

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #315 - Side A

Subject: Gene Timms - With Video

Place: Harney County Library - Burns, Oregon

Date: February 21, 1992

Interviewers: Barbara Lofgren & Dorothea Purdy

DOROTHEA PURDY: This is Dorothea Purdy along with Barbara Lofgren and today we're talking to Gene Timms our Senator in Oregon. We are at the Harney County Library in Burns, Oregon. The date is February the 21st, 1992. Afterwards we will be doing a video, and the video and transcript will be stored at the Harney County Library as part of the Harney County History Project. The video number is #315.

Gene, can you tell us where you were born, and who and what your parent's names were?

GENE TIMMS: I was born in the Harney County Hospital in Burns in 1932, May 16th, which incidentally, I don't know if you want these little trivia's put in there, I bought that hospital in 19 ---, I can't give you the exact year, and remodeled it into an apartment house. Which today it is still an apartment house, and a fairly nice one inside. It doesn't look that well, that good outside.

My father's name is Morgan Oscar Timms, and he was born in California, but was basically raised in Grant County. And my mother, Dorothy "Dot" Paine was born on Cotton Wood Creek in Long Creek, and I can't give you the years today, I'm sorry I do not have that information with me, and I can't remember.

DOROTHEA: Okay, can you tell us something about your father, how he grew up, and what he did, and why he came to Harney County?

GENE: My father's dad, Timms was a ranch hand in Prairie City, and his mother divorced him and married the son of the county judge in Lake County, his name was Laycock, who later became a senator in 1908 in Grant County. And she basically lived in California with him before he moved, Mr. Laycock, before he moved back to Grant County. He basically raised himself from the age of around fourteen. And he had a full sister, Jewel, who married a Chambers later on, which incidentally was shot and killed in the annex school in --- out of the Snake River in Ontario. They named the new police station, which they dedicated a couple months ago, to her husband Ted Chambers. And they lived together, more or less, with different people that would take care of them and so forth.

And he lived in Grant County, and then he went to World War I in 1917, served in the Argonne Forest, was decorated and so forth, and then came back, and he and mother were married.

And then he worked on a ranch, managed a ranch up in the Izee country. Went to work for the Forest Service, worked up to a district forest ranger. Interesting, John Scharff worked for him back in those days. And of course John went to school with my mother.

And then he moved to Burns in 1927, and was a Burns District Ranger for this area until 1937 when he bought Alpine Creamery, he and Lee Miller. And that's basically how it happened.

DOROTHEA: And how did he meet your mother? Did they go to school together, or how did he end up meeting her and marrying her?

GENE: Gee, I just wish I could answer that question ---

DOROTHEA: You don't know that.

GENE: --- but I can't. She went to school in Long Creek, and he went to school in Prairie City. I'm sure he had met her previous to going to war in 1917. They were married in Baker, gosh I can't remember the date, and I should. They were married in Baker, and it

was a double ring ceremony. Another couple were married at the same time, and my mother --- there were eleven girls and two boys, so it was a very big family.

And then her cousin Effie Brisbo still lives over there, and her husband is a sheriff over there. Their mothers married brothers I think, or some darn thing. Anyway there were eleven or twelve of those, so I've got relatives spread all over Grant County. I run into one I didn't know all the time.

BARBARA LOFGREN: I'll help you out just a little bit, they were married in Baker November 21, 1923.

GENE: Well thank you.

DOROTHEA: Now what was your mother's maiden name, Paine?

GENE: Paine.

DOROTHEA: Paine you said?

GENE: P A I N E.

BARBARA: Okay.

GENE: I've been interested, somebody signed the Declaration of Independence with that signed the same way, but I've never been able to trace it.

BARBARA: So when your father bought Alpine Creamery then, he just continued on in business from then on? He quit the forest service, is that right?

GENE: Right, right. He bought out Lee Miller in 1954. And Lee Miller was married to an Otley, Annie Miller.

DOROTHEA: Now was this Alpine Creamery known as the Alpine Creamery at that time?

GENE: Incorporated.

DOROTHEA: And who had it belonged to before that?

GENE: Dillman.

DOROTHEA: Dillman.

