

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #276- Sides A & B

Subject: Avel Diaz - With Video

Place: Harney County Library, Burns, Oregon

Date: May 17, 1990

Interviewers: Dorothea Purdy & Barbara Lofgren

Release Form: Yes

DOROTHEA PURDY: This is Dorothea Purdy, and we're talking with Avel Diaz at the Library in Burns, Oregon. The date is May the 17th, 1990. Barbara Lofgren is with me, and we will be visiting with Diaz about his childhood and his history. Diaz, can you tell us your first name, and where you were born?

AVEL DIAZ: My first name is Avel, and I was born in Mountain Home, Idaho.

BARBARA LOFGREN: And when?

AVEL: October 11th, 1921.

DOROTHEA: What are your parent's names?

AVEL: My mother's name was Beatriz, B E A T R I Z. And my dad's name was Emilio.

DOROTHEA: And where were they born?

AVEL: They were born in Lequeitio, Spain.

DOROTHEA: I think Barbara's going to have to get with you to spell these names.

AVEL: Okay.

DOROTHEA: Why did they come to Harney County?

AVEL: Well, my dad come over to work in sheep around Shoshone, Idaho, when they originally come over. And then they went to Mountain Home, at the age of eighteen. Then my mother come over a year or two later as a maid at a Basco hotel in Mountain Home, Idaho. They paid her passage over here. And then they did a lot of that in those days. These gals worked their bondage

off; I guess you can call it, bondage. And then my dad and her got together. It's kind of a coincidence, he had Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, and they brought him in from the sheep camp. And there was no hospitals in Mountain Home at the time so they, the doctors, put him in this Basque hotel. And my mother's job was to take care of him when he was sick. And through that relationship they ended up getting married.

BARBARA: One thing led to another. (Laughter)

AVEL: One thing led to another.

DOROTHEA: And then, when were you born?

AVEL: Well, I was born October 11th, 1921, in Mountain Home. And my dad was a midwife I guess. Doctors were pretty scarce in that area at the time.

BARBARA: Was he continuing to herd sheep at that time?

AVEL: Yeah, he was --- no, at the time I was born, he was working for the Union Pacific Railroad as a section hand.

BARBARA: I see.

DOROTHEA: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

AVEL: I do have, I got two brothers and one sister.

DOROTHEA: And what are their names?

AVEL: The oldest brother has passed away; his name was Pete, or Pedro. Then my sister was number two, was Anita. Then I had a brother; well have a brother named Ramon. Then I was the last one in the line. I was the baby.

BARBARA: You were the baby.

DOROTHEA: Where did you go to school?

AVEL: Well, I started school in Mountain Home, Idaho, and went to school in Mountain Home until I was in the sixth grade. Then I came to Andrews in the summer of '32, I believe, to stay with my sister. I didn't know my sister --- and I'm going to go back in the history a little bit, but we were orphaned when I was two months old. My mother burned to death while Dad was working, had gone to work in the morning. And he farmed us out to different Basque families in Mountain

Home, the three boys. And then my sister went to live with her aunt, my dad's sister, in Emmett, Idaho.

Consequently, in those days, we never got together. And I really didn't know my sister until she ended up in Andrews as a maid, working for a Basque family by the name of Arriolas, which were, Mrs. Arriola was a cousin, or a sister to Mrs. Urizar that just passed away.

And consequently, my sister got married when she was fourteen years old, which was too young. She married a Basque fellow that was somewhat older than her, and he was from Chili. His people went from Spain to Chili, and then he had relatives in Winnemucca. And as a young man he came to Winnemucca and herded sheep in the South End. And where my sister was working at the hotel there at Andrews, why they ended up getting married.

So, in 1934, I believe, '32, '34, I come over to Andrews to stay with my sister one summer. And come fall and I was supposed to go back to Mountain Home, why my brother-in-law said, "Well, why don't you just finish school here, and pack wood and water?" Didn't have no water in the house, and burned sagebrush, so I chopped sagebrush. He again was working in the sheep camps, so my sister was alone more or less. So, I thought that was a great idea, because I had nothing to return to in Mountain Home.

I had lived with two families from the time my mother died, and I lived with one family until I was going on eight. And she widowed sometime along the line, and had four children of her own. She was Basque. She remarried a farmer in Boise, and things were tough, and he told her that he would take her four children, the other one didn't belong.

So, I was farmed out to another Basque family at that time. And it was an altogether different situation. I lived with these people going on four years.

And my dad remarried about that time. I really didn't know my dad, although I knew him when I saw him up town. Out in the sheep camp most of the time. The only provisions he made for us kids was we could go down to the local clothing store and buy school clothes, and so forth and so on. So, when he remarried, he married an American gal, and she wasn't Basque. So, I run away from the people I was living with, because life wasn't too pleasant there. I went to live with

my dad and stepmother. And my oldest brother he run away from the Basque family that he was living with, because he had had a pretty miserable life. And brother Ray, he lived in the Basque hotel where my mother and dad met, and he really had a good home. So, he asked those people, he'd kind of like to go live with his brothers, and they said, "You go, and if it doesn't work out, you can come back."

Well brother Pete, he lied about his age and joined the 3-C's shortly thereafter. And when I had a chance to come to Oregon, and not go back, why I just stayed in Oregon.

And then consequently, in about a year and a half later, my sister and husband separated, so that kind of left me out here all by myself. And there was a lot of Basque sheep people on the South End at that time, and they took me in and made it possible for me to work in sheep camps.

And then Crane High School entered into the picture after I got out of grade school. And I was able to stay in the dorm and go to school in the winter months. And the school principal was real good to me. He let me drop out every April in school and go to lambing camps so I could make a few bucks. Then I would come back in May and finish school.

And then my senior year in high school at Crane, the school board decided at that time that I had nobody in the county, or in the district, paying property taxes. So, if I wanted to go to school in Crane, I had to pay room and board. And that wasn't possible, so the school principal, a guy by the name of Mr. Haberly, and he apparently took a liking to me --- and his wife had a child that summer, between my junior and senior years. They rented a house in Crane, because they were matron and patron both, prior to that. So, he give me a place to live and stay at Crane my senior year, free of charge. So that way I was able to finish high school.

BARBARA: That was great.

AVEL: And so, I feel like Harney County is my home. They've been good to me. And I really feel that if it hadn't been for me coming to Oregon, I'd have probably ended up being some kind of a bum, and I really mean this. Okay.

DOROTHEA: Well Harney County, you have made Harney County your home, and we have made you our special person. So, we're glad you stayed in Harney County.

BARBARA: Did you play sports and things like that when you were in school?

AVEL: I played football, and boxing when I was in high school. Of course, in those days Crane had a boxing team, and other high schools in the area did, all but Burns. And we had a good boxing team, and we fought Adrian, Vale, Prairie City, John Day, Lakeview. And we tried to get Burns to put a boxing team up, but the Mother's Club wouldn't let them. Probably just as well.

DOROTHEA: I think that, I think that vanished after awhile, because I remember they had them, a boxing team.

AVEL: And then football in those days, Burns wasn't as big as they are now. And Crane played eleven-man football. And so, our opposition in football was we'd play a home, and home game with Burns every year. Travel was really kind of restricted, so Crane would come up here and play fair week, on the weekend of the fair. And then Burns would come to Crane and play on --- Dorothy probably has heard this before, but they used to have the stockman's market, or banquet in Crane in those days, annual stockman's, stock growers party. And they fed people there in the gym, had a big meal. So, Burns would come over as an annual football game with Crane towards the end of November at the stock grower's convention at Crane.

