

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #308 - Sides A & B

Subject: Chuck Clark - With Video

Place: Harney County Library - Burns, Oregon

Date: December 5, 1991

Interviewers: Dorothea Purdy & Barbara Lofgren

DOROTHEA PURDY: This is Dorothea Purdy, along with Barbara Lofgren, and today we're talking with Charles Clark at the library in Burns, Oregon. Today's date is December 5th, 1991. Following our interview we will be doing a short video of Chuck, and it will be stored at the library along with the transcript and cassette tape. The number is 308.

All right Charles, do you like to be called Charles, or are you ---

CHUCK CLARK: Chuck usually, that's what most people call me.

DOROTHEA: Chuck, okay, we'll start with --- Can you tell us your full name?

CHUCK: Charles H. Clark, and I was born in Cairo, West Virginia, April the 17th, 1916.

DOROTHEA: And what was your parent's names?

CHUCK: My dad's name was Walter Clark, and my mother's name was Chloe Clark.

DOROTHEA: And did they come to Burns?

CHUCK: No, just me.

DOROTHEA: Just you. And how did you come about coming to Burns?

CHUCK: Well I came to Burns from Riggins, Idaho in the CCC's.

DOROTHEA: And how long were you with the CCC's?

CHUCK: A little over three years.

DOROTHEA: Can you tell us something about that and what you did there?

CHUCK: The CCC's?

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: Oh yeah, we helped; we built Squaw Butte, the experimental station or whatever it is out there. It is kind of an animal hospital.

BARBARA LOFGREN: And what year was this that you came to work with the CCC's?

CHUCK: '36.

BARBARA: Okay.

CHUCK: We got in Idaho in, I believe it was October in '35, and we came over here to Gap Ranch, we lived in tents, in May of '36. And we drove from, then over the hill until we got the barracks built and all the animal hospital, and fencing and water holes and everything, done everything to it. That was my first experience with Harney County.

DOROTHEA: What did you think about Harney County at that time?

CHUCK: I hated it.

DOROTHEA: That's my understanding with a lot of the ---

CHUCK: I figured that nothing could live here but rabbits. But after you're here six months, you couldn't drive me out of here now. I tried when I retired, I went to Nebraska. My wife was born there, and beautiful country, and you can raise anything. But I couldn't hack it. And the closer --- we was on our way home --- we went to West Virginia to see my mother, and on the way home, I would be looking down and I would be driving 85, 90 mile an hour. And she said, "What's your hurry, what's your hurry?" And I would let up, and I'd look down and I was making 85, and I said, "I'm going home." (Laughter) And we come back to Burns, and I would never leave it again, never! But it takes awhile to get used to it.

DOROTHEA: Well how long did you stay at the experimental station, or were you based there at all?

CHUCK: Oh yeah, when we got the barracks built, we moved from, got out of the tents. We were living in tents at the Gap Ranch and we moved on over and lived in the barracks. I don't remember just how long it was.

And this Warren Northwest was paving, and they was hiring people, so I got out. We went to work, fifty cents an hour, working twelve hours a day. That was big money. We was only getting thirty dollars a month, you know, in them CCC's. And twenty-five of that went to your folks. So you got five dollars a month. Yeah ---

BARBARA: You said Warren?

CHUCK: Warren Northwest.

BARBARA: Warren, Warren, okay.

CHUCK: Warren Northwest Construction. They since went broke I guess, I don't know. You don't see them anymore.

DOROTHEA: And how far did they build that road, was that clear into Burns, or just to the ---

CHUCK: No, huh uh, just a section out there, just a part of, along the Gap Ranch. And then when we finished up out there, they sent us over to Harney and finished up that. And we wound up in November; I know it was awful cold for paving. Of course I was working on the screening plant on the gravel, and it didn't make any difference. It was about the first paved road, I think, in Harney County that I remember of.

BARBARA: Did you like that kind of construction work?

CHUCK: Did I?

BARBARA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: Oh I loved it. It was --- of course I was single, any kind of --- I loved that fifty cents an hour. Yeah that's, that was big money, especially for a single kid.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

CHUCK: And I was boarding down here in Burns with Joe Elliott. Board and room, a dollar a day. Board and room, can you imagine that? Now you can't even buy a hamburger for that.

DOROTHEA: No way.

BARBARA: Barely a cup of coffee anymore.

CHUCK: That's right.

DOROTHEA: You wouldn't have much left after you paid for a cup of coffee, that's for sure. And how long did you work for them?

CHUCK: Oh, I think we finished up in '37, in the spring of '37. And then I worked out at the mill part of '37, and worked part of '37 with the Union Pacific Railroad. Then everything shut down, it was hard times, '37 was a hard winter. And I wound up going to Silver Creek, upper valley, and fed cattle for Pete Petersen. Charlie and Herb and myself was out there on the ranch.

And then in the spring the mill called me back. You see that would be the spring of '40 though when they called me back, and when I went up to Trout Creek from there. Out of the mill, I didn't like that mill, I couldn't stand that noise. That was terrible.

DOROTHEA: So how did you end up going to Trout Creek?

CHUCK: How did I?

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: Well I went up and told Chet Irving that I didn't care for anymore of that sawmill, and I wanted to get out of there. And he wanted to know where I would like to go, and I told him Trout Creek. And he said, "Well then I'll take you down and see Bert Kromer the superintendent." And old Bert, he told Bert what I requested. And he said, "Oh them fellows all trying to get in the mill." And so I told him, I said, "Well I'll go up there and you bring one of them in here and let him come in the mill." Well it just so happened

they needed a man up there. And he wanted to know how I spiked, right handed or left-handed. And I told him right. Well every man on the job spikes left handed. So he hired me and sent me up. And that was in June of '40, and I worked there thirteen months on the section. Then Kromer called me and offered me a job on the train as a brakeman if I wanted it. And he told me that if I didn't like it why I could always go back to Trout Creek on the section. Sometimes I wished I had of.

BARBARA: You drove spikes on the --- were the guys pretty careful or particular I should say, about their mauls, or whatever you drove with?

CHUCK: Oh yeah, you had your own.

BARBARA: You had your own.

CHUCK: Nobody bothered it either.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: Each man was required to dig out, dig them out, five ties, at least five ties a day and replace them, and tap them up, and spike them. So two of you together, see that would be ten ties. And you worked as pairs. And I worked with, Martin Kane was my partner, and he got killed down at Drewsey. You know a tractor turned over on him, drowned him in the river there. He was my partner, he was a wild Irishman.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

CHUCK: He was a nice fellow.

DOROTHEA: I went to school with his kids, so yeah, I knew them. They were nice people.

CHUCK: He had two girls and a boy.

DOROTHEA: And a boy.

CHUCK: Dennis, I wonder whatever happened to him?

DOROTHEA: I think he is over in Vale, I think Marcus Haines was telling us, I think.

CHUCK: His Mrs. I guess was in Ontario.

DOROTHEA: Was she?

CHUCK: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Well he is probably there someplace close with her. I know he tried living here by himself for a while and it just didn't work out.

CHUCK: He had a little fondness for the bottle.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, yeah, a little bit.

CHUCK: My wife, she didn't care about him.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

BARBARA: Did you break many handles in that, driving, you sometimes hit the rail or something and break a handle?

CHUCK: Not too often, no.

BARBARA: Not too often.

CHUCK: If you do, they just, they don't break off, they are hickory and they just eventually chew, it just keeps chewing them up until they get to where your handle won't stay straight.

BARBARA: Just wear them out.

CHUCK: But ---

BARBARA: How heavy were they?

CHUCK: Oh some was six pounds, some eight pounds; most of them was six-pound mauls. And there was two different types. There was a bell type, and then there was one with a little sharp on the end, and flat on the backside for spiking. But oh, they went up to eight pounds, some of them.

BARBARA: So swinging that all day long, you got good muscles, and a tired back probably.

CHUCK: Yeah, when you come in you was ready to take a hot shower and lay down. They had two bunkhouses there at Trout Creek. And they had eight men to the bunkhouse. And we done our own cooking, own house cleaning. The only women that was there was the section foreman's wife and his kids. But it was a good life.

DOROTHEA: Did they have their own home, or did they have ---

CHUCK: They had their own home.

DOROTHEA: They had their own place.

BARBARA: What time of day would you start work?

CHUCK: About seven.

BARBARA: About seven.

CHUCK: I think it was seven we started. Of course we changed with the seasons, you know. In the wintertime you started later, it was daylight later. In the summertime we would get early, before it got so hot. That was a good life.

BARBARA: And you would work what, eight, ten hours a day?

CHUCK: Eight hours a day.

BARBARA: Eight hours.