GENE: Uh huh. Who, I believe they had a hardware store here. It was a business that had, you know, it wasn't making any money. It was in real trouble all the time. And they knew, or my dad knew because he was the head of the forest service, that the three C Camps would be coming. And we had three CC Camps in this area that he knew he could sell milk to. And even though there were some problems, they didn't want to buy it from him, and they went through quite a hassle. But he bought the creamery at that time. I believe he paid for it in one year, because it wasn't much to buy, it was just having real financial problems.

BARBARA: We talked with Dewey McLaren several weeks ago ---

GENE: Yeah, right, a great guy.

BARBARA: --- and he said he worked there a number of years and made the best ice cream in Harney County.

GENE: I used to help him. I loved that job. (Laughter) You talked to Dewey, that's great.

BARBARA: Yeah, uh huh.

DOROTHEA: He also told us about the steam engine that your dad had purchased. And do you remember anything about that steam engine?

GENE: No, I didn't know anything about it.

DOROTHEA: He blew it up.

GENE: Oh, did he? Well that sounds like something my dad would do.

DOROTHEA: No, your dad was in Portland or somewhere at the time, and Dewey had it and he thought, boy I've just really got this thing going. I'm just going to really make ice cream. And about that time he turned and walked away, and it blew a hole in that side of that, just huge. If he hadn't of walked away it would of really burned him. He had some real narrow escapes.

GENE: Yeah, I'll bet. They used to have some narrow escapes with the ammonia systems down there. It used to scare me to death. I didn't want to go near it. Both he and Dewey would get in there and cranking on one of those nuts, you know, and I thought gosh if that thing blows up, because ammonia is pretty toxic, especially when it comes out under that kind of pressure. Dewey was a great one, no doubt about it.

BARBARA: What were some of the other things that your father was involved with, organizations, or was he into politics also, or just straight business organizations, or what did he like to do?

GENE: Well, he was an outdoorsman. He always, you know, we'd go to Bend or something and he'd see some of his old friends from the forest service. He says you know if I'd of stayed in the forest service I'd been retired. And he loved the out of doors. He loved the ranching community. And I used to talk to Allen Turner, used to go on about my dad, used to haul salt for him. You know those were in the days when they had four employees instead of two hundred. And you know they were out there to serve the rancher, and not harass him.

And he was very interested in the Legion. He ran the --- and I've got a certificate in that box at home that I was talking about, where the president of the United States awarded him for the selective service, serving for three years, which he said was the toughest job he ever had. Because he had to call kids into the service, and some of them didn't come back from World War II. He was very involved in the Elks; he was a charter member of the Elks. He was always a big Chamber of Commerce person, and a promoter of the area.

He --- politics, gosh he was on the ESD board for like forty years. He was on the city council for years. Ran for mayor and got beat, which I know really hurt his feelings when it happened. And I remember Orm Carter made a bet that Morgan Timms would

never lose that race. And he bet somebody he'd roll a peanut from Corbett's Drug on the corner to the other corner. And dad said that hurt him more than anything else, for Orm Carter, and they had about fifty people down there watching Orm roll that peanut with his nose, from Corbett's to the Vogue. But he was defeated, and of course that didn't --- he still was very involved civically.

I think if you asked any of the old fair people, that my dad is probably one of the reasons that the fairgrounds in this county is what it is. He was the president of the fair association back during the war when they just, you know, there just weren't a lot of people around for six years. And it was always his first love, would have been the fair.

I remember when he was grand marshal, he thought boy that was great. He said, "Did I keep that horse's head up?" And Jack Drinkwater give him the horse. And he was a jockey at one time. You see his great-grandfather was a Trowbridge. Trowbridge were probably the biggest horse raisers, probably in the Pacific Northwest, and they did have some money. And they raised horses, and my dad was a jockey.

Also Denny Jones, who is your state representative, was a jockey for the Trowbridge's back years and years ago. Which --- my dad was always a little person. He used to ride in the fair down there, they had the fair officers parade. I remember when his saddle came off and he fell off the horse. I thought they had killed him. (Laughter)

BARBARA: So he was interested in what was going on then in town?

GENE: Oh gosh, nobody more civic minded than my dad I don't think in the history of Harney County as far as I'm concerned, but I'm a little prejudice.

BARBARA: Did that influence you then, do you think?

GENE: Oh sure, sure, I was always very civic minded too. And I think basically you learn that from college, a good part of it. I think that a college education rounds you to the point that you realize making money isn't everything. It's a broad experience in life that matters,

not a financial experience, but a broad one in all areas. And I think that probably school taught me more than that, and my father probably. Other than I watched him, and he was very involved in those things.

