

Faye Weimer

6/18/02, tape 1, side 1

SW: I thought I'd tell you a little bit about myself. I've been here two years. My family...my husband retired because we have a disabled son and I couldn't take care of him by myself. He retired early and wanted to come back to eastern Oregon. He grew up in John Day. He loved to hunt and fish.

FW: My husband did too.

SW: Which is what he's doing today. So we've been here two years. I was real excited about the opportunity to meet the elderly in the community and learn their stories. Actually, all I know about you is your name and that you're probably eighty-four.

FW: Yes.

SW: That you were born and you grew up at Five Point?

FW: No, I grew up on the farm out here in the valley. My husband was raised...he was born in Cove, but he was raised...his folks had a little grocery store at Five Point. He was born in Cove, but he grew up actually at Five Point.

SW: I'm not familiar where Five Point is.

FW: It's on the highway between here and Pendleton. Its eight miles out of La Grande. There's nothing there now, but the creek...Five Point Creek is still there. It empties into the Grande Ronde. Its just eight miles, just about eight miles out of La Grande on the main highway going to Pendleton.

SW: I made a list of questions and we don't have to stick to them. Just things that I was interested in and I thought other people would be interested in. One of the suggested questions was how many children were in your family and what was your birth order.

FW: There was just...my mother and father were divorced when I was about four. I just had the one old brother older than I. He's since passed away. Then my mother remarried and she had two more children. Actually I just had two brothers that I grew up with. The other little girl died. But my mother was married twice. We...my great-grandfather...my great-great-grandfather had a farm...I don't know how many acres the original farm had...between La Grande and the road going into Island City. It's out toward Mt. Glen. I don't know if you know where Mt. Glen is. You know where the city park is?

SW: Yes.

FW: The big park. Our farm was on out about a mile and a half on out in the valley. My great-grandfather had the acreage and then when he died he divided up the acreage between his five girls and one boy. I was actually raised on the farm after he passed away and my grandfather on my mother's side had the first mortgage on the ranch. He bought the ranch and that's where I was raised.

SW: How did your grandfather come to this valley? Was he on a wagon train or...?

FW: My great-grandfather came on wagon train to the valley. He's the one who bought the land. I don't know how many acres there was in the original land, but when we bought the farm we just had seventy-two acres that we bought. My grandmother had twenty-three acres of her own and then we bought the other fifty

acres. Original farm...the house and everything, the old house, it was there. The other members of the family each were given so much land. We just actually ended up with seventy-two acres.

SW: What did you do with the land?

FW: My step-dad worked on the railroad, but he farmed. Had horses, cows, sheep, pigs, chickens and he just raised a little wheat and alfalfa, food for the animals mostly on the farm. Of course we always had a big garden. Always canned.

SW: Can you describe some of your earliest memories from living on the farm? Anything significant?

FW: The most significant thing I remember...I had started school in town in the first grade then we moved on the farm. Walking to school, it was a mile and a quarter to the old Moss Chapel School, and walking everyday back and forth to school. In the wintertime it was cold and snow up to our knees. It was good to get in the little schoolhouse and stand around...all of us stood around this big old potbellied stove to get warm. [laugh]

SW: I'm not familiar with where that school was. You called it Elmore?

FW: It was Moss Chapel was the name of the school. You know where Island City is?

SW: Yes.

FW: You know the road that come north out of Island City going toward Imbler and up the branch?

SW: Yes.

FW: Our school was right on the corner of that road just about a mile out of island City. Our farm was three miles out of La Grande. My brother and I had to walk to school everyday.

SW: Was that school all the way through high school?

FW: No, in the sixth grade...my grandfather worked on the railroad, of course, and my step-dad too, and my grandfather...my brother actually had started high school, my older, I just had one older brother and he was two years older than I...he had started high school and so my grandfather, at that time when I was in the sixth grade, he would drive out to our farm every morning for breakfast and have breakfast and pick us up and take us to school. I started going to Greenwood School then in the sixth grade. He went to high school. That was the reason for changing schools.

SW: You said he drove you to school. What were you driven in?

