

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #259 - Sides A/B

Subject: Phyllis Lissman; With Video

Place: Harney County Senior Center - Burns, Oregon

Date: December 12, 1989

Interviewers: Dorothea Purdy & Barbara Lofgren

DOROTHEA PURDY: This is Dorothea Purdy and we'll be visiting with Phyllis Lissman at the Harney County Senior Center in Burns, Oregon. The date is December 12, 1989. We'll be talking with Phyllis about her involvement with the Senior Center and how she got it started, and some of her own personal life. Barbara Lofgren is with me, and she will be doing a short video afterwards.

Phyllis, can you tell us your name, and where you were born?

PHYLLIS LISSMAN: Phyllis Lissman, and I was born in Nebraska.

DOROTHEA: When were you born?

PHYLLIS: 1927.

DOROTHEA: What were your parent's names?

PHYLLIS: Henry and Florence Smith.

DOROTHEA: And when did you come to Harney County?

PHYLLIS: The first time we came to Harney County was in 1953. We lived here about a year at that time. Then my husband went to work for the Edward Hines Lumber Company and we moved to Seneca, over in Grant County. We moved back to Harney County then in 1972.

DOROTHEA: And what all did you do in Seneca? What did your husband do for a living?

PHYLLIS: My husband did a variety of things for the Hines Lumber Company, working in

the woods. The last few years, that as a truck driver, log truck driver. I worked part time, raised a family, was active with numerous activities as far as my children were concerned.

I worked at the Bear Valley Store in Seneca. I worked for the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Also worked for Oregon State University on a part time basis during that period.

DOROTHEA: You mentioned your husband, so consequently you are married. Who did you marry, and when?

PHYLLIS: I married Wayne Lissman in Wyoming, in 1943, while he was in the service.

DOROTHEA: Do you have any children?

PHYLLIS: We have three children. We have a daughter Elaine, a son Larry, and a son Henry.

DOROTHEA: And Elaine is married to who?

PHYLLIS: Elaine is married to Mike Violette, and she lives in Boise, Idaho. He works for Idaho State Penitentiary. Our son Larry is married to Lydia Seminalde, and is with Children Services Division in Salem, Oregon. And our youngest son, Henry, is married to Roxie Watson from John Day, and is employed by the County Road Department in Grant County.

DOROTHEA: Okay, we'll have to get with you and find out how to spell those names. What all did you entertain yourselves with, more or less with your children? I understand that you had some- thing to do with the Seneca Rope Jumpers.

PHYLLIS: Oh, I was busy in many areas. The Seneca Rope Jumpers, as you know, was very active during the time my children were growing up. And as a result of that group, we took a group to Washington, D. C.; we went to the World's Fair in Seattle. We traveled throughout the Willamette Valley to basket, college basketball games. I worked with them, did the publicity for the Seneca Rope Jumpers, and traveled with them as a P.R.

person.

Also was very active in 4-H, led a number of 4-H Clubs. Was a dorm supervisor for 4-H Summer School for 30 years. Also the dormitory supervisor for Oregon State Fair for 30 years.

BARBARA LOFGREN: Back up just a minute and tell a novice what is a rope jumper?

PHYLLIS: What is a rope jumper? A group of girls in the 7th and 8th grade level, who do a variety of things jumping rope. Using double ropes, large ropes, they jump on pogo sticks, square dance with ropes.

BARBARA: I see.

PHYLLIS: Just do a variety of different things. I haven't thought about that for a long time.

DOROTHEA: It was a very popular event in Seneca. I know we had the Rebekahs had the girls come and jump for them, and entertain.

I think probably some of the basketball games and other things in Burns did this also.

PHYLLIS: Yes, uh huh.

DOROTHEA: Do you have any interesting stories that you'd like to share about some of those trips that you took with those girls?

PHYLLIS: I think the highlight of all those years was the trip to Washington, D. C. We took about eighteen 7th and 8th graders, plus two mascots, who were first graders. We traveled by train, first to Chicago, where the girls stayed at the Parker House in Chicago, and toured Chicago, courtesy of the Edward Hines Lumber Company. From there then we went on to Washington, D. C. We jumped then for the USO, for the soldiers, and then the next day had the privilege of jumping before the United States Congress in their chambers.

BARBARA: I don't imagine they had anyone ever do that for them before, had they?

PHYLLIS: No, no, it was a first, and I think a last. I don't think it's happened since. Of course then in Washington, D. C. the girls were able to tour the Smithsonian and a lot of things. I think it was a real experience for the girls, an educational experience.

BARBARA: Right.

PHYLLIS: As well as, you know, the thrill of having their picture taken with Vice President, then Vice President Johnson. Al Ulman, and some of these.

DOROTHEA: Are they continuing this now at the school?

PHYLLIS: My understanding is it no longer exists.

DOROTHEA: About what year did it end?

PHYLLIS: Probably just about the time that we moved down here in '72. Esma Rouls, (sp.?) who was the teacher there, that was the person that started this, retired and moved to John Day, and it only continued a couple of years after that. And my understanding is that it does not exist today.

DOROTHEA: It would be nice to get it started again.

PHYLLIS: Wouldn't it though?

DOROTHEA: It's really interesting.

PHYLLIS: Yeah.

BARBARA: How much practice did they have to do? Would it be just like a regular sports activity?

PHYLLIS: Just like, yeah, like a basketball activity, and whatnot. They practiced, you know, basketball team practiced after school, so did the rope jumpers. Yeah, you have to practice continuous. For one thing, it takes a lot of wind to do it, and so they have to stay in shape. But no, they practiced just like a basketball team.

DOROTHEA: What seasons did you do this jumping in? Was it all year long, or ---

PHYLLIS: Basically it was during the school year, particularly in the winter months. We

did some traveling in the summer, parades, things like this. But basically it began as a gym activity, because it was so cold in Seneca that outside activities, you know, as far as physical education were not permitted. And of course the boys all had their basketball, football. And at that time girls didn't play volleyball. And so it was started as an activity for --- Well when Esma started it, she thought it could be an activity for both boys and girls. But the boys really weren't interested. That was sort of a sissy thing, you know.

BARBARA: Right.

PHYLLIS: And so we ended up with all girls. It was a girl's activity.

DOROTHEA: How did they come about their uniforms? Did they have a special reason for picking their colors?

PHYLLIS: Their colors were their school colors, red and white. They had a variety of uniforms through the years. All made by the parents, and by the people in the community. It was a community project.

DOROTHEA: Did you get a real good buy on material, or did everyone have to buy their own?

PHYLLIS: No, we usually bought the material by the bolt. And those that could, paid for their material. Those that couldn't afford it, there was always someone that was willing to put up the money for that. And we cut them out at the, what's now the City Hall; it's the old Union Hall. We'd spread the tables out, and lay a whole bolt of material out, and about ten or eleven of us start in, and have a sewing bee right ---

DOROTHEA: What all kinds of 4-H Clubs did you lead, or were involved in?

PHYLLIS: Oh, home economics, sewing, cooking, outdoor cooking, those kind of things. I also judged 4-H Fairs, including the State Fair, for about thirty years, as a judge.

DOROTHEA: You've been a busy lady. Now we can get into where you're at today, and you are Director of the Harney County Senior Center, is this right?

PHYLLIS: That's right, uh huh.

DOROTHEA: And can you tell us something about how you came about starting this, this Center?

PHYLLIS: In 1972, in August, my husband was transferred from Seneca to Burns with the Edward Hines Lumber Company. And we moved down here at that time. And the first two months, of course, I was busy with the house that we bought, doing some painting, etc. But by the first of October I was, already figured out that with all my kids grown and gone, that I was going to be bored pretty soon, and I didn't know anybody.

I saw an ad in the Burns paper, and the ad, and I say this, and I chuckle now as I look back on it because at the time it was really kind of hilarious. The ad was for a mental health aide for youth. I thought my goodness, right up my alley, you know, youth. So I inquired, and what they wanted was a mental health aide to do some program development for some of the young people in Harney County. Trying to get something similar to Fridays going, something for youth. I applied for the job, was interviewed, and didn't get the job because the mental health director, as he explained to me why I didn't get the job, was because they felt I was too old to work with young people. It came as kind of a shock I guess, you know, after 20, 30 years of working with young people.

