

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #139 - Side A (No Tape)

Subject: Winona Irving Wright

Place: Salem, Oregon

Date: February 15, 1972

Interviewer: James Baker

WINONA IRVING WRIGHT: I was trying to find out when he came to Harney County.

JAMES BAKER: Robert Irving, you have down here, born in 1857 in Roach Hill, California. And he died in May of 1936 in Burns.

WINONA: He was married in 1887, but I was trying to think how long he'd been there. You see this is what he is doing with all of this for his family.

JAMES: Well if he came out when he was a teenager, Robert Irving, then that would be the '70's.

WINONA: '74, do you think that was it?

JAMES: You were describing how he recalled that area; the lushness was one thing that he mentioned.

WINONA: Yes, and I started to tell you too, you know, he came up through there, and there were the Indian Wars on. And he got as far as Lake County, and the other two men were frightened and they went back. But he was never afraid of the Indians. He hobbled his horses and he said they went out and he couldn't find them, so he just went up to the Indian Camp and asked them.

And never have I known that an Indian didn't like my dad. And for years he let them hunt on his property. And for years, when I was just a little kid, all those old Indians up there knew me. And I went to college, and when I came back, old Pedro was on the

corner, and I said, "You don't know who I am, Pedro." He says, "Yes, I do, you're Bob's girl." We were always Bob's girls. My mother used to laugh and say that she thought he just picked all the blonde children. But then he came on through on his way to LaGrande.

JAMES: What was he wanting to do in LaGrande?

WINONA: Well I think he was looking for a place to settle.

JAMES: Ranching?

WINONA: Yes. At first though, of course, he always worked with horses, and was a lover of horses, and brought some of the first thoroughbreds through into Harney County. And he used to have racehorses. My mother used to say that he was part horse. I can remember --- any medicine he used for his horses was always good enough for his family. You would be amazed how he trained horses. I mean he really trained them so they'd do anything that he asked them, and yet he was never cruel to horses.

But he did, Mr. Craven, who used to be with Swift and Company out there, and they used to have that big P Ranch --- he had my dad come over there and train some. He said he never saw anything like it. My father seemed to talk the language. They'd do all sorts of things for him. He never did this as a show business; he entered horses in races and things like that.

JAMES: Some people have that with animals.

WINONA: He really did with horses, and he was certainly a horse lover. I think maybe horses are almost synonymous with him.

JAMES: Is that what makes people want to go into ranching, the feelings they have towards animals?

WINONA: I guess it could be. I never really thought my father was a rancher, I really never did. There were so many things he didn't do, as many of the ranchers did. I always felt that most of his --- I never saw him butcher on a farm. He never hunted. He was a

lover of nature, and loved the animals, and the birds, and the flowers, an outdoor man. I think he probably gave me my background.

I can still remember taking water into the field for him, and then he'd let me ride back on the mower. But he'd stop the machine if he heard a meadowlark, so that he could listen to this. And he always came in on his horse.

I can remember as a child, he always had a bouquet of wild flowers of some kind, bird's bills or something. So it is strange, I mean, that you do have a person who was an outdoor man; such as he was, to have that love of nature and beauty. And I always have been very thankful for that.

My mother saw that we went to school, and that we had good clothes, and that we were clean. But somehow, Dad was an avid reader and he educated himself. We still have his little math book where he taught himself math, and he was almost a genius at mental arithmetic. He could never help me in high school, because he could never go through the steps that I had to go through, but he came up with the answer. And I used to be infuriated because

--- But as he went through that valley, he told me as he went over there toward LaGrande, and I believe at one time he told me that he was looking for a drier area because he had had an illness. I believe the doctor had, I think it was a malaria, and he was in LaGrande for quite a while before he stopped in Harney County. And that's when he said he thought it was the most beautiful place he had ever seen, and that the grass was tall enough that it was --- well his words were, that it was up to the horse's bellies.

He went to La Grande and he lived over there for a while and he liked the people, but he said it was so windy. If you can believe trading wind in LaGrande for wind in Burns. But he said it was the windiest country that you almost had to anchor your wagons when you put them down.

And so then he came back to Harney County, and he homesteaded. He had a homestead there, and then he bought other property, two other small places.

JAMES: Generally, where was his homestead?

