

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #297 - Sides A & B

Subject: Avel Diaz - Discusses South End Basque Shepherders

Place: Harney County Library - Burns, Oregon

Date: July 24, 1991

Interviewers: Dorothea Purdy & Barbara Lofgren

DOROTHEA PURDY: I'm Dorothea Purdy along with Barbara Lofgren, and today we're at the Harney County Library talking with Avel Diaz. And we're going to be discussing probably the South End country, and some of the people that lived down there. The transcript will be #297, and the date is July 24, 1991. Diaz, what are we going to talk about?

AVEL DIAZ: Well we're going to probably talk about some Basque families and sheep outfits that were down on the Steens, on the east side of the mountain mostly, before Taylor Grazing Act come in, and most of them had to go out of business.

As you all know most of these people were itinerary sheep people, and didn't own any ranches. They just run their sheep on the mountain, and the Sheepheads, and out in the valleys, out in the desert. And when Taylor Grazing came into effect, why if you didn't have a base ranch, why you didn't have the right to run on public lands. And so most of these people, in fact all of them, sold out and went into other --- well just left the country.

And some of the people that were down there at that time was the sheep outfit by the name of Madarieta and Zabala, and Tom Zabala and Joe Madarieta. Pete Zabala that runs, or owns the Star Hotel here in Burns now is Tom's youngest brother. Tom passed away here about, a couple years, two years ago in Winnemucca.

They run an outfit, they had about four bands of sheep, and hired several Basque

sheepherders. And this Blair Smyth here that runs the library, or works in the library, her dad John Smyth worked for Zabala and Madarieta at the time.

And then there was Lauserica and Garay, they were also unmarried at the time, and so was Tom and Joe at that time. They were bachelors. Lauserica, Joe Lauserica and Pete Garay --- that's G A R A Y, and it's pronounced Gray in the Basque language, had a big sheep outfit that hired probably ten, fifteen people.

At that particular time Pete Garay, we'll call Lauserica and Garay, was in financial troubles and owed the bank here in Burns quite a bit of money, and the Winnemucca some money. So they called in the loans, the Burns Bank did. And they brought most of their sheep to the stockyards in Burns, and went down and talked to Ed Brown, and these are facts, and told Ed Brown that there is your sheep, and the sheep outfits. He said, "How much money do you need to get that outfit back in the hills?" (Laughter) And so he refinanced them, above what they already owed. And then wool went up, and the lambs, and the war come along and they were able to bail out, and they were able to pay off their note.

There was Martin Esanola, he had a sheep outfit, he was a single fellow.

BARBARA LOFGREN: Where did most of these people come from that were helpers on these ranches, Idaho or ---

AVEL: I think most of these were from Vizcaya, the same province that my folks come from. They were all foreigners.

DOROTHEA: Now is this Spain?

AVEL: Spain, yeah, Vizcaya is Spain. And oh, there was a couple of Irish sheep outfits, let's don't forget them. There is Murphy and Callahan, two single Irish immigrants. Had a sheep outfit that hired several people.

Billy Berry, I'm sure some of you have heard of Billy Berry. And Ben O'Keefe had a sheep outfit at the time. Ben was married, married one of the Ausmus girls here from Burns.

And then there were, I wish I could think of all the names. There was Shorty (Santos) Arguinchona that herded sheep, and Joe Zorrozuza, and my brother-in-law Joe Lauserica, was no relation to the other Joe. Just happened to be two Joe Lauserica.

The Arriola family, Marcelina and Ysidro, they run the hotel at Andrews at that time. Marcelina was a sister to Cecilia Urizar. And they hired, they would bring Basque gals from Spain to keep rooms, and help cook.

And when the Basque people, the shepherders come to the hotel to spend the night or weekend, they had an old piano player and an old diesel electric light plant, and they'd dance and whoop and holler, and that was their recreation.

These Basque gals that the Arriolas would bring in here from Spain, and these gals would stay a year or two and pay off their bondage, that's what they were really owing them. They paid their passage over, and when they paid their bondage, they'd work a few more months and then they moved on. Some of them married, and I can't give you any of the gal's names. I know there was some named Juanita, Anita, Maria, and last names didn't mean much to me at the time.

Arriolas had the shearing corrals in Andrews. They cooked for, well anybody could go in there and eat in the mornings, dinner and supper. A lot of the people from the Alvord, ranch hands would come in there and eat, Whitehorse, Kueny Ranch, Serrano Point.

Then there was a Basque family by name of Joe Lemma. He was married to a gal by the name of Josephine Errquiaga. And they run, what was then known as the

Alberson Station. There is nothing there now but an old part of the barn, an old willow barn, and the stone wall. It was kind of a stopping place for the mail stage, and freight. Fitchetts run it, and they would haul freight and mail. And they would stop there, and if they had any passengers, they usually picked up lunch there at the Alberson Station. I don't know who the place was named after, but they run Alberson Station.

And then down below Fields there was a Basque family that was in the cattle business, not in the sheep business, by the name of Aquiso. I think, I can't think of the father's name or the mother's. The last name was Aquiso, they had two boys Tony and Pete. And they were between Fields and Andrews. Had a small acreage, some wild meadow, and a few head of cows.

Then down in the South End, or Denio, there was Joe Errquiaga. And him and his wife had a family of about twelve, thirteen kids. They run a hotel, and run a saloon. And -  
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DOROTHEA: They had sheep also?

AVEL: No, they were cattle.

DOROTHEA: Just cattle.

AVEL: They were some of the first people to raise alfalfa in that country. They got their water out of the old Denio Ditch, coming off the Pueblos. Raised a big family, were good to a lot of people, helped a lot of people.

DOROTHEA: Are any of them around yet?

AVEL: Yeah, there is Bill Moser and his wife Ruth, are --- I think Ruth is probably one of the, next to the youngest of the Errquiaga girls that lived in Denio. I'm sure some of you know Ruth. Well Bill Moser, he was raised in Drewsey. He was part of the Northrup Clark family. And there is one girl left, they are scattered all over the country. There is some in

California, some in Washington. Pete Aquiso, about my age, passed away several years ago. And his brother Tony is living in Grand View, Bruneau area in Idaho at the present time.

DOROTHEA: Do any of these people still have sheep?

AVEL: No, after, as I said earlier, after Taylor Grazing Act come in, and the forerunner of what we call BLM today, all these people got out of the sheep business. They give them so much time, I was young, and I don't know just what the timetable was. But by 1940, sometime during the war anyway, and I was gone, when I got back there was just one Basque sheep outfit left in the country, and that was Sam Annaberry. And he run the Sheepheads country. But he did own some land, and had a base place, some place down below Trout Creek. But he run his sheep in the Sheepheads, and he owned what we call Whorehouse Meadows and Pate Lake and that country on top of the mountain. That was his, that's who Jordan, or Dan Jordan bought Pate Lake and that country from Sam Annaberry.

Frank Kueny, another cattleman that also run sheep. He run the cattle, him and Mary Kueny, his wife, run cattle separately. But they had two Basco partners, and they were in the sheep business with the two Bascos. One was Joe Zorrozuza, and I can't put a name on the other fellow. But they had --- I do too know, Dick Clark's first wife Josephine Ocamica was the daughter to Tony Ocamica, and he was the other partner.

And they run sheep until some time after the war, because they used the ranch as a base. Frank was able to work a deal with the federal government, said well I've got a ranch and have a place to bring the sheep to.

