But anyway, they were one of the softball teams.

DW: [chuckles].

KL: And we, in this—in the—it really used to draw crowds—

DW: Wow. Probably didn't know—

KL: and go out there and watch 'em.

DW: what that was.

KL: Well, it was just a sign—

DW: _____?

KL: it was just the time. And there was a lot of interest in it, and so they—oh, I remember the Elks had them a team, and—and the CCC, and they'd really get to compete. Nowadays, why it's all Little League and that sort of thing.

DW: Mm-hm. You think it might have created some kind of tradition here that's maybe stayed? Well—

KL: No, I don't think it had a thing to do with that. That's just like a lot of other things. It—it runs its course, and that's it.

DW: Yeah. Do you think, _____-- I mean that would've been fascinating I think to have people drawn into—to watch something like that.

KL: Oh, yeah.

DW: So, was there not too many other forms of entertainment?

KL: Well yeah, that's true. Yeah, television wasn't a-goin', and of course you had radio, but you didn't have the television. And that television changed a lot of things.

DW: From a movie theater and a—

KL: Go in town in La Grande there were three theaters, one in—well, it's where Domino Pizza is right now.

DW: Oh, yeah.

KL: And another one about in there where the Elkhorn is. And another one down where it is now. It was called the Granada. The other one was called the State, and then the first one where Domino's was was called the Liberty Theatre. And they tell me that the stage is still in that building, in the Liberty. And the—I don't know if the balcony still is. It had a balcony and—and downstairs. It was quite a thing. That's what you did on Sunday, and take the girl to—to the show.

DW: [laughs].

KL: Sit in the balcony.

DW: Did you ever do that?

KL: Oh, yeah.

DW: [chuckles]. And those were plays like—?

KL: Oh no, it was a movie.

DW: Movies?

KL: Yeah. Speakers that—oh, that they—what the talkies came in in what, the early '30's or late '20's?

DW: Mm-hm.

KL: That where that—you never—I don't know. It's hard to get used to all these new films.

DW: Yeah, why is that?

KL: Oh, they—they don't seem to be real to life.

DW: [chuckles].

KL: They jump from one thing to another and a lot of noise and whatnot.

DW: [chuckles].

KL: And these are just downright good family livin'.

DW: Yeah.

KL: For the most part.

DW: [chuckles]. High quality films?

KL: And really, you'd go to the show, and—and the first thing you'd see would be a newsreel.

DW: Hm

KL: Then you'd see, maybe the previews for the next few weeks. Then they'd have a comedy of some sort, and then they'd have a cartoon. Then you'd have the main feature. Now you go, and they can just see the main feature.

DW: Pretty much. What were the newsreels usually about?

KL: Well, it was _____ was a—was a newscaster in those days. I can remember him being on there. And oh, what was the other one? I can't think of it right now. But he—they'd narrate those films—those newscasts.

DW: Hm.

KL: I think they were put on a lot by RKeyO's—RKO. And RKO doesn't hear us anymore.

DW: What's RKO?

KL: Oh, what was it? He was in one of the first movie outfits.

DW: Wow.

KL: You probably could—I can't tell you what it stands for.

DW: [chuckles]. One of the early—?

KL: Yeah.

DW: Did you listen much to the local radio station and—?

KL: The local radio station didn't get here 'til around—well, it was when I was in high school, I think. In fact, getting back to the football game, I think that was also one of the first football games they broadcast in La Grande.

DW: Was on with the local radio station?

KL: Yeah. It was KLBM.

DW: KLBM?

KL: And—

DW: So they would broadcast from the local high school game?

KL: Yeah, yeah. Well, they did that for years.

DW: _____?

KL: I don't know, maybe it was. They just still do it in _____.

DW: Was that a—another big part of the entertainment maybe?

KL: Oh, yeah, yeah. Oh yeah, people went to—to the games. They were well-attended, and—and—well, television just changed a lot of things really.

DW: How'd it do that?

KL: Well, people could sit at home and—

DW: Do you think that would have—

KL: be in their—

DW: make account for—for less attendance at the softball games and—

KL: Oh, yeah.

DW: football games?

KL: Oh, I'm sure, eventually, yeah. Oh, I imagine that softball went out when the war started and that sort of thing.

DW: That's a good point. That could have been another reason for its not continuing like it once did, when the war came.

KL: Oh yeah, that changed things.

DW: How many people do you think from this, and even in your Union County, ended up going to serve in the war effort?

KL: No, I couldn't tell you that. I don't—but have you seen the—the Observer has put up, I think two additions of service people who served in—during World War II.

DW: Hm.

KL: I've got copies of 'em down at the printers, but.

DW: Did it—did the war affect, like the mills around here, or—?

KL: Well, I don't think a mill got it deferred. Some of the railroaders did as they had to run the trains. They got deferred. There's still some of those people went in the service.

DW: Mm-hm. But as far as jobs, I'm sure they needed welding—all that sort of thing during the war.

KL: Oh, yeah.

DW: And were the mill—mills _____ or—?

KL: Well, that's another thing. The mill would—now you don't see any waste in the mill—mills. There used to be that people burned mill wood in—in—well, they took with them. And then they had the—what they called box wood. It was real. I think they made boxes and there was a real smooth finish, and you burned down that, and then you used it for kindling.

DW: Huh.

KL: And the rest of it was a load of mill wood that you'd burn in the furnace or some stove that you had, and then you'd order cordwood. And it'd maybe come in four-foot lengths. Then you'd have to get it sawed up. People that went around doing that for you.

DW: [chuckles].

KL: And they heated their house with this cordwood.

DW: Really? And that's instead of coal or—?

KL: Yeah, that—yeah, right.

DW: I know that some of the houses around here have those old coal chutes that would come in. Were they using those when you were young?

KL: Oh yeah, yeah. Now you're—well, my folks always burned wood within it—in their household on 4th Street. But I'm sure it's probably heated by gas now. But this house here living in currently was a coal stoker when we moved here.

DW: Hm?

KL: And they've since converted to gas, but now there's nothing. It's like at the school they would—out behind every school in town, there'd be four-foot cordwood stacked up.

DW: Really?

KL: And cords and cords of it. And they had the furnaces then that course, they heated the water in the boilers and that sort of thing. And they heated the—and used four-foot wood. They didn't chop it up into finer, shorter lengths—

DW: [chuckles].

KL: at the schools. Course at home, had to get it chopped into what? Fourteen inch or twelve inch lengths.

DW: Yeah. Okay. I think that's enough of everything. There's—I think—well I appreciate the interview and the time.

KL: Well, [chuckles]—

DW: [chuckles].

KL: such as it was. I'll sign this thing, and—
[audio ends]