CHUCK: They could work you seven days a week; there was no time and a half. You didn't --- nobody paid ---

BARBARA: No unions.

CHUCK: No.

DOROTHEA: How was the pay on that then?

CHUCK: You got four dollars and eighty-four cents a day.

DOROTHEA: A day.

CHUCK: A day. And they could work you Sunday, Christmas, Thanksgiving, and there was no time and a half, there was just no time and a half.

DOROTHEA: Was the train running then, or were you just building the rails, the track?

CHUCK: Oh yeah, their trains run, they run everyday.

DOROTHEA: Did they? Uh huh.

CHUCK: And ---

BARBARA: Did they haul during the daytime, or at night, the logs?

CHUCK: Well it would depend. They had a crew that left out down here about three o'clock and went to Seneca and made up the train here and went up and got, picked up all their stuff. And then they had another crew that went to work at about eleven, switched these sheds to get the lumber put in empties. And then they got in a car, whatever, station wagon and drove to Trout Creek. And then this train pulled in from Seneca and they changed crews. This crew here would take over, and this crew that had been to Seneca they got in the car and come home. And then they would make two trips up that mountain with logs and lumber.

DOROTHEA: Going from Burns to Seneca, or from Seneca to Burns?

CHUCK: From Seneca to Burns.

DOROTHEA: From Seneca to Burns.

CHUCK: It had been loaded. And then a lot of nights when this crew, Seneca crew went out they'd make two trips up the hill on this side to get the empties all out.

DOROTHEA: Did they leave a lot of the logs at the siding, or what did, or how did they go about making two trips?

CHUCK: If they had too many, yes. They set them out at Trout Creek, and if maybe tomorrow you might be short they would just reach in and get so many cars of logs. And if they happened to have too many ---

DOROTHEA: Now in the wintertime I understood it was quite difficult to keep these train tracks in good shape, in other words.

CHUCK: Well snow, ice mostly. But it didn't bother diesels, when they got the diesels that took care of that. They weighed 385,000 a piece, and they just cut through that ice like nothing. But a steam engine had a little pony truck out in front, kind of a lead. And there was no weight on it, and when it come to a piece of ice it would just hop up and take off down the country. BARBARA: Oh dear.

CHUCK: But a diesel, they was just so heavy, and we used to have to plow out this tunnel on top of the mountain.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: Across there from Idlewild, you know where, you've seen that haven't you?

DOROTHEA: Uh huh, yeah.

CHUCK: And those ends of the tunnel would snow full. And those side rods on those engines would come over and come down on top of that snow and they would pack it, and there you was. Means you couldn't go forward, and you couldn't go back. So you got out with a shovel and you dug it out by hand. Well we would plow that several times in the winter. They had a big snowplow in Seneca. And that would be a Sunday job to plow out this track from one end to the other on Sunday.

DOROTHEA: And what did you use to plow it out with?

CHUCK: We just put it on the end of a locomotive.

DOROTHEA: Oh.

CHUCK: It was mounted on a flat car. It was a huge, big thing, and they had a little house on there where the operator got inside of it. And we could see him, we just had to give hand signals, whatever he wanted, you know. If we get to going too fast why he'd get scared and want to slow up.

DOROTHEA: Well now how long did you work with the Trout Creek, or Trout Camp crew before you went on with ---

CHUCK: I was there thirteen months.

DOROTHEA: Thirteen months.

CHUCK: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: And then you got on steady on the train?

CHUCK: Yeah after about, it wasn't exactly steady. I was on the extra board, you know, for about two years there, and you just took what come up. And if it didn't come up, you didn't work.

DOROTHEA: Yeah. And during this time you said that you were on the railroad crew, you met and married Polly, is this right?

CHUCK: Uh huh. That's when I worked at Trout Creek, yeah in that thirteen-month period there.

DOROTHEA: And how did you meet Polly?

CHUCK: Oh, the grange hall.

DOROTHEA: Okay, it must have been at a dance.

CHUCK: At the dance. Well I knew who she was, but actually, you know, as far as meet her, that's --- I knew her brothers and all that, you know, some of them. But yeah, we got married in October, the 5th of October in 1940.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh. And Polly was a Petersen.

CHUCK: Yes.

DOROTHEA: What was some of her brother's and sister's names?

CHUCK: Well you got Harold Petersen, he lives here. And Gill Petersen he lives in The Dalles, and Paul Petersen lives in LaGrande. And Norma Paulus she is in Salem, and Geraldine Perch, she married John Perch, she lives in Portland.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: So ---

BARBARA: That was a large family.

CHUCK: Yes.

DOROTHEA: And what did her father do?

CHUCK: He drilled water wells mostly.

DOROTHEA: Water wells.

CHUCK: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: How long did they live here?

CHUCK: Oh, I think they came to LaGrande, or Eugene, they came to Eugene in '36, but they didn't come up here to Burns, I don't know, until I think '38 or in there someplace. They moved up here to Burns.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh. Now we all know her, all of us local people know her as Polly. Is her real name Pauline?

CHUCK: Yeah. Pauline is really her name, but nobody ever calls her that, and they don't call me Charles either. (Laughter) Most of them don't.

DOROTHEA: What kind of a courtship did you have?

CHUCK: There was no problems.

DOROTHEA: Short, huh?

CHUCK: Yes.

DOROTHEA: Did they have lots of shows then, or what did you do for entertainment?

CHUCK: Oh, a lot of time we'd go out here just, the whole family would go out and rabbit hunt, you know. You could go out here by the Double O Ranch and there was tens of thousands of rabbits. And we were serious about it, we were getting, selling the ears, you know, five cents a pair I think they was, or something like that. That bought your ammunition. Oh yeah, they had picture shows, but they weren't like the picture shows today. They was good shows, most of them cowboy shows. But I enjoyed them, yeah.

DOROTHEA: A lot of Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Cisco Kid kind of stuff, huh?

CHUCK: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Well how long --- where did you live after you married Polly?

CHUCK: Oh, we lived here in Burns.

DOROTHEA: Did you rent your house, or did you buy it?

CHUCK: Oh yeah, yeah. No we rented a little house. The first little house we rented was five dollars a month from an old gentleman down here on Riverside, people named McCart. Let's see, one of the McCart boys married a Clemens, didn't they?

DOROTHEA: Yeah, Paul.

CHUCK: Well it was his father. And they lived down there on Riverside. Five dollars a month, three-room house, can you imagine that?

DOROTHEA: And did you live in Burns all the time, or did you ---

CHUCK: No, we've been over to Hines, I bought two different houses over to Hines. But I've lived in Burns most of my life, right here in Burns, other than a few years over there.

But then in '81, we of course, we figured on leaving here. And we just bunched everything and was going to Nebraska, but that didn't work out either.

DOROTHEA: Well now you said sometime when we were visiting that your first house that you bought had cost you fifteen dollars. Where was that?

CHUCK: That was at Trout Creek.

DOROTHEA: And how did you come about buying it?

CHUCK: Well George Carroll owned it, or he built it. You know George Carroll is still here in Burns.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: Well he built it, and he got transferred to Poison Creek Camp for the foreman. And he sold Polly and I the house for fifteen dollars. And he dug the well and all that stuff.

The well, just a bucket, you know, on a rope, you know what I'm talking about. One day we went to Seneca on the speeder, come by and picked me up, you know, and we'd go on to work. Polly went out to get a bucket of water, and the rope was wet and froze and slipped out of her hand and went down into the well. She sat there all day, wouldn't go down to camp. When we was first married she was so bashful, she wouldn't go down there and get a bucket of water. She stayed until night until I come home and got that thing out of the well. (Laughter)

DOROTHEA: How deep was the well?

CHUCK: Well it was about twenty feet I think. It was good water. Oh, they furnished us our wood, and they furnished our kerosene, everything was kerosene lights, you know, there was no electric lights up there or anything. And I had a good life. Of course that four dollars and eighty-four cents a day bought something.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: And they bought --- we dealt our groceries down here from old Uncle Al Welcome and his sister. I forget what her name is now. They had a little store down here just beyond the Ford Garage. And if my grocery bill was twenty-eight bucks a month boy I started looking around to see who was eating them. (Laughter)

BARBARA: Did they bring it up on the cars to you?

CHUCK: No, we come and got our own. We had a little Model-A Ford. But it was, its --- hamburger was two pounds for a quarter, and milk was ten cents a quart, and bread was ten cents a loaf, and potatoes they practically give them to you. And you didn't need a big lot of money.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: Yeah, this little old McCart, he raised lots of potatoes and lots of cabbage. And my mother-in-law, being German, you know, she wanted to make sauerkraut. I went to

get Mrs. Petersen this cabbage, and a cent a pound. Can you imagine a hundred pounds of cabbage in a little Model-A Ford? (Laughter)

DOROTHEA: Okay.