DOROTHEA: Well going to college and back to that, where did you get your education?

GENE: Well I got my education basically, K-12 of course was in Burns. Hank Slater was my principal at school, and a person that I guess you'd have to say I idolized. He was pretty good to me. And in high school I was very active in, probably sports was my number one drive, not books. But I did good in school.

BARBARA: In order to participate in sports you have to do well in school too.

GENE: Yeah right, right. And then I went to Willamette University. I had a ride to go to the College of Idaho to play football, but I went to Willamette University, probably influenced by Bob Smith. He wanted me to go there, and he was a year ahead of me at Willamette University. Plus Willamette University is probably, as far as I'm concerned, one of the best colleges in the State of Oregon. And my dad wanted me to go there also. So I went to Willamette University and graduated with a BA Degree in Economics in 1954, and then went in the army right after that.

DOROTHEA: And where did you serve in the army?

GENE: I served in the army; it was during the Korean War, right after the Korean War. I didn't have to go overseas. I served in the army in Fort Ord, California and at Fort Lewis for two years, and then I went to the University of Oregon graduate school. And at that time my father invited me to come home and go in the business with him, which we had talked about when I was in college. He bought Lee Miller out in 1953; I believe it was, which was the year before I graduated.

DOROTHEA: Do you have any sisters or brothers?

GENE: Yes, I have a sister.

DOROTHEA: And what's her name?

GENE: Barbara Strawn.

DOROTHEA: And was she in the business with you?

GENE: She was never in the business with me. She worked in the business for quite a few years. She went to school in Portland, Business School, and she went to LaGrande. And she didn't really, well she married Norm Strawn in about 19 --- it was after Edna and I were married. Edna and I were married in 1954, and I believe that she was married in about 1955. She has since divorced, and it's a sad story. I currently have her in Marion Retirement Home, where she lives, and stays.

DOROTHEA: Oh.

BARBARA: When you were in college, what were your dreams, what did you want to do at that time?

GENE: When I was in college? Oh gosh, I wanted to be a stockbroker, is what I was really looking at, and that's one reason I went to the University of Washington graduate school. And then as I looked at it, and talked to some friends, it was a dog eat dog world out there, and I think I wanted to come back to Burns because I had a lot of good friends here. Corky Corbett and Bob Smith were both good friends and were back here at the time. Most of my friends were in Burns. In those days people came back to Burns as young people. Today I think we have a tendency, if they're college educated, they leave.

BARBARA: They don't come back.

GENE: Uh huh.

BARBARA: Well that's what I was wondering, when you were over there you were looking at different things, and was it inviting to you to continue on there, or was that old pull coming back to Burns?

GENE: Oh, the old pull was coming back. And I had analyzed the business, and it wasn't



that great a business by any means, didn't do very much business to tell you the truth, for the people that Dad had hired. In those days you could get away with it, today you couldn't. So it was a situation that, you know, I knew we'd have to grow and add things and do those types of things. So I thought there were a lot of opportunities in coming back.

BARBARA: So you say you married Edna in 1954, was that right after you got out of school, or right ---

GENE: That was right before I got out of school.

BARBARA: And where did you meet Edna?

GENE: I met Edna, she was my college girlfriend, and we went together in college our junior and senior year. I knew her when I was a freshman and sophomore. We went together my junior and senior year.

BARBARA: Where was she from?

GENE: She is from Bend, and then she's lived in a lot of different places. Her dad was one of those kind of guys that done about everything you could do, and he ended up in the tire shop in Burns.

DOROTHEA: And who were her parents?

GENE: Evans, Otis and Mary Evans. Mary is still alive. In fact we're having some real problems there right now, trying to get her brother into the vet hospital in Portland. Just got through talking on the phone. But she is 94 years old, still living in the house.

BARBARA: So was Edna interested in coming back to a small town after being ---

GENE: Oh, it never bothered her.

BARBARA: Never bothered her.

GENE: Edna is one of those kind of wives you only find one in a million. You know, she is just ---

BARBARA: Just goes with whatever comes along?

GENE: Yes, she does whatever comes along, and she is pretty good to me. I'm a pretty lucky guy.

DOROTHEA: And do you have children?

GENE: Yes, I have two children, Toby and Trina.

DOROTHEA: And how many grandchildren?

GENE: I have two grandchildren.

