

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #101 - Side A

Subject: Alasna Barainca

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: July 18, 1976

Interviewers: Royal G. Jackson & Jennifer A. Lee

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QUESTION: Why don't you just start telling us when you came here? Was it 15 years ago?

ALASNA BARAINCA: Fifteen and a half years ago.

QUESTION: Why did you come to Burns?

ALASNA: Well my husband, he was working here. So he went over there in 1950 and we met there, and then he went back in 1960 and we married.

QUESTION: You got married in Spain?

ALASNA: In Spain. We came over in 1961. He's been here for years and years and years. In fact, he was born in Boise, then he went back home when he was a few months old with his folks.

QUESTION: Maybe we should talk a little bit about him. He came to the United States in what year?

ALASNA: I don't know. Well he was born here, and the whole family went back home.

QUESTION: How old is your husband?

ALASNA: Fifty-five.

QUESTION: And he was born in Boise?

ALASNA: Yes, in Boise. And a sister and a brother were born in Boise.

QUESTION: So how old was he when he went back to Spain?

ALASNA: A few months old. Then he came back when he was 15 or 16.

QUESTION: Why did he come back then?

ALASNA: Hard times back there.

QUESTION: What kind of work did he do then?

ALASNA: He went to school and then he came over.

QUESTION: Oh, he was a student?

ALASNA: Then he went to work in Owyhee.

QUESTION: Over near the Jordan Valley?

ALASNA: Yeah, he worked there for a year, and then he came over to Harney County.

QUESTION: What kind of work did he do in Owyhee?

ALASNA: Ranch work, with some Basque people. That's what he did here; he was a sheepherder for 15 years, I think.

QUESTION: Here in Harney County?

ALASNA: Yes. Then he went to work at the mill. Well he made trips back and forth. Then he went to work at the mill, and has lived here since.

QUESTION: Maybe we should get his story separately and go ahead and find out about Alasna.

ALASNA: I don't have any story. Nothing exciting has happened during this 15 years.

QUESTION: What Basque province are you from?

ALASNA: Vizcaya. My husband too. In fact just a few miles from each other, you know, towns are really close.

QUESTION: Did you know him before he came back?

ALASNA: No, no.

QUESTION: That's a common thing to do, isn't it? A lot of the Basque bachelors have gone back to get Basque wives?

ALASNA: Uh huh, it is a common thing.

QUESTION: They don't want to marry the American girls?

ALASNA: Well they do, they do more now than they used to.

QUESTION: That's more and more common, to marry outside the culture?

ALASNA: Yeah, now it is.

QUESTION: Let's see, you have children don't you?

ALASNA: Yes, they're in bed right now.

QUESTION: How old are they?

ALASNA: One will be 15, and another is 13.

QUESTION: Do they speak Basque?

ALASNA: Yes.

QUESTION: Do you speak Basque here in the house?

ALASNA: Yes, everybody does.

QUESTION: It's the common language around here?

ALASNA: Yes.

QUESTION: So English is really a second language for you?

ALASNA: A third.

QUESTION: I wish I could speak Spanish as well as you speak English.

ALASNA: Well you do very good in this language, better than I do in English.

QUESTION: Oh no.

ALASNA: Yes, you do. I haven't found very many Americans that speak Spanish like you do.

QUESTION: They are not too interested.

ALASNA: No, they are not. That's too bad.

QUESTION: What about the recent Basque festival that they had in Boise. Did you go?

ALASNA: Yes, I went with my kids.

QUESTION: How was it? Why don't you tell us about it?

ALASNA: It was good.

QUESTION: What kinds of things happened there?

ALASNA: Families get together and have a picnic, and games, and they have a street dance at night.

QUESTION: Did you know anybody there?

ALASNA: Oh yes, everybody. I have aunts that live there, and cousins and friends, and people from ... back home; everything is so close, you know everybody around you. There were three or four families from Canada to the picnic and we knew ...

QUESTION: From where?

ALASNA: From British Columbia, Vancouver.

QUESTION: Is there a large Basque community there?

ALASNA: No, they say there are only 20 people there including kids and all.

QUESTION: Tell me about the Basque Festival. What sorts of things did they do?

ALASNA: Yes. Like weights and pulling the pelota.

QUESTION: They had pelota?

ALASNA: Yes.

QUESTION: They have a handball court there?

ALASNA: Yes, they do in Boise. They also had a bar, very nice. We went to Elko on the Fourth of July.

QUESTION: In Nevada?

ALASNA: Yes. They always have a big festival. That is pretty good.

QUESTION: What kind of things did they do over there?

ALASNA: Oh they mostly drink and eat. I'll show you the newspaper. This is the latest. They have a newspaper in Boise that comes out every month.

QUESTION: Do they have anything like this in Harney County?

ALASNA: No.

QUESTION: Why is that, do you suppose?

ALASNA: Because you need money to do that kind of stuff, I think.

QUESTION: There aren't enough Basques here?

ALASNA: No, not really. And you need to have an organization. I think Elko has a big organization, and the government helps them. We would ask for money providing the government would help us too. But we are not interested. We are not going to die in Harney County.

QUESTION: You don't plan to stay here the rest of our life?

ALASNA: No.

QUESTION: You plan to go back to ...

ALASNA: I don't know. Maybe I'll go to Boise. I'm not going to die in Harney County. This is a lonely place.

QUESTION: Lonely place?

ALASNA: Yes.

QUESTION: Because there are so few Basques?

ALASNA: No, but there isn't much going on.

QUESTION: It is a very small town.

