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HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #494

Subject: Ruel Teague [daughter Paula Teague present]

Place: Teague home, Burns OR

Date: August 21, 2018

Interviewer: Laurie O'Connor

Release Form: Yes

LAURIE O'CONNOR: Good morning. This is Laurie O'Connor from the Harney County Library and it is August 21, 2018. I am in Burns, Oregon, and I am hoping to get a few stories from Mr. Ruel Teague. Ruel, would you tell me your full name, and where you were born, and when.

RUEL TEAGUE: Yeah, this is Ruel Teague. I was born in Calvin, Oklahoma in 1927, August 17th.

LAURIE: You just had a birthday.

RUEL: Yep.

LAURIE: How old are you? Don't lie!

RUEL: Ninety-one, I guess.

LAURIE: That is impressive. You really look good.

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RUEL: I hope so.

LAURIE: Well, Ruel, what was it like where you were born? What was it like growing up in Oklahoma? What did your family do there?

RUEL: Farming.

LAURIE: What kind of farming.

RUEL: Oh, just general. They did a little bit of everything—corn, watermelon, you always have to have watermelons, you know.

LAURIE: Down there where you can grow them, yes.

RUEL: And then of course, beans, whatever, just something to survive on. Back in them days, it was just survival.

LAURIE: That was just dryland farming, and you took the weather as it came?

RUEL: Yep. We had to depend on the weather. And then, of course, about '30 to '38, it was nothing but droughts, all through there.

LAURIE: That was the heart of the dustbowl in there.

RUEL: Yeah, right.

LAURIE: And I imagine at that time, they farmed with teams? Horses or mules?

RUEL: Yeah. Horses and mules. I think most of ours was with mules, 'cause when they were farmin' they preferred the mules, for some reason. Well, the reason is because they are easier to keep, and they're more... well, I shouldn't say this, but they're smarter, smarter than the horses. [*chuckling*]

LAURIE: Rumor has it they are smarter than horses. Did you work with the mules then?

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RUEL: Oh yeah, when I was still young I used to skid logs with a pair of mules, and then I skidded logs with a pair of Percherons. I used to plow in the fields, with mules.

LAURIE: How young would you have been when you were doing that kind of work. Ruel?

RUEL: About thirteen, fourteen.

LAURIE: That's pretty young. Working a big team.

RUEL: Oh yeah. And I skidded logs with them, and that's really dangerous. Even an adult can hardly turn 'em and (.....) But, I knew horses and mules, and I'd been around them ever since I was a little kid. So I was the guy they figured could handle the team, and still keep the sawmill and ever'thing goin'.

LAURIE: So there was enough timber in Oklahoma?

RUEL: Well, mostly, when I was doin' this it was mostly in Arkansas and Missouri'.

LAURIE: So you had moved?

RUEL: Yes, I had moved. I think we left Oklahoma I was about four or somethin' like that.

LAURIE: And what part of Arkansas and Missouri were you in?

RUEL: I was in.... Actually, the town was Omaha, Arkansas, and that is right next to Branson, Missouri', and that is where I spent my last years, till I was about.... I left home when I was, oh, fifteen, fourteen or fifteen, somewhere in there.

LAURIE: That's young, but it wasn't uncommon, back then, for young men to leave home. And what did you do when you left home?

RUEL: I went to Colorado, and worked in the broom corn harvest, or maize, or whatever they call it. It was fall, and harvesting all of that stuff. And then I worked in the wheat harvest.

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LAURIE: Teams again?

RUEL: No by that time, I think I was about sixteen then, by the time I got out there, and we had, believe it or not, self-propelled combines!

LAURIE: That early?

RUEL: Yeah, when I was out and seen our first combine, when was that? I would say, it was about '43, '44, somewhere in there.

LAURIE: What make was that? I did not realize they had self-propelled combines that early.

RUEL: Yeah, that was-- Hmm. I have to think about that. I can't remember what they was, but I remember what they looked like.

LAURIE: I'll bet you'll think of it. You'll find a picture or something of old equipment and recall.

RUEL: But I, uh-- When I first went out there, I had an old Baldwin, twenty-foot header on it, that I pulled with a tractor.

RUEL: McCormick Deering! I thought of it, the self-propelled combine!

LAURIE: McCormick. That was an early make of equipment? What did you think when you left home so young? Was it scary? Or were you excited? Was it an opportunity, or a necessity?

RUEL: Well, it was a necessity, when I didn't get much wages there in Arkansas and Missouri, and I left there, I was makin' about four dollars a day, for eight or ten hours of work, and I was driving an old truck, haulin' logs for this sawmill. And I left, and when I

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got out to Eastern Colorado, I went to work and I was getting eight dollars a day, room and board.

LAURIE: Wow. A jump.

RUEL: Yeah, I thought I had gone to heaven, ya' know.

LAURIE: Did you leave home alone, or did some other siblings go, or did some neighbor kids leave at the same time?

RUEL: Oh, some of the neighbor kids that I ran around with. And Dad had a fit, but I still left anyway.

LAURIE: Do you remember the names of your friends that you left with?

RUEL: Yeah, there names were Tom Vaughn, T. A. Vaughn, and, ah, Willard Ash. And that was from Pineville, Missoura', when I left, and went to Colorada'.

LAURIE: How many years did you do that? How many years did you stay there?

RUEL: About three years, off and on. I didn't stay there all of the time, I would go back to the folks, then go back out there for the harvest time.

LAURIE: Could you keep your wages, or did you have to help your family out?

RUEL: No, when I came home, I gave what money I had to my dad and mother. My stepmother.

LAURIE: Who were your siblings, Ruel? How many kids were in your family?