DOROTHEA: And where does your daughter live right now? We understand that ---

GENE: My daughter has the best job in the United States of America right now. She works for Nike as a meeting planner. Today she is in Los Angeles to a, I don't know what kind of meeting, but she is, takes care of their meetings. So she flies all over the world.

She was the host the other day for John Havlicek and his wife. Yesterday she called from the airport; they were having a meeting at the Portland Airport for track people, famous track people around the world. And she was greeting and taking care of them and so forth, and she just walked out to the rig with the decathlon guy, that won the decathlon.

BARBARA: Jenner?

GENE: Yeah, you've got it. It's not Jenner, but your close, Joyner.

BARBARA: Joyner, oh the girl, okay.

GENE: Yeah, right. She goes to Boston for St. Patrick's Day, they give twelve trips. You guys don't mind if I bore you, do you?

BARBARA: No, no of course not.

GENE: They give twelve trips to people in that office, which means, there are six of them, they get two of them a year to the highlight places of the United States to go and stay for three days. She got --- she wanted to go to St. Patrick's Days in Boston. So she gets

three free days. And I thought it was a wise choice. She had the Mardi Gras in New Orleans, or Palm Springs. But it is some kind of --- probably one of the more coveted jobs for young people to get.

And she has been in the meeting planning --- she was at Sun River for better than a year as their convention planner there. And then she has been at different hotels as their convention planner. And it's just ---

BARBARA: Sounds like a fun job to have.

GENE: Fun job. I love it, because I'm going to have all Nike clothes. I can go and buy my Nike clothes for cost, and I just love it.

BARBARA: And is she married now?

GENE: No. She was engaged once, and she called it off.

BARBARA: I see.

GENE: Even after we had bought the wedding dress.

BARBARA: Oh dear.

GENE: It was going to cost daddy some money, but --- nope she is not, she is unattached.

BARBARA: Having a good time.

DOROTHEA: And having a good time.

GENE: Oh gosh yes, she's having a good time.

DOROTHEA: And your son Toby still lives here in Burns, and he's running the business.

GENE: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: Did he take after his father's footsteps, or --- how long were you in the business?

GENE: Oh, I was in the business from 1956 until 1983 when I went to the legislative session, which would be what, twenty-seven years. My son has run the business since I

went to the legislature. There is no way that you could do both.

It drives me crazy just doing the legislative work, let alone trying to run a business. And I wouldn't kid myself; if I had to run the business I'd get out of the legislature because you'd go broke. There is just too much time, it is very time --- I work harder being a legislator than I ever did in my business. It's about sixty hours a week. People won't believe that, but it is true. When you count reading, the total --- and you could make more out of it than that if you wanted to. That's the problem, is prioritizing what you do, do. But he's done a, you know, we've survived in a tough, tough period.

We have had real financial problems, and it hasn't been easy. We're no different than any other business in town. It happens to be that I saved some money; I've always been a saver all my life. I always saved ten percent of my income, even when I was in the army, and it wasn't easy then, until my wife got a good job. And she was a dental assistant, so she never had a problem getting a job. And so because of that I have made some investments that have paid off, and that's the only reason that I, you know, I take very little out of the business. They can't afford to pay me anything.

BARBARA: So tell us a little bit about what you did during the time that you ran the business here? What did you get involved with in the community, and what led you to become interested in politics during that time?

GENE: Well to start out with, I was very involved in the Jaycees. Corky Corbett and Bob Smith, when I came home, were both running all over the State of Oregon, they were both bachelors. I was married, so that wasn't a very good setup. But --- as far as Edna was concerned. But I traveled a lot with them, and Corky ended up being a national vice president of the Jaycees, which I was always pretty proud of that, and a state president. And I was always involved in those campaigns to be there.

And then I was a local president, and a state secretary/treasurer, head of different

committees statewide for years. I guess I got out and about in 19 --- when I was about 32 I quit going. But you can be a Jaycee until 35. So I was very involved in that, and then I got involved in Chamber.

I was always involved in; I coached Little League for like ten years. I was always with my son, or tried to be. I thought that was a number one priority. And I even coached after he wasn't on the team. But that's how I got involved in that.

