

## **Gere Zacharias**

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Interviewed by Micheal Minthorn

Transcribed by Danny Cotton

[Tape #1, Side A]

I: Test, this is an interview with Gere Zacharias on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Gere, tell me a little bit about yourself. Tell me your name your birth date, where you were born, that kind of thing.

GZ: Okay. Well, I am Gere Jones Zacharias and I was born in Laramie Wyoming in 1924. So um, and my parents were Mamie Jones, Mamie Carly Jones and my dad was Levelle Jones and they were from Nebraska and they had moved to La Grande when I was eight years old in 1932.

I: And do you remember that move to La Grande?

GZ: Uh huh. It was . . . My dad had, well it was new at the time, he had a Plymouth and it was a four door Plymouth and it was like in that era they were like a box. You know, they were real square and it was kind of a blue-green color. More green than blue, I think, but anyway it was bluish-green and we, my aunt and uncle moved with us so we came with my mom, my dad, my aunt and uncle, and me. I remember stopping at, like instead of motels like we have now they were called cabins and they were little individual places with a bedroom and I don't even remember a bath. I remember it had a sink, you know, a place where they could cook. I think they fixed breakfast when you'd get up in the morning and then you'd take off. But anyway, that was such a thrill because I always like to play house and these little cabins were like playing house like little kids do. That was really exciting.

I: Tell me just briefly about your visual impairment. Has that always been with you? Is that something that developed as you progressed in age?

GZ: Okay, I was born, my family didn't know this but I was born with a genetic eye disease called Retinitis Pigmentosa, which is a deterioration of the retina, and when I was little I seemed normal enough. They couldn't see, I mean they didn't know I couldn't see. And of course I had nothing to base it on so I couldn't tell them that I didn't see but as I got . . . in the first grade in Laramie, Laramie Wyoming, and I . . . the teachers it was a training

school for teachers and so the student teachers took quite an interest in me because my mother worked in a copy shop on the campus at the university so these kids, these college kids knew my family and they saw me around the campus shop and so they took quite an interest in me and they realized I couldn't see. So they told the school nurse and they told my parents and so my parents took me to an eye doctor and they found out that I was near sided so I started wearing glasses in the first grade. But nobody really, the doctor just said oh she's near sided and that was it and they thought it was because I had the measles, a pretty bad case of measles when I was young, so that was what they thought. And I could see well enough to play and do things with other kids. It was just at school I couldn't see but I always loved to read so I read a lot because the print in children's books is large and so I did read a lot. And since I was an only child I amused myself a lot by reading and then when I got when I was in the second grade and we moved to La Grande the school was . . . we hit it right in the middle of the depression and school was not equipped for handling anybody with a handicap and so my mother would talk to the teachers and say Gere can't see very well could she sit in the front? And I was tall for age so the kids would say oh I can't see around here she's too tall [laughs]. And so that was kind of hard and I'd have to sometimes get up and walk up to the blackboard and read the things that were written there because I couldn't see them that far. But the doctors, they took me to doctors, and they all said oh she's just near sided she'll get better as she gets older. So it's been a gradual thing and about, oh, probably . . . about 40 years ago I lost all my sight but it was gradual when I was growing up and then finally it just wasn't there.

I: So how did they . . . when you got to La Grande and you were already um, they assumed you were near sided, what kinds of things did they provide anything else for you other than placing you in the front row and giving you glasses?

GZ: No.

I: How did that affect your learning?

GZ: Well, it was hard because when I was going to school in Laramie they stressed reading and spelling and that sort of thing and they hadn't really got into arithmetic. I mean, we had adding and subtracting and that's it, but when we moved to La Grande I had six weeks of school in La Grande before the summer, and they were into multiplication tables and so I was way

behind because I had not had anything like that. I couldn't . . . so I really got a setback. And then I never got a chance during the summer to get caught up and when school started I started backwards again, I mean I never caught up. I could read, read and spell with the best of 'em but I couldn't do math because I got a bad start to start with and I couldn't see what I was doing and I couldn't, you know, I was so far behind I couldn't, I just couldn't understand it. My parents tried to help me but my brain just wasn't, I think I, you know, because I had a bad start it was hard to catch up so I never did. But, no, they didn't have any kind of help. No tutoring or no types of that kind. We didn't have large print other than the kids books that [inaudible]. Actually the second and third grade [inaudible] started, you know, getting a little snarl because you were starting to get into chapter books and textbooks with smaller print so then I had some problem reading.

I: So, tell me about, tell me about your friends in school and social relationships and things like that when you were in grade school. Did that make it difficult to make friends? Did you make friends?

GZ: I was [inaudible] really shy. My friends now think that's funny because they can't believe I was ever shy, but I was. It took me a while but there was one other girl. Her name was Nyna and she wore glasses too and she was fairly outgoing so we somehow got together. There weren't at that time there were no other kids in our grade that wore glasses. Well, there was one boy. And we all started, you know there only the three of us. So, we played together and because Nyna was pretty outgoing I got acquainted and then was Jean [inaudible] lived near my Dad's store so I got acquainted with him and I kind of, you know, they understood because they had a little problem too. But as I got older kids teased me a lot the first few years but by the time I got to junior high all of a sudden kids seemed to grow up a little and started being a little understanding. And they would walk with me because I wouldn't see well enough to always see curbs and things very well. And so the kids knew pretty good then by the time I got into junior high and high school I fit in better but I had problems in school because in junior high we had to take P.E. and I had to play volleyball and I couldn't even see the ball until it hit me and I had to play basketball and I couldn't see that one. I could learn to throw the basket for a free throw but otherwise I'd [inaudible] if the ball hit me I'd just stand there like a dummy. And so nobody wanted me on their team. My best friend Nyna was athletic and she just didn't want, they'd choose, you know, they'd pick a captain and then they'd choose. Well, I was always the last one chosen on the teams and I

thought really my ego suffered a lot 'cuz I felt like I was dumb and nobody liked me and stuff.

I: Now, did you finish all of your schooling then in La Grande? Grade school, junior high, and high school?

GZ: Uh huh.

I: When did you finish?

GZ: I graduated in 1942.

I: So what kinds of things did you do as time progressed. You said that people became much better and more friendly and understanding to you so . . .

GZ: Well, they sometimes would work with me. Like, they'd try to help me with my homework and um . . . they couldn't do much but they'd help try to read some things to me [inaudible] and . . . then when we had to go to things, especially after dark, when we'd go to sports things and [inaudible] at the school. We lived two and a fourth miles from high school so we'd have to walk and none of the kids had cars like they do now so we had to walk. And so they'd go up with me. I don't think I realized how bad my eyes were and I've always been grateful because when I was in the seventh grade my parents bought me a bicycle. And they had no idea that my eyes were as bad as they were. So, I could ride fairly well in the daytime because I had pretty good hearing and I could hear a car coming. I had a lot of accidents. I ran into trees and ran up poles [laughs], and run over curbs and falling in gravel and things but I wanted to do it so much. So we'd ride our bikes from La Grande to Alicel and during the summer several times a day. I mean several times a week and ride bikes and stuff because I'd be in the rear. We'd go single file on this country road and I'd hear the cars coming from the rear and I'd yell at them and they saw 'em coming from the [inaudible] they'd yell at me so we'd get right on the edge so that we weren't in the way. So I survived and I've always been grateful because otherwise they would have never let me have a bicycle if they would have known that I couldn't see.

I: What kind of social things did you do in school? What did you and your friends do besides things like riding to Alicel?

GZ: Oh, well, I don't know [laughs]. We went to, you know, I was a spectator sport person. I liked to go to the games even though I couldn't see 'em I liked just the excitement of the cheerleaders, you know, the cheers, and everybody had to tell me everything especially football. They had to tell me who did what because I couldn't see. I tried so hard to learn about football but I couldn't even see it. So, anyway, I did go to all those things and I was active in . . . I took home economics for a couple of years and I was active in a club called the Home Ec club and that was fun. We used to get together and, you know, have meetings and read. So, because we were kind of an active group we used to be the ones that would serve for some of the banquets and things that they have at the high school and that was, you know, it was fun. It wasn't, maybe the most exciting thing but we enjoyed it. I used to baby-sit some but they weren't little kids. I had kids usually around seven or eight or nine years old that I baby-sat with.

I: Did you, did you date in high school or have boyfriends?

GZ: Oh yeah. Yeah, I had some pretty good crushes [laughs].

I: What kinds of things would you do?

GZ: Oh, we went to movies and I wasn't a very good dancer because I couldn't see what they were doing and I never got the hang of that too much until I got older. But . . . but we went to a lot of movies and I had a lot of crushes on some of the movie people. When I was real young, I mean in my grade school years, I had . . . I was enchanted with Shirley Temple and I crafted Shirley Temple pictures and everything I could get my hands on that had Shirley Temple on it. That was my passion. I still have about nine scrapbooks with pictures of her.

I: Did you see all her movies?

GZ: Oh yeah. Had to do that.

I: Were they all presented in La Grande if they showed up?