RUEL: There was five of them. Three boys and two girls.

LAURIE: Do you know their names, and married names?

RUEL: Yeah, as they go, well, the youngest boy came out, and he was workin' and going to school in John Day, and he went to Prairie City to a boxing match, "smoker" they called

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it, and on his way home, the guy he rode with was drunk and killed him. Wrecked the car and killed him. And he was sixteen years old. His name was Stanley. My youngest sister was Deloris and she came out to Oregon and spent some time with my dad and stepmother. And, you know, my brother, he and I came out together, my older brother.

LAURIE: And what was his name again?

RUEL: Nate, Nathaniel, Teague. And then my sister is May [sp.? Mae Lorene Scott d.o.b. 10/18/1929] Scott, and she is still alive.

LAURIE: Where does she live?

RUEL: In Ridgedale, Missouri', and that's just a little bit south of Branson, about eight or ten miles. That's where I grew up, in the Branson area.

LAURIE: So, you are saying your parents came to Oregon at one time. Is that how your younger brother was here?

RUEL: No, my younger brother came out, they sent him out on the bus, Dad did.

LAURIE: He was the first to come to Oregon, your younger brother?

RUEL: No, of course it was us that came first, in 1946, August.

PAULA: So back up to when you and Uncle Nate came, and Earl Tiller, tell her about that.

RUEL: Well, yeah, [*chuckling*] my brother and Earl. Do you know Earl Tiller?

LAURIE: Yes, I do.

RUEL: Well my brother and Earl went to radio school together. They went to boot camp, in the Navy, and then they went to, oh where was that, to regular school?

LAURIE: They went to broadcast school, radio?

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RUEL: No, no, they went for the service, '42, '43. Well, he and Earl got to runnin' around together, they ran around together in the Navy, during the war. And then when my brother came home, he was discharged in 1946, summer of '46, and then we came to Oregon. We was goin' to Klamath Falls to work in the timber, and Earl asked us what we was doin'?' Well, we said we were goin' to work in the timber. And Earl said, why, you should go to work for Hines. Of course, we didn't know anything about this country, and when we came in, all we seen was sagebrush. I didn't see any trees enough to cut for lumber!

LAURIE: Yeah, "Where's the timber?"

RUEL: Well, yeah. [*chuckling*] So, the next morning we went down-- In fact, maybe I shouldn't tell this, but when we came in, the night we got here, Mr. and Mrs. Tiller, Pluribus and-- Do you remember what her name was? We always called her "Grandma". Pluribus was the father you know, and in fact, he had a store, a grocery store here, for years and years and years.

LAURIE: In Burns/Hines? A grocery store?

RUEL: Yeah, Tillers did. In fact, they had a store uptown, and they had a store where the Donut Hole and parts house is today. And then they built this deal down here, um....

PAULA: Erickson's.

RUEL: Yeah, Erickson's.

LAURIE: Oh, in the mini mall area, where Erickson's and Rite Aid are now? So Erickson's was their store originally, the Tillers?

RUEL: Yeah, yep, that's the Tiller Store. But, anyway, we came, when Earl told us we ought to go on down here, they wanted to know if we could work in the woods. And we

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said, “Oh yeah, that is what we do, we work in the woods. So we went to Seneca, they hired us, and we went up to Seneca. That was in, hmmm, 1946. August the twenty-eighth.

LAURIE: So you hired right on, Nate and yourself?

RUEL: So we hired on, so of course, my younger brother came later, and was going to school out here, he was gonna’ finish school, and then he got killed in that car wreck. And then my brother moved over to-- What’s that name?

PAULA: Go back to, you met Mom in Seneca.

LAURIE: While you were working for Edward Hines, in Seneca, that was where you met your future wife?

RUEL: Hmm hmm, yeah.

LAURIE: And that was Margaret-- Thompson?

RUEL: No, Johnson. Margaret Johnson. I worked there from ’46 to about ’50, and then we moved to Burns, in May, I believe, of 1950. And, uh, we’ve been here ever since.

LAURIE: Yeah, so let me ask you, what kind of work were you doing for Edward Hines? Were you out in the woods? Did you work in the mill? Were you a sawyer or running equipment?

RUEL: I was out in the woods. I run Cat, bulldozer, and “carryall”, and they had DW10’s and 15’s. I run that. I run about every kind of equipment that they had, and I was kinda’ the guy that filled in for everybody if they got sick or something.

PAULA: And then you were a timber faller.

LAURIE: You fell trees as well? What were the chain saws like back then? What were you using?

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RUEL: I was using a Disston, and when it was fully gassed and everything, it weighed 128 pounds!

LAURIE: That's amazing. What kind of a bar did you have?

RUEL: A six-foot bar.

LAURIE: A six-foot bar?

Paula: Isn't the saw that you used up at the museum?

RUEL: No, well yeah, but that is the lighter one, that's the nine-horse. The other is twelve-horse.

LAURIE: Wow. A twelve-horse, over a hundred pounds. That's impressive.

RUEL: Yeah, well it was impressive, and it was something as I grew up when I was a kid, I was Dad's other end of the crosscut saw. So I know pretty much about a crosscut saw, and a broadaxe. Do you know what a broadaxe is? Ok, well, with a broadaxe, I made a lot of ties with a broadaxe.

LAURIE: Back in Arkansas, Missouri?

RUEL: Yeah, when I was twelve, thirteen years old. At one job I skidded all the ties. We had a bunch of "tie hackers", we called 'em. So I skidded all of the ties out so they could haul them to the railroad station for sale. So I pretty well know what work is.

LAURIE: Yes, from a very early age. And dangerous work also. So did you ever have close calls? Did you see very many bad accidents in the woods, either back there or once you moved here?