Also, oh gosh I got on a lot of committees. I was on the committee to, or opened my big mouth at a meeting, always had a tendency to open my mouth and get myself in trouble. (Laughter) And I opened my mouth at a school board meeting when they were going to sell the Lincoln High for one dollar. Corky was with me, he wouldn't open his mouth. And I got up and gave them heck for selling that school, you know. There was a gymnasium and a auditorium that we were going to lose. And so they appointed me chair of the committee to find out what we would do with it. Well first I went to Hall who was a construction guy, and I said, "You know I want a legitimate estimate on what it would cost to fix that building." Well it was about a third less than what they had figured.

And so then we went ahead and they said a no vote in the area was a no --- it meant that there was no vote. See they had to vote down the curriculum, to include seventh and eighth grades to make a junior high out of it. Well they ruled that a no vote in Riley was a no vote. Well I got an attorney general's decision that it wasn't. That was just considered a no vote. You didn't count it as one no. So it should have passed. Well they still wouldn't agree with that. I had a slight problem. So we kept working at it, and finally I talked Dr. John Weare and Mr. Slater, and it wasn't a big job talking them into it, and then they bought the school for a dollar. And they made the grade school, seventh and eighth grade there. I'm proud of that project because I think it has been a real asset to the community. I'm not sure; maybe somebody else would have come along and did just

what I did. But I'm proud of that.

The park right down over the hill, the Jaycee Park, I started that. Grover Jameson had that in a will, and I forget who the people were, and we got it set up to where they'd give it to the city. And we made that tourist park out of it, and we planted the trees and all those things, and I think its developed into an asset for the community.

Worked on, you know, the other things you do in a community organization. But those are two --- I can drive by and say, "Gene, you know maybe you had a little something to do with that." And I had a lot of help but you know, it was my idea. I was always a pretty good idea man.

BARBARA: So when Bob Smith went into government then ---

GENE: Well I was always involved in his campaigns. You know we raised \$36,000 for Bob Smith in a week in Harney County when he wanted to run for congress. And ---

DOROTHEA: Does that say something about the people of Harney County?

GENE: Oh gosh yes. I think the people in Harney County are the greatest people in the world. Sometimes, you know, you get a little displeased with them when you're in this process, but deep down, you can't beat them. When they're with you, they're with you. And we worked pretty hard to raise \$36,000. And I gave him more money than I ever thought I would, and I made my mother give him more money than she ever thought she would too. (Laughter) But it's paid off, it's paid off. Bob Smith has been a super congressman for this area.

BARBARA: So during that time you thought well maybe you would like to get involved in making something happen too?

GENE: Well yeah, I was always, I was in the --- I went down to see Bob when he was speaker of the house, which you know he is the last one, twenty years ago. And Larry Campbell this last session is the first Republican that has been speaker since then, which

I attribute to why Oregon has got so screwed up. Now we're on the right track again, I hope.

But I sat in the office when he organized the house, which was kind of fun to watch your best friend. I have been to committee meetings and sat with him and watched the process. Felt it, you know, it doesn't take much to be, you know, a U. S. or Senator, or Representative. I thought I could do it, so when he quit I jumped in. And Bob discouraged me from getting into it. He didn't want me to get into it.

DOROTHEA: That's what I was going to ask; did he talk to you and try to convince you?

GENE: No, no, for the reason is he knew the time it took. Figured it would break me, my business. Of course he didn't know my complete financial picture. And there was a question in my mind whether my son could run the business too. He thought my son probably couldn't run the business. Well my son has, I think, you know it has been nine years and we are still afloat. So I think it's a pretty good indication that he can run the business, plus he has learned a lot in nine years. I didn't give him much help; I just pulled out and went to Salem. Because I only had a month's notice when I got in this, you see, I was appointed.

I would have never been a senator if I'd of had to run, never. I mean running for this job is tough, tough, tough work, hard work, costs lots of money. The only reason I did it is 'cause I knew through Dale White who helped me, Judge White helped me a lot. He was the president of the Association of Oregon Counties at the time, Oregon Association of Counties. And Dale I feel is one of the outstanding judges in the State of Oregon, and has been for a long time. And he said he would help me, and I knew if we'd go around to all the county courts, and convince the county courts and commit their votes to me, that's who you are elected by, that I could get elected, and it wasn't going to cost us a lot of money. Well it cost us about \$300 I think for running around. And so we did that, and

every county voted for us except Malheur, and of course they had the other candidate who was Bob Skinner, who is probably one of the outstanding men I have ever known in my life. I was very fortunate, as far as having an opponent, he was a good one, and a great one, and a man I think a lot of today. And so it was fun, and we made it work.