FW: He had a little car. I don't know if it was a Chevrolet or what. I know when I was younger and we'd have to come in town for groceries in the winter we drove our horses in the sled to town to get groceries in the winter. We had a little old Ford, but when it was too slick, too much snow we'd take the horses. The little Moss Chapel school is now a home and I can't remember the name of the little road that leads down to the school. Just about a mile, mile and a quarter maybe, out of Island City. It's a little old brick house and its been made into a home.

SW: That would be interesting. I will have to try and find it.

FW: Its on the left hand side just coming out of...actually, there's very few buildings on the left hand side of the road coming out of Island City. I cannot remember the name of that lane. I should. That I used to walk down all those years to school.

Then I have a half brother that lives right across the road on the same side of the street as the railroad chapel, Moss Chapel School.

SW: Was that a public school?

FW: It was a county school.

SW: A county school. How many children attended?

FW: I think thirteen was the most we had. Quite a few that were Mormon kids. Mt. Glen, which is not too many miles from our farm, but over the hill toward Mt. Emily, Mt. Glen was. That was a Mormon community. About the last two years I was there there were about four or five kids from the Mt. Glen school that came to our school. Apparently, they closed their school and they came to our school. Thirteen was the most we ever had.

SW: How could you describe your early education? Did you like going to school?

FW: I loved it. I just had boy cousins and my brothers to play with so I grew up like a boy, climbing trees and everything that they did. It was really fun to have girls there.

SW: Then after the sixth grade you came into La Grande?

FW: Came into La Grande everyday. My granddad would pick us up. He'd come out for breakfast at six and take us in town and we'd stay at his house until time for me to go to Greenwood. My brother would have to walk up on the to the high school. I would stay there at his house until time to go to Greenwood School. I'd walk down to school about eight blocks. He'd come home from work and about five o'clock we would go home with him out to the ranch and he'd eat supper with us. Then he'd go back to his house in town. He was the one...we didn't have busses in those days. We made our own transportation.

SW: Then you went on to La Grande High School after that?

FW: Went to high school. And he did the same thing clear through high school. Every morning coming out, picking us up, taking us in town to school. Then we'd walk from his house because it was too early to go to school when we'd get back. We'd walk to school up to high school.

SW: After you finished high school what did you do?

FW: I had really special friends that we had the Eastern Oregon College here at that time. These friends were really...they had enrolled at the college. We were short of money and everything and I didn't particularly want to go to school...to the college. So I went to business school. It was Draper's Business School that we had here in La Grande at that time. It took about a year to finish that work and then I started working for Western States Grocery, which was a wholesale outlet for Safeway stores. We had twelve stores in this area. They weren't trucking things in from Portland for the stores at that time. They'd come in on the train to our Western States Grocery Outlet there in La Grande and we'd truck whatever the stores had ordered. To stores in Baker, Union, up the branch and here in La Grande. We had three stores in La Grande if you can believe it!

SW: Three Safeway stores?

FW: Yes, at that time.

SW: My goodness!

FW: I worked there for about another three years and then I got married.

SW: Started a family then?

FW: We were married in '39 and our first little girl was born in '42. Stole's father had wanted him to take over the auto camp. The just had six cabins there at this auto camp at that time.

SW: Stole was your husband?

FW: Yes.

SW: I see.

FW: Dad Weimer...that was the arrangement when we got married. Stole was...we were to live in one of the cabins and Stole was to help in the store. By that time...what do you call it...when they could beer and drink it?

SW: After Prohibition?

FW: After Prohibition that happened. They were selling beer there at Five Point, that little store. Stole did not like it. On Saturday nights men working for the Mt. Emily Lumber Camp on up the river, Grande Ronde River, and other men working on the railroad there at Hilgard, would come and drink beer and tall stories told and everything. Stole did not like working there. He just didn't like it. One night we had come to La Grande to go to the theater. We stopped for refreshments at the old Nook in La Grande. A young man came up and asked Stole if he would fight fire. There was a fire...this hill right back here was on fire. Stole said sure he would fight fire, but he would have to take me to Five Point and change clothes and come back so he did. I didn't see him for over a week [laugh]...fighting fire. That's how we got interested in working the hills. We stayed there at Five Point for about six more months and then he started working for the Oregon State Forestry in La Grande and we moved into town then. That was disappointing to Dad Weimer because he wanted Stole to take over. He was getting to the point where it was too much for him. We moved to La Grande. My granddad had five houses and he had given each ...my full brother and my little half-brother and me each a house. So when Stole and I moved to La Grande we were living in a one-room apartment on Jefferson. The street off of Adams. We were paying eleven dollars for this one room and shared a bath with the neighbor there. We cooked and ate in this one room. He said, "How come you're paying eleven dollars in month's rent and you're only getting six dollars a month's rent, which is really cheap rent, for the little house that my granddad had given me." We asked these friends of my mother that were renting the little house to...that we wanted to move in there. So when they moved to another home that's where our first little girl was born there. One of my granddad's house that he had given me.

