

Bernice and Gary Webster

4/2/03, T1, S1

ES: This is an interview with Gary and Bernice Webster on April 2nd, 2003 in their home in the Grande Ronde Valley. Would you both tell me when and where you born?

BW: I was born in La Grande on October 30th, 1934. And...

ES: But your parents had lived in La Grande for some years?

BW: My mother had been around this county most of her life.

ES: What was your maiden name then?

BW: My maiden name was Howard. My... My father was from Idaho. And my mother had relatives in Idaho and went out there to two years of high school and she met my dad then and they were married. And she came back to La Grande to be with family when I was born.

ES: What was your father's occupation?

BW: He worked in sheep camps and...

ES: Sheep camps?

BW: Uh-huh. And he also worked on gold dredges.

ES: Like the one in Sumpter?

BW: No, in Idaho.

ES: I see.

BW: And he died at a very young age. He died when I was two. He had an attack of appendicitis and his appendix ruptured and he died of peritonitis. And I had a brother who was six weeks old.

GW: She was born in a house on...was it 'X' or 'Y'?

BW: I'm not sure what the street is down there.

ES: The north side.

BW: Mm-hmm.

GW: North side.

BW: In my aunt's house.

ES: Gary, you were born when and where?

GW: I was born November 19th, 1934. I'm an only child and I was born in the house that my younger daughter, Stacy Webster, now lives in. It's approximately eleven miles from La Grande on Webster Road. And I...I don't know how much more you want to know.

ES: The Webster family is one that's been around Union County for some years. Give me a thumbnail history of the Webster family.

GW: The name Webster...my grandfather came to this valley apparently, and I'm not quite certain of the year, by daughter Vicki probably had that in her thesis, but he was...served as a deputy sheriff for his brother Wesley Webster and then he went to work as a bridge foreman when the...I think it was the forerunner of the Union Pacific Railroad came into existence. And he built...or was in charge of building the bridge near Orodell just to the west of La Grande. And he got into the field of farming basically because his father-in-law, who was John Webster, had taken back, or repurchased, I think, a hundred-and-sixty acres of land from a Dutch

homesteader of the name of Henry Booker who was single and who wanted to, after a number of years of homesteading wanted to go back to the old country, back to the Netherlands.

ES: Was that b-o-o-k-e-r?

GW: Yes, b-o-o-k-e-r, yes. And my grandmother...one grandmother in the VanBlocklin side was married to my grandfather William Webster who took up farming. And they had six children, one of who died durin' diphtheria and the other five survived to adulthood. And my grandfather William Webster died in 1925 we think of prostate cancer.

ES: Where was the Webster farming land exactly?

GW: It's... It's on Webster Road, it's eleven miles northeast of La Grande. You come out Hunter, you turn right on Monroe, go a mile-and-three-quarter on a gravel road and then turn a quarter-of-a-mile left, or north, on Webster and it's right off that corner. And the...there was a homestead house when...when the Websters purchased it and then they built a new house, home, in 1916 which still stands.

ES: Do you know who had homesteaded it?

GW: Henry Booker homesteaded it.

ES: Oh, I see. How long was he here, do you think?

GW: You know I really...I'm really not certain. I'm really not certain because... I hesitate to mention some of this. Apparently my great-grandfather John VanBlocklin was a shrewd land trader.

ES: That would've been John.

GW: That would've been John. And he was responsible, I'm told through numerous grandchildren, of getting several Dutch settlers, usually young men in their late teens, early twenties, to come into this valley and because the land donation act, I think the Homestead Act went into effect in 1962 under Lincoln.

ES: 1862.

GW: 1862 under Abraham Lincoln.

ES: Yes.

GW: And I forget...forgotten the specifics of that, but I think you fessed up on land for three years or five years it became yours. And Henry Booker was single, he was apparently a eighteen, nineteen years of age. And he was here for, I would guess, twenty to twenty...twenty years or so. Apparently never married. Got homesick for the homeland. At that time the Dutch in some ways and certainly it came out in World War I were persecuted because they didn't...basically did not know English or knew only broken English and there were very few females around. And one by one, I am led to understand by descendants of John VanBlocklin, that Dutch...young Dutch men would get homesick for the motherland and want to return to Holland, to the Netherlands. And John VanBlocklin for a team of horses or a...maybe a...I think train had come through in 1884, I believe, would pay their trip...for their train trip back to New York where they could catch back to the Netherlands. And he acquired, I am told, considerable amounts of land in this valley through...some said that he was a shrewd trader and that he probably realized when he brought them over that they might stay five, seven, ten years and then wish to go back and generally many or most of them did. And according to my daughter Vicki Brishotti in her thesis, I think this has to be an exaggeration,

but she was told by two or three of the grandsons who were living at that time when she was writing her thesis, which was about 1979 or '80, that you could go to La Grande to Summerville without stepping off of VanBlocklin land. And they lost it, basically, through high living before the Depression.

ES: It might not have been an exaggeration if you say he was shrewd and there were a number of people around who didn't want to have very deep roots. But that's beside the point because it no longer exists as an empire, right?

GW: They lost all of it. The head of the Great Depression that's in this thesis.

ES: Yes. [telephone ringing]

BW: Excuse me. [recording paused]

ES: You were born near where we're sitting right now...

GW: About a mile...

ES: You went to school in several schools, you told me earlier. Let's start with the first one.

GW: Okay, I went...I started first grade in Iowa at the age of five and the...there was one teacher for grades one through eight.

ES: This was the Iowa School.

GW: Iowa School.

ES: Now...

GW: It was at the corner of Stanley and Monroe...and Hunter.

ES: And it's... Was it demolished?

GW: No.

ES: Was that the one...

GW: It was moved, I believe, probably in the late 1950s, that could be determined by someone else, and it is setting right near the corner of Blackhawk Trail and Fox Hill Road. Right across from the fair grounds.

BW: Fair grounds.

ES: Oh yes. Yes, I've seen that. I didn't realize that had been the Iowa School, however.

GW: That was the or...I'm not sure it was the original Iowa School, but that was the Iowa School. There was a horse barn and there was a little bicycle barn and there was a pitcher pump and two outhouses.

ES: How vividly do you remember your experiences in first grade?

GW: Quite well.

ES: Yes?

GW: There was one other little first-grade girl and the teacher said...told my parents that...Dad was a director, there were three directors in the Iowa district, and Mother was clerk of the Iowa district. And they did not want to take me...the teacher did not want to take me because I was under age. And...but they needed, as I understand it, to have a minimum of ten students to keep a rural district going according to state education laws and there were seven. And apparently they could squeeze by if they had eight or nine and so a lady by the name of Pauline Johnson...she and her husband ran the Polar Fur Farm which is up on Mink Road, they had minks...she taught grades one through eight. And apparently I did well enough that I went the first and second grade to Iowa. The one girl is still living, she's wife of Don Waldrop who had Waldrop Oil, Lila Waite was her name.

There were no second-graders. There was a third-grader by the name of...his last name was Ockletree. There was a fourth-grader by the name of Eloise Tucker. A fifth-grader by the name of Wilma Campbell. She lives out of Cove. And a sixth-grader by the name of Frances Ockletree, girl, female. And two seventh-grade boys, Kermit Hols and Paul Ockletree.

ES: Do you remember all those names because you have reunions?

GW: Yes, I do. No. I've never seen most of 'em since.

ES: I don't remember the names of my classmates when I was first...

GW: Were there only seven, though? [laughs]

ES: It does make a difference. What's your best information about why it was called the Iowa School?

GW: My best information, and I didn't know this at all at the time, but, in fact, my folks were not in Iowa district. They were in what was called Lone Star school district, which was on the sand ridge. But Lone Star had ceased holding classes in 1934, the year I was born. And Lone Star consolidated into Iowa. And I have only found this out recently, I think it's accurate, because the Iowa community of homesteaders came from the state of...basically came from the state of Iowa and I suppose they were the ones that erected the school. I went the first and second grade to Iowa and then the two seventh-grade boys having graduated out of the eighth grade had to leave and go to high school and there were no new kids coming in and that dropped it down to six and they forced Iowa to close. And I...my parents lived four miles from Imbler and I went the third, fourth, and fifth grades to Imbler. And Pauline Johnson and her husband, who were somewhat social friends of my parents, she left and went to Imbler and was a music teacher and I believe an English teacher at Imbler. And she told my folks at the end of three years at Imbler in the fifth grade she says, "Get Gary out of Imbler. It's not challenging enough for him." And my folks fought a court battle and won. My folks' residence, where my daughter Stacey lives, where I was born and raised, the Booker homestead, is four miles from Imbler and eleven miles from La Grande. And if you look around at the district lines in this valley you know there were sixty-five or seventy school districts and La Grande does go within two-and-a-half or three miles of Imbler, it goes within about three or four miles of Cove, it goes past Hot Lake and basically the consolidation into La Grande at that time apparently took place because those in the powers that be in La Grande, I assume the board of education, superintendent, realized that there was a lot of what they called, quote, "rich farm ground with very few students." And property tax being the main source of income La Grande was able to garner much of the valley's land and property tax coming into La Grande rather than the smaller rural districts. And the folks were not well-liked particularly in Imbler because they did fight this court battle. And I can recall even after I was married that there were older folks that remembered what had gone on and would not speak to my parents.

ES: What was the specific purpose of the suit?

GW: It was to consolidate Iowa with Lone Star into La Grande because Imbler wanted us in Imbler district and Imbler ran the first busses in this county. They were three years before La Grande started running busses.

ES: And your parents wanted this because they thought Imbler wasn't challenging enough for you?

GW: I don't think it was necessarily they thought that, but the teacher, Pauline Johnson, told my folks that.

ES: But they had decided that they needed a suit in order to get you into a La Grande school?

GW: Apparently they were going...my parents were going to be forced into Imbler because they lived, as I said, four miles versus eleven. And Imbler had busses and La Grande didn't.

ES: Bernice, your early school experience was in La Grande, was it?

BW: I started school in Huntington, Oregon where my mother lived after my dad passed away.

ES: I see. I didn't realize you left La Grande for a while there.

BW: Mm-hmm. And we lived there for six years. So I went to...I started third grade there and my mother had married a railroader by the name of Floyd Hagey. And he was transferred to La Grande and so we moved to La Grande probably in October of my third grade year. And then I went to Ackerman through the rest of grade school.

ES: I see. Tell me a little about the Ackerman experience as specifically as you can. It often is cited as being rather different than going to school in the other La Grande elementary schools.

BW: I...yes, I'm sure it is. You had a teacher for every class and then according to terms you had like two student teachers in the morning and two student teachers in the afternoon. And so each one of Ackerman's classrooms had like two rooms in it and they divided classes up.

ES: Like fourth and fifth together or fifth and sixth?

BW: No, I'm talking about to accommodate the student teachers they would take part of the class and the supervising teacher would take the rest of the class.

ES: But weren't several of them combined grades?

BW: I only had one year when I...when we had a fourth and fifth that I was in a combined class.

ES: Did you thrive?

BW: No. [laugh] I was very shy when I moved to La Grande and it took a while for me to make friends. I had very good friends there, but I was adjusting to a new step-father and a new town. I...my grandmother had lived with us in Huntington and took care of us while my mother worked. And it was just totally different environment. I guess I was an average student.

GW: I think there's quite a...if I might intercede... I think there's quite a cultural shock coming from Huntington, Oregon to La Grande and Ackerman was perceived as the...the school that many professors sent their kids to and I don't know about doctors so much, teachers, professors and teachers. And many of the students that she went to Ackerman with were pretty fair students.

BW: One... One nice thing about Ackerman was that the college professors taught art and music and P. E. and so we had all...all three of those classes that other grade schools in La Grande at that time did not have.

ES: Do you know why your mother, if she was the one who made the decision, decided to have you go there rather than one of the other La Grande elementary schools? If you were living on the north side... Or at that time were you living on the north side?

BW: No. We lived on 'K' Avenue which was right under Ackerman, the college hill.

ES: The old Central School near the high school would've been the choice then for you, wouldn't it?

BW: When... When we... When we moved here and Mother was taking us to school to enroll us we were going to Central. And we climbed up Eighth Street hill, which is blocked off now, and it was very, very cold, it was in the fall and there was a really cold wind and Mother just couldn't stand to think about us walking clear to Central the whole winter so she stopped at Ackerman and they took us in.

GW: When you said 'K' it was the bottom of 'K' down under College Hill.

ES: Yes.

BW: So that was really the reason we started at Ackerman.

ES: Do you recall being aware at the time of attitudes that other children or adults had about people that went to Ackerman?

BW: I think that the Ackerman kids were considered by the other grade schools to be elitist.

ES: And therefore what behavior? What did the other... What behavior did the other kids have toward Ackerman kids?

BW: You know, I really...we all came together...all the grade schools in La Grande came together in the eighth grade and we were in the old Central building. And I...I seem to make friends very easily when I got into the eighth grade.

ES: You weren't taunted from having been at Ackerman?

BW: Not really taunted, but I think there was...personally I never felt better than anybody else because I went to Ackerman, but I think that the other kids perceived that. But I...I think when we came together in the eighth grade we melded in pretty fast. Don't you feel that?

GW: We had one year of middle school, eighth grade is unique in Oregon.

ES: And that's where you went after Iowa?

GW: I went the first, second to Iowa, third, fourth and fifth to Imbler, sixth and seventh to Greenwood and in eighth grade Patten, Fred Patten was the superintendent and apparently it was unique in the state of Oregon, I've heard that Klamath Falls had a one-year eighth middle school, they called it junior high, call it middle school, and then a four-year high school. And we were at the one-year junior high on the...were we in the top story of the old Central building? Central School had...

BW: No, we were in the bottom floor.

GW: We were in the bottom, weren't we?

BW: And we had some classes in the high school. We went over to the high school for P. E. and for music.

GW: That was all, yeah, P. E. and music. We had...

ES: Tell me a little about the conditions for learning at Central School, the routines you went through, the kinds of textbooks and other materials you had, the teachers' methods, discipline, those kinds of things.

BW: Most of the teachers were very strong disciplinarians and they didn't put up with very much. And at that time teachers still were allowed to...

GW: Corporal punishment.

BW: Yes. Spank.

ES: And they did?

BW: And they did.

ES: With rulers?

BW: And they all... I had one teacher who had the sole off of a tennis shoe that was about that long that he used. Ridicule, particularly to these smarty boys. They were pretty much ridiculed. One teacher that we had who was a math teacher...and she just died a couple of years ago...she'd set the boys under her desk.