CHUCK: A cent a pound, and the potatoes was a penny a pound, same as the cabbage. Boy that's an awful pile of cabbage. She made a barrel; I think it was a barrel of sauerkraut. That was for all of us. But now, four dollars and eighty-four cents don't go very far. I don't know, them was good days.

DOROTHEA: You couldn't get very far in your car on four dollars and eighty cents either.

CHUCK: No.

BARBARA: So that four eighty-four a day it just provided you, before you were married, your housing, and it didn't cover your food or anything? You were responsible for purchasing your own food and all of that?

CHUCK: Oh yeah, that was just our wages.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: But they'd take us out there, you know. When I was on the section they'd have a wreck and we'd go out and work as high as, oh fourteen, one time worked nineteen hours cleaning up this wreck so they could get through. And you know now after forty hours why you would be really drawing down some money. But we still got the straight time. We never did get no overtime. Oh they've had, they used to have a lot of wrecks, derailments.

I was out one time on that train twenty-five hours, I think it was. We was way off up here in the mountain, nobody could get to us. Well it was just before Thanksgiving. Them days they didn't have snow cats, and all this and that things. We set up there in the canyon, and finally they got the track fixed enough that we could get out. Hungry, we just, so hungry, you know, I could eat anything. All we had was, in the caboose was lots of

coffee and water. And we just made that coffee and drink that old black coffee until I just swore I'd never drink it again, but I do. Yeah.

BARBARA: When you were working on the tracks, did you ever encounter a lot of rattlesnakes?

CHUCK: Oh no, no. No, not up on that side. You do on this side of the hill.

DOROTHEA: Did you ever wonder why that was? As you cross over the top of the mountain until you hit what, about the Grant County line, or even, no I guess further than that, into Seneca maybe, there are no rattlesnakes. Did you ever wonder why?

CHUCK: No. It's too cold.

DOROTHEA: Too cold.

CHUCK: The last rattlesnake we ever seen was up at milepost twenty, and that's, well right on ---

DOROTHEA: Right on top.

CHUCK: It's practically across from Idlewild Park. It's the Whiting place, and that's the last place we've ever seen a rattlesnake was at milepost twenty. From there on, you see little water snakes, but you never seen a rattlesnake. And I never seen a rattlesnake in the Silvies Valley, and I don't know where they start in again on the other side. I suppose down around John Day maybe.

DOROTHEA: Somewhere just on the other side of Bear Valley there someplace, I think Clint said there was some rattlesnake.

CHUCK: There is a Rattlesnake Ridge out from Seneca towards the Drewsey side.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: Bob Brophy was telling me out there one day, we was out there hunting, and that there was so many rattlesnakes on this one ridge that you couldn't get a horse to go down it. If you was riding a horse, they just wouldn't go. And they called it Rattlesnake

Ridge, and it's on the map, you can see it on the map.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: But I don't know why it is.

DOROTHEA: Well I know since I lived, and have been married to the Purdy's, well we've seen one rattlesnake and we felt that it came in somehow or other on a log truck. But it was on top of the cross hill, and it had been run over. So, you know, it never did anything. But that's the only rattlesnake that we had ever seen up there.

CHUCK: There is a lot of rattlesnakes that used to be here around, between Burns and Hines.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: There was a golf course, a little five hole golf course out there back of the Egan. And every once in awhile some of them golfers would come in for a cold beer, you know, they didn't have no club house or anything, and they'd have a, they'd killed a big old rattler out there on the golf course. But I have never seen one on this one out here, and I do a lot of walking on there with my dog. That's about all I get out of my dues is my exercise. Polly likes it; she golf's a lot.

BARBARA: You mentioned the railroad tunnel across from, about across from Idlewild. Is that where it is located?

CHUCK: At milepost twenty?

BARBARA: Is that where ---

CHUCK: Yes, it's almost; well yeah it is almost across west from the Idlewild. Well you've seen that road where it says Poison Creek. If you went on that road and it's four or five mile in there to ---

BARBARA: Four or five miles off of the highway west, is about where the tunnel is. Well I had never known exactly where, about where it was so I was kind of curious.

CHUCK: That's what we did for our recreation. Well we had a little Model-A Ford sedan, and in this Whiting place, I knew Frank Whiting real well, you know. And I could go in there, and there was beaver dams all up and down through there, and you could go down there and catch all the fish that you could eat. Just the right eating size. And Polly and I would go up there, and we didn't have propane stoves, and we didn't have propane lanterns, and down filled sleeping bags. And we'd just throw our bed right out on the ground under these little cottonwoods and cook, take some stones and make us a little fireplace and cook. We didn't need all of that. We'd go down there and maybe buy a few potatoes and we'd have some eggs, and a little piece of bacon. You never bought sliced bacon, it always come in ---

BARBARA: Slabs, yeah.

CHUCK: Slab bacon. We'd go up there and spend a whole weekend, and just have a good time. You didn't need all this stuff that they have today. We didn't have motorcycles and snow cats, and four-wheelers.

DOROTHEA: No.

BARBARA: You hiked.

CHUCK: Yeah, if you wanted to get there, you hiked. Oh, them was good days. Yeah, I would go through it again if I could. It's an experience. But the young people today, I think they're missing out on a lot of that. They want everything too soon. They want it now.

BARBARA: Yeah. Well they're accustomed to having it at home when they're growing up, and then when they start out they think they should have it all too. But not work for it like we had to.

CHUCK: That's right, they want it today. When they get married, they want --- get out of high school they want a new car. They get married, they want a new house. Well Polly

and I lived in that little old five dollar house and just as happy as a coon in a corn field.

DOROTHEA: How many bedrooms did it have?

CHUCK: Just the one.

DOROTHEA: Just the one bedroom. And a little wood stove that you did your cooking on?

CHUCK: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: And how did you heat?

CHUCK: Wood.

DOROTHEA: With the same stove?

CHUCK: That little stove would heat the whole place.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

CHUCK: And that was another thing, there was a Mrs. Barnes lived here in, down in Burns, Wilbur Barnes' mother, and she was a widow woman. She had this little stove, it was a new stove. I bought that stove for eight dollars, and the oven opened from both sides, the door opened from both sides of that stove. But you talk about your heat, we could build a fire in that wood stove, and we got our wood out here at the mill, and then you could open them doors on both sides, why it was just like a furnace. We never had no problem with heat. Of course with a two-room place, it didn't take much heat. Yeah, good times.

BARBARA: Well after you worked on the, up at Trout Creek, you then went onto the railroad, working on the train itself.

CHUCK: Yes.

BARBARA: What did you do when you first started on that?

CHUCK: Well I was, I started out as a student brakeman. And like I say, I was there, I think it was my third day when this old George went under this engine and rolled him up,

George Swearingen. And he was all ready to retire. And he'd bought a dairy down in Louisiana and had it all paid for, and had an old fellow running it, and he was going to go down there and retire. That was where he came from. It killed him up there at the summit. He went down to uncouple this engine from the caboose. They was pushing us to the top of the hill. They had two engines on each train, you know, a helper engine. He slipped or something, nobody will ever know, and it drug him a hundred and some feet before it finally got him under. But it just rolled him up in a little ball. So that was one of my experiences that wasn't too ---

BARBARA: Wasn't a good one to start out with.

CHUCK: No, I didn't care too much about it.

DOROTHEA: You didn't know whether you wanted to stay on the train or not.

CHUCK: I give it a lot of thought.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

CHUCK: So then ---

BARBARA: From brakeman what did you do next then?

CHUCK: Well as soon as I got my student trips in, why I went on to regular brakeman. And then I was on the extra board. Between working on the extra board, what days I didn't work, I could go out and work on the track if I wanted to on the section. If I wanted to drive out to Poison Creek and do it, which I did, you had to work. You have to eat, you know.

BARBARA: Unfortunately.

CHUCK: Them days they didn't have food stamps, and they didn't have welfare.

BARBARA: You took care of yourself.

CHUCK: That's right. You either worked, or you didn't get it.

BARBARA: So all the time then that you worked on the train, you were a brakeman?

CHUCK: Yes.

BARBARA: That was your job.

CHUCK: Well I was promoted to conductor, and I was on the conductor extra board a lot of years. When I retired, I was retired as conductor off of the railroad. There was only one crew left.

DOROTHEA: Well some of the people that you worked with, are there many of them left? Can you tell us some of their names?