WINONA: Well as you are coming in over the hill, as you go into Burns right there at Hines, if you look right straight across the Valley, it is in the other end in the foothills over there. There is a deep canyon; I can always see it, because I see the rocks up above. We used to call that the Big Hill. It doesn't look so large now. I can see the canyon down in there, and that was a part of his homestead. And then, oh, just a few miles west of that, he had what we called the Dry Ranch, and he had some property there. But we never stayed out there the year round. We always lived in Harney, or later we moved to Crane because of the school situation. We never went to school out there. We lived out there in the summer and moved back into town in the winter to go to school. And my mother was one who insisted that her children were in school. I think that's what people always remember. Ruth Shaw said to me not long ago, "I can always remember your mother's love for education, and love of teachers." She respected every teacher. And she wasn't formally educated, either. It was just something that she felt was necessary, I mean, she hadn't gone on other than the lower grades.

JAMES: So you went to school in Harney and in Crane?

WINONA: I started to school in Harney.

JAMES: What do you recall that is memorable about that?

WINONA: Well I don't know, I can remember Grandma Bower's store because it was fascinating, and Mary Bower was always a character to me. And we were so close to the Loggans, and they were involved. And I have a memory of the old livery stable and this blacksmith shop. This is something that I can still remember. Ruth Shaw's husband, George Shaw, had the blacksmith shop. And I think there are many people that never

really saw a blacksmith shop. But that one out in that area, you see, that they did require this, because there were horses, etc. around.

And of course, the school building I remember. And I remember the dedication of the first church that was there, I think it was the Presbyterian Church. And very definitely the old cemetery out there, because we could walk out and back.

JAMES: That's the Harney Cemetery? That's the one that this Mrs. Luce got fixed up?

WINONA: Right. And her, let's see, it was her mother and her aunt that I knew.

JAMES: Are they Rodgers, or are they McGill's?

WINONA: Kathryn married a McGill. But Kathryn and Marjorie, now Marjorie was nearer my age, Kathryn was a little bit older. She was about my brother's age, I believe. But I remember Grandma and Grandpa Rodgers very well, and Alex Rodgers. I have a quilt downstairs that they made, what they call a friendship quilt. And they have their signatures on there and it is embroidered, all those people. And I had a beautiful picture that I found in mother's --- not long ago, of Kathryn and Marjorie, and I sent it up with Zella ... because I thought maybe the library might like to have it. The girl I didn't know, who died, I just knew the family prior to that.

And of course the school building was the center of all activities. Oh, and another thing I remember was the old hall, and it was used for entertainment, and dances, and everybody from Burns came to Harney to the dances. And my mother was always a good chaperone.

I remember the Daltons; they had a big store, Lunaburg and Dalton there in Burns. And Mr. Dalton was my mother's uncle, Uncle Jim. So all the Dalton girls used to say that their folks would let them go to Harney to those dances if "Sis" chaperoned them. So they always stayed at our place. But I can remember hearing those dances going on all night long. It was real fascinating to me as a child.

And there was the old jail over there, I remember that. It wasn't so large; it was pretty large at the time. And then there was a big fire bell on the corner, and of course the kids loved to go by at night and throw rocks at it, so someone would think there was a fire. Those things I remember.

I remember Helene Loggan falling in the well in the old barnyard and I couldn't find her. Because she was pumping and all of a sudden she disappeared, and I ran around all the buildings trying to find her. And finally I called my mother and she came out, and there was a little hole, and you see as she pumped her arms went like this, and she just had gone down in this little hole. And I remember the people rushing down there and finally getting a ladder in there, and it was just mud, there wasn't water. Those things are very vivid.

And one thing that I can remember, the old hill up there for coasting.

JAMES: Oh, in the wintertime?

WINONA: Oh, that was a delight, you could almost coast all the way down the street if you wanted to, and all the natives around there --- Harry Loggan's father was one to always take us up there coasting, we had these big sleds. I was pretty small then. I was trying to think; I think I didn't go to school more than about, oh maybe three years there.

JAMES: Three years in Harney and then you went to Crane? What was Crane like at that time?