A month later the same ad, identical ad, appeared in the Burns paper. Looking for someone to work with the elderly. I thought, now wait a minute. Now I'm probably too young to work with the elderly. But found out what had happened was, a local mental health clinic had received a seven year grant for two positions. Those positions as long as they related to the betterment of the mental health of the youth and elderly, were pretty wide open as what could be done with them.

There had been a group of local women who had been getting together and talking about wanting to do something for the elderly people in Harney County. They didn't know

what, but just what can we do, and this was about the time that senior citizens were really coming into their own. And they were finding out that there was needs out there for seniors, and this was a voting population.

I applied for that job, and that one I got. I guess they decided I wasn't too young to work with the elderly. I went to work then on November 1st, 1972. And I chuckle when I think about this because I've worked at a lot of jobs in my life, including office work, including administrative work. And I was told to report to work at what is now the, what, X-ray department at the hospital. And this was where the mental health office was at that time, on November 1st, at 8 o'clock.

Well I had visions that somewhere in that building there must be a desk and a telephone, and a pencil and a piece of paper. I had no idea exactly what I was going to do. They had told me that they really didn't know either. But they wanted somebody to develop senior programs. And I had spent the three weeks before I went to work getting some ideas of what I wanted to do first, so I could present them to the director.

I walked in and was greeted by Mildred Red, Knight, that later worked for me for a number of years, and just retired. This was the secretary at the mental health clinic, and she said, brought me a cup of coffee and said, "Why don't you have a seat. Mr. Young's busy right now, he'll see you in about twenty minutes." I said, "Well, while I'm waiting, why don't you show me which corner I get in this building." And I'd brought along a little bag of some personal things that I had, I wanted to bring to work. I'd been doing some background work at home and wanted to get that in. She looked at me, and didn't know quite what to say, I'm sure. And said, "Well, I don't think there is a desk."

BARBARA: Oh dear.

PHYLLIS: Oh dear! I think I'd better have a second cup of coffee. (Laughter) Okay. So we waited, and I went into Mr. Young's office and he wanted to know if I had gave any

thought to what I was going to do, and I very quickly gave him a list of things that I had put together that I thought might be a good starting point. The first thing that I wanted to do was to get the names of those people who had requested of the County Court that this position be funded. And I thought those names maybe could serve at least as part of the steering committee to start.

Well he thought that was a good idea. And I said, "Well now where will I be? I'm going to need a telephone, you know, etc." And he said, "Well this is a staffing position only. There is no budget, no office, nothing. This is a staffing position. What you're going to do with it, I don't know, but you're it. Thank you!"

I guess you know I left that office with no place to go, except home. I did go home, and I thought, well now this is certainly a new twist. What am I going to do now? You know, it sort of threw me for a loop. I just didn't know what to do. In fact, I didn't do much of anything the rest of the morning. Then I finally decided, well Phyllis, it looks like a real challenge. I thought, well this is a real challenge, and so I've got to figure out something here. And I thought well, maybe I can find a place where I could do something.

Well my husband came home from work that night and I guess what really happened was I unloaded on him. Because I really was, you know, where do I turn? You know, I had planned on calling together this group of people. I did have the list of names. I wanted to do a kind of a mini-survey, and by putting out a box in the stores to put them in. Run an ad in the paper with a little survey instrument in it, you know. And kind of get an idea, what do the people want. You know, what are we doing here?

That night when he got home I told him what my problem was, and he said, "Well, I'll tell you what, why don't you, tomorrow, go down to the bank and take the equivalent of one month's salary out of our savings account and establish a bank account for this 'To Be' organization. This at least will give you a few dollars to buy some stamps with, and

run an ad in the paper. And clean off the dining room table and set the phone on it. You've been through it; you developed that City Council at Seneca. You know how many years you ran that city government from the kitchen table. I'm used to a mess on it."

So basically that's what I did. I established a bank account with that salary. I put \$600 in it, and ran an ad in the paper. Made boxes to put out for them to put it in, in the stores. Called a no-host meeting, needless to say, at what is not the Castle, of that group of people. And had a couple of those kind of meetings to get a little direction from them.

The surveys started coming in. And I learned a long time ago, that if you want to do something, organize something, or do something with any age group, the best place to do it is feed a person. So in the meantime, I had found out that we could rent the Museum Club Room for, I believe it was \$5 then, that we paid for the Museum Club Room.

So I took part of my budget that I now had and I rented the Museum Club Room, and I put together what was later known as a popular item called, "Surprise Lunch", and invited the seniors in Harney County to lunch. And that was --- then along with the committee at that first lunch, we started feeling them out, finding out. Okay, where do we go from here? What is it you want? And a lot of the things that's in existence today came out of that meeting of what it amounted to was the needs of the elderly. What they felt their needs were, as far as services go.

BARBARA: About how many people did you have show up at that first sack lunch?

PHYLLIS: I think we had about thirty, if I remember. We got up, while we were still doing that, we got up to finally --- We held them in the Museum Club Room for a while, and then we went to the Episcopal Church. I finally held those once a week, every Wednesday we had "Surprise Lunch". I cooked it and they donated towards it, whatever they could afford, just like we do out here. That paid part of the expenses on a lunch. And

we got up to where we were having 75, 80 people at those lunches on a regular weekly basis. So our nutrition program really started in 1972, not 1976. But, you know, in that kind of a situation.

Then from there, in September of '73 then, in the meantime I had negotiated with the Area Agency on Aging which was supposed to serve Malheur and Harney County, their offices were in Ontario. I had found out that there should be dollars available for some of these things in Harney County. Particularly for the planning portion of it.

It took some rather hard nose negotiations, because Malheur County had really had all of these dollars since 1967, and rather enjoyed having all of these dollars, and really were quite reluctant to give it up to Harney County.

The first year's budget that I got from the Older American's Act, was \$682.

BARBARA: That doesn't go very far, does it?

PHYLLIS: Our budget today, with the Older American's Act, and Oregon Project Dependents, is over a \$100,000.

BARBARA: My goodness.

PHYLLIS: But that's all we got. But we took it.

BARBARA: Oh, yes.

PHYLLIS: In the meantime, we did some fundraising. The City of Burns, Dale White, was then Mayor of Burns. I went to City Council in Burns, they obligated, I believe it was either \$2,000 or \$3,000 for the first fiscal year. That was in July, before we opened up the Center. The City of Hines gave us \$500. The County obligated a couple of thousand at this time. So we began to have at least a bank account where we could maybe get something open.

At that time Ruel Teague had just purchased --- let's see now, did Ruel have that? Yeah, Ruel had that, Montgomery Ward went out. Ruel Teague had purchased where

the old Montgomery Ward Store --- where Sears is now, and he was willing to rent that to us figuring out what it costs for heat, taxes, lights. Because he didn't want to rent the back of the building, just the front, and the heat was for the whole thing. So we figured out what it would cost, he rented that building to us. It had one small office. We put in --- rounded up a cook stove and a refrigerator, cabinets back where their office had been, so we moved in there and we opened the first Senior Center in that building. And that was in September of '73.

BARBARA: Now is that the same size that it is at the present time?

PHYLLIS: Okay, yeah, just about. The office is where it is right now. We didn't have that back room where they keep all of their merchandise.

BARBARA: I see.

PHYLLIS: Back where their counter is, there used to be a higher counter across there, and we put a kitchen behind that. Used it for a kitchen, and then had a ---

BARBARA: That's not a very large space then.

PHYLLIS: No, no. That Christmas, I can't remember how many we had for Christmas dinner that year, but we were so crowded that it was just sort of like this. (Hand signals.)

BARBARA: Go in shifts.