RUEL: Yeah, I was workin' in the woods-- Timber fallin' is very dangerous. And there were a few guys, I helped carry them out. The reason I finally quit was because I had

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escaped death about two or three times, big limbs and fallin' trees that hit another tree or somethin'. And a [kick around?] almost got me, so finally I thought maybe I'd better quit.

And then I bought, in 1961, down here where-- Hmmm.

LAURIE: It was a wrecking yard, or a parts store?

RUEL: No, down here it was, what's it called? Oh, the Smoke Shop? That's my place there. About then, I bought all of that.

LAURIE: Ok, but just a minute, when you quit logging, you had a young family by then? You married in which year?

RUEL: I married in 1947.

LAURIE: Ok, so you had a young family and you quit logging around...1950?

RUEL: 1961.

LAURIE: Ok. How did you meet your wife?

RUEL: Well I met her in John Day, well actually not too long after we got here, I met her in John Day, and then after, I thought she was with somebody else, so I didn't ask her to go with me for a date. So, I, uh, of course when we went back to Seneca, why I met her. Of course, so the kids up there all got together, ya' know. So she said, why don't we go to this shivaree? And we was shivareein' this guy by the name of Curly Radinovich, and his wife. They had just got married, and that was in '46...

LAURIE: What is a "shivaree"?

RUEL: You don't know what a shivaree is?

LAURIE: I might, but I don't think I knew it by that name. I think I've heard of it.

RUEL: Well, you go and you surprise them, at night, when they're together.

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LAURIE: Oh! Newly wed couples.

RUEL: Oh yeah, and you fire guns and make all kinds of noise. And then they're supposed to treat you to whatever they've got in the house. And guys would get a little carried away, used to sometimes. They didn't while I was there. I don't like this ol' foolish mistreatin' somebody just because--

LAURIE: Yes, just as a joke. It's not funny sometimes.

RUEL: It used to be they'd take the guy out, maybe they'd throw him in a pond, or something. But anyway, we had to go to this shivaree, my wife and I, and we had another gal along, her name was Dodie Roth [Barott] it used to be. Dodie is still in Seneca. We went in my car, we went to this shivaree, which was across the Silvies River, which is where the shop was. And Curly and her lived in a little house, or a cabin or something. Anyway, we went to this shivaree, and that is when I really met my wife. And after I found her, I didn't look anymore.

LAURIE: Good for you. And good for her!

RUEL: Sixty-eight years.

LAURIE: I know. That is history. That is something! You were playing music by then? Did you play music with bands and at dances and things, when you first came here? Your whole family was musical, I believe, your father played music.

RUEL: Yeah, Dad did. And of course my mother died when I was eight, so I had a stepmother, and she wasn't musical, she was just a good lady. And so, Dad, he would play the fiddle and of course I would play the guitar behind him. And my brother and I, we had a fiddle, guitar, and uh, harmonica. And so, I learned to play fiddle, guitar, or thought I did, anyway. I played until everybody leaves you.

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LAURIE: So you just started playing by ear?

RUEL: Yeah.

LAURIE: And then you also learned to read music?

RUEL: No. Oh, I can read music, but I have to put it in my guitar, or on my fiddle. I don't use that. You can give me a verse and chorus on a song, and I'll just play it with my fiddle or guitar, it doesn't matter.

LAURIE: That just amazes me.

RUEL: You said you play mandolin?

LAURIE: Oh, well, I had picked it up. I had some music. I played piano for about ten years, and played in bands with some instruments. And then, about four, five years ago, I decided to order a mandolin, thinking I could take it out when we went camping, because we ride mules and horses, all over in the mountains. So I thought I could have a mandolin when we were out. I worked at it for about six months, and then I just got too busy. So, I really liked it, and I have to go back and start playing it again. But I would like to play more by ear. I am so darned dependent on sheet music and printed chords. I would like to be more like you.

RUEL: Yeah, well, it's like all of those songs-- I probably know five or six hundred songs by heart. People get kind of aggravated, they'll say, "Oh ask Ruel. He'll know that song, and give you every chord in it." And, it kinda' gawks 'em, but I learned how to do it, and so--

LAURIE: It's just kind of like second nature to you.

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RUEL: Yeah, it kind of aggravates me, of course I teach, kids to play fiddle, guitar, mandolin, banjo, whatever. It's kind of, to me, kind of disgusting to get somebody who can't seem to pick it up like I did.

LAURIE: Yeah, well, I'm not going to play for you, Ruel! [*all laughing*]

LAURIE: So, when you came in and started a business in town, in 1961 you moved from Seneca to Burns?

RUEL: Well, yeah, I had moved to Burns in 1950. And I worked in the woods here, I did all kinds of jobs. In Seneca, I even drove truck, log truck. I did everything that they had. I think I worked for the company for exactly about fifteen years, I think.

LAURIE: For Edward Hines?

RUEL: For Hines Lumber Company, yeah.

LAURIE: So then, when you started a business, that's a little bit out on a limb but you and your wife probably talked about the safety of being in the woods.

RUEL: Oh yeah, that's what it is.

LAURIE: So then, you went out on a limb to start your own business. What business did you have at first?

RUEL: I had a repair business, but whenever I got ready to try to go to something else, we prayed about it, and maybe I shouldn't tell you about these kind of things?

LAURIE: Oh no, that is fine. That is good to know.

RUEL: And my wife and I, we kinda' did a few things and we would say, "Lord, does it work this way? Then make it work the way it should." So we would ask, "If you want us to do this?" So I got in business, and it wasn't easy, but I started in, and of course we went

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from repairs, to sellin' cars. We used to sell Nash, or American Motors, what they called it. You know, they change the names of them. Anyway, we got to selling Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep, GMC, and Datsun.