Now most of the Basco, I call them itinerary sheep people, because that's what they were. In the winter months they'd bring the sheep down and, out of the high country,

and they would keep them out on the desert until sometime in December, usually the middle of December. And they always bought hay from Frank Kueny or Mr. Crump there on the Serrano Point, Alvord, Whitehorse. And they would feed these sheep until lambing time. And they were given meadows to keep their sheep on; with part of the hay they bought. And that's how they wintered. See a lot of people wondered well how did they winter if they didn't own a ranch. Well they did buy hay from these ranchers for winter-feeding. And they didn't feed any more than they had to, what I mean time wise.

DOROTHEA: Where did they keep their sheep when they come down? Did they have special pens for them, or ---

AVEL: No, usually when they rented these pastures from one of these ranches they were given, they were fenced, but they were given an area. Of course I was just a kid, but quite a few acres. Had a whole field, like oh say the Alvord, they got the Cottonwood field, or Mosquito Creek field. And they kept their sheep in those, on the pasture there and fed them hay.

And just as soon as April --- well usually in April they would pull out of those ranches and head for the desert again. Just until the feed was gone, and the feed started, was the only time they were on these ranches.

But they weren't penned, because they had --- you see there was about, the average band of sheep was about, on the average of fifteen hundred lambs and ewes, so when they sold the lambs in the fall of the year why, which they shipped, the ewe herd would be down to about seven, eight hundred, so it didn't take a lot of fields or ---

DOROTHEA: Now you said when they shipped in the fall, where did they, did they take these into Crane or where did they ship from?

AVEL: Yeah a lot of them, most of them went to Crane, and some come to Burns. Like

Pete Obiague and Mark, the Ramirez and they brought theirs to Burns.

But the people that I mentioned on this tape, most of those people trailed their sheep to Crane. Usually lambs, and sometimes they would take them, oh three weeks, two weeks from the time they left before they got to Crane. And the way they did it was, and in order not to lose too much weight and stuff on their lambs, there was stock trails all over that country, and they were, I think, a mile wide. And when you moved cattle or sheep on public lands in those days, if you kept them within the confines of that stock trail, you wasn't penalized. Your husband probably would probably say yeah, Diaz knows what he is talking about. So what they'd do is they kind of had an idea where these stock trails --- there would be a post every quarter of mile or something, like an old fence post. But none of them ever stayed within the boundaries of that stock trail. They just --- and so they would bring their sheep into Crane, and some went to Riverside. They had a stockyard in Riverside.

DOROTHEA: Most sheep don't trail like cows though, do they?

AVEL: Oh, yeah you can move sheep really, I think, if you've got a little feed and some good dogs. You can move sheep probably faster and further in a day's time than you can cattle.

DOROTHEA: Can you?

AVEL: Oh yeah, definitely. Because you just head them out and just keep putting pressure on them. Especially in the open range like that, they move right along. They can cover a lot of miles in the daytime.

DOROTHEA: Did you ever work with some of the sheep that those sheepherders have? How did they keep their sheep in line?

AVEL: Well I was fairly young, and yes, I did work with them. But just in the spring and

summer months. And I helped lamb, and I did some camp tending in the summer months. And I had a herd of yearlings for the Alvord Ranch; they were in the sheep business. They had two Greek boys run their sheep outfit. The only one I can think of, of the two Greeks was Alec Yokum. I can't think of his partner, can't think of the name. But I worked for them one summer.

And usually when I did between school, I wouldn't start school until October, until they started bringing sheep down off the mountain. So I didn't quit the first of September and go to school. I usually worked right on through until first of October. Wool the same way, they had several shearing corrals in the country at that time. They had one at the old town of Folly Farm that doesn't exist today. It was run by Tom Pollock, who was a brother to Fred and Max that owned the Juniper Ranch. He had quite a little store there. And there again, these shepherders or sheep outfits in the spring of the year bought a lot of stuff from Tom, because they lambled around Ten Cent Lake, Twenty-Five Cent Lake, and that country. That was prime lambing country.

And you'd see lambing camps all through that area in the month of April. So then another set of shearing corrals in Alberson Station. And these shearing corrals in those days, what they would do is Dewey Quier, a local Burns fellow, had a shearing crew of twelve shearers, and a couple of wool tiers and hazers, and a old gas plant, mechanically run shears run off of some belts and pulleys and a drive shaft. And in order to get all the sheep sheared in that country, because there was a lot of them, it was impossible for all these sheep people to bring their sheep to one location. So they'd come in the country, and the Jenkins boys, it's Dick Jenkins' grandparents, which were Scotch people, they run sheep in Riddle Mountain and Paul Creek, and that part of the country.

So there was an old sheep-shearing corral on the north side of Folly Farm



Mountain. I think they use it for a cow camp now. And Dewey Quier's sheep shearers would hit there first and spend about a week, ten days. Then they would move on into Folly Farm, spend a week, ten days. And these sheep people knew they were coming. So they all set up --- I'll bring my sheep today for two days, you bring yours --- everything was on schedule. They had somebody there cooking for the sheep shearers; they had a regular mess hall. And then they would move from Folly Farm to Alberson Station, they'd be there another ten days, two weeks. And then they'd end up at Andrews.

BARBARA: So how many shearers would come in this group?

AVEL: Twelve.

BARBARA: Twelve.

AVEL: They had a crew of twelve. Totally they had a crew of probably eighteen, nineteen people. He had twelve shearers that did nothing but shear. Then he had wool tiers, then he had a wool --- what we call them wool stompers. Had a big tower, put a woolsack on there, and then the guy would jump in that woolsack and he really had a job.

DOROTHEA: Did Avel ever do this?

AVEL: Huh?

DOROTHEA: Did Avel ever do this?

AVEL: Avel has been in a woolsack, yeah.

DOROTHEA: Dorothea has too. I didn't appreciate that, because you always got ticks.

AVEL: It's hot, you don't get no air. And those sacks have got to be ---

DOROTHEA: Right, ten feet tall at least.

AVEL: And they got to be packed just like a cigar, you know. You can't have a little bulge there, or --- they had to be just perfect. So ---

BARBARA: How many sheep could a good shearer shear during a day?

AVEL: Jim McCullough, he's still alive here in Burns, Larry Tilley's stepfather, he probably was undoubtedly one of the best shearers that Dewey had. And he would get in the neighborhood of two hundred and fifty to two seventy-five ewes a day. And that was a lot. Because you're bent over. She got some idea. And I don't know how they sheared sheep, because she is younger than I am. In those days each shearer had a pen. And guys like us kept those pens full of sheep for him. And he never looked up. Once he started cutting wool in the morning, he'd just --- and they had a canvas door or a flap in front of the pen from his side. And all he did was just reach back underneath that canvas and he'd just grab a foot. He never looked. He didn't have time to look. And bring that old ewe out here and put it back next to his belly and go.

DOROTHEA: And set her up and start up.

AVEL: And the sheep people were pretty fussy. If a sheep shearer cut up --- yeah, they drew blood occasionally, but not too often. But if they drew a lot of blood on an animal, they let Dewey Quier know about it. And said now that guy is not doing a good job, or --- so they were pretty particular what these sheep --- not because of the looks, but they just didn't want their, first thing you know they get fly-blown, or if their wounds are bad enough, and it was just a hygiene deal more than anything.