ES: What kinds of infractions would bring punishments like those?

BW: Chewing gum, talking.

GW: Exactly.

BW: Being unruly. We never... We never talked back to a teacher. I mean if you did you were in big trouble.

ES: Would you... Would it be accurate to say that fear was prevalent in the classrooms?

BW: I wouldn't say fear so much. You respected your teacher.

ES: But if they ridiculed you how could you respect them?

BW: I don't know. You just did.

GW: It was a respect that came from the fact that teachers wore dresses, men basically wore suits and... When Riveria closed last year...my younger daughter is a teacher at Island City first grade, but she taught kindergarten at Riveria...and I was looking through the...some of the '50s and '60s booklets of classes in Riveria and you could be suspended for school for three days for chewing gum and that's in one of the Riveria...

BW: I have to say that I loved most of my teachers.

GW: I did, too.

BW: But I wasn't a child who was in trouble, you know. I behaved and followed the rules pretty much.

GW: I rode the school bus and the bus driver was a man by the name of Vern Berry and he had a rubber hose about this long. And the boys just loved...we'd make spit wads all night and put the rubber bands under my arm all the way up to my elbow because, you know, they do break once in a while. [laugh]

BW: Under your sleeve.

GW: Under your sleeve, yes. [laugh] And you'd set on that sixty-six passenger bus and you go "boing, boing" and...but every once in a while you'd get caught because he would see ya and he'd come back with the rubber hose and he'd whack you a good one.

ES: Stop the bus and...

GW: Oh yes. Oh yes.

ES: ...make a spectacle of the wrong-doer.

GW: Oh yes. And the...the roads weren't built up, the grades weren't built...bar pits were not deep like they are now. And during the winter months he would have

basically the bigger kids...all the weight that could set in the back of the bus so they could get...the bus could get more traction as it'd go through. And they would try to ram through any east-west road that was...today that busses would not even attempt to get through. And many times we'd be stalled for two or three hours out in the middle of a raging blizzard in the valley waiting for some help from somebody else. They didn't have cell phones and I guess after so long of time somebody'd come lookin' for ya. [laugh]

ES: Do you recall very much homework?

GW: Yes.

ES: And did you do it?

GW: I don't recall an exorbitant amount, but you...

BW: It seems like we had homework every night, probably just a page in a class. Math I recall because I...that was the subject that I wasn't very good in.

ES: What would be the conditions for getting that homework done?

BW: My mother just...after dinner we just did homework.

ES: Supervised or...?

BW: Yes.

ES: Exactly how did you go about this? Did you sit at the dining room table, for example?

BW: We set at the kitchen table. And my mother did work out of the home, she was home. And after we got our homework done we listened to radio programs. We'd...of course that was before TV. And every evening while we were doing our radio programs, well, we'd eat canned peaches and toast. So...we just...it was just a rule in our house that you did it.

ES: About a half-an-hour's work, then, after dinner and then the radio?

BW: Probably. It seemed like a long time to me.

ES: Oh yes. Yes. Especially if you're being forced to do it.

GW: Mine wasn't supervised. I think... I really think I worked for quite a bit more than a half-hour, but it wasn't supervised. Could I jump back just one little interesting tidbit about Iowa School?

ES: Please do.

GW: War II started, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, and Pauline Johnson, our teacher, husband...I don't know whether he was...I think he was called to duty...Don Johnson...by the way, he later came back and became a teacher...a teacher in La Grande High School. And they're both still living and they live in Boise, Idaho. But I can recall him going away to war and him coming to one room, which was maybe as big as these two rooms together, and saying goodbye to the eight of us kids. And I was, again, just a five-year old or maybe six by that time, I guess I'd just turned six, and I was absolutely panic-stricken that Japanese plans were going to come over Mt. Emily and bomb Iowa School. I can remember that and every morning I would look up at the mountain and I expected to see planes and I expected that we were going to be bombed. That's very vivid in my memory.

ES: What do you think fed your imagination that that would happen?

GW: Her husband going off to war, number one, and then I had two uncles that went into the service.

ES: But what made you connect going into the service with having Japanese planes come across the Pacific Ocean?

GW: I really don't know other than my folks were pretty well up on news events and history. They weren't people that just sat even though there was no TV. We went to movies and they had the news reels, fifteen minutes news reels or eighteen, whatever they were. And we watched...can't even remember their names now, the old RKO programs preceding the movie.

ES: The Movie Tone News.

GW: Uh-huh. They had three theatres in La Grande.

BW: In Huntington we had blackouts.

GW: Yes, and we did in La Grande.

BW: And everybody had to have blackout curtains and there was a warden who walked around and made sure that you had your lights out. And I can remember...I don't know as I was scared about begin bombed, but that...that was frightening to have to turn your lights out and set in the dark.

GW: Huntington was the turn-around, the railroad, you know, at that time.

ES: Yes.

GW: Okay.

ES: There were also plane spotters around here.

BW: Yes.

ES: Supposedly looking for...[end tape]

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BW: I do remember in the middle in of the night if you'd wake up and hear a plane going over it would...it was kind of scary, but I'm not sure that I really equated it with bombing. I really...you know, I don't really know what I equated the fear with now. It's been too many years.

GW: I think for a brief period of time they did walk a railroad bridge or two also.

BW: Oh, they walked the railroad yards.

ES: There were armed guards at various places, on bridges especially and tunnels. Other narrators have told us about this. Anything else about the Central School, middle school experience that's vivid in your memories?

GW: We certainly had the basics which is more than you can say now. And I've spent twelve... I was on the La Grande School Board for twelve years and I think I know. But the teachers...you got a very good base in English and in arithmetic, in math and in science.

BW: We were excellent readers.

GW: Yes, we were excellent readers. Basically you were excellent reader...

BW: Even average students were excellent readers.

GW: Yes. Yes. Diagramming sentences. At our class reunion...we had our fiftieth last summer...and Betty Ragsdale was the only teacher that's still around and I asked the class, I said...she was there in attendance and I said, "How many of you know what a split infinitive is or a dangling participle or a juron?" And, you

- know, I couldn't begin to tell you what they are [laughs], but one of the kids said, "I don't know what they are, but I could sure diagram 'em." [laughs]
- ES: That's a controversial subject. As a former English teacher I'm up on the controversy. Right after high school did you have a little interval of further education before you took up farming?
- GW: I...like I say, I went to Greenwood sixth and seventh, Central eighth, which was middle school, and four years La Grande High School and then I went straight to college in the fall of 1952. And you said EOC, but it was EOCE at that time and the year that I graduated I was one of the first three students in the spring of 1956 that was...had a bachelor of science in general studies. I did not get a BS in education. Or I don't have a BA 'cause I didn't have another language. It was a BS and there two others and myself.
- ES: What led to your choice of EOCE as the college that you would go to? There were certainly other choices, weren't there?
- GW: Didn't have the money. Farming was pretty frugal. At that time my folks did not have a large farm and I had a girlfriend, for heaven sake, and she lived in La Grande. I couldn't have afforded to have gone to college anywhere else. I always knew I was probably going to farm, but my rational was, and it's been born true many times with friends of our kids and friends of ours and their kids, my parents pretty well felt that you needed...a person needed to get an education before they got married and started having children and that... We've seen so many cases where somebody would go to a prestigious university, Stanford or MIT or something, which would be wonderful, or Oregon, Oregon State even or Washington, and they would have enough money to last out a term or two and then they'd have to come back and work for a term or two or a year and then to go back for another term or two and then they'd fall in love and they'd get married and they'd try to go back and work and they'd get about two or three years of education and they'd finally give it up. And where I...my folks really instilled in me the fact that if I didn't always want to farm that I could probably go out and when I graduated I could've taught in Idaho, not in Oregon, but in Idaho.
- BW: Plus the fact that he helped his father on weekends and vacation time.
- GW: Yeah, I did. I helped weekends.
- ES: Tell me a little more about the conditions of the student life at Eastern Oregon College of Education at that period.
- GW: There were the kids who traversed back and forth and then there was the townees, the kids that lived in the dormitories.
- ES: Were you driving back and forth each day?
- GW: Yes. Yes. And I'm not sure what you want me to tell. I enjoyed college very much, I've always enjoyed school. I was a good student. I was able to stay out of the tail-end of the Korean War because my grades were in the top third, top thirty-three percent. And I was heavy in social sciences and in history and in literature were my subjects, which about all you can really do in those fields is teach where in many other...in your science, math fields you can go on to become many things.
- ES: You can also live a richer life by knowing some of those things.

GW: Yes. But I loved history and I loved literature and geography, that type of thing. I was in theatre and I was president of Sock and Buskin. I was in four or five plays. And I was in a...I was very involved in politics.

ES: Where were the plays produced at that time?

GW: Inlow. Inlow in the theatre.

ES: In the main auditorium there.

GW: Yeah. It wasn't called Inlow at that time, but the administration building.

BW: Gary also had a beautiful singing voice...has a beautiful singing voice and he was always involved in music.

GW: I was in Blue and Gold Singers and briefly in a quartet. I was very active in politics and I guess you would say the reason...or there were more than one reason...returning...and this may fly in your face...returning students coming back from the Korean War were basically all Democrats and they were...they'd been around the world and they loved to play poker and chase girls and drink all weekend. And I was...I was pretty much of a prude. I didn't care for that. My folks were rock...rock Republicans and so basically I was in Young Republicans and I was also in IRC, International Relations Club, under Joe Geyser. And Joe Geyser took twelve or fourteen of us to the model United Nations the tenth...on the tenth anniversary of it's founding at the War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco. And I forget what...I think we represented Egypt. But we went in 1954. The U.N. apparently was formed in 1944, the War Memorial Opera House. And so I considered myself a big world traveler. Then the next year they held the eleventh anniversary in Corvallis at OSU and we went again that year. And I was quite vocal, probably obnoxious. Again, you may not like to hear some of these things...

ES: That doesn't matter what I like to hear.

GW: At that time Wayne Morris was at the...

ES: Yes.

GW: ...epitome of his power, the United States senator, and very well liked and very well respected. And the Hells Canyon dams were big issues. I was campaign manager for Sam Coon who was Second Congressional District who Al Omen finally defeated. And I can recall going into Wallowa County trying to spread the word...I can't even remember who ran against...it was the governor...McKay. But also, basically, for Sam Coon. And we had these loud speakers mounted on top of vehicles and we would go through Wallowa and Enterprise [laugh] and Joseph. It's so hokey now it's ridiculous. But blaring out, you know, all the good virtues of basically any Republican candidate. And I can recall...I was not a part of this, but I was going with Bernice and she can...she can remember it too. The Sacagawea Hotel was standing and the second...second story was the ballroom. And Wayne Morris was speaking, had a major speech in the Sac ballroom. And there were about a dozen...again, I did not get involved in this...but there were about a dozen Young Republicans...that's a hardwood floor and they had the squeaky chairs...and they positioned themselves in the middle of the huge group of people. And just when Wayne Morris would get to a very important point in his talk, and you know he was quite a flamboyant speaker, I'm sure you have to know Wayne Morris...one or two of 'em would get up and have to get out and go

to the door. Well, everybody had to pull back, you know, and there's all this...all this "squeak, squawk, squeak, squawk" and, you know, it was...

BW: It was embarrassing.

GW: ...civil disobedience I guess you'd call it. [laughs] But it was all planned. I can remember that.

ES: While we're on the subject of politics I'd be very curious to have your version of what it meant in the 1940s and '50s to be a rockrft Republican in Union County.

GW: Very much a minority. Very much a minority.

ES: Are you sure of that?

GW: Yes. In Union County it was three-to-two Democrat registration.

ES: Maybe then we should talk about kinds of ideas...

GW: Neuberger.

ES: ...people held in Union County that would've made the Republicans a minority.

GW: Morris of course started out in politics as a Republican and then he switched to Independent. I don't know if he ever become a Democrat, I believe he did.

ES: I think he was primarily and Independent.

GW: Yeah, he certainly was. *The Tiger in the Senate*, have you ever read that book? And Richard Neuberger...I honestly can't tell you other than I think it was a residue left over from War II and Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman and the fact that Dewey was not liked, Thomas Dewey.

ES: Residue? You mean an antagonism toward FDR's policies?

GW: No, no, no, no. No, people...people loved FDR and basically Truman.

ES: Even the rockred Republicans?

GW: No, no, no. I don't mean...no...you said what...

ES: What does it mean to be a rock red Republican even if it was a minority?

GW: The folks were very conservative and...

ES: Socially conservative?

GW: Yes. And they had no use for FDR. And I can remember when I was five or six years old listening to...at late, late into the night listening to when Roosevelt beat Wendell Wilkie, which was basically pretty much a landslide. And of course before that...

ES: Al Flandin.

GW: Al Flandin, yes. 1936. Daughter is Nancy Castlebaum. I really don't know why the folks were initial...basically it's because of my folks.

ES: That's what I suspected.

GW: Yeah.

ES: I'm wonder...I'm wonder... My parents were Republicans, too, and I have never understood why. Maybe you... Maybe you have a better understanding of why yours were?

GW: They didn't like...Roosevelt tried to pack the Supreme Court, fifteen members, they did not like that. They felt...now, you know, I'm tellin' you how they felt.

ES: Yeah.

GW: I'm not telling you what maybe...

ES: And they influenced you.