CHUCK: Oh yeah, Albin Carlson, he lives over in Hines, and Frank Hannah he lives here in Burns, he was an engineer. And Lloyd Fones up here, and he was an engineer, fireman-engineer. Of course they didn't have fireman anymore. And oh, I don't know, there ain't too many of us.

Of course some of the later bunch, I worked with Carl Wilke, and Bob Drinkwater, and fellows like that. There just ain't many of the old heads though left.

DOROTHEA: Was there much turnover of crew, or did you just hire as they retired, or ---

CHUCK: Yeah, that's about it. Nobody retired off of there.

DOROTHEA: Nobody retired. More or less then you worked with the same crew for most of your years?

CHUCK: Yes.

DOROTHEA: And you said something when I was talking with you, that you were on that train for forty years.

CHUCK: Uh huh. I worked for the railroad, including the section time of thirteen months; I was there forty years and ten months. And I wanted to be 65 when I retired, and I was. And I retired in April of '81 I believe it was.

DOROTHEA: Well how soon after you retired did they tear out that railroad?

CHUCK: Oh, it was probably five or six years. Let's see, '85 I believe it was. '85 or '86 in

there someplace. Ida Carl would know. After I got away from it, I just forgot it.

So --- it was all night work, you know, you'd go to work at three in the afternoon, and there was never a day that you ever worked eight hours. Twelve hours was about the least you ever worked.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: And you could work up to sixteen before the hog law got you, and then you had to quit. Wherever you was at, when sixteen hours come up you just went to bed. You just stopped and tied the train down. And then they cut it down to fourteen hours, the federal did. And then they cut it down to twelve hours. But Hines got special permission, due to our setup here, that they could still work the sixteen hours, but not beyond.

DOROTHEA: Well then, what do you mean go to bed? That means that if you were out halfway between here and Burns, or Seneca, you just stopped?

CHUCK: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: And set on the track?

CHUCK: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Until how many hours was passed?

CHUCK: Well you have to have eight hours, either that or they send somebody --- they usually send somebody to come and get you.

DOROTHEA: Oh, I see.

CHUCK: And they would send a station wagon or something out and bring somebody else to take over and turn you lose. Yeah, they didn't want to sit there and pay you another eight hours. (Laughter)

DOROTHEA: So your time quit after sixteen hours, or whatever your recommended hours were?

CHUCK: Of course they, you see there is bunks in them cabooses.

DOROTHEA: Oh, is there?

CHUCK: Oh yeah. They are not the most comfortable thing in the world, but they were a little, they was beds. People back in the old days used to live in them cabooses.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: And we had an old fellow, an old bachelor lived in one out here to Hines. He just, he bought his own groceries and cooked and ate and lived right in this thing. They parked it out in front of the office. And then when he went to work he was always on the job. Money come in, he'd just go over and register out and go back and go to bed. And the caboose set there until the next day. They had two cabooses. He lived right in that.

DOROTHEA: That's where he lived?

CHUCK: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: I'll be darned.

CHUCK: He didn't, not all the time, but he did for quite a little while he lived in it.

BARBARA: So did you carry your lunch with you, or did you guys cook in the caboose?

CHUCK: Oh, we carried our lunch. We didn't cook; I didn't care about that, try to cook.

BARBARA: So you say you went to work at three o'clock in the afternoon?

CHUCK: Yes.

BARBARA: So you pretty much hauled the logs and the boards during the nighttime hours.

CHUCK: Yeah, we'd go to Seneca and ---

BARBARA: You leave Hines at three o'clock in the afternoon and go to Seneca.

CHUCK: Three. Right. And then we'd go to Seneca, and then the woods crew, the Edward Hines Lumber Company, we was known as the Oregon Northwestern. One company owned it all. But theirs was the Edward Hines Lumber Company. They had to shay engines. They'd go out in the woods and load the logs and bring them in. And we'd

go up and switch whatever lumber there was to switch, and then we'd wait on them if they wasn't there. And then the car inspectors would inspect the train, and then we'd shove them all together and head out.

So, but oh that's, Seneca, I've seen it so cold up there. We worked there three nights at forty-six below. And we'd try to start them trains out of the yard, and just pull them in two. Just tore the drawbars right out of them.

DOROTHEA: The wheels wouldn't turn?

CHUCK: They would slide.

DOROTHEA: Oh, they slide.

CHUCK: And then in those days they used journal packing, just called it waste, just kind of like string. And they would pack it in around them journals, so they would run cool and put oil in them. And that would just roll up and pop them doors open and come out on the ground, just a big ball like that base of that lamp. And then of course later on they got a deal now with a spring in it, and they just shove it together and slide it up under the axle. It made them a lot easier to pull.

But we tore the draw bar out of three cars there one night. And it took us over three hours to set them out over on the rip track, where it should have took ten minutes. We'd have to go get a cable, and imagine trying to work forty-six below. You could only stay out so long. And we'd run and get in the sand house and warm up. They had steam in there for drying sand. And we finally got them set out, and here they had three engines setting over there in the shop, and a man setting over there keeping them warm. So I told this conductor one night, let's get him to give us a shove and get us started. And once you get to rolling and get them warmed up --- so then they did.

But old Dave Jones, him and I worked together, and we about froze to death that one night. I swore I was going to quit just as soon as we got in, but I never did. They

wasn't all good times.

And then you get up here, you know, on this mountain, and the car would jump the track, maybe snow fifteen, twenty inches deep, and you go down there and start digging it out, and down on your hands and knees. And you work by signals, you know, which later years they had radios which was really nice. You try to get, pull that car and get it back on the track, and you can't start a fire, nothing to burn, and it wasn't all fun and games, you know.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

CHUCK: It was a pretty hard life.

BARBARA: And when these cars or engines derailed, how did you, how were you able to lift them back up onto the track? What kind of equipment did you use to get them back?

CHUCK: They've got a thing, they call them frogs, or camel backs. It's --- oh I couldn't explain it to you. But it's a little odd shape metal deal. It's got grooves in it. And you set it right up against the rail, and sometimes spike it down. And when you pull that car up, it gets in this groove; you set two of them, one on each side, under each one. And when it gets up here, it just pops that car over on the rail.

BARBARA: I see.

CHUCK: And of course on them diesel locomotives, they had air jacks, big air jacks that would --- I don't know how many hundred ton they would lift. And we used that, but --- We used what they called, we always called them frogs, and some called them camel backs and all that. But that's the way you would re-rail them. And those things weighed about; oh some of them was about from seventy to eighty pounds. And you put them on your back and wallow around through the snow with them on your shoulder.

BARBARA: Not too fun.

CHUCK: No. Yeah, it's ---

BARBARA: What were some of the things that you hauled on the train? You hauled the logs themselves, you hauled lumber that was cut in Seneca, you hauled the hog as you call it, is that right?

CHUCK: Out of Hines, we'd just take the empty flats and the hog fuel. And we'd pick up, down here in the transfer in Burns, all the gasoline, diesel, and coal, and furniture, automobiles, all went to John Day, everything. They'd unload the new automobiles up there at Seneca. And all the coal for the John Day School, we hauled so many cars a year. And a couple three times a year we would get a carload of furniture for the John Day furniture. But, oh yeah, you never seen a fuel truck out here on the road. Everything was shipped into Seneca, and John Day come up and got their gasoline out of the cars. Oh yeah, we handled everything; it was a common carrier railroad.

And then in August, they'd start a stop train. And the sheep men would start out, a lot of them, O'Toole's and the like, would start out down at Juntura. And they would trail them sheep all summer into Strawberry Mountain. And then there was several of them, not only O'Toole, and along in August they would start shipping cattle.

And Hines put a train on, special stock train, didn't handle anything but stock from early August until after the first of the year. And they would bring out thousands of carloads of cattle and sheep. And we loaded at Silvies, and loaded at Seneca. Oh yeah, that was, we come out of there with forty or fifty carloads of cattle in one day.

But then more federal regulations, every seventeen hours you have to take stock off and water it and feed it. Well trucks come along and you'd load cattle in Seneca maybe at dark tonight, and by the time we got our work done and got them in here, well the Union Pacific had already come in and went to bed, and we just set the cattle out on the transfer down here. And the next morning they'd have to take them out and feed them and water them. And then they'd go on to Caldwell, or wherever, if they was going on to

Omaha or Portland, wherever, and they'd have to feed them again. So by the truck, he can just back up there to Seneca tonight, and he can load them cattle on, and the morning he has them in Portland. So the railroad lost all that business, and they tore down the boiler house in Seneca, and they didn't want no more fuel. Then they started to build, shipping these chips out. They built a big loader up at Seneca, where they sold all their chips, made everything into chips. They had to, to survive I guess, the way they say.

