Robert Terry

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RT: …no middle…no middle name. Born September 29th, 1926 in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Don't remember much about Arkansas because I moved to Oregon shortly after that.

ES: Now as I remember, Lucky Trice was also born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Is that true?

RT: When you get back to his part of the story, but I moved to Oregon. My grandfather migrated to Oregon 1918 to 19…right after World War I. And he went to Maxville.

ES: Specifically to work in lumber?

RT: In logging, yes. My family ___ from logging to logging. And we kind of moved around from camp to camp. Wherever they could find a place that were accepting.

ES: Do you know how he found out that there was an opportunity there?

RT: I have no idea. I idea to whom he had spoken. We went back to Pine Bluff and talked with some of the people that were alive at the time and all they could remember him being very enthusiastic 'cause he was tryin' to get us to go. And one of the things that he did with the lumber company he went back to recruit workers.

ES: Was it the Bowman Hicks Lumber Company at that time?

RT: Bowman Hicks Lumber Company. I've…they went back and forth. The only way they could travel…now they didn't have money so they had to hobo. They caught the freight train and it took, you know, two to three weeks or sometime a month for them to get back and forth. So he did that for a number of years, hoboing this lumber company bringing in black workers.

ES: Why, do you suspect, they wanted African-American workers?

RT: Labor cheaper. One of the things I find in looking at the history of the ___ they look quite larger to go in and get the prime timber. They would…they would harvest the fine timber. They had to bring in low pay…low pay black workers to finish up clean up the area. And I kind of gather that from looking at the history of how the movement of natural was precipicated. The black farmers lived on one part and the white had ___ the old way like living in the South. It was a regular little city. It had a hospital, a hotel, café, that dairy that I showed you. It was all populated, but it was segregated. The blacks lived in one part, whites lived in another.

ES: And do you think…you assume that all these building and planning for the building was done by the lumber company?

RT: I'm not sure. I have to assume that Long Bell Lumber Company, which was one that Bowman Hicks was subsidiary of Long Bell.

ES: Oh, I didn't know that.

RT: Yeah. Because my grandfather had worked for Long Bell and that's how he knew about this job. That's what I got from my grandfather. [laugh] Anyhow, he had worked. And I guess one of the things that you can think about for that time

being able to read and write was really an access word for an African-American. And he did read quite well and my grandmother pretty well read.

ES: Had he gone through high school in Pine Bluff?

RT: No he hadn't. He hadn't gone to high school in Pine Bluff, be he had gone to school, which was somethin' that was really…something really special. You look back in the late 1800s and early 1900s. I would say that eighty-five to ninety percent of the black people did not read or write. In fact, my grandmother taught many of the young people at Maxville to read. And she only had a fourth grade education.

ES: But there was a school there?

RT: They had a school and…

ES: But only for the whites?

RT: The __ school was built for the whites. Now…and I'm not quite sure how the black school came about because… I think that that may have been something requested by the black lumberman. I don't know, but I know if you get through it you kind of wonder there was something there that was not quite a matching.

ES: Most of these men were fairly young.

RT: They were all young.

ES: And did most of them bring wives?

RT: No, they didn't bring wives. Look, I say they came on the freight train. And if we start [laugh] ___

ES: But I was just thinking…

RT: But once they had earned enough money they would send back for a wife or a mother. And that's getting to how I got here. Okay, alright, okay.

ES: I should just shut up and let you talk. [laughs]

RT: Anyhow, this went back and forth and my grandfather had come back to Arkansas. And my mother…they were through…had gone back to Oregon where she was pregnant. But something happened and we belated. So I was born in Arkansas, but in the interim my grandfather died. And that's left my grandmother and I in Arkansas for two years longer than they had anticipated. Lafayette, or Lucky as you know, was also…was in Maxville and the thing my grandfather had made sure was that get…get the boy, which was me and Ella, his wife, and get 'em out here, you know, if that's the last thing you do. So that's one of the things he worked toward was having enough money to send to get my grandmother and I in 1930. And we got the train and then we went to Wallowa and into Maxville. And it was quite an exciting place for me. I'd never seen a mountain [laugh] and the animals. It was a beautiful place.

ES: You were four years old at that point.

RT: Mm-hmm.

ES: When do you start having memories of how it really looked? At what age?

RT: The amazing thing I remember from four years.

ES: From four years old?

RT: Yeah.

ES: That is remarkable.

RT: And I hadn't realized that until I was explaining something and they start looking at me and said, "___ my grandmother's age, but no way anyone could have told

him that." ___ 'Cause I can remember my grand…my grandfather had lost his left leg in an accident and he had an artificial leg that he wore on Sundays and he wore the peg for working. If you notice a person with one limb there's a skip when they walk. And with the peg leg he would skip and a clunk. And that's when I could tell Grandpa was coming. And that was…I was just, you know, ___. But anyhow, I remember going hunting with him and my grandmother said, "There's no way anyone could have told you that." [laugh] I said, "No. I remember he shot the rabbit."

ES: Do you remember the train, getting to La Grande?

RT: I remember getting on the train. I remember…what I remember mostly on the train was getting on the train and riding for a long time ____ little kid. And then one day the train stopped and we got off and we got back on for the white people with us. We rode until we got to the Mason-Dixon line segregated. And then…because a little…another youngster a little older than me we became friends. And I remember that 'cause I…they were surprised to see these people when they got on there, growing up in the area, you know, and knowing that we seldom saw white person, very seldom. But it was kind of different. As kids, you know, we'd always get together and just play. And then we got…we'd been through La Grande and my first experience in La Grande was going to a little café called John's Kitchen. Now I don't know if you've got that anywhere in your notes. Alright. John Stewart was African-American. He fed probably one of the best cafes in La Grande. Now his connection was the Union Pacific Railroad. He was the head chef for the entire Union Pacific Railroad Company, which was something at that time was…really was amazing. But he was kind of slight man, well spoken. I remember that. I was older when he died. And he was always trying to reinforce getting an educations. That's how your gonna make it. And Jenny, his wife, was the same way.

ES: Do you now know anything about his background? How he became a chef? Or how long he did that? Or why he came to La Grande?

RT: One of the problems when you're young you're…call it stupidity, not asking questions.

ES: I thought maybe later you had learned.

RT: I didn't. The thing is he died, his wife died and then I was just getting out of high school and went into the service and came back and started to develop an interest in __ and the history of the little __ and start asking some questions. But I waited too late because most of the people died out before I could get…get answers. So I thought, well, you know, someday I'll try to dig it out and never did.

ES: Do you have any way of knowing where in La Grande his café was?

RT: It was on Depot.

ES: On Depot?

RT: You know where the station is now?

ES: Yeah.

RT: Just across the street on the corner. John's Kitchen. And, uh, very popular place. Excellent food. I __everything always. [laugh] The other place…he was one of the black __ of men. And one other who probably knows the different men is Craig Warrior. And I know you've never heard that name.

ES: How do you spell it?
RT: And I'm not sure.
ES: Warrior as in fighter?
RT: I would write it that way as in fighter. But in the pronunciation sometimes…okay, let me divert here. I was trying to find some information on a Flauncy Cooper. And I was talking to my uncle and he looked at me. He said, "Do you mean Flauncy Cupper?" I says, "No. It's spelled Coo…" he said, "That's Cupper." Okay. [laughs] She was probably the third black teacher at Maxville. And somehow they would not allow her to remain there even though she was credentialed, but she was credentialed to teach to Arkansas. And somehow they would not let her teach. And they ended up, the Cooper family, they lived in La Grande for a while and then they moved back to Arkansas. But Frank was a college graduate or __. And I'm not sure which college. Didn't know to ask that. Except that, you know, you could all remember when you were working and living and hearing people talk and not sounding like the other loggers, you know. Different and a little, you know, very articulate. Any question I could ask he would answer, you know. And so he…I really kind of liked him. He was…I kind of followed him around and asked a lot of questions. I've always been that way. 'Cause my grandmother would get so crazy and my grandfather's say, "What are you gonna do with that boy, Ella? He's drivin' me nuts!" [laughs] I was just curious.
ES: A kid.
RT: Yeah. And I'm getting off the track. But you want to kind of know what that is. I came to La Grande, spend the day at John's Kitchen. My uncle…they call him Lucky, his name was Lafayette. And I don't think anyone hardly realized, though, that the man is Lafayette Trice. So his tombstone had Lucky Trice on __. But he was Lafayette. And he came, picked us up and drove us back to Maxville. And I spent the next several years at Maxville before finally having to come back to La Grande because there was no school in Maxville at that time. And Wallowa was impossible in the winter to get out. The snow was four to five feet deep. So we moved back into La Grande and I started to school at Greenwood School. Finished up there…that was quite exciting to come into a __ school. I could read. And remember getting into the first grade and then, you know, going through the little __ and things and I could always read 'em. My teacher looked at me like I was strange and wanted to know where I learned to read. And I said, "Well, grandmother. Don't grandmother teach everybody to read?" [laughs] 'Cause she had taught so many people.
ES: Alright.
RT: I remember being on the train. Why I didn't write down… When I did become interested I would scribble what I remembered consistent. And I would scribble notes and things that I was kind of curious about, what interested me. Observations that you have of __. And I think probably living in an environment where you are a minority, but you are really a minority when you are the only one. I think probably considering growing up in that little town was a very fortunate thing for me. I did get a good education. I did develop skills of communication and learning to live with other people and trying to understand

some of their biases and things and trying to look at them from both sides. So it gave me that insight on how to work with people who are difficult sometimes who did not want to work with you.