GW: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. They felt that the Depression was starting to get better, that basically Hoover was doing all that he could and that actually the Depression is

- deepening prior to War II and becoming even with the CCC and WPA and the BWA and all those good things, and I think historians would agree with that, and war, too, basically...precursor to War II was basically what brought us out of the Depression. That was their consensus. They did not like...
- BW: I think also the farming community was pretty much Republican.
- GW: Yes.
- BW: Because of...they had to be conservative to make a living. They had conservative views and they spent only what they needed to spend, you know, they bought only what they had to have. And, well, Gary and I have spent most of our lives if we don't have cash to buy something we just don't buy it, you know. And I think the social programs that were being brought in at that time and the increase that brought taxes, and of course the land was taxed as well as your income, I think that had a big bearing on it.
- GW: We... We have a nice house. We built our house. I've got \$280 hired labor in this house. It's built on the foundation of an apple warehouse that burned down in 1910. This eighty acres that we have and the eighty acres across the road was originally apple orchard. And you've probably been told this by maybe Glen McKenzie or others, at one time in the 1920s there was a sign at the...each end of Imbler, Oregon said, "Entering Imbler, the Apple Capital of the USA" before Okanogan and Hood River and...
- ES: Cherries, too, wasn't it?
- GW: Yes, cherries, but I know there was a sign regarding apples. And these...these trees up here were supposedly put in in the 1880s. They're about a hundred and twenty years old.
- ES: Bearing apple trees?
- GW: Oh, they have apples on them. They're basically...there's only about this much cambry and bark holdin' 'em up and every time you get a windstorm it blows over three or four, but they're basically hollow. We have the stock rock, Jonathan's Roman Beauties and a few Delicious trees. But we keep 'em up here because they're a wind break for our cattle, I have a herd of cattle. Now we're getting off the subject. But farmers... Our house we had turned \$280 hired labor in...in our house. The rock that we got for our house we got from a quarry up at Mt. Glenn.
- BW: We dug it out.
- GW: We dug it out and Dad and I built this house. We plumbed it, we wired it. And it took us...we'd go about fifteen, twenty feet a year.
- ES: I get the sense from you both then that in the '30s, '40s, maybe '50s the Republican party, at least in Union County, stood for social conservatism, anti-taxes, stability. Democratic party maybe it seemed like big spenders, too much oriented towards...
- BW: Too much government control in your business.
- ES: Government control, yes. Even if the government control was intended to improve the general welfare.
- BW: Mm-hmm. But farmers in particular resented...

ES: Do you think that the Republican party was a minority here at that time because most people weren't so closely related to farming and therefore their interests would've been different?

BW: We had... We had a lot of railroaders in La Grande at that time.

ES: Yes, indeed.

BW: I was raised in a Democratic household.

GW: Mill workers.

BW: And a lot of mill workers, all labor union people. And, yes, the farmers were a minority. Now the state of Oregon at that time, I think, was pretty conservative.

GW: Yeah, but not Union County.

ES: You mentioned going around campaigning for Mr. Coon and events such as that, were you feeling much of the time, or any of the time, strong tensions between people with Democratic or Republican leanings?

GW: Oh, to a degree. Young people are so...well, they're probably not matured in their thinking, impetuous.

BW: My feeling is is the only time you ran into it was at some type of a political gathering. I don't think, you know, at church or socially that...that they were out sparring around about their beliefs.

ES: Wasn't a prominent part of everyday life then?

BW: No, no.

GW: I guess there certainly still are the extremes. Bernice's dad was a labor union Democrat and he...the...I call it the Labor Union Rag that he brought home that was the gospel. And I cannot think of one thing that he and I agreed on, not one thing. And not just politics, we didn't...he was a...he was a General Motors man and I was a Ford man. [laughs] He was a great guy, but we didn't...and he was very volatile. And honestly when we went to vote, when we just turned twenty-one we were married just before we turned twenty-one. We went together from my junior year of high school till my...till junior year of college. In between my junior and senior year of college...I didn't really know how Bernice was going to register, she registered Republican, but I really didn't know.

BW: Because he had drug me around to all these political meetings my mind changed. [laughs]

ES: I see.

GW: I MCed a lot of meetings and I was also Berry Goldwater's campaign chairman for several...several counties in Eastern Oregon and I drove Berry Goldwater Jr., who flew into La Grande, I drove him from La Grande to Ontario.

BW: Then also the farm organizations that we belonged to, Farm Bureau and...

GW: Farm Bureau in particular.

BW: ...Cattlemen's.

GW: Cattlemen.

BW: They were...

GW: Very conservative.

BW: ...conservative.

ES: Did you identify any newspaper in Union County as being Republican or Democrat or did they seem more Independent?

GW: *Eastern Oregon Review* was under Sam...not Sam...whatever Shorb...C. J. Shorb. Was one that was published one day a week and it was very definitely Democrat. *The Observer* I really can't tell ya.

BW: Their editorials at *The Observer* were basically, I would say, lean toward Republicans.

GW: Yeah, I think so.

ES: Reflecting the business interest in La Grande, perhaps?

BW: Perhaps.

GW: Of course you probably know this as well as I do, *The Oregonian* basically was a Republican newspaper and *The Journal* was Democrat.

ES: Yes.

GW: And both of those...I think...I don't know whether that many people take the...of course *The Journal* is out of existence, but I don't know if that many people even take *The Oregonian* anymore. You see it in the library and a few people take it. A lot of people get the *Walla Walla Union Bulletin*. I imagine... I imagine it was conservative, but I don't know.

ES: Most likely.

GW: Yeah.

ES: Yes.

GW: You know, in hindsight, and I don't want to really go into this because I still have some mixed emotions, but I remember at the college they...they had the Coon-Neuberger debates...Richard Neuberger was the U.S. Senator and Coon was the Second District congressman...over the high dams in Hells Canyon. And at that time, I'm saying at that time, I could see nothing whatever wrong... We did not want the government dams.

BW: PUC, right?

GW: PUD.

BW: PUD, okay.

GW: And, you know, in retrospect what has happened with the salmon runs, with a number of things, you really wonder about the wisdom of some of these things forty years afterward.

ES: Certainly do.

GW: And I know you're probably a very good friend of Dick McDaniels. Dick and I served on the school board together.

ES: I don't know him.

GW: He's big in Blue Mountain Forum, you said...

ES: I know who he is, but I don't know him.

GW: Dick and I used to argue all the time. We were both on the school board, he was as hard-headed as I was. We'd argue just to get each other's goat. But, you know, in retrospect and I think...who was it that said, you know, the older you get the wiser you get. [laugh] I must be getting pretty ancient, at least I think I'm wiser than I used to be. I'm still Republican. In fact, we both are. But it's not as black and white.

BW: We don't attend meetings or...

GW: No. I am a precinct committee member.

- ES: I'm primarily interested here in the Republican-Democratic relationships in earlier years, at least fifty years ago. Shall we get into the subject of farming? Something that you have a lot of knowledge about, both of you I'm sure.
- GW: Bernice is a city girl and she'd never lived out on a farm or outside the city limits till we were married and that was a little bit of a change.
- ES: You said you were supposing...I'm not trying to shield my eyes. You said you were supposing from the time you were fairly young that you would farm as a career. Was this because of your parents' expectations do you think, primarily?
- GW: To a fair degree. I think if I'd had brothers or sisters I never would've farmed because I...I really have a keen interest in other things. And although I think I was a moderate to fairly good farmer... Dad had registered Hereford cattle and I was an only child and the folks were of course getting on in years and I mean I had, you might say, dropped in my lap, so to speak. I loved... I think I could've been...I couldn't be now because I'd kill a kid, but I think I could've been a good teacher. I loved music, I loved acting, I'm a reasonably good artist, at least I think I am, and I like journalism, I really like journalism. I always thought I might...would like to work for a newspaper as a...as a reporter. But, of course, I never did any of those things. But I...I never took...well, of course, at that time there was no agriculture to be had here at Eastern Oregon. And of course I couldn't...didn't go to Washington State or Oregon State to cow colleges, is what they called 'em then.
- ES: Tell me about the kinds of knowledge of what's involved in farming and cattle raising you'd acquired by the time you were in high school.
- GW: I worked in the summer for my dad and basically it was haying and the wheat harvest. And at that time they had crews of men... When I started as a small boy I drove derrick...driving derrick for a...on a Mormon derrick?
- ES: Yes, but please explain that.
- GW: [laugh] I'm probably not very good at explaining...what...a Mormon derrick or what?
- ES: Mormon derrick, yes.
- GW: A Mormon derrick was on wheels and could be moved from field to field, but it had...it had large corner pieces on a...on a...on usually pole frame and it had a swinging boom on an axle high up in the air that on one end was a what they call a Jackson fork that would drop down and it would pick up loose hay that would be brought in from the field on a buck rake or on a slip and they would pick up enough to hold a Jackson fork was usually four-tined and about three-and-a-half or four feet in...in width and maybe the tines would go out two, two-and-a-half feet and it would...on a cable would go up through the top of the derrick and it was pulled by a horse. I started out driving a horse. And then when the hay would get up in the middle of a loose stack a stacker or sometimes two or three stackers'd yell "Hit 'er" or "trip 'er" "trip it" and it would trip the Jackson fork and the loose hay would fall on the...on the stack and then with pitchforks they would kind of arrange the...the loose haystack. And a good hay stacker could make a stack with kind of a bulge at the top to keep the weather, the winter storms, from rotting the hay so much. A bulge kind of like the top of the match head, like a match head. Of course if they weren't a good hay stacker it'd all fall

down, too. And I started doing that and then I drove. I never mowed hay with horses, but I've driven side-delivery rake and I've driven a buck rake with work horses. They were two Clydesdales called Dick and Bally and there was another called Tom and Jerry. And then when the...when the Holt combines first began to be converted over from using horses or mules... In fact, I have never really seen...I've only seen pictures of horses pulling Holt combines. But the Holt combine Dad had was an eighteen-foot...had an eighteen-foot header, had four...four...it was run by four men. And Dad cut off the tongue where it would ordinarily...which originally when it was the Holt combine when it was new would go out and the initial horses were...I forget what the pack horses were called...hitched to them and then of course the catbird seat went out in front of the Holt combine and the catbird driver had I don't know how many lines...I guess there were twenty-eight horses he must've had...I don't know, either seven or fourteen sets of lines that he had to work those horses from. I never saw that, however, but Dad had shortened that tongue up and it was pulled by a '30 Cat, Caterpillar. And I drove a '30 Cat for about three or four years.

ES: Do you have pictures of all this equipment?

GW: No, I don't. I have pictures of the haying equipment, but I don't have pictures of the combine. I certainly know what it looks like, but, no, I don't. And then... And then they would dump the straw out of the back of the combine. There was a fellow attended separator and he would keep the wheat and the stuff going down in the bulker box, which was...basically they were pretty much made out of wood. And then a guy that tended header would raise and lower the header, which was out to the side of the combine, depending on the height of the wheat.

ES: Was the header what cut the wheat?

GW: It...the header was...yes. Yes. It cut it and then there was a reel that pulled it in. And then it came into the side of the combine. I've kind of forgot what some of that terminology is called. And then it went through the combine and then you had a sack sewer who sat back on the...up on the combine...oh, did they eat dirt!...and...

ES: These were hot August days...[end tape]

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GW: A saw jigger would jig the sacks and they would sew the tops of the sacks with an ear on each side and then they would let 'em down a little trace or a little slide and the ground and there were four people on those combines.

ES: And these crews, where did they come from?

GW: When I was around it was Dad and the neighbors and of course I was a young kid. Before that, of course, and the old-timers could certainly tell ya, Glen McKenzie, certainly they had threshing crew that came around. I can remember the very last of the threshing crews, but I wasn't involved with 'em. And that took many more men.

BW: Your folks had hired men that lived there with them.

GW: Yes. Basically that was through haying season. And they would have...

ES: They were itinerant?

GW: Yes. They basically came from the Dust Bowl areas, from Oklahoma and... There were four young brothers that were all single that came out in a roadster and they lived... a couple of 'em lived... slept in the hay mow of the barn down at the folks' and I think one or two of 'em slept... I think one of 'em slept in the car and one of 'em slept upstairs in my folks' house. And then Dad basically always had a hired man. Of course Dad had a lot more ground then, too.

ES: Where would a hired man typically come from?

GW: He usually... they were kids that was right out of high school that didn't have a job and many of 'em didn't have much... much of an education. A lot of folks came... I mean this was the end of Grapes of Wrath. Tobacco Road came from the Dust Bowl areas. I know the Davis... Davis boys came out from... Miller, excuse me, there was a Davis and there was a Miller. The Miller boys came out from Oklahoma. And I... I can remember some of the stories they told about the dirt and what they had or what they had that blew away.

ES: Would most of those hired men move on gradually or did some of them settle around here?

GW: A little bit of both. There's a fella and this guy I think... I haven't talked with him in about three years, but he was very sharp. Doc Miller lives in Union and he was... he was one of the boys and he remembered Dad and really liked my dad. And, you know, I kind of think Doc worked at the mill although I'm not a hundred percent certain. And then there's a young fellow that I also liked really well that worked at the mill at Elgin. I'm not sure whether he went... I think he went in the serv... went in War II and then when he came back from War II.

ES: While they were...

GW: Clarence Hays is his name.

ES: While they were working around the farm were they essentially separate from families or would they take part in some family life?

GW: They eat their meals basically in the house, yes. No, I don't remember them being socially... In that day and age farmers played pinochle, couples played pinochle and later canasta came on, but no, they weren't involved in that. I suppose... I suppose maybe they went to town and got drunk on Saturday night, I don't know.

ES: I guess one... one of the things I was thinking was, do you think they were considered essentially lower class?

GW: Oh, I didn't feel 'em that way. Of course, I was a young kid.

ES: Yes, but you get a sense of those things when you're young.

GW: No, I didn't feel it that way. No, and...

ES: Did you talk to them?

GW: Oh yes.

ES: Did they tell you stories?

GW: Yeah, and they were all very nice. I never had one that I felt uneasy around or felt... I mean, good grief, the world we have today you wouldn't want to put your kids alone around... you know.

ES: They did go into town on Saturdays to have a good time?

GW: Saturday nights.

ES: Yes. They'd work during the day on Saturday.
GW: Yeah.
ES: Six days a week or seven days a week work?
GW: Oh sometimes at harvest they worked seven days a week.
ES: I should think, yes.
GW: And they worked twelve hour days and you took care of your horses first. You got that ready, you watered them and you harnessed them...
BW: They probably bathed in the watering trough. [laugh]
ES: Yes. Was your mother cooking for them.
GW: Yes. Yes.
ES: Do you remember some of the kinds of food she served?
GW: Yes. Basically some meat and potatoes type of thing. A lot of chicken. And, of course, on a farm you got your eggs, meat and milk and Mother raised a big garden
ES: A big meal at noon...
GW: Oh yes.
ES: ...other times.
GW: Oh yes.
ES: You started what? About six?
GW: Yeah, at six-thirty.
ES: Noon? About twelve or twelve or twelve-thirty from... Did you call that dinner or lunch?
GW: I think we called it dinner and then we called supper supper.
ES: I think that's right. That's what I remember, too.
GW: In fact, I never ever called... When I got cultured, "let's go out for supper" and people look at you strangely. [laughs] Where's this kid from?
ES: It meant something different.
GW: Yes, it is. By they way, I was reading the other day Lewis and Clarks' men had to have about eight-and-a-half pounds of food a day when they were pulling up the Missouri and on across the Bitterroots.
ES: Sure.
GW: And a lot of that was lard and bear grease. I'm tryin' to formulate a talk on Lewis and Clark, but I'm not getting very far.
ES: This is the year to do it. When you finished a days work and the sacks were filled with wheat they'd be brought back to a barn to be stored would they?
GW: They'd be loaded into a header...into wagon for a year or two is all I can remember and then they had the little trucks and then they would be taken to Alicel, which is where the grain elevator was. And then, of course, it was just very shortly after that and they did away with horses and...
ES: What was the selling-buying procedure for the...the year's harvest?
GW: Good grief don't ask me. I don't recall.
ES: Later you must've been involved in doing that though.
GW: Oh yes. Yeah, later. In fact...
ES: If they took a load into Alicel would they sell it for whatever the going price was?
GW: No. You sold your crop at the end of the harvest.