But they tore the boiler room down, they didn't need it anymore, that hog fuel. Then they tore the shop down, and everything is gone up there now, ghosts.

DOROTHEA: Well let's pause for a moment while I turn the tape over, the light is blinking.

SIDE B

BARBARA: How long did it take the train, when you left Burns, to get up to Seneca, how many hours would it be?

CHUCK: Well that would depend if you double up the mountain, it took about eight hours. When you doubled, you'd have to take half of your train to the top of the hill and set it out and tie the hand brakes on it, and come back and get the other half.

BARBARA: Oh, is that right?

CHUCK: And then you get on top of the hill there, like I say, you was working with lanterns, and try to shove them together. And if you didn't make your joint the first time, you can't tell the guy to go ahead and we'll try it again. When we got radios it helped a lot. But it would, if we doubled up this mountain, you just hustled you to get in here a little under sixteen hours, and made a double up that mountain. But most of the time it was twelve, thirteen hours just for going up and coming back, time you done your switching.

BARBARA: Well that is what I was wondering, if you can make more than one trip in a

work shift.

CHUCK: Oh yeah, yeah.

BARBARA: You were lucky to get the one in.

CHUCK: But them old radios sure did help though when --- but we'd be in these sheds down here switching. You get way back in there, that one shed is a half a mile long, and you can't see nobody. It would take two or three guys to peek around there with them lanterns. And you can just set there and talk to that engineer and tell him what you want. And it sure did help.

BARBARA: Who was the engineer during the time that you worked?

CHUCK: Oh, there was a dozen of them. Gosh, I don't know.

BARBARA: You wore a whole bunch of them out then?

CHUCK: (Laughter) Well I don't know who wore who out. But oh, there is just so many of them. A lot of them quit and left. But I worked most of my years with Lawrence Olson. He was the old head, you know. When I got on that crew I just stayed. Oh, we had lots of engineers. Fones up here, he was an engineer. I worked with him quite a little bit too, and Frank Hannah.

DOROTHEA: You mentioned Davey Jones, was he also a brakeman?

CHUCK: Yeah, he was, he wound up as conductor. He retired as a conductor. Then when he retired, I took over. He had twelve hours more seniority than I did.

BARBARA: Oh dear.

DOROTHEA: Okay, then you worked with the Solomon boys, there was Harold and John both. Did you work with both of the Solomon boys?

CHUCK: Oh yeah.

DOROTHEA: And what did they do?

CHUCK: Well Red Solomon, he was conductor, only thing I ever knew of. Well he was

one of the older heads, you know. He was practically born and raised on this thing. But he was conductor all the years I worked with him anyhow.

BARBARA: What was the conductor's job?

CHUCK: Oh, he done all the bookwork, and he does the saying what you do, you know. He takes responsibility for everything. If there is any chewing out done, he gets it, and you better do what he says too.

BARBARA: I see. So he was, the conductor then is mainly the boss of the whole thing.

CHUCK: Uh huh.

BARBARA: And then the engineer is kind of the head of the work part on the train.

CHUCK: Well he just runs the engine. You tell him what you want, you know. You don't tell him how to do it, but you just tell him what you want. But ---

DOROTHEA: Well what is the brakeman's job? I mean you are called a brakeman, but just what is your actual job?

CHUCK: Well if there is any, like I say, if you take a cut of logs to the top of the hill, well that brakeman goes along and he sets the hand brakes and lines all the switches and brings them back, there is two of them. And the conductor don't have to go, he can stay in the caboose see, kind of got it made. But he stays there most of the time. But they do all the work on the ground, you know. Dig out a lot of switches. Frank Hickey was real good on that section. But he'd get to Seneca and get all them yards cleaned all up, and everything cleaned up. And we'd come, the first time we come through with that old snow and just shove it all full again. Well you got to dig it out again. So, oh Frank was good, he was one of the best they ever had.

BARBARA: You mentioned that there were a lot of accidents, or derailments, or events that happened on the railroad. Can you tell us maybe some of the bigger things that happened that stick in your mind?

CHUCK: We had eight in one day.

BARBARA: Oh dear.

CHUCK: And Kromer was still here then, and they kept a calling up, we'd get them on the ground, and we had a young preacher working with us, a young kid from Idaho. And we'd get them back on the track, and we'd get to going about a mile or two, and the track was in horrible shape. We'd be on the ground again, and that went on eight times, and we called old Kromer, and we got him out of bed about three in the morning. Said see if you can get that damn thing in here and we'll tie it up and take a day or two off and fix them ties. (Laughter) So we did.

Oh, there was funny little things that happened. We was traveling along up here one night going to Seneca, on the other side of that Joaquin Park. There was a woman out in the middle of the road and she was just a waving her arms and a screaming and a hollering. And I said there is a car laying down there in the middle of the track. And she was all alone. And of course we pulled up there and stopped and went out, and she was screaming, "Oh my baby, oh my baby, my baby is in that car." So we grabbed our lantern and went down there and dove in that car, and the old baby he was just a laying back in there sound asleep. He didn't know anything had ever happened. She was sure he was dead. That baby didn't even know what happened.

BARBARA: She had slid off the road in the snow or something?

CHUCK: Uh huh. No, it wasn't snow; she just drove off the road.

BARBARA: Oh, I see.

CHUCK: Yeah. And we found one fellow up there, they were paving up there by Crow Flat. And we found his car in the middle of the track and him in it. And he had a little old roadster of some kind, and they got him out of there and called in. They come and got him and took him to the hospital. He had a big hole knocked in his head. And he had

picked up a black guy, and this old black boy hit him in the head and then rolled him off into the railroad tracks and took his billfold. And his mother then wrote, called back down here to the office and told whoever the superintendent was, what a bunch of crooks they had on that train. And he hadn't come to, see. This boy was out for over a month, he was out cold.

DOROTHEA: Oh, gosh.

CHUCK: What a bunch of crooks they had on that train. Her son's wristwatch was missing, and his billfold was missing. He was working up there on the job making big money. So when he finally regained consciousness, why she wrote and told them.

DOROTHEA: Apologized more or less.

CHUCK: Because the guy, said the black fellow had hit him in the head and rolled him, took his money and stuff.

DOROTHEA: We don't have very many black people in this area.

CHUCK: No.

DOROTHEA: And they just don't stay around. But ---

CHUCK: Oh yeah, we've had a lot of tragedy on here.

DOROTHEA: How about by the Black place, there is a car that set off the edge of there. What, do you remember what that was about, was that on the track or ---

CHUCK: Soldiers.

DOROTHEA: Soldiers.

CHUCK: From the radar base. They had been to Seneca to see some girls, I guess, and they come home, and they just forgot to turn the wheel when they come to the curve.

DOROTHEA: Oh. Did it land on the track, or ---

CHUCK: It went clear across the track.

DOROTHEA: Went across the track.

CHUCK: Oh yeah, they must have been making about eighty, I guess. DOROTHEA: On that forty mile an hour turn, huh?

CHUCK: That's what happened. And then of course we hit the steel parts of that truck out here in the, by the Harney crossing, by the Tyler place.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: That fellow hit us; they don't know how fast he was going. But John Solomon, I remember he was with us, and we was going out --- those flat cars were just so, built so you could see right over the top of them with the headlight.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

CHUCK: And he had problems with migraine headaches they said. And he had a stock rig and he was going down to Drewsey or somewhere to load stock, and he decided he would come back and wait until morning. And there was some people, members of the Chamber of Commerce from Ontario, was on their way up here for a meeting. And they were making seventy mile an hour, and he passed them with that truck. And when he hit that train, he just tore them wheels, just broke them in two. And he was just laying there gurgling. There wasn't a whole bone in his body, but he was alive. They got him, got out there and got him, and took him to the hospital; he lived for about an hour. It just tore his feet right off, you know. Oh John Solomon was out there walking around there in the weeds and stepped on that foot and it flew up and hit him, and it made him so sick he just heaved all over the place.

BARBARA: Oh dear.

CHUCK: Oh, it's been some --- and we found another fellow up there out by this Whiting place I'm talking about, up at mile twenty.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: We come down there one morning about eight o'clock, and here this fellow was

just sitting back against the bank, and blood all over him. We pulled up there and stopped, and he had a huge hole in his head. And there was a camp down below, under that meadow, deer season. And oh, we went out and looked him over, and we had a telephone where you could hook it up anyplace. And we called in, and Harold Larson was the state police, he come up, and the sheriff. So Lawrence Olson he said, well let's go see where he come from off of that, it was just straight up that cliff for sixty, seventy feet. So him and I walked up there, and there was his, his billfold, and his shells, his rifle. And he was coming in after dark, apparently, and this rocks laying in this, they are not down flat, they are laying edgewise. And he tripped and fell, and hit his head it looked like. You could see right in his head, you know. And then he had come on about twenty more feet, and he had an old dirty handkerchief in his hand, an old red handkerchief. And he stumbled and fell on down on this little ledge about four or five feet below. And that's where his rifle and everything was. And he know doubt heard that train a coming, maybe. But it was dark and trying to get into the track. And he got up, fiddling around there and fell off on into the track. And if he hadn't of, he might have laid there for ---

DOROTHEA: How many years?