BARBARA: And what year was it that you graduated from high school?

AVEL: I graduated in 1941. I dropped out one year, well let's don't lie about this, I got booted out one year. I, it was again, this was good for me, because the first principal that we had, that I had in Crane, he was, didn't get along with kids too well. And we were kind of a bunch of renegades. And we were taking one another's stuff, that didn't belong to us. And I picked up a flashlight that didn't belong to me. So, in March of that year I got booted out of school. And I went right to work in the sheep camp.

I come back that fall, and I think I had a chip on my shoulder. And being on my own, and Mr. Haberly, that was his first year of teaching there. I come to school in October, I worked an extra month, and I went in the office and I'll never forget it. I went in the office with my suitcase and little bedroll. "Oh," he said, "you're Diaz." "Yeah." And he said, "Well, you don't need to unpack your suitcase, because you're not going to be here very long." He said, "The school board

hired me to run this school, and I think you come back with the attitude that you might try to run it." He said, "We both can't run it." And he kind of set me back a little. And I decided then, well I'm going to show you something.

As it ended out, this Mr. Haberly, we became very close. He helped me out a lot. And when I was in the Service I sent my money and put it in the John Day bank, they took care of it for me. When I got out of the Service, they had a job for me in John Day. I stayed with them in John Day until I got squared away after I got out of the Service. But my heart was always here in Harney, in Burns and Harney County.

I learned the cleaning trade in John Day. And when I had an opportunity to buy a cleaning shop in Burns, why I traded my automobile in for a down payment. And here I was, two kids, no money in the bank, and living back of the cleaning shop for several years. And we made it from there.

DOROTHEA: You mentioned you had kids; you must have gotten married in the time.

AVEL: Yeah, I got married in John Day in 1949.

DOROTHEA: And who did you marry?

AVEL: I married a gal by the name of May Belcher. She was from Missouri. Her dad had come out here and worked for Edward Hines up in Seneca. And she come from divorced parents, and so when she got out of Chillicothe Business School, why her dad got her a job working for Bear Valley Stores. And she come out and worked for them as a bookkeeper and accountant. And then I --- she worked there about a year, and she moved to John Day and went to work for a law firm, and become a legal secretary. And I met her there, and we got married, we went to Winnemucca and got married. And settled in John Day for three years after we were married. May sure didn't want to come to Harney County. She was pretty well set in Grant. Of course, really not, my heart was over here really. And so, we made the move, and I can say this today, you couldn't get May to go back to Grant County. So, we're set.

BARBARA: What were you doing then in Grant, in John Day?

AVEL: Well, when I first got out of the Service, I went to work at the Ford Garage for Lloyd

Ogilvie as a body, fender person. And I went to work there under the GI Bill. And I kind of liked the trade, but I got to the point that I couldn't get off the GI Bill and just make a hundred dollars a month under that program.

I quit and went to work in the woods as a scaler. And we were shut down one winter, heavy snow, and it kind of knocked us out of the woods, so I was doing odd jobs around John Day, waiting for the woods to open up.

The cleaner needed a cleaner. He said, "Come on in." This cleaner kind of took a liking to me too, because he had married, or his wife had gone to school with somebody from Harney County, one of the Ausmuses. And they had gone to normal school. And this Ausmus gal had married Ben O'Keefe.

And so, the guy that I went to work for spent a lot of time in Harney County, because his wife taught down at, oh, down below Fields, Wright Point. There was a schoolhouse at Wright Point at the time, and so they made a lot of trips to Harney. I think that's why he took me in. He said well this kids from Harney County, or this guy --- and I learned the cleaning business from him, and worked for him about three, four years. And had a chance to come to Burns, so I come back.

DOROTHEA: And so how many children do you have?

AVEL: Five.

DOROTHEA: Can you give us their names?

AVEL: Gene, the oldest, then Donita, two years younger. And then Michael, about two years difference. And then Beatriz, and I don't know what happened, we had two there within a year, so -- then Tony come along. No, I'll back off here; Mike and Beebee are just a year apart. And then a year and a half later, two years, we had Tony. So that makes five.

DOROTHEA: And how many children, grandchildren do you have?

AVEL: At the present time we have about ten.

DOROTHEA: Ten.

AVEL: Uh huh. I think there is another one on the way. I don't like it, but ---

BARBARA: And where do all your children live?

AVEL: Gene lives in Bend, he works in one of the city golf courses over there. Mike he is an itinerant plumber, or he builds motels, strictly in the motel building business, him and his boss. They go all over the country. They just moved to Salem out of Portland, be in Portland, or Salem several months, and then probably be going down to Southern California. He likes it.

And Donita she married a local boy, Keith Jordan, and has three kids, and he has been a mill worker since they have been married. And Bebe, we call her, Beatriz, she married one of the Sitz boys, Philip from out at Drewsey. And he is in the contracting business. So, three of them --- and then Tony's got his little restaurant downtown. So, three of them live here, and one is on the road, and the other one lives in Bend.

BARBARA: I want to back up just a little bit. You say you were in the Service. When did you go into the Service, right after you got out of high school, or?

AVEL: A year later I enlisted in the, well I went to school in --- when I got out of high school, they had a program; the government did, called NYA, National Youth Administration. And a bunch of us Crane kids, and a couple of guys from Jordan Valley went to Pendleton that summer, the summer of '41, and went to NYA school. And we learned to be aircraft, supposedly mechanics.

And then we went up to Boeings and got a job at Boeings, Seattle. We batched. There was five from Crane, and two from Jordan Valley. We rented a big house, and we did real well.

And then when the war come along, we had been in Seattle about three months before Pearl Harbor. And none of us had to go in the Service; we could have stayed in Seattle. But my two brothers were in, one of them got drafted, and the other was a Marine at the time of Pearl Harbor. And so, I quit my job and joined the Service in '42.

BARBARA: And then when did you get out?

AVEL: I got out in December, December 31st of '45.

BARBARA: And where were you located during the time that you were in the Service?

AVEL: Well, we were, I was in the air force, as an engineering group in the air force. Of course, they was army air force in those days. And so, from Fort Lewis to Chico, from Chico to Hobbs,

New Mexico, took some training there. And then to Sacramento, Santa Maria, Pendleton for a while, god I loved that. (Laughter) And then from Fort Laughton to Hawaii.

And then we were, we were a different type of air force people. We repaired airplanes, and we also got airstrips and facilities ready for use. And the only place I ended up in the Pacific was Iwo Jima. And we were trained in combat. And they were supposed to take that island in thirty-six hours. It took them twenty-six days, so my group, there was thirteen of us; we landed on Iwo, D-24, which is the next day after the invasion. Then we was supposed to wait for the rest of our gear and stuff to come on. We didn't see any of our outfits for thirty days. We were just stuck on Iwo, thirteen of us. We had rations enough for three days. And we run out of rations, so we just went in and we worked as stretcher bearers, and the marines fed us, and we'd go on the front lines and bring back wounded. And we didn't see nobody from our outfit for, like I say, right at a month.

And then right after that we were taking winter training, and after things settled down, and we was going to go on invasion in Japan. We was going to hit the northern part of Japan, where we were headed. And I don't think too many of us was looking forward to it. So, I'm one of those people that, when they dropped the bomb, I thought it was a great deal. So shortly thereafter that, why they dropped the bomb in August, and in December I was on my way home.

BARBARA: And during the time that you were in school, your sister remained down in the Fields area?

AVEL: No.