GZ: Yeah. So, I was . . . but I remember there was one little girl, you know how there is always somebody you don't get along with, there was one little girl that I did not get along. So one day she came to school and she said she had seen Shirley Temple downtown La Grande. She was with her parents

and they were driving through on vacation and she stopped and went into one of the little shops to get an ice cream cone. I was so envious. I was just like, I couldn't . . . to this day I am not sure it was true because I can't quite imagine some of the things I read later that Shirley Temple was pretty well guarded. But, anyway, whether she did or didn't I was so jealous. I was green as emeralds [laughs] . . . I did like movies and I used to, I took dancing for a while, tap dancing, and I liked that. I didn't do well with some of the dancing but I did like to tap dance. I wasn't very talented. I was awkward because I was little tall for my age and I couldn't see what I was doing but it was fun. I enjoyed it. I liked to pretend I was in the movies and stuff.

I: Why do you suppose that you did better at the tap dancing?

GZ: I don't know. I've never thought about that [laughs]. I don't know. But I've, you know, it just came easier I guess. And maybe I wasn't as embarrassed 'cuz it was with kids, mostly girls. I think I was embarrassed for ballroom dancing. I didn't want to dance with another girl and I was afraid of the boys [laughs]. I was afraid I would embarrass myself.

I: I see. Where would you study your technique dancing classes?

GZ: Oh, in those days well, money was real short. So, these young girls would take it now and they were like high school age and they would teach it in their home. It wasn't in a school it was just like in their [inaudible] living room or kitchen or wherever, and danced in basement-whatever they happened to have.

I: So it wasn't a formal dancing school or . . .

GZ: No, it wasn't. It was just that these girls, you know, made money on the side. They needed it and they tried to teach it and I sometimes wanted to learn and it was kind of fun. Then we'd [inaudible] my grandparents and, you know, we'd play theater all the time when we were young.

I: What did that involve?

GZ: Oh, we'd just pretend we had a stage and some of us would be the audience and some of us would be the entertainers. We were really silly. We had a lot of fun. We were known as, my friend Nyna and myself and one other friend named Donna, were known as the gigglers and I was always

getting in trouble because all we had to do was look at each other and we would just go into [inaudible] of giggles and then one of us would get sent to the cloakroom. Whichever one hadn't been sent the day before got sent that day. [laughs]

I: Now, what is the cloakroom? Is that a punishment?

GZ: Oh, well, this day and age . . . yes. This day and age you don't have 'em because the rooms are all open but its lockers they just had a . . . hallway that was at one end of the room and there were hooks for your coats and stuff like that and your lunch buckets and what have you. So anyway, whenever I started giggling I got to see the cloakroom.

I: And how long would you have to stay there?

GZ: Oh, I don't know, until the teacher decided to let me come back. I guess 'til she decided I was through giggling [laughs].

I: Huh. So that was a punishment?

GZ: Uh huh. Oh yes!

I: It doesn't sound like it worked.

GZ: Didn't [laughs]. It didn't.

I: What other things did you do in school, high school around town here?

GZ: Well, I worked in my dad's store. He had a . . . when I was in the third grade he bought, it was the summer before third grade, he bought a little grocery store and I was pretty young but he'd let me help in the . . . they had a candy counter and he'd let me help because it was across the street from Greenwood School. So, Saturday's and stuff because he'd come in to buy candy and I could sell candy so I learned how to work in the store and then as I got older I worked there more and more as I got older and could do better with money and what have you.

I: Did that become a part time job? Or was that just helping your family?

GZ: It was just helping out. I didn't get paid. I just had . . . my dad; he would take some groceries to deliver them so I could run the stores while he delivered them because my mother was busy. While I was young we had this three acres and had a huge garden and so Mom would work in the yard and garden and do canning and all that stuff so she was working very hard so she couldn't really spare the time to come up and that. So in the summer I worked in the store. In the winter I didn't.

I: Tell me about running the candy counter. What did that involve and what things were there?

GZ: Oh. Well, like, candy bars that you pay a dollar for now, were five cents and they had wonderful one like [inaudible] they still have, you know Mars? I am pretty sure you do.

I: Yes.

GZ: And, you had . . . Mounds I think. And then they had some things called Pickins and they were probably . . . they were as big around, they were more like chocolate with like an orange and a cream filling and they were as big around as, almost as big around as a cupcake but not that tall. But big around and puffed up to maybe an inch instead of like a cupcake, which is a couple inches. Anyway, they sold for a penny a piece and now if you'd sell them they'd be 50 cents or something at least, maybe a dollar. And they were really good chocolate and then they had a candy bar called, I mean a candy sucker called the Bat. It was called the Bat, and it was kind of a square caramel type of stuff, and it was long not square but rectangle I guess because it was long and maybe an inch in diameter and about four or five inches long. Sold for a penny a piece and the kids would buy 'em buy the dozens. They just loved 'em because you really got your money's worth and the kids would come in the store and just buy 'em. My dad couldn't keep them hardly in the store. He'd buy a few boxes of them every delivery and they'd just sell out real fast. And then of course they had nickel bars but mostly penny candy was what we sold at the store. Lots and lots of penny candy and they had the long streams of licorice. Oh, I don't remember because I mostly liked the chocolate Pickins and [laughs] that was my favorite.



I: Did you, you said you babysat a little bit and you worked in your father's store, did you work for employment anywhere while you were in up 'til high school?

GZ: Oh just occasional babysitting. I'd get like 25 cents an hour or something like that I think which was pretty good pay in those days.

I: Did you go to college?

GZ: Yeah.

I: Where did you go?

GZ: I went to Eastern Oregon.

I: What did you study?

GZ: More or less just general studies. The first year I went, it was right out of high school and my eyes were getting worse and worse and worse and I couldn't see what I was doing and I had a terrible time. But my dream was to be a dietician. They said that you had to take a lot of math and chemistry so I took math, which is my worst subject, and of course chemistry was no better. So I spent my first year doing some English and things that were required but I did quite a bit of math and chemistry. So . . . it was very difficult for me and I got C grades which really made me feel bad because I would have liked to have better grades but I couldn't see to read the assignment so I'd just sort of read part of it and bluff my way through. Somehow I made it. It don't know how. And then at the end of that year in the meantime before I went to college right out of high school I met Dale and I met him and everything.

I: Now who is Dale?

GZ: Dale Zacharias and he was born in Pendleton so it was kind of this other side of the mountain thing because I was living in La Grande and lived here. And he was two years older than I was so he was working over here at the um, we used to have a cannery here and he worked with that. He was waiting to go into the military. He knew . . . well I guess he had signed up but he hadn't had his call yet.

I: Now was he a student at Eastern also? Is that how you met him?

GZ: No, no I met him through mutual friends. I had come to Pendleton with a friend of mine and we saw friends of hers that I knew too and he was with them and we just met that way so it was just his friends. So anyway, I went to school and he went off to the Navy and . . . so I got through one year and that summer I didn't see him that whole year. He was off in Oklahoma and San Diego and different places because he was studying to be an aviation machinist mate and so they sent him to Norman, Oklahoma and Oklahoma City and so on. So anyway I . . . his mother when he went from Oklahoma to San Francisco he got the word that he was going overseas. And of course in those days they didn't tell you anything like now. I mean it was all big hush-hush but they did tell him they were going overseas but they had no idea where. So he wanted his mother and me to come see him so I went to San Francisco to see him and, anyway, against everybody else's approval we got married [laughs]. It was sort of . . . I sort of eloped because I didn't tell my parents until I'd already married him and so it was kind of sad because I didn't want to hurt my parents but I was just so crazy about him I couldn't . . . 'cuz I didn't know how long I'd have with him. It wasn't like today were you would live with somebody and stuff and nobody would think about it. I mean I wanted to be with him every minute and the only way I could see that it would be proper would to be married and of course I thought that was fine. But I didn't have any idea whether I'd have a day with him or a week with him or a month or what. So we got married and we found a little apartment in San Francisco and we were there exactly a month and he got shipped out.

I: Did you come home . . .

GZ: Then I came home but I didn't want to go to college because it had been so hard for me so I worked. I got a job in a bookstore. Of course the only thing bad about that was that . . . 'cuz I could see well enough then to see the price on the books and I could always ask one of the other help anyway. And I could see the titles and stuff so I was, I did alright in that. Then finally we decided that my mother needed . . . she started to work at the bank somewhere along in there and was already working in the bank so she decided if I would do the housework and cooking at home that would be a good experience for me and it would also help her so instead of me paying them for me staying there I just did a lot of work and that helped both of us so that's what I did.

I: Now they knew you were married by then, right?

GZ: Oh yeah. I told them right away. It was just . . . I knew that if I called 'em and asked if I could get married they would have said no because I was too young. I was 19 but I wasn't terribly mature I don't guess. I mean I must not have been [laughs]. But anyway so I did that and then I didn't see Dale he was gone 21 months before I saw him again. By the time he came home and everything so much had changed in a lot of ways because we were real happy when he first came home but . . . and for a while I was with him while he was in the Navy. He was stationed actually he was stationed in Corvallis Oregon so we went down there and everything was fine. But when he got discharged in 1945 everybody needed a job. Everybody was coming home. Everybody needed a place to live and he couldn't find anything and in the meantime his mother had died and his father had moved away and so we kind of had to stay around La Grande because we didn't have any place to stay. And so my folks let us stay with them for a while and then my dad needed help in his – this time he'd moved to Union and had a hardware furniture hardware store. So he needed help so Dale worked for him and that just didn't work. About that time I got pregnant and it was just all of us living in the same house. My grandmother came to live with us and it was just too crowded and so right after my daughter was born we'd just . . . he wanted to go to school . . . because he didn't like the store. You know, it just doesn't work working with relatives sometimes and so he wanted to go to school for aviation machinist and the school was in San Diego. So we made arrangements for him to go and then while he was gone I was supposed to go down there. Well, my mother and my dad my family said well you can't go down there and take this baby down there because you can't see well enough and something might happen to her and I was terrified. So I left Dale. I told him I didn't want to be married anymore. I loved him but I just couldn't tear the apron strings apart. [inaudible]

I: Let's go back to your college days again then. You didn't complete college?