WINONA: Crane was a very busy community, and you can't believe it! See that was the end of the railroad, and that was the largest community, and Crane was the busiest town. At one time I think they had, I think we were counting one day, and they must have had about four hotels in that town. And, oh several grocery stores. And I kept books while I was in high school at that Vale Trading. I went down and posted books every night after school, and sometimes, you know, we would carry those sheep men the full year, until

they could sell their wool. And, oh I've forgotten how many warehouses. I can remember three, but maybe two at one time.

The stockyards, the busiest place in the world, because they brought all the cattle in there and shipped them out. It was one of the busiest little communities I've ever known. And lively! And when all those cattlemen came to town, particularly on a Saturday night, those dances were quite notorious out there too. It was almost like having them go through, what is it on Gunsmoke, you know, when they are driving the cattle through. And a pretty good-sized school at one time.

JAMES: You were there another three, four, maybe five more years?

WINONA: I graduated from high school there. I think I graduated in three years from high school, but I was there during the three years in high school, and then I went to the University of Oregon. And after that I really didn't live there. My mother and father moved to Burns.

JAMES: You mentioned the store that Loggans had.

WINONA: Yes, Mary Bower.

JAMES: Who would you see in there, and what would you talk about?

WINONA: Oh, I can still see Mary Bower with her glasses up over her white hair. Oh, and of course there were fascinating things. I remember those great big containers that had spools of thread. And then the big round chunk of cheese that she had in there, the big wheel of cheese, and then the cover. And I can still see that blade that they used to use for cutting it. And of course there was always the fascination of candy. And she had a dry goods side over there, and those things were interesting.

I remember that Mary Bower was quite an avid reader. And with my sister, who was older, they traded books for many, many years. I found books that had Christmas, such and such, from Mary Bower. But she was quite a character. I was really too young,

maybe, to appreciate her as much as later I could have.

But she had brought a piano, oh, through years, I think maybe she had shipped it, I'm not quite sure of the history of that piano, but she had other pieces of furniture that were always fascinating to me. Because we didn't see them in ordinary homes.

JAMES: Do you know where she came from?

WINONA: I'm not sure, I have a feeling --- now Harry could have told you this because he was real fond of ... but I have a feeling that she came from around Ohio or some place back in there. And she married this Seth Bower who was quite a character too, and quite a different type of man. Harry could have told you about him. The only thing I can really remember about him was that he had long whiskers.

Then there was another store in town that belonged to Fred Haines. But when we went to that, we didn't have the freedom that we did at Grandma Bowers. He was a good businessman, a very polite man, and wanted children to be very polite. And I think I was welcome, but he didn't like rowdy children. And they were a little bit different. He was purely a businessman.

JAMES: A little harder to get credit from?

WINONA: I'm sure. Grandma Bower must have had interesting books. I don't know who has them, whether Harry has them or not. He told me he found some stock, or was notified of some stock a few years ago that his grandfather had purchased. I don't know whether they ever were worth anything. Yes, in radio I guess it was.

Seth Bower was quite a character, and I don't think it was anything against him, but he had very vivid expressions and I think he used profanity when he needed to, and maybe he would have been the good one in this day and age when we say some of the expressions are a little crude. Because I think --- now I don't remember that as much as some of my older brothers and sisters, because I think maybe when children were around



he didn't do this so much. But I went to see, with my sister in San Francisco, oh what was that book, anyway people were so shocked at.

JAMES: Oh, a book that just came out recently?

WINONA: No, no, a number of --- "Of Mice and Men," Steinbeck's. And we went down there to see the play, and some of them were kind of shocked at the language that was used. And my sister said, "It didn't bother me. They didn't say anything I hadn't heard Seth Bower say." So I think at that time he was quite a colorful individual.

Grandma Bower was a lively little lady, but was a lady, too. It was interesting; I don't know how people like that --- all of them. I often wondered, Harry could probably tell them sometime, too. But I often wondered how they ever got together, and how they happened to come out here.

JAMES: That's fascinating why people go out of that area.

WINONA: It is, isn't it?

JAMES: Desolate, hard land, beautiful and attracting ---

WINONA: In a way, but oh, it was hard to make a living there. There's something though that must be extremely fascinating.

This brother of mine lives in Arizona, the one that I said was 82; he does some writing. And he said that one magazine; one western magazine had told him that they would buy anything, any fiction story he wrote, because he had sold several of them. And he laughed and he said, "They thought those were fiction stories. They happened in Harney County." He writes quite well. He did write for the Western Horseman, which is quite a nice magazine too, and he does write very well.