BARBARA: Or after she was divorced, did she leave ---

AVEL: She married, it's a coincidence, she married --- well, when I first met May in John Day through a mutual friend, she got in my car, and he had his girlfriend. And I said, "Where are you from?" And she said she was from Macon, Missouri. I said, "Macon?" "Yeah." I said, "I've got a sister living in Macon, Missouri." She said, "You do?" "Yeah." "Who's your sister?" And I said, "Lindley." And May's people, and the Lindleys and the Starbucks, the Pendleton's in this country are all from the same area in Missouri, they all knew each other. And she said, "Well, my dad and, my brother-in-law Elliott," said, "his dad and my dad are coon hunters. They hunt coon together,

and squirrel." "Now you got to be kidding."

BARBARA: Is that right?

AVEL: So, she couldn't believe me. Anyway, my sister and her husband finally ended up in --- they're retired now, and they live in Idaho Falls. He went to work for the atomic people there at Arco as a contractor. So, they're, so they make their home in Idaho Falls. But it was just a kind of coincidence.

BARBARA: I should say. How many different Basque people were running sheep on the mountain during the time of your high school years?

AVEL: Probably Basco involvement, there was Tom and Jose partnership, Madarieta, and Zabala. They just buried Tom here last, about ten days ago.

DOROTHEA: Was he going down in Nevada?

AVEL: Yeah, Winnemucca. He was the guy that was really good to me. Tom, he kind of took me under his wings, and taught me how to cook a little bit in sheep camps. He was a master cook anyway.

Okay there is Tom and Jose, and there was Martin Esnaola, he had an outfit. And there was two partners with Frank Kueny, Joe Zorrozuza, and little Shorty Arkoochan. They worked with Kueny. There was big Joe Laucirica. The reason they called him Big Joe, was a kind of coincidence too. My sister's first husband was Laucirica, Joe Laucirica. Two Laucirica 's in Andrews, and one was --- brother-in-law was a little fellow, about five foot three or four, so they called him Little Joe Laucirica. Big Joe Laurica he was a big man, six foot something, so he was Big Joe Laucirica.

DOROTHEA: Were they related?

AVEL: No, no relation at all, just had the same last name. And then there was the Zabala family, another Sabala. They spelled their name with an "S", Domingo. His whole family was in the sheep business. The kids did not go to school. They formed a sheep outfit and it took them several years, by taking bummers in. They take in twenty, thirty, forty bummers, and then pretty soon they picked up, had enough after a period of years, they had a couple bands of sheep. They kept their ewes.

And the girls, from the time they was old enough to walk, they worked in the sheep camps. They ended up going to the Roseburg country about the time Taylor Grazing come in. They went, they did real well there. They got in the lumber business, logging. And they're still there. So, there was the Zabala's, and then there was the Garays, and Ecgabus from Ontario, and Mendiola didn't quite make it up to the Steens from that country. Then there was a Raymond [Raymundo] Zabala that had a sheep outfit for a while. And there was, I think that's about it.

BARBARA: So, there is quite a few.

AVEL: Yeah, there is a bunch of them, yeah.

BARBARA: And did most of them come maybe from Idaho, or did a lot of them just come straight from Spain?

AVEL: A lot of them come over here from Idaho. Most of them, and Nevada, some of them migrated up here from Nevada.

DOROTHEA: Did you ever work with --- who all, I should say who all did you work with?

AVEL: Well, I worked with Tom Zabala mostly. And then a couple of lambing camps, and one summer I worked with the Urizars. I forgot to mention them; they had sheep up there, Julio's dad and uncles. And I worked with them two lambings, and then with Tom. And then one summer I worked with the, when the Alvord went in the sheep business, they had two Greek boys running the sheep outfit. I herded sheep for them one summer.

I, a couple of summers I didn't go into the sheep camp. I kind of ended up working for Warren McLean part time as a net setter. And then you've heard of Mustang Smith, used to be some kind of a contractor in the Denio area. Helen Felt was his daughter.

DOROTHEA: Oh, yeah.

AVEL: Okay. And I worked for him part of one summer in the hay fields there on the Alvord. I got a little better both ends of it.

BARBARA: Were there more sheep on the mountain than cattle at that time, do you think?

AVEL: Oh, I would think so. I would say probably at one time, you could look the records up; of course, they didn't keep records. It was probably a hundred and fifty to two hundred thousand head

of sheep on the Steens Mountain alone at one time. And there was some Irish sheep people, Murphy and Callaghan, and O'Keefe's.

The Jenkins people come in here, were sheep people to start with, Tom and Dick Jenkins' folks. They were all sheep people. And the McWilliams, you've heard of them, they were all sheep people.

DOROTHEA: Were there still the --- did the McLean's run sheep at that time too?

AVEL: McLean's at that time had run sheep for a while, and quit and went into the cattle business. And then sometime during the war, or right after, when I come back to Harney County in '52, they were in the sheep and cattle business both. So, they had gone back into the sheep business.

DOROTHEA: How did the Taylor Grazing affect the sheep business as far as you were concerned?

AVEL: Well, it eliminated it on the mountain. Because these Basque, they call them itinerary sheep people, and they didn't have any base, ranches. They just, they rented meadows and stuff in the winter months. Bought a little hay from like the Crump's and some at the Alvord, and different places, Mann Lake. And the summer months, why in this country, they'd lambed in April, and they lambed out in the sagebrush in the open range lambing. And just as soon as they sheared their sheep, why they'd head up to the higher country, and most of it was on public lands. They would lease some homesteads, there was some homesteads up there to be leased. They would lease some land, but mostly on public domain. So, when Taylor Grazing come in, the primary purpose of Taylor Grazing was to take pressure off the range and get people off the range that didn't belong there. And if you didn't have a base ranch, why you didn't get no permits. And that's what eliminated the Basco sheep people in Harney County. Because again, they didn't have any base ranches. And it become predominantly a cattle grazing operation after that.

DOROTHEA: Well, did a lot of them stay here, except for the ones that you say, mentioned, and went to Roseburg. Did a lot of them stay here?

AVEL: Well no, Tom stayed, the one that was good to me. Him and his partner Jose Madarieta, when they had to go out of the sheep business, they bought the Central Pastime here in Burns. They stayed. Then Jose died with cancer several years later. And then Tom sold the Central to Roman

Yriarte, and his stepfather John Ebar. And by the way, John Ebar had sheep on the Steens at that time, the old man. And then Tom bought the old Star Hotel from the Urizars, and run a boarding house there for a while then, and sold it to his brother that came over from Spain to herd sheep after the war. That's the Zabala's that live there now. And Tom married somebody from Winnemucca, and moved to Winnemucca after he sold the Star Hotel. Martin died here, Telesforo Zabala died here. Most of them are buried up here, that at one time was in the sheep business.

DOROTHEA: Well now the Urizars, did they run a motel, I mean a hotel down in the Fields area?

AVEL: Yeah, they run a hotel in Andrews.

DOROTHEA: And so, this is why they more or less stayed. And then they came to Burns and bought one.

AVEL: Yeah, what they had done, they sold their hotel to Cecelia's sister Marcelina Arriola, and they run the hotel for years. And Urizars came to Burns and bought the Star Hotel. And they was Felix the father, or the husband was in the sheep business with his brother Alex, and a guy by the name of Teles Zabala. And they had some private land.

But they bought the old; I think it was the old Jones place which is the present ranch now. And I think Mrs. Zabala, or Mrs. Urizar paid for that by running a boarding house. She kept the sheep outfit going. If it wasn't for her, the sheep would have went kaput. Because the wool, and sheep, and lambs wasn't worth anything. And the banks, you know, were closing in on most of them that were still operating.