ES: I can't think at the moment what there might have been about the people in La Grande whom you had contact with that would have helped you do that.

RT: It's…I'm another step into high school. Went through the elementary at Greenwood and to Central. We all came into one junior high school, or middle school they call it now, all the city, all the schools. We had only one Central Junior High. And we spent two years there. And I had gotten an advanced math class somehow. I guess tracking and working with the students you don't realize the records that are passed along and I didn't know how I was in some of those classes until my twentieth anniversary. And I went back and one the teachers was there and she…her comment was ___ was true. "All of you," she was speaking to a group of us, "were kind of picked to be successful and was placed in a special type program." Now I didn't know that and none of the rest of 'em did.

ES: You probably felt it, though.

RT: You kind of wondered why you were getting ___.

ES: You can tell when people are approving of your performance.

RT: Yeah. And why I was selected to go Ackerman which was the school for the summer program that was an enrichment where you got to out and do all kinds of different __ school. So you start wondering about that. And since I got older I realized why. To give you that exposure and everything. But the thing that I wanted to bring to your attention is how did I develop that kind of sense. I was a pretty good athlete. And was the only freshman, when I was in high school, to be on the varsity basketball, football, track.

ES: __

RT: Yeah. ___ They had a…they had classes that were set for this group of students that they were…that they'd been watching, but because of my being involved in athletics I couldn't get into that core program. So I got to take my math from another…from an instructor that was not…

ES: Purely a better schedules?

RT: Reschedules. Couldn't… So I was scheduled into this math class and I had been taught if you don't understand ask questions. So I asked a question and the retort was, "If you don't know that you shouldn't be in this class." And I'm going "whoa." So I went by…

ES: Was this algebra level?

RT: Mm-hmm. So I didn't understand why, you know, the person would make that comment so I went back to the teacher who had been my principal and one of the people who had always been there, you know, for me. And I said…I just asked why I'm in this class if I don't understand this question. And I'd never heard Ronald swear and he said, "That bitch." [laugh] He said, "I'll take care of it." And he went…when he came back he said I'm putting in another class. It's just not gonna work." So was gathering there was some animosity or some hesitancy. So you stop listening to these little things, you know, and okay. But what was just because that…that I'm the only one and then pretty soon you could start being…seeing the sensitivity and the…sometime there is a freezing. You walk in

the door and you can tell immediately. Okay, you know. You get that second sense that you…if you're living it. When you're not going…so you ignore it if you can and you try to make the best of it. Sometimes if you can't you have to move on. But in that case he took me out of that class and I think that some of the young people that were in that class went on and majored in math and they win all kinds of things. So they asked me, you know, "What happened? You were one of the better math students." That really killed me. It just kind of dampened everything. I don't know. And I use it as a…he said, "Don't use it as an excuse." And I said, "You know, it's…all my buddies were there, in that school, they were still in that class.' They didn't have to go in that one class with me. I felt badly being separated from the people whom I'd grown up with.

ES: If you'd spotted your athletic pursuits and probable reason did that make you think maybe you shouldn't be so active in athletics?

RT: Uh, yeah.

ES: [laugh] You had a choice.

RT: I had a choice. But one of the things if you are kind of guided toward athletics…

ES: That's powerful.

RT: …and when you come into the school the head coach comes over and he said, "I'm glad that you're here. We're looking forward to working with you." And I'm been with the upperclassman. And I'm functioning with the seniors and the juniors and the outstanding scholars on that football team. We had some really fine scholars. And I became one of them. They'd give me a lot of prestige. But now when we go back to reunion they tease me, you know. And they say, "We wonder how in the hell you have to play…when we all had to play on the junior high team you were playing varsity." [laugh] But anyhow, it was…

ES: How did the coach react to you? Favorably all the way?

RT: Oh, always! Very supportive.

ES: Did he react to you purely on the basis of your athletic ability as you could tell?

RT: No. I think it was just a human… I'm gonna tell you something else and I'm getting way out of line, but after I finished school the 1944 football team was the champion team. And we played…

ES: For the region?

RT: For the region. For the area region, yeah. We were the Quaker State Championship and it was played at Multnomah Stadium in Portland. And it was against Roosevelt and I will never forget. And it was wet and muddy. I was a fullback so generally you'd use that big man to run a lot. And I was the principle ball carry even though I was a fullback. And in that game I got the ball four times. Never did know why. Made yardage on it. And it was almost…let's see, Michael was thirteen so that had to be twenty some years. We were coming back, we'd gone down to California to Rose Bowl, and I come back through __ Oregon and I stopped and looked up the old football coaches. He was there when he retired. And I called him and introduced myself and said, "Do you remember me?" He said, "How could I forget you!" You know. And then he says, "I want to apologize to you." I thought, "What for?" He says…he left the coaching the very year that we left, you know, and I didn't…I thought he was just leaving. He says, "I've never gotten over the fact that I had plans and I'd set up the plays and

we would have won that state championship if I could have used you as usually did. I got pressure from some of the citizens that the other person had to star so I didn't use you and I apologize." And I didn't know, but I always wondered. That was something that I just couldn't fathom. But he had to, because of pressures, not run me. And I will not mention the name of the young person that had to get the glory. The family still lives in Oregon. But they were pushing him to get…and that was __, that's what happened, you know. You get people who sponsor you and push and if the board tells you okay and that's what happened. I really felt it took a lot of courage for him to tell me that. But he had always been a very…almost like a dad. Just really nice. And he says, "It's bothered me all these years and I'm so glad you called because I've often wanted to write to let you know why you didn't carry the ball." I said, "I wondered why you were angry." [laugh] That was it. But anyhow, it was some of the things that Jimmy __ and I went through. Let me kind of go back now. Getting into La Grande, getting to the first grade and there were two other African-Americans in the class.

ES: At Greenwood.

RT: At Greenwood. Women. Girls, you know. They stayed about half their year and then I don't know, but I should think their family moved on. But in La Grande at the time…I could name you all the families were there. There was probably forty people.

ES: African-American you mean?

RT: Yeah. African-American.

ES: All tending to live in that same area of…

RT: Right. Here we were.

ES: …north side of the track.

RT: Let me tell ya. Okay, fine. Again and these little towns all over the country where there was a railroad track one side you had certain people living on the other side you had the more black people. No different. And that's why we liked beating Central. [laughs] But this was…but we kind of band together, you know. But we had Greenwood and Willow and Riveria. And I understand they are now getting ready to demolish the old Riveria School.

ES: Yes. Well, there are some other ideas suggested, but it probably will be demolished.

RT: Please try to get on some board and keep it…keep something, you know.

ES: I think the gym is the most likely. It's relatively new.

RT: That's what they kept at Greenwood, the gym. And you know…and I know those old buildings are antiquated and not adequate and all these other things, but they were solid wood and there was a lot of memories and beauty in those buildings. And not one's left standing.

ES: La Grande is not good at saving historic things.

RT: See, I don't…it's not any better. Were you here when they had the old library here?

ES: Yeah.

RT: The oldest one with those lavatories beneath and the steps going up.

ES: Yes. Noble building.

RT: Noble building. Beautiful old building, but they don't do that anymore. Now you're getting on one of my pet peeves now. I hate people who just want to tear everything up and build something anew. And no longer beauty, it just has to be functional. But La Grande High School was built by the WPA. It had some significance to me. __ they tore it down. Now they got this big ___. Yeah, its functional, but there's anything artistic in it at all. Just big functional buildings spread out all over the place. Well anyhow, grow up in this little town I've developed a lot of friendships that last forever. There's Bill, my best friend. We faced the segregation. Bowman Hicks was the only mill that would work blacks. Mt. Emily, no. Not one black person ever worked for that mill to my knowledge. At Bowman Hicks they only worked in the field, in the logging camp. No one worked at the mill. They were all in the woods. And I get…my uncle was the only one that drove truck back and forth in hauling logs, but he bought his own truck and that's why he was doing it. But no blacks worked in the mills. This was just not something that they would let happen. They all had to work in the woods. It was there until our group moved on and they brought in another group that…Dorothy's friend was part of this last group. The Willpongs you will here when you look in La Grande. They came in the last bastion you came into Maxville into Bowman Hicks before they finally closed it down. And they were the last of the blacks. And they brought __ mainly at Wayside, which is on the way up to Wallowa and we can talk about that. But they brought in about thirty blacks from Arizona and the other places who finished up the work at Maxville. The original crew left that my uncle was…that my uncle and my grandfather and all of those people were part of. And something I had not realized is…my grandfather is the person who kind of went back and did the recruiting…I didn't realize it until later that they were either blood relatives or were related through marriage. So almost everyone in Maxville was…they were related. It was just kind of natural if you go back to find someone you find…

ES: Easiest ones to recruit.