SW: Does that house still exist?

FW: Yes. Its still there, I think. Stole, after having worked fighting fire that July there was about two or three weeks that he actually worked on the fire, but then started working for state...Oregon State Forestry and we left Five Point. Dad Weimer stayed there I don't know how many more years, but it wasn't too many years and then they sold it and moved to La Grande.

SW: Did you have more children than your daughter?

FW: We, my husband and I, had five children. We had the one little girl when we were in that little house on Monroe and then just before the second daughter

came along we bought a little house on East N Avenue. We had our four children down there.

SW: In the house?

FW: On East N Avenue.

SW: So the children were born at home?

FW: No, I went to the hospital, but that's where we were living, on East N at that time.

SW: As a child growing up, what did you do for entertainment? Other than climb trees and. . .

FW: Played Annie Over. We played all the games that kids...climbing trees and fishing in our little creek that went through our farm there. We would fish. I never ever caught anything, but anyhow. We just played boy games because I didn't have any girl friends close. We wrestled. I wrestled just like a boy with my cousins and my brother. We kept busy. Of course we had to work as we got older on the farm.

SW: Did you ever travel out of Union County as a youngster?

FW: Before my...when we were just little I can remember...I must have been three or four...my granddad worked on the railroad and so we had passes. My mother hadn't been married so she was on his pass and my brother, my full brother, and I and my mother and Granny. My grandfather's wife would go to the coast every summer. My grandmother had very good friends that lived in Gresham and sometimes we stayed with them. We'd go down and we had pictures of the coast. That was always exciting to look forward to. When Granny died I don't remember...I must have been only four and a half or five maybe when she died...why then those trips stopped.

SW: What was a train trip like then?

FW: Just like it is now.

SW: Really?

FW: I loved it! I hated it when the train went out. It was just too bad to loose the passenger train.

SW: I'm very disappointed also that there's no passenger train. When did the train service, passenger train service, end here?

FW: I can't remember. I know when I was working at Western States Grocery it was going on. I can't remember when it went out. I didn't have any...I did take trips going over to my cousin over in Pendleton on the passenger train. I guess I was a senior then. I can't remember. [soft voices]

SW: I don't know. One of the questions my daughter wanted me to ask...I have an eighteen year old daughter that's very interested in history...she wanted me to ask you how the Depression affected you and your family and what you remember about that.

FW: I couldn't see any difference myself. [laugh] We didn't have much before, you know living on a farm you just lived off your farm.

SW: You still had coal for...?

FW: Yea. And we had plenty of food. I couldn't really see much difference, actually. My granddad, he had his little old Ford at first that he drove back and forth to the ranch, he was the one that really kept us going, I think. When my folks first moved on the farm out there I'm sure he was the one that really helped us get

settled in and helped with getting things that we needed to farm with. I can't remember... the people...

SW: You don't remember shortages of shoes or...

FW: We just wore our shoes until they wore out. [laugh] We couldn't have new ones. We'd buy probably a pair at the time school started and that lasted all winter. Summer you went barefooted. [laugh] We didn't belong to any church. We didn't go to church, so we didn't have a lot clothes to get.

SW: What to you remember about the ethnic people in the valley when you were growing up? The Chinese, the Irish, the Blacks and the American Indians? Do you have any stories to tell?

FW: I just don't. My granddad worked a section for them on the line...I don't know where it was, clear through Union up that way...he always had a lot of Italian that worked for him. I didn't know any Spaniards or anyone like that. He had some really good friends and they would fix us Italian food and send out to the farm with him. I didn't know any Spanish speaking people...

SW: No Chinese?

FW: He had some Chinese that worked for him, but I never ever knew them. I know we had what they called China Town here in La Grande.