PHYLLIS: Yeah. Everybody brought their own dishes, you know. Every Wednesday we had lunch on a regular basis. At that time then, I was able to obtain a Title V --- the old CETA, which is now Title V, position for a half-time person. Mildred Knight had just lost her husband about that time, so she went to work in that half-time position. So now there was someone there to answer the phone, you know, do those things, so I could get out and do outreach. Ended up starting a mini-transportation system, because as I got out and started doing outreach, I found out, you know, that there was people out here that needed transportation. So I would take Mrs. Jones to the store or the doctor's office, and

then run over and see Mrs. Smith, and find out what she needed, and go pick Mrs. Jones up and take her back home, and kind of, you know, did a little bit of everything.

BARBARA: Right.

PHYLLIS: We went along like that, and in the meantime, in '74 it became quite apparent that we were never going to get what I called our fair share of the --- any dollars that was available of Federal/State and whatnot, as long as we were in their Area Agency on Aging with Malheur County. So we decided that the best thing that we could do for ourselves was try to convince what was then the Office of Elderly Affairs in Salem that we were just too far away from Malheur County to be able to work with Malheur County and have a joint Area Agency on Aging.

Besides there was another side to this issue. We had found out that Federal dollars have bases, and these bases were such that every Area on Aging was entitled to at that time, what was a \$10,000 base, and then additional money based on population. Well there was only one base for each Area on Aging, Area Agency on Aging. And that base was over there, that \$10,000. We weren't getting any part of that base; we were just getting a population formula over here. But if we could become our own Area Agency, then we'd get a base too.

BARBARA: Right.

PHYLLIS: So we got some petitions together, and the seniors went to work. And it was really exciting, because at that time there was just under 1260 plus seniors in Harney County, that was the census count. We had just over a 1000 signatures on that petition when I went to Salem.

BARBARA: Oh my.

PHYLLIS: Those seniors worked at that, and we got our Area Agency on Aging. We're the last break that was ever made in the State of Oregon. They will not do that now, they

will not. And now what was then a \$10,000 base is now a \$30,000 base in Social Services. It brings us in our Oregon Project Independence Home Care money that we wouldn't have got. It brings us in an additional \$10,000 for nutrition, that we wouldn't have got, if we hadn't have split, so it was a very wise choice.

BARBARA: I guess.

PHYLLIS: The other thing it did for us then the next July, in '75, it gave us some dollars to begin to put together more of a permanent program. About that same time then, nutrition programs had not been funded yet, under the Old American's Act, they became funded. We then realized that we were going to have to do some-thing else, because we couldn't serve meals, a minimum of two days a week, and deliver Meals on Wheels out of that situation there.

So at that time, I started looking then for another --- here we go, we're going to move again. And at that time --- just about that time, Ruel sold the building, so we had to be out. This was July by then, and we thought we would have until the end of the year, but then he sold the building. We had to be out by fall. And we started to look then for a building we could afford, and found out that they were few and far between.

But Sam Woyak had his plumbing shop down, remember where that is? Down back of Sam's house down here along ---

DOROTHEA: Next to the Laundromat.

PHYLLIS: Right, across the street from the Laundromat. And he had kind of semi-retired and wasn't using the front third of the building. It was just empty, but it was a mess. We convinced Sam that for a \$100 a month, and we do the work that we ought to have that front of that building. And I look back on it --- we paid for the heat in it, and what not, but I'm sure he didn't make anything on it. So we went in, and thanks to my husband, who is an excellent volunteer I find out, we got some paneling, we put up paneling, we put some

carpet on the floor, and painted like mad. Built an office, my husband built me an office so I wouldn't have to be right in the middle of everything. And we opened our first recreation center, still doing surprise lunches on Wednesday.

And then we found out the nutrition money was going to come down that fall. So there was certain requirements, you know, they weren't going to allow us to pack our plates in and have lunch one day a week. We were going to have to serve two regular meals a week. We were going to have to deliver Meals on Wheels five days a week, and we had to have an approved kitchen. Well behind the partition where we were at, was some more empty space. But there wasn't even --- it was just strictly parts, plumbing parts, had broken windows. We convinced Sam, but it was the rest of the building, there had to be a partition built. So we convinced Sam to move back another third of the way, and poor Sam, I think he quit plumbing in desperation, because he had this pushy lady in front of him that kept building things and pushing him out the back door.

He agreed to this, but we would have to move all of the plumbing stuff out, and we would have to build the partition because now we are talking about the whole rest of the building. So we built the partition, so this doubled the size of what we had, and in that back part then we put the dining room. We remodeled the front again, separated part of it off, and built an acceptable kitchen to the health department. We also had to build two bathrooms. There wasn't any bathrooms in it. We had built one when we first started, but when we started the nutrition program, they said, "You can't do that. You've got to have two bathrooms, you know, one for ladies and one for men." So we had to build another bathroom.

So we --- and then we ended up now we've got the recreation area in the front of the building, with a pool table and davenos and whatever. We've got a little tiny office, we've got a kitchen in the middle, and we've got a dining room in the back. So we're into

the nutrition business then, and that was in 1976 by the time we got all of that done.

In 19--- early of 1977, a thing called in lieu of taxes came down to the county, for the federal lands. In lieu of tax dollars, they got money for all of the federal land we have.

We went then, with the seniors, to the County Court and approached them of trying to get them to set aside a portion of those payments each year for a permanent senior location, to put some continuity. My seven years on the grant was soon going to be up, there was no way of knowing whether it would ever be funded again, and we wanted to get some kind of permanency in the program before I wasn't there.

So we went to the County Court, and at that time the County Court voted and agreed that they would set aside \$100,000 a year for two years. And at the end of that two years then, we could use that money to build a permanent Senior Center in Harney County. Well a really neat thing happened. When they got their first in lieu of tax check in Harney County, they had not realized that that was retroactive for the year before, so they got two payments in one. They got \$600,000 instead of \$300,000 that first year, because they got the year before plus this years.

And Doc White was the person who then convinced the County Court that since we got the windfall, let's let those people start working on that building. Go ahead and set aside their \$200,000. Because inflation at that time was just bringing building costs up madly. And they voted to do that.

One other exciting thing happened about that time, Delphine Lazarus, and this is Grace Farster's sister, you probably remember her ---

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

PHYLLIS: --- passed away, and in her will was \$25,000 to go to County Court to be used for a permanent Senior Center.

BARBARA: That was great.

PHYLLIS: She was on the first planning committee that I used in 1972, and this was in the will. So then the County said, "Okay, we'll give you a \$175,000, you use the \$25,000 with that. So you've got your \$200,000."

We put together a building committee and we started drawing up plans. The next question is, "Where are we going to get a lot?" The Arrowhead lot came to the County about this time for taxes, back taxes. They didn't pay the taxes on it, and it became County property. It would have been fine, the County said, "Well, maybe we could use this lot." There would only be one problem with it, and that's parking. It was a good location, but parking would be a problem. I found out that Bill Allen owned this property right in here, so we negotiated with Bill, and the County traded Bill Allen that lot down there for this property here. They did a trade, and that's how it ended up down here. It was still a good downtown location, but a lot more parking space.

So we started construction then. The plans --- oh, one other thing that was kind of interesting. I talked to architects and found out architects think they are worth lots of money. Whew! You know, we're talking \$200,000 here to build the building, and the architect is saying he is going to have to have thirty or forty of that just to design the building. And we have already got a rough draft of what we want, but he needs it.

Wagner's was building their new furniture store about that time, and I was driving by it every day coming to work, and it was starting to look pretty good for a metal building. You know, it looked pretty nice, and I'm thinking, hmm, seems like a metal building wouldn't be too bad. But how do you get a building without an architect? It doesn't seem to me like this is going to work. I was sitting here at the desk one day and I thought, "Well Phyllis, instead of sitting here fretting about how you are going to do this, why don't you go down and talk to those people, maybe they know something you don't know. So I went down and talked to their --- the man that was over here. He was one of the partners

for the metal building, the company that was building it. Caught him and I told him what my problem was. And I said, "Do you have any idea how we could get this kind of a building without paying an architect \$35,000, \$30,000, whatever, they want?" Well, he didn't know, but he said, "I'll tell you what, I'm going home this weekend and let me talk to my boss, maybe he's got some ideas."