LAURIE: And so you changed locations, a couple of times. You started out down by the old smoke shop.

RUEL: Smoke Shop. Then I went right to where Jerry [Woodfin] is now.

LAURIE: So, who owned that spot before? Was that Johnson?

RUEL: Yeah, Johnson. Johnson.

LAURIE: Dora? And Ray, or Roy?

RUEL: Roy. Roy Johnson.

LAURIE: So they built that, and had it for a few years, and then you moved up and took that over? And what vehicles-- What make were you selling there?

RUEL: Chrysler, at the time Plymouth. Dodge, Jeep, GMC.

LAURIE: It seemed like at the time there were a lot of auto dealerships here, in the fifties and sixties.

RUEL: There was quite a few. The Chevrolet garage had one. Ford garage, Ray Weeks, and then there was quite a few little ones.

PAULA: There was Ganger & Grover?

RUEL: That was Chevrolet. And then there was, oh, used cars and shops here, too.

LAURIE: And the economy here would support that many dealerships here at that time?

RUEL: Oh yeah, it was good. But now, the stupid thing is that they left this stuff all die, fall over and rot and burn.

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LAURIE: The timber?

RUEL: The timber. How it used to be, why, it had an income for Harney County, but not anymore. They let 'em stand out there and rot and fall down, and then the fires come through. They wonder why they burn so hot. Why, the reason they burn so hot is because all of that stuff has fallen onto the ground that should have been harvested. But they don't harvest it anymore. They have messed it up completely. It's sad, but that's the way it is.

LAURIE: And you don't think that any of the problem lies in competition with other countries that seem to undersell our timber? Is that any part of the problem?

RUEL: No, I don't think so. We could still compete with whatever, yeah. Because we had the roads built through all of this country. We wouldn't have to worry about building any roads anymore, like we used to. I used to have a steady job running a bulldozer, buildin' the first part of the roads. Went to other jobs, learned how to do all of their stuff because, I guess, though I didn't think much about it at the time, like if I was fallin' timber and they didn't have anybody on a Cat, why, I would go and run that Cat for them.

LAURIE: Skidding? Bringing the logs in, working the deck.

RUEL: Yeah, or I could bunk logs, cut trees, whatever they needed.

LAURIE: But you were there during some of that major road-building period, so you know a lot about the building of the roads for Edward Hines? That was quite an era, a big time in our history here. So, when you started your business, it was hard at first, and gradually you got more secure?

RUEL: It got a little easier, and then of course every time I turned around, there was another job, another business that come up. We used to have a tire shop. What was left of the tire shop, my son-in-law, and daughter, Peggy-- I don't know if you know Peggy?

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LAURIE: Yes, what was the last name? Ausmuson?

PAULA: Asmussen.

RUEL: They had the tire shop. Well, first he came and wanted to work for us, in the shop. And then he wanted to go into the tire shop. I supported on this tire shop, and then he wanted to go to Alaska. So he left and went to Alaska, so I had the tire shop, and during that time I bought, there at the airport, built a hangar out there.

LAURIE: Oh, the airport. Were you a pilot also?

RUEL: I was a pilot for about thirty years. Forty years.

LAURIE: When did you start flying? I didn't know this.

RUEL: Nineteen—1950? 1965. I was about thirty-eight years old, something like that. And that was, I had nearly ten, eleven thousand hours when I quit flying.

LAURIE: That's a lot of hours. Mostly just out, around here?

RUEL: Yeah, mostly out here. I was a taxi, I had an air taxi certificate. And I did that, and we had a guy that repaired airplanes, and taught.

LAURIE: Who was that, Ruel?

RUEL: His name was John [Seablom]. And then, things went to heck. Well, he got to where he wasn't doing anything, but drink coffee, smoke cigarettes, and read a book. He wouldn't finish his work.

LAURIE: Partnerships are hard, often times. What kind of planes did you fly?

RUEL: I threw everything, from little tail-draggers, to the biggest thing I ever flew was a Cessna Citation 3, and that was a jet. I got to fly one of them one time, and I have owned

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a prop jet and for the Hoyt Cattle Company, I flew for them. And I flew a Cessna 425 Conquest.

LAURIE: I don't know what that is, but I will go looking for pictures.

RUEL: And then I put in about four, five hundred hours. The planes that I had were a 150, a 172, a 185 Cessna, and then I had a Cessna 310, which is a twin. I can fly twins, or whatever.

LAURIE: So, with smaller planes, what kind of jobs would you have?

RUEL: I would fly to and count sheep or goats in the mountains, or elk, or deer.

LAURIE: Game counts.

RUEL: And then if somebody wanted to go to California, I would put them in the plane, fly down, and drop them off, and come back.

LAURIE: That is a real taxi then.

PAULA: And you helped fly people that were sick.

RUEL: Oh yeah, I would take them, before we got this thing that we got now.

LAURIE: I should have introduced you at the beginning, Paula. Would you introduce yourself, please?

PAULA: Hi. I am Paula Teague. I am Ruel's youngest daughter. And I am here to be with my dad, and to help him with whatever.

LAURIE: Helping us relay this history. I should have done this at the beginning.

LAURIE: So, you were doing taxi service, and official work for the ODFW or the game agencies. You flew for Hoyt Ranches.

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RUEL: Oh, I have flown for a lot of them around here, the ranches. I flew for the electric outfits, and I used to fly all of the power lines.

LAURIE: Looking for problems, line issues?

RUEL: Yeah, like the crossbars might be broken down, and they'd want to find them and line breaks, and we'd fly to Denio, McDermitt, on down to Winnemucca.