ES: Yes, but was there any effort to sell at the highest possible price or did you simply sell when it was harvested?

GW: Generally speaking rule of thumb, and I think most farmers would agree for this and I didn't agree with it this year and I really lost some money, is within six weeks...a month, six weeks after harvest is your best price. Now I really do not know why. And I recall this, it's kind of humorous, I remember I had an uncle that...Kiddle brothers was head of the big building they tore down.

ES: Yeah. K-i-d-d-l-e?

GW: Yeah. K- i... Mert and Fred Kiddle. And then there was a Lyle Kiddle, I think, over at Imbler, too. But Kiddle brothers. In fact, Mert...Mert was a...no, Fred was a state legislature one time. Anyway, the newspaper...The Observer was coming out daily with the price of wheat. And Kiddles right after harvest was, oh, one or two or three or four cents a bushel under what the price was in the newspaper. And I know my uncle went into Island City and said to Mert Kiddle, he says, "The paper quotes said...say a dollar-sixty-seven and you're offering a dollar-sixty-five." And he says, "You know what, I want to know why." Mert Kiddle says, "Well, sell it to the newspaper then. Go sell it the newspaper."
[laughs]

ES: The Kiddles were shrewd about...

GW: Yes, yes.

ES: ...their purchase price and their sale price?

GW: Yes.

ES: I think I've heard that a good deal of the grain that was raised in Union County, at least in earlier years, went from the Kiddles to Portland and then into ships and over to Japan and other countries.

GW: Likely did. They had a mill...a milling...flour mill also. And at one time, probably many people have told you that, it was run by paddle wheel by water power.

ES: Mm-hmm.

GW: I can just barely remember that.

ES: What specific types of wheat were you raising most successfully here?

GW: It was all club, white club.

ES: White club?

GW: There was some red club. It was all club wheat. It wasn't the bearded wheat varieties.

ES: Was this something your father had discovered as to...

GW: He didn't discover it.

ES: I don't mean discover the brand, but discover that it grew well here or that it would sell well?

GW: Yes. There was also what they called Alicel club and it was a white...white club and I'm not sure just why it was called Alicel club. There was a spring wheat and, boy, I've forgotten the...forty...forty...oh, I can't remember the name of it.

ES: Do you think these were hybrid varieties?

GW: Darned if I know. [laugh] They were club wheat.

ES: I'm asking this because...

GW: It was soft white...soft white wheat.

ES: ...the growing conditions in the Grande Ronde Valley for wheat and several other crops are in many respects different, are they not, from other places in the Northwest?

GW: Yes. Yeah, I know hard red winter is coming in more and more and then...oh, gee, I wish my brain was a little better. There was also...they had a turkey red or something red that was a hard wheat that... But I don't think they were raised very much in volume. Basically club, white club.

ES: Let me ask...

GW: I don't know why. I can't answer your question.

ES: Okay, let me ask parenthetically, considering what you learned about farming from your father and perhaps from other farmers in the area did you consider yourself to be a scientific farmer?

GW: No, not really.

ES: Was it seat of your pants kind of farming?

GW: No. Probably as much I learned basically what I learned from my dad. I was not big in...in going... I think I was pretty quick to follow the fertilizers and sprays, but I wasn't in vanguard.

ES: Where were you getting most of your information about what you should do?

GW: From the county agent.

ES: Tell me about you and the county agent would interact about these things. Was it face to face...face to face or through publications?

GW: Publications basically. Publications.

ES: Over at the Union Ag station?

GW: No, Island City.

ES: Island City.

GW: Yeah.

ES: Would you confer with the agent about next year's crop should be each year?

GW: Not usually. We... We had cattle and basically we had alfalfa and wheat, a little bit of barley. And you would keep a field in alfalfa until the alfalfa fizzled out, the gophers starting coming in, a lot of cheat grass came in and then you would...you would start rotating...putting wheat and then we started renting some of the grounds when we had pasture hay. Just usually enough oats or barley to feed your horses. And of course horses were being phased out.

ES: What did you do with the hay?

GW: Fed through the winter the cattle.

ES: You didn't ship any out?

GW: No, no. No. We got up to about a hundred-and-twenty, a hundred-and-twenty-five registered Hereford cattle, horned Hereford. And then we sold bulls and occasionally heifers. And then as...last dozen, fifteen years as the market has gone into other breeds and got out of the English breeds, particularly the Herefords, the horned Herefords. I have one that I think is the only...only I believe two or three horned Hereford cattle in Union County. I liked horned animals, but basically most people do not because they think they're more trouble to take care of and if your feeding __ feeders they can do more damage. But I like the Hereford breed because they're docile or gentle. You go out to look at calving, which happens between the end of February and the end of April, go out

and check your cattle in the middle of the night or something some of these new breeds of cattle you gotta spend as much time lookin' behind ya and worry about what's gonna hit ya. And some of these new breeds it's like trying to drive China business down a road. The Hereford and Angus is not that way, particularly the Hereford. The Angus is a little more skittish.

ES: Aside from selling some of the bulls for breeding purposes were you sell...do you sell...did you sell, or do you still, sell to packing houses?

GW: No. Raise cattle...calves are born in March and keep about the top thirty are heifers for breeding, regenerating your herd, and then you...I sell the spring calves in the end of November usually about tax time to pay property taxes. Anymore I'm not really selling bulls because basically people are wanting the other breeds. They're wanting the Glebeths and Salars and...

ES: When you sell the calves was that for...

GW: To the livestock yards.

ES: People want to start their own herds, is that it?

GW: No. No, basically they go to feed lots. We've got... This is one of the largest feed lots in the Northwest...not feed lots, auction yards. I think the one at Madras may be larger, but they have buyers come in every Thursday and they're shipped out. And you keep about...I keep about a top twenty to thirty percent, thirty-five percent of the heifers depending on the year and sell the other sixty-seven percent and castrate the bull calves, steers.

ES: Are the calves that you sell taken off to feed lots to fatten up and then...

GW: Yes. Yes.

ES: ...go to packing houses?

GW: Yes. Of course the cows after they're ten or twelve, fourteen years old are canner cutters that you also sell at the sale yard.

ES: They're what?

GW: Canner cutter.

ES: Canner cutters?

GW: Canner cutter. In other words, they're used for beef broth and for beef...beef...

ES: Oh. I hadn't heard that expression.

BW: Canned meats.

GW: Canner, can, canner cutter. You've never heard that term?

ES: No, I have not. I'm not a farm boy. [laughs]

GW: Glen McKenzie could tell you or Clayton Fox.

BW: Probably go into, you know, chili and all that...all the canned things.

ES: Yes, not the prime sirloin tip cuts.

GW: No.

BW: No. Hamburger.

GW: Yeah, they're the hamburger. Yeah, that's the hamburger animals.

ES: This may be a little bit of a digression here, but the...the auction yard in you said Island City...

GW: It's on McAlister Lane.

ES: Yeah, right. How long has that been there?

GW: Ha! Boy, it's been there since I can recall.

ES: Tell me about some of the history of that.

GW: I don't really...it's had different ownerships. I really don't...

ES: Was the place there because it was close to the railroad?

GW: I would assume so. When I was very young I know there was a stock yard in La Grande right there at the...on the west side of 'Y'...

BW: I'm thinking of the mill, sorry.

GW: West side of 'Y' close to Riveria School. Are you familiar with where the old swimming pool was down...

ES: Mm-hmm.

GW: Okay.

ES: Crystal Plunge?

GW: Yeah. Right...right over from the Crystal... It's really... I can tell you exactly where it is. It's...what is that street? Yeah, it is 'Y'. Where it goes a block west of Second Street and then makes the elbow turn. And if you...you know there's a railroad spur...

ES: Yes.

GW: ...a spur that goes... That was to where the old stock yards was.

ES: I see.

GW: And there was a stock yard at Imbler. I suspect there was one at Union and Elgin, but I do not know that. I don't know whether you want to know interesting stories or not?

ES: Certainly.

GW: This wasn't when I was alive although probably when I may have been a baby, but Dad...I do remember the stock yards at Imbler very vaguely though, but there were three brothers, they were called the Traverso brothers and they were Italian.

ES: T-r-a-v-e-r-s-o?

GW: T-r-a-v...v-e-r-s-o, yeah, Traverso. And then they had a sidekick and four of 'em. And I want to tell ya they lived right under the base of Mt. Harris between Harris and Fanny. I'm not sure whether they were Italian or Sicilian. I kind of think they might've been Sicilian. But...who was the actor, John...that had the gravel voice? He was in all the gangster movies. But anyway...

ES: Edward G. Robinson?

GW: Thank you. That was it, yes, yes. Johnny Traverso [low voice] sounded like Edward G. Robinson. And the others they looked...they looked like urks. And when they rode I mean...I mean there...there was no guessin' around about it, those guys are cowboys. As far as I know they...I don't know that they ever had a mean bone in their body. One of 'em names was Till, t-i-l-l, and Johnny and Verge. And then they had the sidekick and he wore a sheepskin all heavy...what was that that Madam Dorian wore? I can't think of the word. That thing that...

BW: Shawl?

GW: Yeah, it's a shawl, but it's a big...there's a word for it. Anyway, but they would drive their cattle from between Fanny...about halfway between Fanny and Harris they'd drive it over to the stock yards at Imbler. And Dad felt very sorry for 'em, in fact, Dad sold 'em the place when they had come into this valley I think probably 1921, '2, '3, '4, during that time. It might even be in here. In fact, Vicki might even have this in here. But she said that the school kids at Imbler would hide in the corners of the chutes and in the corners of the corrals and when

the Traverso brothers would come in with their animals, and of course they had several hundred head, they would get up and yell and scream and ring bells and the cattle and stuff would go in every direction. And of course they were a minority...definitely minority and they were really, I mean, they looked like five miles of bad road. I mean, you wouldn't want to meet those guys at a Christmas social, but I think they were very nice guys. But Dad said he felt so sorry for them because they would come all the way across the valley over to Imbler at least from across the valley and the kids just gave 'em hell.

ES: And they came over there only to sell their cattle?

GW: To put them in stock you had to put 'em on freight cars I assume to go to Swift or one of those other packing companies in Portland. And I'm not sure whether they had a sale yard here then or not 'cause everything initially was shipped in cattle cars basically till World War II.

ES: Were they shipping these animals without having any sort of guarantee about whether they would be taken or what the price would be?

GW: I do not know.

ES: It sounds like speculation.

GW: I do not know. I really cannot tell you. I know Vicki in this has an instance of when the Depression hit and Dad had a load of pigs that he sent to Swift in Portland...

ES: Mm-hmm and then he never got paid.

GW: He never got paid, never got the hogs back.

ES: Yes. I think I was probably thinking of that. I wonder if that was a common occurrence.

GW: I'm sure it probably was, but I can't tell ya. I really...darn few guys... Glen McKenzie or Clayton Fox could tell you that, but I can't.

ES: Do you think it might be true to say that in the '20s, '30s, maybe '40s people who raised cattle around here weren't necessarily making much money?

GW: They weren't making much money, no. What the farmer had that people in town during the Depression didn't have was they...they could raise their own vegetables and they had their milk, meat and eggs.

ES: Sure. Sure.

GW: And they could subsist. People in town didn't have that, but... I...when I... When I started school I was one of the...I think there was one other... I think I may have been the only kids that the folks drove to school in an automobile. The rest road horses or bicycles. And then, like I say, I went to Imbler because they had the only busses for three years. And when I went to La Grande starting in the sixth grade I wanted to go out for sports, but it was right toward the end of War II and there was gas rationing and rubber rationing and, you know, the stamps that came along with it. And if I didn't catch the bus home I was in big trouble and there was no way I could go out, not that I might've been any good anyway, but there was no way I could go out for football or basketball or any other sport. And I always...I didn't resent it, but I always felt kind of bad that I was never had the opportunity. And that's maybe what caused me to go more in music and other things.

ES: Also requires after school time, though.

GW: Yes, it did. I... I was... I took sectional and regional in public speaking in FFA and went to state and took second. And also I and two other guys, and they both live around here yet, took first at the Pacific International in livestock judging my junior year of high school in Portland. And I've got the banner right over there. But other than that was the only thing I did.

ES: You keep saying things that I want to ask you about. How did you learn to judge livestock?

GW: I took ag class.

ES: High school?

GW: High school and all four years under a very fine instructor called Ray Wendell.

ES: Part of his curriculum was to teach judging of livestock?

GW: Yes. We judged dairy cattle and beat the kids that came out of Tillamook and the Western Valley... Willamette Valley that had lots of dairy animals, which I always thought was kind of unique. At least our instructor thought it was pretty good. [laughs]

ES: What makes Union County, or the parts of it that you've known, a good place to raise cattle?

GW: We have a pretty good rainfall in spite of the last couple years and I mentioned this for Oregon Trail talks and I think it's still true to a degree today, John C. Freemont said you know the lush, lush grass throughout this valley. We don't really have that much BLM ground until you get out of this valley in the Baker valley and other areas. We don't really have sagebrush. And we have basically been able to keep this valley... I'm talking about the mountains now... free of any... pretty free of any noxious weeds. We're havin' some problems now. But we've got a good aquifer in the valley and we've got deep, dark, tillable soil. In fact, Freemont said it was... and many of the pioneers the finest they've seen since they left Missouri. I really don't know. We do get a lot of wind here and that's why I have the apple trees up here, protection from the wind.

ES: Have the herds been relatively free of disease or other sickness?

GW: Yes. Yes.