RT: …find your family. Yeah. But, you know, it never registered. I know all these people and their names and didn't realize just until I went back to visit a cousin who saw my…she happened to see my name…I was working in Seattle schools and I had become the dean of something for a community college and put in the paper. And someone recognized the name that had been in Pine Bluff and sent her this writing back and a little note said, "He looks exactly like the person whom you have a picture of on your desk." And so I got this call from a very soft voice and rather tentative, "What is your father's name? Would you mind telling me?" And I says…[end tape]

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RT: …and she said, "Did they call him 'Doc' by any chance?" I said, "Yeah, that's the only thing most people know him by is Doc." She said, "Well, that's Uncle Doc and he left home when he was fourteen and we have not [laugh] seen him since he got out of Arkansas. And we wondered what happened to him." And

she said, "We still have his picture here on the…" She said…she gave me the person's name…saw your picture in the paper and remembered seeing the picture on my desk of my uncle and it's your dad." I said, "I probably have not seen that picture." But…so we got acquainted and I went south and tried to follow ___. I went back to Bruce, where we came from before we came to Oregon. Bruce is a little logging camp outside of Pine Bluff. Post office, grocery store and a bunch of houses. That's it.

ES: Segregated?

RT: Segregated, oh boy. See, I wasn't old enough to really realize how segregated it was. But going back and asking questions and then listening to my grandmother and the __ talk about the reason that Mr. Dodds, my grandfather brought him and the family out. And we lived in La Grande, Jim and I were I think well received and I think respected even though we were black. Got along quite well. There were areas that you know that you were not…because of our parents __. Dating, no. Invited to all the birthday parties until you're about twelve.

ES: Then you got dangerous.

RT: Then you became dangerous. [laughs] Okay. Then you would hear about the parties. It was just one of those things. We'd laughed about it, you know. Okay. But we were always cautious. Grown-ups said to be accepted, don't try to date. [laugh] __send you home. She said that'll be…that's the line. So, okay, fine, you know. So that's the way it is, but we have friends. And we were still asked to go places and do things that I'm sure were the genuine friendship, you know. We were just buddies. In fact, I had a very close friend. Jimmy and I were close because we were the two minorities there. Then the Wilfong kid came on. He was a kid, though. We didn't mess with him, you know. He was about four of five years younger. And when you're fifteen four years younger is really down. [laugh] But Jim and I we were…we had the same friends. But Phillip was probably the closest friend I had other than Jim Kline. In fact, I'd asked him to be best friend at my wedding, but he had gone through what we found out later on was schizophrenia. ___ and was functioning somewhat, but going in and out. So the time…I got a letter from his brother saying, "Phil's not well. He will not be able to come to your wedding." So I told Jim…I said, "Well, you know, you two guys 'cause I never know if we had two best men, but if we can we can do that." So it did work out alright. But he was very close.

ES: What happened when your team would travel and you'd have to stay overnight somewhere?

RT: The coach had to be very careful in selecting. In fact, in Idaho, dear old Idaho, we were in Caldwell. And you know when you go into a town the team goes into the hotel and you have dinner, then the coach says, "Take a stroll and be back here by right before nine." Jimmy and I and Phillip and a couple others we went out and about four of us were coming in. And I was coming in with Phil and some other and started up the steps. And someone at the desk says, "Where you going?" I says, "To my room." "You can't have a room here. We don't have colored." About this time the coach, who was sitting over here with a high back chair, stands up and says, "What's…What's happening?" I says, "Steve, he says

we can't go up there because they don't allow colored." He says, "Well, I guess he guess he doesn't allow any of us then." He cleaned it out. [laughs]

ES: Just what you'd want.

RT: Oh, just perfect. He says, "We'll find a spot for them." The guy started going, "But, but..." He says, "No buts, nothing." He says, "If you don't want them, you don't want the rest of us in here." And the kids started…they did everything. They were throwing stuff, but, hey, don't get into trouble, you know. They were pretty upset. But that was an education for some of them, too.

ES: So did you have to stay at a second-rate place then?

RT: We went to a…we found another place. And I don't…I never did stay at that one so I couldn't compare. But it was probably one of the better hotels and they had their accommodation for kids' breakfast and all that stuff in the café that was right in the basement. But, no, that was something that we faced…

ES: Did that happened often?

RT: Not at the frequent as one would think. Idaho was the worst__.

ES: Somebody told me Prineville was not so good.

RT: Oh, don't make __. [laugh]

ES: I don't know what's so special about Prineville.

RT: But anyhow, we dreaded going to Idaho. The Dalles was okay 'til we got barred from a hotel because we were…we should have been barred forever. They had a balcony and someone had the idea to fill it with water. On the hotel balcony they plugged up the drain and put about yea much water in it. And then they had water lilies floating around in that and then they were tossing 'em over the edge and they hit a Marine. [laugh] That Marine came up and the guys were scattered, you know. I didn't know what was happening. I didn't get into that. But Ben yelled, "Guys, run for your lives! That Marine's coming up here!" [laughs] So anyhow, so they barred us from that hotel. __ high school kids, you know, so you get all the things that high school kids did. But there was a church and I hope…what we would like to do… I lived at 1303 Monroe and that house is still there and they… Someone got in it and refurbished it. It really looks great. But behind it is a little church called The Boys Memorial Baptist Church. You know there were a lot of blacks in that city. And I feel they had worth and should…someone should acknowledge that they lived here. And if they're forgot no one…no one…no one. They're forgotten. We didn't even exist. And Fred Warrior had what he called a wash rack. You call it detailing cars now. He had…he and my grandfather were close friends because Granddad lost his left, Fred lost his right so they would buy these shoes together. You know, which was…yeah. Luckily they had the same size feet. But anyhow, Fred had…he had it on business. He run it well. And he did exceptionally well to be an acute alcoholic. Most of the time you'd…see, Fred he was never drunk at when he worked, when he did those cars. He'd get off then I don't think he knows from a standing or sitting, but, you know. He was well liked. The other thing that I don't think that people… Now where the Safeway store there was the La Grande Hotel. Then they had the Foley. Then the big old Sacagawea, which was there forever. Now blacks couldn't live in any of them. There was a Zuber Hall that was around the corner became a skating rink and all that stuff. Alright, my uncle was one of the people who helped bring in

some of the black musicians. Alright, we could not get on the dance floor. We had to sit in the balcony and watch. But the whole orchestra's black. [laugh] ___

ES: A lot of things done before…

RT: See,___ how to learn that long ago. ___ And the orchestra'd get out on the floor and they're dancing with people. They're having a ball. But Zuber Hall was all…when they made it a skating rink I still wouldn't go in it. No, no.

ES: How did they enforce that? If you tried to go into the main level floor who would say something to you or direct you up to the balcony?

RT: Whoever was supposed to've been in charge over the door when they let you in and out.

ES: Would this be a teenage kid?

RT: A police officer.

ES: Police?

RT: Oh yeah. Off-duty policeman.

ES: How would he…do you remember how he would say it?

RT: "You're not allowed to come in." "No, you have to stay in the balcony."

ES: And if somebody said, "Why?"

RT: There was no why when you're fourteen, fifteen. The adults didn't challenge it. These adults had grown up in the South strictly segregated and scared as hell to be confronted with a white person. We were a little bit more brave because we grown up in a different kind of environment, you know. So we just talked back to 'em, you know. But anyhow, Grandmother'd say, "Now don't get yourself in trouble 'cause they'll throw you in jail then…you know." So we said okay. So we'd just go in and go up there to have a look at the band and come back down. And my…'cause we got to get in there because my grandmother housed them. We had the upstairs full of musicians. They stayed at our house. But…

ES: These were itinerate musicians, or…?

RT: This was…now I don't how much you were into jazz music.

ES: Some.

RT: Okay, fine. There was a musician who was in the Pacific Northwest that was really a fine musician. Ernie Fields was one of them. And then the other…oh, I of course now his name just fell off the back of head…Jimmie Lunceford. You may have heard of Jimmie Lunceford.

ES: I think I've heard that name, yes.

RT: Jimmie Lunceford was probably one of the best arrangers for his time. He and Fletcher Henderson arranged a lot of music. You know Glen Miller did a lot of Fletcher Henderson's arrangement. So Jimmie Lunceford was at that level of musician. When they came they stayed at our home so I got to meet them. And I met a lot of them that I've heard the names later on and I didn't realize that they were part of that band, you know, that had come through La Grande. Eddie Hayward, you know. A bunch of became very popular.

ES: Was the system then for a musical group like that to maybe prearrange gigs in every little old town along the way? Baker City, La Grande, Pendleton…

RT: They were both in Baker and La Grande. In Baker City they would…

ES: …The Dalles.

RT: …at the Covered Wagon at Baker and go. And then they'd…they never hit The Dalles. I don't know why. But they hit towns generally that had some minority population. But generally they were brought in by the townspeople. So, you know, a lot of times they'd come in… But we found out, they would tell us, you know, you can't go there, you can't go here in this town. That was one of the things that I remember that you had these people who were professional people who made pretty good money, but they couldn't find a room to live in.

ES: While we're on Zuber Hall would you tell me anything else you can remember about that place? How it looked physically? What other kinds of activities were there?

RT: Primarily dances and balls. And they would have it for…the Elks would have something. They would have some kind of large activity. They would use Zuber Hall for their activity because they didn't have much space in the temple.

ES: Was it just a big square room?

RT: Just a big barn-like room.