GZ: Not then. But then later after my daughter . . . after my daughter was about in the second grade, we didn't have television then or anything, it was just beginning to be in Union county. So this would have been about 1955. I decided that I couldn't depend on . . . I didn't want to hold her back by having her have to take me places and have to do things for me and so I

decided to go get a guide dog which seemed like a good step. Which it was and so I went to California and I got a guide dog named Sheila. When I got this dog my daughter and I would go places, you know, go shopping and stuff after school and everything was fine but then she started coming home from school in the second grade knowing more than I did about what was going on, because by that time I couldn't see to read the newspaper. We didn't have television. Radio station really didn't have much on it. You know, anything that I was learning very much so I decided to take a class at the college after I'd . . . [end of side A]

[side B]

I: . . . continue the interview with Gere Zacharias. It is April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005. So you were talking about your new guide dog Sheila and you took a class at Eastern?

GZ: Right. By this time I found out that because the doctor had diagnosed me with Retinitis Pigmentosa and I was called legally blind so that's why I could get the dog. I still had some vision but I couldn't really see to get around. It's a strange thing. I could see inside the house but when I went out in the sun or the dark I couldn't see everyone. I couldn't see at all. So anyway, I took this class and I had a friend that took it with me and she read the lessons to me and we studied together and we did so well in the class that we both got A's. So, that excited me so I decided that I'd like to take some more classes so I talked to the school and I decided to take . . . I didn't go on any plan. I didn't work toward graduation. I just decided I wanted to take things that were interesting and also I wanted teachers that would understand that I couldn't see. I didn't want to be babied but I didn't want them to, I wanted them to understand that I had to have readers and at this time I could get readers. The state would pay for me to have another student or somebody to read for me.

I: Tell me what that means getting a reader.

GZ: It means, like now everything can be taped and you can have a book on tape. I get books from the library for the blind all the time that are on tape but at that time they didn't have the tapes. It was . . . just wasn't [laughs]. So um, they had records but they weren't as easy to make. So anyway, the state would provide you . . . they would pay another student to read to you. So they would read all your lessons to you. I arranged for that. The teachers would help me find somebody in the class that was willing to read to me and

they'd come to my home or I'd go to a study hall at the college and read and study together. So my grades were good because we had, it got so that instead of just one reader kids from the dorm liked to come to my house because they got away from it, you know, from the dorm a little bit and I'd feed 'em goodies. So they'd come to my house and I'd have kids sitting around the dining room table. We'd sit there and read and if any of us had a question we'd stop reading. I mean, they'd read and if any of us had a question we'd stop and discuss it. So we all got really good grades.

I: In this group that used to show up at your house?

GZ: Yeah. They were all in the same classes and so we all got really good grades. I took like maybe two classes a term because I was, you know, I had a household. I had my home, I had things to do, and I had a daughter that was in school and so I couldn't really afford the time to take more than two. But I'd take two classes at a time and I got up through, I think I have probably half a year of college left that I didn't finish but I got that far and I really enjoyed it. But I finally kind of got burned out and about that time my daughter graduated and left and that broke my heart because she was an only child and the empty nest thing just about killed me. But I did enjoy going to college and all the instructors were so helpful because they would see that I got good kids to – and I met so many nice young kids. 'Cuz see I was in my 30s by that time and these kids were, you know, 18, 19 years old. And they were so good to me. It was great.

I: Did you know of a term that sometimes used to be used at Eastern called "townie"?

GZ: Mmm hmm.

I: The people who were here when it was considered a town.

GZ: Oh yeah. I was a townie.

I: And so they were just glad to get out of the dorm and go somewhere.

GZ: Right. They were thrilled to come because they were in the dorm all the time and they'd come to our house.

I: So did you eventually follow a degree path of some sort or did you continue to just take the classes that interested you?

GZ: Yeah. I just took general studies. I took um . . . I liked history real well so I took quite a bit of history. And I took some sociology and I took some economics and . . . I think social studies of something, anyway, it included geography. And one of the girls that read to me was wonderful because she would make copies of these maps. And I still have some vision at this time, so anyway, she'd make maps of the countries that we were studying and she'd make them big and do 'em in bright colors so that I could get an idea of geography which I had never been able to do because when I was young my mother would always point to the globe and say well here's such and such. Well I could barely see on the continent level let alone the little countries involved. This was wonderful because I really got – I really learned a lot because Nancy was so good at making my maps. By studying with these other students I learned so much that I just felt like I came into a new world because I was really not that bright. You know, when I had read before it was so difficult.

I: Did you do other things with younger students then besides study?

GZ: Oh yeah.

I: It sounds like you socialized a lot.

GZ: We did. Some of them went to the same church I did and sometimes they'd come on weekends and we'd do things. I can't think . . . we went to some weddings and we went to some social things. I can't remember just what but I know that if there were things going on in La Grande we'd go. I still liked movies so we'd go to things like that once in a while.

I: Did you ever meet any other visually impaired person on campus? Did anybody else ever attend Eastern that you could be friends with, or at least exchange points of view?

GZ: Not at that time but that reminds me of something in high school. When I was a senior in High School I was taking a class . . . a history class from Lee Johnson, who was from La Grande. In fact I think he was a history teacher I think he also wrote a book, I know he wrote a book, about La Grande. But anyway, he was teaching and so this young girl came into

class my senior year and she was totally blind and used a cane and couldn't get around real well because she hadn't had a chance to really get cane mobility. They weren't really good at teaching cane mobility in those days. She had been to the school for the blind but she hadn't, they hadn't really taught her . . . she knew some cane mobility but not really where she was comfortable with it. So anyway, she needed somebody to walk her to and from school and she asked me if I could do it. And I didn't know I couldn't see that much and so I thought [laughs] . . . I walked by her house and walked her to school every day and take her home in the afternoon and one time I missed the corner and she said, "Hey we missed the corner." But it was rather ironic that the only totally blind person I knew asked me to help her. But you know, like I said, I was only legally blind then. I didn't know I was legally blind until a few years later.

I: Did you continue your friendship over the years?

GZ: We did. Well, she moved to Portland and um, I was in La Grande and then later Dale and I moved to Seattle and I didn't keep in touch but I used to occasionally run into her in Portland just to see her.

I: What did it, what kinds of . . . Tell me about using your seeing eye dog now to get around town in La Grande. Didn't that open up a lot more opportunities for you?

GZ: Oh my. Oh yes. Well, when I went down to get a dog I had absolutely no idea what I guide dog did. I mean, I had a friend who worked for the state commission for the blind and she had a guide dog. I knew that she got around all over the country and everything like that. I thought oh that would be, you know, I never thought it would mean me that I could do that. So, one time I asked her because she worked at the commission for the blind and I asked her if she thought I would be eligible for a guide dog so she sent an application in for me and signed it and everything and of course I had to have a doctor's, you know I had to have the eye doctor say that I, besides her I had to have two people do it. So anyway, I decided to go down and get this dog. Well, it was actually 50 years ago today that I went down to get my first dog. So I had to go to [inaudible] California. I got down there and I thought, "What am I doing." They took me to this dormitory. The guide dog person met me and took me to the dorm and I thought, "What am I doing here." I didn't even really care an awful lot about dogs at that time. I

mean, I liked ‘em but they weren’t a part of my life. I thought, “I’m going to get a dog and I might have to have one the rest of my life.”

[interruption of a phone call]

GZ: So I didn’t even know for sure what I dog did. I mean, I’d see ‘em on a harness but I didn’t know . . . I knew they were supposed to save you from getting run over but outside of that I didn’t know anything. So they found out that the dog works . . . they keep you for a few days and find out kind of what you do and they pick the right dog for you, one that is the right speed and the right size and all that. So I got this lovely black lab, Sheila, and um then you have to kind of bond. So everything you did at the dorm you had to do it with the dog. I had to stay there four weeks. So when you went to the dining room you took the dog and when you went in to take a shower you took your dog. The dog didn’t take a shower but it would go in the room and um, in the bathroom with you and you’d just get bonded. Then they take you out for like a block or two at a time and the dog is taught to stop at the curb so that you don’t step out into the street and fall. They stop at the curb and then you can tell the dog right, left, or forward. Whichever way you want to go. The dog knows right from left and forward so you just do that. And then you learn that, like if people have cars parked across the sidewalk or there is a bicycle on the sidewalk they are trained to go around those things. Or if there is construction they’ll go around it. But if they can’t go around it they’ll stop. Sometimes I’ll turn around and go back and try the other side of the street if there’s . . . well like now there’s a yard that’s all torn up down where I walk so I just go on the other side of the street now until they get it finished. But anyway, it was amazing. When I would walk before I got the dog I would be walking down the street and there were people that would have dogs that would lay on the sidewalk in the summer and it would be nice and cool. And I stepped right on the dogs and the dogs go roaring into the house. None of ‘em ever bit me. I can’t understand it but none of ‘em ever growled at me they just ran yipping away and I felt so embarrassed. With the dog those things didn’t happen.