SW: Can you tell me what you remember about that?

FW: I was just scared. [laugh] Of China Town. It was where the old Safeway store was. That street through there was China Town. There was just some old buildings there. Old buildings that went over to the railroad. I don't know whether it was about two blocks, I think it went, that we called China Town.

SW: You had a fear of going there, or...

FW: Just because it was Chinese and we didn't know them...

SW: It was different.

FW: It was different. We kids we just never ever went there. We'd have to drive past in the car.

SW: What about American Indians in the valley? Do you remember any?

FW: No.

SW: Hot Lakes, what do you remember about Hot Lakes when you were growing up?

FW: Hot Lake?

SW: The hotel out at Hot Lake.

FW: I don't remember anything about it.

SW: Really?

FW: We didn't have any...never went to Union. When I was...before I was...probably never went...I probably was in the sixth grade before I knew there was a town Union. Our interests were out on the farm and the other direction. My granddad... his houses were just two blocks from the railroad there. That was our little world, his house and the farm.

SW: What can you tell me about the medical care that was available to you as a child growing up?

FW: I don't think there was much. I know our baby...my mother had this little girl after she married my step-father...I don't know what was wrong, but she was born early and only weighed about a pound and a half. We never weighed her. My granddad's wedding ring he could put it on clear up to her shoulders she was

so tiny. She lived within a few days of being a year old and then she died of whooping cough. I was going to the little country school and the whole school had the whooping cough. I guess she got it from me or my brother and she died.

SW: That's amazing that she survived a year.

FW: Really. Even at nearly a year she couldn't sit up by herself. She was still like a little baby. Other kids that are born and weigh that small amount have survived and grown up and developed into strong healthy kids. She didn't...maybe because she couldn't sit up by herself. She loved to have you hold her and sit her up, but she wasn't strong enough to do it by herself. We kids...she got it from one of us no doubt.

SW: Whooping cough is something we're vaccinated for now.

FW: Right.

SW: What can you tell me about what downtown La Grande was like in your earlier years here?

FW: We didn't get to go downtown very often. [laugh] Only to buy a pair of shoes, you know, living on the farm and everything. What really was exciting to me was when they...and I can't tell you the years, I just have no way of know what years...they took the land there where the old Safeway store was and they built a hotel, the La Grande Hotel. It was a Spanish design with cream colored stucco and red tile roof. It was beautiful. I loved it. I thought it was just gorgeous. They had a beautiful dance floor...ballroom up on the second floor. There were several businesses, a barbershop and I don't know what else down on the first floor on the Adams Street side. I went to...moved to Arizona with my husband. When I came back they had torn down the La Grande Hotel.

SW: What year would that have been?

FW: I don't know. I just wish I had written things down! I couldn't tell you that. I was just heartbroken to come back and see it gone. Here they were building the Safeway store.

SW: The one that they just moved out of last winter?

FW: Yes. I can't tell you the year that would have been. Another time when I came home...in the meantime, after they tore down the La Grande Hotel, they built the Sacagawea Annex, which was the apartment building in the back. Its seven stories high. The Sac Annex.

SW: Yes.

FW: We had the Sacagawea Hotel in front, they built that. I think it was built before the La Grande Hotel was torn down. That was a seven-story hotel and it was beautiful too. They had a nice dance floor there, too. I loved to dance. My husband and I used to go to the dance. When I came back from one of my trips...that was just when they were starting to use motels...and here that big beautiful seven-story building was gone and the bank was...[end tape]

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FW: ...after I married my husband I joined the LDS Church. Our meeting place was on the corner of Fourth and N Ave. The old Stake building. I came home from

one of my trips and here it was a pile of brick. That beautiful old Stake house. The LDS Stake house was nothing but that pile of brick and they were cleaning them and sold... I couldn't believe it! I hadn't heard anything about selling that brick. Those were three real shocks in my life. When they tore down the La Grande Hotel, the Sac Annex and the LDS Stake building. Changes are necessary in life and we don't always understand why things are done. Those were three big shocks.

SW: How has La Grande changed for the better, would you say, in your lifetime?

