

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #279 - Sides A & B

Subject: Sylvia Thomson Saum (With Video)

Place: Saum Home, Burns, Oregon

Date: November 15, 1990

Interviewers: Dorothea Purdy & Barbara Lofgren

DOROTHEA PURDY: My name is Dorothea Purdy, and we're visiting with Sylvia Saum in her home in Burns, Oregon, on November 15th, 1990. We'll be talking to Sylvia a little bit about her mother's history and father's history, and how she came to Harney County.

Sylvia, can you tell me your name, maiden name?

SYLVIA SAUM: Sylvia Thomson.

DOROTHEA: And when you were born?

SYLVIA: 1905 at Vale.

DOROTHEA: And where?

SYLVIA: Vale, Oregon.

DOROTHEA: And what are your parent's names?

SYLVIA: My dad's name was John Orr Thomson. Mother's name is Lucy Boston Thomson.

DOROTHEA: Boston was her maiden name?

SYLVIA: Yes.

DOROTHEA: And when did they come to Oregon?

SYLVIA: My dad came to Eugene in 1857, and he came to Vale in 1866. And Mom came to Vale in 1874, when she was seven years old. And she had twelve brothers and sisters, and they all settled around Vale, and raised their families there.

DOROTHEA: How did they come to Oregon? Can you tell us something about how they arrived?

SYLVIA: They came on a wagon train.

DOROTHEA: And something --- did your mother say something about what happened on their trip?

SYLVIA: They didn't have any Indian attacks, but she was scared to death when they crossed the big rivers. And she saw one wagon go down the river with some kids on it. They lost them. Said she'd hide in the bottom of the wagon when they'd go across the river.

DOROTHEA: Did they have much problems with food? Or how did they supply their food?

SYLVIA: She didn't say anything about the food, but she said it was hard. The kids had to gather buffalo chips to build fires to cook with. And when they got to Vale, it was just a stone house, and a blacksmith shop, and ---

DOROTHEA: What kind of streets, or were there roads, and ---

SYLVIA: Just dirt roads.

DOROTHEA: Just dirt roads. How big was the town?

SYLVIA: There was just a stone house and a blacksmith shop.

DOROTHEA: And that's all?

SYLVIA: Yeah, that's all.

BARBARA LOFGREN: And what was the reason that they decided to go to Vale? Just on the route, and they decided to stay there?

SYLVIA: They lived in Missouri, and they had all those kids, and they had malaria and ticks and they just decided to join the wagon train and go where it was more healthy, a

more healthy country.

DOROTHEA: What did they do after they came and got to Oregon?

SYLVIA: They took up homesteads, the ones that were old enough.

DOROTHEA: How did they make their living?

SYLVIA: I wasn't there.

DOROTHEA: You don't know?

SYLVIA: No, I know they planted apple trees, and they raised gardens, and they had cattle and pigs.

DOROTHEA: More or less ranch type work.

SYLVIA: They all settled on ranches.

DOROTHEA: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

SYLVIA: Two sisters.

DOROTHEA: What were their names?

SYLVIA: Gladys, she married Glen Thayer, and Muriel married Crannell.

DOROTHEA: And where do they live now?

SYLVIA: Gladys died in 1927, in Ontario. And Muriel lives in Washington, Auburn, Washington.

DOROTHEA: What did your parents do as children? Did they help with their parents, or I mean did they help on the ranches?

SYLVIA: When my dad was twelve years old he helped his brother freight to Burns and different places. They had a freight team, jerk line team. And of course in Mom's family there was so many, that they all had to help. They had to heat the water on the stove and put it in the washtub and scrub with a washboard. And they'd hang their clothes out in the wintertime, they'd get so froze they'd have to pry them off the line.

DOROTHEA: I can remember some of those days. Did you make your own vegetables, and some of your foods?

SYLVIA: Mom always raised a big garden. She canned a lot of vegetables. They butchered a beef twice a year, and they killed about eight or ten pigs and they would smoke the hams and the bacon. And she made headcheese.

DOROTHEA: Do you remember some of the recipes that she used?

SYLVIA: Nope.

DOROTHEA: You don't remember any?

SYLVIA: I was a tomboy; I didn't stay in the house. I rode after the cattle. We didn't have any brothers.

DOROTHEA: Did you help your dad then?

SYLVIA: Yes.

DOROTHEA: And what did you do?

SYLVIA: We rode after cattle, we broke our own horses, we went out in the hay field haying, anything outside. Didn't learn to cook until I got married, and that was terrible. I married a buckaroo, and when the buckaroos would come in any time of the day or night for something to eat, and I didn't know how to cook. (Laughter)

BARBARA: Oh, dear.

DOROTHEA: What --- you say your dad moved to the country before your mother did. What brought them to the country, do you know?