I: So you brought Sheila back to La Grande . . .

GZ: Right. After four weeks of school I came back to La Grande and I had experienced – I felt like I was a new person because one of the things toward the end of the training was that we walked across the Golden Gate Bridge. To think that here I am walking up here on this bridge with traffic going zooming by on one side and the drop off into the water on the other side. I



mean, I knew there were fences, but still it was really exciting to do that, and so I got home and my dog was such a speedy dog that I practically ran. Everybody was laughing because we just practically ran everywhere we went. My daughter would come running along behind me but it was a wonderful experience.

I: What kinds of things did that free you up to do once you got back home with your dog? What things could you do that you didn't do before?

GZ: Well, for one thing I could go shopping by myself and I could go visit friends. I didn't have to have help. I could do it in the day while my husband was at work and while my dad was at school. If I wanted to go to something at school to see my daughter, like P.T.A. or something, I could take my dog and walk. So, you know, like in the day time, I would walk places or I could . . . after my parents moved to La Grande again I could walk by and visit friends.

I: Were you able to work? Did you work?

GZ: I didn't work then. When we moved to Seattle I worked. But I didn't work in La Grande. I just never thought about it, but I went to Seattle and took some training and was a receptionist at the library for the blind for 10 years. But anyway, in La Grande I was busy. My daughter was still at home and it was just nice being an at home mom.

I: So, you had Sheila but you were in La Grande quite a bit of time there. I think about 30 years or so before you came over to Pendleton. How many dogs did you have?

GZ: Well, in La Grande I had three. I had . . . my first two were black I had a . . . Sheila was a female black lab and my second dog was ironically it was named Dale and he was black lab male. And then I had a male golden retriever named Wally. I had, with Wally it was fun, it was right after my daughter left to go to college and I was out on the front porch brushing my dog one day and this little boy came up and, to be truthful I can't think of the boy's name right now, but anyway he was about 5. And he said, "Can I come in and visit?" And I thought, "I don't know if this is a very good idea or not." Now days you wouldn't do that but I said, "Well okay, if you behave you can come in." So he came in and he said, "Can we have tea?" So I made tea. Very weak tea like [inaudible] tea . . . so almost every day

he'd come by and we'd have tea. So that was one thing that the dog will, a dog will make friends. When I first moved to Pendleton I was not happy because the first people I met didn't really care much for dogs and they would say, "Oh, you don't have to take your dog, we'll help you." That dog got to retirement age and I almost didn't get another dog and then . . . Dale wouldn't make my decision for me so I finally decided I guess I would because I meet doggy people. And I have. I've met lots of friends and they like my dog and that's wonderful. Anyway, in La Grande I had . . . and that was the dog I had with the little boy friend I had. He was my boy friend until one day after school started he came over and he said, "Well, I won't be coming over to have tea anymore because I've got a girlfriend." So I got dropped. [laughs]

I: Oh boy. Now, what kind of uh, there must be some adventure tales that you must have gotten into with your dog.

GZ: Oh yes.

I: Want to share a few of those?

GZ: Well, yeah. When I was going to college with Sheila, she was trained, they're trained to go around obstacles. So I was walking on the campus and some man was putting in new sidewalk and he had put up some saw horses. And so my dog went around the sawhorse and we got in this wet cement because she didn't know that it was wet cement. So he came running out and he was very unhappy with us because we left our footprints in his cement. But she did what she was trained to do and another thing that a dog will do and most people don't understand it. They are trained to go to the curb and if somebody's standing in their way they just come up and sort of nudge you out of the way because the dogs don't necessarily have manners. They are trained to go to a curb or they are trained to go to a counter in the store. And if somebody is standing at the counter they can be rude. They can push you out of the way there too so it is kind of embarrassing at times.

I: Did that happen?

GZ: It has happened many times. [laughs]

I: And what people don't understand what's going on in that particular case?

GZ: They don't always understand but usually when they see the dog they, most of them don't get mad or anything. It was rather embarrassing when I had my golden because it was right about the time miniskirts came out and we'd be going into the check counter of the store and his nose was right about where the skirt left off. And these girls, I mean they wouldn't see me coming and then the dog would put his cold nose on their bare leg and they go, "Ahhhh" and then they'd see me and [laughs] and then everything was okay.

I: You mean in order to get 'em out of the way or . . .

GZ: No, it was just friendly, you know. Well, he didn't do it on purpose. He wasn't really sniffing or anything. He just happened that he was tall enough that his nose just hit right the bare leg. He'd just go up to the counter he'd just look at 'em I guess, you know, and catch their leg. Most of 'em were pretty understanding.

I: Now, are the dogs trained to protect as well?

GZ: No.

I: Are they um . . .

GZ: They are not supposed to. Although . . . they probably would if you needed 'em. I mean, I asked one of the instructors and they said that they don't train 'em to be but because they bonded with you they very well could. But on the other hand they might lick them to death. You just don't know. But mostly a dog is intimidating enough that not everybody's going to bother you. And I have had a couple dogs that I am sure would've protected me. My current one probably would.

I: Did anything ever occur that a dog might have kept you from danger then? At any time?

GZ: Oh several times when I'd not heard the traffic. See, the dog stops at the curb and then you listen to hear the traffic and tell the dog we're going to go forward. When you want to cross the street you tell them forward. And I have made the mistake a few times not hearing a car because some of 'em are so quiet or there would be other noise and I wouldn't hear it. Or

sometimes somebody would make a turn and came awfully close to hitting me and the dog will stop. They're told to, they call it intelligent disobedience. But they'll pull you back or stop to keep you from getting run over.

I: So the dog can see the traffic and they know that when some thing's coming that they shouldn't put you in it?

GZ: Yeah, course it is usually that the car is coming from the left side where the dog is. Course the dog doesn't want to get hit either. But then they've been trained and that's what they're supposed to do is catch you.

I: Now the dog is trained to stay on one side of you?

GZ: They're always on the left unless you have a disability where you have to have it on your right. But that's standard for dogs, like show dogs and other things. They are on the left. And she . . . one time when I was walking across the Main Street bridge here, a big gust of wind came up and was blowing toward me, I mean pushing me toward the street and there's not a railing there you know, but there's a railing on the river. So she just jumped at me and shoved me toward the railing. I don't know, I mean that surprised me but it kept me from going out into the street when there was traffic so that was pretty neat. And she is good to go to concerts. We went to the play at the college the other night. We used to go to a lot of things like that in La Grande. Concerts, and plays, and the dogs were always well behaved at those things.

I: Now, I have been told by another person that I interviewed that, I don't remember now if you came to her classroom or if it was a general assembly at the school over in Union, to talk about your dogs and . . . but I understand you've done quite a bit of this, so tell me what that involves?

GZ: Well, it depends on your audience.

I: It would have been elementary school, probably first and second graders in Union.

GZ: Okay. I kind of remember that. I didn't remember her name, I think you mentioned it but I didn't remember her name. But I went because a friend of mine asked the teacher if I could come and talk to their kids.

Usually we talk to 'em about third or fourth grade, although I've been to younger ones, but the younger ones don't really understand about a guide dog. They just want to see a puppy. When I go to talk to kids that are older you know, explain to them what the dog does and how to treat them and they're not supposed to stop and pet you along the way and get your dog all excited. I mean pet your dog, you know, and not get you all excited and get lost. Cause you can talking to somebody on the sidewalk and its normal to kind of wiggle around. You don't just stand in one spot like military, you move your feet and the next thing you know you're turned around. And if you do that, then they walk off, your friends walk off and when you start out you might be turned around the wrong direction and you're not going to end up where you're supposed to be. It's not a good habit to do that. We always tell them things like that. We always tell them that they need to learn to clean up after their own dogs and to not feed their dogs anything. I don't want my dog fed because she's on her own diet and I want to keep her weight just right. But I do let them pet her if they ask me and the conditions are okay I'll let people pet her.

I: So um, you have quite a friendly dog here today. She's different then when she's on the street or when she's working I guess?

GZ: Okay, she wears a harness and when she puts the harness on she's supposed to know she's working. And it makes a big difference. She likes to work. I get her harness and she comes running. But as soon as I get home her harness comes off and she's just a dog then so she doesn't necessarily heed at home then as any more than a spoiled dog would.

I: Well, it's good to describe that for the tape because . . . now what's her name?

GZ: Her name is Rozzy.

I: Rozzy. I met her at the door, well, she met me at the door and she didn't remind me of a working dog at all. She's really a good leaper and so as soon as that harness comes on she wouldn't be like that at all?

GZ: She's not supposed to. Once and a while she forgets but she's really pretty good about it. And she's good like at public places. Like I went to the play the other night and we were sitting right by the orchestra and she just laid down and slept through the whole thing. Didn't even . . . even the percussion instruments didn't bother her [laughs].