Ken Retherford, which you both know, he was probably one of the best wool stompers that, I mean wool tiers, that ever, I don't mean stomper, a wool tier. There was an art to tying wool. I could never do it. But you have these cotton strings, they're kind of made out of burlap or paper really, twisted paper, twine. And you gather each fleece between your legs and it was an art.

DOROTHEA: And you have to roll those just right.

AVEL: Yeah, you roll it, yeah.

DOROTHEA: They roll them and stuff them.

AVEL: Each fleece was separate.

DOROTHEA: And stuff them.

AVEL: But you didn't roll more than one at a time.

DOROTHEA: Kind of like you do bread.

AVEL: Yeah, uh huh.

DOROTHEA: Kind of like you're punching bread.

AVEL: And they'd make a good solid, and then a guy would come along and pick up the bundles and throw them up on the ---

BARBARA: Oh, so the hide was not loose as ---

AVEL: No.

BARBARA: --- they threw it in the big sack to stomp down. They were all, each tied.

AVEL: Oh yeah, all tied. Each individual bundle was tied. I got to tell the truth here, because she knows about --- she's going to put me to the cross if I don't. (Laughter) But I'm sure is, hope you're agreeing with me that this is the way it was done.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, yeah.

AVEL: And so then they would move on to Fields and spend a few days there, and then ended up in Denio. Now Dewey Quier when he started his shearing crew, he would start in California, probably in February, latter part of February, same crew. Then they'd run up into Nevada, because their seasons were earlier, they lambbed earlier. Then they'd hit Oregon. And then from Oregon they'd go up into, sometimes in Montana and Wyoming and that country. And they'd end up some time in July. So they really sheared sheep for several months. It wasn't just what they sheared in Oregon or this particular part of the country. And they weren't the only sheep outfit or sheep shearers. He was the most

prominent one in that country. But ---

DOROTHEA: Well now the Heinz's used to shear sheep too.

AVEL: Yeah, Heinz. And Evans', like Art Evans' dad. He had a sheep crew, shearing crew. But never hit this area. Dewey had the --- the reason I mentioned Dewey was, Dewey had all the Bascos in that country. And they contracted, say we'll be at Andrews, Folly Farm, Alberson Station, wherever on such a given date, providing the weather. Because if it rained, they couldn't shear when it was wet. The wool had to be dry.

BARBARA: What length of a day are you talking about? They'd start --- I mean how many hours did they work?

AVEL: They'd start in about, they'd start in about, at least these crews did, about seven, work until noon. Like at Andrews there, Mrs. Arriola would have quite a --- they ate. She'd have a good dinner for them, and of course she run the corrals and everything. She was getting percentages too. And they'd shear until, oh some-times between five and six. And then again cleanup.

BARBARA: That's a long day of stooping over.

AVEL: You bet, bent over. And a lot of them ended up with back problems. They were a bunch of grouches. Oh, they were ---

BARBARA: Everything had to be just right, or you heard about it?

AVEL: Uh huh. And they played --- they're like the old time rodeo riders. They worked hard, played hard, and every night they'd get --- there was bootleg whiskey and homemade brew. But they'd get to feeling pretty good, and they'd party until, just about every night until ten, eleven o'clock, and then go to bed. The next morning they were mean, grouchy.

BARBARA: They were hung over, huh?

AVEL: Oh, yeah. At least the crews I have been around.

BARBARA: And what kind of money would these shearers make?

AVEL: I don't know what the shearers got. They got so much a head. So that's what, they counted, kept tallies on how many sheep they put in the pen, and how many he pulled out of there and sheared. Bucks, they got double when they run bucks through the shearing corrals. Why they're bigger and harder to handle. So, I don't know how much they got, paying the kid. But they got paid by the head. That's why there was no fooling around, they just get with it.

And then a lot of them had straps that they would, leather straps that they would put on their stomachs, and then they was on a pulley to keep them from, their backs from giving out.

BARBARA: Oh, so they could lean on it a little bit. Oh, I see, okay.

AVEL: Uh huh. And it was on; it had a weight on the other end. At least Dewey's people did. So they would kind of bounce around on that contraption that they had, strapped on.

BARBARA: That would take some of the strain off of the back then. That's a good idea.

AVEL: Uh huh. I even forgot that, until I just got to talking about, thinking how they sheared sheep. And I don't know what else to talk about. But that's ---

DOROTHEA: Well I come up with a question a while ago, and didn't ask. When were the lambs born, were they born mostly in the winter?

AVEL: No.

DOROTHEA: Late winter, or ---

AVEL: They put the bucks in with the sheep, with the ewes in October in this country. In Idaho they put them in a lot earlier than Nevada. California earlier than that. But in Oregon, or at least in Harney County, let's say Harney County, October through about the

middle of November was when they put the bucks in with the ewes. And then, so they was hoping to start lambing around the first of April.

And as I said earlier, they usually got their sheep off these ranches and stuff around the first of April. And then they'd go into the tall sagebrush and they'd come out in bands. They'd have a band of seven, eight hundred ewes. And then they'd start dropping lambs.

It was quite interesting, really, how they did it. Whatever dropped, well say the first day of April when they first started, let's say they dropped, forty ewes dropped lambs. That bunch of lambs and ewes were kept separate until marking time. So they had one guy take care of that drop. Then that night there would be some more dropped, so he would have another bunch to take care of, but he never mixed them, he kept them for thirty days, right at thirty days he kept those bunches. So the end of lambing season, he'd probably have ten, fifteen drops he was watching. Another guy would have ten, fifteen drops. And the reason for that was grass was a little scarce, the lambs were fragile, because the weather was cold, and they didn't want to move these lambs around, and the sheep, because they didn't have sheds. Everything was done out in the tall sagebrush. And rather than bunch all of these sheep together, I don't know where they developed it, but that's the way they did it in this country.

And then another thing we would do, the night guy he would stay up until way late at night to keep coyotes away from the lambs. Because coyotes are deadly on lambs. We'd build bonfires around these bunches at night. Sagebrush, just take sagebrush, and coyotes didn't like the smell of the smoke, if they weren't too hungry.

And another thing we did was, they bought a lot of dynamite, and they would have dynamite in the lambing camps. And we'd take a dynamite, a stick of dynamite, cut it in

quarters, just take a knife and make four chunks, the chunks were about like that. Put a fuse and cap in it, and just at dusk they'd go around and light these, light the dynamite around these lambs and ewes. And the dynamite fumes would stay to the ground, and coyotes didn't like the smell of that dynamite after the explosion, and kept coyotes away from the lambs. Lot of people think I'm lying, but this is the way it was actually done.

And you knew Pete Ebar, or John Ebar's dad, he had one arm. They had an unwritten law that when you threw a stick of dynamite, or a chunk out there, and it didn't go off, you let it lay until the next day, you didn't pick it up. And John was his name, not Pete. And John Ebar's dad, and his dad's name was John, threw a stick of dynamite out and --- over around the Crane country, and it didn't go off. So he come by a half hour, forty minutes later and picked it up, and it blew his arm off.

DOROTHEA: Went off.

BARBARA: Oh dear.