BARBARA: So now that you are running again, and down the line do you see yourself continuing on in politics, or at a certain period in your life do you have aspirations for a higher office? Or do you have aspirations to come back to Harney County and live, or would you like to stay in the valley?

GENE: No, gosh I ---

BARBARA: Or have you gotten that far yet?

GENE: Yeah, I've gotten that far. There was a real question whether I would run this time. You know this is a lot of work, a ton of work.

BARBARA: Our state is in a ---

GENE: And physically it gets you. And you'd be amazed of some of the letters --- I should have just brought down a letter I just wrote, you know, somebody calling me every name in the book you can think of, you know, and here you are working your butt off for \$940 a month. So it gets a little exasperating, other than I have met a lot of great people.

Probably the highlight of my political time, of being there, was when I was targeted number one in Oregon for re-election in 1984 when Mark Stringer ran against me. And how I won that race I don't know. He outspent me, he had all the union support, everybody. I'd run into schoolteachers here, you know, OEA who were walking, knocking on doors for him. Most of them didn't even know I was running against him. The union had just told them to go do it. I --- that was a tough, tough election.

My wife and me talk about what we put ourselves through. Cal Mosley, bless his



heart, helped us. He had just sold his shoe store, so he helped me in my house. I didn't pay him near as much as he should of been paid, but he worked pretty cheap. He used to say Gene; I don't know how the hell you do it. And it was hell. And, but we won, and now we're tough to beat, because we've been there and we're incumbents.

But now my district has changed dramatically. I now have Klamath Falls, which is 55% of the vote in my district. So now I've got that whole name familiarity thing to start over in Klamath. I'm spending probably a week a month there, and probably a week, or two weeks a month in Salem, so you can see how much time I get to stay home.

And it is such a tough process that Mike Nelson just resigned. I don't know if you noticed in the Oregonian, he was just a representative, he is half the size of my district, half the people, and gets paid the same amount of money, and he resigned because his business couldn't afford it.

So it's a process out here --- first you've got to have enough financial backing to be able to run. You know where you can take care of a lot of the cost yourself, or you couldn't afford to do it. And you got to really have a desire to serve. And I get a lot of self-satisfaction. I could tell you stories of people I've helped in this county that, you know, make you feel awful good. And you, I love that part of it, I love it, you got to love it or you wouldn't do it.

BARBARA: Try to make a difference as to what's going to happen to our country.

GENE: Oh gosh yes. And you don't make it to your country; you probably make it your district. Because philosophically we're so different from west of the mountains. You're in such a minority position, it's so tough. You've got to have the ability to get along with people, because you've got to make those people do it, because you can't do it with your votes out here.

And I've had a, I feel a big impact; I've had an impact on the fair. You know I got

the fair association award, the year that I put in the bill and lottery funding for fairs --- \$500,000 a year, which we've had in every year since the inception in 1985. And we got \$76,000 last year to put in the water line and so forth. I know my dad would have been proud of that. We tried for a long time to get a grant, and we didn't get it every year. But most all my fairs have received that.

I've been very involved, I made rural health care an economic development factor in the State of Oregon which has added dramatically to this hospital and all A Hospitals in the state, which I put that legislation through for A Hospitals. It also helped get the Mountain States Grant for Ramona Bishop in that area, plus a lot of other things that we've done in that bill, doctor recruitment. The BIC, which we were one of the first here where they had the communication link, and so forth. In fact right now I'm working with Oregon Health Sciences University, I'm on the AHEC, the Oregon Health Sciences University --- I can call there and get about anything I want. I'm not going to tell you and brag about some things that I've been able to do, because I'm not sure I want everybody to know about it. Sometimes I wonder if it is quite right to, as far as medical care and those kind of things ---

Oregon Health Sciences University, and through the AHEC, Area Health Education Centers, we will have an intern in here who will study here for six weeks. And then we'll change him, and their practice, and they'll have a preceptor doctor that will help them here and guide them, and they will be educated six weeks in Harney County. They'll have to stay here and work here, and we hope that because of that we'll have more rural docs that will graduate from the Oregon Health Sciences University who will practice in rural areas. And that is key.