I: Didn't make her wake up?

GZ: Huh uh.

I: So, more about La Grande then . . . You were telling me, if you want to talk about it. Let's see how much room we've got here. We will have to go into another tape here in a moment but you said that your impairment has presented other problems from time to time and you were telling me about your daughter in the bus station one day. I am assuming this might have been before you had a guide dog and the man made off with your baby and went into the bus station in Union.

GZ: Right. Well, I was waiting for the bus to go to La Grande from Union and it was at Saints Café, which is on the main street of union, and I had my baby in my arms. She was probably about 18 months old maybe, I don't know. All of a sudden she was so friendly that this guy came up and I didn't realize it but the next thing I knew he picked her up and carried her into Saints Café and was going to buy her and ice cream cone. If that had been now I'd have had a heart attack. I followed them and got her back but it scared me. You know, to think he could just come up and take her away from me like that. He wasn't mean or anything he just took her and he said he was going to buy her ice cream. Well, I believed him at that time because I was more naïve and besides things probably weren't as bad as they are now but it scared me. But Kay was, my daughter Kay, was very gregarious when she was little and she liked everybody. Oh, some of the things that happened through the years when I got my first dog that changed a lot since then was . . . there were places that you . . . you're supposed to be able to go to, it's a law that you can go to restaurants and places but I was told to leave several time in restaurants because I'd just get in the door and they'd say you can't bring the dog in. And I had a copy of the law and they wouldn't even believe it. I could have made a big issue but I didn't. But technically now, I don't know what it is, but there is a big sign for them telling you to leave.

I: Oh, you mean if they don't cooperate with the law?

GZ: If they don't accept you, and there's a restaurant here in Pendleton that says well they have to do it but they'd rather I didn't bring my dog in so I don't go there. I just don't make an issue of it.

I: And you said that happened to you in La Grande?

GZ: But it happened in La Grande and Union. Not in Union. It didn't happen in Union but it happened in La Grande several different times and, you know, other places I go it would happen. You don't see that happening much anymore because I think people know more about guide dogs and stuff. Another thing about being impaired, like I said, I like to read and so I get all my books on tape now and get magazines and things in Braille that I can read. But my mother also has, she has macular degeneration and she gets the taped books too. They are really wonderful.

I: Now did you, did any of that hit the La Grande Library? Did you like the library there at the University for that?

GZ: No, they didn't have anything like that at the school but I got the books from the state library in Salem provides the books for the state. Actually they come out of the Library of Congress and each state has their own regional library that serves all the print impaired people. So I get all of mine from Salem. Now of course you can buy or rent recorded books in a lot of places but they're not quite, but the ones I get from the library aren't . . . from the library for the blind aren't condensed and so many of them you get if you buy them and stuff, you know, they're condensed.

I: We're going to run out of tape here.

[end of tape]

[Tape #2, Side A]

I: And we're continuing the interview with Gere Zacharias. It is April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

[tape cuts off the next sentence]

GZ: . . . just be called administration building.

I: Is that well, we're talking about, we're continuing about talking your guide dogs and you were telling me about problems with stairs before you had one. Tell us more about that.

GZ: Okay, well when I was about three a little girl, I don't think she did that on purpose, but she pushed me down the stairs and I broke my collar bone

and I've been scared to death of stairs ever since. So one of the reasons I wanted a guide dog was because I was so afraid of stairs. The old post office in La Grande didn't have railings on the steps when I was growing up so I was always scared to go up and down those stairs. I did it and I'd go inside the old post office and go up and down the stairs but one of the first things I did after I got Sheila was to go up to the college and go up and down the grand staircase in front of the, what they used to call the administration building but it is now Inlow.

I: Inlow Hall.

GZ: Inlow Hall. That was quite exciting to think that I could go up and down those stairs without being scared. I tried every place in La Grande that had stairs. We'd go . . . the Sacajawea Annex building that had an elevator. I'd go up the stairs when I'd go up, my dentist was in that building at that time and I'd go up and down the stairs instead of riding the elevator because I wanted all the practice I could get with my dog.

I: So that was a new level of freedom for you as though as you overcame a challenge by doing that?

GZ: Right. Well, I am still a little timid of the stairs but mostly I'm okay. But one of the things they did in training is they have this huge stairway. I think it's in City Hall in San Francisco. It's a big marble stairway and we had to go up and down that and that really scared me [laughs]. Because there was no railing, but that was the first time, now they have a railing on it. If I can just touch the railing I am alright. It is just I still have the fear but the dog goes up and down the stairs just fine and I haven't had any accidents and so it's worked.

I: What other times have things freed you up and you did in La Grande then?

GZ: Uh . . .

I: Or Union County?

GZ: Um . . . like I said it freed me up to go visiting and things like that I could do. To go east of . . . you know, well, I used to go to Portland from La Grande and visit friends. I could go on the bus and meet 'em or I could go



down in a car and go down on the bus downtown and meet friends and go for lunch.

I: And you could take your dog?

GZ: And I could take the dog.

I: Did you say that the drivers knew you or got to know you on some of these runs?

GZ: Right. Right. Some of the drivers, even like when the Greyhound used to go through Union and I used to go back and forth, the drivers got to know me because I'd go back and forth to see my folks. So anyway, when I went down to get Sheila, when they put me on the bus we told them that I was going to get a guide dog. So this driver, I had ridden with him before, so he looked after me until I got, until he changed for another driver he saw to it that I was okay. You know, that when we stopped at rest stops and things and then he turned me over to the next driver. Then the next driver passed me to the next one so it was really nice because I got to know them and I could trust them and they were really careful. And in fact when I got to [inaudible] they weren't there to meet me. Guide Dogs was supposed to meet me at the bus and there was nobody there and this driver was so concerned that he wouldn't leave. It was the end of his run and so he took me over to the counter and got me a cup of coffee and he said, "Now you sit here until I find somebody from Guide Dogs." So he walked all the way. Huge bus stop, I mean bus station that they had then and finally found the Guide Dogs person. And what happened was that we had told them I was coming. They knew I was coming from Oregon but they thought I was coming from Portland but the bus that I took from La Grande went through Winnemucca and went up through [inaudible] lake, you know, going toward Idaho and then into California. So he was looking at a Portland bus and so but this driver wouldn't leave me without it. And it's a wonderful way, you know you get to know people when you have a guide dog because people will offer to help. Sometimes you don't need help but I got lost just the other day. Not exactly lost but my dog kind of missed the curb and I was going kind of down the street and somebody that I know stopped me and helped me get back on course. Dogs are not, they're not human. They make mistakes. They don't make them very often but they make mistakes and that happened to be a day that I wasn't in any danger but she just was going along the edge of the curb instead of the sidewalk.

I: I see. You know, when you . . . when you became divorced over in La Grande was there ever a period of time that you lived on your own?

GZ: Um, yeah. I lived alone in La Grande for two or three years before I moved to Seattle. I get along really quite well because I am lucky enough that I have lots of good friends but I do all my own housework and cooking and take care of my mom. I can do most things. There are things that I many, many friends and I am very lucky. When they come in I have one very close friend that takes me shopping but if somebody comes in for any reason I ask 'em if they could look over my mail and I have a friend that writes my checks for me and helps me pay bills and stuff like that.

I: Did that happen when you were living on your own in La Grande?

GZ: Yes. Uh huh. I had a lot of . . .

I: Where did you live in La Grande when you were on your own?

GZ: When I was on my own, well, it was on Cedar but it was a little house. It belonged to a friend of mine. She and he husband had . . . a little house in back of her mother's home. It had been, I think, a garage and it was right after the war they built this and then they remodeled it and made a real cheap little house. And so when I was on my own they let me rent from her and I lived there. So I was in this real cute little house behind her house. That was only about two blocks from my folks but I could go up to town and I could walk down to their house and I had friends that would come in hand help read my mail.

I: How did it make you feel when you did that? Was that a good feeling of being independent?

GZ: Well, yeah.

I: When you were on your own? I mean . . .

GZ: Yeah. Yeah. You get, you know, I've got lonely sometimes at night in the evenings because everybody would be with their families. Actually right now, I mean, since Dale died I uh . . . that was the thing. I got divorced in La Grande and then remarried my first husband. And my husband died about five years ago, Dale did. Even though I'm alone and I get lonely for

him I really like the fact that I can do things. I have to get somebody to help with the yard but I do pull weeds and water flowers and stuff but I can't keep it like it should be kept. But I can do all the cooking and I do the cleaning and the laundry and all that stuff.

I: Would you do that when you lived alone? You did that then?

GZ: Right. I've always done that because I started doing it when I could see and I got a lot of criticism from some of my friends because I didn't teach Kay to do all these things, or make her do it. You know, they'd say, "Well, make her do it. Make her do the laundry. Make her do stuff." She did help cook but that's because we enjoyed cooking together. I didn't want her to feel burdened about her mother. I didn't want her to think that, "Well, I have to do it for my mom." I wanted her to have a life of her own and I've never regretted it. So, I kept saying, if I show up and make her do the ironing, then when I lose my sight, which I knew I was going to at that time. I'd have to learn all over again. I say if I keep doing it then, you know, I'll be able to do it.