JAMES: True West? I know that one and Western Horseman.

WINONA: Western Horseman, I have read some of his articles. I didn't read his stories, but he could tell you stories. And my brother from Pilot Rock writes. Of course they have

the love of horses too, right along with my dad.

JAMES: What is his name?

WINONA: Cecil Irving.

JAMES: Now he's the one that has this record book from the livery stable?

WINONA: Yes, he has some of Dad's old books that he had on stock and various things, but he has all these old records. It was interesting to see the prices of things, because when he freighted, you see, he took orders and brought back things that people wanted. And it was interesting to see how much it cost at that time. And I was amazed that he kept such meticulous books, he was such a meticulous bookkeepers. Because really my dad, as I remember him, never bothered with writing. He never believed in contracts, he thought a man's word was the law, and that you should be able to depend upon that.

JAMES: And now you find lots of records of his activities?

WINONA: Well he kept books for that livery stable. And I don't know, told how much he sold horses, a team of horses for, and a wagon, and how much people paid him for various things.

JAMES: Prices are an interesting thing to compare.

WINONA: But he really was the horse lover, but my brothers, all four of them, grew up to be horse lovers too.

JAMES: One thing I've been interested in, coming in from the outside, I see a lot of intermarriage, and a lot of real close family ties. Harry was telling me how anxious he and his wife were to get out of the country because it was so close. Did you get that feeling that people were always telling you what to do?

WINONA: I think I grew up in a little bit different atmosphere, maybe. I never had thought the people around me were always telling me what to do, I don't know why. Maybe I was working at a fairly early age there. My parents were fairly strict. My mother was a

disciplinarian, and she always told me what I could do and what I couldn't do. And whenever she'd tell me to go ask my father, I always knew it was something she didn't want me to do. And my father would always say, "Well, what did your mother say about it?"

But I have an entirely different attitude from my older brothers and sisters. But I grew up alone at home. You see they were about the same age. My father was quite a strict disciplinarian and he was very busy making a living, and working, and having four children about the same age there, to buy shoes. When I came along, I can't remember my father ever even scold me. But you see, he taught me to play cards, and I can remember looking forward to staying home when Mother went out, because I'd get to play casino with Dad. And he would make one of his famous mulligan stews, and then he told me the stories. You see, I think I grew up in a little bit different atmosphere. Although Helene, Harry's sister, was my age and we spent a lot of time together. And Harry was the age of my brother, and they were very good friends. Now there shouldn't be too much difference in our ages there, but still I didn't have the feeling of --- I never had the feeling that people were telling me what to do. Sometimes they expected me to do things that I used to say, "You know, I'd like to do something else." But they expect me to do the right thing on this. That I think I got from, I think I --- somehow with older brothers and sisters, you see my brother was, well he was in college about the time I was born, I guess. Whatever I asked, you see, they thought that they were very modern, so they just answered it. I believe that's why I grew up in a little bit different atmosphere. I used to come home, you know, and announce Mrs. So and So was going to have a baby in June, very nonchalantly, and everyone in the family would look around and wondered how I knew something. Having older brothers and sisters like that, that much older, they always believed, you know, that you should tell children the truth. I think this is true, and it is true

now.

JAMES: People were very neighborly and they were very dependent. For example I've heard, you could always drop by and get a meal or stay overnight. But now you want to call ahead a week ahead of time. I'd like to talk about that, I'm trying to get a handle on that, the feeling about neighbors.

WINONA: This was very true. And the one thing that I recall in particular in Harney, we used to have these migrating ministers, or they traveled around, you didn't have a minister that lived there. But the one that I can remember very well was Reverend Beard; he used to come over from Baker. But they would come to town and there was really no place for them to stay. Now there was an old hotel there in Harney at one time, I don't remember so much about that as my older brothers and sisters, because it had closed. But they always said in town, "You go down and see Mrs. Irving," that was my mother, "she always has her meals on time and she always has a clean bedroom." My mother was a meticulous housekeeper; everybody knew this. So at one time I can remember, we had three ministers staying there, of three different denominations. They were interesting people, and I can remember

--- the Reverend Beard always stayed with us when he came through and we were very fond of him. And I can remember my mother telling him, now I have the kids here. And at that time we had an old organ, and we had playing and singing, and if they want to dance or if they want to play cards. Many a time I've seen him sit there and tap his toes, and he never objected; he was very liberal. But it always interested me, and I can remember several of them were of denominations that they were fairly fanatic on some things.