ES: Ugly some people have told me.

RT: Ugly. Yes. Just hideous. The outside was even worse than the inside. It really was just horrible. Big old wooden structure building right behind the Sacagawea Hotel.

ES: A good floor?

RT: Beautiful…beautiful floor, yeah. Guess who kept the floor beautiful? My grandmother. [laugh]

ES: Did they serve food or drink?

RT: Maid work… No. No food. Drinks, yeah, but no food. My grandmother did maid work and she did laundry. And I think probably she laundered every doctor's shirt in La Grande. And with the old hot iron stove, starched collar. Before they had the new cotton so they had to iron them. And I had to carry every drop of water that she used to wash with. [laugh]

ES: Did she do that in her home?

RT: We did it in our home, yes. And we didn't have a washing machine. We had the old sink tubs, or whatever.

ES: A washboard.

RT: Washboard, mm-hmm. And I brought the water in to the…that room so fill the tubs 'cause she couldn't carry all this water. So when I helped her…and I helped her do the cleaning in the hotels and stuff. And the other part of La Grande, that is probably gonna __ for you, is the number of houses ___.

ES: Oh yeah. I'd like to know whatever you can tell me about that.

RT: Alright. Now, over behind where the Safeway store is located now and back over in that corner was Chinatown.

ES: Now this is the old Safeway store.

RT: The old Safeway store down on…as you enter La Grande.

ES: Right. All the way from there to the track.

RT: Yeah. Okay. Chinatown. Madame…there was Estelle and…oh, good Lord…

ES: These are white women.

RT: No. These are black women who were madams and prostitutes. Okay. And they were the ones who ran that brothel in Chinatown. Caroline and Estelle and I can't

remember the other's name. Lots of money. Jim Bradford, who was one of their pimps, tall, very handsome black man. Immaculately dressed, silk shirts, gold tooth. [laugh] The whole smear, you know. But we looked at Jim Bradford as kids and went, "Man, we'd like to dress like that." My grandmother said, "No you don't." [laughs] So we wondered…Stella. Stella bought a lot of property over where the railroad now has expanded, torn those houses down. Rowdell Patkins is the name that you have get in your list. Uncle Rowdell. Rowdell ran a gambling house…this a black fella. Because this is the only place the black loggers had to go when they came in. And now we were little and our grandmother told us…my grandmother told me and Jim an other kid, "We don't want to going over near Uncle Rowdell's house. Stay away from there." Well, you tell a nine year old to stay away he gonna wonder why, you know. [laugh] Not only did he have a little gambling going on he had the prostitution, you know, the whole smear. What we found out if we go by there and if we looked rather sadly they would throw money out to us. But one thing when we'd get near Rowdell…we called him Uncle Rowdell. He probably weighed three hundred fifty pounds. Big. Deep voice. He'd say, [imitate deep voice] "Okay you guys. The boys are out here now I don't want no cussin'. You hear me?" "Okay Uncle Rowdell." Then he'd, "Give 'em some money." They'd put money out. We'd pick money up and take off, you know. Mother, "Where'd you get the money?" "We found it." "You went over by Rowdell's, didn't you?" "Mm-hmm." He ran that…when Hermiston opened up the war, World War II, and they moved the ammunition dump and all that outside of Hermiston. Rowdell moved his action down there and became a millionaire. I'll never forget… he was about 6'4" and he was the biggest person I'd ever seen. Always a big smile on his face and a cigar.

ES: What kind of gambling was it?

RT: Oh, they played poker, pin-the-annie, lot of regular straight poker. I had a jar, a crock jar, about so big and so high full of my pennies that my uncle… When he'd come by he'd drop all the pennies off in there before going home for me, you know, so I had that cash there. But that was their recreation. The other thing that was in the neighborhood at the time…you probably going to run across the name of Max Turn.

ES: Turning?

RT: Max Turn. T-u-r-n.

ES: Turn.

RT: Turn. Okay. Drop dealer, __... yes. [other voice] I haven't drink mine. Probably he might want another little [tape interruption] These are things that are in my head.

ES: Sure.

RT: And they're caught from time to time and if I remember… But Max Turn he had…he had a scrap iron…collected scrap iron. So the houses he owned that were rental houses had scrap iron all over. And we were renting that house before we moved up the hill. And all of the scrap iron was piled up on the outside and around the side of the house. And then over behind down the street __ he had behind his other home he'd built this fence. And this was filled with tires, rubber

tires. Thousand of 'em. Then he had a hide house…all in this neighborhood where he collected hides from the slaughter houses.

ES: Which he would tan?

RT: Which he would tan and soften down, put them in there and store them. One of the things Jimmy and I, who lived across the street from…we played in those scrap iron piles. I mean running across the top and jumping and our parents thought we were gonna get killed. But we learned…we were quite sure footed. But we learned, though, some of the old cars had brass fittings in them. So we realized…'cause we watched Max come out one day and was pounding these fittings out. So we thought, "Oh."

ES: You could relieve them of their brass.

RT: No. We talked to him. "Could we do that and you would pay us for it?" And he said, "Sure."

ES: I see.

RT: So yeah. So we would go out and pound out the brass fittings and take 'em. But we didn't ask him that about his tires. Jim and I said, "We need a little money." So we get into Max's tire pile. You'd have to dig maybe a half hour before you find a couple real good tires. So we'd take 'em and…I know Max knowed that we were getting 'em from his, but he'd buy them from us. Just as though he was __. We figured out when we got about seventeen Max knew we were bringing those tires out of his tire pile and he was just a nice old man. [laughs]

ES: And go along with your con.

RT: ___ from the tire pile. So we watch you comin' from in here, you know. But it was…that was…that was part of our neighborhood. And it was…it seemed to me that in a normal environment it would be kind of awful to pile scrap iron around a rental house. But put a hide house across the street they're be an eye…

ES: Somebody would complain.

RT: Someone would complain. Okay, here, but you've got black To whom are they going to complain? So but anyhow Max…okay, the war started. The scrap iron pile disappeared. Just prior to Pearl Harbor Max had gathered all that up and he already had business with Japan. Now not knowing, you know, that they're going to do this awful __, but he was sellin' that scrap iron we found out later and he felt guilty that he had sold this scrap iron to Japan. And know he would go by there and we were still not in the war, we were still to young, and he was saying, "I've hurt some of my boys." That's what he meant. By selling that…he didn't say it explicitly, but he was kind of depressed. He said, "You didn't know, you know. And he was a stable man, he was a business man. So he'd sold all that rubber and all the cars to Japan and Max became very wealthy in that. He was a really nice man, you know. He was very kind. But I think he had guilt feelings all his life about that.

ES: If I remember correctly you're saying that probably all the African-Americans who came to La Grande came here because of the logging?

RT: Ninety-eight percent of them came because of the logging. The only places that you would them working, and there were only two. Union Pacific Railroad as section hands. Now you remember when the railroads were right at the peak then and they still had the big Malley, Molly…whatever it is…

ES: Malley locomotive.

RT: That biggest locomotive that they had they were all steam driven. And they had the big coal yard. And they had the roundhouses there. And that whole operation was fenced off with a six or seven foot fence with gate opening. And we could go through from where we lived through the gate to get across that was off the track over across town or you had to go up to "T"…up to "S" Avenue and walk across the tracks. You couldn't get through any other way. But we went through and one of the reason we went through there when they would come into to load those engines and put the coal…they had a big coal to fly their… And if they would leave sometime this coal, a piece of coal, would fall off. We could go in and pick up the scrap coal. We'd go in every day and by the end of the month you have a…probably a whole coal bin full of coal. So, no, we would go… and they didn't care if we picked it up. You couldn't go into coal chute and get it, but it's along the tracks. So Jim and I would go on and we'd bring the coal to our friends. So we did that. And sometimes we watched the big railroad police, when they called him a railroad __. He was a big man. He had a…he had only one suit. And from the day I first saw him, they called him Tiny, he was about 6'5" and probably weighed two hundred twenty, thirty pounds. Really physically big man. He could really run. We know that because we watched him chase people who were trying to steal out of the coal yards. [laugh] You'd see him behind someone. These ___. And we knew if we tried to steal coal __. But he was the yard and he road back and forth on the train. Lot of __ loved the train __. I looked at 'em as big dragons, you know. That was…yeah, they were hissing and puffing and seven foot wheel, you know. And those kids, well, they just loved it. Jim's Dad worked for the railroad, section hand. Martinez and Lopez, who were black. They had a Spanish name, we never did know why. But they had Southern accents so they didn't sound like they were __. [laughs] We don't know. It doesn't really matter because you get a little bit of mischief. We don't' know how they got the name. But they…we bought the house the Martinez's lived in. And then Camilla and Meacham were the two other for the section gang. Union, then Camilla and Meacham. They'd be top of a hill, the grade, they had those too close together. But did you know the section gang for every fifty miles?

ES: No, I didn't.

RT: Alright. They had a gang who were responsible in between.

ES: This was track maintenance.