SYLVIA: I really don't know. They were in Eugene for a few years, and I don't know why they came to Malheur County.

DOROTHEA: His parents lived in Eugene?

SYLVIA: His parents did.

DOROTHEA: What did they do?

SYLVIA: I don't know. I'm not much help.

DOROTHEA: Your dad didn't talk about himself much. He's kind of like my dad.

BARBARA: So how did your mother and father become acquainted?

SYLVIA: I suppose at the dances. They had lots of dances, and masquerades, and get-togethers. They'd go for miles in sleds or horseback when it was forty below.

BARBARA: That was pretty much a common thing in the early days for people to gather for dances.

SYLVIA: Yes.

BARBARA: Mostly their main social thing to do.

SYLVIA: They'd go in sleds, and they would put hay in the sled and put a tarp over it and hot rocks, with some quilts and blankets, and then another tarp over. And you'd just sleep so nice and warm. You didn't want to get out when you got home.

DOROTHEA: Can you tell us something about the dances? And did you have card parties and things at other people's houses?

SYLVIA: Yes, they did. I know they played "Pedro". I don't know how you play it now. They played pinochle. But mostly those basket socials, and dances, and things like that. Christmas parties.

BARBARA: Did they have programs at school and that sort of thing that people came to?

SYLVIA: Yes. And Thanksgiving and for Christmas, all the kids were in the programs.

BARBARA: What about church? Did church have socials and picnics too?

SYLVIA: They didn't have any church close.

BARBARA: I see.

SYLVIA: It was ten miles away from our house.

DOROTHEA: So what did you do for entertainment around home?

SYLVIA: We worked!

DOROTHEA: You didn't play any?

SYLVIA: Oh, we played. I had a dog that would pull me on my ice skates, and on my sled. And he rode on behind me on my horse. I had a pacer, and it didn't bounce him much. He'd get up on the hay wagon and go behind me, and we'd --- He was my buddy. I didn't have anybody to play with really. My sister was --- one was ten years older, and one was eight years younger, and they weren't any company. So we entertained ourselves with animals mostly.

DOROTHEA: You mentioned your mother, and your mother had quite a few brothers and sisters. Can you tell us some of the people that they knew, or what was the brother's names.

SYLVIA: Well John Boston had a ranch on Bully Creek. And Tom Boston had a horse camp, or a ranch there. And then a big horse camp up on top of Cotton Wood Mountain. And --- some of the others didn't make very good with ranching. The women all married ranchers. And one was Frank Loveland that had, raised Jacks, Mammoth Jacks and Jennies out at Barren Valley. The other one was Herb Ricker, had a big ranch and a lot of cattle.

DOROTHEA: Where was this at?

SYLVIA: Out of Vale.

DOROTHEA: Out of Vale. How about your father? His name was?

SYLVIA: John.

DOROTHEA: And he had some brothers?

SYLVIA: Just one.

DOROTHEA: Just one. What did the brother do?

SYLVIA: Well his brother, my dad, sent him to college. And he was the first county school superintendent in Malheur County. And he was a teacher. They had a lot of kids.

...

DOROTHEA: Well I understand that you were related to Bill Thomson who lived in Harney. Can you tell us something about him?

SYLVIA: Well, he was my first cousin. And he was buckaroo boss for the PLS, and he had a ranch on Rattlesnake Creek, out of Harney.

DOROTHEA: How did he come about being in Harney?

SYLVIA: I don't know.

DOROTHEA: Just sent there to work.

SYLVIA: I suppose he went with his dad when they were freighting here.

DOROTHEA: And ended up in Harney.

BARBARA: You say they freighted back and forth from Vale to Burns.

SYLVIA: Different places.

BARBARA: How long did it take them to go with a load? Do you have any idea?

SYLVIA: No, I don't have any idea. They freighted from every-place. It wasn't just from Vale.

BARBARA: Were they gone pretty much --- most of the time then?

SYLVIA: Yeah, they were gone a lot.

BARBARA: And they took their supplies from where?

SYLVIA: From Vale.

BARBARA: From Vale. Was that kind of a dropping off place for some --- a supply place?

SYLVIA: Yeah, Vale and Ontario.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: And they had --- he had some sons, and what did they do --- Bill?

SYLVIA: Just Ross and young Bill. They buckarood here, around Burns, and for the Company.

DOROTHEA: They worked for the PLS too?

BARBARA: And so did you then grow up in Vale until your adult life?

SYLVIA: Yes.

BARBARA: And then you said you married a rancher too.

SYLVIA: I married a rancher.

BARBARA: A rancher too. And did you live around Vale then when you were first married?

SYLVIA: We lived about six miles from Vale on a ranch.

BARBARA: And how did you meet your husband?

SYLVIA: Well, he --- we met --- we were out riding, my cousin and I. And he and another --- we met another fellow and him, and that's how we got acquainted. In fact he was going with my cousin at the time.