That was before Taylor Grazing, they was all in trouble. They bought sheep high, and then the bottom dropped out from under them. So, Mrs. Urizar, she's the gal that kept the Urizar sheep people going. And then again, due to Taylor Grazing, and not having enough base property, they had to get out of the sheep business.

And they bought the present ranch, I believe, I might be corrected on this, but I think I'm right; it was coming up for a tax foreclosure. And they bought it, and that's been their home.

DOROTHEA: And they even had a time keeping that ---

AVEL: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: --- for a while.

AVEL: Yeah, you would know that. That's what I said, things wasn't easy. Another thing about these Basque people, the women folks like Cecilia, and Mrs. Osa, and Marcelina down at Andrews, they sold, they were in the bootlegging business. That's what kept the thing going. When these itinerary sheepherders and camp tenders, and even a lot of ranch hands, all these ranches had a lot of ranch hands in those days. Everything was done with team and horses of course. Like in Andrews, there was nothing on Saturday and Sunday to see twenty-five, thirty people at the Andrews Hotel a drinking beer, and homemade brew, and moonshine. They made a little money at it. They were conservative.

Like the Arriolas, they made enough money there at Andrews to accumulate enough cash or money, and then they traded the hotel into some people in Westfall. And they're still in the ranching business in the Harper, Westfall, and the Durkee country. And it all started by watching their pennies at Andrews. So, that was the same way with the Urizars, and the Osa's down at the Plaza Hotel.

BARBARA: Where did they take their sheep to market then?

AVEL: Most of them brought them to Crane, and they ended up in Omaha. That's when they had the big yards ---

BARBARA: On the train then?

AVEL: Yeah, stockyards in Crane. But sheep buyers would come down to the South End and buy the sheep, and then the shipping point was Crane, at least when I was a young person. Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Well where did you, you said you learned to cook in the sheep camps. What did you learn to cook with, and how did you cook your meals?

AVEL: Well, mostly Dutch ovens. And like I say, Tom was a, in my books, an expert cook. And the funny thing about these Dutch ovens, a lot of people think it's a Basco tradition. These Basques didn't know what a Dutch oven looked like until they come to this country. They didn't know a Dutch oven from a frying pan. But they learned to utilize them, and they got to be good at it. They baked all their bread in the ground, and cooked most of their meals in pits. And breakfast of

course; we cooked in the camp, and sourdough hot cakes. We'd make biscuits and gravy.

And we didn't have, we don't have what they have nowadays, like the Norman Ranches, those Peruvians there, they got everything in their sheep camps. But it was good, it was a good life.

These guys all were pretty good cooks. And so consequently why, that's where I kind of learned what little cooking skills I got.

DOROTHEA: Well, what kind of stoves did you use?

AVEL: Just a regular square sheep camp stove, they called them. Just a little square, well they were about three foot, four foot long, and about a foot square, three foot deep, and just had a stovepipe. Had a little, probably ten by ten oven in them. Sometimes you could bake in it, sometimes you couldn't. But a lot of cooking was done in the ground.

DOROTHEA: How did they cook in the ground, would they dig a hole, and make holes and ---

AVEL: Yeah. Dig holes, and sagebrush was their, they preferred sagebrush to willows or juniper, or anything else that might have been available. And the reason sagebrush was good, because it burned fast. You could have a pit, and within a half hour the sagebrush would have enough coals that you could put your Dutch oven in it, and cover it and forget about it until mealtime. And one thing about Dutch oven cooking, the way --- usually about three to four hours to cook a meal. But if you put one in the ground say in the morning, and don't come back to camp until that evening, the stuff will still be hot, and nothing will be over-cooked. We don't know why. And it will still be boiling hot. So, it just made it easy for them to prepare a Dutch oven in the mornings, build a fire while they was eating breakfast. But a lot of them did that. They'd get their fire going, and then go ahead and finish breakfast. When they got done the pit was ready, they shoveled out the ashes, leave about six inches in the bottom of the hole, put the Dutch oven in, put ashes around it, on top of it, about six, seven inches on top, and then seal it off with dirt. Make sure it was completely sealed off. If it wasn't sealed off, then it would burn. You'd have a burned meal. But take all the air away, and it would just sit there and work like an oven.

Another thing we used to do is beans. We'd, you can't cook beans in a Dutch oven good, it rusts and corrodes. And so, they'd have aluminum snap-on lid pots. And just as soon as the bread

was in the ground, we made sure that when we baked bread, which was every few days, on the average of twice a week, depending on how many people you were cooking for. Bread cooked in an hour and ten minutes, it was completely cooked with nice golden crusts. So, what we would do was when we took the bread out, we'd have a lot of heat left, a lot of warm heat, so then we'd take one of these aluminum --- I'm going to donate one to the museum one of these days. I've got one left. Aluminum pot with a snap-on lid, and we'd have our beans already. And put it in that hot hole, and leave it there until the next day. And god those beans were really good, a good way to cook beans. We put tomatoes and onions and a little garlic, and bacon or ham in the beans.

DOROTHEA: That's the kind of beans I like.

AVEL: Yeah, that's what we call ---

DOROTHEA: Clinton doesn't like that kind, but I do.

AVEL: Anyway, we ate a lot of hotcakes. Once in awhile we would make sourdough biscuits and cook them in the little oven. Once in awhile we'd say god we wanted biscuits, and didn't want to use the oven, we'd just fire up the pit, and in about thirty minutes in the pit, the biscuits were ready. Dig them right back up. We've even been known to make cakes in those Dutch ovens.

And there is something else about a Dutch oven, you know, you can, now days people, we do it a lot, we take chicken and rice, because we didn't have that in those days, didn't have chicken. We take chicken and rice and put all kinds of stuff in Dutch ovens and bury it just like you do beef, or just about anything you want. Noodles and chicken or --- it all comes out good.

DOROTHEA: Yeah. Do you miss this kind of cooking? Or do you still eat a lot that way?

AVEL: Oh, I enjoy doing it. I enjoy doing it for groups. It's a lot of work. My big failing, I believe is, and I hate to say this, I take on too much by myself. And if I'm going to continue doing this, I'm going to get people to kind of help me a little bit.

BARBARA: Get them to help you a little bit.

AVEL: Yeah. And then another thing I'm doing is --- Tony is in the restaurant business, so he knows how to do all this. So, I just kind of shove it. But they might as well pay him. (Laughter) Because that's just like that barbecue they had at Roaring Springs last year, we cooked for eight

hundred people. And I ended up fixing all the meat and stuff myself, and it's just too much work.

BARBARA: You don't need that anymore.

AVEL: No. I do enjoy doing it though.

DOROTHEA: That is part of our life, but we're hating to give up, I think. We're getting old, just like other people, and we don't want to admit it. Did you teach Tony how to do this, or has he just picked it up from watching you?

AVEL: Oh, he picked some up at home, especially the sourdough bit. Because I'm going to take sourdough to hell with me, when I go down there. I'm going to have a pot with me. (Laughter) The devil doesn't know that yet. Tony picked some of it at home. He is the only child that we had that was interested in it. And again, we tried to send Tony to cook school, and he wouldn't go. We tried to send him to different schools, because he just had a natural ---

DOROTHEA: Knack.

AVEL: And he can --- I'm not bragging on him, he decides he wants to cook something, he's got a pretty good idea what's in it, and he comes up with a pretty good solution. So, it's just one of those deals.

BARBARA: Does May like to cook too?

AVEL: Yeah. May loves to cook. And in fact, I think we're competitors at times.