RT: The track maintenance section gang. That's the only place, that and Pullman porters, the only area that black could work for the Union Pacific Railroad. You either had to be a Pullman porter or on a section gang. You could not hold any other position. And there were three section gang workers there, Mr. __ and Mr. Carther and a guy named Brown. And that's all I ever knew. Brown was rather silent, didn't mingle with anybody. Big man. He rented a room from Stella who was the madam who had bought houses and she'd have rooms to rent. Brown lived in one of Stella's rooms and he didn't bother anyone. You'd see him out in the morning walking, you know. And on the weekends he put his suit on and I kind of think he went to the Catholic church. No, I think…I'm sure he did. He didn't go to ___ but __ Methodist Church was on…over on the outside of the

track. But the Carlson who was the Pentecostal minister. And his son now, I think, has the largest Pentecostal church in the U. S., Warren Carlson and we went to school with. But they were all good friends. And I went to all the churches, especially if one of the cute girls I knew went there. [laugh] On Sunday, you know, go __ Baptists this week.

ES: Did you try Episcopal, too?

RT: Yes. Oh yes I did.

ES: You didn't discriminate then.

RT: That's right. [laughs] I think all the ministers in town knew me. So I would say, "That's a good kid." Well, I was a good kid, but I wasn't going to the church for the reason they might have going to church. [laughs] But it was really fun. Enjoyed that. We had a lot of chances to learn about life. I think probably my grandmother was really surprised when I started telling her that I knew about the red light district. I knew what Stella and all of 'em were doing. And she said, "But you were so young!" "Oh, eleven years old." We knew. ___ to keep it a secret 'cause they'd be talkin' about it.

ES: I'm gathering that the prostitution was segregated, too.

RT: No.

ES: No?

RT: No. One area…

ES: Equal opportunity?

RT: Equal opportunity…

ES: Oh wonderful.

RT: …for prostitution. One of the areas that'll never been in segregation. On the corner across…about up Depot, Claire's Hotel, one of the biggest ones in town, and I forgot the name of the other two down the street and then Chinatown. Chinatown was just loaded. And, uh, it went on until the war.

ES: Patronized primarily by loggers and railroad men or…

RT: Loggers, railroad men…

ES: …other __ too?

RT: …___ some of the good people.

ES: More respectable reputation.

RT: …respect their reputation. 'Cause we would be over that way and we would see them coming back, you know, and said, "Okay." We knew what was going on. But anyhow it was that kind of a place.

ES: And do you think that the city government was winking at these operations?

RT: One thing we found out that was really disturbing that they…when we reached, you know, our early teens we were not part of the some of the social gatherings. You live in La Grande and you know some evenings are really hot and stifling.

ES: Yes.

RT: Jimmy and I we lived thirty feet apart so we'd go walking down by Greenwood School and down by __ Park and back home, you know, just the way we cooled off a bit. We didn't have air-conditioning. You open all the windows in the house and hope the screens on it or you're gonna be filled with flies. And we found out that the La Grande City Council had assigned one of their members to follow us. [pause] To see that we were not fraternizing with any of the white

girls. And that was something that just didn't quite fathom, you know. Why…you know… We saw this man…[end tape]

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RT: One of the things that we found out, and this was not rumor, that gentleman…and I can't recall his name…moved to Seattle that was on the city council in La Grande. And I went out to pick up one of my kids from school and I walked past him. And then he said, "Bob." And I turned around. "I'm looking at you. 'Cause you're Bob Terry." "Oh yeah, yeah." And he said, "I'm so-and-so." And I said "I remember you were a city councilman." He said, "Yeah. I was the one assigned to watch you." And I'm saying, "Pardon?" [laughs] "Watch me do what?" "Nothing," he said. "You were totally innocent. You went for a walk in the evening, you came back home. You didn't go out to meet any girls." And I…he said, "I was assigned." And I said, "What if we had been picking up girls? What would you have done?" He said, "I would have reported back." And I said, "What would they have done then?" He said, "I don't know."

ES: Make it hot for ya.

RT: Make it hot for me. Yeah, that's all.

ES: They'd find a way.

RT: Oh yeah. You realize why you didn't do this or that. Yeah, yeah. But anyhow, that…this…these were kind of covert actions, you know, and going on not totally in freedom. Always that distance between. You know, when you get a certain age then you're a threat.

ES: Now the Ku Klux Klan was active in 1922, '23. Did you have any…any sort of remembrances of that?

RT: My grandmother knew about that. They still burn the "L".

ES: Oh yes. On Table Mountain.

RT: Table Mountain. Also where the Ku Klux Klan burned their cross.

ES: Yeah.

RT: You know… You were chosen from the school to go up and set the "L" on fire. I didn't know why my grandmother wouldn't let me go. Then she told me, "I don't want you up there. They used to burn the "L" and you'd get something." So I always respected her. We never…I never participated in the ceremony when they were burning the "L".

ES: Did she ever say that the "they" were the Ku Klux Klan?

RT: Ku Klux Klan. Baker, La Grande had a group, a large group of 'em. Now, the little booklet, or the pamphlet that was found here, what, twenty-five years ago… My uncle was doing some excavating and found that book with list of the Ku Klux Klan people in them. Some surprised names in that book.

ES: Oh yeah.

RT: [laughs]

ES: I know.

RT: That's a deep… Oh yeah. And the stranger thing is some of their sons were my friends. We were really close friends. And I think the kids were shocked when they found out.

ES: I…this is just incidentally… I was interviewing a man named Pat Fitzgerald last week…

RT: Oh yeah. I know Pat.

ES: He was growing up during all this time. He knew a lot of the men who belonged to the Ku Klux Klan. And I said, "Why do you think they put on these sheets and went up and…" "Oh, just a bunch of damn fools!" I said, "Do you think they didn't know the connection between the Klan and the South?" He said, "I don't think so."

RT: Yes they did because they had migrated, their families, from the South to Oregon and Washington. So that they were pretty much familiar with the Klan and what they were doing. Now, but I think some of the younger people may not have known. But those elder people did know. Now this is just…

ES:

RT: Yeah. It was just after World War I and a lot of these people who used to be in the __ Day parade, not a lot of them, but some of them were Klan members. They were friendly and outgoing on the surface. But that makes you really get kind of fearful when you look and say, "Wait a minute."

ES: I suppose they would say that they thought they were preserving the best values of America modernization.

RT: A democracy. This was something they were engrained, you know, in them.

ES: They didn't realize how hypocritical it was.

RT: No. They had no idea. They thought they were right. And that…I loved my grandmother because she says, "Well, you know, sometimes when we feel that we are…we're doing the right thing that we feel it is right it may not be totally right for someone else." And so she explained to me. She said, "Okay, the people who are in the Klan somehow feel that we are here and we can damage them and take something away from them." She said, "I don't know what the hell they have that can take." [laughs] She says, "If they'd point it out to me I'd sure like to know what it is." So her sense of humor got me through. Because ___ a problem, you know, she would laugh, you know, and say, "Come close. Come over to grandma." Which the president was gonna have a pot…a chicken in every pot? Which one was that?

ES: Um, Harding?

RT: Was it Warren G. Harding?

ES: I think so.

RT: Okay. My grandmother'd comment, "Mr. Harding said he was gonna give us a chicken in every pot. I got a jar full of chickens and a pantry full of pots." [laughs] ____...give me something that I can have.

ES: A little money in the bank.

RT: That's the kind of person she was. Just so she gets goin'. So I learned that she had lived and how she had gotten through from just taking it. Yeah, taking it that way and being able to say, "Well, no. Learn to deal with it. Accept those who are friendly. Those who are unfriendly to hell with them." That's exactly what she

told me so that's kind of my whole life. And you can…when I get ____ just turn it back, go on and talk to somebody else. But it was an interesting town. It was a segregated town. There were some sharp differences. And something I hadn't realized, because metropolis ____. Mr. Metropolis married Angel Metropolis. She was a blond women. And I hadn't realized that she was not accepted. Angel was not accepted. Her husband was Greek.

ES: Somewhat dark skin.

RT: Dark skin. Uh-huh. And I hadn't realized that this…that they were…their victim was __. So she said, "In Maxville, you know, we lived right on the border of where all the blacks lived." And then they came to me when I got the job in Seattle. I was the first black male hired in the state of Washington to teach. Beulah, her daughter, had gotten a job in Klamath Falls or someplace. She ended up writing for ___ or something. But I got a nice long letter from Beulah and one of the statement in there was that "we showed them, didn't we?" And I tried to figure what…but I hadn't realized that she had gone through some of the same kind of things I did. Because you just don't think about it, you know. But she was dark skinned. A very beautiful girl. And she had married the Methodist minister's son, so [laugh]. But that was it. And then I talked to a number of the Buritas who were Hispanic. Ed who refused to go back to La Grande. And I said, "Why?" He says, "You don't know how I was treated." And I'm thinking big handsome guy, you know. He was kind of olive skin. And most of the kids I grew up ___. [laugh] ___. He says, "No. Bob." He said, "That was just some of the things, but you don't know how our family was really treated." And I said, "No." I said, "I have an idea." I grew up in the neighborhood. There were the Aslips who spoke Spanish. The Thomolinchavitches…zigavitches…Nick and the maid were there. The Seedars. Now they were loggers also, but they worked for Mt. Emily. They occupied the housing and they moved on kind of like Jewish people moving out and now blacks moving in. In La Grande it was the Slovak people moving in and the blacks were occupying this. So the homes that we lived in were built by the first people who came in from Yugoslavia and Germany and what have you. But I grew up with their kids. Those are my kids that I played with. But Tim…I knew curse words in about five languages. [laughs] But I've forgotten now, you know. 'Cause we would go to Aslim and she'd be screamin' and yellin' at him. We knew when to move. But we were all good friends. So they…alright, I was in Portland walking down the street and this very tall man stopped me and says, "Terry?" I says, "Yeah." He said, "Tom Zibbick." And I'm looking at him. I'm thinkin' "huh". He said, "I lived right behind ya." I said, "No. The Ziggab…oh, okay." The Ziggabickes lived behind us, you know, but had shortened the name. And I said, "Was the Fritzy Zibbick who was the championship prize fighter, was that your…was that the one? Was that the Frizty we knew that was Fritzy Ziggovitch?" He said, "Yeah. We shortened it." And I says, "Well, I know him!" He says, "Well, of course you know him. Are you nuts?" [laughs] But they…yeah, Germalosky always people…you know…they were… These people came in and they had faced some of the kinds of biases that we faced. But the thing is they were sometimes more biased than the people who

grew up in the country. And it was something that's kind of interesting to work at __ that you see.