BARBARA: You stole him away then? And what was his name?

SYLVIA: Roy Johnson.

BARBARA: Roy Johnson. And when were you married?

SYLVIA: In 1925.

DOROTHEA: Did you have any children?

SYLVIA: Two.

DOROTHEA: And what were their names?

SYLVIA: Mary and Margaret.

DOROTHEA: And when were they ---

SYLVIA: Mary Drewitt Brown and Margaret Teague.

DOROTHEA: Can you tell us something about what they do?

SYLVIA: Mary is a real estate agent in Boise, and Margaret has a garage, Teague Motor in Burns.

DOROTHEA: At one time Mary was married to Rusty Drewitt, and they owned a restaurant in Burns. Can you tell us something ---

SYLVIA: They owned Rusty's Pizza Parlor.

DOROTHEA: Pizza Parlor.

SYLVIA: Then they owned Rusty's Steak House in Ontario.

DOROTHEA: Do they still have that?

SYLVIA: No.

DOROTHEA: She sold it? Where did your kids go to school at?

SYLVIA: They went to school at Vale and at John Day.

DOROTHEA: So you lived in John Day for a while. Can you tell me how you came about going to John Day?

SYLVIA: Well we lived in Seneca, and when the kids were in high school, they went to John Day from Seneca on the bus. And we went to John Day; we were on a lookout, out from Baker. And my husband got a job on the road, the highway, and we lived in John Day for a while. Then we moved to Seneca. He worked for Edward Hines for twenty-eight years. That was Fred.

DOROTHEA: And then ---

BARBARA: If we could back up just a little bit, you say you met and married in Vale. And

you ranched then in Vale for a time then before you moved to the Seneca-John Day area?

SYLVIA: Uh huh.

BARBARA: I see, okay. And what were some of the things that you did as a young married person? You mentioned that you had to learn to cook. What kind of experiences did you have as a young married woman, and learning to be a housewife, and that sort of thing, after being a tomboy as you were growing up?

SYLVIA: Well he encouraged me to help him around wild horses. That didn't help my housework any. And --- well I know one time when Margaret was a little, about three years old, one of the buckaroos came to the house one evening and he said, "You've got to fix my supper." I said, "What in the world happened?" He said, "The kid threw my sourdough biscuits in the creek, and put cow manure in my coffee." (Laughter)

BARBARA: Oh no. Then he was really hungry. So how did you learn to cook then? Just by practicing or ---

SYLVIA: Well I helped my mother-in-law. The buckaroos ate with the family, and I helped her, so I learned to cook that way.

BARBARA: Was it really hard to learn at that stage of ---

SYLVIA: Not really.

BARBARA: And did you end up doing any sewing for your girls and that sort of ---

SYLVIA: Yes, I did. I made all my kid's clothes.

DOROTHEA: Did you have any lessons in this, or did you just do that?

SYLVIA: No, I just did it.

DOROTHEA: Did you make your own patterns?

SYLVIA: Yes.

DOROTHEA: How did you do that?

SYLVIA: Well, when you've got to do something, why you just do it.

BARBARA: Just lay it out and kind of cut around it, and it looks like well this ought to fit and go from there.

SYLVIA: Well sometimes I used, you know, I'd take the old clothes apart and use them for patterns.

BARBARA: Were you able to do any store buying of clothes once in awhile?

SYLVIA: Yes, we'd buy some clothes, but I liked to sew. And Mary liked to sew. When she was in the fifth grade she made her own clothes.

BARBARA: Well good for her.

SYLVIA: Then she went --- after she graduated from high school she went to designing school. She really could make ---

DOROTHEA: I remember some of her sewing.

SYLVIA: She used to make Rusty's suits. You'd think they were expensive bought.

DOROTHEA: Let's back up again a little bit and talk about your parents again, and talk about some of the things that happened in their lives that you can remember. Did you have any Indian troubles?

SYLVIA: The Bannock Indians came there and they stole a bunch of the rancher's horses, and they took them up on Cotton Wood Mountain. And there is a natural rim rock corral up there, and they corralled them up there. And they'd rope them, and if they weren't broke to lead they would shoot them to get the rope off right quick. And they saw the ranchers coming, and so they left.

And years later, we had a ranch up the foot of the Cotton Wood Mountain, and a sheepherder came down with some human bones that he had found. And my dad said,

"Well I know where that Indian was buried." Before that we thought that all the Indians had gotten away, but they evidently killed one of them. They got most of their horses back. But ---

DOROTHEA: Well you talked about the Meeks Trail, can you tell us something about that?

SYLVIA: Only what's in the history.

DOROTHEA: In the history. Your parents didn't have anything to do with this?

SYLVIA: No.

DOROTHEA: Did any of your relatives work on the train that went through there?