FW: We have much better streets than we had when I was a kid. [laugh] We had a lot fewer trees. I can remember when I was in the sixth grade, I think it was, that our street was just a dirt road. Spruce Street was just a dirt road out to the big park and on out to our house was just a country road. La Grande started...I don't know who it was that instigated it, but they planted trees on both sides of Spruce Street. They're beautiful now, just gorgeous. It was wonderful putting in the curbs and putting in trees and the parking and we had gravel on the street instead of the dirt and mud in the winter. Now we have blacktop. The trees now...La Grande really has a lot of trees. At that time it was quite a project going on finding...

SW: To pull trees.

FW: In the parking up the street. I think Spruce...the trees on Spruce Street, particularly where I...going to school at Greenwood I love those big trees now. They're just gorgeous.

SW: What would you say that La Grande has changed for the worst? Other than the buildings that were torn town.

FW: Taking the railroad out of La Grande. All we have is just freight trains. I think that has hurt La Grande. There are not very many opportunities for kids graduating from high school to get work to stay here, to keep them here. I have two brothers that after they took the passenger trains off had to move to Portland or another area to keep their years that they had in with the railroad. I think that's the one thing...we just don't have the opportunities for kids graduating high school without going on to college to get work. I know my son moved up from Arizona six years ago and he has six boys. Its real difficult for them to find work.

SW: I love it here. I've lived in Arizona and Utah and this is home.

FW: This is home. From Arizona when my dad was starting...his third wife had died and he needed somebody to help him. My brothers asked if I would come and stay with him...my half-brother...if I could come and help out with him. So I moved and stayed with him all that winter and then he died the next spring, so I went back to school with them in Arizona. My brothers didn't want to leave La Grande, they loved La Grande too, but they had to move because...

SW: Of work.

FW: Uh huh. They had quite a few years with the railroad so they were able to finish out their years and retire from the railroad.

SW: Your husband worked for the forest service?

FW: State Forestry. After fighting fire all that week and I didn't see...when I quit work with Western States Grocery I really loved working...anyhow, when I left they gave me a check that was eight hundred and some odd dollars. I don't know



how come I was entitled to it, but it was one of their policies. We bought three cows, some little small pigs and we bought a hundred chicks with that money. Dad Weimer said just help yourself to the till when you need something, just help yourself. We could not do that. Stole had been on a salary and you just don't go into a till and help yourself, even though he was supposed to be helping Dad taking over so he wouldn't have to be working so hard. We had our chickens and our cows and we had our cream money, so we had our money from the cows and when the chickens came to turn out Stole was fighting fire. So Mother Weimer and his sister Della and her husband fed these...he would kill the chickens by...he had a hook you kind of go through under the chin and up into the head and kill them. He'd hang them on the clothesline and let the blood drain and then we would...you didn't take the innards out in those days. We got the heads and the feet on them. We just took the feathers off and took them to the grocery store.

SW: You sold them.

FW: We sold our chicks. This night it was thundering and lightening and Fred was killing the chickens. We were taking...they'd get up some of them...they weren't completely dead when he cut them off with a knife to take in to take the feathers off. Some of them would get up and walk around and that hook was hanging out. I tell you that was so scary! It was thundering and lightening when we were doing this. Mother Weimer and Della were helping inside putting boiling water on and taking the feathers off so we could take them to market the next day. You took a dozen at a time because we didn't have refrigeration like we have now. I'll never forget that! Anyhow, Stole got out of all that work, working on the fire. He missed all that fun.

SW: How much would a chicken bring? Do you remember?

FW: I don't remember. It wasn't much, but I don't remember. We had a crew working on those chickens. Like I say, that wasn't the only time we killed. We just killed whatever ...we had reports that they would accept so many the next day.

SW: At the market?

FW: At the market. It went on for several weeks before we got rid of all those chickens. Stole got out of all of that. [laugh]

SW: Because he was on the fire.

FW: But that's how he got his foot in the door working for the State Forestry. We moved to town then. We were married in September in '39 and moved to town in '40 into my little house that I had that my grandfather had given me. We were able to not have to dip into Dad's till to get money. We were able to survive.

SW: When you were raising your children did you belong to any clubs?