ALASNA: Yes. There is nothing going for the kids. Like in Boise they have dancers and ... if you want to keep your culture, you have to keep going to Boise and to Winnemucca

to see those things.

QUESTION: Would those be the main centers of Basque culture that you know about, Winnemucca, Boise?

ALASNA: Well I have never been to Winnemucca, but I have been in Elko, and I have been in Reno, and the best one I think so far is in Elko.

QUESTION: You are concerned about your kids growing up and losing the Basque culture?

ALASNA: Well I hope they don't, but I know they are going to marry some American, and that is going to be it. It seems to happen to everybody.

QUESTION: Isn't there a tendency among the Basque to encourage ...

ALASNA: Well they encourage the kids, and like, I know a lot of kids, maybe their mother or father is American and they will always say we are Basques, even if they weren't hurting us. We are Basques and they are really proud of their heritage, but they don't keep up with their language. It is really impossible to do that. But even the third and fourth generations are really proud of their heritage.

QUESTION: The Basques seem to have a stronger sense of nationalism and pride than most groups that you come across.

ALASNA: Oh yeah, we do. But not everybody feels the way we do. I mean not all Basques feel that way. Not everybody does. That's why we try.

QUESTION: There is that much difference?

ALASNA: Yeah, there is.

QUESTION: What about your daughters; they both speak Basque and English. You don't expect them to marry a Basque?

ALASNA: No, I wanted them to, but we are not better than other people. We think we are, but we are not.

QUESTION: You would prefer that she does?

ALASNA: Yeah, I think so.

QUESTION: Are there many young Basque men?

ALASNA: There are a few, maybe just as many as the girls, but it seems like few. We don't push kids. At home, there were some Spaniards coming to the Basque countries, and we always felt superior to them, so the parents never wanted the kids to go with the Spaniards.

QUESTION: Do you still argue Spanish politics here in Harney County?

ALASNA: Oh yes.

QUESTION: What are the different viewpoints on Spanish politics? Don't all of you want the same things?

ALASNA: No. Well some decided to fight. Lots of people here in Harney County are satisfied the way it is going there.

QUESTION: How are they satisfied?

ALASNA: Well with the dictatorship and things like that and we want to follow their government, but we want our freedom too, like having our own flag. Things like that, and we cannot have that.

QUESTION: It's not allowed at present in Spain? Even the Basque language can't be spoken in public? Is that right?

ALASNA: Right now, yes. They even have schools right now. When I was growing up, they never had Basque schools, and you weren't allowed to speak Basque in school, and all that. But now ... the language was losing ground. So they had their private schools.

QUESTION: Are there Basque schools in Idaho or Nevada that are just for Basque children?

ALASNA: No, for everybody.

QUESTION: What about the food; do you eat a distinctive kind of Basque food here?

ALASNA: Yeah, we do.

QUESTION: What would be a traditional Basque meal?

ALASNA: Soup, and beans, and fish.

QUESTION: Different kinds of soup?

ALASNA: Homemade especially.

QUESTION: What kinds of beans, any particular type?

ALASNA: Yeah, red beans.

QUESTION: Can you get that kind of beans here?

ALASNA: No. And also sausages, we call chorizo.

QUESTION: Chorizo is a Mexican sausage that is very spicy. Can you get those here?

ALASNA: Yeah, but we usually get them in Boise.

QUESTION: Those are usually made by Basque people?

ALASNA: Yes. We eat Basque food if we can get it. There is nothing special about it. We cook differently.

QUESTION: Do you come together with the other Basque families in Burns, for example, to eat Basque food?

ALASNA: Yeah, on occasions.

QUESTION: What would be some occasions when you do that?

ALASNA: We celebrate every occasion we can.

QUESTION: Each town has their own ...

ALASNA: Oh yes. Sometimes we celebrate Christmas day. Back home it's Christmas Eve, so we keep celebrating Christmas Eve, and we don't do much on Christmas day.

QUESTION: Saint's day, Christmas, other holidays then?

ALASNA: Oh yes. On the 31st, Ignatius de Loyola.

QUESTION: Why is that a big day?

ALASNA: It is the patron saint of the Basques. And that is why they celebrate in Boise.

QUESTION: What other things can you tell us about being a Basque in Harney County, besides that it's lonely?

ALASNA: Nothing much. People are very nice. We don't mix with the Americans very much, but they are nice.

QUESTION: How many Basques are here?

ALASNA: Quite a few. I don't have any idea how many.

QUESTION: Maybe twenty families?

ALASNA: More, maybe about 100 Basques.

QUESTION: Is there a single day or time in Burns or Harney County when all of you come together for anything?

ALASNA: No.

QUESTION: Would you like to see that?

ALASNA: Yes. Like in Boise, many Basques get together.

QUESTION: It is interesting to me that here in Harney County, so far from Spain, there is still interest in Spanish politics.

ALASNA: Oh yeah, because our minds are over there, and they are not here.

QUESTION: How long does it take a Basque to get his mind over here?

ALASNA: Never. I have an aunt who has lived here over 55 years, and we get together and home is all we talk about. She doesn't go back and live there but that is all we talk about.

QUESTION: Have you been back since you came over here?

ALASNA: Yes. My brother came over this summer to see us and my mother.

QUESTION: Would you like to live there?

ALASNA: I would like to try.

QUESTION: Is your husband willing?

ALASNA: Well like I said, if the politics change and we get more freedom, and we might.

QUESTION: Your husband works ...

ALASNA: At the mill.

QUESTION: Has he always worked in the mill? Didn't you say he had been a shepherd?

ALASNA: Yes, 15 years or so, and then he started working in the mill. We have been in Burns since then.

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