SYLVIA: Well Joe Meek was my grandmother's brother. He's the one that got the train lost.

DOROTHEA: Well can you tell us something about that?

SYLVIA: I don't know anything about him.

DOROTHEA: You don't know anything about it.

SYLVIA: He was in trouble.

BARBARA: You say Joe Meek was his name?

SYLVIA: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: Can you remember your first automobile, and your first automobile ride?

SYLVIA: Yes, we had a Maxwell, and my dad was going to teach my mom to drive. So they went out in the alfalfa field, and my little sister and I were in the back seat and she hit a ditch and threw my little sister out and I caught her by the feet as she went out. She never learned to drive, that was enough for her.

BARBARA: That scared her, huh?

DOROTHEA: And so you drive now though, all over the place. Do you go out of town

much?

SYLVIA: I did when my husband was well. I went places, I drove a fifth wheeler. We were gone most of the summer.

DOROTHEA: What is your husband's name?

SYLVIA: Steve, Steve Saum.

DOROTHEA: Can you tell us how you met him?

SYLVIA: Well we were all rock hounds, and I met him out when we were hunting rocks and some petrified wood. And then another time we went down to the opal fields in Nevada, and that's where I first met him. He helped me park my trailer.

DOROTHEA: How long did you hunt rocks before he became ill?

SYLVIA: Eight years.

DOROTHEA: About eight years. And he is now living in the Burns Nursing Home. Can you tell us something about your grandchildren, and how many you have?

SYLVIA: Seven.

DOROTHEA: Seven grandchildren.

SYLVIA: Grandchildren. Mary had two boys and a girl. And Margaret had three girls and a boy.

DOROTHEA: And what do they do?

SYLVIA: Well, Pete helps at the garage; he's working at the garage, Teague Motor. And Patty lives at Redmond, and she is working, parts person, in a garage. And Paula and Doug have a service station. And Peggy is part owner of the garage.

DOROTHEA: Now Pete and Peggy and Paula and Patty are all your daughter Margaret's children?

SYLVIA: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: And Mary's children do what?

SYLVIA: One of them is studying to be a minister.

DOROTHEA: And that one is who?

SYLVIA: That's Mark.

DOROTHEA: Mark.

SYLVIA: The one that was little when he was here. And Jamie is married; her husband has a good job. And Kerry has a job; I don't know what they're doing really. And they all live in Boise.

DOROTHEA: They all live close to their mother?

SYLVIA: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: How did your daughter meet her husband, Ruel?

SYLVIA: Well he was from Arkansas, and his brother was in the service with one of the Tiller boys. And he and his brother decided to come here to visit the Tillers. And they said why don't you get a job at Hines? And they did, they went up to Seneca and got a job setting chokers. And Ruel stayed working for Hines, and Nate lives in John Day.

DOROTHEA: And that's how Margaret met Ruel, huh?

SYLVIA: Yeah. And Joy and Margaret were good friends, and they married brothers, Joy Brisbo.

BARBARA: So Ruel and Margaret met while you were living in Seneca, is that right? Okay.

SYLVIA: Uh huh.

BARBARA: Margaret was still going to school at that time?

SYLVIA: Yes, she was in high school.

BARBARA: So when did they then get together and get married, do you recall?

SYLVIA: Well they went together a couple years I guess, I can remember.

DOROTHEA: Then Mary met Rusty during her school years, or how did she meet Rusty?

SYLVIA: She met him when she was going to high school at John Day. He lived at Prairie City. They met at a dance.

DOROTHEA: They met at a dance. Well we keep jumping back and forth here, but I see on your little cue card there that you have some things that you haven't told us about. Would you like to tell us about that?

SYLVIA: Oh, well all the ranchers had icehouses with sawdust in them. And it was about forty below zero in the winter, and they'd drive their teams out on --- teams and wagons out on the river and cut blocks of ice and put in their icehouses. And there wasn't any electricity in those ranches until 1938.

DOROTHEA: How did they get their electricity, or what kind of stoves and things did they have?

SYLVIA: I don't know, just a bunch of guys came and put the poles up and put a wire on them. That's all I know about it.

DOROTHEA: So you did a lot of wood ---

SYLVIA: I left the summer; I left the ranch the summer that they put the electricity in, so I don't know.

DOROTHEA: Oh, that was the year you got married or something?

SYLVIA: That's the year I left the kid's dad.

DOROTHEA: Oh. But they heated mostly with wood and cooked with wood.

SYLVIA: Oh yeah, they had to have --- they didn't have any timber around Vale, so they had to use sagebrush. And they'd go out with wagons and haul big loads and pile it up for the winter.

DOROTHEA: Well when you moved to John Day, or Seneca, what did you do for a living?

SYLVIA: Worked for Hines.