AVEL: So that's how the fellow lost his arm. And then after all the ewes had their lambs, it was a process about like cattle, you know. You start having calves, and you get so much calving every day, you know. And then at the end of a month, six weeks, you're through calving. Well lambing was the same way. Usually started the first of April, and by the last of April you was pretty well through lambing, and there wasn't hardly any ewes left to lamb. So that's when you brought all these bunches together to make a band. And we'd make corrals out of sagebrush, just throw a bunch of sagebrush together and make a corral. And then we'd run all the bunches in these corrals. And that's when we branded them, or we call it marking. We mark lambs instead of, the cowboy brands, but the sheep people mark theirs. And then they'd castrate the male lambs, and cut the tails off of the, all the lambs.

And the reason I think the word mark come from, they used a lamp black and coal oil and make a slurry out of it, like a paint. Then they would brand them with their brand, it was just like a cattle brand, but they used big old wood brands, and stick it in the bucket and --- because they didn't want to burn the hide or lose any wool see, so they marked.

DOROTHEA: Now did that stay on long enough to, when they sheared?

AVEL: Yeah, uh huh.

DOROTHEA: It was still there?

AVEL: And the same way, the same way when they sheared a ewe or a buck, when they come out of the shearing pen sheared, there would be one guy sitting there stamping each animal as he come out, with this mixture of lamp black.

DOROTHEA: Lampblack, marking each one again.

AVEL: Marking each one again. And it would stay there.

DOROTHEA: Marking a lamb is an interesting subject for a lot of people. Today's people with sheep don't do this most generally. But can you kind of describe how it is done.

AVEL: Well, the way we did it, and I'm sure most people did, was you'd have a bunch of guys working in the corral. We'd just make a makeshift sagebrush corral, and they wouldn't jump it or any-thing. Just be about that high. And just get sagebrush, and kind of interwove. And then you put up two juniper posts at one end, and then you had a juniper post run across like a rail, it would be probably three, probably higher than that maybe ---

DOROTHEA: Which is about what, four feet?

AVEL: Four or five feet off the ground. And then the guys that was working the corrals would grab the lamb, take the front feet and the hind feet and put them together like that, and then they would set them on this cross bar with their rump to the guy that was



working on them. The rump up. And the first thing he'd do is if it was a female lamb, he'd just cut the tail off, and we'd turn it loose out of the corral. Everything went out of the corral then.

And if it was a male lamb, why it was a little different. We'd put them up there the same way, and before he cut the tail off, he'd take the sack and push up on it, and take a knife and just barely cut the tip of it off, off of the sack. And then he'd push the testicles up and grab them with his teeth, and they'd have a little sinew coming down into the body --- and then he'd take --- instead of cutting that off, they'd take a knife and they'd kind of scrape it like, a sharp knife at an angle, and they would kind of serrate that tendon instead, and it would kind of heal. And not everybody could do it.

DOROTHEA: It's a special knack.

AVEL: Special knack. And a lot of people would say, oh Diaz, they never lambed that way or marked. But that's the way they did it. They just --- And they were really touchy. I tried it, of course I was just a kid, and I didn't like the ---

DOROTHEA: Taste.

AVEL: The guy that was good at it, he'd just push those two little fellers up there, and he'd just barely --- didn't want a big hole, just barely cut the top of the bag and squeeze them through, and grab them with his teeth. He had to have his hands to work with now see. So he'd hold that up with his teeth --- am I right?

DOROTHEA: Yep. That was what I knew. It would be interesting. Environmentalists might not find it interesting, but it is interesting to people.

AVEL: This is just a ... of the story. When Bob McDonald and Patsy had several hundred head of ewes out here, several years ago, Bob run into Jim Palmer, which you all know, like to pull jokes on him, or visa versa. So Bob said, "Jim, why don't you come out

tomorrow, we're going to mark lambs." And Jim said, "Oh no, I'm not going to come out and help you mark lambs. But I'd like to have the oysters you get off of the baby buck lambs." And Bob says, "Well by god, I ain't going to give them to you." So Jim gave him twenty dollars to, figured Bob would save them for him. And Jim was raised around sheep camps too, in his younger days down in the Vale country. And a couple of weeks went by, and he run into Bob again, and he said, "Bob," he says, "where is my mountain oysters, Rocky Mountain oysters?" He said, "Well Jim if you just get a five gallon bucket and go out in the meadow, they ought to be dropping off right now, you can just follow those little lambs and pick them out of the meadow." He didn't know that they were rubber banding them. (Laughter) I always thought that was a pretty good joke.

DOROTHEA: That's the modern method of doing it.

AVEL: That's the way we did it. And then once these lambs were --- and then they made up their bands again, and now you'd have a band of about, if you had seven hundred and fifty ewes to start with, you had a lot of doubles, twins, some triplets. But if you figured if you could lamb in Idaho and California and Nevada, the sheep people in those countries figured on about a hundred and thirty to a hundred and forty percent lamb crop. But they did shed lambing, everything was done under protection. In this country, if you got a hundred and ten, you was really doing good because of the weather, coyotes, whatever, the element we'll call it. So most of the ewes probably carried doubles, or twins. And then you'd make up your bands right after marking. And then the herd, and then you could assign a herder to this band here, and then he would take off.

And they didn't push them the first few days, the lambs were sore. But they just --- and ---

DOROTHEA: Well is it true that, I grew up with this, somebody telling me this, but for every hundred head there was a black one. Is this true?

AVEL: Oh, it would probably run pretty close to form. Why --- and of course we used them for markers. I suppose you did too. And you know what I'm referring to now? We had so many bells, we'd put so many bells in the band of sheep, we'll say thirty. There would be thirty ewes with bells on them. And then you'd have say, fifteen, twenty blacks in your band. And when these sheep were scattered out feeding, the shepherd in order to know if he had lost any sheep, or if he was short sheep, because it was easy to do, he would count the markers. That was the bells and the blacks. And if there was any blacks missing, or any bells missing, he knew he was out some sheep. Because the rule of thumb was, if a bunch of sheep strayed off, there would be a marker in them, a bell or a black. So I suppose that's --- Am I right?

DOROTHEA: Yeah. That's what I was referring to.

AVEL: Yeah. So they had a system. So they didn't count them every day. But every day or so a guy had nothing to do, and he'd count the blacks and the bells.

BARBARA: So how many herders would there be per band?

AVEL: One.

BARBARA: Usually one.

AVEL: And in this country until the later days, the herder herded a foot, he didn't have a horse.

DOROTHEA: Now I saw a herd about last year, we saw them driving across, oh I think it was Utah or someplace. And they were doing it on horse.

AVEL: Yeah, they do it horseback.

DOROTHEA: They had their trailer house parked and ---

AVEL: Yeah. Now they use camping trailers. We used a tent.

DOROTHEA: That's what I was going to say. Tell us something about the camps, and what kind of meals you had.

AVEL: Okay. In the summer months you had again, two types of shepherders. You had some herders that stayed next, because of the terrain and the feed, stayed close to the home camp. And your home camp consisted of two tents, pyramid tents, and you had a camp tender that took care of the home camp. And he moved it whenever it was necessary, a week, ten days, depends on what the feed and the water was. But this particular man would do all the bread baking. And then he'd, if the herder was close to camp, he stayed at camp, and he'd eat and everything there.

But you had some herders that were a long ways from the main camp, and they herded sheep with a burro. They didn't ride the burro. The burro --- early in the morning he would get up and he'd move his sheep out. He'd load his burro up with a little tepee tent, which he very seldom used if the weather was good, his bedroll, his clothes, and a loaf of bread, or whatever bread he had, some eggs and some bacon. Maybe a potato or two is all he had, just this particular type of herder. And he would just wander around wherever the feed was.