LAURIE: So, you'd have to fly pretty low doing that, almost like crop dusting?

RUEL: Oh yeah, you'd have to fly right along the lines so you could see it.

LAURIE: Any close calls flying?

RUEL: Not really, only close call that I ever had, I went to Wyoming, and I was bringing a plane back that they had stuck back together, and they didn't really have it working good. I was gonna' land and get gas, and the right brake hung up on it, and I swerved into a snowbank. But that was about it, the only close call I ever had-- Well, no, I was coming back from John Day, one time, where I had flown for the Forest Service all day, and I was coming back, somebody had been stealing my gas. I'd been kind of accusing the people who kept saying that someone was stealing gas at the airport, and uh, I found out that they was, 'cause I should have had about an hour and fifteen minutes left in my airplane, but ran out of fuel and I had to land on the highway up here.

LAURIE: Oh! You didn't quite make it home? But you landed safely on the highway? Did you get any strange expressions from the cars as they were meeting you?

RUEL: No, when I landed, there wasn't a soul. I just pulled off and shoved my plane back on the edge. It was just around the corner, where the big rock is, as you are going up [HWY] 395.

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LAURIE: So before you are into the canyon up there?

RUEL: Yep, well, I was in the canyon when I went down. And I landed and backed it off on that road that goes around there. And this guy drove up there, he was this Canadian, and he said, "Well, gad, is this the way you people fly down here?" Well, I says, "I'd tell you, but I run out of gas!" [*Laughing*] "Somebody has been stealing my gas, but I didn't know it." [*Still laughing*]

LAURIE: What year do you think that would have been? Sixties? Seventies?

RUEL: Nineties? We were running the airport then--

PAULA: No. It had to have been the late eighties.

RUEL: Well, anyway, he wanted to know if he could stay and watch me take off. And I said, "Well, yeah." But the dirty part about it was that we had a big blowout up at the--

PAULA: Airport?

RUEL: Well, yeah, we had a big show out at the airport, and I was the only pilot we had at the time that could do the flyin' at the time. And I was going to go fly that day, and I was just getting back, but then we had a-- The Elks was having a party up at the, at the-- What's the name up there?

PAULA: Idlewild.

RUEL: Idlewild, yeah. So then everyone was all up there, and then they're coming back, and I am sitting there, on the highway. [*Laughing*] Do you know Dick and Patty Jenkins?

LAURIE: Oh sure.

RUEL: Well, they was here, and they grabbed ten gallons of gas, and they put it in the helicopter and brought it up, set down on the pavement. And my son-in-law came up, and

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we were fueling the plane up with gas, and here's everybody, everybody is sittin' and watching me. [*Laughing*]. Well, there I was, and they're saying, "Hey, you're flying for the public", and that was kind of bad. And I had an outfit they were trying to--trying to take my business. But the good part was those guys, I told them what had happened, I called them and told them. And so, they jumped in a plane, they were coming over here anyway to check me out. The--

LAURIE: The F... FAA? Federal Aviation Administration?

RUEL: Yeah, so they were coming over here to check me out. And they had filled their plane up, and from Portland, from Eugene to here, they used 65 gallons of fuel! And they said--- [*tapping the table*]

LAURIE: "You could run low on fuel out here!"

RUEL: Yeah, they said, "We know now about this running out of fuel." And they were stealing gas everywhere. Well this guy, we finally caught him, and he was gone. Anyway-

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LAURIE: And that was happening where? The fuel was getting lifted where, at Burns or John Day?

RUEL: At Burns. Well of course we had seen the guy, we were running the airport, and we had seen him going by, checking out the airplanes. All you gotta' to do is back under the wings of an airplane, and you can fill a pickup just like that.

PAULA: Well, and there were fires at that time. You were flying fires?

RUEL: I was flying everything.

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PAULA: But, he always would fill his airplane up the night before, so he knew how many hours those gallons would fly.

RUEL: So he had stolen about twenty-five gallons out of my plane.

LAURIE: That is so dangerous. A horrible history.

RUEL: Yeah, well, anyway, all that I got outta' that was, I seen a gal and she was working up at the bank, and I went up to the bank, and she said, "Well, Ruel, I was up there when you took off with that airplane, when you had to land on the road, when you ran out of fuel." She said, "That was the most exciting thing I think I have ever seen!" And it was, for me, too. [*laughing*]

LAURIE: I am glad you enjoyed it.

RUEL: [*Laughing*] Well, I couldn't do anything different. I just had to do it, well I just pulled that old 210 out of there and flew it into Burns.

LAURIE: Too bad there were so many witnesses, but it sounds like you handled it with professionalism.

RUEL: That's something that I told the guy that was raising Cain about the airport, he was trying to get my business. And he said, "Sounded to me like you handled it pretty good." I sure wasn't strung out on a rock pile, on a high mountain. I landed it where I was supposed to.

LAURIE: What was going through your mind at that moment, when you were running out of fuel in the mountains. What does a pilot think about?

RUEL: Where to land.

LAURIE: Where to land. You just look for that spot.

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RUEL: And I knew the area, so I just went down. I had to watch my wing over one big rock, close to where the railroad crossing used to be up there. But anyway, you gotta' keep an eye on your wing over that one big rock, and then you gotta' swing back, and land.

LAURIE: Other pilots have told me that every time they fly, they are always looking for that emergency landing.

RUEL: Yep. That's what you do. Yeah. You know all of the time, if you had to. Usually, if you're ten, twelve, thousand feet in the air, well, you've got six thousand feet above the ground, and you've got enough room to go right, left, whichever direction. And if you're going east, you can go south, you can go north, you can go back where you came from, you just have to know where you are at.