DOROTHEA: You worked for Hines. And you say your husband worked for Hines. And your husband was Fred Weesner at that time? How many years were you married to Fred?

SYLVIA: Thirty-two.

DOROTHEA: That's a long time. The kids more or less knew him as their dad then.

SYLVIA: He was a really good stepfather. When the Bully Creek Dam broke, I was taking teacher's training at Vale. And it was in 1925, and a wall of water came down through Vale about six feet deep. And when it went down there was dead cattle and horses all every place.

DOROTHEA: Well that was kind of devastating, wasn't it?

SYLVIA: And nobody drowned, because they had plenty of warning. We got out of the way, but it was sure a mess to clean up. And a friend came in town with his horse and wanted to know if I wanted to go for a ride and look over the town. And I got on behind him and we were riding along, and this horse stopped. He wouldn't go. And so we just let him go around. And when the water went down, there was a basement there. He sensed that, he wouldn't walk off in it.

DOROTHEA: He wouldn't go in it. That was a good thing.

BARBARA: Good for him, or you would have been swimming too, wouldn't you?

SYLVIA: I rode horseback down to the Holladay School to practice teaching in the spring and in the fall. That was quite an experience. It was about six miles down there, I guess.

DOROTHEA: Did you teach school?

SYLVIA: No, I got married and didn't teach.

DOROTHEA: Didn't teach.

SYLVIA: I could have ---

BARBARA: Where did you go to school?

SYLVIA: At Vale.

BARBARA: At Vale.

DOROTHEA: Can you remember some of your teacher's names?

SYLVIA: Mr. Hawks. And I had gotten --- I didn't like him because --- I got married before school was out, and when I went up, spotlight on me, to get my diploma, they threw rice at me and I was so embarrassed. I never forgave him.

BARBARA: That was cute though, really.

SYLVIA: It was supposed to be a secret.

BARBARA: Oh, I see.

DOROTHEA: I think it was.

SYLVIA: And before they put the dams in the river, the salmon used to come up and they'd come over the riffles and they'd be half out of the water, and the men would go down and get them with pitchforks. That was pretty exciting.

DOROTHEA: Was that during certain times of the year? In the spring, or something like that?

SYLVIA: Yeah, in the spring.

DOROTHEA: So you had salmon to eat in the springtime then.

SYLVIA: Then they'd have rabbit drives when the snow would get deep. The rabbits were eating all the haystacks up. So they'd drive those rabbits in the stack yards, and

then they'd club them to death. That made me sick. Those things would scream.

BARBARA: Not a pretty sight.

SYLVIA: They had to do something.

DOROTHEA: We used to shoot a lot of them, but we never beat them. What have you been doing since you've retired? Did you do a lot of traveling?

SYLVIA: Yes, we traveled all over Arizona, Nevada, Montana, different places. We fished a lot, we hunted, we hunted rocks. We have all kinds of rock equipment to make things with. Table tops and stuff like that. That's out of style now. Nobody cares anything about it.

DOROTHEA: Well I think a lot of the country has gotten so that they won't let you on their ground, and the artifacts, they're trying to protect, so they won't let you pick them up. So I think that's kind of made it kind of tough on the rock hounds. Do you go ---

BARBARA: Excuse me, you say that you studied to be a teacher, but then you got married so you didn't teach. Then you went to Seneca, and you worked for Edward Hines. What did you do?

SYLVIA: Well I didn't, my husband worked for him.

BARBARA: Oh, your husband worked. So what, you just were a homemaker then, and worked in the home during the time that you were there?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

BARBARA: And when you left Seneca, where did you go, did you move to Burns?

SYLVIA: To Burns.

BARBARA: And did you have any job or anything at that time?

SYLVIA: No --- oh yes, we came to Burns to take care of the airport. We were airport managers for ten years.

BARBARA: Oh, I see.

DOROTHEA: Can you tell us something that happened during the time you were airport managers?

SYLVIA: You remember that plane that crashed out at Crowley?

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

SYLVIA: Well they were from Canada, and they had been to Mexico. And they stopped in and I gassed their plane up that morning, and they didn't file a flight plan, and that's the reason we couldn't find them. They didn't miss them for a while, you know. And then that man that crashed out --- oh his plane came to pieces, where was that, out toward Drewsey, someplace.

DOROTHEA: I don't remember.

SYLVIA: Anyway, some of the men from the shop went out to bring their remains in, and bring parts of the airplane. They found his hand with his wedding ring on; they got it and sent it to his wife. Oh, a lot of things happened out there.

DOROTHEA: What years was that?

SYLVIA: From '69 to '79.

DOROTHEA: Ten years.

BARBARA: So did Ruel learn to fly during the time you ran that, or was he a pilot before that?

SYLVIA: He was a pilot before we came down here.

BARBARA: I see. What made you take an interest in taking a job at the airport?