He called me then on Monday and said, "How would you like to get together with my boss, we've got an idea that might work for you people." "Sure, anything." So they came down and he said, "Do you have any floor plans or anything?" Well, the senior building committee had just had a ball drawing these floor plans, you know. We've got some real artists. So we pulled them all out, and we talked about it, and he said, "Why don't you call your building committee, and let's set up a date and have a meeting." He said, "I've got an idea of something we might do for you." "Okay." So we had a meeting, called them together. And a few days later we had a meeting. And his boss, who was an architect, said, "I'll tell you what we'll do, we will take these plans, and we will draw you up one set of specs for a building. I'll work with the building committee; we'll draw you up one set of specs that meet all of the codes. Fire codes, building codes, you know, everything you have to have for \$5,000, and we will allow you to make copies of them. All we ask from you is that when you get ready to put that building out for bid, that we have the same opportunity as anyone else to bid on the metal portion of the building. That's all we ask. A local contractor is going to get the bid, but all we ask is to receive a bid from him for the metal portion. If we get the bid, we will not collect our \$5,000 for that one set of drawings. If we don't get it, you owe us \$5,000 bucks."

BARBARA: Outstanding.

PHYLLIS: How's that for cooperation?

BARBARA: I should say.

PHYLLIS: So they did get the bid by the way, we never had to pay the \$5,000. And then to top everything else, when they brought over our finished one set, it was really hilarious.

He come in and he had his one set, you know, very nice, all done, complete blue prints, the little booklet to put it out for bid, and everything with us. And he said, "Well, here's your set." He said, "Have you got a big copy machine?" "No, we don't even have a copy machine, but I think I can probably get Palmers up here to copy them." He grinned, and then produced a box with ten sets in it.

BARBARA: Oh, well bless his heart.

PHYLLIS: He had given us ten --- they knew we needed that many to go out for bid, and so they just made ten sets for us. We put it out for bid. The bids were to be opened on July the 1st, of 1977. And when those bids were opened, from the time we'd started this process which was early in '76, until those bids were opened, inflation had went up enough that the lowest bid was \$229,000. We were \$29,000 over what we had. So we backed off and we took out all the floor covering, we took out the wainscoting around the walls, and some other little things. The bi-fold doors that you see over there weren't in here.

And they went back and started construction, and during that period then from July 1st in '77, until the building was almost completed early in '78, the Seniors had fund raising and stuff, including selling all this floor coverings, we had big cardboards up on the walls. We took every room, scaled it out, and you could buy a yard, or a foot, or whatever you want. We sold the whole building out in pieces. They raised that \$29,000 in the community; by the time it was time to put the floor covering down. The bi-fold doors were put in --- Dorie and Floyd Burden put those in later, and we did some little things. But the \$29,000 that was in the initial bid had been raised and was there when the time came, so it worked out fine.

Another really neat thing happened about that time. We had some kitchen equipment down there that we had bought with Old American's Act money. I read a little tiny ad in the Portland paper, one of those little ones about this wide (with fingers, designated about an inch) where the White Stag Company had got fined for price fixing, like, you know, several million dollars. And the money had been put in escrow through the district court in Portland. And part of the judgment against White Stag, the fine was, that that money would go out to private non-profits, whatever, in the form of one time grants for any purpose. It was wide open. But you could apply for these. So I called the district court in Portland, got the information on it, and we did not have only just --- we had a kitchen stove, a four-burner kitchen stove, a couple of roasters, one refrigerator, and a three compartment sink that we had to buy and put in that building of Woyak's, that we took out. And some cupboards that my husband built, and that was about it as far as equipment goes, you know. It was more like a home kitchen. So I applied to the district court for White Stag money. It worked perfectly, because we already had our blue prints and stuff, so that we could say we were in the process of building.

We got money. We applied for a grant from that White Stag money, for the range that we have now, the dishwasher, the walk-in freezer, the walk-in refrigerator. Oh, what else? The convection oven, I think that's about it. But the big items were the walk-in refrigerator and freezer. We got the grant! This was the 1st of November when they approved it. There was one catch to it. We had 30 days to purchase that stuff, and give them the receipts. This was November; this building is just a shell. So we went ahead, and Leonard --- Mildred had married Leonard (Leonard Knight) in the meantime, and he had been, he was our first site manager down there when we started the nutrition's. Before they got married, I had hired him for \$200 a month. And he worked for \$200 a month until the day he retired, last July, to run the nutrition program. So we went ahead

and he purchased the stuff, and we rented a storage shed, and we had that stuff in the storage shed down there waiting for the building to get finished, because we didn't dare turn it down.

BARBARA: Oh, no.

PHYLLIS: Well then it became evident by then, by then it was becoming quite evident that one of the other tremendous needs in this community was some kind of transportation system for the seniors to get around. At the same time that we started our nutrition program, the Federal Government put a whole bunch of money into nutrition programs, and sent it out to the states. Well Oregon had, the State of Oregon, when they got that money had not brought it out to the elderly in the form of nutrition programs. And on the third year of that money, when they did their audits, the Feds said, "Wait a minute, you can't just let that lay over here in Salem in the state coffers, that money is supposed to be out there serving the elderly. What are you people in Oregon doing? You're in trouble." So they told them that they had a year to get that money out there to programs, or they were going to take it back.

And they couldn't put it out to subsidize, just a budget to operate. It had to be one time use money, because they didn't want it to go out to start this big program with a budget, and then when the money is gone, there is that program and there is no way of funding it, you know, you get into trouble. So they called it "start up money". And they put it out, and we applied for money to buy a van, and the rest of the equipment in that kitchen. And we got that.

So we ended up with our van then, and then a year later, they still had not got rid of all that money. And nine months from that time, Oregon still had some money left, and they put out another start up package to people like me. And said, "Hey, its here you guys." Then we got the little Chevy car that we had at that time, so we had the two

vehicles at that time. And then in March, of course, we moved into this building then.

And since we moved in here then, we've continued the Senior Center, the nutrition program, the transportation program. We started the home care program, and then it became apparent in the County there was money started coming down for fuel assistance and westernization, with the elderly having top priority. You serve them first before you serve anyone else.

We took those grants in order to serve the elderly. But that branched us out to serving other low-income people in the community. Then Dale assigned emergency shelter, emergency services and the food bank to the Center. So we started doing that, and that's just pretty well where we are today.

BARBARA: You just kept growing, and growing, and growing.

PHYLLIS: We just kept growing, and I think we've stabilized at a level now.

BARBARA: You were fortunate to be in the right place at the right time.

PHYLLIS: Right. This is the whole key to what happened. Was that it just happened that they got this seven year grant at a time when these things were starting to happen, and there was someone then with that grant to go out there and get those things. And by the way the grant did end in seven years, and then the County decided rather than let the position go, they would pick it up. So Nancy (Case) is now taking my place, and will be that new director, with that position.

DOROTHEA: And this is Nancy Case?

PHYLLIS: Nancy Case, uh huh.

DOROTHEA: And she was originally, what, activities director of the Burns Nursing Home?

PHYLLIS: Nursing, yeah, right. Uh huh. What they did, the County Court requested that the Senior Board appoint a hiring committee, and that committee did the interviewing and

hiring.

DOROTHEA: Did you have many apply for that position?

PHYLLIS: We had five applicants for the position. And that brings us up to today, I guess.

BARBARA: What education did you have in order to start all this? You said you did some city, government type work when you were in Seneca, and administrative work, and things with the college. What is your schooling background then?

PHYLLIS: I'm a high school graduate.

BARBARA: Then you really, you worked hard at this then.

PHYLLIS: I'm a high school graduate. A lot of the knowledge and the ability, I think, to organize and do administrative work, I'll give credit where credit is due, comes from Oregon State Extension Service. I was extremely active with the Extension Service all the years my children were growing up, even at the state level. I went to work for the U. S. Census Bureau, as supervisor, I worked for the Department of Agriculture, doing ranching and enumerative surveys as a supervisor.