I: Was that, did you ever discuss that with her?

GZ: Not really, no.

I: That was just your own idea and you carried forward with it?

GZ: Well, I just didn't think she would . . . you know, children don't ask to be born and to make them be responsible for me I didn't think was fair. And as it turns out she's grown up to be . . . she respects, she's proud of the fact that I can do things. Dale was proud of the fact that I could do things. I didn't lean on him all that much either. He believed in me being independent and so like if I needed help, he helped me. I mean, he did all the checks and he helped read the mail but I did all the cooking and the cleaning. If I needed help he was there but he made me feel independent. Like, I go for a walk with friends and have tea almost every morning and he had coffee with the boys and that's the way we liked it. It was my independence. He was proud of the fact that I could get out and walk and go places but if I needed him, he was there. And I liked that. I like the independence. And I liked in La Grande with the dog I could go pretty much everywhere I wanted to go. I had friends that took me places too and that was great. I love people.

I: Shall we talk about some of these friends that you and I discussed earlier in the picture book here?

GZ: [laughs]

I: Tell me about, tell us a little more about your friend Nyna because there are a lot of pictures in this book of her.

GZ: Well, Nyna's name was Nyna Wells when she lived in La Grande. Some people in La Grande would remember her because she lived there from probably about 1930 or so until she got married I think in about 1955 or 53, something like that. Maybe it was 50, anyway, in the 50's. Then she moved away but we were good friends. We lived on the north side of town. I lived on Russell Street. She lived on Z Avenue and then there were friends like Jean Winslow who lived out on Spruce Street and he used to come and . . . his father had died when he was in the third grade so he used to come to our store. My dad kind of took an interest in him and he'd come and stay and hang around while we were at the store and he'd send Jean on errands if I wasn't available. He'd send either one of us to the bank and things like that to deposit or to get change and stuff. He'd send us to deliver like if one of the neighborhood people wanted just a few groceries that we could carry on, you know, walking or on our bikes he'd send either Jean or me to do it. So he was like a brother to me. We used to fight like cats and dogs but we were the best of friends too.

I: Uh huh. Now you said that Nyna was a person who also wore glasses because I see she does.

GZ: Her vision didn't deteriorate. I don't think that her eyes ever got much worse. He still drives and everything.

I: Didn't you say that was a drawing point/ however? It kind of brought you together a little bit?

GZ: Right. Yeah. Because I think we were both a little self conscious wearing those old [inaudible] rimmed glasses [laughs]. They weren't very attractive and neither of us were exactly what you would call glamorous so it kind of drew us together and then we found out that we liked to do a lot of the same things. She was an only child. We just spend much of our time together. We'd go . . . we both were long legged and we liked to jump and

there was an irrigation ditch that went down, let's see, that was X Avenue that they lived on. Anyway, we'd go jump over this ditch and in certain times of the year it'd be pretty high and you almost couldn't make it but we'd do it anyway. We just had fun doing stuff like that. It was kind of a challenge to see how far we could jump. And we used to go play in the playground at school after school was out. One of the things we did that was probably very dangerous, but we did it, and that was the old Greenwood School had an outdoor fire escape. It was a big slide that you were supposed to go out the door in one of the rooms upstairs and if there was a fire go down this slide. Well, we would go over and it wasn't just us, I mean it was a whole bunch of us that did this. We'd climb up this slide. It was a kind of hard going up the slide. You didn't have anything to hold on to. You just had to work your way up this slide by . . . I don't exactly remember how we did it but we did. Then we'd get up to the top and then slide down. Oh we had so much fun. I don't know that my parents ever knew that we did that [laughs].

I: I take it you weren't supposed to do that?

GZ: I don't think so. Although they didn't have anybody guarding the school so all the kids did it. I don't know of anybody ever really getting hurt from it but it could have been hurt from it but it could have been dangerous because it was wet. You know, on the second or third story actually I think. Pretty high up there anyway and we were just little kids.

I: There's a picture in here . . . that says, "Girls leap float on the fifth day at La Grande High School 1941." Do you remember that?

GZ: Oh yeah. We were carrying the flag. We had a big flag and we were holding that up I think. That's what it seems like maybe that wasn't the one. I know one parade I had a huge like the flags they give you when somebody dies, a veteran dies. I don't know or maybe we just rode in that one.

I: Well, this one you're riding in it with some other . . . they can't read with umm hmm . . . well, I can't read it, something Davis.

GZ: Oh. Let's see. I don't know. Anyway, we used to do things like that because I liked to get into, you know, we were, Nyna and I liked to be in active things at school. So like, you know, parades or special things we did. And we always went to all the activities.

I: Were you in a parade in Union?

GZ: Mmm Hmm. Maybe that's where I carried the flag.

I: Mrs. Rupert was telling me she had seen you in a parade in Union once.

GZ: Oh, recently? I mean more recent then when I was . . .

I: No, well, I'm not sure about that.

GZ: I was going to say we used to go . . . I had been in a parade in Union I think with guide dogs in recent years. But before that a long time ago when I belonged to some organization in Union, it was Junior Women's Club, we had a float and [inaudible] and we carried the flag. Yeah, I think I was in the parade two or three years in a row. It was kind of fun. Then we were in a . . . oh, they did a musical. Our Junior Women's Club did a musical one time [laughs] and since I'm not too talented somebody else sang. They sang "She's Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage" and so [laughs] they had me waltzing around on the stage holding a birdcage. I mean, it must have been pretty funny when I think about it but it was fun doing it. And we decorated floats. I remember making flowers and putting them on the floats and things like that. So, I like . . . I just like to get into a lot of things.

I: Were you . . . there is a wallet card here that says that you were a member of the Quill and Scroll. Were you a high school journalist?

GZ: Yeah. I used to think I that I'd like to be a journalist. Yeah, I wrote for the school newspaper. I used to love to write. I don't care to anymore but I used to love to. It was fun.

I: How long, did you do that all through high school?

GZ: All through high school but I didn't get into anything in college. Well, the year that I went to college right after high school was right at the beginning of the war, World War II and most of the organizations just kind of disbanded during the war years and so I wasn't involved in hardly anything in that year in college.

I: Because there weren't a lot of activities available?

GZ: Right. Well, like there were no sports. Well, hardly any boys. They were all girls. It was just nothing . . . there were no [inaudible] things to do that year.

I: You know, I do have to say that of the college pictures that I'm seeing here at Eastern there is practically no men.

GZ: That's right. There weren't.

I: And I haven't seen actually . . .

GZ: That's why. Because see it was 1942 and the war started in 1941 and it was right in the middle of it.

I: That was then after Pearl Harbor and all of that too.

GZ: Then later while we were in that year they did, the Army Air Force took over the . . . I mean, they didn't take over because we still had college there but they took over some of the classrooms and they had aviation cadets that were studying to be, you know, um, pilots in the air force and they were in class there. So there was some dating of some of those guys. But they didn't intermingle. They weren't in any of our classes. They were in one end of the school. We were in the other.

I: So they were really strictly there for military training at that time?

GZ: Right. And they had taken over the Sacajawea Hotel, which isn't there anymore, but they had taken over the Sacajawea Hotel as a dormitory for these aviation students.

I: And what happened after that? They would just go off to their assignment when they got done? Were they rotating classes?

GZ: Yeah. They were rotating so they'd only be there, you know, two or three months or something and take off. You really didn't get to know them that well most of us didn't. So I don't know um, we did get acquainted with a couple of 'em but not well enough that when they got ready to go they went. I mean, you'd see 'em and talk to 'em and stuff but you didn't know 'em well enough that when they took off you didn't shed any tears because you didn't even know they were leaving. It wasn't that serious.

I: So uh . . . could be almost easy to say that it was practically almost a women's college at that time?

GZ: There were, in my chemistry class there were two or three boys who were just under the age of being drafted but by the end of the year they were gone.

I: Because they'd been drafted?

GZ: Because they'd been drafted. And so yeah, there weren't many boys there. The only ones were there were just under the . . . they were probably not quite 18. So under 18 years old so they weren't drafted yet.

I: Um, do you remember rationing and those programs that went on during that time?

GZ: Oh yeah. Yeah I still have rationing cards, I mean, not cards but rationing stamps that I had when I . . . you know, during the war. I remember my dad had this grocery store and people would come in people that had never traded with him and they heard that sugar and coffee were going to be rationed and they'd come in by droves and want to buy all the coffee and the sugar. Well, it didn't take my dad long to figure out that they weren't customers so he wouldn't, he'd sell some but he'd mostly put it back for his regular customers because, you know, he owed it to them to have some food for them. And another thing I remember is that you had to, if you wanted, it wasn't rationed but if you wanted toothpaste or shaving lotion or anything like that that was in a metal tube you had to turn in the empty tube in order to get a new tube because they recycled the metal. And you saved grease and turned it in to them. They used it somehow in war. That's how Mom learned how to take grease out of the top of food and save it for later to make her soap, I mean in much later years. But you know, we started doing that, like if you roasted a chicken or roasted anything and you had the grease always comes to the top and it gets cool. You just skim that off and save it for the, and turn it in.

I: So originally it was a war effort that your mother learned to do that and then she learned soap after that?