FW: My husband was LDS, but I wasn't and he was inactive. We had been in high school together and we had friends that we'd known in high school that had married and started a little family. There were about six or eight couples that were friends in high school that we would get together on weekends and do things together. Sometimes play cards and games and things. We didn't actually have any clubs or anything that we belonged to. We did go to the dances at the LDS...the LDS had this...they played basketball in the big building and then they had a dance floor down below for dancing. Every Friday night during my senior

year they had dances and the community could come as long as they didn't drink or smoke and behave. That was just really great. I love to dance, we all loved to dance, the six couples of us. We had a really good time. We did fun things together. We'd go on little picnics and stuff together.

SW: You said your husband hunted. Did he provide food for you that way?

FW: Oh yes. I've got a picture of him when he was twelve years old just where Five Point...you know where Five Point Creek is that comes down?

SW: Yes.

FW: It comes down from the north and the hill across the street right there where the little auto camp was. Stole went up there hunting with his brother-in-law when he was twelve. His first gun. He shot this deer and killed it. His brother-in-law had to help him to clean it out and everything. He made him pack that deer. If you're big enough to shoot it, you're big enough to pack it. [laugh] It was a little deer. I have a picture of him with that deer draped around his neck when he got down off of the hill there by Five Point. He loved to hunt. Birds, ducks, whatever.

SW: Did you pick huckleberries, pick berries in the mountains?

FW: He didn't. He would bring me home some if he found them, but he didn't like to pick huckleberries. My mother and my step-dad they would go huckleberrying. I loved to pick huckleberries. I love them. Stole didn't like to pick huckleberries, but if he ran into some...he didn't deliberately go hunting for huckleberries. There's some girls here now...do you know the Combs girls? They know where the huckleberries are and every year they get huckleberries. My daughter-in-law...I don't know if she goes with them, I think she has gone with them. She has made jam, huckleberry jam. Delicious.

SW: What about mushroom collecting? Did anybody do that?

FW: Not my family. We never liked mushrooms. A lot of people do.

SW: My husband and I do that.

FW: Do you?

SW: Yea. What experiences have you had with the La Grande Fire Department? I think that I had some information that your son was with the Fire Department.

FW: He is. You know its really strange. Six years ago before Mother's Day he called me from Arizona and I was here in La Grande. He said, "Mom, if the fire chief ever resigns, let me know." In the paper that very night it was telling about the fire chief, I can't remember his name, was resigning. I called him back that night after I read the newspaper and I saw it I couldn't believe it. He said, "Well, I'll call and find out when they're interviewing and I'll be up." He had twenty years in there at Mesa fire department. He was battalion chief over five small fire stations. There in Mesa he had twenty years in and he was wanting to come back to La Grande. His wife was from California, was born in California. He wasn't sure whether she'd want to come, but she's loved it here, I think. He came up when they were interviewing and I think he said there were nine that were interviewed for this job. He said, "Well, if I'm supposed to get it I'll get it." And he got it! I was so tickled. They've been here six years now. He's been fire chief for six years. They love it here. His kids, his six boys, and then they adopted two little girls. She always wanted a girl and hadn't. They adopted these little girls. She was working in Arizona in an office. I don't know what kind of

an office it was there. She came home from work one evening and the boys they'd had their friends over. They had just bought, or were buying this new house that was two-story with an attic. Here they'd had their friends over walking on the 2x4s up in that attic and one of them fell through. [laugh] Missed the board and fell through. She said, "That's it!" She quit work to stay home with the kids because she wouldn't be home. She started working with foster...with these group that is was that had these children that had special...

SW: Special needs?

FW: Uh huh. She started taking care of these children. I don't know how many different ones she had. She had older boys and then she ended up with these two little girls. One of them had a cleft palate and she still...the other little girl she's beautiful. She's Spanish and really black eyes and brown hair. The oldest little girl is now nine and they adopted these two little girls. Little Isabella she never...how old is she now...she must be, will be seven her next birthday...She'll always just be an invalid. She had beautiful big brown eyes and brown hair. They keep her so clean. She'll never be any better. Then little Rebecca, she'd in the third grade. She's behind one year in school. She had this cleft palate and she'd had so many surgeries and you can still tell she's having problems. They adopted those two little girls. Bruce says their just special little spirits and nobody wanted them. But they got their girls.

SW: Got two girls.

FW: I can't believe the care they need. To take that on. They've got their girls.

SW: I believe the tape is just about to run out, so I think we're going to have to stop.  
[stopped tape]