And when the City of Seneca was told, "Either you will build a new sewer system, and a new dump, or we will put padlocks on every door in town, because we are a little bit tired of having you dump your sewage in the Silvie's River." They had to incorporate, and of course then they held a city council election. And in one of those foolish moments when you think, you know, no way, they had nine men running for city council positions, for five positions, and they decided they wanted a woman to run. And they asked me if I would run, and I thought, "Well sure, you know, who's going to get elected with nine men."

Not only did I get elected, but I got chosen to be City Recorder, which was another one of those free jobs. I have taken courses through the years though. Anytime I have the opportunity, I take college courses. But as far as a college degree, I do not have one.

DOROTHEA: We have a little warning light on this, and it is blinking, so we have to turn over the tape, so we'll pause for a moment while we do that.

SIDE B

PHYLLIS: That's about all, you know, there's been lots of little incidents through the years. But that basically what I did, was just my job.

BARBARA: It took a lot of courage when you first got this position, and no place to do it, to get out there and work. A lot of people might have just thrown up their hands and said, "I can't do this."

PHYLLIS: Well it was a real challenge, but the need was out there. And this first group, this first planning committee, this was the original group that went to the County Court and asked if that position could be assigned to do this, was real enthusiastic, and that helps. Mary Bennett was on that group, Delphine Lazarus, Ron Hornbeck, Grace Farster, Beulah Clemens, I'm trying to think, it's been a long time, seventeen years.

DOROTHEA: Now you have boards of directors, and you have people --- can you name some of the committees that you have working to keep this Center running smoothly?

PHYLLIS: That's one thing that I didn't talk about earlier. One of the first things we did in 1973 was incorporate as a private non-profit, so that, you know, we could avail ourselves of grants, this kind of thing, as well as not paying taxes, you know, this kind of things. We operate now with an advisory board, and a board of directors. The board of directors is comprised of fifteen people, twelve which are elected by the seniors themselves. The other three are appointed, and the reason for these appointments, is to meet those federal regulations that we have in order to get funding. One of those people has to represent government, one has to represent the public at large, and one has to represent

the elderly, and they are appointed. They are appointed by the board. Then the advisory board is there again to meet federal regulations. And they are appointed by the board of directors. And they have to comprise --- there are six advisory board members, they comprise of three low-income members, at least three of them have to be low income, and at least three of them have to be consumers of service. One of those has to be representative government, and two the community at large. They are the ones that basically then will direct Nancy, to see that this continues. These are the basic; this is the basis then, is this what you wanted?

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

PHYLLIS: Yeah. And they will be the basis, and I've tried and I'm sure Nancy will too, of having them involved every year, in every step of the way so they know exactly what's going on. I think this is real important.

DOROTHEA: How often do you have meetings with those people?

PHYLLIS: We have quarterly meetings, formal meetings, and then we meet with the executive board once a month, with the executive board.

DOROTHEA: Do you have inspectors that come in and tell you, "You need a new floor, you need a new stove, you need a new cook?"

PHYLLIS: Oh yes, oh yes! Health, we're subject to the same regulations as restaurants, through the health department. We are subject to the same regulations as any public building with a fire marshal. The various funding sources that we receive, send in monitors on a regular basis to look at our fiscal books, to look at our program books, to see if we're meeting the guidelines of seventeen funding sources. So yeah, we, you know, we meet the federal regulations of, you know, we're subject to anything that anybody else is, and I think a few that they aren't sometimes. So, is this what you meant?

BARBARA: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: Yeah. You started as a one-person staff member, and eventually hired yourself a phone answerer, and more or less secretary. How many staff members do you employ now?

PHYLLIS: Seventeen, and five of those are part time, and the rest are full time.

DOROTHEA: What do you do? You mentioned a westernization program through this Center. What does this pertain to, and what does it do?

PHYLLIS: The westernization programs have two parts. One part is called the fuel assistance program, and this is what you see going on out here right now. This program operates from December 1st, through March, or until our, Harney County's allocation of funds are gone. And what it does is, we receive an allocation of funds that will, number one, seniors and handicap have top priority. We serve all of them first and then we open it up community wide. It permits a one-time payment of heat bills per heating season. For example, this year seniors, and non-seniors, who qualify on income of less than 125% of the poverty level, based upon the number of people in the household. They will qualify for an average payment of \$225 towards whatever their heat source is, oil, electricity, or whatever. That's one phase. That only operates during the wintertime.

Then in conjunction with that, we operate a westernization program, which we go out and weatherize those same people who are eligible for the heating assistance, or if you didn't get in during heating assistance, you can apply the year around. We go out and we weatherize those homes, and we can put --- We have two different programs, and we can put up to \$1,600 in materials and labor in each of those two programs, into those homes to cut down on the cost of heating. So that's basically the two things that we do, in a nutshell, in westernization.

DOROTHEA: Okay.

BARBARA: This work comes from contractors then that do the work?

PHYLLIS: No, we have our own crew.

BARBARA: Your own crew?

PHYLLIS: We have our own crew. We have a three-man crew. We have two men that do the westernization, and we have a third person that does a combination of auditing, getting ready to weatherize, and purchasing materials, and inspection. And then we have a gal that is the coordinator, and she runs all of those programs, all three of those programs.

BARBARA: I see.

DOROTHEA: What kind of a program or --- something, do you go through to quality for this kind of thing?

PHYLLIS: For westernization? You come into the office and we're going to be looking at what your total household income is for a period of either three months, and then take those three months times four to come up with the yearly average, or full twelve months income, whichever is to the advantage to the client. And that income, total household income, then must be at or below the 125% of poverty level. And it's based on the number in the household. So, and that's, and you have to have proof of income, etc. And lots and lots of paperwork. But that's the qualifications, yeah.

DOROTHEA: So this takes care of people with little children, as well as older people?

PHYLLIS: Right, right, right. Top priority is the elderly, and the handicapped. We pre-screen them in November, then on December 1st we open it up and top priority, there is a priority then, children under six, children over six, and so on.

DOROTHEA: You have the Meals on Wheels, do you furnish those five days a week, or do you, how do you supply those?

PHYLLIS: Meals on Wheels can be delivered, or can be furnished, I shouldn't say delivered, can be furnished up to seven days a week.

We have two hot meals, which are delivered on Wednesday, and Friday. And then we have frozen meals, main dishes that we can deliver whatever the need is, you know. We may have somebody that has a need seven days a week, you know, on a temporary basis, or whatever, so they can be. And we make those frozen meals right here. They are like TV meals, only larger, and we make them right here. We keep them in our deep freeze, in our walk-in.

DOROTHEA: How many families or persons do you have on the Meals to Wheels program?

PHYLLIS: Right now we've got, I believe, about 27 or 28, right now. It varies. We have some that are what we call regulars. These are people who for one reason or the other just can't quite cope with cooking, or won't cook, so we have our regulars. Then it depends on what's happening. In the winter, we have a higher amount than in the summer. Because we have people who --- with the flu, cold, or people who are afraid to get out, come to the Center, that they are alone and --- We're pretty generous with our Meals on Wheels, because even though the federal guidelines say you must be, quote, unquote, "homebound", they leave you some gray areas to define "homebound". And if you've got an elderly woman out here who doesn't want to go out because it's cold and nasty, we have got a transportation system; we encourage them to come in. But, you know, if they feel strongly about it, they don't want to go out, let's not deprive her of the opportunity to this nutrition, let's get a meal out to her. So we're pretty broad on that.

DOROTHEA: You also have your vans for transporting people to their --- for their grocery shopping and things like this, and cleaning some of these elderly people's homes. Can you tell us something about that, and about how many people do you clean for and transport?

PHYLLIS: We have two programs that we're doing what is called "home care," which is

the cleaning, etc. of homes. We have one program called Oregon Project Independence, a state funded program. It is probably the most restrictive program that we have. It has a sliding fee scale, based upon income, determines whether you pay a fee, and how much that fee is. Right now we're carrying eighteen homes on that program.