BARBARA: Help take turns in the kitchen at night.

AVEL: Yeah. The only thing about it, when she is in the kitchen, I don't go in. When I'm in there, she stays away. We just do our own thing.

DOROTHEA: That sounds like my son and daughter-in-law. When my son married his wife, she didn't know how to cook. So, he taught her what he knew, and then they got to running competitions. Well, she's outdone him on her bread now. She makes better bread than he ---

AVEL: That's good.

SIDE B

DOROTHEA: Okay, we're back to Tony again. Did he decide to go into the restaurant business

just because, or was that his real plan in life?

AVEL: Oh, I think so. He was going to put one in Sisters, when Sisters were trying to become a western type town. And financially it wasn't --- the place that he was looking at, and at that time Sisters, you had, DEQ was quite a problem. Sisters doesn't have the central sewage and water system. And it was just about impossible to start a new business because you had to get septic tanks, and drain fields, and it was just too --- unless you had a lot of money behind you, just to start out from scratch. So, he worked on golf courses here and there, and worked for the City of Burns, took care of park and the cemetery for two years. And he's always kind of wanted to get into this cooking, and so instead of Sisters he decided he would try it in Burns. And we helped him a little, as much as we could. So ---

BARBARA: Okay, so now we've gotten to the point where you were in John Day, and you were working in the cleaners and then decided to come to Burns and open up your store here. Can you tell us a little something about that?

AVEL: Yeah.

BARBARA: How you progressed?

AVEL: Yeah, there was three cleaners in Burns at the time, in those days, and I think Dorothea and you yourself will vouch for this. People utilized cleaning establishments a lot more in the '40's, '50's, and '60's. And so, wash and wear come along --- and there was two other cleaners in Burns, and I bought Quality Cleaners.

BARBARA: Where were they located? This is a little bit before I came here.

AVEL: One is where Modern Laundry is now.

BARBARA: I see.

AVEL: And then where Palmer & Sons Surveying.

BARBARA: Oh, uh huh.

AVEL: Dick Mayo and Dale White's dad, partners, had a cleaning shop there.

BARBARA: Oh, uh huh.

AVEL: And, I don't know, I guess there was a lot of conceit on my part. I, and I had a chance to

buy this cleaning plant, why Ken Retherford and I were partners for a year. Ken talked me --- Ken was over here grading lumber at the Wolverine. And he says, "Diaz, Parker will sell this cleaning plant, let's go into partners." And I said, "I haven't got no money." And he said, "Well trade in your car or something." "So, okay." And I was a little conceited I guess, I just knew if I come to Burns and started a cleaning business, that I'd end up with my share of the business, because I knew people. And it kind of worked out that way. I'm not bragging, but we put, we changed equipment as time went along, and we had a good cleaning establishment. And all the people that I'd known in the Crane area, and I knew a lot of people in Burns, and they all give me a try. And I didn't get all the business, but I got my share, and I was able to survive. I really come back with that in mind. I thought gosh, I got a lot of friends over there, you know. And it kind of worked for me.

BARBARA: So, you say you and May and the two children lived in the back of the shop then to begin with?

AVEL: Yeah. There was an old tin building back there. And I ain't kidding you folks; in the winter months there was frost in the bedrooms. It was tough. We were there four years and didn't own an automobile of any kind. We didn't have it easy. We were able to pay our bills, and do what we wanted to do, you know. That's what we come here for. We didn't come here to live high on the hog, you know. We knew it was going to be a struggle.

DOROTHEA: Well, it was a struggle, but it was easier in those days too.

AVEL: Yeah.

BARBARA: What did May think about this, the first couple of years?

AVEL: Well, it took her about two or three years to adapt. Of course, she was busy, she was busy hugging children, and she kept the books. We had accounts in those days before we went cash and carry. And she paid all our bills, and did our banking. She had a full-time job. It wasn't easy for her by any manner or means. And, because I worked, I was working probably twelve, fourteen hours a day in that cleaning plant. And we never took the weekend off. I was down there scrubbing floors, and working on equipment. And just about the time we got to where things were going our way, why wash and wear come along. And we went from seven employees to just May

and I.

DOROTHEA: How long did it take you to work out of, more or less just yourself into an employing business?

AVEL: Now give me that again.

DOROTHEA: How long did you work probably just as a family, before you started hiring people?

AVEL: Well, we hired people right off the bat.

DOROTHEA: Oh, did you?

AVEL: Yeah. May, of course we had those two young kids, and one was two and the other one was just a baby when we got here. So, she would, where we lived in the back of the plant, why she would come in sometime during the day and I had --- we had a clothing route then, we had a truck out picking up cleaning and delivery service. And so, I had myself and another guy helping me in the cleaning room. And they had Vanita Hebenner, Vanita, you know her, she and Jerry Stupfel pressing. And a guy by the name of John Evans and his wife Kate, and then we had a counter girl. And it was, as things went, it was a struggle just making payrolls once in awhile, you know. It wasn't --- but it was fun.

There again, I, when the cleaning business went plumb gunny bag, why I didn't feel bad. Because where else could I have, it paid for my home, it paid for itself. It put my kids through school. I couldn't have done it working some place else. So, they didn't own me. I mean ---

DOROTHEA: Right.

AVEL: When the cleaning business did go, and I was the only cleaning plant left, it got to be boresome. Because I was cleaning maybe two and three days a week. Where before I was cleaning ten, twelve hours a day, this is a fact. And it was just May and I. Mama and Papa shop, it ended up being a Mama and Papa shop. And we'd both press, and she'd do the sewing. We'd both wait on the counter. And we --- it just wasn't paying off.

DOROTHEA: Well then, you had a little competition with self-cleaning business.

AVEL: Yeah. Well, I put in the self-service.

DOROTHEA: Did you?

AVEL: And I made a big mistake when I put it in. I put it in where Palmer & Sons are located. Now, I bought Dick Mayo out. He had the Burns Cleaners, and I bought him out, and junked the equipment. And I remodeled the building and put in a cleaning, a dry-cleaning operation in there, a coin-op. And where I made my mistake was, being a cleaner I went to the equipment people that made cleaning machines. They were in --- that had made cleaning machines for hundreds of years, and I bought --- and then they got into the coin-op type, and they was just too complicated, and too expensive. If I'd have went Maytag, Whirlpool, what those people had done was, the appliance people, they just took a regular home washing machine and kind of converted it, and made it into a dry-cleaning machine. And they was using synthetic solvents, which was something new on the market. And so, I went ahead and I over extended myself. I bought eight machines, they were big, thirty-pound machines, and built on the same concept as the regular cleaning machine that the average cleaner used. And it was just too complicated for the average person coming in there and putting in quarters.

And they had a lot of breakdowns. Even the cleaning manufacturing people didn't, they was trying to put something that was completely automatic together, and their engineering was bad. And we lost our shirt on that; in fact, it darn near broke the cleaners. I was very lucky that I didn't put the two businesses together. I incorporated one, and kept Quality Cleaners out of it. And I tried it for two years, and it was just bleeding Quality Cleaners dry keeping it going. And you had to clean thirty-six loads a day. And they said that here in Burns you could clean thirty-six loads a day, coin-op. The biggest day we ever had was around twenty, twenty-four. So, it was just a losing deal.

So, I let the finance, it's the only time I ever financed anything, I usually went through a bank. So, I let the finance company have the machines back. I paid, oh gosh, I don't know, three or four years on them. They sold the machines, and didn't sell them for what I owed. So, the Quality Cleaners still picked up the tab for several years paying on the dead horse.