ES: Why do you think that is? Are they somewhat isolated, perhaps?

GW: I think so. I think that's part of it. Yeah. They've had very little red water, which is urinary tract, red urine. I think about all most farmers vaccinate for is bang___ bangs disease.

ES: Have you availed yourself of the services in veterinarians very much?

GW: Oh yes. Oh yeah.

ES: What have they done for you?

GW: Anything I can't do for myself. [laugh]

ES: I should think, though, if you've been around cattle all your life quite a few veterinary jobs you would have learned to do yourself?

GW: Oh yeah. I pull... pull every calf I can. About six weeks ago, in fact, six weeks ago day before yesterday I had my gall bladder out and believe it or not I really hated to, but I had a calf coming, he was coming correctly... by correctly that... front feet are down like this. When they're like this it's... they're backwards, or if their tail's out they're breach. But I could see one ear, but his head is... his nose was sideways. And she had quite straining, her water had

broken and four or five hours went by. Oh, I hated to 'cause... 'cause I had a \$158 I think and that's almost half the worth of the calf when you sell it in November. And I got the cow in and I roped her and I put her in up here, tied her up, but she was, of course, in pain, labor pain and she was steppin' around quite a bit. And it was, what, a week after I'd gotten home, four or five days after I'd got home from the hospital and I...they didn't do a laparoscopy, they had to cut me 'cause I can some gangrene and some infection. I thought all she needs to do it bump me or kick me and break that open so I had two vets come out here and it was \$158, which I dearly hate to do and you have the conservative flare coming out of me. But that's the only one I've had to take care of this year. Son-in-law comes over when we get ready to...and my daughter, older daughter, the one that wrote this...comes over when we get our calving season over and they spend part of the day and we take care of all the calves. We...I have horned cattle so anything I'm gonna sell I put a acid on their nubbins of a horn which you just feel like a little button at that time. And of course we castrate and we give Black Leg shot...Black Leg ___ actually, it's an ___ for a different diseases. I can't even tell you what the other five or six are. And then we turn 'em out into...I've got four or five pastures.

ES: All these things you do for yourself, you don't need a veterinarian for them?

GW: No.

ES: What services do...are veterinarians usually needed for then?

GW: Just pulling a calf or if you have a cow that is...

BW: Goes down.

GW: ...goes down or...

ES: What's that mean?

GW: Gets down or gets weak.

BW: Sometimes their calf lays against nerve or something and after the calf is born they can't get up or they get...like if you have a really wet spring and they get...they're used to hay and they get a lot of green grass they get a weakness. What is it you call that? Anyway, the vet comes out and...

GW: Grass...grass tutnee.

BW: Yeah.

GW: It's a... It's a tetanus, some form of tetanus.

BW: Gives them a...like and IV and I suppose it's vitamins and minerals to try to give that cow strength to get up. Even though they're huge animals when they go down they sometimes just give up.

ES: Then what?

BW: Then the die. You'd shoot 'em.

ES: What do you do with the carcass?

GW: There used to be a rendering service in Baker City, but that's gone now and basically what you do is you have to drag 'em out to a ravine and dispose of 'em.

ES: Some of the coyotes and other animals around here help with that?

GW: Oh yes...[end tape]

- ES: This is April 5th...4th, yes, again at the Webster's place in the Grande Ronde Valley.
- GW: I... I might mention first about the cattle. Dad had purchased I think five head of horned Herefords, registered horned Herefords, in 1934 or possibly 1935, it was the year I was born, and they were basically pretty good quality seed stock Herefords at that time. And I think the next year he purchased four more and he built up a herd of about a hundred-and-twenty-five head.
- ES: Where would he have to go to purchase cattle like that?
- GW: He purchased them here in the valley. He purchased them from one of the Conrads and they had, I think, initially bought them in Idaho. I'm not that well versed on exactly... At that time Hereford was the premiere, by far the dominant breed of cattle, horned Hereford, not old Hereford. And although we didn't...Dad didn't participate in what they called pompered bull sales, in other words, the bulls that were where you curry combed their tail and the back and you washed 'em and you cleaned their hooves off and halter broke them and all of that stuff...
- ES: Did you say pompered or pampered?
- GW: Well, pampered or pom...yeah, same difference. Probably a...probably a Websterism is pompered...pampered, yes.
- ES: I had not heard of pampered bulls before. [laughs] I understand what you mean.
- GW: Yeah. We... He basically sold bulls for less because he didn't have to put the time in...as you would another...
- BW: Called 'em range bulls.
- GW: Yeah, they called 'em range bulls. Dad and individuals that bought from Dad always made the comment, this is a cattleman's comment, but, "Webster, your bulls 'll go to the top of the mountain." That meant that a bull...on range land a bull would usually service twenty cows. On farm pasture land, in other words, land like this, flat land, they'd service about thirty cows. But people...individuals who were in the stock raising business, or many individuals who were in the stock raising business...not trying to overemphasize this because 'cause there's a lot that wouldn't buy Dad's bulls on a bet because they didn't look in the top quality condition...that they would go to the top of the mountain. In other words, when you turned 'em out like to go up the side of Mt. Emily or the side of...the west side of La Grande, well, anyplace, you weren't gonna have to worry about them getting lame, usually, or many times the pampered or pompered bull if you turn 'em out they're so used to...to good grain, oats and good quality alfalfa and so forth that they'll just lay down by a pond or a creek and never go out and breed a cow or breed fewer cows. They're lazy. They're lazy. In a word, they're lazy. But when you buy these show animals, and this I think really goes for more than bulls, I think it goes for many types of animals, I mean, they're lovely to look at, but do they do the job for ya? And I know many buyers, particularly in my younger years, that would come back to Dad time after time. And then there were always what they called jippo buyers. I don't know whether you're familiar with that term or not.
- BW: I've heard of jippo loggers.

GW: Okay, same... I can't speak much about jippo loggers, but there were individuals that would...I don't want to use the word roam...they would circuit the valley and probably half a dozen valleys, Baker, Wallowa and Grant County in particular, those four valleys, and they were pretty adept at...they would trade or they would buy a bull and they would...and then they would take it over maybe seventeen miles or up to Cricket Flat or up to Enterprise and they would have...they would know where they were gonna place the bull when they bought it from you, or from Dad, and they made their living simply by trading, by horse trading, it wasn't horses, but they did it by...by trading animals. And where Dad would... I can remember the earlier bulls that you sold for \$125 to maybe \$250 that was in War II and maybe up until the early '50s. Then, of course, they got to four or five hundred dollars. And when I kind of quit sellin' bulls it was...they were bringing eight hundred to eleven hundred dollars. But then other breeds of cattle, I'm talking about beef cattle, not dairy cattle, came into demand and the hybrid cross with the Hereford. The Hereford is...is primarily known as a...as a milk producer for the calves, not for milk...well, they were...I mean not milk for dairy purposes, but for raising a calf. But there's also what they call hybrid-bigger. In other words, if you cross a Hereford cow with an Angus bull or Charlet or any other type of bulls...and we're finding this out here. I just changed over to have a Blank Angus bull two years ago and it was one of the toughest things I've ever had to do 'cause I was so proud of the Herefords. But a hybrid bull, just like hybrid corn or hybrid wheat or hybrid vegetable garden or rose bushes, will raise a produce that has more vigor, a little faster growth and that type of thing. So the Hereford bull market is pretty nonexistent now. People don't like gen...cattle breeders general...cattle raisers...I shouldn't say breeders...individuals that have stock generally don't care as much for the horned Herefords because you put a horned Hereford in a feed lot and they can hurt each other and they can also...well, they get their horns caught in the stanchions and that type of thing. Dad always like the horned Hereford and I like the horned Herefords because we thought they were the most docile. And they were also the best brand we had. I would say...this is probably an exaggeration...but we have the one pasture just west of La Grande and anymore...now your age, my age most...or certainly my parents' age...most of that generation was born and spent some time on farms and ranches. They knew what agriculture was, they knew what animals were. But eighty percent of the people today haven't a clue what...oh, they have a clue, but not realistically, on farm animals. And our pasture up Deal Canyon was just close enough to La Grande that is a tree went across the fence or somebody left a gate open cattle were right down to where the Hospital is now or Central School. And evitably, right when we were the busiest in the summertime you'd get a call from some frantic housewife because the Herefords had horns they thought they were bulls. And, "oh my goodness, I've got thirty-two great big bulls out eatin' my shrubs!" Obviously nobody had thirty-two bulls and all they'd have to do is inspect them a little bit and know they were cows. But the average individual today thinks anything with horns is mean. That's not true at all. The Hereford is the most docile breed of animal...I may be a little prejudiced, but far more docile than many of the other breeds. Many of the other breeds kind of like driving

China pheasants down a road where a Hereford...and if I have a wild...and animal that's a little spooky or a little bad in handling I simply won't keep 'em. They're sold for canner cutter.

BW: You were gonna talk about the cattle drive.

GW: Cattle drive, yeah.

ES: I was going to about ask about that. Please, tell.

GW: At that time Dad didn't have as many cattle as he had, but he still had fifty or sixty head of cows. And they lived...my folks lived eleven miles from La Grande and, like I say, I was an only child. And sometime usually early in May we would load the baby calves, which were March and April calves, into the back of a stock truck, cattle truck, and Mother would drive ahead of the cows with the cattle truck and with the calves bawling and the cows mooing following on behind. There was only Dad and I and occasionally a neighbor, Warren Tucker, and we would on three saddle horses drive the cattle...I know you don't quite know where my daughter lives...but we would drive... Everybody had fences. Everyone had fences. There were no farms without fences. That came when grass came in the valley in the late...started in the late '40s and now hardly anyone has fences. I am very much a minority in the land I have and having fences. But they would start up what's is Webster Road and they would go to McDonald and...all gravel road...and then they would go McDonald to Holly and Holly to Buchanan and hit Hunter Road, the paved road, at where the Moss Chapel school was about two miles north of Island City. And we would...with Mother leading and with the calves bawling and the cows mooing and trying to catch up with the truck in a kind of slow general procession we would take those cattle, fifty or sixty, we would go over the bridge at Island City, over the railroad track, of course the Grande Ronde River, straight through the intersection at Island City where the light is, south on McAlister, past the golf course, all of those new homes most of which weren't there at that time, certainly the developments weren't there, and we would turn...I think you saw an article was it yesterday or the day before of the Blue Mountain Grange. Right where that Blue Mountain Grange is we would turn right on Gekeler, which is gravel, and we would go on Gekeler, there was no freeway, and we would go over the U. P. railroad tracks and over Highway 30, which went to Union and North Powder, up Highway 30 to 'C' Street...again...

BW: You mean up Gekeler.

GW: Up Gekeler to 'C' Street. Again, Grande Ronde Residence wasn't there, the state buildings weren't there, the Forestry... Up 'C' Street and turn on Sunset, go up Sunset past where the Grande Ronde Hospital is. Majority of those homes weren't there. There were some old homes, obviously, on 'C' Street 'cause that was Old Town La Grande. And we would...and go up the mountain and Deal Canyon, which is 'K' or 'L'...'K'. And we would do that in the day and we never got in trouble. Everybody...

ES: Did you have to have a permit or approval?

GW: No, no. No, no.

ES: Did anybody know you were doing this beforehand?

GW: No. Never. And we weren't the only ones that did it. We were the only ones that did it from out here, but Smutz brothers, several of the Hugheses, several of them

did it from out Ladd Canyon Road...Foothill Road, excuse me...Foothill Road and came and went up 'C' Street and then the pastures would be up on Morgan Lake, all that area up from Morgan Lake to Starkey, Rock Creek.

ES: Was that land that your father owned?

GW: Yes. Yeah. Four-hundred-and-thirty-one acres.

ES: When had he purchased it approximately?

GW: About 1934 when he got the first five cows. That... I think that is in here. That was original VanBlocklin land.

ES: Was all of it fenced?

GW: Yes. Yeah. Yes. Barbwire is probably a hundred years old then and some of it still is.

ES: Were all these cows branded?

GW: Yes.

ES: So that you could identify them?

GW: Yes. And they're also horn branded. I could've shown you that yesterday, or the day before. Registered cattle obviously you had to basically know...and then we accumulated a second pasture and then a third and then a fourth. I think this being the fourth...third or fourth here. And so we started trucking when I was a...instead of taking them by trailing them...when I was a junior in college which would've been 1955. And we started trailing them because there started begin complaints about cattle. They weren't our cattle. No sense telling who's they were, but... We could take those cattle, they would follow the truck and, like I say, people on...imagine this, people on 'C' Street, all that picket fences, they had manicured yards and they had shrubs and flowers, but...and over on Sunset basically all those homes weren't there. There were a few of...Central School wasn't there. Certainly the hospital wasn't there. The medical clinics...

BW: Old dairy.

GW: Yes. Yes. Miller's Dairy was up there. But then we'd turn up... And we did that in a day. Now you think of trying to through Island City today. You think of trying to go up 'C' Street.

ES: While they were there during the summer, I suppose until September, October?

GW: Yeah.

ES: Did you have to go up there to check on them periodically?

GW: Oh yes. Yes. And we basically reserved Sundays to salt them and to check on them.

ES: Otherwise they were perfectly independent?

GW: Yes.

ES: Plenty to eat?

GW: Yes. Yes. And then we would...we would bring them out. We...before we started trucking them up we did build...build a corral up there with kind of a loading chute. It all burned up in the fire that went through in La Grande in 1973. But we would truck them home simply because...I really know why. I guess that time of year the more likely that it'd snow and bad weather. We left them till the middle of November. ____

ES: Do you have any idea how much weight they gained while they were there?

GW: No. They were in better shape when they came out. A bunch of grass...there's no substitute for bunch grass. That's a natural grass, it wasn't planted or a hybrid variety of grass. It was the old original grass that the homesteaders...

ES: What is there about bunch grass that's more nutritious?

GW: You know, I really don't know. I can't... I can't tell ya that. But...and of course you can overgraze. And much of what has happened and much of the environmental movement...in retrospect I see their points because many ranchers overgraze. They certainly did it with sheep in this BLM land and the fact that much land went into sagebrush and the poor quality that they have now is because of overgrazing. But a good steward didn't do that.

ES: When you were fairly young was there bunch grass in other parts of the valley?

GW: Not on the valley floor, I don't think.

ES: There had been, hadn't there?

GW: Oh, originally, oh yes. The thirty by fifteen miles.