The other program is the Title 19 Contract, which is identically the same program, but it is for those who are on SSI, the extremely low income, and where else ... for Title 19, and right now we're carrying 11 clients on the Title 19 program. And it's a contract with Senior Services Division. Operates just like ours does. The only difference as far as operation goes is the Title 19 has a case manager, which is housed in this building here, in the back office, through the Ontario office that does the case management. The Oregon Project Independence Program, we have our own case manager, who does case management on it. That's the difference in the two as far as service goes.

DOROTHEA: She's a local person?

PHYLLIS: Right. Barbara Shultz is our Title 19 person, she is, works out of the Ontario office, as a satellite here. And again I might go back and say that initially, when that first committee got together in 1972, the one message that I got from them, and from the seniors, as we began to bring them in and find out what was wanted, the messages that came loud and clear, was they wanted as many of these Senior Services activities in one place, so that they didn't have to run all over to get these services.

And one of those gaps we filled three years ago when we negotiated with Senior Services Division to put a case manager for Title 19 in this building by renting that room. That filled that other gap. The only one that's left now is the food stamp assistance, which is still up at AFS. And with the adult transfer that's coming down in a year, that's probably going to move down here too, for the elderly.

DOROTHEA: Do you have an office space for that, or ---

PHYLLIS: It'll be in the same office, it will be the same --- she will go full time. So it'll be the same person. It'll still be a satellite out of Ontario, but she'll increase her hours.

DOROTHEA: Right now she is just part time?

PHYLLIS: She's half time right now, yeah. I shouldn't say that, she's half time working full time, I think. But ---

DOROTHEA: How much do you charge the elderly for their Meals on Wheels and their frozen dinners, and ---

PHYLLIS: Okay. There is no charge per se for those; it's a donation basis only. The board of directors sets that suggested donation based upon cost, and what they feel would be reasonable. It's set right now at \$1.75 per meal, but no one is turned away, and only you as a participant know how much you pay for those meals. In fact I can tell you a little, a cute little story on that one. Back early in the program, in fact we were still down in the Sam Woyak Building. We had a monitor come down from Salem to monitor our meal program, a federal monitor. And we got an "A-", and one of the reasons we got an "A-" was our donation can. We had taken a coffee can and covered it with bright pretty flowers, and cut a hole in the top, and we thought we were doing real well. You could stick the money in there. We got called on the carpet for that. It seems as though we had a problem, two things. One it had a clear lid on top, and two, you could hear the money hit the bottom of the can. Three, you could also see the bill, or the money when it went in, you know. You've got a flat can here, and you stick something in it, you can see. What we had to have was a box that had a rail around three sides of the top, at least three inches high, so that when you walk up here to this box, no one around can see what you are putting in, and we had to put foam in the bottom so they wouldn't hear how much money was put in. We actually got that gig on a monitoring visit.

So, (Laughter) I knew you'd enjoy that story. So one of our seniors, bless his

heart, built us --- he was on the board of directors, and when we did the exit interview for our monitoring visit, they talked about this to the board. So he rushed right home and built the box that we have today. So it's legal Nancy. That's one of those cute little things that comes out of years.

So actually there is a suggested donation of a \$1.75, but no one is turned away.

DOROTHEA: And that is including the meals that are served hot here on Wednesdays and Friday?

PHYLLIS: Yes, that's for any meal.

DOROTHEA: Now if I were to come down, and I'm not quite --- what is the age limit, I should ask first?

PHYLLIS: Okay. On our nutrition program, it's 60 plus. If you're lucky like I was and married to an older man, you could avail your-self of that meal at a \$1.75, or whatever you choose to donate at 59. In other words, one person in the household has to be 60 plus. We encourage the seniors to bring guests. Their friends, you know, their children, whatever, when they're in town. And the cost to them would be \$3. We do not encourage just the community walking in. You have to be a guest of a senior. We don't want to go into competition with our local restaurants.

DOROTHEA: You have a lot of volunteer work going on down here. Can you tell us some of the work that the volunteers do?

PHYLLIS: Of course our biggest volunteer program, and to me what is one of the most successful volunteer programs I've seen as far as a director is concerned, is our nutrition program volunteers. When we started the nutrition program, we sat down with the various churches in the community, and asked them to be a part of the nutrition program. And what has happened as a result of that is, the churches now do the serving, and do the table settings for the nutrition's program. And it is such a neat thing, and Nancy is going

to love it, because there is nothing to it, no work. Just feed them lunch once a year. What we did when we started was we sat down with the churches and asked them if they would appoint someone from their church to be the liaison person with us to start the program. And then we sat down with those and we assigned the church, churches, to a regular meal day. Then --- how many years ago, five --- four? When did you start, Rebekahs?

DOROTHEA: I don't know. I've got ---

PHYLLIS: I was trying --- off of the top of my head; I could look in the records.

DOROTHEA: I've got eight buttons. And I think I worked towards the first, and this is our ninth year.

PHYLLIS: Okay, okay, so it must have been in '80. The Rebekahs then had been doing a thing called the, was it Friendship Club. (Note: Correction --- The Friendly Hour.)

DOROTHEA: Friendship Club, and it was the Friendship Club, and I can't remember what else it was, but it had a couple of names.

PHYLLIS: Right. For the seniors. And then after the Center was going, and the activities were here, they disband this and they joined us as one of those volunteer groups to serve at the meal site. So now they serve also at the meal site. So what we've got is church groups plus the Rebekahs today. They are assigned a day, they come every month. Internally they elect a person to chair that. They find their own volunteers, and it's sort of like magic, you know. The door opens and they are here. I never have to call them. I have never had to call a volunteer. The Faith Baptist Church --- we had all of our days filled, and they wanted to get involved, so they're what we call our hidden volunteers now. They come every morning at 8 o'clock and set the tables for us. And that's always Faith Baptist.

We have numerous seniors and non-seniors on our list if we get in a bind in the kitchen and need extra help, and whatnot, we can call on. The seniors themselves, and

we have some non-seniors doing this now; open the Center now on Friday evenings and Sundays for recreation. The Old Time Fiddlers volunteer to provide music once a month, and dancing for the seniors.

We're using --- we've used some volunteers this year in our westernization, or energy assistance program for the first time to do some work before it's started.

DOROTHEA: Do you still have an exercise program for the elderly?

PHYLLIS: Yeah, they --- oh anywhere from oh, 3 to 7 or 8, and they are faithful. They're in there to their end. I think they must have a lot of fun in there. I'm going to go in there and check this out when I retire and see what's going on in there.

We, I was just trying to think what else. Oh, there's so many things. We have a friendly visiting program. We change the name of it this year, it's now Volunteer Coordination Program, and that's seniors helping seniors. It's seniors who do home visits, or visits in the home of other seniors. You know, if you've got a senior who is ill and whatnot, we can call them and they do these kind of thing.

BARBARA: Who do you have as your cooks? Have you had problems keeping cooks?

PHYLLIS: No, I have been very, very fortunate with staff. A lot of my staff has been here since almost day one, you know, as the program grew. They are starting to retire on us now. Mildred Red, later Knight, went to work as I said early in the program as a secretary, became my administrative assistant, became the legal aide for the elderly. Working on all kinds of insurance problems, and whatnot.

And then Leonard was our first sight manager, she later married him. He stayed with us until last July, when they both retired.

But in the meantime, Louise Bamberry went to work as head cook in the kitchen, and now we combined that and the site manager position, and she does both. And she's been here for seven years. So most of our staff have been around for quite a while. Oh,

we've had a few replacements, you know, but they move away on us. But the home care girls have been here 12, 13 years, the same girls. Added a couple of new ones. All the staff has been around for quite a while.

BARBARA: You must be an easy person to work for then if you've had these people come and stay with you all these years.

PHYLLIS: Well, they stay. I don't think, I'll be honest with you; I don't think it's me. I think it's the seniors, not me. I think it's the seniors is why they don't go way. They learn to love them. So I'll just be up front about that.