And then I sold the building to First Interstate when they come in. And they really didn't want to buy the building, but I, the alley way that --- they wanted to build that big parking lot in there, you know where Palmer sits, and then the parking lot. Well I owned the alley way from the

street all the way in. And in order to make a complete parking lot out of it, why they paying out, financed Palmer and bought the building from him. And that's how come Palmer sits in that little --

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DOROTHEA: That used to be Doc Homan's office, yeah.

AVEL: Doctor Homan's, yeah, used to be Doctor Homan's. So ---

BARBARA: So, during the day, the time that you ran your cleaners, what else did you become involved in, in the community during those early years?

AVEL: Helped start the ambulance, fire department. Ganger and Grover gave us an old army Packard. They painted it, and they picked it up in Fresno and brought it up here and kind of overhauled it. And we went in the ambulance business, fire department, volunteering. And we found out this Packard wasn't good enough for long hauls. Our hauls in those days were to Portland. Bend didn't have no more facilities than we did. And we were averaging three and four trips a week to Portland.

BARBARA: Oh goodness.

AVEL: And so, we went to the city, and the city pays the volunteers, had on their budget in those days twenty-five hundred dollars for volunteer wages. And you got paid a dollar for a fire call, and a dollar for a meeting. And sometimes we used the whole twenty-five, and sometimes we didn't. So, we went to city hall, I did, and Jim Richardson, and talked the county, or the council into giving us twenty-five hundred dollars a year cash. And we made a deal and bought a brand-new ambulance, Cadillac ambulance in Portland. And it cost seventy-five, a little over seventy-five thousand bucks --- or seventy-five hundred bucks. And the Cadillac, or the ambulance people had never heard of a deal like that. But we talked them into accepting a twenty-five-hundred-dollar payment in three years. And the city agreed to give us cash every, once every three --- the first of July every year for three years. And then we made an agreement that if the fire pay went over twenty-five hundred dollars, that we'd fight fires for nothing. And if they went under, we got the monies.

So, we ended up putting in an ambulance service. And we used to average fifty to sixty

thousand miles a year on that thing. And then we found out that the first ambulance that we bought wasn't equipped right to haul people to Portland, no oxygen. Only had little oxygen bottles that were good for a half-hour. And we had --- in fact we're the first people that got the ambulance industry into putting big tanks and stuff in ambulances. They'd never heard of such a thing. But we needed them. And we ended up; I think it was a good deal. People again, Harney County, being Harney County --- The ambulance wasn't on the tax roll. Donations and what insurances we could collect, we didn't bill anybody. Everything was free. And in about four or five years we had made enough money to have two ambulances. Everything free, I mean paid for. We paid cash for them.

Over a period of twenty some odd years, these ambulances went from seventy-five hundred dollars, to a little over thirty thousand bucks apiece. And we were still able to buy them and pay cash. I don't know what happened, something, sometime during the line --- When I quit the ambulance, when I went up to the county, we had three ambulances paid for. We had fifty-five thousand dollars in savings, and fifteen thousand dollars in checking. No tax dollars involved. And I'm not ---

DOROTHEA: And at that time, they didn't charge, like you said, for ambulance calls either. Now they charge you for ambulance calls and ---

AVEL: Then we got some council members in, council that thought they should be part of the city. It was an independent deal, although we called ourselves the Burns Volunteer Fire Department-Ambulance, it was independent. And some council people frowned on that, you know. Things change, and they wanted to incorporate it into the city. And then they started billing people, and people quit donating. And that's why it's, it's really where it is today. Fire chief, I was on the fire department in John Day, and come to Burns and joined this one, and was assistant fire chief for a number of years. Then Jim passed away, and I took the job temporarily. I really didn't want it, it was too much work. And I ended up being fire chief going on thirteen years. That's the longest temporary job I ever had in my life. (Laughter) But I enjoyed it.

That was something that May, to this day; I really admire her because she put up with a lot. I wasn't home a lot. Because I was working that plant ten, twelve hours a day. And I probably took

sixty percent of the runs myself. Because we didn't have radios, and they called the cleaning plant, or call my house, and I'd call one person and we'd go.

BARBARA: Away you'd go.

AVEL: And I don't know if you people recall that when Gary Novotney had his retirement party the other day, he mentioned that there was seventeen deaths in Harney County one year, automobile accidents. I hate to say this, but I picked up all seventeen of them.

BARBARA: Oh dear.

AVEL: I was on every one of them. And --- but it was, I met a lot of good people.

BARBARA: Well, it's a rewarding feeling doing those types of jobs too, when you're out helping people.

AVEL: And I think really today, the ambulance people that are involved today are better trained, they're more qualified ---

DOROTHEA: Did you have to have special training when you started?

AVEL: When we first started out, they wasn't, the state board of health wasn't in the ambulance business. It was --- see Burns was one of the first fire departments that put it in, an ambulance service in the state of Oregon. And they were unknown of. Mortuaries run the ambulance services. And really, we were the first ones. Then Madras and Bend, and everybody else started to putting them in.

So, then the state board of health came into it. And so, when we first started, our basic training was advanced Red Cross work, and it was good. And then they went into the EMT program, and we qualified. Doctor Campbell spent hours, and hours, and hours with us. He was the only doctor that would. He'd come up to the fire hall, and he really worked with us. He was good for us. He trained these people real good, and real well. But we weren't trained as good as the boys that are doing it today. These people are excellent, they are good. So, I'm not knocking them. I think they are doing a good job. It's just a different ball game than it was when we run it. And a lot of it due to laws, a lot of the health laws. And we ---

BARBARA: And insurance and the lawsuits and all that ---

AVEL: Yeah. We could, you know, I'd do this a lot of times, Dorothea, if I'd get an ambulance call and I couldn't find a fireman, I'd call up Jett Blackburn, or get Julio or somebody that I knew. I'd call the Elks Club, "Who is in the Elks?" And they'd say so and so, and so and so. And I said, "Have they been drinking?" "No, he's just been in here." Tell him I need some help, you know.

As long as I was there, I could always get somebody to drive it. You can't do that today. These people, you've got to have an EMT behind the wheel, and one in the back.

DOROTHEA: They have to have a nurse that's in the vehicle at the same time.

AVEL: So, it sounds like I'm giving them the business, I'm not. Once they got to regulating the ambulance, and that's one reason why I kind of wanted out of the fire department. It just got too much, the regulations on that ambulance were getting beyond ---

DOROTHEA: So, you decided to go into the political line.

AVEL: Yeah, I was getting desperate, I guess.

BARBARA: So, when was it that you gave up the cleaners, and went into ---

AVEL: 1977. I was elected in '76, and I still run the plant for about six, seven months. And I made a commitment that if I didn't sell the cleaning plant within a year, that I would resign, and I would have. It wasn't fair to the county court, and a lot of people in the county were good to me. And said well Diaz, give it a try. And I said I would do it a year. And we sold the plant within ten months. And I would have, I would have resigned within the year if I hadn't of sold the plant.

DOROTHEA: Well, did you carry any other office besides the clerk position?

AVEL: No, no. Just fire chief.

DOROTHEA: How many years did you work as county clerk?

AVEL: Twelve.

DOROTHEA: And who did you follow?

AVEL: Don Filteau.

DOROTHEA: Don Filteau.

AVEL: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: Did he retire, or was he ---

AVEL: No, I run against him and beat him out in the general.

DOROTHEA: And he was kind of ready to ---

AVEL: Oh yeah, I think Don was ---

DOROTHEA: I think he'd been in there several years too.