ES: I'm glad you mentioned that because I was getting the impression from Dorothy that all was sweetness and light pretty much between people of all races in La Grande.

RT: When Dorothy moved to La Grande in 1946 she was an adult. Her associations were with people, adult people…

ES: And of course she was still very busy with a lot of children.

RT: And she had a house full of children

ES: And was a little isolated.

RT: She was isolated. Alright, women don't have that exposure that men have.

ES: That's right.

RT: She's sheltered. Yeah.

ES: Especially teenaged boys.

RT: Yeah.

ES: Would get a ton.

RT: You should…interview her eldest son. [laugh] ___ totally different story.

ES: I'll bet.

RT: Yeah. Grew up in La Grande. He is…well, he's retired now, a colonel…army. They've done pretty well with their grandchildren. She probably told you that one of her grandsons is an attorney in Oregon.

ES: No, she didn't mention that.

RT: Yeah. He's one of the…he was in Portland in a big firm and didn't like working in a firm so he's at one of the little towns there. And I'm wondering, you know, how he's getting along. But he is mixed, you know, from his mother white. So he's very fair skinned. And that's something else.

ES: That's the son who's a brakeman?

RT: Yeah. The son that's a brakeman, his son is an attorney.

ES: She told me about that son and his wife ___ both living in La Grande.

RT: This is something that you realize, too. That if you're a fair skin you are accepted a little bit better than the darker skin. And I don't think people realize that.

ES:

RT: But it is. It's true.

ES: Yeah.

RT: But when I came to Seattle there was a young man here named King. And he says, "How in the hell did you ever get hired? I've been fine. I have a masters degree, I've done this and that. And I says, "Well, I found out how I got hired." I says, "Our superintendent of school was named Patten and I've been working two years here. And we were over at the administration building one Christmas…had a group of…our kids were caroling…and Sam Fleming came up and stood beside me and said, "Well, it turned out really well." I'm looking at him, I says, "Okay." He said, "Patten and I were roommates at college. And when you applied for a job here we got this really great letter." I said, "You didn't look at my transcript?" [laugh] I didn't have the highest grades, but I did okay. He said, "Oh no, no. But he said you were a good guy and he was my closest friend." So that had bearing on why I got hired. And Brennen was here, but Brennen was

very dark skin. He finally was hired. Ended up being one of the best football coaches they had around. But we realized that. And it's just unfortunate, you know, that happened. Let me go back now. Okay, La Grande from John's Kitchen all the way to Maxville, back to La Grande, back to Greenwood School, Central School. And I was lucky enough to get into good classes. I had some really fine teachers. I was surprised that a number of them had graduated from Eastern Oregon Normal. My first and second grade teachers were…they only had three year degrees, you know. 'Cause Normal school that's all they have to have. I think the third grade before I had someone with a baccalaureate degree. And Lila Walk was my…I thought you'd be teachin' me forever. It was my seventh grade and I got junior high was there. Then ended up being principal of the high school. [laughs] ___. I guess when they sent in for recommendation when I signed up to go into service he filled out some papers and he had neglected to put my race down. Didn't even think about it. And I was going through these lines and the guy said…said something and he got up and went back in the room. And they asked me, you know, do…in the other room. They were sending me through the white processing line. [laughs] Whoops! Whoo! I went back and I told him and he said, "Oh God, Bob. I'm sorry." I said, "Don't worry about that. I think…didn't look at me. They must have been blind! [laughs] He said, "I didn't even think about marking it." Well, that's the way he was. He was really nice. But these were the things. I think that there were several people who, in my life, that were very…very, very supportive and helped being I lost my dad and mom when I was two years old. Grandmother had be responsible for trying to rear a child after all her family was gone. And now I realize what she had to go through. You know, how rambunctious kids, you know. And here she is probably in her mid-forties when she had to take…after all her five kids are gone, you know, she's got another little one. She stays another twenty years, you know, rearing.

ES: What encounters did you have with Mormons during your early years?

RT: As I said, one of my best teachers and great supporter I didn't know was Mormon until I had graduated from college.

ES: You weren't aware when you were a teenager that Mormons existed here?

RT: I know Mormons existed. But I had…somehow I hadn't realized that he was a Mormon. We used the Mormon gym for all our classes, we used everything. Some of our best friends, the Westenskows, all of them. They were just good friends.

ES: The subject never came up?

RT: The subject never came up. Never came up. And I was kind of surprised later on in life. The were all very cordial, good. We went to their homes. And I will tell you Ronald Walk was Mormon and he was one of the…

ES: Mm-hmm.

RT: Yeah. And he was the person who probably did more for me than any other single teacher. We used…I wondered why we used the Mormon gym and everything. He had access to it. And I didn't realize that Ron was Mormon. And no. When the Westenskows and…oh, good Lord, I don't know how

many…Geddis and a whole bunch of people that I played with. Religion never came up.

ES: You said you went around visiting all the various churches.

RT: I visited every church.

ES: Visit the Mormons?

RT: The LDS.

ES: You did?

RT: Yes! Yes.

ES: Did they invite you to become a member?

RT: No. [laugh] I was not asked to join the group. Not asked to go to Sunday School there. I did at the Baptist. [laugh]

ES: That should have cued you some way.

RT: Well, I don't think you think about it. No. You don't think about it. I don't think…no. I'd grown up and then I realized, my God, you know. Risking my life? No. No. They were good people. Great, but…not…they have this belief, you know, that we were less than human, I guess, for a while there.

ES: Now when the war came along you were just about eligible to be drafted, weren't you?

RT: Yes. Mm-hmm.

ES: Is that what happened?

RT: I joined the Navy.

ES: On your own?

RT: Mm-hmm.

ES: Before they could get you in the army?

RT: I'd got my notice.

ES: Ah. [laughs] That's a familiar dodge. I've heard that story before.

RT: And I would kind of sad that I was left out of the thirteen young people how left on that carrion. See, I was one of those, but my name is not in the group. I left at the same time.

ES: I'm not sure what you're telling me here.

RT: Just a moment. __ that group. Stocken boy made a killing then. He was a neighbor recruiter. And they had about fifteen recruits just went and I went in the service at the same time…before they finished. You know, we had another year to go.

ES: You were discharged as soon as the war ended then?

RT: Yeah.

ES: Or shortly after?

RT: Eight, ten months after.

ES: Yeah.

RT: I was over in Ireland when the war ended.

ES: You decided to come right back to La Grande?

RT: I came back and we were going…I was slated to go to University of Oregon.

ES: On a football scholarship?

RT: We went down…I kept the letter to come down. And we went down and very graciously…then they said, "We will try to find housing for you." And I'm going, "Okay. You've got quite a lot of dorms." You're not allowed to live in the

dorms at that time. Just about four months before the vets' dorms came up. Being…see, what, nineteen…just before my twentieth birthday…maybe twenty before my twenty-first birthday…yeah. We'll __. And I figured if you can't find a place for me to live, screw you. [laugh] So I went back and went to teach in August and stayed with my grandmother. And happy that I did.

ES: From '46 to '50?

RT: Mm-hmm.

ES: Yes.

RT: Yeah.

ES: I imagine you have a lot to say about the times at the college. It must have felt different in many ways from high school.

RT: Oh, quite different. I think…

ES: Did you immediately turn out for the various athletic teams?

RT: Not the first year.

ES: No?

RT: No. I had to get my feet wet.

ES: Were you a little apprehensive about undertaking college work?

RT: No.

ES: No.

RT: No. Didn't have enough sense to be afraid. [laugh]

ES: Or plenty of confidence. I guess you'd had a chance to demonstrate your abilities.

RT: So anyhow, got in…got in to the program and then turn out for football the second year and ran track. We can have a successful football season. We didn't have good…the kind of players that you need, you know, if they have a successful football team.

ES: And they weren't importing players from Seattle at that time.

RT: No, they weren't importing players, no. They were people coming to school to get the two-year degree and go on to the university or to complete there and become a teacher.

ES: Was it your idea to become a teacher at that time?

RT: No. I wanted to be a dentist. And I got into the school and I met…

ES: You were taking lots of science then?