DOROTHEA: Well they are a good group to learn to like, every one of them.

PHYLLIS: Yeah, they are, they really are. You get real attached to them. That's the hardest part of my job, as far as I'm concerned is, you know, you work with these people, and the end result is their death. And that's hard sometimes.

DOROTHEA: Some of them are quite shocking, because they come so fast.

PHYLLIS: Yeah, uh huh.

DOROTHEA: What are your plans towards your retirement?

PHYLLIS: What are my plans? Well I'll be real honest with you. For about a year now, I've been physically tired, and I'm not as young as I used to be is my problem. I became a senior! I don't have any big plans. My husband retired two years ago, and he's been sitting at home for about six months now saying, "Dear, when are you going to come home?" We're going to do a little traveling, hopefully, by next fall. Nothing planned much for fall. We're fortunate in that our grandson and his wife moved to Burns three years ago, and are living just across the street from us. And we have two great grandchildren there who love to spend time in Grandma's kitchen. And I'm really looking forward to having them in my kitchen. The little girl is three, and she just can't hardly wait for Grandma to come and teach her to cook. She's sure she can learn, at three! So I'm

looking forward to that, and a little traveling, and just relaxing.

DOROTHEA: Having two grandchildren, I know they can, because I have, my oldest grandson is 9 and he can put on a meal now all by himself. So I know they can. And he started about 4.

PHYLLIS: Yeah, she's wanting --- she likes to watch me, and the first thing we're going to do after I retire is learn to make peanut butter cookies together.

DOROTHEA: It worries me to death that they let that boy get in the kitchen all by himself because of so many dangerous things can happen, but he thinks he's old enough, so ---

PHYLLIS: He thinks he's capable.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

PHYLLIS: But not any big plans. Plan to stay in Harney County.

DOROTHEA: Good.

PHYLLIS: Not go away.

DOROTHEA: That sounds like a good idea.

PHYLLIS: Hopefully Nancy will feel sorry for me on occasion, and invite me down to do a little volunteer work. And I'm the best dishwasher in the world, Nancy. I enjoy the kitchen. So hopefully ---

BARBARA: You're ready to get out of the office and back to the kitchen.

PHYLLIS: Right, right. That is the one thing that has happened on this job that probably has caused me more concern than anything else. When the job started I got to work with people. The job is evolved for 17 years, and it's no longer a people job, it's a administrative job. Looking for, getting budgets together, getting money. Seeing that the budgets work. Seeing that the programs work, and it's really got me away from the people, and I miss that.

BARBARA: So much paper work anymore.

PHYLLIS: Yeah, and I miss that, I miss that contact. In fact I think one of the things that Dale (White) sent down as an extra added task for us down here, is the emergency service program, which is working with stranded --- people that are stranded on the road, families with problems. And most of these things are at night, but I thoroughly enjoy them because I'm working with people again. I don't mind getting up at 10 o'clock and going down and loving half a dozen kids that have got a problem. I don't mind that. If you ever need a volunteer in that area, Nancy, I'm available.

BARBARA: You have that down on record.

PHYLLIS: Feel free to call me.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, this is recorded, you have proof.

PHYLLIS: I'll back you up.

DOROTHEA: Proof and witnesses.

PHYLLIS: But I do miss that people contact. I think maybe I give myself this summer off so to speak, and I think maybe I may find a 4-H group of kids that would like to have a 4-H Club again.

BARBARA: Well I'm sure there's a great need for that too.

PHYLLIS: I miss that. I haven't had time now for a long time to

DOROTHEA: For some reason, I just can't see you sitting around not doing very much.

PHYLLIS: I don't intend to, I intend to be involved.

DOROTHEA: I for one can remember going out and falling timber with you also.

PHYLLIS: Yes. In fact, I think the first time I ever met you, you may have been running a power saw.

DOROTHEA: Right, I think so.

PHYLLIS: What she's talking about is that to put our three children through college, we

took thinning contracts for the Forest Service. And they could earn enough through the summer months to get through another year of college. And quite often we had, we camped right out in the woods. My husband was driving log truck, and I was the camp cook, and the camp gofer. And a lot of those contracts were a little larger than what you could get done during this span, you know, that the kids could work, so you'd end up with part of a contract left and the University of Oregon was calling. And so we would sub-contract these out. And I can remember Dorothea out with a power saw on a sub-contract thinning timber. So she did a little of everything too, along the line. I can even run a power saw if the need arises.

BARBARA: Jack of all trades.

PHYLLIS: Yeah, yeah. Oh, my husband is one that, he doesn't have a lot of outside interests. His life has been his family. And, you know, our kids tease us now because we never owned any-thing but a wood stove until they left home. And we always did it as a family project, you know, to get the wood in, in the summer. This was a family project. Everybody went to get wood in. We had a barbecue in the woods, or a picnic, and we got our wood in. The kids love to tease us now about, "Well we just don't understand that, we leave home and the folks get an oil furnace." (Laughter)

DOROTHEA: I think maybe that goes along with --- It isn't called age, I'm sure, but anyway --- One time or one piece of leisure, maybe that, because I love the oil furnace too!

PHYLLIS: Yeah, yeah, me too.

DOROTHEA: Although I'm using a little bit of wood it seems like.

That wood heat you just can't get out of the oil furnace.

PHYLLIS: No, no you sure can't. So I'll be busy, I'm sure. If not, I'll find something to be busy at.

DOROTHEA: I imagine you'll come down and enjoy some of these meals ---

PHYLLIS: I plan on it.

DOROTHEA: --- just to kind of check on things.

PHYLLIS: I've got to get used to sitting down though, I've already found that out.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

PHYLLIS: I've turned this portion over to Nancy already, willingly, and --- But I find myself sitting there thinking, you know, kind of sitting with, about this far off of the chair, because I'd really ought to jump up and do something. But I'm learning to sit closer to the chair.

BARBARA: And when is your retirement date?

PHYLLIS: The 22nd of December will be my last day, and I've already told Nancy that feel free to call me if I forgot to tell her something. I don't think it's going to be a problem. She's catching on real quick.

BARBARA: Good.

DOROTHEA: Well, is there anything else that you would like to add on to this? I'm about questioned out, and I'm sure you are about talked out.

PHYLLIS: Well about the only thing that I would say in closing is that when I took the job, I had no idea what it was. It was a challenge, but it took me about one year to find out that it was not a job, that it was more of a devotion to a group of people. And it's been really exciting. And I wouldn't trade those 18 years for the world. I'm glad I didn't get the youth job. (Laughter)

DOROTHEA: Though I think youth are very nice to work with, but I do like the older people myself. We'll close now; if you don't have anything more to add, and do a little video that we are going to do with about the same questions that we've asked you before. And Barbara will get you on tape, because we want to store you in our Library.

PHYLLIS: Okay.

DOROTHEA: So, thank you Phyllis, we've enjoyed the visit, and now we'll take your picture.

-dlp-

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INFORMATIONAL DATA RE: PHYLLIS M. LISSMAN
HARNEY COUNTY SENIOR CENTER WORK CAREER

The community of Burns-Hines had no senior services prior to 1972. However,

there were many within this community who were aware that senior centers and senior services were springing up throughout the country; and groups of people within the community were getting together and discussing how to have a senior center within Harney County.

During this period, Eddie Young was the Director of the Harney Counseling & Guidance Service (local mental health clinic). There was federal funding available through mental health for two "Aide" positions to round out the mental health services. Following input from several senior citizen age women in the community, it was Eddie's decision to use one of these positions to fund a "Senior's Aide" position. And on November 1, 1972, Phyllis Lissman was hired as a "Senior's Aide". There was only money for salary, nothing for supplies of any kind, not even a postage stamp. This federal grant was an "eight year diminishing grant," meaning federal funding diminishing through the eight years, with no federal funds at all by the ninth year. Assumption being local funds would pick up the position, and it has been a county funded job as it evolved into a AAA Director's position for several years.

Phyllis worked out of her home. Her first decision was to run a survey to determine the needs and desires of the local senior citizens. She learned the number one goal was to, "have a senior center of their own".