And then the guy from the head camp, the head camp tender would run into this guy about once every four days. He'd stay with him overnight. He'd bring him a Dutch oven, bread already made at the main camp. He would cook him a pot of beans. And we had snap tops so nothing would spill out. And he would cook him dried apples with raisins, or bring it already cooked, rice with raisins. And bring him a couple cans of milk, a dozen eggs, and bacon. And then he wouldn't see that guy again for five, six days, until his supply of food ran out.

If it was wet and rainy, well he just had a little tepee tent, like a pup tent, except they were higher. And then he would crawl into that. If it was weather like we are having today, he never put up the tent. He'd just throw his bedroll out on the ground, right close to bed grounds.

And bed grounds, sheep prefer a little rocky type area to bed down in. So a herder during the daytime would kind of pick a bed ground for night, kind of a more rocky, kind of an open clear area. And then he'd --- okay, let's go back to daylight. The guy would get up in the morning, and if the feed was good he'd take his sheep out, load the old burro up, and they'd take off. And the burro run with the sheep, he didn't have to lead him. The burrow was part of the band. They were taught to do that. He'd just run right in the middle of the band, with a full pack all day long. And if you had good feed, about nine, ten o'clock, weather like this, and the old sheep would lay down in the shade of juniper, whatever they could find. And they would lay there until, oh four or five o'clock in the afternoon, after the sun started going down, you know, to the west. And then they'd all start getting up and stretching. Then he would feed them again until dark. Then he kind of had a bed ground already picked out, so towards dusk, him and his dog would take them to where he wanted to bed them down. Just as soon as it got dark, they'd all ---

BARBARA: They'd just go to sleep.

AVEL: Yeah, they'd stay there until morning.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

AVEL: At daylight you had to be --- it was quite interesting really, how it all went together.

DOROTHEA: Let's turn it over and continue with this.

SIDE B

AVEL: The main camp I was referring to earlier, it had everything. It had meat, flour, rice, good supplies. And the camp tender would either go to Folly Farm, Andrews, or Fields, maybe once every two weeks with a pack string. Go off the mountain and he would buy a half a case of eggs, a sack of potatoes, depending on how many people were going to eat, and then they butchered yearling mutton, whenever they needed it. They always had fresh meat.

So at the main camp, we'll call it, this guy did all the cooking. He would cook, you know, was limited to what they could cook. But they had mulligans, and stews, most of them cooked in the ground, some on top of the stove. And he'd bake at least one or two loaves of bread every day. Because he had to take care of four or five herders. Then he'd made sure that his guys with the burros had bread all the time. And then they kept bread in camp. All the bread was cooked under ground in Dutch ovens. And it took about a good hour or two to cook a loaf of bread if you want to cook it right. And the way they did it, was dig a hole about two feet deep, about six, seven inches in diameter bigger than the Dutch oven he was going to put in the ground. They just piled sagebrush on it, because it was quick heat. And burn that sage-brush down to ashes and coals, and dig out the coals and leave about eight, nine inches of coals in the bottom of the pit or the hole, and then put the Dutch oven in with the bail up, cover it with the rest of the coals, you want it about five, six, seven inches of coals over the whole Dutch oven. Then you seal that off with dirt, just throw dirt on it and seal it off. Otherwise it would burn, make sure it wasn't getting any air. And the loaf of bread was usually cooked in an hour.

And there was still a lot of heat in the ground, so a lot of them would have one of these aluminum, Forest Service uses a lot of them, kettles that's got snap-on lids. And they would come telescoped, different sizes. One fit in the other. So they would take the

biggest of those, depend on how many people they was cooking for, and put beans and bacon, or ham or whatever they had, a little onion, some canned green peppers, and tomato sauce, and throw it all in these kettles, and a little salt and pepper, and put it in that ground just as soon as they took the bread out. No more fire, using that same heat. And the beans would stay in there until the next day. They didn't do this every day, you know, a pot of beans would last several days. And that saved them doing a lot of cooking. Because the next day when they used that same hole to bake bread in again, they would clean the hole out, and pull that pot out and the beans would be cooked. Then they would just heat them up on the stove when they needed them. Good beans, they were ---

You couldn't cook beans in a Dutch oven, a lot of people think you can, yeah they will cook, but it ruins your Dutch oven, and the beans come out looking, they don't look like red beans. They just don't look good. It's a metallic reaction with the beans and the Dutch oven.

BARBARA: Did they use beef, or mostly mutton?

AVEL: Mostly mutton. Once in awhile they would buy a hindquarter or something from a rancher, because they had no way of keeping meat. And although they had fresh meat, they didn't salt it --- and the way they kept their meat fresh until it was all gone in the summer months, was they would hang it every night on a juniper tree, or whatever. And then in the daytime, at daylight, they would, when they got out of their bedroll --- bedrolls were pretty thick in those days, a lot of wool blankets, and a nice tarp, bed tarp. So then they would roll that meat up in their bedroll.

DOROTHEA: To keep it cool.

AVEL: It would be in sacks. I mean it wasn't meat against bedroll; it would be in a bag.

And that meat would stay cold. At night, or whenever you took, wanted lamb chops, or wanted meat to make stew out of, or whatever you did, the meat was cold. And it never soured, or never spoiled. Otherwise it would spoil on them. So they had a system, hang it at night and let it get cold, and wrap it up and ---

DOROTHEA: You know they kept their bacon that way too, and I noticed that you can't keep bacon like that anymore.

AVEL: No, I think it was cured different.

DOROTHEA: I don't know what ---

AVEL: It was cured different. Everything is done processed now, where before it was put in a vat and brine, and then smoked in a smoke house for days. Now the whole thing is done in a couple of days, where it used to take a couple of weeks to smoke.

DOROTHEA: I notice when we have riding camp, you'll try to keep bacon, and it will mold in about three days.

AVEL: Uh huh. I think it is the way they do it. So then this guy would, he would move camp, if it was sheep in the main camp, he always kept his camp in an area where he could service several herders. His job was, you couldn't have one camp tender for every sheepherder. It was impossible, financially it was impossible. So he would, if he had satellite herders, we'll call them, with burros, he would make sure that he saw those people at least once every four days.

BARBARA: So he was kind of the center of the spoke with all the herds all around him, and he just kind of worked from there.

AVEL: Yeah. And the satellite sheepherder, all he had to do, all he would eat for breakfast normally was, if he had ham, just ham, eggs and bread. He didn't go into hotcakes. But the main camp, hell you would have hotcakes and whatever, you know.



BARBARA: So a herder had kind of a sparse existence then.

AVEL: Damn right. He ate --- a lot of them would take --- I thought it was a good meal, it was a good quick meal, I've done it. Take a potato and just slice it in chunks that thick, fry some bacon, you know, quick like, just fry some bacon, and put the potatoes in the bacon juice, a little water, and boil them, a can of string beans, and in about a half hour --- it was pretty tasty. A little salt and pepper and ---

And most Basco shepherders, and I got the habit, any time we'd cook, they put a little oil automatically in the pan, and smash some garlic, and we fry our garlic before we do anything else. The oil picks up the taste. And nine times out of ten they take that garlic and throw it away, the bulb or the clove itself. But the oil had the ---

BARBARA: It had flavored the oil for your cooking.