LAURIE: Impressive. To me.

RUEL: Anyway, that was the only real spooker that I really had.

LAURIE: What year was the airport actually built? When did it become an official airport?

RUEL: Oh, it was way back, during World War II, the first part of World War II they used it to supply 337's, which was the [Cessna] Skymaster. They used it for training.

LAURIE: That was a long enough runway?

RUEL: Oh yes, it's long enough now. We've had jets out there. In fact, we had an F4 come in here one time. It showed he was out of fuel. Well, the wire had just come off of the tank.

LAURIE: So, they had a technical problem, not an actual fuel problem?

RUEL: Yeah. But everybody was worried they wouldn't get it off of there, but I said, "Yeah, they will. Don't worry." That runway they were on was fifty-two hundred feet, over a mile. And I said, "He will get off before he even gets to the intersection." And they

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had, oh man, everybody was going to watch this. Anyway, they got him fueled up, and two or three days later, they came and checked him all out, and they were making sure he was alright. And, I have to laugh, because the power they have, and the power that I don't have, and there's a lot less he can take off with. Anyway, he sat there on the end of that runway, and he just pulled that thing wide open, you could hear that ol' jet just a bawlin', you know. And so, as he, of course, was holding the brakes on it before he turns it loose, why there was fence posts, wires, sagebrush, everything just a flyin'! [*Laughter*] I said, "God almighty! I hardly have enough power to just get off of the ground!" Anyway, he come off before he even got to the intersection. He come off, which is less than half of the entire way.

LAURIE: That kind of power, with equipment like that, it just shakes your bones.

RUEL: Yeah, I was there a-shaking, when he lifted out of there.

LAURIE: Awesome.

RUEL: So he goes on out, and real cute, he comes back over the runway, and he did three barrel rolls.

LAURIE: Oh that showoff! Nice.

RUEL: Wooooeee!

LAURIE: What year was that, Ruel, do you remember?

RUEL: Um, I don't remember when that was, for sure.

LAURIE: That must have been a spectacle, though, around here.

RUEL: It was. Everyone in town came out, and I was out there working all of the time.

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LAURIE: So, the airport started around World War II. Did it start as a military base? Who built it initially, and did it go through private hands?

RUEL: No, it has been city, all the way through.

LAURIE: So, it just went through different management?

RUEL: Yeah, we managed it for four years.

LAURIE: It has had a lot of ups and downs, it seems. I've lived here almost thirty years, and it often seems to draw controversy. And then it rights itself.

RUEL: You've always got so many people that knows how to run an airport, that have never run an airport. They don't know anything, you know.

LAURIE: Do you think it is a pretty healthy airport though? I imagine it has done a lot for this community.

RUEL: Oh yeah, but people don't realize it.

LAURIE: They don't recognize it for its value?

RUEL: Yeah, yeah.

LAURIE: It could be more, perhaps. I would like to see better services.

RUEL: You see, we used to have a DC3 come in here, an airline came in here daily and finally it just washed out. And it never did come back in here.

LAURIE: How many people could sit in a DC3? How many passengers?

RUEL: Um, probably twelve.

PAULA: Dad, didn't they, when they were coming in for, when they brought all those people in to buy the lands out there--

RUEL: Oh, yeah, that was what they were doing flying in.

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LAURIE: The speculators?

RUEL: Yeah, yeah, to buy land, land sales.

PAULA: They were selling all the land out there.

LAURIE: Out by Harney Lake, and Mud Lake, those sections that they plotted out?

RUEL: No, no, right out here. Out of Burns.

PAULA: What's that called? Actually, it's from here to Crane to Buchanan. All of that sagebrush land. They would bring people in, in the winter, when it was covered with snow, and they sold a lot of property that way.

LAURIE: Yes, well that happened in several spots, throughout Eastern Oregon, and in Harney County.

RUEL: Well, they did that over at Christmas Valley, too.

PAULA: And then they, the people, they would come, when there was no snow and it wasn't exactly like they thought it was.

LAURIE: I think some people bought it sight unseen, as well. "I can own forty acres or whatever for \$50/acre. That's amazing!" When it wasn't worth five dollars per acre then.

RUEL: Yeah, yeah. Three dollars per acre.

LAURIE: So, you never ranched, yourself?

RUEL: Well, we ranched for the kids. We had horses, two or three or four cows, and the kids had three or four or five horses.

PAULA: And a pig.

RUEL: Oh yeah, and pigs. Oh yeah, we had a couple of pigs.

PAULA: His name was "Porky".

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LAURIE: Porky? Oh oh. I don't want to ask about Porky's fate.

PAULA: Yes, and I was like about four, three or four or five years old, and they butchered Porky, and I wouldn't eat any meat.

RUEL: She was like, "Waa waa-- Oh no, not Porky!"

PAULA: It was sad.

LAURIE: I think any of us that grew up in rural areas learned that lesson awfully hard. Pets and meat.

PAULA: And well, then, Dad with the cows and stuff. And of course, Patsy, my second sister, well we would always want to name them. And Dad would say, "Don't do that. We're gonna' eat them." "Oh, no, not Teddy and Reddy, Dad!"

LAURIE: It's hard, it's hard. A fact of life though.

PAULA: Yes, it's what you learn.

LAURIE: So, your children? You have three daughters, and a son?

RUEL: Yeah.

LAURIE: And, you raised a foster son, right?

RUEL: Yeah.

LAURIE: Could you tell me your children, from oldest to youngest? Or, you could help, Paula.

RUEL: Well, the oldest is Peggy. The next one is Patsy. The next one is Paula. The next one is Pete. And John, he is older than the rest of them, Johnny. But we didn't get Johnny until he was about ten, or twelve years old.