But no, we always, there were no arguments. My family, they'd argue, they were always arguing on politics, and still do. The one thing I can remember was Mother's big dining room table there in Harney. We never had as large a dining room table as that, it

was a long dining room and she had this long dining room table that was always set up with a linen tablecloth. I still have one of her big ones. And I can remember her ironing it, and then rolling it on a broomstick so it wouldn't have seams in it. But at mealtime it was very nice, because everybody had fun at the table. We all laughed and talked. I think it's one reason that many people who came there and couldn't find a place to stay, they'd always say, "Well go down to Mrs. Irving's she usually has a room and she usually has her meals on time."

JAMES: That's the first thing you want to know when you come into a strange town, where that kind of people are.

WINONA: And she always made bread every night before she went to bed. She had this living yeast, and she was quite well known for her hot light bread biscuits for breakfast, always had them. But later when I was a little older, and I had a boyfriend, they always knew when my mother went to the kitchen to fix the bread; it was time for them to go home. But she did this type of thing.

JAMES: What was the secret to the bread in the morning?

WINONA: Well they were fresh and she baked bread every day. This I can remember in Harney, coming home even for lunch and smelling that bread baking, and apple butter. I was telling someone, I guess Harry Loggan or someone, we were talking about Mother's donuts. And they'd always come in, and she liked to do. And I didn't think mother really enjoyed cooking too much, but she did do lots of cooking. But always those hot light bread biscuits. You see, now you can go out and buy them, but she kept a living yeast there all the time.

JAMES: Was it sourdough?

WINONA: No, it wasn't sourdough, it was a potato yeast. I remember now her boiling potatoes, and then using the juice from that and mashing them up. Have you heard of

potato bread?

JAMES: Yes, I make bread, that's why I'm really interested.

WINONA: It's on the market, this potato, but it had a very good flavor and it was light bread. I'm sure Harry Loggan remembers Mother's ---

JAMES: I guess I don't understand what living yeast is. You mash up the potatoes, and you let it ferment in its juice for a little bit, or ---

WINONA: Yes, but I think she used a yeast cake of some kind. In that day and age, of course, you had to get the dry, they used dry yeast. And then she just kept it going all the time, and put more potato juice, etc. in it. Her light bread biscuits, that's what they called them, they didn't call them rolls; they called them light bread biscuits. But she had them every morning for breakfast, and then she baked her loaves of bread later on in the day. She had fresh bread every day. She didn't bake once or twice a week. So I think maybe that's why I remember some of those people that used to stay there.

Of course my older brothers and sisters remember some of the things that took place there that I don't remember, such as the murder of Toots Stroud. Well I can remember my brother, who is older than I was, and I was pretty small then, cause he was, oh I think he must have been about 4. Maybe I was a tiny baby because I don't remember it. I've heard the tales of it. A number of people were supposed to have been involved in shooting him. I think he had a saloon up there. I don't remember the details.

I do remember Mother saying she had just sent Ches, my brother, to the post office to get the mail, and she heard the shots. My brother was one of those who could, all the natives remember. So she ran out to the fence around the barnyard and she went over to look for Ches, because she knew there was some shooting. I think she called across to Charlie Loggan or someone over there to find out what had happened. I can always remember, she said it was just a few minutes and then she heard this woman scream,

who was the mother of this fellow. But I think there must have been five or six people involved in that. I think they all shot, and I'm not sure that they ever knew exactly who did kill him. And I don't know exactly why.

But now those --- they have more memories of things like that that happened than I do. But the Loggans, you were talking about families helping families. My mother always went to Charlie Loggan for advice, that's Harry's father. "Well I'll find out what Charlie has to say about it." Or if anyone was sick, Charlie Loggan was there. He was sort of a doctor, and Mother told me his father had been. Now I don't remember Grandpa Loggan very well. I remember Grandma Loggan because she lived much longer. But mother said Grandpa Loggan did the same thing. If anybody in the community was ill, he went to help them. And Charlie Loggan had sort of carried on, and was always real good. And if there was anything that needed an answer, Mother would say, "Well, I'll discuss it with Charlie." So there was that feeling in the family.