AVEL: I think he'd been in there twenty years, or five terms, or something like that. He was, he had got crippled, and I think it was time for Don to move on.

BARBARA: And what were some of the highlights of your stay at the county clerk's job?

AVEL: Oh, enjoyed the --- when I first become county clerk, of course we still run the circuit court. And all the child support, and arguing with, you know, irate fathers coming in saying they wasn't paying child support. And then I'd have to talk to them, because there was no judge here. And I enjoyed the trial work.

And elections, elections were really a challenge to me, for some reason, I enjoyed elections. And there are so many, oh, you're running against me, or I'm running against you, and I say something, or I put a sign in the wrong place. And you'd be surprised at how many complaints, you know, you have to settle complaints between people running for offices.

And then people forget to vote. Or vote, and then you send them a purge notice, and they have to come back and update their registration, and they don't. Then there is an election issue comes up, and they're not on the polls anymore, and they go to the polling place, and boy they get right on you, you know. And then you say, well you didn't vote for two generals, and two primaries, and the law says we've got to purge you. But we don't purge anybody; they don't purge anybody until they notify them. And if they don't answer, then you purge them. You give them a chance to pick it up. And while --- I didn't get the mail, you didn't mail me one. I've been called a communist several times up there. But it was a good experience, I enjoyed it.

And I had a good staff. Probably, I like to be honest with people, and if it hadn't been for a good staff, I probably wouldn't have been a good county clerk. I had good people. And Don had good people. And I inherited the people, and they stayed, they didn't want to quit. And I'm bragging a little bit now, I suppose that they enjoyed me. And they said, a lot of them had planned

on quitting if Don had been re-elected. And Colean was a sweetheart, Vee, Esther Haugen, they were just good people up there. And they just took me in and ---

BARBARA: Showed you the ropes, huh?

AVEL: Oh, yeah. Without those people I think I would have just threw up my hands. There is a lot to the job, then a lot of people think, really.

DOROTHEA: We better get some of the last names on some of these people.

AVEL: Okay.

DOROTHEA: Vee Dolan, and Esther Haugen.

AVEL: Vee Dolan, Colean Norton.

DOROTHEA: Colean Norton.

AVEL: They were the county clerk's office, let's just put it right out there.

DOROTHEA: Okay. What are probably some of the things in the community that you feel have really enhanced your life, or been the biggest achievement of your life?

AVEL: People. People are good to me. People that, I don't know, probably realized my situation and were willing to give me a little boost when I needed it. Like Marjorie Shull down at Andrews, and her husband Andrew. I never really had a job, like you say, when I got out of school in the spring. I knew I could get a job. It was a matter of seeing who needed somebody. Because most of them had their sheep people at the ranch, you know, ranch people had everybody pretty well set. So, I'd leave Crane and I'd go down to the Andrews area, and didn't have any place to live. And I just stayed in the sagebrush, I ain't lying to you. I had a couple of frying pans, and a bedroll. And Andrew and Marge would charge a little groceries to me for ten days, two weeks, because I didn't have no money until I got a paycheck or two, or a payday, or draw. And I was always able to go in there and buy a little bacon, didn't buy a lot. A little macaroni, a can of tomatoes, some supplies you know, and flour and baking powder. Made baking powder biscuits. And in those days, I don't know where I had learned it, but I had one of these, in those days they had those five-gallon gas cans. They were tin, shiny, and I'd cut one side off of them, run bailing wire through them, and make a shelf, and put it in front of a sagebrush fire and cook biscuits in it. It was a reflector, it

really worked.

People were just good to me. I could, Starbucks were good to me, and these Basque people were --- and I think a lot of them just said, well that old bummer kid there, he needs a little help. And no, made a lot of good friends over the years.

BARBARA: What are some of the things that you enjoy doing for recreation now that you have retired?

AVEL: That's my big failing. I have, outside of, I never learned to fish, never had time.

BARBARA: You were always too busy working, and didn't have a hobby or recreation thing to do.

AVEL: And outside of doing a little cooking, I don't have, I wish I had some more activities. I'm keeping busy, but most of the --- do a little work around the house. And I've been involved again, helping put a few cooking things together. I'm --- I can't drive a nail, I don't like to paint.

DOROTHEA: What organizations ---

BARBARA: You're a people person.

AVEL: Yeah, uh huh.

DOROTHEA: What organizations do you belong to? I know that you're very busy with your organizations.

AVEL: I belong to the Elks, and I'm not too active with the Elks anymore. I was for years. I belong to, I'm on the Chamber Board, I'm enjoying that. I was on the Fair Board two different times. I was on in the '50's and early '60's, and then back on all through the '80's, and the tail end of the '70's. And I enjoyed that. And Lions Club, I'm really kind of partial to Lions. And the reason I'm partial to Lions is their eye program. And I'm on the eye committee, and I run it for years. And we've helped a lot of children in the county, people that really needed help. And we don't publicize it, we just do it. And we spend on the average of three to four thousand dollars a year just in Harney County just putting glasses on kids, not counting what we sent to, we send to the clinic in Portland. And we've sent a lot there. And we pay; usually have to pay transportation and their lodging while they are there. And if it wasn't for, again, if it wasn't for Harney County people all pitching in, we wouldn't be able to do that. And most of our money comes from selling hamburgers

out at the fairgrounds. And if it wasn't for that, we wouldn't have a program. It just wouldn't be here.

And so maybe I, this sounds kind of like I'm feeling sorry for myself, but I'm not. I feel that I should help other people. And I can't do it individually, so I do it collectively through the Lions Club. We'll just put it that way, and I hope I'm being fair with you. And I'm not just saying Lions Club. Each service club, be it sorority or what, booster club, each one has their own effect on the community. I just say Lions Club because I'm involved. So ---

BARBARA: Well, I think if it weren't for all the service organizations and sororities, or fraternities here, our community would be in bad shape. But the people care about one another, and they work hard to take care of things.

AVEL: Right. So, I feel that's my way of probably doing something, like I said earlier, that I couldn't do individually, that we'd do it collectively. And that's what it takes.

BARBARA: I put a lot of hours in all these different things too.

AVEL: Yeah, right. So that's my hobbies I think. I like to travel.

BARBARA: Do you have any plans on any major trips or side trips?

AVEL: But May doesn't like to travel see, she is a homebody. She wants to do her quilts, and work in the yard. And that's her hobby, she enjoys it. And a trip to her is go to Boise one night, and come back, you know. And me, I'd like to go back to Spain one more time while my health is good. She got no --- and I can see her point. She doesn't speak the language. We was there for twenty some odd days six years ago, and of course I had a ball. They were good to her, all my relatives on my mother's side, and my dad's side, they were really good to her. But the fact that I was able to sit at the table and ---

BARBARA: Makes her feel a little bit left out.

AVEL: Yeah, sure.

BARBARA: You know, when you can't communicate.

AVEL: Then she wanted to go to Rome and Paris. And me, I'm selfish, I was contented right there in the Basque country.

DOROTHEA: Now this is something that I'm curious about. I have heard that all Basque don't speak the same language. Is this true?