LAURIE: That's your foster son? What is his birth name?

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RUEL: Johnny Tyler. Let me see, I called him--

PAULA: Well, his real name was Johnny Tyler, but he went by the Johnny Lynch, for a while.

RUEL: Yeah, well, his stepdad was Lynch, and he went by that.

LAURIE: And he lived with you from ten on?

RUEL: Well, he was in and out of the family, until he was about fourteen, and then we-- His stepdad and I had a set-to, and I took care of the set-to, and I asked the mother, "Do you want me to take him home?" And she said, "Yep. Take him home." So he came and stayed with us then. When we lived down on Riverside Drive.

LAURIE: How many of your children play music?

RUEL: Oh, they all play a little piano.

LAURIE: Was Margaret musical also? Did your wife play?

RUEL: No, she didn't, but well, she made sure the kids would practice.

LAURIE: So all the kids play something?

RUEL: They played piano, and Paula now is learning now how to play Dobro slide.

LAURIE: Oh nice.

PAULA: And he has got a granddaughter, which is my daughter, Stacy, and she is a champion fiddler.

LAURIE: I have read about Stacy. Where does she live now? She has played on some big venues, I think.

PAULA: Yes, she has. She is in Elko.

LAURIE: Does she ever come up here and play?

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RUEL: Oh yeah, she came up here to play at our country music jamboree. Do you know anything about it?

LAURIE: Yes, I do. I didn't make it this year, but that is my next question, actually.

PAULA: Yeah, she was a teacher.

RUEL: She was a teacher. She was an instructor for two days, down here, for us.

LAURIE: And she plays which instruments? She fiddles and--

RUEL: She plays fiddle, mandolin, and guitar.

LAURIE: Nice. That is just so impressive, to share that with your family and let it spread.

RUEL: Yeah, but her fingers, she's getting where she's crooked with the arthritis, she's only-- Is she forty-one?

PAULA: Yeah. And there's time where she can't play 'cause it's like they are sausages, her fingers, and she can't play.

LAURIE: Oh, what a tragedy.

RUEL: Well, she played in Branson for a couple of years, she played with all kinds of different people. Box Car Willie. Maybe you've heard of a couple of 'em. She played Box Car Willie. Glen Campbell.

LAURIE: Kenny Rogers?

RUEL: Well, she never played on the Kenny Rogers Show. She played Box Car Willie, Glen Campbell.

PAULA: Showboat, Branson Bound. Dixie Stampede. Um, Mel Tillis. What's the one that just died? Oh, with the Alzheimer's-- Glen Campbell. She played in different theaters.

RUEL: And she played with Acuff. What's his name? Carl.

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LAURIE: Oh, Roy?

RUEL: No, it wasn't Roy, it was his boy.

PAULA: Yeah, Carl, she played in his band, and she also played with Ralph Stanley.

RUEL: Oh yeah, she played with Ralph Stanley, and Bill Monroe. Yeah, she did the opening for him.

LAURIE: That's major league! Good for her.

PAULA: I know. It gives me goosebumps.

RUEL: Yeah, I had to be, I had to back her with the guitar.

LAURIE: You had to back her. I like that.

PAULA: Well, you know, he is an awesome rhythm. I mean, a lot of people cannot back a fiddle. I mean, they just, they just don't know how to do it. And at the contest, she played in contests ever since she was five, and of course, people would come grab Dad to back them up. It's really an art. You can't just go play the fiddle. And like down there, she hasn't found anybody that can back her up.

LAURIE: Like he could. I've heard that from other musicians. It's like being the hazer in a bulldogging.

PAULA: Yes, that is for sure.

LAURIE: So, Ruel, what is your history with the High Desert Fiddlers, and, you've actually been involved with musical groups nationwide, haven't you?

RUEL: Well, I've been a member of the Blue Mountain Fiddlers, and the High Desert Fiddlers, and the Oregon Old Time Fiddlers.

LAURIE: And, from way back you started?

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RUEL: Yeah, I think I started about '78, I think it was.

LAURIE: This jamboree that we have here is now just a jamboree. Wasn't it a contest at one time?

RUEL: Yeah, it was a contest, for about seven years. But we got to where we didn't have enough people to put it on. So we had to back off and do it differently. But, we paid out good.

PAULA: It was the weekend before Weiser. [The National Oldtime Fiddlers' Contest and Festival, in Weiser Idaho]

RUEL: And some of the best fiddlers in the country would come by here.

PAULA: 'Cause they knew that we would pay good here. It was nothing to have at least five hundred people from out of town to come here. And, sadly enough, Harney County didn't even realize what kind of people that we were bringing in.

LAURIE: Oh, and they didn't get behind it, the community as a whole?

RUEL: No, they haven't ever.

LAURIE: I don't want to be too negative, but it often seems to me that Harney County and Burns miss opportunities.

RUEL: They do. They've got a bad case of it.

LAURIE: I don't know why that is.

PAULA: Even the jamboree this year, there was, like, what do you think? Two hundred people, this year, that came in, from out of town, and there was hardly anybody from town out there. And, you know, it doesn't even cost them to go. And the food was absolutely marvelous!

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RUEL: And we have some good musicians, too, that come.

LAURIE: I know a lot of people that that have played, both locally and people that come in from out of town, and they like this event.

PAULA: And even the fiddlers, they used to play out at the fair every year, but now they don't have the right criteria to play there anymore. And so people are calling Dad, "Why aren't you guys playing out at the fairgrounds anymore?" They have another agenda.

RUEL: We didn't have the right kind of music.

LAURIE: You need more amplifiers.