RT: I took some science, yeah. And was disappointed in a couple of the classes. And then I got into Dr. Badgley's class. And I figured, "Boy, wish I had gotten here the first year!" Oh, what a difference! And I figured I would have majored, you know, in here if I had this man teachin' me. Oh, it's a difference in the teaching, the quality of teachers. But Badge was a good teacher. A fantastic teacher.

ES: And really devoted to that college.

RT: Oh, loved it! He could have gone any place in the country to teach and he devoted… some of them were there, you know, teach… she taught biology. And it was for…I got her because she was the one who taught for those who were gonna teach in elementary school. We had to take that science. And I was…Ronald Walk again. He was principal over at the…I suppose the high school. I went over there because we were…you know, we were supposed to go up and do our practice teaching. So I went to do my intern over there. And he says, "What you need to do is to get elementary and secondary." He said,

"Because if you go in and there's a job advertised for x teacher and you get in there you'll send them your credential." And I said, "They have to send pictures." He said, "Yeah." But he says, "But you'll get there and then they'll question you. Then they'll say, 'Well, we just filled that position.' So just tell 'em, 'Well, I can teach fourth grade, too.'" [laugh] That's what he said. I came to Seattle and interviewed and they said, "We'll…We'll let you know." I got back home I had a letter from San Francisco also and Los Angeles. So I said, "Well, I'm gonna hunt." The next…just two days later I got this note from Seattle that, "yeah, we have a…we found a spot. Would you mind teaching at the eighth grade and a school also that's for special students?" And I said, "Nope." Well, I got there and they were…these were deaf students. And was fascinating to work in that program. I never did learn to sign, but have a number of… And I was the only male in the building other than the principal. And so he…elderly lady said, "Would you teach our P.E.? We can't go up and down those stairs. We will do your art and something else." I said, "Great!" They had music on there for me to teach and no way! I said…well, they look at a transcript and they see what you can this, this and this. I said, "I took that music course because I had to have it to get an elementary certificate. I'm not a musician!" Say, "Well, you got a good grade in it." I said, "Yeah. I can't teach 'em to sing."

ES: What was your preferred field of teaching?

RT: I wanted to really get into psych.

ES: I mean when you started out.

RT: When I started out?

ES: In public schools.

RT: In the public schools?

ES: Yeah.

RT: Yeah. Well, I loved history. I loved biology. I liked science things, too. But…like I got a history class, finally got to do the history. That was fun.

ES: When Seattle schools hired you though what academic areas did they expect you to teach?

RT: They thought I would go to a high school and I would be history. If I went into elementary you teach everything that's on the books. But history would have been my area.

ES: Assuming that you would also coach?

RT: Yeah. This was the assumption. Because my goal then was to become a football coach. You know, get the class to be a football coach. Came in, got keyed. One of the guys who was coaching he said, "Bob, you get on that list." And he says, "You will probably be a grandfather before they get to you." He said, "It's kind of an incestual thing in this coaching field." He said, "If you notice the people who are coaching now their grandfathers coached back there somewhere [laugh] and then their dads and now they're there.

ES: The railroad worked that way too I understand.

RT: Yeah.

ES: Especially if you wanted to be an engineer.

RT: Yeah. And that's it. And I go…I kind of looked at him and I started asking questions. And I found out that, yeah, this was the son of the person who coached

there before. And he said, "Unless you have that kind of in-road," he says, "No matter what you do or how well you coach." He said, "If you're lucky enough to get in there and become friends and become the assistant then maybe after ten or twelve years." [laughs] I tell him, "I'll be old and grey. Won't be able to move." So anyhow, that's when I…special ed…I got into that and I watched these teachers who I thought were geniuses to work with that type of student, with deaf students. And working in Washington how they have to work with them. And then I transferred into another building and these were academically challenged students. A real task. I wondered why I got there. But I think it taught patience and you had to teach. You had to teach. You had to have patience and you had to go over it back and forth so it did teach me a lot. Then I realized, you know, that a good teacher really has to devote himself almost 100% to that student.

ES: Where did you say you had student taught while you were…La Grande?

RT: Ackerman.

ES: At Ackerman?

RT: Yeah. Mr. Hill and Mrs….oh, good Lord…Ware.

ES: Oh, Eva Ware.

RT: Eva Ware.

E Oh yeah.

RT: Uh-huh.

ES: So you taught for what, two quarters?

RT: Two quarters, uh-huh. I had Hill who was with seventh grade and Ware was fourth I think. So I had both so I could get both areas. That was because of Ron Walk. He says, "If you do it get the whole thing. So that you'll…when you go apply for a job you can teach at any level." And that's what I did.

ES: Did you have discussions with Ms. Ware and Mr. Hill about where you might teach after you left La Grande?

RT: No. Let me tell you something that I was surprised. Martha Addy was the advisor. She was over the teaching.

ES: I took a course with her, too.

RT: Alright. Martha took me aside just before graduation and says, "Bob, probably you're gonna have to teach in the South. Probably not gonna be anything for you in this part of the country."

ES: Martha was from the South, wasn't she?

RT: Martha, she and Dr. Powell, her twin sister. And she says, "You'll probably have to…" I said, "Why didn't you tell me that before I signed up? When you first interviewed me and put me into the program why didn't tell me 'If you become certified you'll have to go South.'" I said, "I'm not gonna teach in the South. And I didn't say anything other. I still smiled at her when I got the job here.

ES: Do you question her all about that?

RT: No. No, I didn't. I just said, "No, I'll try my hand at someplace else before. That's the last resort." I didn't think anything else of it. I figured, well, they're hiring and I've been reading about the seven women, black women, who had been hired in Seattle…[end tape]

RT: …about eight…seven or eight years ago I was down at Salem visiting a friend. Had party all the people around the area that had been at Eastern Oregon that were Salem and down in that part get invited ___. And so he called me and said, "Okay, I've got a bunch of the gang that was the EOC, as we called it then, to come down and we're gonna get together." So I went down there and oh it was fun meeting all these people that I hadn't seen in years! They were all teachers. And I was talkin' to someone and I overheard Alice saying, "When I got ready to leave Eastern Oregon Dr. Addy told me I probably would not be able to get a decent job. She was Japanese. Because of the war...'cause they went through this whole thing. So I went over and I…she didn't mention the name who had told her that. And I said, "You talked to Dr. Addy, too, didn't you?" She said, "Well, yeah." I said, "She told me the same thing." We started laughing. After…I wonder what she'd think if she came down to Salem and drove down by the Alice Wadda Middle School. [laughs] Touché!

ES: Well, things have changed.

RT: Things have changed. But superintendent of schools, you know. She's not gonna get a chance? I don't…I think Alice would have passed out if she'd ever gotten a B. [laugh] She'd probably just been dead. Never know anything but A's. Just the brightest thing in the world, you know, and really a great, great person.

ES: How did a Japanese student get to La Grande in those days?

RT: In those days there was a lot of labor going on in the area, fruit, Yakima. And they came into La Grande from Yakima from the farm area. She was from Yakima originally and had been…she and Carl Asiree has been part of the internment.

ES: What did she have to say about how she was treated in La Grande?

RT: Very well.

ES: Other than by what Martha Addy told her.

RT: I think probably when you're confined to a college environment and you don't have to do too much association with the city at large. You're living in a very special community of people in the dorms who are friends. And I think that was it. You're really sheltered. Yeah. You're sheltered in this environment.

ES: Even so I think in those earlier days many of the students at Eastern Oregon College had the reputation of being pretty narrow minded when it came to social values.

RT: Tell me about it.

ES: Yes.

RT: Including the president at the time. ____ I was vice-president of the school body at Eastern. And we were in a meeting and…it was the student body officers and the editor of the paper and a bunch of students who worked on student government. And this gentleman got up and told a darkie joke. Then he realized I was sitting there. And…

ES: Was it a ___? It was out of the blue?

RT: Out of the blue. Just out of the blue. He turned five shades of red because he forgot there was a darker black person sitting in that… He's just not accustomed to it.

ES: Did he apologize?

RT: He tried. He tried, but I never could… I was glad when he went to the hospital. [laugh] No. I will never forget that as long as… Jimmy was…he suggested ___. I said, "Forget it." That's the way he is. He would have told the joke anyhow if we hadn't been there. And since we are not the…you know, we're not here all the time he's never had a black person on student government.

ES: You were living with your grandmother, but I suppose you went to businesses of various kinds in La Grande.

RT: Oh yes.

ES: So as an adult did you perceive any other uncomfortable kinds of reactions?

RT: I think probably one of the reasons I did many of the places I went by the time I'd gotten to college level the sons and daughters were running the business. And I had already attended high school and two or three years of college.

ES: So they greeted you as an old friend?

RT: Good old buddy.

ES: Sure.

RT: So I don't know how that would have been if I had gone…yeah.

ES: Obviously had an advantage.

RT: Had an advantage. And one of the things I had a great advantage.

ES: Would you like to talk a little bit about the place of Lafayette "Lucky" Trice in the La Grande business community?

RT: The business community…

ES: Also he was in the Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion, wasn't he?

RT: Yeah. Head of the American Legion, First War crew.

ES: Very active in conservation efforts, I read.

RT: Extremely, yeah. But one of the things…you have to realize here is a man who always wondered what would happen if he had been able to get a college degree. Where would he have gone?