When I went to Salem I could see that there is no way that you're going to change how --- the big, big issues. You've got to work on things, and we have to preserve our

infrastructure, which is our schools, our health program, and our transportation system. And I've been involved in all three of those, and I've been able to accomplish a lot of things. Mainly the health care areas, probably the biggest. And that's the reason you do it. You asked the question --- and I've no desire to go on. I can't handle the job I've got. I would not want to be a congressman. There is no way I would want to fight that rat race. This is bad enough rat race in --- and you can accomplish something here in this process. You go back to Washington, D. C. it's so partisan and so political, that you can't get things done. In Oregon I can stand up on the floor of the senate any day I want to and mouth off --- you've got to be careful how you handle that privilege, but you know you can do things. You can make a difference as an Oregon senator, but as a ---

And Bob Smith has made a difference, don't get me wrong. But he didn't do it the first two, four years he was there, it took time, it took time. And I have no desire.

And sure if the process came up where Bob Smith couldn't be there, and I thought there wasn't anybody out there that could do the job as good as I could do, I might look at it. But I don't think that's going to happen.

I'm working on some people right now to run for congress when he gets done, and they're good ones. And I'm looking for somebody to take my job, and I'm grooming some young people for that. I want out.

BARBARA: So when your time comes to get out, will you return to Harney County?

GENE: Oh gosh yes, I wouldn't live any place else. I --- first place I've got a great house. I can watch the weather everyday, and it's beautiful, and the country is beautiful, the people are great. No, I would always live here. I might run off in January, and February and March, you know, and go south or something. But I would not --- no there is no way that I would want to live anywhere but Harney --- that's where my friends are. And I've tried to keep those friends.

That's the problem with this job; you're in Salem so much. Mike Thorne got up, who is from Pendleton, he is head of the Port of Portland now, very good friend, and he said, "You know, all my friends are in Portland and Salem now." Well I don't want that to happen to me. I try and work at getting a hold of my friends Arlie Oster, Bud Garland, and Thad Geer. And I don't do a good job with Thad because he's tougher to get a hold of. I see the others downtown, but I think we are still great friends. And ---

BARBARA: I was going to ask you, the people that you grew up with here in town, or you worked with after you went into business, have remained your close friends so that a lot of them are still here, so that kind of draws you back home again too, besides your family.

GENE: Oh sure, and I think it is the same way with Edna, she has some friends here. Tom Clemens, Delmer Clemens, you know, kids I went to high school with. Dale White, we all went to high school together.

There is a guy you should get in here, is Dale White. There is a guy that has accomplished a ton, and he is not a bragger, he does it for the service. People in this county know what he'd done, they think he is great. But there are a lot of people that think he is a bad guy.

BARBARA: No matter what job you have, that's always ---

GENE: (Laughter) Yeah, I guess, I guess.

BARBARA: That's for sure.

DOROTHEA: Well since you said you've only got a half an hour, well we could cut this short if you promise to come back maybe one day when we can take a little longer, because we do, and would like to get a video of you, which would take about ten minutes.

So do you have anything else that you want to tell us, or shall we cut it off here and do the video so you can get your next meeting, or ---

GENE: Gosh, I probably should wear a suit when you do the video.

BARBARA: Oh no.

DOROTHEA: No, no, no, we want you natural.

BARBARA: Everyone is casual in the videos, I promise you.

GENE: Okay. Gosh, you know there is just so much that you can

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DOROTHEA: Avel Diaz in his baseball cap even, so ---

GENE: Yeah, well good for you. Avel Diaz is a great one. I, you know, I just don't know of --- the business has always been, you know, a struggle. And that's probably why we have existed in Harney County. But boy, it hasn't been easy, because you've always had to fight the biggies in this town, which, I mean the grocery houses, Safeway. I wouldn't want that publicized because they are a good account of mine, but boy I'll tell you they take a ton of money out of this town, and always will I guess. It doesn't look like it is going to change. But it's been tough.

DOROTHEA: That's a question that we've asked a lot of people, is the difference in the town since you were a kid ---

GENE: Good question.

DOROTHEA: --- and now. Have you seen a lot of changes?

GENE: No. When I was president of the Chamber I'll bet the problems are the same today as they were back in 1960, because the town is a rural community and its survival. This is a survival mode, and you just --- things don't get easier, they've gotten tougher.

Look at Main Street, look at the vacant buildings. Things have gotten bigger and more impersonable. People have lost loyalty, those types of things. And so it's just a lot tougher to make a living in Burns, Oregon than it's ever been.

My son has gone through more in the last eight years as far as making it as I ever did, or my dad before me. And my dad had it made; it was a sellers market in those days.