AVEL: And oh, in the, we'd kill a sagehen or two once in awhile in the summer, and take rice and peppers and onions, and put everything in the Dutch oven and put it in the ground, and oh, come out of there just --- with a little seasoning.

And we'd bake, something like an old pound cake or something, throw a cake together. And we ate a lot of hotcakes in sheep camp. Everything was done with sourdough.

DOROTHEA: How did you keep your sourdough?

AVEL: Oh, using it every day, we used it just about every day, and if it was real hot, if you had a spring, we'd put the --- the old wives tale is that you can't keep sourdough in aluminum, but we did, with a lid, snap-on lid. And if there was a cold spring or creek around in the summer months, we'd take out what we needed; we'd set it in the creek or someplace. But if you didn't have a creek or someplace to keep it, where you used it every day it never got that sour on you. See nowadays people use sourdough, and they

don't use it everyday ---

DOROTHEA: Yeah, it gets pretty sour.

AVEL: See like the kid down at Steens Mountains, he uses sourdough everyday, so it --- sourdough if you use it every day in and day out becomes just like yeast bread. It doesn't have the sourness. But at home, where I got sourdough, I got the same sourdough he's got; he's got a starter from us. My sourdough gets sour, because I just keep it in the refrigerator and use it maybe once a month, whatever, you know. Can't afford to use it every day.

DOROTHEA: That's the problem with our problem there, we have age on us.

AVEL: So, if sourdough is used everyday, it doesn't have the tendency to be as sour as, more of a, got a different taste I think.

BARBARA: So what does sourdough consist of?

AVEL: Okay, sourdough. Start, I like to start it with just flour and potato water. Boil some potatoes, take the water off, mix some flour in, pour a little sugar in it and let it sit for two or three days, and it will start ---

BARBARA: Just leave it on your counter to work?

AVEL: Uh huh, yeah where it is a little warm. Then once you get it started ---

DOROTHEA: Well now when you take a cup out, do you put a cup of flour back?

AVEL: Yes. Well then a lot of times, where I don't use it a lot, and I know it is getting too sour, I'll just take a cup out and throw it away, and add a cup to it and let it raise, then back into the refrigerator. Always let it raise, don't put it back in the refrigerator, let it raise overnight or --- We don't, but May is getting so, for grandkids and stuff, she is making cookies two or three days a week, and everything is basically sourdough. So we use quite a bit of it. We don't use a lot of our own selves, but she bakes. Well we make

muffins, and just about ---

BARBARA: So initially you start out with about how many cups of water, and a cup of flour ---

AVEL: Well each one has got their own little --- now what I do, I keep a little crock, about a quart crock, not quite half full all the time. And if I'm going to cook for, oh say the Cow Belle breakfast. So on Wednesday I'll take that one cup of sourdough and I'll --- Wednesday evening I'll take a gallon of water and enough flour to make that thick, and take my cup of sourdough and mix it in a plastic bucket or whatever. First I start out with just a bowl, and then Thursday morning I'll get up and take that gallon that I had, now I've got good old bubbly stuff, and once I get that first gallon made, I can make several gallons.

DOROTHEA: Make several gallons.

AVEL: So by Saturday morning, I'd have sixty, seventy gallons of sourdough in four days, or less than four days, with that one little cup of sourdough I started with, by just adding. By just adding and separating it.

DOROTHEA: Well one cup of sourdough will make a gallon?

AVEL: Oh, yeah. If you're really in a pinch, one cup of --- I experiment with it a lot, one cup --- I can take a cup of sourdough tonight in weather like it is, and say I'm going to cook hotcakes or biscuits for somebody, say for thirty, forty people. I can take that one cup of sourdough, lukewarm water or milk, and I add a little sugar in it, and when I do this I add a little sugar to it, because it feeds off of sugar, and by morning I've got enough sourdough to cook hotcakes for thirty, forty people. Just all --- I don't know, don't tell me the proportions because I can't tell you. I just ---

DOROTHEA: Sourdough is an interesting subject ---

AVEL: Yeah, you can do anything with it.

DOROTHEA: --- because, I mean you can do anything with it. You can make bread.

AVEL: It's a mystery to a lot of people.

BARBARA: I've never cooked with sourdough, so, you know, I'm just ---

AVEL: It's probably to her and me both. And a mystery, why does it do it? But it does it.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

AVEL: There is no answer, I don't think, if you've got good sourdough.

DOROTHEA: Mine was never good.

AVEL: I'll give you some of this. This come from Mildred Graves mother.

DOROTHEA: Oh, really?

AVEL: Yeah. And she picked it up from some old hermit out there in Wagontire country.

This has been going for probably a hundred years. And it's a --- Dorothy, I'm not bragging, it's not my sourdough, it's a hand me down, but this is the damndest sourdough I've ever played with. It really is. I've done, I've abused it, I've ---

DOROTHEA: Mine always goes bad. It just turns to water.

AVEL: This sourdough for some reason does not go bad. And it's not mine; I claim that it is mine because I have nursed it now for thirty, forty years. But Julio got it from Mildred Graves. Mildred got it from her mother, and her mother, the history of it; it was picked up from some old ranch bum out in Wagontire country. And it's been --- and what we do in case we --- we've never lost it, but we've experimented with it. You can keep it frozen. Take a cup of it and just freeze it. Or you can dry it, take a chunk of it and just let it dry in a big gob. It will be hard knot. Put it in the pantry in a glass jar or something, and if you lose your starter, just take that dry stuff, it takes about a day, just add a little warm water to it and let it dissolve, add a little flour to it, and there the baby comes.

DOROTHEA: And you've got it again.

AVEL: And if you freeze it, just take it out of the freezer and let it set in the kitchen for a day, and open the lid ---

DOROTHEA: And there it is, huh?

AVEL: There it is bubbling.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, sourdough is an interesting thing.

AVEL: And so it's, I mean I like the stuff, I like to play with it. I don't do it, not much anymore. But I've done a lot of things with sourdough, good doughnuts.

DOROTHEA: Oh, yeah.

AVEL: Cakes, muffins. I think it makes the best waffle that come down the pike.

DOROTHEA: My mother-in-law got me started on it. And I had, my husband and I tried to compete with each other, see who could make the best biscuits and hotcakes. My biscuits never won. They were the kind that you bounced off of the floor. But his was better.

AVEL: But, now you see, Dr. Campbell, I'm supposed to take him out a starter. Now he called me two weeks ago. I bet I take him starter four or five times a year. And the guy just can't master sourdough. I keep telling him, god you were a doctor at one time? (Laughter) We get along real good. But he cannot master, and I tell him the simple, what I think are simple --- and he just can't. Sourdough will beat you if ---

DOROTHEA: Oh yeah, it beats me.

AVEL: I think sourdough is --- the rougher you treat it, the better it likes it, is my theory with sourdough. Don't baby it.

DOROTHEA: I keep telling my daughter-in-law, she bakes bread twice a week, and I keep telling her she should get that, because boy it would really make --- and she makes

delicious bread.

AVEL: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: I mean it is just like store bought.

AVEL: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: But she had ought to get started on sourdough.

AVEL: Yeah, don't baby it; just treat it like a pup.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, yeah. Well back to the sheep. Something about the dogs.

AVEL: Okay.