ES: Was it essentially tilled for farmland so it was gone?

GW: Yes, basically. In fact, one of the things I talked about in my Oregon Trail speech, the far...or the Indians...this is where Burnt River Canyon got it's name...in September of the year set fire to the grasses and as the pioneers were coming through from Farewell Bend up to Baker Valley...what's now Baker Valley...what's now called Baker Valley, they crossed Burnt River Canyon over twenty times and they would have to wear a heavy kerchief and they would have to wet that in the water because the ashes and the soot from the Indians setting fire to the bunch grass and, of course, cheat grass. And even though this valley was a sea of purple from the camas it was basically all bunch grass. There was a lot of rose...rose bushes out here, too.

ES: Burning, I suppose, had the effect of making it burn better the next year.

GW: Regenerate. Regenerating. It's the same thing that the farmers do now with an eighty-acre field. I started out on Bonneville...I was gonna mention Bonneville. When Captain Bonneville came through in 1834 they were coming back from Astor...from John Jacob Astor's port Astoria they saw this darkening black sky and atmosphere when they were clear over west of the Pendleton area. And he had a group of trappers or so forth with him, they were going back east to the States. And they took several days, they finally got to the rim of the valley up in what we think, and John Evans has kind of corroborated this and near as you can, was our pasture because they said there was a spring overlooking the valley on the southwest corner, or close to the southwest corner of the valley. But anyway, when they got to the rim of the valley looking down...looking out on this valley, of course no La Grande, no anything, no pioneers, it was 1834...it was twenty-seven years before the first pioneers settled here in 1861. He wrote that the valley was a vast conflagration, it was entirely on fire and it billowed up in great flames. It came from the Indians setting fire and then to regenerate the grass for the next spring. And they camped supposedly for a few days, according to Bonneville's journals...you probably familiar that Washington Irving wrote quite a bit about Bonneville and probably amplified everything Bonneville said. But they were not able to get down in the valley at all. They had to totally skirt the valley and go on back of...back of the valley kind of towards Starkey and came out where Starkey

- is now and came out in Baker Valley. 'Cause they said it was a sea of fire that totally blackened the sky and the atmosphere.
- ES: Is it true that some of that burning was to clear out below the ponderosa pines in order to protect them?
- GW: I don't know about that. I think it was just to regenerate the grass. I kind of contradict myself to a degree, and nobody's really caught me on it yet, but I'm not really certain because they say the Indians also, besides the camas, they picked rose hips, or the rose bushes and they took the sarvus berries and of course rose hips are used for medicinal purposes and they got those in the valley. Well, if they set fire to the valley every single year you're not gonna have rose hips. My guess is maybe the rose hips they got around the edge of the valley. And how you would stop a fire in the late fall of the year, this was in September, I can't imagine stopping a fire. I can sure imagine starting it, but good grief almighty, I mean, if there was nothing but dry bunch grass. I do not know how... I don't know how they stopped it. Obviously I don't think they did stop it, but I don't have an explanation for that. Nobody's ever pushed me on that.
- ES: I thought I read somewhere that perhaps the Indians had some kind of intuitive sense of ecological balance. That if the trees were to be preserved there had to be clearing out under... underneath them to prevent worse fires.
- GW: Oh, I'm sure that's probably true. I'm sure that's probably true.
- ES: There were many more trees in the valley at one time.
- GW: Oh yeah.
- ES: Are we pretty sure at that?
- GW: I certainly assume there were. I...I can't say for certainly. I've never really asked that particular question. I would...no, I can't say.
- ES: Do you know of any logging that's ever occurred on...near the valley floor?
- GW: They've logged right to the edge of the mountains, but, no, I don't.
- ES: I know that there were a couple of sawmills near Summerville, for example, and I suppose they would've liked to get their logs from as close by as possible.
- GW: There were numerous sawmills, many portable mills. And the original settlers generally...that had...that had farms in the valley would buy ten or twenty or forty acres of timberland right at the edge of the valley and these small acreage tracts...in fact, there was a lawsuit fought about six or eight or ten years ago...I'm not sure it went through a lawsuit, but they certainly took 'em long enough to get the thing settled. There's a... There's a little road right up here as you make this last elbow turn and there were probably nine or ten or twelve landowners that had little tracts of ten or twenty or forty acres of timber and the reason they had that timber, it certainly didn't...wasn't for livestock because it's...it's too thick...was for firewood to heat their homes. And Dad had twenty acres, I think, right over here about three-quarters of a mile and the road, which was never declared road, took off and I can name eight or ten or twelve old name...pioneer name landowners that had little chunks of land over there. And there was a doctor right up here on the corner...they're since gone...Stevens, Brad Stevens and his wife...it's this lot home up here as you make the turn. Now the...the number two person in Grande Ronde Hospital, Shorb, Sam Shorb...not Sam...
- BW: His dad's Sam.

GW: Paul. Paul. Paul Shorb and his wife own it, but they closed...they...actually the land all came below where the road went north and they closed the gates. What happened...I don't know how much of this you want to hear. People from town started dumping garbage. They would come out and they would dump garbage. Obviously, the person that had the...it was Dr. Stevens and his wife, padlocked the gate. They put up a ___ gate and they padlocked it and they gave everybody a key. That's only good until it gets on Johnny six-pack that decides to jimmy up the lock, put a matchstick in it or a .22 bullet in it or some Superglue in it. And so...and there's always one of those around and that's one of the problems we had before some landowners started building homes up Deal Canyon. If you padlock your gate...I know I'm digressing here and it shows I'm getting old and senile... If you padlock your gate there's somebody that, "Oh, I've hunted up here for a hundred years and nobody's gonna stop me." And they're gonna go through. And we're out here, you can't camp up there, you can't patrol the place. And somebody with a wench on a four-wheel drive with a couple of beers and huntin' season or sometimes just for orneriness, they'll take out the gate and maybe and eighth of a mile of fence with it. And then you got cattle downtown and you got everybody mad. Everybody's mad at you because your cattle's eatin' their flowers and their shrubs. You're mad because usually it's right at harvest season and you don't have the stock racks on your truck to go get your animals which you've got to make a sudden shift. But as...as more homes got up the mountain, believe it or not, it became much better with that, but there still were...there are occasional problems. Anyway, out here the doctor in the corner started changing the locks because somebody'd jimmy 'em up or...and of course you can't patrol things twenty-four hours a day. People do leave. And then some of these land owners and basically they rarely use these ten-acre plots over here, they're totally timbered, and once in a while some of 'em be logged off or something. But they would get mad and the doctor'd say, "I'll give you an extra key." You know what happens with keys, they get lost and then the locks get changed again and so there finally was some heated words and the doctor says, "This is my land. It's not a declared road and you can't threaten me like that and I'll just close the whole thing off" and that's what he did. And the... In fact...this has nothing whatever to do with it...but it was funny, the doctor that defeated me for a school board position, but...that has nothing to do with the road because Dad had had vested himself and his interest to his brother and brother-in-law way before that time. But the landowners that still had land up there finally had to go about a mile-and-a-half north and buy the right-of-way up from Hunter through a different direction.

ES: Here's a subject related to the east slopes of Mt. Emily, mushrooms.

GW: Don't know anything about 'em.

ES: Nothing about them? They'd been...this has been a favorite picking area for years, hasn't it? Morels and brain mushrooms?

GW: I can't tell you.

BW: We used to have Morels in our...in our place right out here in the field. And I don't know what happened to 'em, but we don't have 'em anymore. We used to mushroom, but we didn't mushroom around here. We always went up to...

GW: Ladd Canyon.
BW: ...Mt. Emily Road up the freeway and off in there. We haven't mushroomed for a long time.
GW: Haven't mushroomed in twenty years. There are a few huckleberries on the front side...on the east of it.
ES: It was more than twenty years ago that I was wondering about especially.
GW: I don't know anything about mushrooms.
ES: Is that because you don't like mushrooms?
GW: No, I love 'em. I know how to stay out of trouble. [laugh] I know what Morels are and what...
ES: You mean trouble with poisonous mushrooms?
GW: Yeah. Cauliflower __ and camsprings and snow mushrooms, love 'em. But we haven't mushroomed since the girls were small.
ES: What do you know about the weather conditions here that make this a good place to begat mushrooms?
GW: Regarding mushrooms I don't know. I'm not knowledgeable.
ES: Okay. Why don't we switch over, if you're ready, to the Farm Bureau experience you had.
GW: Well...
ES: Is this a county agency? [end tape]

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GW: At that... At that time there were three Farm Bureau Centers.
ES: And what is that time?
GW: That would be about 1950...well, it ought...I think Farm Bureau was organized in this valley in '39, '39, or '40...and somebody could be very precise on that, but it was around 1940. I think Max Hoke, that Hoke Hall was named after, was instrumental in...in...from Pendleton...was instrumental in getting...starting getting it going here, however, he never lived here. But there were three centers, one in Island City, one in Cove and one in North Powder. And Farm Bureau basically, to all intents and purposes, took over what the granges had been first and foremost in for a hundred years before that. Farm Bureau basically is a young farm organization. By young I mean sixty years or maybe seventy years now. But there were three centers, they met monthly and they had a pot luck dinner.
ES: What had the grange...granges been doing that was no longer being done and made it necessary for a Farm Bureau?
GW: I really can't tell you. I can tell you what I surmise. The granges were mostly old-line families that were getting on in years and didn't want to fight the battle...fight the fights the farmers...be mouthpiece for the... They liked to do it, but they were winding down. Granges, you can see 'em all over the...all over the Northwest at least. Half the halls are rotting into the ground.
ES: I thought their purposes were primarily social.
GW: They probably were, but they were a pretty...I think they probably were more social than Farm Bureau.

ES: Was it also a way for farmers to organize on whatever problems they faced so that they could have an organized voice?

GW: I think the granges were initially and into a lesser extent perhaps still are, but Farm Bureau, I think, was more of a lobbying voice of agriculture.

ES: Within both the county and the state?

GW: Oh yes. Oh yeah. There'd be others that would know much better than I would, but...

ES: When you were involved what were some of the problems that the Bureau was lobbying about?

GW: Farmers... and I... you kind of hit on this the other day and Wife did a much better job answering than I did and I thought about my poor answer which was almost nonexistent. Farmers are fiercely independent, fiercely independent. That's basically why most farmers are Republican. At that... When I was younger and, of course, I'm winding down. I don't have the firebrand attitude that I had been and I can see some of the fallacies of maybe being a little too much of a firebrand. But at that time labor unions were at their zenith. And the AFL-CIO, John L. Lewis and basically the farmers felt that the difference between what they got... A farmer is the only occupation that goes hat and hand and says what will you give me for my product. Nobody else does that. I mean I'm oversimplifying, but basically that's what... "What will you give me for my pigs? What'll you give me for my wheat? What'll you give me for my cow?" Nobody else does that. And farmers started organizing... I don't think they thought the grange was probably pushy enough... and they became more... farmers became more strident and they started organizing into commodity groups to a degree and lobbying at the legislature. And they were quite a powerful lobby and I think still pretty much are.

ES: Explain to me, if you would, how their lobbying might result in higher prices for their goods, their products?

GW: [laugh] Very weak answer.

ES: Was that the aim?

GW: Yes. They felt that the middleman, i.e. railroads, railroaders, charged too much freighting, barges down the Columbia way too much and labor union men would strike, or they'd shut down the railroad and, by golly, nothin' moved. They'd shut down the barges, they'd shut down at the docks. This happened in... in your more powerful unions and truckers, later on, with Hoffa and predecessors of Hoffa, Jimmy Hoffa... can't quite recall their names now. But farmers basically got between what the retailer had to pay and what the consumer was willing to pay and the farmer got what was left out of the hat. And farmer... Farm Bureau, I think, started and I... I wasn't big into this as far as the end result of what they were trying to accomplish, but they were trying to keep freight rates down, meat packers...

BW: They... They also would fight against tax... I can't think of the right...

GW: Property tax loads.

BW: And, you know, they wanted to make... I can't think of what I'm trying to say.

GW: Bare inequitable.

ES: I can see how...

BW: Taxing...tax agency...tax...

ES: Assessments? Assessments?

BW: You know when they were trying to make a port here in La Grande?

GW: Port authority district.

BW: Yeah.

GW: Port authority.

BW: Tax...tax districts they fought against.

GW: Yes. PUD they fought against.

BW: Sorry.

GW: Oh, you can cut this any way you want to. Farmers paid huge amounts of property taxes. Farmers generally paid little or no income taxes. Educations, schools, school districts basically, until Measure...what was that measure that went through in 1980...well, the ceiling one-and-a-half percent property tax limitation. I can't think of the measure it was called. Farmers...I'm repeating myself...paid large amounts of property taxes, they paid little or no income taxes. Oregon is a weird state in the fact that they go to two-legged milking stool, they don't have a sales tax. And without that sales tax you don't have the third leg on the stool. Milk stool's generally had three legs, not four.

ES: For good reasons.

GW: I don't know whether you... I don't know whether...

ES: Yes, I'm aware of that.

GW: Okay, I didn't know what you knew about a milking stool. [laughs] But...and farmers basically were getting, I'm being prejudiced now, but it was...it was a fact of life. Farmers were basically getting squeezed because they were a minority, you've got maybe three hundred farmers in the valley, and you've got city people who pay taxes, property taxes on a house and they may pay through the nose on that house, but that's all they're paying on. And first of all farmers had, until that finally was basically through the rural vote of legislatures and through lobbying to the Farm Bureau, they paid on their cattle, they paid on their machinery as well as their land. And you paid many thousands of dollars and basically that's why farmers either...the only way you can go into farming, basically, now is to marry it or to inherit it. I can become a doctor, I mean I don't have the brains, but I can become a lawyer if you had the wherewithal up here to do it. It can take eight years of school or six or whatever, but there's no way basically that you can ever get into farming unless you marry it or inherit it. I mentioned the other day I probably wouldn't have been a farmer if I had siblings simply because the farm wasn't big enough and I had other thoughts, too. But farming is, you know yourself originally it was...I don't know what percentage, but it dropped down to ten or twelve percent and then eight and six and four and I think probably two percent of America is...or less...is engaged in farming and some of those are...are weekend farmers or toy...what do you call it? I'm not saying the right word here. Or they might raise...

ES: Hobby farmers.