CHUCK: Before anybody ever found him.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

CHUCK: Then the next morning, then after the sheriff come out, and the police they turned us loose, and we went on down the mountain. And this camp, there was two or three other fellows down there, and they was standing around the fire, and we stopped and asked them if they was short some of their party. And he said, "Yeah, one of our guys he was out, didn't come in last night." But said, "We never thought nothing of it, because he does that quite a lot. If he gets some meat he will just stay with it until daylight." We said, "Well he's up there in the track, and he's dead." So they went up

there then. But he was a bachelor, little old bachelor. Oh, there is a lot of things. Ain't too many funny things ever happened to me on that line.

DOROTHEA: No, that would make you think twice to stay on that track.

BARBARA: You say you had some runaways too?

CHUCK: Oh yeah, we had one in '47. We had that tunnel cave in on me.

DOROTHEA: Oh, the tunnel caved in? I've never heard about that.

CHUCK: Oh them wings.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

CHUCK: One of them come in and took the side out of the caboose. Dirt, you know, pressure builds up behind them. It caught the caboose, and I had just, I had been at the desk doing some writing and I just turned around when that caught the corner of that caboose, and my whole side of my face was full of fir slivers and dirt. And then the other end of it caved off, but we wasn't in it when that happened. It took off about forty, fifty feet of it. I was always scared to death of that thing. And then they're still using it, there is still people driving through there. I wouldn't drive through there for all the money in Harney County.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, I know they are driving through it. They are trying to think of some way to keep it as a historical land sight.

CHUCK: I don't think the forest service is going to let them, are they?

DOROTHEA: I don't know. They haven't made up their mind yet. But they are trying to do that.

CHUCK: But they should stop people from going through there.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, they should.

CHUCK: One of these days that will cave in, and somebody come up missing, and after awhile they will find them in there.

Oh yeah, we had the run away in '47. That was --- we had doubled up the mountain, and when we got back up with the second cut, it was my job to go down and take the hand brakes off and put the retainer up. It's a little deal you pull up on the side of each car. It holds pressure on the brakes when you're going down the hill, you know, it helps you with your air. And so I went down, they'd had trouble all night long with one of the pumps, air pumps on this engine was quitting. And they would get it started again, and they had two pumps on there --- but anyhow when they started out of there, it was eight below zero. I was braking in a new pair of boots, and I had on a sheepskin vest, and of course heavy underwear and heavy shirt, but I didn't have on a great big coat. But when he started out of there, oh he just went out of there something fierce. And I thought uh oh. He had to go about thirty, forty cars before he picked me up. And when that caboose went by me, the snow was a boiling up, and old Benny Cottrell, the old conductor said, "Don't try to grab that." He had his head out the window. Why it would have torn my arms completely off if I had of.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, yeah.

CHUCK: But anyhow I started back up to the telephone booth then, before everybody stole everything. So I could hear that thing just a roaring, you know, and it was out of sight. And just about the time I got up two thirds of the way back up to the telephone booth, why I could hear it piling up down there. You could just hear the boom, boom, boom, boom, bang. And then pretty quick I would hear the steam blowing. And I thought, well that's the end of that. Just as I got to the telephone booth, I unlocked it, and I heard the telephone just go ding. It just made one ding. So I went on in and I tried to ring, call in. I could hear somebody breathing, just breathing, like you had been running real hard, and it was old Benny Cottrell. And of course we, I said, "Is that you Benny?" "Yeah." And well he said, "We lost the whole thing in the canyon down there." Yeah. But him and

Dave Jones was in the caboose. He said, "Well you just as well come on down." Said, "We're about three quarter of a mile down here." And I had to walk through that snow. And I said, "Well," --- He said, "I can't get nobody." Well the train, when it piled up, it tore the telephone line down and we couldn't go either way.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: And that was around eight o'clock in the morning. And I said, "Well I'll get up on top of the tunnel." It didn't have that nice road in there then.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: So I said, "I'll go up and get out to the highway and maybe I can get a ride and go in and report it." "So yeah," he said, "that's a good idea." So I got up on top of the tunnel, and I've always had great respect for cross-country skiers ever since. I got up on top of there and that little old country road, and somebody had cross country skied, clear out to the highway. And I just got right in them ski tracks and just walked right along. But I got out there then, I come out right there where that little heli pad thing is. Do you know where I'm talking about?

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

CHUCK: And I walked from there, clear down to that, below Idlewild where that stone fountain is. And a cheese salesman came along, a Kraft Cheese salesman in a little Plymouth coupe, and I flagged him down. And he had two loggers with him that had quit at Seneca. That was three people already in that car. He said, "Gosh I ain't got a place for you fellow." And I told him what happened. "Oh," he said, "get in." Cops get us; we'll talk him out of it. So he brought me on in. And that was about eleven o'clock. And I got into the office out here, he took me right out to the office.

And they were having a big meeting. Hines was here, and Dewey and the whole bunch, and I went in there and told them what happened. I said, "I don't know anything

else." So they got an ambulance and all kinds of people and went in. The only one fellow had got hurt, Charlie Pierce, he jumped off of it. He didn't know anything was wrong until he was, down there for a mile. They had got to rocking around, and he jumped off into a pile of ties. It caught him right here in the chest. And the old engineer jumped off and skinned his nose, he slicked it off. Oh, that was ---

BARBARA: That was really fortunate that they weren't killed or something.

CHUCK: Well they all got off and just let her go.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: And that engine just went down there to mile twenty-one and just laid over on its side. It broke that cylinder, blow down on the cylinder. It just bored out a hole as big as this table. Well you take several hundred pounds of steam ---

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: And then these cars, there was twenty-two cars come right over the top of it, just like leap frog, and went over in the canyon.

And one mill in Seneca, with new mill, that's the first car of lumber they ever shipped, and it was in the canyon. (Laughter) I had a lot of pictures of that wreck. And this fellow that got hurt, he sued the company. And Pat Donegan was the attorney, and he wanted these pictures. Well I let him have them. It's my own fault, Mrs. Dwight Gunther, she called me when Pat died, and said; "Now we're cleaning out his office and we got these pictures, and if you want them, why you come and get them. If you don't I'm just going to get rid of them." And so I didn't go get them, which was a mistake. Oh, that was a mess I'll tell you. Yeah.

DOROTHEA: I know Frank Eki said that he had just gotten to Portland, they were going down to visit the kids or something, and he had just gotten to Portland and they called him and he just turned right around and came right back home.

CHUCK: Who was that?

DOROTHEA: Frank Eki.

CHUCK: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: He was on the railroad crew at that time.

CHUCK: Uh huh. You know that Mrs. Okita, you know her?

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: She wrote me one day about this railroad history, you know. I got books back; I can give you to '62.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: I've got daily records. I've got them all boxed up in my shed. But I can go back to 1962 of what happened, and who was who, but I just didn't want to dig them out.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: I find a lot of things in there I don't like, you know. Poor old Harold Solomon, you know, he passed out right up there at Trout Creek with bucket of water. But he just begged this company to put him back to work. And he did look healthy, you know.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

CHUCK: He was off two years and two months.

BARBARA: That might be something that you might like to give to the Historical Society or the Museum at one time.

CHUCK: What, these books?

BARBARA: Uh huh, the records.

CHUCK: Well they're these little daily logbooks. I get them from Jordan down here. What happened, what the weather was, and --- I can tell you anything. Anything that was important to me. Who the crew was, I got the crews name in there. And a lot of it I've got the hours we worked. So, oh yeah, I didn't want to throw them away. And I had to ---

I lost a lot of stuff as it was. I went up here on this hill, on the other side of the sand hill, and I would get up there in them garbage dumps when Rex Schaefer built a place out there and I helped him. Found all these license plates. Some went back to 1916, the year I was born. And I gathered them up and I had them all in a box. And I had a lot of tickets from the Sumpter Valley Railroad. When Hines bought out over there, they brought all this junk over here and put it in the basement. And they had tickets for the Sumpter Valley Railroad. And somebody stole that stuff. I had a lot of license plates, old Oregon plates, and somebody took it right out of my garage down here.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

CHUCK: I think I know who it was. I think he come in there and just took them --- friends.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, yeah, I probably know who you are talking about. But some of the railroad, did it demolish during the time you were, or I mean fall apart more or less while you were --- it didn't? They kept it pretty well up after ---

CHUCK: After the time we had the eight, the eight derailments in one day they went to work on it and they brought in Morrison Knudson. And they had a hundred and some men. They rebuilt the road from one end to the other. And a year, or two years before I retired they rebuilt all the bridges, \$385,000 for bridges. Then the next year they abandoned it. That road was in good shape, and they graveled it all up. And Frank Eki kept it up in good shape.