SYLVIA: Well Fred was retired, and they called us and said they needed somebody down here, that nobody was taking care of the airport. And they were afraid the planes would get ruined. So we came down one evening and had a meeting with Jack McAllister

and some other people. And they told us to be down the next morning. So we didn't have any place to live, we got a little camp trailer and lived in it until we could get a house, or get a mobile home. Every day something would happen that was interesting. Then Jack McAllister bought a new twin plane, and he brought it in and the wheels didn't come down and he took a belly landing, and it burned up. He jumped out in time, but if anybody had been with him, they couldn't have gotten out.

BARBARA: Goodness, a new plane huh? Goodness. So did you meet a lot of people from all parts of the country?

SYLVIA: Oh, yes.

BARBARA: Stopping in?

SYLVIA: And when that Mrs. Luce, wasn't it, that her family came in, in a jet. And they talked to us all the way from --- I believe it was Chicago they lived, wasn't it? Anyway, when they got there, why it was sure different from anything they'd ever seen. And after the funeral they went out and picked some sagebrush to take home, because their mother had talked about sagebrush.

DOROTHEA: I think, unless I'm wrong, Barbara can correct me, but I think that is what we're doing here today, is because of some of the money that she donated.

SYLVIA: Oh.

DOROTHEA: Now am I right, or wrong?

BARBARA: Right.

DOROTHEA: That she wanted the library to keep a history on the County of Harney, and the goings on, and the things that are doing that. And that's what we are doing.

SYLVIA: We had to cater a meal for them when they got back, before they left. We had a good visit with them.

DOROTHEA: Were they nice people?

SYLVIA: Uh huh. They asked us all kinds of questions on the way. What's the place like, what are the people like, you know.

BARBARA: After living in New York and all different parts of the country, to bring her back to a place that they didn't know and leave her in a little cemetery like Harney, it must of been a real adjustment for them to bring her back and leave her when they lived such a different life.

SYLVIA: I would think so.

BARBARA: But that was her wish, that was her love to be back where she grew up.

DOROTHEA: And she was a McGill. Do you know any of the McGills?

SYLVIA: No.

DOROTHEA: You don't?

BARBARA: So then after you had the airport and worked there for ten years you just retired and traveled around since that time, is that right?

SYLVIA: Yes, we moved to Burns.

DOROTHEA: Did Fred pass away after you moved into town?

SYLVIA: No.

DOROTHEA: While you were on the airport?

SYLVIA: Let's see. Yes, we were still at the airport, because he passed away in '63, or '73. So I was out there quite awhile after that.

DOROTHEA: So you ran it for about six years after he passed away. I understand that Ruel does a lot of --- like when planes crash and wreck, he goes out and looks for them. Did he always do this?

SYLVIA: Yes. And he flies, if they have any trouble with the power lines, he flies low to

see about that. It's pretty dangerous. And one time he was helping run wild horses, and there was a woman here from Portland taking pictures. And they were going to corral the horses on the other side of Steens Mountain. And they were flying low, and this woman said she didn't know if she was thrilled to death or scared to death.

BARBARA: That's quite an experience, I'm sure.

SYLVIA: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: How would you compare your life today with that of twenty to thirty years ago?

SYLVIA: I can't see that it's much different.

DOROTHEA: You think it's pretty much the same? The prices are all pretty high.

BARBARA: Everything is relative. You make more so you spend more on things, I guess.

DOROTHEA: Do you remember your grandparents at all?

SYLVIA: I remember my Grandma Boston.

DOROTHEA: Can you tell us something about her?

SYLVIA: She was Irish, and everything was funny. She had those thirteen kids, and I don't know how it could be funny. But ---BARBARA: I guess she had to have a sense of humor to take care of thirteen children.

SYLVIA: She sure did.

BARBARA: A real challenge.

SYLVIA: I didn't know my other grandparents. They were gone before I was born.

DOROTHEA: What did she do? Did she stay with you, or did she live by herself?

SYLVIA: She stayed with different kids. And I just mainly remember her being so full of fun.

DOROTHEA: Can you tell us what you think probably was the most important event or thing that's happened during your lifetime? Something that really sticks out in your memory?

SYLVIA: One thing I didn't like. The folks were on a ranch four miles from anyplace, and the roads would be snowed in, so they sent me to the Sister's School at Boise that winter. I was twelve years old. I had never been away from home. And those kids I thought were all sissies. I didn't like to play with them. I bawled all the time. And the folks thought they were going to have to go and get me, because the sisters wrote and told them that I wasn't doing good. So finally I started taking piano lessons, and then that, I kind of got calmed down. But I hated that. And my cousin who was there, she had been three years. And when we'd go anyplace she'd swipe a spoon or a saltshaker or something. She had joined the church. She tried to get me to join, I wouldn't join. And she called me a heathen, and I called her a hypocrite. I never did join the church, and to this day, I hate organ music and Latin singing.