GW: Hobby farmers, thank you. Thank you. Hobby farmers. And you know yourself...well, maybe you don't know, but I believe you can get a...now they're...Farm Bureau helped lobby and some of this has gone too far, but the

neighbor right here next to us who works at...or any neighbor...who works at a mill could raise enough rabbits to be declared a farmer just by having a few rabbit hutches out next to the side of the house. I don't know whether it's five hundred dollars or if it's fifteen hundred, but it's a very low amount. You know, you could raise three or four cows and sell 'em or a couple a cows and really be classified according to Census as a farmer, a legitimate farmer, as much a farmer as I am. And yet in no way does he make a living...or whoever...make their living farming. That all changed with the one-and-a-half percent cap on property taxes and Oregon's feeling the...Oregon's feeling the pains and increasingly so. And then of course they put...what was that last measure? I should be more up on it, but... When I went on the school board in 1976 I ran against Bernice's cousin who was the incumbent and it was a four-way race and I won with about twenty-nine percent of the vote. I think he got...Sheldon got about twenty-eight percent and the other two candidates, one of which was Dick McDaniel's sister, got maybe twenty percent and the fourth weak candidate. But basically I was supported by the farm community because of my...my conservatism and the fact that you're gonna go in there and you're gonna kill snakes where you want a set of directors. And in about six months time you go from being a pied piper to public enemy number one because you can't do what you promised to accomplish.

ES: What... What were some of the snakes you thought you needed to kill?

GW: Well, keeping...keeping monies down. Property taxes, I can only talk about La Grande district... Originally Oregon law was written...and I do not know how it stood this long...but district consolidated the property tax evaluation, the...what's the word...

ES: Assessed value?

GW: There's another word. Yeah, I know it...that's good enough. Assessed value of the district that's being swallowed up did not transfer over into the larger district. Now whether you know that or not...

ES: No, I didn't.

GW: But Lone Star when it consolidated with Iowa, Iowa...it was the evaluation of Iowa district and the property taxes that kept Iowa goin' for a few more years was basically the limit was from Iowa. Then when Iowa went into Island City, Island City was the larger and then Island City consolidated or merged into La Grande. What am I trying to say? That word? I get so mad at myself. But anyway, the...millage, millage. Millage is what I'm trying to say. La Grande had an antiquated tax base based on 1916 property taxes when La Grande had eleven hundred students. And that, of course, did not include Fruitdale, did not include Starkey, didn't include any of the valley, didn't include Island City, Ladd Canyon, any schools. I think there were eleven or twelve. There was Liberty, Valeria, Lone Star, Moss Chapel, Iowa, Hilgard, Howard Meadows, Starkey...did I say...Mt. Glenn, Perry, yeah, all consolidated. They were forced to basically because they weren't having enough students in the late 1940s, early 1950s, but the base remained the same and people...property tax payers to add more dollars to the general fund budget had to vote...it automatically rose six percent per year, automatically by law rose six percent. But as you went into the '60s and '70s and

'80s you know what inflation was doing and inflationary costs many of those years was considerably higher than that. On top of that you had many other things such as extracurricular activities, all your sports and then finally girls' sports. When I started on the La Grande School Board girls did not have competitive sports. That started in about 1977 or '78. Now I know they played intramural sports, but they...they didn't have coaches, they didn't go to state in basketball, in volleyball, in track, in golf, in cross country. Certainly didn't have swim teams for boys or girls and they didn't have half the sports. They had football, basketball, baseball and track. That was it for boys. And as people wanted these extracurricular things you've gotta pay for 'em. And then you also...you need to have your farm system comin' up. You start... You don't pick up a piccolo when you get to be a freshman, you start pickin' it up in the fifth grade or sixth grade, or violin. And it's... And it's...it's true in everything. La Grande had Mock Trial teams now. But much of that was...came into being about the time I went on the board and I had to wear several hats because I think as any intelligent...hopefully I'm intelligent...person knows these things need to be funded and yet they were being funded basically to an unfair extent by property taxes from agriculture. And the first couple of elections I got along pretty good and... Make no mistake about it, I could talk out of both sides of my mouth and I can certainly see where you can become a politician. I was at the Mickey Mouse level, don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to... But I can... I can remember going to state conventions and I can remember, you know, I talked to bib-overall Joe Farmer different than I talked to you or different than I talked to the druggist or the...or the...anybody. And I think I was as conservative as I could be, but...I don't know exactly where I'm going with this...as times started to tighten up, I would say basically it was through Ronald Reagan administration and with good reason, money wasn't as free and it became more difficult to...to keep teachers' salary up. When I started in the school board teachers made less than ten thousand dollars, they made nine thousand-something in '76...bachelors. And teachers immediately disliked me. I was... I had a terrible time with teachers. I have a daughter who's a teacher now. But... Because they felt that...this is when other people are getting twenty thousand dollars teachers are making nine. My argument was teachers had the system in La Grande district to contract negotiations where you got to the top of the scale in nine years, in nine steps. Almost every other district in the state of Oregon was fifteen. So La Grande's teacher even though they weren't...maybe were only average aide teachers...and of course La Grande's teachers love to compare themselves with Beaverton, Park Rose, Eugene, Salem, Medford, Willamette Valley particular... And this wasn't unique, La Grande, Baker, Pendleton have the same problem, all of Eastern Oregon had the same problem. But I would tell the teachers rightly, correctly, that, hey, you've been...and of course you also can go over for your master's and you have you CPI, Portland Consumer Price Index, they were getting that, but they were getting whatever the contract...but they got to the top in nine years and so for six years they were gliding at the top where the others are still striving to get up there. And if you had a teacher who's goin' twenty-five years and they didn't move across to get a masters or a bachelor's plus fifteen or a

bachelor's plus thirty hour...or thirty credits, yes, they were not going to be average in...in the money that they got. But I think La Grande's teachers did quite well, but you had to be very careful in how you dealt with that subject. And eventually I was beaten. I ran successfully three terms. I won the four-way race, as I said, and then the second time I ran against the ESD superintendent and I clobbered him mainly because people felt the ESD...they called it IED in that day...they felt...they didn't like professional educators on board. And he and I never did speak to each other again. He's now living down around the coast. The third time I ran unopposed and the fourth time I ran against the...the doctor ran against me and he basically beat me because La Grande was having to clamp down hard with the monies and teachers...educators' salaries are eighty percent of the...of the total...total general fund budget. And we were gonna have to cut sports and...or do something else. And living out here I fought for the bus routes because I said, hey, farmers are paying more than their share of taxes and he fought for athletics and that was a better argument than what I could afford out here.

BW: Every year at tax...at budget time it was just a battle and almost like an armed camp.

GW: Yes, it was. We would submit four and five and six levees. You had to fine pencil for eleven-and-a-half out of twelve months. Many times we ran with a budget...without a budget and would not get...of course you've got some state monies coming in, as you know. I used to know quite a bit about it, but I haven't been on since '88 so it's been fifteen years and I can't really talk with much authority in that. But every year we would go...or not every year, but the majority of the years of the twelve years that I was on board you would go into March and April...July to June 30th budget without...without a formal budget. And you'd pare and you'd...you would cut and... I mean it wasn't only sports, it was music, 'cause that's extracurricular. I had two daughters that were outstanding public speaking. Public speaking is a low-totem pole item. My daughters made state, both of them, and they would compete against kids that had been in ten or twenty tournaments and the only tournament they'd been in was winning the district championship and they did very, very well.

BW: We funded all their trips because there wasn't money for that.

GW: I remember one year that my daughter Vicki, the one that wrote this, Termond Ashland, her speech coach had to take personal days, personal leave days, to be able to accompany her to Ashland where the state tournament was. I mean, you gotta have dedication on part of your teachers 'cause extracurricular if you're a teacher, you know. And I know she...and we were down there with her and talked to some of the kids she competed against and she beat almost all of 'em. But I remember one boy in particular had been to twenty-two tournaments from Forest Grove. And I mean it's like putting the Imbler Panthers against the Portland Trailblazers basketball team. [laugh] If you know what I'm sayin'. Of course they might beat 'em the way the Trailblazers...[laugh] I'm not a Trailblazer fan.

- ES: When you said that many of the small one-room schools had to close because the number of students was decreasing what was going on there? Why were those population shifts? Or were there fewer children being born?
- GW: Fewer children being born, obviously. When the pioneers came across every child raised was...or every...was a hired hand. And Lee Johnson, if you're familiar with that name, used to mention he got one of his degrees back at Iowa, and he says you'll see the gravestone of a old farmer and four or five wives and fifteen children all in the family plot. Well, the wife was a brute mare basically, and of course they died usually from any childbearing complication, aremic poisoning being one of the biggest ones. And they raised kids basically to work on the farm. You worked on the farm. And, of course, as we came into industrial revolution the twentieth century that was needed less and less and less. And then, of course, War II sure was a catalyst for the last of, you know, farm boys found, hey, I can make more workin' at the shipyard or the docks than I can out in Dad's farm sloppin' pigs.
- ES: From your experience...
- GW: They had less kids.
- ES: From your experience on the La Grande School Board and various kinds of problems that fairly large district had, is it your sense that perhaps at least through elementary levels quality of education, quality of teaching, quality of learning, might've been better if the small schools had remained?
- GW: Certainly to a degree, yes. I'm sure to a degree, no. Kids today know so many more things, technical things, that we did not know and for heaven sake, don't print this...no, no, I'm being cute. I don't want you to print it anyway.
- ES: You'll see what gets printed and anything you don't want there we can take out.
- GW: Our granddaughter is a senior in high school. She's... She's a lovely girl. She's a fine girl. She had a boyfriend that was two or three years older that is in the Guards and was going to be...he got called up to the war that was coming. This has been what, three weeks ago, four weeks ago. And he was going through basic training in Ft. Knox...Ft. Campbell, Kentucky. And she came out here to... I had had this surgery and she came out to see Grandpa. And she has her own car, as all kids do. Forget the prejudice. But had a wonderful two-and-a-half hour visit. She was very alarmed that he was gonna get called into harm's way. And we said...you know, she didn't quite know where he was going. She thought the country started with a K and I said, "Well, would it be Kuwait or Korea?" She didn't know. She couldn't even find the right continent. And when I got the...I've got a globe right over there, big globe. I brought it over and she was right about where you are and when I pointed out Kuwait at the southern tip of Iraq she said, "That isn't any bigger than La Grande." Well, obviously it is and of course on a world map or globe it doesn't look any bigger. She didn't have a clue. Didn't even have the continent. Didn't know whether it was Korea or Kuwait. She's a good girl, she's kind of an airhead, but she's a good girl. I don't know what to say... I'm goin' all around the question. Teachers have to be nurse and nanny and they don't dare touch a child, they've got to see that they get on the bus. My daughter when she...younger daughter when she lived here would come home with different war stories every night. In today's... When we were

in... When we were in school if Mom and Daddy weren't together, weren't married, it was highly unusual and you kind of pointed to that kid, you know, he doesn't have a dad. Now there's Uncle Joe and Uncle Jim and Uncle Harry and between Easter and Thanksgiving Uncle Joe might be gone out of the picture and Uncle Jim is in and by Christmastime maybe they've split sheets.

BW: Obviously country schools like Iowa and these smaller schools could not hire music teachers, art teachers.

GW: Had to be a multi...

BW: Computer...

GW: No, they didn't have computers.

BW: No, but I mean if you still had country schools they just wouldn't be able to hire the personnel to teach the...[end tape]

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GW: I get awfully far-field in that, I apologize. I did the service of a lady that was a teacher...a funeral service of a lady that was a teacher that died about three years ago. And a female could not continue teaching unless she was married. Or, excuse me, I've got that backwards.

ES: If she were married.

GW: Yeah, if she were married. I've got that backwards. And she had to quit teaching when she became married. She lived up on Pumpkin Ridge and she taught at either Dry Creek or Pumpkin Ridge and she taught over at Ladd Canyon when Ladd Canyon had a school. And when she married Hugh Coffin, her husband, she had to quit teaching. I think teachers had a modicum of knowledge about so many more things than teachers of today have. They probably were not specialists in any subject, but they were well-grounded. They had roots, they had knowledge, they had common sense.

ES: Do you know why that rule held for so long that a female teacher couldn't continue teaching if she were married?

GW: I haven't a clue.

ES: What's your guess?

GW: My guess is probably to a degree religion maybe. Many times the old maid schoolteacher lived with a family that was a director in the school board or clerk of the school district. I know Mrs. Coffin did. That's how she met her future husband.

ES: Could it be that a wide-spread assumption was that a married woman had a full-time job just being married? She didn't have time to teach?

GW: Probably.

BW: And you didn't have child care and all that type of thing unless maybe she had her mother living with her or mother-in-law to take care of the baby while she worked, but that was really highly unusual.

ES: There was no law to that affect as I recall. Simply a widely held assumption?

GW: They just weren't hired.

ES: Did you know anything about how school boards of these one-room schools operated?

GW: I can remember settin' in the Studebaker car when Dad and the other two directors...and Dad was a director and Mother was a clerk and there was three directors. And they'd get together once or twice a year and, you know, gosh, how many cords of wood do think Iowa's gonna need and does the pitcher pump need, you know, need a little oilin' or need a few shingles on the outhouse?

ES: They didn't fool with curriculum.

GW: Oh, heavens, I don't know. Good grief. I can't imagine, no. No, they didn't. I was only four years old, but they didn't fool with curriculum.

BW: Did they make a budget or was it all volunteer work?

GW: Oh yeah, they...

BW: ...around the school?

GW: No, I think...

ES: I think they must've had something to do with the budget, figuring out how much they would pay the teacher and how much they could have for supplies.

GW: Yeah.

ES: Bernice, you must've been involved in some organizations in your earlier life, church, social organizations?

BW: I was in... I also was involved in Farm Bureau. I was secretary in Farm Bureau for a number of years. However, we never got to the point of being in the state...yeah, just local.

ES: If you were secretary you must remember then a few of the questions that had come up for discussion or for action?

BW: Basically just what we've been talking about already. I think one of the biggest fights that I remember that Gary touched very little on was the port authority fight. But... And I also belonged to a social sorority that was just women my age, married women with children. And very few of them worked at that time. We were all homemakers. And then...

ES: What would you do at a typical meeting?

BW: Oh, we'd have our business meeting...

ES: What kind of business?

BW: We did philanthropic work in...in La Grande.

ES: Helping out families that needed assistance?

BW: Yes. And so we had projects that we had to make money for...to donate. We... We did fair parade every year and they still do it. I'm no longer a member, but they still do the fair parade and that...