GZ: She didn't do soap until years later but I mean we learned how to save it and that sort of thing. I can't remember what else we saved. I know we



saved grease and metal. You know like I say, the tubes. Other things were not rationed but you had to stand in line to get oh, like bed sheets or stockings, diapers. It was pretty hard to get flannel for diapers. Of course now they have disposable but I ran across one of my daughter's diapers just the other day. They make wonderful dust rags [laughs].

I: I was going to say that the women that I see here with you in class they're wearing socks but I don't think I see stockings on anybody.

GZ: Well, we didn't wear 'em. You know, when I was young they didn't wear them unless you dress up. And when we dressed up we wore stockings but to go to school we wore anklets. We always wore anklets. Then, of course, if you got a job or when you got out of school you started wearing stockings but when we were in college we wore anklets. I don't think hardly anybody wore anything but anklets.

I: Would you like to talk a little bit about the Simmons brothers that I see in here? There's quite a few pictures of them in here. I won't tell you all of them but I see Keith and Bob. You have a lot of pictures. They must have been good friends.

GZ: They were. They lived in Island City. There were Bob and Keith Simmons and um, they were brothers. Bob worked at what used to be Hyde's [inaudible] I haven't been there for so long, but it used to be Hyde's Grocery Store on the corner when you go into Island City and turn like you go to the bridge to go toward Cove or something. Anyway, it was big. At that time it was a grocery and kind of an all round general store. Anyway, he worked there when he got out of high school but I knew him and then I knew his brother Keith. And there were . . . just kids in school I kind of had a crush on one of them.

I: So they went to high school with you?

GZ: Bob was out of high school, well no, Bob was out of high school before I met them but Keith went to school with me and Bob was a year or so ahead of us.

I: So these were . . .

GZ: These were schoolmates [inaudible]. And then they both went in the service like everybody else. Let's see . . . I don't remember too many. I

remember a lot of kids but I don't remember happened to all of them. Although I keep in touch with Nyna, used to be Nyna Rice, and a mutual friend Donna Dewy. They both live in Portland and I keep in touch with them even now. It's been a long time. Because Nyna's the same age I am and Donna's two years younger. It's been a long time we've been friends.

I: Now when you um . . . now let's see . . .

GZ: And I used to run off another girl that's in Portland too and her name used to be Jean Andros and she lives in Portland now.

I: Yes, there are pictures of her in here.

GZ: And she, she was a year younger than we were, Nyna and I. But we were good friends and so I keep in touch with all three of them even now and the same with Jean Linthrow and Zelda Klein who live in La Grande. I keep in touch with them.

I: Now there's a picture in here of Nyna. There's two, one of them she'd standing next to Bob Simmons and then in the next picture she's – oh and Bob Simmons is in his uniform but in the next picture Nyna has it on.

GZ: [laughs] Well, that was the thing that they used to do is the guys would come home and they'd want to have a picture taken in the guy's jacket. You could do it with the army but it wasn't easy. I didn't ever try Dale's navy top on because it was an over the top type of things so I didn't really wear his.

I: Yeah, she's got his jacket and belt and his hat. Oh she's almost completely in uniform.

GZ: Probably his pants, huh [laughs].

I: Well, I know she still has a skirt on.

GZ: [laughs] Yeah, she was a pretty nice girl. She wouldn't have changed pants with him.

I: Right, right.

GZ: Yeah, we had fun in those days. You know, it was different. We had a lot more, I think kids had a lot more responsibility when they were that age then they do now. I think kids now have more social life but we had to do chores and most of the kids now they can't start working to young a lot of them can't. And we kids started young. Now I remember I couldn't do it because I had the store but Nyna used to go . . . Nyna and Jean, I don't know about Donna, used to go every summer and pick berries and stuff. Now I don't think they can do that when they're too young. You know, they can't allow that but they used to make money during the summer to buy their school clothes because everybody was having a rough time. First there was a depression and then when the depression ended the war came along and even if you had the money you couldn't buy it because it wasn't there to buy because everything was going into war material . . . And so that's one reason for the short skirts is they were cutting back on material and they just, so . . .

I: Oh, so that helped raise the skirt hems?

GZ: Yeah, they shortened skirts so they could use more material . . .

I: For more skirts.

GZ: For more skirts. Then after the war ended then skirts when about clear down to your ankle and all of a sudden everybody ended up – well, I happened to be pregnant at that time so here I had short skirts that I couldn't wear because I was pregnant but then after Kay was born I couldn't wear my skirts because the styles had gone clear down to your ankles so you were left with all these short things you couldn't wear anymore.

I: Um, did you care for that? Would you have preferred the short over the long?

GZ: Well, I didn't really like the long ones too well. I got used to them, you know. But I liked the shorter ones better. I mean, they weren't as short as miniskirts they were short but I liked them a little short.

I: We're out of tape on this side here.

[side B]

I: And we are still continuing the interview with Gere Zacharias. It is still April 30<sup>th</sup> 2005.

GZ: I just happened to remember that at the first of the year, when I first went to college in 1942 that they had just build the first dormitory and so some of my friends lived over there. I mean, you know, friends that lived over there.

I: Is that the building they call Hunt?

GZ: Well, I thought it used to be Hoke Hall.

I: Oh, Hoke.

GZ: I think Hoke. I think. Anyway, it was [inaudible] from that main building the first one over across the grass and stuff kind of . . . I can't tell you exactly but it was called, I am pretty sure it was Hoke. Anyway, it was a dormitory and then that when they took over for the army the army guys took over that dorm. And so the girls that lived there were, they found homes in La Grande for 'em. Like there was a large home down on Fourth and Washington that was a huge house with many bedrooms so they took that over and the girls lived there as a dormitory. And there were a couple other places but I don't remember where they were but I happened to have friends in that one so.

I: Did they, so it was taken over by the military the same people who were doing their training there. How long did that last?

GZ: I don't know 'cuz see then I got . . .

I: Oh you were [inaudible]

GZ: Yeah, and after I got out of school I didn't pay that much attention because after Dale came home the war was still on and we went to Corvallis so I don't know when that happened.

I: Right. Were freshmen or young students required to live in the dorm if they didn't come from La Grande at that time?

GZ: Um, I think they were supposed to except there were exceptions because my friend Nyna lived with us. Her parents moved to Washington State in her senior year of high school so we made arrangements through her parent's circumstance and everything they let her live with us.

I: To finish high school?

GZ: No, to go to college. Well let's see, I think they lived here until she graduated so I think it was just college that she lived with us for a couple years in college. And so she didn't have to live in a dorm. But I think they couldn't just have apartments, they had to live in a dorm or probably I think there were others that lived with family and they considered us family. I don't think anybody lied or anything I think they just approved us. But anyway, there was, so it was practically by that time, except for the aviation students it was practically a girl's school in about every way.

I: Now, it appears to me that both sets of your grandparents also lived in La Grande? From some of the pictures I see anyway.

GZ: It was not both sets but it was my grandfather on my mother's side lived in La Grande. He's the one that built the house we lived in on Russell Street and he lived there until he died. I think he died about . . . I think he died in December '41 I think. But then my grandmother was from Nebraska but she was a widow. That was my father's mother. So when her husband died and everything then she came and lived with us for a while and then she'd go live with her son in Wyoming and her daughter in Nebraska she'd go back there and then she had a brother in Washington--Washington State--and a sister in California. So, she really didn't live anyplace. You know, I mean her home I guess basically was I guess she did claim La Grande as her home because she spent more time with my parents than she did with any of the rest. But she really didn't have a home. I always felt sorry later because she enjoyed keeping house and she enjoyed entertaining and things like that and her daughter talked her into, her daughter and her other son not my dad but my uncle, talked her into giving up her home and just living with the family. People used to do that a lot in those days. And so, anyway, all she had really was she had one of those huge steamer trunks. It had like a wardrobe in it. I'd love to have had it. I don't know whatever happened to it when she died but wherever I put it everything she had was in that. And she would travel and stay with us and then go somewhere else so she didn't actually live in La Grande. I mean, she never really got out and made friends. The only people that she was friendly with was my family's friends. So she didn't really have I don't think she had a really . . . excellent [inaudible] that way. And then when we lived in Union she lived with them

for quite a long while too. She was not a part of Union County, you know, not and old timer there. But my grandpa was. He was an old timer there.

I: You remember uh, this . . . centennial celebration where your father had to grow these whiskers and long beard and . . .

GZ: Oh yeah.

I: What was that about? Your [inaudible] explained it a little bit too.

GZ: He didn't have to but if they didn't they would threaten to throw them into a tank of water and so my dad grew this little goatee thing. He didn't like it very well but I think he kind of had fun with it too. He griped about it but I really think he thought it was kind of fun because everybody was going it. I mean, all the men most of the men grew a mustache or a beard of some sort.

I: So they did this and then danced? They did this . . .