DOROTHEA: Well I was going to say Frank Eki said that when he first started to work there it was terrible.

CHUCK: Well, there was nothing there.

DOROTHEA: It was really, really a mess.

CHUCK: There was nothing there to work with.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

CHUCK: The ties was rotting, as you look at the tie, and the tie looks just as solid as that table. But down that deep, it was just dry rot. And you could just pull them spikes out with your fingers. Now that's what Frank Eki got.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

CHUCK: And we were so scared of them people, you know, when they came here. And of course all of them, hearsay in the paper and the news and everything. You know how they would cut your throat and all this. And I'd never been around no Japanese people. And they were in that bunkhouse, and we'd be setting out cars there at Trout Creek, and you'd have to watch at that engine to pass signals and watch this guy back here. And some of them boys would be coming out of that door to go to the bathroom at night, and it would make you kind of wonder, you know. Well when you met them, they were some of the finest people in the world.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, yeah.

CHUCK: I never seen a Jap I didn't like.

DOROTHEA: Well you know, that's us too where we lived up there with them, and they were the nicest people you ever saw. At one time Pat Lambert was hired to watch that trestle, because they thought that the Japanese would go up and bomb it, or you know blow it up, or do it some kind of damage so that the train would wreck.

CHUCK: Well they had the tunnels, same thing.

DOROTHEA: But, yeah, oh did they?

CHUCK: Hattie Schroeder, you remember Hattie Schroeder?

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: Her brother, Huffman I think it was, he was watchman up there. He lived in a little; well it was a cellar, kind of --- just dug out a little cellar in the side of the hill.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

CHUCK: And he lived in there, him and his dog. And he watched that tunnel. He'd go through before the trains come, you know. He could call in, and he would go through and make a trip through and back. See it was only three or four hundred feet I think in there. Yeah, they had Pat Lambert. Pat Lambert said that just made me, that job. He was having it pretty rough.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, I think it did, yeah.

CHUCK: Him and her both worked hard. They worked hard.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, they did. Drove school bus and everything to kind of keep together.

CHUCK: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: But I know that was part of the story that I had heard, that it was more or less demolished, and it was ---

CHUCK: It was awful, it was ---

DOROTHEA: Bad tracks.

CHUCK: Well there was no track there. And then of course they brought in Morrison & Knudson with all these men, and work train and they just rebuilt the thing from one end --- I forget how many hundred thousand ties they put in, and built it back up.

BARBARA: When they first started out, they didn't have treated ties, is that right?

CHUCK: Oh no, no, they never had treated. They made them right out here.

BARBARA: Uh huh. And about when was it that they finally got to using the treated ties?

CHUCK: Well they, I don't know when they started to buying them.

DOROTHEA: Frank Eki said that he got the first treated ties from; they were used ties from a Prineville place. And that's when they found out that the treated ties worked so much better.

CHUCK: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: But I can't remember what year he said.

CHUCK: These pine ties, fir, they run about three years really, good and solid for about three years. And then when they went, but they just, on top would look good.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: And just down about an inch and a half they would be just punk. Oh Frank, he done a great job here.

BARBARA: You said there was a trestle. Where was this located, and how long was it?

CHUCK: Oh, it was around three hundred and some feet. It was about two mile, just; do you know where Trout Creek is? Well just right back from, it's what they call; now they call it the Lost Creek fill. Henry Geer, when he was superintendent, had it filled in. You would get out on there and that old locomotive would get to pulling, it would go to slipping, you know. You would see the bark fall off of them uprights. And they sent a federal inspector up there and he said, "Get rid of this thing or rebuild it." So

DOROTHEA: Well I hate to sound so dumb, but yes I do know where that fill is. But I didn't realize that that was where the trestle was.

CHUCK: That was it. Well the timbers are still laying there on the Purdy property.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

CHUCK: They wanted them, and then they never did use them. I don't know what they was going to use them for. But they just laid there and decayed. Yeah, Henry Geer had that filled in. That's what they call the Lost Creek fill.

Oh yeah, well I got hurt up there, you know, at Trout Creek. Oh I was firing then, helping out. I fell off an engine up there. This rope broke while I was pulling that waterspout down, and rope broke. Them Japanese people had just came here, and I didn't know any of them too awful well. And everything was rationed, you know, you had red stamps, and green stamps, and all kind of stamps for anything. So when I got hurt ---

and I knew one of them young Japanese boys there, I would talk with him quite a lot. Gee, the next day they wanted to know where I was, you know. And they told them that I had got hurt. Well here the next day they come with a big box of fruit juices, and peaches, and everything that was rationed, you know.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: So I learned right quick, you know, that a lot of this stuff, we weren't talking about the Japanese in this country, we were talking them others. Of course there is no doubt there were a few bad ones in this country too.

DOROTHEA: Well according to Frank and the Okitas, I've talked to, they got a lot of blame that was not really theirs, because they were really Americans.

CHUCK: Yeah. Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: They were born here. Frank wasn't born here, but he had lived here. And when he came back, he had to make his choice whether he wanted to be a Japanese or an American. But they were truly Americans, and they kind of got a raw deal.

CHUCK: Yes they did, yeah.

DOROTHEA: And so, you know ---

CHUCK: And they lost money, lots of money.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, uh huh.

CHUCK: And he had a store, didn't he?

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

CHUCK: And Fred Azuma, this old fellow that used to, his wife was a cook up here to Poison Creek. He had an automobile agency in Portland. He'd go clear back as far as Chicago and pick up cars and bring out here. And he told me one day --- we was down, I took him fishing down on the Blitzen River. He was a nice old guy. And he was telling me there he made three hundred thousand dollars one year, so you know he wasn't broke.

And he didn't sound to me like a saboteur or anything. Oh, I liked them old people. But there was some of them Japanese fellows that, they just didn't fit in, you know, they didn't care about associating with other people. They knew, probably had ideas of what other people thought of them, and it was bothering them.

DOROTHEA: Well, they were afraid to come to Burns too. I mean, you know, they ---

CHUCK: We hauled their groceries.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, because they were afraid to come down here. They'd tell Hines what they wanted, and it was dangerous for them to come. Betty told me the first time she came to town by herself, and the fright that she had, you know, just coming into Burns by herself. So I mean, you know, they were as afraid of us as we were of them too.

CHUCK: And then when Frank came here, they had a guy here from Louisiana, well I want to say Deiter, but that ain't it. But he was road foreman, and oh how he hated these Japanese people. What's his name, he had a wife and a couple kids here. But he'd just cuss them and call them everything in the book. And we had a wreck up here one time at mile post twenty, and them guys was just working like ants, you know. And here he was, he'd been out drunk all night, and he'd stand up there, just look at them. On you little SOBs, get that up out of there. If there was a ham of meat, there wouldn't be a slice around. Them little guys would just dig in. They hated him too.

DOROTHEA: I used to listen to them working, as we lived down in there by that mountain, and we used to listen to them working. And this was all you would hear. You would just hear a huh, huh, huh, huh, you know, and every time it was a clink, a clink. And it was as they were coming down with their mauls to hit that spike, well they would grunt. And it was quite a sound.

CHUCK: We had one little fellow up there, they called him Peanuts. He was an old, old man. Well he died right here at Burns.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

CHUCK: Do you remember him? He was a gambler.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, I remember him.

CHUCK: And every time he would swing that big maul, and when he come down, his foot would come up off of the ground. (Laughter)

DOROTHEA: Yeah, yeah. But they did it in such a regime or something like this, that it was just like rowing a boat, you know, everything was so perfect.

CHUCK: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: We talked to Thad, and that's what he was talking about, the rhythm that they had, you know, when he worked with them.

CHUCK: But them little buggers was stout. Of course naturally you couldn't expect a 120-pound man to pick up the same thing as a 180, 190 pound guy. But they was doing it the way it should have been done. Used to, when I worked when we had that Italian up there, he wanted each man to carry one tie. You went down in the ditch, and you got it on your back, and you brought it up and put it in the track. But now they would take maybe two or three of them, and you still didn't see all them fellows running around with hernias either.