JAMES: Sort of relying on somebody in a time of need.

WINONA: Oh, you could, you had to in that day and age.

JAMES: You had to because there was no professional doctor?

WINONA: For that we had to go to Burns, of course. You no doubt have heard about Grandma Howser, who delivered all the babies there. I wasn't one of them because by the time I came along why they had a doctor, but not in Harney, in Burns. I was born in Burns. But Grandma Howser, I don't know how many babies she delivered. Have you not found anything on the Howser family? Now Darrell Howser is up there, but someone told me, I think it was Ethel Hotchkiss the other day, that he and Celia were in Yuma for a while, but they do live in Burns.

But Grandma Howser was one of the well-known pioneers. And she made every child that she delivered; I think she made them a quilt. Now I believe Cecil has one, my

brother, I think she delivered him.

JAMES: Is this one of these friendship quilts that you describe, or is this a different kind?

WINONA: No, she just did a patchwork quilt. But the friendship quilt, each one, each person in the community made a block, and then they put the blocks together. And maybe they'd put their names, like the Rodgers girls, I have Kathryn Rodgers, and then the year. That would be embroidered on, and then they put all these blocks together, you see, to make the quilt. And you had a friendship quilt.

But Grandma Howser was well known for the beautiful quilts she made of various designs. And I don't know whether she did make one for every person that she delivered, but someone told me that, that that was her project. She lived to be quite an old lady. And I think that Howser farm or ranch; we always called it a farm, over toward Harney, that was just out of Harney. Because I think Grandma Howser, now I don't know anyone but Darrell who might be a relative that's living. I think you should talk to him. Now he married, Celia was a Byrd, and she wasn't Julian's daughter, but Julian's brother, I can't think of the father's name, but she was a Byrd. But Grandma Howser was a well-known person then.

JAMES: Do any of the old pattern names of quilts stick in your mind?

WINONA: I can remember the wedding ring, they had the design, you see, would go around like this. Maybe on plain material, and then they'd take these little blocks and put them together in a circle. And then they'd have another one that would go like this, and they called that the double wedding ring.

JAMES: Oh, circles of blocks that would sort of overlap one another?

WINONA: Yes. I think I have one of those down --- and then I can remember the star quilt, I know I have one of those. And then the friendship quilts. The friendship quilt had the names on them and made by everyone in the community. Maybe they'd get together



and have a little sewing, and everybody would make a block. And often they brought material, you see, blocks from things that they'd had, dresses or something. So you see, this was a part of them, too. Oh, they used to just treasure pieces of material, because you could make quilts from them, see all different colors. And many of them are of every color.

Now I had an old quilt, I did give it to my brother to put in the museum up at Burns, that my father used when he was freighting. And it was made out of; do you know what serge is? It was made out of a wool and they called it serge. And I think all of it was made out of wool, and he carried that with him freighting. And I gave that to my brother, I think, for the museum. However, I have two or three patch quilts down there I could show you if you want to see them. Oh yes, people would get together, like the Ladies Aid or something, they always had some sewing, just as people have knitting now.

JAMES: What did they talk about while they were working?

WINONA: Well I don't know. My sister always said that women the world over, she had discovered, talked about the same things. You know, when they were working. Of course maybe they were somewhat limited. You did know all about everyone. This is true, and I think maybe that's, maybe what Harry and Mildred --- And of course, both of those were large families. I mean, there was the Loggan family, and then Mildred was a Parker, and that came from the Bennett family, you see. Her mother was a Bennett, and that was a large group. And you see my brothers and sisters went to high school there in Burns, and they were older than I.

And so, oh, I went through Mother's pictures not long ago, and sent them to all the families. But there was, we were looking at one group the other day, Harvey and I. My brother was on the basketball team, and Merle Bennett, he was principal of the high school for a good many years, he was principal when I taught. He's out here at

Woodburn now. Have you talked to Merle Bennett?

JAMES: No, I haven't.

WINONA: Well he's Mildred's uncle, and you see that's quite a large family. And of course Gus Bardwell is dead, but you've probably heard of the Bardwell family up there. I can't recall who else was on that, oh Nollie Reed. You know he played basketball for Oregon State. What record did Nollie Reed hold at Oregon State for basketball for many years?

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