ES: Lots of ability.

RT: Tremendous amount of ability. A very bright person with very limited education. Except he did not perform as someone who had been denied…I guess when you think of education I think you're…you know, the formalized type. No, but well educated. He was an early denturist. Trying anything. He would just curious, you know. And my grandmother said he'd always been that way as a kid, you know. He wanted to know how things worked and he was good at doing it. And one of the reasons he got jobs because his dad could repair almost anything and he taught him that. So anytime they got jobs in the log jump…see, my grandfather ran the skidder stuff. And when he would…he'd load…he run the loader there was no logs on the train. And so Lucky learned all these things and he learned how to repair the bulldozer and all that so he knew how to do this. So he was a busy man. He never had to take a job of menial labor.

ES: But yet he did menial labor.

RT: But he did…in La Grande he did. Pride. He always wanted to work except for himself. And that's what he did. Alright, I says, "But you're cleaning a building." He said, "But I'm in that building all alone. Nobody bothers me. I wax the floor, I clean it, I get praised for that." He says, "And that's all. And all I want is the money." He had a shoe shine parlor. He'd had a pet walking thing. He had a race car thing. He was always trying to build something. I worked with him in Baker. That's where he lived most of the time before Dorothy met him. And what he had done he'd made a business. You know the oil tankers that run back and forth?

ES: Cars?

RT: No, the big tankers that carry gas, oil?

ES: Yes. The railroad.

RT: No, no. These are on the highway.

ES: Trucks.

RT: The big trucks.

ES: Yeah.

RT: Yeah. They get stress fractures in those big tanks. He started a business where he would do…when they are…when they have to be repaired, you know, get a new one. They got a little crack in it, you know, they'd have to have it repaired. What you have to do is you have to steam that thing for a couple days to get all the gas fumes out. Then you go inside and weld it. He set up a welding shop and a station to clean those things. I went up to help him clean 'em. He never let me go inside the well because he said it's too dangerous. Not when you're in it, you know. But he would clean 'em and then get inside the tank and then he'd weld little cracks. I could do the welding on the outside. But he…that he started it up. He had that and he ran…then he sold that and came to La Grande after the war. And he sold that business to someone. But he…at times he would have as high as five tankers sitting in that lot that he had to repair. And he got paid well for it. Yeah. And he was always ___, you know. [laugh]

ES: Is there any truth to the idea that…and this was in the newspaper…he got the name Lucky because he was so lucky at cards?

RT: Yeah, but it wasn't luck.

ES: That's what I suspected. [laughs]

RT: I happened to have found up in the attic at Grandma's house some of his lucky cards. Yeah.

ES: Marked?

RT: They were special decks that had…on the back of 'em there would be…the little diamond would be out of…would be a little askew on the back where it had that little design. And I thought "Okay." Now, I flipped that over "okay, that's the ace of hearts." That's why ___ [laugh] He ordered them from some company. They were already set up. But he could play with a straight deck, too. See, one thing he didn't do he didn't drink. And he would set up the table. He'd tell 'em "Bring more." That's why he was lucky.

ES: It helps to have your fellow players a little bit careless.

RT: ___ just a little ___ [laughs]

ES: Why do you think he didn't drink?

RT: His dad was an alcoholic. My grandfather died at fifty-two. And the thing that happened __itis. Now one of the things that I found out. They had a lot of stills and they'd drinkin' moonshine. One of the things that some of the moonshiners would do in order to get their wares to market they would fortify them with lye and get them so they could get it out and sell it. And they evidently he got a hold of a pint that had been laced with lye that was…yeah. And it ate through the stomach. Yeah. My grandmother told me that. And I think probably that was one reason that he, you know, he never… He went to a party once and I think he had probably half a beer. [laugh] He was up singing! He said, "Well, if it makes you act that brave..." Nope, just didn't drink.

ES: I gather that his success with people and with businesses in La Grande was a combination of his ingenuity…

RT: Ingenuity.

ES: …in working for himself and probably he was very affable.

RT: Very affable. Yeah.

ES: Liked everybody, or…

RT: They all liked him. And he…so he's got all these buildings that he's had to be cleaned. He had __. I think all the major office buildings. I don't know how he got them, but he had them. So he would dole them out and then he would get the money back. 'Cause I cleaned a couple of them when I was in college to make extra money.

ES: Now which veterans' organization was it he was in? There was a picture of him in the newspaper in uniform. Was it the American Legion?

RT: American Legion, mm-hmm.

ES: Was it at all unusual for him to be invited into that organization?

RT: When we first…the American Legion was always open. The Veterans of Foreign Wars didn't want to accept him. The American Legion, you know, not the most gracious, but they were willing. But no.

ES: Did he have an officer's position?

RT: He was noncommission officer.

ES: I mean an officer in the American Legion.

RT: Oh yeah. He became whatever their top person is.

ES: That's what I suspected.

RT: That was the change from the time…from 1946 until 1960s, '70s that was that breakaway and the change. And the other thing is that the young people that were now American Legion people were kids he had known. Because when I went back and they said, "Well, this person… Well, I went to grade school with the guy who was now the …" So he knew them.

ES: What accounts for his activity in conservation efforts? He was interested in fishing?

RT: Fishing, yeah. And he was really upset, you know, if they open up when he…we went up for __ fishing.

ES: Was that at the time when there was some sense that fishing runs were in danger?

RT: Yeah. And one of the things that he was concerned about was the…and I was kind of surprised that when he came out with that little article about the Indians having total rights to fish at any time even when there was endangerment of you

know. And I said, "How can you do that when you're grandmother was half Indian?" He said, "That have nothing to do with it." [laugh] "That had nothing to do with it." He said, "If I were a fool working and would hit here I would still think ___ fish in that when the salmon are low." That's the way he was.

ES: Was he basing this opinion just on what he observed, or do you think he had studied some of the science of it?

RT: He studied. He had studied. He…you know, he was a strange person. I'd always kid him that you could ask him a question and he couldn't answer it. But if you ask him the next day he would…he could tell you everything. He'd read it. And I says, "Why didn't you go to school?" "Didn't have time. I had to help Dad, you know." He went to work at fourteen. And I thought what a waste!

ES: That's in the air force for three or four years, wasn't it?

RT: Air force. Four…he was just at the maximum age so he would not have been able to find a…about six months later he wouldn't have been able to get in. And, you know, he worked up there master sergeant…whatever that is, sergeant major…whatever they're called…in the air force.

ES: And he would have been eligible for the GI Bill, surely.

RT: Yeah. Never…

ES: But he didn't.

RT: No. No, he said, "I have to go back too far, really." The eighth grade is…yeah. He said, you know, "A seventy year old in eighth grade just won't cut it." I said, "I can't get in a regimented… I could learn it if they'd just let me do it, but they can't give me a time frame and then give your marks being how well I did on it. I can't deal with that." [laugh] "You don't want to be graded?" He said, "Hell no."

ES: What might be the most significant achievement that he made in the conservation field?

RT: I was away. So I read about it also. I don't know. I was surprised that he was that vocal. I know that he had always fished and had always hunted. I…but see we lived in Maxville and there was no season. If you ran out of __ you just walked down by the spring and get one. And I, as a kid, didn't know there were seasons. Pheasants and deer and quail and all that, you know, were there.

ES: And they were probably more loosely observed, anyway, in those times.

RT: Yeah. I don't think in the '30s they….they were plentiful, you know. And you never killed more than you could eat.

ES: Unlimited supply.

RT: Yeah. No. You'd __ and the deer would be drippin' out and hang it up and secure it. When that was you'd shoot another. But I grew up in that kind of an environment and I hadn't realized, you know, that there was restriction on it. And I remember the first time I ordered…what was it…pheasant on the glass when I was out eating and about died when they brought the check. [laughs] I used to eat that every day, you know. I didn't realize we were poor, but we were eating quite well. And that was something that my grandmother had a garden and we had chickens. And each year they would by a little peter pig and raise it up and slaughter it in the winter. So…and she had…we had plenty of food always.

ES: I haven't heard of anybody in Union County who went through the Depression period and was hungry.

RT: No. Actually, we…she…the house was tagged. You know the railroad you have people going west one day looking for jobs and then the next day you got a whole wave of freight trains going. And they knew they could get off and go to Aunt Ella's house for a meal, but you had to chop wood first. So she got all her winter wood chopped. [laugh] She said, "No, don't ever just give it away, you know, we've always…" She said, "They feel better about it, too." So that was one of the things that I learned.

ES: So these were families sometimes?

RT: ___ just individuals.

ES: Men?

RT: Yeah. And occasionally you'd get a family coming through. And we had a family that I don't know where they came from, that reminded me of the story with Henry Fonda and Dust Bowl…what was that thing…?

ES: *The Grapes of Wrath*?

RT: *The Grapes of Wrath*. This family really reminded me of... They moved…

ES: The Jones.

RT: Yeah, the Jones. They moved in next door and they had a disabled child, blind. And they were really poor. And Grandmother fed them for about four months to help them get on their feet.

ES: Fed them and housed them?

RT: Mm-hmm.

ES: Did she give them a room?

RT: Yeah. Are we supposed to get ready to go? Oh, I guess we are, aren't we. [other voice yeah] [tape stopped]