DOROTHEA: Nope.

CHUCK: Oh yeah, Frank had a pretty good system there. And I think the fellows all liked him. I never did hear --- he's had a little trouble with some of them, but you would have trouble with some of them regardless of who it was.

DOROTHEA: Right, right, yeah.

BARBARA: And what about Mr. Geer, did you know him and work with him?

CHUCK: Oh, I worked with him. When I, he was the guy that broke me in on the railroad.

BARBARA: I see.

CHUCK: When I went out as a brakeman, I worked for him. He was conductor when this other fellow got killed. Yeah, he was my conductor when I went to work. Yeah, oh yeah. And then it went on; I don't know what year he got promoted, or anything. But anyhow, Kromer left here and they promoted Henry, and then Danny Crump, and oh I don't know how many superintendents. And then Ronny Barrett, and of course the last one they had was Paul Taylor. The company never did say he was superintendent but he was. He done all the duties of a superintendent.

DOROTHEA: And you say he is still working there on the ---

CHUCK: Yes.

DOROTHEA: --- with the railroad now.

CHUCK: With Wyoming, Wyoming something, I don't know. I was down there one day and talked to him a little bit. Yeah, I worked for Henry, he was my conductor.

Oh yeah, them was good years. I think about them a lot, you know, some of the old heads I worked with. But I told Polly, I guess I'm one of the lucky ones, most all of them are gone.

I remember the last time I seen Henry was, he was usually a very active guy, you know. And the last time I run into him was up at Yellowjacket fishing. He was setting there, and he had had a stroke or something, and gosh he was just cranky even with her, you know, and Julie was one of the finest woman ever lived.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

CHUCK: He was just as cranky, and I told Polly that don't sound like Henry Geer to me. Yeah.

DOROTHEA: I think this is what stroke does to people, I think it makes a nice person cranky, and a cranky person nice. I think it turns their --- complete attitude around, whatever they were, they are not anymore. Well is there any other thing about the

railroad that you would like to include? We've pretty well covered most of your forty years with accidents, and working there.

BARBARA: What were some of the good highlights that you remember working on the trains that were really fond memories to you?

CHUCK: Well now I'll tell you the fondest memory that I can remember --- we were working seven days a week. And when we were loading sheep I think it was, or cattle or something at Silvies, and Henry Geer of course he come up and he said, "Well boys it sounds like the war is about over." Well the next day or two it was over. And that was one of the nicest memories I could think of. Because they was working us to death, and there was no getting off, or you just had to practically be dead.

In fact I fell off of a car out here and cracked a bone in my arm and I had it in a sling and everything, and they still --- they had a state law then that you, if you handled so many cars you had to have so many people, which was a stupid law to begin with. And here I was out there in a sling with a broken arm, just riding the train drawing my wages, and wasn't doing nothing. Oh yeah, that was one of the nicest feelings I had when they said that war was over. We was just all in, all the time. You never had a minute for nothing.

BARBARA: Well I was going to say, you married Polly, did you have children?

CHUCK: No.

BARBARA: No children.

CHUCK: Yeah, we raised a couple, but --- her brother and sister.

Her dad come home one day at fifty-three years old and just fell over dead in the bathroom. That left two little kids, let's see Richard was about eight or nine, and the little girl was about, I guess, around two years old. So they wasn't all financially fit, you know, what little bit of social security, so we kind of took them in. Oh, we lost two kids early in

the marriage, so ---

BARBARA: Well your days were kind of different, so you go to work at three o'clock in the afternoon, and you come home and you go to bed. What did you and Polly do after you were married, I mean, the little time that you had at home to be together, what kind of things did you do?

CHUCK: Oh, we usually went out and camped out a lot, go fishing. We've always been, of course later years she don't even go to the hills. I got my dog, and she is my fishing partner. I've got a gold pan, and I go up here and get in the creek and just dig around, and I wouldn't know gold if I seen it. (Laughter)

BARBARA: A good excuse to get out of the house, huh?

CHUCK: Yeah. But I was up here at Emigrant Creek, and there was a little old fellow telling me that there is some color, he said, up there in Emigrant Creek. So I was fishing one day, and I got to looking at that sand and thought gee that looks pretty good. So old Maggie, she was a following me along there, I've got a little white spitz dog. And I got my pan and I got out in the creek with my shovel, and I was --- and she come out and looked all around, and then she looked up at me like, well you idiot, what are you --- (Laughter) Well there is nothing there.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, dogs can become people. They seem like they are --- yeah.

CHUCK: No, my years on this railroad have been, you know, really good years. But I did look forward to that retiring, and was hoping that I would make it, and I did. And I wanted to be sixty-five, and then, well I could have retired at sixty years old, if I had in thirty years which I did have. And a lot of them, Frank Hannah, and some of them retired a little bit early. But I wanted to be sixty-five when I retired. I was in good health, you know.

BARBARA: So why not work, huh?

CHUCK: Yeah, but I, I got hurt a lot on this job. And I got hurt right over there in front of

Purdy's when that caboose turned over on me. Yeah. It run into the side of the train and come over on top of me. That was one of the things I don't like to think about. But I walked, had to walk on a broken leg from there down to Eki's. That Mrs. Eki like to went wild. My head was all cut open.

And I didn't know there was a guy like Doc Campbell. And they got, Frank Eki brought me in. And Betty, she just wrapped my head up in a towel. And this Eki, Frank brought me up to the hospital. And of course they called Polly and told her that I had got hurt, the caboose had turned over on me. So she was up there. And gosh, they just cut my clothes off, you know. Here this guy was standing over there, and he had on a pair of old cowboy boots, and a pair of Levis, and it looked like he had just come out of the barnyard. He had his foot up over the back of a straight back chair, and I was beginning to hurt a little then, you know. He just a kept a looking at me, just looking at me, you know. And I thought, gee, maybe that guy is falling in love with me or something. (Laughter) Pretty quick he said to me, he said, "You're a hell of a looking thing." I said, "Well you don't look a damn bit better." And he started to laughing, and then he said, "I'm Dr. Campbell."

And of course Polly had got sick, she'd went outside. And he sewed me up, and Polly said when he --- he put in forty-six stitches in the top of my head, and she said that's when she had to leave. But he was a telling her then --- I didn't know there was a Doc Campbell even here. And they went back, and they put me to bed then and give me some kind of a coyote injection there and I went to sleep.

And him and her went back and had coffee, and he was telling her about fixing up this black man down in California when he was serving his internship. He'd fell off, he'd got about half-drunk and he fell off of a train and cut his leg off just below the knee, under a freight train. And he was, took him up, brought him into this hospital and these doctors

said, "Oh, just cut it off up above his knee there and get a good clean cut and fix him up. He is just a wino anyhow." And Doc said, "No, I wasn't taught that way." So he got him in there. They said, "Well you take care of him then." He got him in there and he said he cleaned up that below his knee. And the nurse got him just a regular old GI scrub brush, and they took soap and scrubbed them cinders and everything out of that skin. And he said he straightened that all up, and said the last time he seen that black fellow he was --- said he was just a young man. He had an artificial leg, and he had the use of that joint. Them doctors wanted to cut it off above the joint.

Oh Doc Campbell, I thought he was the greatest. And then he got to messing around with them horses and ---

DOROTHEA: Yeah, and got hurt.

CHUCK: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Well our little light is beeping again. If you think we can go on with this to another tape we can do that. Otherwise --- do you have some more stories that you can tell us?

CHUCK: I could probably tell them all day. No, I think we are pretty well to run out. But oh there are things that come back to you, you know, that happened.

DOROTHEA: I know we always think, oh why didn't we ask that, or why didn't we say that afterwards. But before we run out, well we can say, we can close off here with we'd like to thank you. We will do a video after this and kind of reminisce a little bit more. And if you want to tell another story, well we will continue until the tape runs out. But thank you again for the afternoon.

CHUCK: Well there ain't a whole lot to tell. I didn't know whether you wanted the history of the thing, or whether you wanted facts and figures of the --- what everything was. Oh, there is many things to tell.

They have logged so many places, you know. They logged Silvies there; they decked twenty-two million feet of logs there. Yeah. Oh there is a lot of little funny, little stories, but you don't want them on tape.

BARBARA: Well have you enjoyed your retirement since then?

CHUCK: I have, I have. I get awful bored in the wintertime. In the summertime I do lovely. I didn't get to get my wood in, the fire season and everything. I got my permits, but --- if I can get Gary Arnall wound up now we're going to go up and cut wood. But I bought wood, so ---

BARBARA: And do you do much traveling, you and Polly now?

CHUCK: We ---

(END OF TAPE)

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