DOROTHEA: Do you have any family stories or funny things that happened during your childhood, or during your married life that you can tell us about that you thought was kind of comical?

SYLVIA: You should have told me this a long time ago, so I could think. Oh, when we went to school at Vale, we went to a country school. There were eight grades in one room, and usually it was a teacher from back east. Well this Halloween we thought we would play a joke on her. So we put a big old black Tomcat in her desk. So when she came to school that morning, she raised the lid up and the Tomcat jumped out and squalled; and she fainted. And we thought that was awful funny. Kids can sure be mean.

BARBARA: It's a wonder she didn't have a heart attack. Leave it to a bunch of kids.

What kind of games and things did you play at recess and that sort of thing at school? Do you recall?

SYLVIA: Oh, we played "Shivey", and "Black Lamb", and all kinds of stuff. I don't remember how --- the kids don't play it now. But there was tall sagebrush around the school, and a good place to hide. And we had a lot of fun. And then they skated the slough that nearly surrounded the schoolhouse. We'd skate all winter on that slough. And we had heard the saying that, "He's as independent as a hog on ice." So one day we were skating and some pigs came. So we got one out on the ice. Well he did real fine, his little sharp feet; he just stood up real good. But then he fell in and drown!

DOROTHEA: Oh.

SYLVIA: We got him out, but he was dead. My dad went and paid the neighbor for the pig.

DOROTHEA: No excuses, huh? Well let's think a little while, and we'll turn this tape over.

SIDE B

SYLVIA: ... my sister and another girl and I had been out riding after horses all day, and it was hot. And we came to the highline ditch. We thought boy it sure would be fun to go swimming. So we took our clothes off and we tied them on the saddles to keep them up out of the dirt. And we were having a ball. And here came a bobcat down the ditch bank. It was slobbering, and just weaving around. We ducked under, and just our noses sticking out. We just knew he was going to jump in after us. Our horses got a whiff of him and they ran home. And we had to wait until dark to go home, because there were buckaroos there. (Laughter)

DOROTHEA: The horse had took your clothes, huh?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

BARBARA: And what kind of trouble did you get in when you got home?

SYLVIA: Oh, we didn't get in any trouble. They were worried about us wondering where we were.

BARBARA: Well when the horses came back without you, I suppose with your clothes and everything.

SYLVIA: Well I guess they didn't notice. The corral was quite a ways from the house. They didn't even know they were there. We never did find out --- we figured he had rabies, but nothing else showed up with rabies. So then we decided probably he had gotten into a porcupine or something.

DOROTHEA: That's kind of interesting. Can you think of anything else that you want to tell us that's about your --- some of the history that you can remember? Your cousins, or -
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SYLVIA: I don't think so. I think I ran down.

DOROTHEA: Bill Thomson had a ranch out on Harney. Can you tell us anything about the ranch? Was he one of the first ranchers out there?

SYLVIA: I don't think so. I think he bought it from somebody, I don't know for certain. I thought of something --- then I lost it again.

DOROTHEA: Can you remember something about how people related with each other, and how they got along?

SYLVIA: Most everybody got along fine, and everybody helped each other.

DOROTHEA: Did you know your neighbors well?

SYLVIA: You bet. Yes.

DOROTHEA: Who were some of them?

SYLVIA: Stacey's, Ricker's, Vines, Limberger's, Parks, we were about --- did I tell you --- Oh, I didn't tell you about that doctor? I didn't put that on tape yet. Anyway everybody helped each other, good neighbors.

DOROTHEA: What about the doctor?

SYLVIA: Well, we lived ten miles from Vale, and my sister lived about a mile on past us. Her little baby got real sick. And we used the crank up phone and called Dr. Carl Bartlett. And he came as far as our place in the car, and it was so muddy, and he couldn't go any farther. And we had a team of horses with a harness on, tied to the hay wagon, and he ran and jumped on one of those and ran the horse up there and saved the baby. And she lives in Fruitland.

DOROTHEA: So that was how people cooperated with each other?

SYLVIA: Yes, that's how the doctors took care of you then.

DOROTHEA: You say you didn't remember the depression. But how did it affect your neighbors?

SYLVIA: I don't think it affected any of them. I just wasn't around anybody that, you know, that was having a hard time.

DOROTHEA: So they got along pretty good.

BARBARA: They were accustomed to growing things and raising things, so they had enough food and that was all that ---

SYLVIA: They had plenty of animals to eat. My folks butchered a beef twice a year, and they killed about ten pigs, and we smoked the hams and bacon.

BARBARA: Did you have chickens too?

SYLVIA: Yes, we had chickens and eggs, and turkeys.