AVEL: Well, they're like the southerner in this country, and the guy from Boston, they all speak the same language, but they have a little different dialect. Like see, the original Basque that come to Oregon and Idaho to start with were Viscanso. Biscay province, like Harney County. And they have a little different dialect. Then there is Guipúzcoa. Maria Lete who used to run the Plaza. Agustin Andueza, they're Guipúzcoas, their province. They speak a little different. They talk --- they have no problem communicating amongst themselves. Now me, when I talk to Augustin or Maria in Basque, I really got to be attentive. They don't have no problem with me. But I'll, the way they slur their words, they put a different accent on stuff. "Now what'd you say," you know. And the second time around I usually pick it up. But they have no problem picking me up. They're just in their own dialect. The French Basque, like Jean Harriett out at Urizars, they used to be several of those. And John Ebar was French Basque. You really got to be, they speak Basque, just the same Basque as these other people do, except they have just a little different slur, so you got to be a little - -- but it's all the same language.

BARBARA: So how many times have you been back?

AVEL: Just the once.

BARBARA: Just the one time.

AVEL: And I'd like to go back. In fact, I got a, my dad's sister has never been in this country. I hope she comes to Burns.

BARBARA: Maybe you could go back and then bring her back with you.

AVEL: She is coming to Boise; I guess her aunt and her, next month.

BARBARA: Oh, I see.

AVEL: I got a letter from one of my cousins. So, there is something else that's kind of sad. My dad had a sister in this country when I was a youngster, and they raised my, that's where my sister went to live. And I don't know those people. I know you people better. And here in the last --- well my sister had a fiftieth wedding anniversary last summer, and we went to Idaho Falls and we

picked up my brother, May and I. And here was these cousins from Emmett that didn't, you know, in our back yard. I don't know them. Well, they're bringing my, you see they were relatives on my dad's side.

And something else on my dad's side. Dad's side of the family never kept track of us or anything. But the mother's side, I had an aunt that apparently was real close to my mother, and she always made an effort to find out about us four children, you know. She knew that we didn't have the best of everything, and they were poor, and --- but when I went back to Spain she was still alive, eighty-six years old. And it surprised me what she knew about us. Different Basque would go to the old country, especially when I moved to Burns and then went in business and everything. These Basque people go back to Lekeitio, and I'd send them a little money. Say take this to my relatives there. And they'd give it to my old aunt. And then they'd tell her what I was doing. And she knew more about us four kids than we do about each other, really, in all these years. And what made it nice was, my mother and her must have been real close. And when I showed up, why, and my sister went with me, she said my gosh I've waited all these years to see one of her, to see some of her kids. No, she said I'm ready to --- She didn't last too long after that, that made her whole --- she said my life's complete now. And that kind of made me feel good.

DOROTHEA: Well, did your father pass away?

AVEL: Yeah, he passed away in 1949.

DOROTHEA: And had you had much contact with him?

AVEL: Oh, no. Probably a month before he died I went over, and he was all right, you know, we visited and got acquainted. And he, you see when he married the second time; he married an alcoholic, that's why we all busted up. She was, poor old soul was just a mess. And my one brother, like I said, joined CC's to get away from it all, just lied about his age. And brother Ray, he went back to the people that raised him. Because they told him, "Now if this doesn't work, this is home." And then I was sitting out here, brother-in-law says, "Why don't you stay in Burns, or Andrews?" And gosh, you know, that's great. And Dad kind of probably resented that. He did marry, and kind of wanted us all together, I think, and it just didn't work out.

And then when I was at Crane, he wrote me a couple of letters and told me I had no business being on my own. And he was going to get the law to get me to go to high school in Mountain Home, Idaho. And, no. And we had differences. So just before he died, why we ---

BARBARA: Made peace then.

AVEL: We made peace.

BARBARA: That's good.

AVEL: Everything was, everything was all right.

BARBARA: So, what do you look forward to in the next few years of doing?

AVEL: Oh ---

BARBARA: Take each day as it comes?

AVEL: Yeah. Take it as it comes. And I will be interested in seeing Harney, or Burns, the community heal their wounds.

BARBARA: Get back on their feet again.

AVEL: Get on their feet. It bothers me.

BARBARA: Well, I think it does most everyone.

AVEL: It bothers everybody that likes the community. I don't mean the community is fighting amongst themselves, they're not. But we've had a lot of bad luck in the last ten, twelve years. The lake, railroad, seems like every time we kind of raise our heads a little bit, we get it knocked down again.

And again, I'm not trying to be a braggart, but Harney County is something special. And I think we have had our knocks, and it's about time we're, maybe some place along the line we get a break or two. And we haven't had the breaks. I'm not crying in my soup, we just haven't had the breaks. Everything has been ---

DOROTHEA: Well, it's just like everybody getting rain around us, and us not getting any.

AVEL: That's what I mean, it's, now we've got our drought, you know. We got the cattle prices and things are looking good, and now we got this.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

AVEL: There is an element out there trying to take cattle off of the public lands. And I don't think we need that.

BARBARA: No Moo by '92.

AVEL: Yeah, yeah. (Laughter) I feel that, well where else can you, like this cancer deal a week ago.

DOROTHEA: Well, that was so amazing.

AVEL: Fifteen thousand bucks in the community that's hurting. Good people here, and we're going to lose these people if things don't --- they're not going to lose me, because I tell May, I say, "Hey, as long as there is a City of Burns here, they're going to have water to my house, and going to have a way to dispose of my sewage, I'm going to have lights and telephone. My place may not be worth nothing, but I'm here, you know."

DOROTHEA: Well, I think that's how a lot of us feel.

AVEL: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: We don't want this town to diminish.

AVEL: And the hospital, you know, that's been --- and god I hope we can turn that around. I really do. It's very essential to us, to you, to her, to me.

DOROTHEA: Well talking about the railroad, I heard the other day, just through kind of a conversation that they're going to have another railroad trip. The train is going to take a trip. Do you know anything about that?

AVEL: Not outside of the one they're having the 31st.

DOROTHEA: Well that's the one I'm talking about.

AVEL: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: What is that?

AVEL: Well what they're doing apparently, is the governor and everybody is coming in because we got some state money in this railroad. Lottery money I believe. And they're going to bring three passenger trains from Ontario to Crane. Then they're going to bus the people from Burns, I think they are going to figure on about a hundred, be limited to a hundred apparently. And they're going

to bus, by school bus, people to Crane, and then you get on this passenger train and ride to Burns on it, and end up down at the mill. Then they're going to have a barbecue.

What I'd like to do is, I still think it can be done; I don't have time to work on it. I think we, as a community ought to buy a passenger car. Something like Sumpter Railroad doing out of Baker. And maybe three to four times a month in the summer months --- spring, summer, and fall, make excursions from Ontario to Burns.

DOROTHEA: A tour, a tour trip, yeah.

AVEL: I don't, I don't know where to go, or how to go. But again, there is supposed to be a piece of equipment out at the mill that's related to railroads. And I haven't been able to get any answers on it. It's an antique. It had something to do with straightening wheels or something. And there is somebody in Shoshone or Burley, or in Twin Falls area that's putting up a railroad museum of some kind. I understand they got passenger cars. And she is looking for this thing that is supposed to be here. She doesn't know it's here, but somebody has contacted her. And I don't know who it was that was telling me this. But she's interested in something that seems to be here. Why can't we trade that off to her for a passenger car, huh?

BARBARA: Yeah.

AVEL: If she's got one. (Laughter) And then just have this train hook it on, and pull it once in awhile. Charge people.

DOROTHEA: Well, my little red light tells me we're running out of tape. And unless you think you've got some more stories to tell us, well we'll ---

AVEL: I think you've got enough from me for one session.

DOROTHEA: Thank you for the afternoon, and the time you've spent with us. And we appreciate you being here.

AVEL: I appreciate being here.

DOROTHEA: Now, we'll take a few minutes and do a video on you. So, thank you Avel.

AVEL: Thanks for having me.

(END OF TAPE)

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