The early activities included a monthly newsletter, run off on an ancient memo machine from her kitchen table. Renting the Museum Club Rooms, and later the Episcopal Church for weekly cards, dancing, potlucks, and soon a "Surprise Lunch" once a month which Phyllis cooked herself. The Surprise Lunches were continued until our nutrition program (III C-1 & 2) were begun October 8, 1976.

By September 1973, Phyllis had found a building to rent for an "actual" senior center. The only money available for rent and utilities was what the seniors and Phyllis

donated. The seniors also donated dishes, silverware, pots and pans, chairs and tables from their homes to furnish the center. Everything we had was second-hand. Phyllis' desk was a door put across the top of two small "home style" filing cabinets. This building was directly across the road from the cemetery. With respect for the feelings of the elderly, we always tried to draw the drapes when we saw the hearse coming. (It could be we were more concerned than the seniors.)

During the autumn of 1973, Phyllis began a search for a way to get either federal or state funds so the center could be expanded, and an office person could be hired. An application for Title 3 (Information & Referral) grant was filed, and funds were to begin on January 1974, to pay a half time salary for one more person, and some money to pay the rent and utilities --- we were on the way to expanding services. There was more time to give to seniors and more seniors surfaced who needed assistance.

A Blood Pressure Clinic was begun March 1974. We began taking seniors shopping, to the doctor, helped them understand their Medicare and insurance, and we offered more recreation. By May 1974, the building was sold. A local plumber rented us part of his building, but it required much remodeling. Volunteers, including Phyllis' husband, did carpentry work to return a plumber's shop into a senior center.

In the autumn of 1974, Phyllis hired two local women to do a complete survey of the Burns/Hines area to determine the needs of the local senior citizens. This was the key to getting more funds to meet these needs. Proof was given that the needs were there and documented.

In March 1975, another woman was added to the staff as a "Geri-Aide". This was our forerunner to the OPI program that officially began in the State of Oregon, that was called (Oregon Project Independence) begun on a statewide basis July 1, 1976. Our log for our Geri-Aide was an eight-armed woman. It seemed in those days we all needed at

least eight arms. We had lots of seniors needing escort, transportation, shopping assistance, and a score of needs; and we did our best to meet all these needs as they arose.

About February 1976, Phyllis learned there was funding to be had to insulate homes for the low-income seniors. A crew of two men were hired in the spring of 1976. This portion of our services continues now under the DOE & LIEAP programs, and employs four full time persons. It is a very busy part of the services given through Harney County Senior Citizens, Inc.

Title 7 - Now IIIC- 1 & 2 Nutrition Program for congregate and Meals on Wheels began October 8, 1976, in a makeshift kitchen with one electric, and one gas home style stove. A quarter-time site manager who cooked, and one part-time assistant cook/baker was hired with these funds. We served a hot meal at that site two days a week. We all stopped whatever we were doing and helped the kitchen crew prepare the meal, and with the help of volunteer seniors delivered Meals on Wheels. Eating was our most popular part of the program.

By winter of 1976-77, we received funds enough to hire two more persons. By spring of 1977, we learned from the "Office of Elderly Affairs" in Salem, that there would be some, "One Time Start-Up" funds for "needy" nutrition sites to help them get equipment on a one-time basis, to start up nutrition sites for senior citizens. We were "made to order" for these funds. Application was made, and funds received.

We were able to purchase a small Van --- WE HAD A TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM, a real milestone toward total services. We also purchased commercial kitchen equipment. More funds were made available as services expanded, and others were added to our staff. We were a very visible part of the community, and Phyllis was recognized by the community with appreciation of her leadership. In 1976, she received

the Business & Professional Women's "Harney County Outstanding Business Woman" award; in 1977, she received the BPW's "Golden Torch" award; and in January 1978, Phyllis received the Harney County Chamber of Commerce "Woman of the Year" award (a cherished and well earned award).

These were not her first recognition of leadership awards. In 1974, Phyllis was the first recipient of a state-level, annual award given for leadership with youth to receive recognition for years of support and participation with 4-H youth. Phyllis was cited for her "outstanding management of the Oregon State Fair's 4-H dormitory over a three year period". Phyllis was in 4-H as a girl in home in Wyoming, and her love for 4-H continued as an adult. She was a 4-H leader for 18 years in Grant County while she and her family lived in Seneca, Oregon. With her move to Harney County, her endeavors turned to the other end of the life scale.

In May 1977, Dr. Frank White, local medical doctor and County Commissioner of Harney County, came to the senior center office with the news that there were lots in the downtown area that could be made available to the seniors for a site for a Senior Center building. These lots did become available to the seniors and were subsequently traded for the lots where the Harney County Senior Center now stands at 17 South Alder Street, in Burns.

About the same time White Stag was fined a large sum of money. That judge determined this money should be made available to organizations and programs who benefited people. We applied, showing how we would spend the money and received \$13,000. What an incredible piece of good fortune. We could use this money to help furnish a new Senior Center.

Our site manager sat down and began drawing plans for a "dream kitchen". We all added our thoughts on what we thought should be part of a building for senior citizens, for

services, and recreation. All services for senior citizens would be under one roof. No one would be sent from agency to agency to seek the services they needed. A dream that was fulfilled.

Many of our seniors had excellent advice and suggestions, and the plans were changed over and over again. A "building committee" was then appointed by the Board of Directors of the Senior Center, and more changes were made. Plans were drawn and re-drawn.

In the spring of 1978, we learned there was a turn-back of some of the one-time start-up funds; and so funds were again available on a one-time basis for more kitchen equipment. We also purchased a small car to help with escort for those who could not climb up the step into our "transportation van". This new kitchen equipment was stored until we could move into a new building that we hoped to begin building later in 1978.

There had been \$25,000 received from the will of one of our dear seniors who had worked hard in our early efforts to have a Center. Then the great news of all, the County Court (County Judge and two Commissioners) advised they would set aside "In Lieu of Taxes" funds that were received by Harney County, toward a new Senior Center Building. With the green light on funding from our County Court, an architect was hired to draw our plans, and bids were let. The best bid was for many thousand dollars beyond what we could find when we put all the money together. Inflation was to blame. We were advised if we could not go with a building that year, we would probably never have the funds to build on our lots. We cut back what the contractor would put into the new building by many thousands of dollars, and the local fund raising began. The seniors, the service clubs, the sororities, and nearly every organization in town, young and old people made donations and we got enough to finish the building as was first planned. No tax money went into our building. All of Harney County was proud of their efforts; and most of all, the

seniors and those of us who worked with them.

We moved into our new building March 19, 1979. We knew we wanted to have an "Open House" and a special dedication with a party. The decision was made to ask Governor Atiyeh to come to Burns and be a "guest speaker" for the dedication for our new Center. We were honored to have both Governor and Mrs. Atiyeh come to Burns and be a part of our celebration. We were also fortunate to have Congressman (then State of Oregon Senator) Robert F. Smith, serve as our Emcee for the program. It was during the program that "Senator Bob" presented Phyllis with a plaque, given by the senior citizens of Harney County, which reads, "In recognition to Phyllis Lissman for her devoted leadership in acquiring this new senior center. We are grateful. Harney County Senior Citizens, May 12, 1979."

Phyllis has grown with the job. She began as a "Senior's Aide," progressing to a Senior Center Coordinator, to a AAA Director for District 14-Harney, supervising 16 employees who work in the multiple phase program which includes Food Bank, Emergency Shelter, Energy Assistance, and Westernization of low income homes, meeting the needs as they arise in this community for the elderly and low income people. During their years in Seneca, Oregon (Grant County), Phyllis and Wayne Lissman raised their one daughter and two sons, educating them in the local Grant County schools, and later higher education in the state schools. Phyllis and Wayne have four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. They moved from Grant to Harney County in 1972, just a few months prior to Phyllis being hired "to start a program for the senior citizens in Harney County". When you come to visit the Harney County Senior Center you can see the job is being done.