I mean you didn't have to go out and sell anything; it sold itself, not anymore. So it's a tough, tough place to be in business. It's just not easy to be so remote, to make it work.

DOROTHEA: Well Dewey McLaren was telling us about when you first went into business there, you took milk from all of the local ranches, and dairy people. Now they're getting their milk from elsewhere. And in order to do this, you've had to let the dairy people go. Or did the dairy people just quit?

GENE: Well the dairy business was one of those things that's kind of on again off again. You know if beef prices were up, the milk business didn't matter very much. The beef prices were down; well then the milk business mattered, because it was a supplement to another product. And they really weren't in the dairy business as such. And so therefore it had a tendency to fluctuate, and we had big problems, you know, with count, with the health department and those type of things, many times. And I'm not sure that the product might not have been just quite as good as it should have been.

And then of course when the big dairies came in, the dairy business is probably one of the biggest businesses in the United States. It is basically done by three industries, or three different businesses, and it froze the little guy out. There is no way that we could keep doing it, you know. Ice cream, we quit ice cream the minute Dewey quit. I quit it for the reason is that, you know, I didn't have anybody to keep the machinery running. Dewey was one of those kind of guys that could keep everything running. And he was a very hard --- well he was the old school guy. He and Lloyd Taylor were both there over thirty years each. And they were both super people, and it was easy. Employees make a business, and they were those kind of employees. And they didn't work for much. I cannot believe what my dad paid those people.

Toby is worse than I --- Toby really pays good. He pays too good. I told him you can't afford to pay those kind of wages and make money. And that's our problem; we're

not making any money because he pays too high a wages. I was somewhere in between.

You know I think as the younger generation comes on, they realize the importance of employees. And not that my dad --- and they loved, they'd fight me over that, Lloyd and Dewey, they thought my dad, that the sun rose and set on him.

But I go back to the financial statements and I can show you that those were the easy days to make money. My dad made quite a bit of money there.

DOROTHEA: Well that's when we could go to town and buy a week's groceries on ten dollars.

GENE: Yeah, right on.

DOROTHEA: Now you can't even buy a day's worth of groceries for the same price.

GENE: I sure got us off track there, didn't I? But that's a good question. This town, as a businessman, you know, this town has changed where it's really, really tough for people to make a living. And I think one of the big things that saved us is tourists. And some people say it's no base for jobs.

DOROTHEA: And if we lose our highway ---

GENE: And natural resources are key. But tourism, let's say my business, and Joe Hardwick would tell you the same thing at Safeway, from April to November their customer count goes up three times. So tourism is a big factor in Harney County for supplemental --- and look at the motel rooms, you know. Look at the growth industry here, has not been --- mostly has been tourism which is motels, service stations, and restaurants. We have a lot of restaurants per capita in this town, and it is because of tourism.

And the Steens Mountains and the Refuge, which I was the first one to put together a colored brochure at the Chamber to promote the Steens Mountain. Now some people, the agriculture community and so forth, will say oh boy, you know, the tourists are

back. Well they come and spend their money and they leave. We don't have to buy infrastructure for them, we don't have to educate kids, and we don't have to take care of any of the social problems, that's a big advantage. Another advantage is if you give access. If you get people involved in going to the Steens Mountains, they want to be able to go there. They don't want to be shut out, and that's a big advantage.

Idaho and Montana are having big problems because of so much wilderness. They are locking up so much of it. We keep them from locking it up, if we expose it to people. Because people want to be able to go there, not just a very few. Boy you guys got me rolling pretty good. I had better shut up, hadn't I?

DOROTHEA: No, we've got another side on there, but you're time is running out, and that's our problem. And our light is blinking, means we have to turn this tape over.

GENE: I'd be glad to come back any time. We can work this in.

DOROTHEA: Okay.

GENE: And I appreciate you, you know, taking the time, you know, letting me go so I can go to the --- So if I can run down here, you know, what I do is take a break, and it's great to get away from that telephone, make Edna answer it for awhile. (Laughter)

DOROTHEA: Well shall we close this off then before we have to change sides, and we'll do a little short video so we've got that on file.

GENE: Okay.

DOROTHEA: So we'd like to thank you Gene for taking the time with us.

GENE: Well thank you. Anybody likes to brag, they love to be in something, you know. (Laughter)

(END OF TAPE)

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