[Right here they are both talking at the same time and I can't understand the interviewer]

GZ: Well, see the centennial . . . yeah because it was planned for oh, probably a couple of years or so before they really hit the date so they planned a lot of these things and women um, a lot of them made old fashioned dresses to wear during the celebration. Particularly for parades and things like that but a lot of people wore old fashioned long dresses and stuff like that, you know, they could buy patterns and make these. Of course nearly everybody sewed then and they could make these outfits. So it was just a fun thing. We all acted like kids playing dress up you know. You know, it was sort of fun. I remember they had a horse and carriage that you could drive in. I paid, I don't know, 50 cents or something and get to ride around town on that. And then the American Indians, they had a big festival uh, big celebration with them. I don't know what tribes they were or where they came from for sure because, like I said, I wasn't always able to read everything and I just went along with the crowd but they had at the old high school ball field, you know, we had all the bleachers and everything and it had Indian entertainment which was really nice. Dancing and all that and um . . .

I: This was during the centennial celebration?

GZ: Well, it was during the centennial, uh huh. We had a neighbor at that time, we lived on Spring Street, and our neighbor their name was [inaudible] and I think they were from Oklahoma but I am not positive. Anyway, he was the coach at the high school and he was quite active in this. He and his wife were real active in getting this Indian celebration together and it was so popular that they tried it for three or four years after that during the summer but the thing was, like a lot of other things, politics get into it and there was some dissention going on among the people and the [inaudible] moved away and it just went downhill.

I: What kind of dissention?

GZ: Oh, I don't know. It just, you know, some people, I don't really know because I don't get into that kind of stuff but I guess some of 'em thought that it should be done this way and somebody else no it should be done that way and some of 'em didn't like the entertainment and maybe somebody wanted to add entertainment.

I: Oh, it's sort of squabbles about how it should take place.

GZ: Right. It wasn't anything serious and it wasn't, I mean, serious in that we lost it, but it wasn't anything dishonest or anything that I know of. It was just everybody wanted it done their way and it finally just disappeared. It was sad because it was really a nice celebration. I know I always enjoyed going. We had, like in the evenings they'd have this entertainment and it was kind of fun to go . . . And the lights at this stadium at that time, the lights had been purchased by . . . several years before that, but my dad had been in a softball league and they had saved money through their admission to softball games and got the lights that they had there so that was kind of nice. Softball when I was in about the eighth grade, along in there--eighth or ninth grade--it was a big thing around La Grande. The men, there were no women involved in it in those days, but the men played softball and had, I don't know, they must have had a half a dozen teams in La Grande and then they'd play Baker and Pendleton, Enterprise, Elgin, all around. It was pretty great entertainment in the summertime.

I: I'm looking through, you have an album that it pretty much devoted to your guide dogs and your . . . it's pretty much guide dogs.

GZ: Yeah it probably is.

I: There's great books in it. There's a lot of articles in here . . . this one from 1969. The picture with you out of *The Observer*. [inaudible] alpha [inaudible].

GZ: Oh, that was the sorority I belonged to.

I: And um . . . this might have been just a general picture rather than really about the guide dog but your dog is in the front row here with you, which will be natural.

GZ: That was Wally.

I: That was Wally?

GZ: Mmm Hmm. He's a golden retriever, I'm sure. Yeah.

I: Here's another picture. It doesn't have a date on it here but it's a very interesting caption. It says, "Style shown for visually impaired is a sleeper for some spectators" and you uh . . . there's some women sitting here. Looks like inspecting clothing for some reason here but all the dogs are lying on their side in the sun asleep. I can practically see the snoring.

GZ: Yeah. Oh.

I: Oh that was in Seattle.

GZ: That was in Seattle but it was at Nordstrom's in Seattle and they had a fashion show for the blind and I was lucky that they chose me to be one of the models and so [inaudible] there. It was kind of interesting because you walked around instead of regular fashion show it was like you had to feel the fabric and the styles and everything so it was a touchy-feely type of style show [laughs].

I: Uh huh.

GZ: But it was interesting. It was fun. They brought out some of the nice clothes and, you know, had us wear them and the store picked the outfits and what I wore wasn't really to my liking but it was what they wanted me to model so that's what I modeled. But anyway, that was kind of fun.



I: Um, you've been in the paper a lot because of these dogs here. Now here's another one with you and Wally and you conducted workshops?

GZ: Oh, that was in La Grande. We had . . . there for a while we had, it started out with the [inaudible] auxiliary as kind of our sponsor and we . . . had craft workshops and we had visually impaired people from La Grande and um, Joseph, and Union I think. Anyway, quite a few people would come and we had the women in the auxiliary volunteer to help and they'd help teach us different crafts and we could either work on all the same thing or we could take our own but we like to do stuff. I used to like to knit but I still can knit I just do other things. I can't find time to get everything into my days. Because now I am trying to learn how to use a computer, which is driving me up the wall but I'm working on it [laughs].

I: Do you think you'll catch on?

GZ: I, well, I'm beginning . . . What I basically wanted it for was because I'd like to be able to write letters and my daughter wants me to get on so I can do email. But anyway, I've learned how to turn it on and get into the documents and write my letter but I'm having problems figuring out how to get rid of it. You know, if I don't want to keep the letter I wrote by, you know . . .

I: Oh, to delete it?

GZ: Yeah, and I have what they call, it's called Jaws, which is a funny thing, but anyway it's a speech synthesizer that will read things to me and tell me what to do and stuff like that. Except that it's not as complete as what you see on the screen. What you would see on the screen is more to it so mine's pretty [inaudible] I'm more limited at what I can do. And it has to all be done on the keyboard. You can't use the mouse. A blind person can't use the mouse because you can't control what you're doing.

I: Where it goes.

GZ: So, I'm [laughs] . . . um, my daughter calls my computer my nightmare and it sure is. But um, and it's always funny because the synthesized voice comes on and says, "Ready for Jeer Zacharias" [laughs]. Cracks me up.

I: Oh, it's not trained yet.

GZ: It's not trained yet. But anyway, but I like to knit so we used to teach knitting in that class. Oh, we made some placemats out of some kind of metallic stuff. And uh, you know, I can't remember what else we made it's been a long time but we had fun.

I: K, we're winding down here. You lived in La Grande until when?

GZ: I think I left there about 1970.

I: And was that a marriage that brought you over here?

GZ: Yeah, well, I left there and Dale and I got married again and we . . . he had a job in Seattle. He worked for the *Seattle Times* so we went up there and then we were in Seattle until he retired. Until we both retired from our jobs and then we decided to come back and he had been born in Pendleton. We liked Pendleton so we just came here.

I: Now so uh, you got married to him and then you were both living in La Grande at that time?

GZ: No.

I: Or did you . . .

GZ: He'd been living in Seattle. It was kind of a creepy thing. I hadn't seen him for years and because his . . . and he had, well, his wife, his second wife, had a large family so they didn't keep in touch with Kay because he heard that I was married again and he didn't want to mess up Kay's life too much and he was kind of shy so he didn't come back. But anyway, accidentally my daughter was working for the highway department in Portland and a man came in with an application for a job and it turned out it was Dale's cousin so she asked where he was and she got in touch with him. Then through her we found out he wasn't married anymore and my husband had just left me so we got together again and we commuted for quite a while. He came to see me in La Grande until we finally got married but . . . so I left there about '70 and then I went, I decided I wasn't going to let that happen to me again, that I wasn't going to be up the creek without a paddle and not be able to support myself. So I went through the Commission for

the Blind I went to school and learned to be a better typist and be, well, I studied to be a medical transcriber but as it turned out I got a job in the library in Seattle as a receptionist and I liked that better.

I: Well, let's not leave this love story too fast because I know to talk about earlier but certainly it worked out for you in the long run. Now, your daughter, was she actively seeking him or this was purely by accident?

GZ: No. It was purely by accident. She often wondered about him and she asked me, you know, what happened. And I said oh we were just too young which is the truth. We were just too young to know what we had. So she just noticed the name and she said, "Do you know Dale?" and he said "Yeah, that's my cousin." Or I mean my nephew I guess. Yeah, nephew. So she got in touch with her dad and when he found out I was free and he was free, well, he got in touch with me.

I: Did he come and see you then?

GZ: Well, he called me and then we got . . . we decided he would come down from Seattle to Portland to see Kay and I'd go to Portland to see Kay and that way we can see whether we still liked each other which we did. But we didn't know whether we would or not after all those years.

I: Right.

GZ: So, it turned out fine but we, you know, we didn't just start dating right away. It took us a while to kind of . . . he had not known me since I had lost all my sight and I wasn't sure how he would accept that and he, you know so, and he wasn't sure what I was like or anything so we had to kind of just take it almost like we were brand new, just brand new meeting each other. It was almost that way in some ways.

I: Do you think it was better the second time around then because you took all of that time?

GZ: Oh my yes. I mean, well no better. It was no better, I mean, because when I was married the first time to him it was always the young romance and, you know, that excitement of him being in the navy and uniform and all that. I mean that was kind of neat but we had a wonderful marriage the second time because we were grown up and we'd been through a lot, both of

us. We had so much in common. We were a little afraid that maybe when the new wore off we wouldn't have a lot in common, you know, we would just have the past. Because at first we talked about the good old days and then we found we had so much in common. We liked to go camping and we liked to go to plays and we uh . . . we liked the same people. I mean, I liked his friends he liked my friends and we just, it worked out wonderfully. So, we had a great marriage.

I: I'm going to thank you for helping us with the history project. You have given a lot of perspective on your life and Union County and things that you encountered and I appreciate interviewing you. Thank you very much.

GZ: Thank you.  
[end of tape]