DOROTHEA: How many dogs does a shepherd have, and ---

AVEL: Oh, most of them had one, some two. One was a plenty. And they'd get them as pups, and they could just about take any dog. They didn't have --- hell I've seen collies. Pick up a pup some-place and make a sheep dog out of it. Probably not as good as a regular Irish, in those days they went for the old Irish sheep dog. A little grayish looking dog. But they were hard to come by. But they could take an average dog. And if you had good feed, and plenty of water, you didn't use a dog much anyway. It was all up to the man himself. Only time you used the dog a lot is when you was trailing, or the sheep got too far away from you. Scattered out on the hillside and you wanted to bring them back, tell the dog, in the Basque language, say make a "wilta", and the dog would automatically make a circle. Which was make a circle, and bring the head, turn the --- once you turn the head around they all come back anyway.

And a lot of them, most of them didn't need a dog. They always had a dog for a companion, a lot of them. Especially this type of herding. They could whistle. I couldn't whistle. Hell, they wouldn't answer. (Laughter) Get their old fingers in their mouth, and that old head --- always got a lead. And when that lead hears that whistle, or whatever, it

scares them or something, and they'll turn right around.

BARBARA: The band falls right back.

AVEL: Yeah, take a can, barbwire, or bailing wire, with a bunch of milk cans on it and shake it, and that lead hears that noise they'll turn around. A lot of them would take a rifle and shoot, just above the head, and they'd see that dust, or hear the report and they'd come back.

So a dog was good around corrals, when you was trailing them, wanted to keep them kind of bunched up. A dog was more companion-ship in this country than a working animal. They did work them. But like Blair's, this would be a good one, Blair's dad, he was usually a camp tender. Blair probably doesn't even know this. And he was --- the old Basco shepherd got sick and they brought him to Burns and put him in the hospital. And they told John to take his sheep over, you know, until they got another herder to come in. And John wanted the dog to bring them around, and the dog just looked at him. Okay, John didn't know how to tell him in Basque how to bring the sheep around. John, you dirty son ---

BARBARA: Wrong word.

AVEL: But, no, they used dogs but not ---

DOROTHEA: A lot of times dogs don't work for more than one person too.

AVEL: That's right. And that was something else, the dog usually was just a one, a companion, and that was that one person's dog. Like again I keep saying, feed was good, had plenty of water ---

BARBARA: How much water, I mean, did they have to have water everyday?

AVEL: No, we water them, oh probably once every two days, three days, they could go three days without water. When they did go, they just slurrpp --- really suck it up. Now

you could go, well again, it depends on how hot it is. Days like today, maybe every two days. In the spring of the year when we were lambing, three days.

DOROTHEA: I think dew on the grass has got something to do with it too.

AVEL: Yeah, uh huh. It just depends on --- One thing about lambing I was going to, hate to get back to lambing, but now they tried to save as many lambs as they could. A lot of ewes would lose both lambs, or lose a lamb, a lamb that they had. So there was other ewes that had triplets, or had twins that they couldn't take care of. The way they --- and a ewe will not accept another ewe's lamb. Just won't take it. So what they would do is take the dead lamb and skin it. Take the hide off of it, and tie that hide on a live lamb, the one that they wanted to leppy off. And take leather tongs and tie it underneath its belly. And they would cut the legs so he could, they would put his legs through the hide. And the mother would accept it, she would smell that hide, smell that. So they saved a lot of lambs.

DOROTHEA: I got a lot of my 4-H lambs from the triplets that was born too. So I think that probably furnished half of Harney County with lambs for 4-H season.

AVEL: Yeah. They didn't have time to raise bummers; you know, like --- too much work. So they'd always skin one, and put that lamb on another ewe, and it worked. There was one sheep outfit in this country, they were Sabalas too, no relation to these Sabalas, Domingo and Maria. They had five children, they were a husband and a wife team, and they got in the sheep business with bummers. And the whole family worked. And the mother would have a baby and she'd carry the baby on one hand, and work the sheep in the other. And when they left this country, about '39, sold out, they probably had two bands of sheep, and all of them started with bummers.

DOROTHEA: Huh.



AVEL: You know, increasing their herd. They sold out and went to Roseburg, Sutherland country, and introduced sheep in that country. Some of the first sheep in those valleys were done by these Harney County Basque. And they ended up being one of the biggest logging people. They bought all this timberland that wasn't worth nothing in the '30's, and put sheep on it, you know. And people laughed at him, even the Bascos. Said well you crazy so and so. Well they didn't have a whole bunch of sheep maybe, three or four hundred head. But they was buying this timberland for nothing.

DOROTHEA: For a little bit of money, yeah.

AVEL: The whole thing, they got to be big logging people, still are. The family, I think the third generation is in the logging business in that country. And they started down around, well you've heard of Domingo Pass, I know your husband has, down on the Pueblos. It was named after this particular family. And they really worked. They didn't go buy hay in the winter months. They kept those sheep right out in the sagebrush, and moved snow, and get them where there was no snow to eat grass. And they scratched, no bank money, they didn't go to the bank and borrow money. And they made it, and not very few can make it that way, but they made it. Well I don't know what else to tell you.

BARBARA: When do you think the first sheep appeared on Steens Mountain? Do you have any idea?

AVEL: Oh gosh, I have no idea. I would say, according to knowing Julio and those people, I would say probably, don't hold me to this, but I think I would be in the ballpark probably, 1800's, 1918. Well, it had to be in that time, because Julio was born in Andrews.

DOROTHEA: You mean 1900's?

AVEL: I mean 1900's, 1919, I'm sorry. 1918, 1916, because Julio was born in Andrews,

Gilbert was. And the only reason they were down there, because there was sheep down there.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

AVEL: See they owned the hotel.

DOROTHEA: That's what I was going to say; they owned the hotel down there too.

AVEL: And then they sold it to the sister and moved to Burns and run the Star Hotel.

DOROTHEA: Star Hotel here.

AVEL: And see that's where Gilbert, a lot of people, part of the old hotel burnt when Urizars had it. And Gilbert, I don't know how old he was; he couldn't have been too old. And before they got him out of the fire, the back of his, he got too much heat on the back of his skull, and his brain got too hot. And his problem is really from a fire, than it is being born a cripple.

DOROTHEA: Oh, that's why he is crippled?

AVEL: Uh huh. Due to that hotel fire. Hell of a man.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

AVEL: So I would say 1915, '16, I would say in that era. Because, let's see, my dad come over to this country, to Idaho about 1916, and that's when they really started coming over here.

BARBARA: So a lot of these herders came from Spain and settled in Idaho, and then came here. Or did a lot of them just come to this country?

AVEL: I think in the late '20's and early '30's they come here. But most of them that were here come from Nevada or Idaho.

BARBARA: Initially.

AVEL: Initially from there, yeah. All of them got their roots back to Idaho or Nevada. Like

they say, there is, like this Tom Zabala I mentioned, he came right straight from Spain here, but he had an uncle that had a few sheep in Harney County. Uncle Thomas, they called him.

So, but I think the original Basque in Harney County, see my dad would tell it, I never lived with my dad, but he was telling me after I come to this country. I was visiting with him one time, he come to Burns and was going to set up a Pastime in Burns, when Burns had wooden sidewalks, and mud in the streets. I said, "You've been in Burns?" "Oh, yeah," he said, "I and a guy by the name of Victor Turey was, Aguirre I mean, was going to put a business in Burns, Oregon at one time. We didn't like the mud and wooden sidewalks." Never knew my old man had ever been to Burns. So that was probably in ---- well ---

BARBARA: So at one time how many Basque families do you think were on Steens Mountain, and the South End?