RUEL: Yeah, something you can't hear, after about two or three hours, after you get out of one of those! [*chuckling*]

LAURIE: Don't you still play at the Aspens and out at the Senior Center, what, every month?

RUEL: Yeah, and right over here. At Ashley Manor.

LAURIE: Oh, at Ashley Manor. I did not know you played there, too. And you went to John Day, just last week, you were up fiddling there for several days?

RUEL: Yeah, we was up there for three days, wasn't it?

PAULA: You know, they will play wherever.

LAURIE: Well, I think I have to come back, Ruel, with a video camera, and maybe have you show me some of your instruments, if you wouldn't mind, and play a little music, if you would. I would like to see your instruments and hear some of your history that way, if that would be okay. It seems that would be good to have a history recorded of that. Do you feel that people playing, and small musical time, playing at home, is that fading? I wonder

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if TV and other entertainments, like video games, other passive entertainment, is taking away family music?

RUEL: Yeah, yeah. They don't have the time, they're not going to do it, and rather just sit there and--

LAURIE: Well, and maybe they don't have families with a background in music, either. If you come from a family that plays music, well, you're blessed. I think as long as families keep that going, that is a real heritage, that's a real gift.

PAULA: It's exactly like the Harney County Fair, or any fair, if the parents taught the kids to bring their products into the fair, they will do it when they're older. But if those parents haven't taught their kids, well, it's a dying art. And, it's the same way with fiddling—it's a dying art.

LAURIE: You share your heritage, or if you don't it goes away.

PAULA: And a lot of people, they don't, well like Stacy-- A lot of people used to ask me, "How can you stand that screeching fiddle?" Well, she never did screech the fiddle, and she could always play.

LAURIE: When she was young and learning? They were wondering how you could tolerate her when she was practicing.

PAULA: Yeah. But with Stacy, she never "practiced". I would say, "Come on Stace, let's go play." But we never "practiced". And you know, that "p" word is a bad word to kids. But if you say, "Let's go play", then that was different than to practice.

LAURIE: So the attitude that the parents were sharing was important.

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PAULA: Yes, it is, because we didn't always have Dad, because we moved up to Clatskanie, and so I would back her on the piano, you know. So that's how we kept her going. But if I hadn't have done that, then she would probably have quit.

RUEL: She could have lost it all. Yeah, when they were there, and if there was a contest somewhere, then I would go wherever they was at and play backup for her.

LAURIE: You would find their events and go with them wherever they were, and join them from this corner. There is something else I wanted to ask you about, from another article that I read. You traveled quite a bit, after you retired. You went south, you spent some time in the south, you went down into the southern states for the winter, you and Margaret?

RUEL: Yes, in Arizona.

LAURIE: What did you think of that experience? What was travel like? What were the rewards? How was that different?

RUEL: [*Laughing*] Well, it's not different. You just go down there and you can play to your heart's content down there!

LAURIE: Oh, you could play music there, too?

RUEL: Oh, Lord yes! Yes, in fact where we have our Park Model down there, they have a big rec hall there, and they'll have 200, 250 people down there, every time. They'll usually play Wednesday night.

LAURIE: Where is that, Ruel?

RUEL: Quartzite.

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LAURIE: Quartzite? You're in Quartzite! I've always wanted to see that spectacle. So you are in Quartzite for several months of the winter?

RUEL: Yeah, we usually go down there, at least by November, and we stay until June--um, April.

LAURIE: Well, good for you.

PAULA: You know, we lost Mom two years ago, so Dad and I still go down there. We were playing eight times a week. And if we could have played more, we probably would have. But it's a fun time. It's really good. The people are great, and we're just into the music all of the time. And that is the one thing coming home, you come home and there's nothing. Hopefully you get to play at least once a week, you know. Yeah, it's fun, but we're going down this year.

LAURIE: Well, good for you. Well, what I have heard about Quartzite is that it's just giant chaos, on the edges anyway, it draws thousands of people. The crowds don't bother you? You're fine getting around?

RUEL: Oh yeah, we know how to get around, because we know all of the town. We know all of the roads.

PAULA: You know, the chaos really only happens around the end of December. Well, from the middle of December into February.

LAURIE: When it turns into the giant flea market?

PAULA: Yes. You'll have to come down. I'll give you our card and you can come see.

LAURIE: John and I drove through there one year. We went through just when it was starting, and we only had one day, and we just went out and camped on the BLM

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somewhere, you know, and there were vehicles everywhere. But I was just envious of all of the signs about things going on in town, you know: card games, and pinochle, and speakers—it looked like a grand time.

RUEL: You can do about anything that you want to down there. They have, they teach dancin' and stuff like that, you know.

PAULA: But if you have a four-wheeler or whatever, you can just go everywhere. There are trails all around.

RUEL: You can get on those trails and go a hundred miles if you wanted to.

PAULA: There's always some place to see, and Mexico is only ninety-one miles, and you can go down there. That's fun to go down in there just for the day. You know, it's fun.

LAURIE: Good for you. I am glad you are still going. Well, I am going to wrap this up for today. I think I would like to return to record you playing and to see some of your instruments if you wouldn't mind?

RUEL: Maybe I should play her a tune before she goes, on the harmonica?

PAULA: Well, you could.

LAURIE: That would be great! Would you play me a tune on your harmonica?

RUEL: Yeah. I'll show you something that you will never see again.

PAULA: Unless she has seen it?

RUEL: Unless she has seen me do it. [*Laughing*]

LAURIE: I don't think I have-- So, let's listen to that harmonica.

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[Ruel set up to play, his guitar and accompanying harmonica, held in his mouth without a brace. Six minutes of music on the tape follows. First song unnamed tune from his childhood; second one, "You Are My Sunshine".]