DOROTHEA: Raised a big garden, so they did some of their canning. Did you raise a lot

of fruits and things? Or how did you get your fruit?

SYLVIA: The neighbors had some fruit trees. So, we got fruit from them. We didn't have any fruit trees.

DOROTHEA: What kind of landscape and things was in Vale, or say Grant-Harney County when you first came here?

SYLVIA: Sagebrush. ... Northwest of Vale was all sagebrush. And when they started farming that, and plowed that up you couldn't see anything, there was so much dust. There was just --- but I can remember when there wasn't any building up there on that bench. And, well it was just a valley with sagebrush, and the river wasn't very far from our place. Then they had great big rows of those tall poplars. And one time I asked Mom why did they plant those? What good are they? They called them timber cultures. And she said that they planted them so they could take up more ground. Like it was timber instead of just plain fields.

BARBARA: I always thought of them as being windbreakers around the homes and that sort of things.

SYLVIA: Well these would be just acres of trees planted close together. Those huge big poplars.

BARBARA: Oh, for heaven's sakes. I didn't know that.

SYLVIA: They'd have picnics down there, and they'd have swings. Put poles way up high, and have swings from those poplar trees.

DOROTHEA: And this was in Vale?

SYLVIA: Yeah, between Vale --- out of Vale.

DOROTHEA: Are they still there?

SYLVIA: Most of them are cut down now. They got rid of them so they could use the

land.

BARBARA: And how big a community was Seneca when you lived there? Edward Hines was kind of booming at that time maybe.

SYLVIA: Probably four hundred.

BARBARA: Is that right?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: About how many people are up there now?

SYLVIA: I haven't any idea. A lot of people have retired there. We sold our place to an engineer from the coast. And I don't know why they wanted to come to Seneca; it's the coldest place in the country. But the places were cheaper, and taxes were cheaper.

DOROTHEA: Well they don't have a store or anything, but they did rebuild the post office. And I guess they rebuilt the grocery store which is more of a, kind of a tavern type thing now. But I guess there are a lot of retired people living up there. Not many children I understand.

SYLVIA: When the hotel up there was full, I worked there. I think there was fifty-two rooms. And ---

BARBARA: Was it people that were working at the mill that lived in the hotel?

SYLVIA: Yeah. Out in the woods and ---

BARBARA: I often wondered why they had that building there. I really didn't know what it was used for.

SYLVIA: It was pretty nice. We did the laundry, and took care of the rooms.

BARBARA: Was there a restaurant in there too then?

SYLVIA: No. There was one in the south side of the store, but that closed.

BARBARA: Were they allowed to cook in their rooms or anything?

SYLVIA: They did, yes.

DOROTHEA: Did they have a barber shop and ---

SYLVIA: No.

DOROTHEA: They didn't have anything like that up there?

SYLVIA: Had a community hall. And they had pinochle parties. One woman came to John Day and to Burns, and she asked the stores for things for prizes. She had some real good prizes. I wouldn't have had the nerve to do it.

BARBARA: Oh, I wouldn't either, to come down and ask for things to take out of the community. It takes a lot of nerve, doesn't it?

SYLVIA: She had lots of nerve.

BARBARA: And what did your girls think of growing up in Seneca? Did they like it up there?

SYLVIA: Well, they were ---

BARBARA: Or were they bored?

SYLVIA: They were in high school by the time we got to Seneca. So they went on the bus to John Day to high school. I was always scared to death they wouldn't get home. Because they, those roads were --- have you been to John Day? You know what that grade is like?

BARBARA: Oh, yes.

SYLVIA: You can imagine what it was like when it is icy.

BARBARA: That was a bad trip to take every day, wasn't it?

SYLVIA: It was. One time the bus broke down not far from the ski lodge, and the kids went up there. And they burnt their books in the fireplace to get warm. One boy was in a wheelchair, and he nearly froze his feet. And they got them rescued and took them to

John Day, and they had quite a time getting them thawed out. That's the only time I know of that they had a problem.

BARBARA: Did your girls go on to college then, or not?

SYLVIA: No, Margaret got married, and Mary went to designing school in Seattle, and then she got married.

DOROTHEA: Well, it sounds like you've had an interesting life, and you've done a lot. Shall we do an interview on the video now? I know you're not looking forward to this.

SYLVIA: Now what the heck are you going to ask me? Are we still on?

DOROTHEA: Yes.

SYLVIA: That's awful.

DOROTHEA: It's just some of the same questions that we have asked you already.

SYLVIA: Don't ask me something I don't know.

DOROTHEA: Is there something else that you would like to add on to this before we close off? Some stories you would like to tell us, or some of the history that we have forgotten?

SYLVIA: I don't know. I think I've probably talked enough.

DOROTHEA: Okay, well we'll close off and thank you for the afternoon anyway.

(END OF TAPE)

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