AVEL: I would say family wise, probably not more than eight or nine families, I mean husband and wife and children type deal. But I would say, when I first come to Harney County, there was probably on the Steens, probably fifty, sixty Basque shepherders, and whatever. Which was quite a few for those days. Camp tenders and people associated with sheep, yeah.

Not as much here as there was in Boise and Mountain Home, and Shoshone and that country. Because that's where they first migrated earlier. I think they started coming into Idaho in the late 1800's.

DOROTHEA: How many families are still left here?

AVEL: I'd say, full blooded ones from the old country, I'd say about twelve.

DOROTHEA: That's all?

AVEL: Uh huh. There is a lot of inbreeds, like my kids.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

AVEL: I call them polluted, watered down Bascos. (Laughter) I'd say about twelve, Dorothy.

DOROTHEA: Twelve original families.

AVEL: Uh huh, yeah. They leave, they retire from the mill, they go to Boise or Ontario.

DOROTHEA: Do a lot of them go back to Spain ever?

AVEL: Some, not too many.

BARBARA: There is just not the bond or tie to, other than curiosity perhaps.

AVEL: Uh huh, yeah. Their kids are here, their kids were raised here, the kids are American, you know. Like Ocamica, he says, "I'm going to go back to Spain." I said, "You're not when you retire, you're not going to go back to Spain." I said, "Rosie and Rufino aren't going to go back to Spain. Your grandchildren are going to be here, your family dying off over there."

DOROTHEA: How many of them speak the Basque language as, well I'll call it your Basque language?

AVEL: Here in Burns?

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

AVEL: You mean of the old time, from the old country?

DOROTHEA: The old Basque, yeah.

AVEL: I would say out of those twelve families I just mentioned, probably nine of them were taught the same lingo I talk. The other three talk the Guipuzcoa. But we understand each other; it's just a little different lingo. They claim they speak the pure Basque.

DOROTHEA: Is it kind of like the southern, like the south and the north, one has a little

more drawl?

AVEL: Uh huh. And Tony called me the other night, and the biggest Basco I ever seen in my life. And he said --- well the guy called the house, and it was just about suppertime, dinnertime. And he asked me in Basque if I was Basque. And I said, "Yeah." He says --- I said, "Where are you from, or what do you want?" I knew he was a stranger. I mean not leery of him, but he said, "Well I'm down here at your kid's restaurant, and he told me to call you, or he called you and give me the phone." Said, "I'll go down and see, I'll be down." So I went down. Biggest man, I don't mean fat, he was big. He was wearing shorts, and he was a foreigner too, and had thighs on him, arm, a brute of a man.

DOROTHEA: Like a hulk.

AVEL: He had an American wife. I said, "Well how long have you been in this country?" He said, "Twenty years." And had two beautiful kids, one blond and one dark. Wife was a fair-haired gal. And his mother, just here from Spain, was with them. They was going to go to Bend, just seeing the country. I said, "Where do you live?" And he said, "Emmett." I said, "How long have you been in Emmett?" And I think he told me nineteen years. Herded sheep for nine years. Spoke good English. Had his wife speaking Basque, and she is not a Basque gal. And those two little boys, one twelve and one about eight, just rattling it --- Same type of Basque as I talk. So we was shooting the breeze there, and finally he says --- we wasn't, no English at all. And his mother was a yakking at me, we was having a ball. And the mother finally asked me, said, "Well when did you come to this country?" I said, "I was born in this country." "Oh, you couldn't have been." I said, "Why not?" I knew what the answer was. Well you speak, they were Vizcaya's. Well you speak Basque too well to be raised in this country. I said, "Well I started it when I was a kid." You see Julio never spoke Basque, Morris spoke Basque.

DOROTHEA: Yeah. Do you still remember a lot of it? I was talking to the Eki's here a couple of years ago, and Frank does not remember Japanese hardly at all.

AVEL: Well I --- no I don't have a bit of problem with it. Just like these people, we just spoke Basque, and never missed a beat, you know.

DOROTHEA: Do your kids?

AVEL: Huh?

DOROTHEA: Do your kids speak Basque?

AVEL: No, this big brute of a guy just really got on me. He says, "I spoke Basque to your boy in there, and he says he doesn't understand nothing." I said, "No, I never taught him Basque." "Why didn't you?" I said, "Well my wife is an American," I told him. American, you know. Well he said, "My wife is American too, but by god my kids speak Basque." (Laughter) Had a good visit with him.

BARBARA: Do the majority of the children of the families; well say like your children don't, do most of the other children just never have the desire to learn?

AVEL: Well they learned when they were kids. And they did in grade school. By this time the folks were picking up a little English, so they come home, and the parents wanted to learn English, because they are doing all their business with, you know, in English. They are banking; they are grocery shopping, doctors, and whatever. And so the first thing you know the parents are learning English, and the kids are forgetting Basque.

And it makes me kind of mad, like Ocarinas, because we are real close, Rosie and Ruffino. They can't hardly speak any Basque at all. And when I talk to them in Basque, they will answer me in English. They understand what I am saying, and they know what I'm saying.

BARBARA: But it's too hard for them to put it into words, to think of the words.

AVEL: Yeah. I think it is a shame; because here was kids that spoke good Basque until they started to school, see. And the mother speaks just damn near perfect English. The old man is still pretty broken.

DOROTHEA: Well I know when I taught, I can't remember the girl now, but she is married to the Hofman, one of the Hofman boys.

AVEL: Oh yeah, Amparo Lete.

DOROTHEA: Yeah. She talks ---

AVEL: Good Basque.

DOROTHEA: --- good Basque.

AVEL: Good Basque. Now see there is an odd case that is really interesting. The dad is Vizcaya, the mother is a Guipuzcoa. And she speaks; well she picks up some of her mother's lingo.

DOROTHEA: And some of her dad's.

AVEL: And her dad's, see. So I get a bang out of her, I'll tell you. Now those two boys, and there is two boys.

BARBARA: Jesse and Harvey.

AVEL: Jesse and Harvey speak good Basque, beautiful Basque. And I think these Bidaburus do, but Ocamicas have forgot it, Andueza kids won't speak it. And the time will come they wish, maybe it will come back to them. They wish maybe they kept it up. But I'm not sorry I ---

DOROTHEA: Are you sorry you didn't teach your kids?

AVEL: Yeah. And all of them chew on me. Say Dad, I wish you would have taken time and taught us Basque. I was too busy working, you know.

DOROTHEA: Well we've kept you here, if there is not anything else that Barbara has to ask, and if you don't have anything else to say, we probably had ought to close.

AVEL: You're probably tired of me by now.

DOROTHEA: No.

BARBARA: No.

DOROTHEA: No, we can sit and listen to you for hours, but it's almost two hours, so ---

AVEL: Yeah. And I'm sorry I was late.

DOROTHEA: Oh, that's no problem.

AVEL: I was pulling weeds in the alley, and hot, and ---

DOROTHEA: But we'd like to thank you for the afternoon, and the interesting visit.

AVEL: Yeah. And thanks for waiting.

BARBARA: No problem.

(END OF TAPE)

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