ES: Getting a float ready?

BW: ...that was one of the biggest money makers that we had because we were paid to put that fair parade together.

ES: You organized the parade?

BW: Yes.

ES: Oh, I see. I thought you meant getting a float to participate in it.

BW: And then when my girls got in junior high I started working part-time outside of the home. And I worked in a fabric store and I sold sewing machines and later spas.

ES: Claudson's?

BW: Mm-hmm. And I worked there until I was sixty-five and quit and then since then I've become more active in the church. But basically, well, I was involved with my kids and their...in school, PTA and when they got old enough to go on trips with their organizations I always took them.

GW: She's very active in the church. She's chairman of the elders.

ES: This is the First Christian Church, right?

BW: Yes.

GW: Up until fifteen years ago you didn't have female elders, you didn't have female deacons or deaconesses. She sings in the church choir, she had a solo coming up next week in Sister Act. She sings in Sister Act. She sings in Praise Team.

BW: We've sung in our church choir since before we were married.

GW: Like forty-some years.

BW: And I took a few years off when my kids first started school because they had to be in bed by eight and choir went past that time. So I took a few years off and then when they were old enough that...that I could leave them here, you know, for a little while alone. And then as they got older they started singing, too.

ES: Can you tell me a little more about the nature of that church? Not necessarily beliefs, but the nature of the congregation and any positions that they take or concerns they have about the community?

GW: They're a member of the World Council of Churches.

BW: Once again it's just been recently, other than the choir and the music part of it, that I've become, you know, really more involved. We... I belong to the women's group and we donate to Church World Services. In fact, our little women's group gave twenty-five hundred dollars to that group. We do... We give money to Northwest Medical Teams, Red Cross. And we gave five hundred dollars just recently for the Habitat for Humanity.

ES: Aside from the recent rise in women in leadership positions how else...how has the church changed over the last forty or fifty years?

BW: In our particular congregations we're finding fewer and fewer younger families. In fact, we probably have maybe what you would call a dieing church right now. We're trying to work on it, but the majority of our congregation is probably between the ages of...what would you say...forty-five...

GW: Forty-five and sixty-five.

ES: Do you think this is true of other Protestant churches or Catholic church in La Grande?

BW: I think it's true of a number of them. I think the more conservative churches right now are getting more of the younger people that are going to church. And I don't know if that's because they were raised in conservative homes or if that's just more appealing to them. Church... The church service has changed from being going in quietly, sitting down in the pew and maybe reading your Bible or praying before the service started, meditating. Now you have praise singing where...

GW: Contemporary...contemporary music.

BW: ...it's a lot more active.

ES: Do you think that's been done to try to bring in more young people?

BW: It has, yes.

ES: But it hasn't worked.

BW: Not to the degree that we hoped it would. It has in some churches.

GW: Yes, it has in some churches.

ES: How had the sermons changed in their content over these years?

BW: They're not nearly as what I would call...they're still Bible based, but it's not like you're just preaching from the Bible. You... They're taking like a scripture and relating it more to our times.

ES: Wasn't that done in the past?

BW: Yes, but not to the degree that it is now. Our minister is very...I guess this is an old-fashioned word...hip. And he's not what you would call a great orator.

ES: There are very few orators left anywhere. [laughs]

BW: More and more I think that it's...it's...in some ways it's a problem because a lot of the older folks...and I don't count myself as being one of them...like the new service.

GW: They like a traditional service.

BW: I like the new service. I think it offers more to more people.

GW: They like a service where you go in and you sing The Old Rugged Cross and you sing Amazing Graze, but you certainly wouldn't sing...sing anything with a guitar or with castanets. Stacie has the castanets. And Sister Act is a very upbeat, very contemporary, very modern...

BW: Have you seen the movie Sister Act?

ES: No.

BW: Well, we...we took off from that.

ES: Tell me, if you could, about relationships among the various churches in Union County, especially in early years. Was there much communication? Did they each tend to be isolated from the others?

BW: I think... I think the churches had pretty good relationships. We just saw a movie of the building of our church which took part in the '50s.

GW: 1950 to '55.

BW: And there...in the movie was the dedication of the new building. And I would say almost all the ministers in La Grande, excluding Mormons and Catholics maybe, at that time spoke at that dedication.

ES: You bring up the subject of Mormons. What has been your perception of the Mormon community in relation to other groups in Union County over your period of living here?

BW: I... My mother was the only member of her family that was not Mormon. They all became Mormon. And so we were never Mormon, but my aunts and cousins were. I would say that they're more clannish among themselves. I think... They have very large Mormon population in this area and we went to school with a number of Mormon kids and liked 'em, you know. But I think they're...they're not as outgoing in community work and I would say that a lot of their money goes back into their own church and into their own buildings.

GW: They take... They take care of their own. Would you like a glass of cider?

ES: Sure.

BW: And I think that there... I think that even people in our church in this day do not really understand Mormons or their religion. I... There's a lot of people who do

not think that they are Christian, but they do believe in Jesus Christ, you know. So that...that's about the only way I can answer that. I don't think there's any open discrimination against them.

ES: Has there been in the past?

BW: Here?

ES: Yes.

BW: Not to my knowledge. Oh, I'm sure there are people who don't like them and don't have anything to do with them, but...

GW: Bernice, would you like...

BW: No thanks. But I wouldn't say there's been any op...you know, open opposition against them. And I don't...however, I think in the early times in La Grande probably were as discriminated against as Mormons, maybe more, I don't know.

ES: How would you have knowledge of any of those things? Would you...was there much word of mouth on subjects like this or call it gossip? How else... How else would you know about how people felt toward each other, especially if they're related to religion?

BW: Just hearing people... Just hearing people talk.

ES: So from that, of course, it's always hard to make generalizations.

BW: And of course I know that throughout the U.S. from reading there was a lot of discrimination.

ES: Yes.

BW: And so I'm assuming that even though it wasn't open here that it probably existed.

ES: How much aware...awareness have both of you had of black people living in La Grande...in Union County or especially in La Grande?

BW: When we were in high school I think we had, what, three black...

GW: Three or four black kids.

BW: ...three or four black kids in our school. And so it was never a problem.

ES: What were you picking up about how people felt about people with black skin?

BW: You know, I never...I never felt that kids were mean to them, but I would say probably they were shunned. Maybe not...maybe not on purpose, but they were just different, you know.

ES: A different social group.

BW: Now my mother always said to us when we were growing up that we were never supposed to be mean to anybody who was, you know, or not be nice to anybody who was of a different race than we were. Now my step-father was...[laugh]

GW: Oh, he was so prejudiced!

BW: ...was not that way at all.

GW: He...

BW: And so I...I sort of know both sides of this. One of the boys that were in...that was in our class happened to belong to a Methodist youth group that I went to at that time. And I never ever noticed that anybody treated him any differently, but I know there were some girls that were in school that were very, very mousy and...I don't know that...

ES: __ girls?

BW: I just think... Yeah, a couple of black girls, I think they were friends with each other and that was very much it. They did play intramural, the girls did. Okay.

GW: Can I... Can I interject? I said I went to first and second grade at Iowa and then I went third, fourth and fifth to Imbler 'cause they had the first busses. And one of the big things that was thrown in my folks' face when my folks were carrying it to court to consolidate into La Grande school district rather than be taken into Imbler school district was, "Why do you want to go to La Grande? You got those niggers up there." And what I started to sixth grade at Greenwood, which basically the blacks were across the track and they're...like I say there was just two or three families.

BW: Yeah, they went to Greenwood School.

GW: They went to Greenwood, no other school, but basically because they lived in that area. The black...any black kid that I ever saw wasn't half the problem that half the kids were at Imbler. [laugh] At Imbler...I'll get back to the blacks in just a second... Well, they used to fail kids.

ES: Yes, repeat a grade.

GW: Yes.

ES: Yes.

GW: That doesn't happen now. But I can remember...I swear some of those kids in the fourth and third and fourth, fifth grades were fifteen, sixteen years old. And that day a mowing machine had the guards in the front of the mowers, looked like daggers, kind of short daggers. And the boys...they're all farm boys...and the boys'd wear these daggers under their belt and they'd...you know, it... Another kid and I...he's dead now...we were the...he'd gone to Mt. Glenn, I think, and I'd gone down here to Iowa and I was so sheltered. Just one other little first-grade than me. When we went to Imbler we were so frightened with some of those boys at Imbler...not just boys, girls...some of those kids at Imbler that we would take our sack lunch, he and I, and we would crawl under the front of Wade Hall, which is the old gymnasium over there, and we would eat our lunch. We had a little hiding place under there. We'd be down there with the brown recluse spiders and the [laughs] everything. And, you know, I...when I look back at that...cause I went there three years, third, fourth and fifth grade...those kids were tough and they were mean, they were mean. There were some nice kids at Imbler, but honest to gosh! And I was panic stricken to be sent to Greenwood where all those quote-unquote "niggers" are. They were a piece of cake. [laugh]

BW: We didn't have enough black...

GW: No, we didn't have.

BW: ...people in La Grande at that time to have a high crime rate. I mean, we didn't have a high crime rate of any kind. You could walk all over La Grande and people left their doors unlocked.

ES: Were the Chinese mostly gone by the time you got into La Grande?

GW: Yes, they were totally gone.

BW: Yes.

GW: But I... I remember...I just want to make this one little comment about Bernice's dad. He was so bigoted that...and like I say, I don't think he and I ever agreed on anything...but I took him to one college game, only one. Eastern Oregon was

playing Portland State and Portland State had a black center. Bernice's dad was short, stocky and loud. And it was the old gym that was right next to Ackerman, you know. Got down there and got sat...sat down at that game and this black kid obviously was a star, pretty good player. Bernice's dad jumped up and he said, "Block the god damn jig!" I made it through that game with him and I...I...we weren't married...no...

BW: Yeah, we were married.

GW: Were we married?

BW: Mm-hmm.

GW: It had to be my senior year...our senior year then. And I said never again will I take him to a ballgame. Anyway, that's enough of that.

ES: Do you think he... Are you telling me about him because he was unusual in his attitudes in this valley?

GW: I'm sure they...many harbored...

BW: Yeah, he was just more vocal about it.

GW: He was vocal...volatile, very volatile.

ES: You know where he stood.

GW: Oh, you sure did. And yet he loved doin'...when he became an armchair retiree he loved pro football and pro basketball, which had their token white on the team. [laughs]

ES: Yes. He must've had to change his attitude a little bit.

BW: He mellowed a little bit...

GW: He mellowed a little.

BW: ...with age.

ES: Do you have any reflections on the role of the railroad in Union County? Or railroads? You must've had an awareness of it's presence and importance throughout your lives.

BW: See, my step-father worked for the railroad...or the railroad and so I'm...I know the railroad was what, you know, caused the area to grow. And at the time that Dad worked on the railroad I think it probably employed more people than anybody.

GW: Yes.

BW: Up until just the last few years he worked there.

ES: Was it always in the background for you, though, or did it play any prominent role in your life?

BW: Of course that's how we lived.

ES: Yes, but you could...you could live without...by wages from the railroad without paying much attention to the railroad.

BW: I love riding on a train, always did. When we lived in Huntington my mother and grandmother and my brother and I would ride from Huntington to La Grande to visit relatives on the train. And then after Mother married Dad we had a pass. And I loved the old steam engines. I remember during the war being on the platform saying goodbye to people, you know, and those steam engines would come roaring into town and I can just remember my heart would just pound. I just thought... And I still think they were just beautiful.

ES: They were noisy and dirty and smelly.

BW: Yes.

ES: What was beautiful about them?

BW: All the black, shiny black and they were exciting. They're sort of liking a jet airplane take off. They were exciting because probably the noise.

ES: There were some respects in which they almost seemed like living things.

BW: Mm-hmm.

ES: They pulsed and they made sounds.

GW: La Grande in that day, of course, had the roundhouse and when Bernice's step-dad started railroading they walk...literally walked the cars, the tops of the trains.

BW: He was a brake... He started out being a brakeman and then he ended up being a conductor.

GW: Front to back.

BW: But the brakemen actually walked the top of the cars setting brakes.

ES: I know. Dangerous.

GW: You bet.

BW: In ice and everything.

GW: Can you imagine settin' brakes at Meacham on cold winter nights?

BW: He suffered a lot as he...in older age from arthritis from jumping off and on the train. But, no, I always...I always loved riding...loved drinking water on the trains, [laugh] going to the bathroom 'cause you had to step between the cars. [laugh]

ES: Oh yes. Oh yes. An adventure. Gary, what was your awareness of trains?

GW: I had little, none, basically.

ES: You can't avoid them though when you're here. You've got to hear them and you've got to see them, you've got to give some thought to them, don't you?

GW: Quite frankly I never rode a train until I was going with Bernice. In fact, that's the only train ride I took was from La Grande to Haines.

BW: They blocked the crossings [laugh] is his awareness of 'em.

GW: Yeah, my total awareness. I will say one thing, probably isn't something you want to put anywhere, but Bernice's dad...and I don't know whether this was...I think most railroaders pretty much work wise, occupation wise, did not layoff for anything, Christmas, Easter, birthday, you name it. And of course they were twenty-four hours a day on-call...they're on-call all the time.

BW: Didn't participate in any school activities.

GW: Did not participate in didly-squat. And in 1976 our...our older daughter Vicki was graduating from high school. Floyd had just...I don't know if he was sixty-four or sixty-five...and...in fact, I used this when I talked a little about him when he died last June...last May at the funeral service. Vicki was chosen to give the baccalaureate address from her class. In fact, she was the classmate voted "Most Likely to Succeed." And Floyd had never heard either of the girls sing or any of their speaking of any kind, any activity. They weren't athletic. Neither of the girls were athletic, involved in sports. And I remember about the week before we said...Bernice said or I said, "Dad, your granddaughter's giving the baccalaureate talk. Couldn't you lay off to hear Vicki 'cause it'll never happen again?" He was a man of few words. He sat there for a couple of minutes and he says, "No, I won't lay off." He sat there for a couple more minutes, he says, "I'll retire." And

he did and he said he never went back to the yard office again. He never darkened the door. He hated the Union Pacific. Oh, he bellered and moaned and bitched about the Union Pacific and everything. Uncle Pete is what they called him, Uncle Pete, U. P. And railroaders, salary wise, were well paid. They sure made a bunch more than teachers or professors or farmers. And...[end tape]