

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #319 - Sides A & B

Subject: Early Ambulance; With Avel Diaz - With Video

Place: Harney County Library - Burns, Oregon

Date: April 29, 1992

Interviewers: Cathy Slyter & Valorie Davis

DOROTHEA PURDY: This is Dorothea Purdy, and today we are here at the Harney County Library in Burns, Oregon visiting with Avel Diaz about the early ambulance in Harney County. Doing the interview with Diaz is Cathy Slyter. She will be asking Diaz about how the ambulance got started in Burns, and where it has gone from then to now, and perhaps some of the incidents that have taken place to get our ambulance where it is today. This video, cassette, and transcript will be stored with the rest of the Harney County History Project at the Harney County Library, the number is #319. Today's date is April 29th, 1992.

CATHY SLYTER: Okay first of all, Avel, thank you for agreeing to do this with us. The first question we would like to know is, tell us about when the ambulance was started, what year, and where it was located.

AVEL DIAZ: It was started in about 1956, and the local mortician up until that time had a semi-ambulance service, and he was wanting to quit. In fact he was going to quit. And the fire department, Jim Richardson the chief, said well we ought to go in the ambulance business. I for one didn't think the fire department had any business being in the ambulance service. As it turned out they took a vote and the majority voted to go in the ambulance business. And the reason they went into it, Ganger and Grover, which was the Chevrolet Agency here in Burns, had gone down to California to a military

auction, equipment auction, and they seen this old Packard army ambulance and they bought it and they said they would give it to the fire department if they'd start an ambulance service.

So they brought it up, and Norman Liebig was given a lot of credit, he was shop foreman for Ganger and Grover, and he took it on his own to go completely through this ambulance and make sure it was as good as it could be, considering it was a used ambulance. He spent a lot of time, evenings, weekends, and on his own time getting this thing put together for us. And so Ganger and Grover donated the thing to the fire department.

So the next step was, how do we finance it, keep it going. And so the firemen agreed to take some of their wages, the city budgeted money for meetings, a dollar for a meeting, a dollar for every fire call, every hour they were on call, so that money was to be used to keep this thing operating. And so we --- that was the first step, and it's unbeknownst to us, as this thing took hold, why people started donating money to us. And money really come in, and we were able to collect money from the insurance, the people that had insurance that covered ambulance runs, and ambulance calls.

So then we set up a program that we would not charge anybody in Harney County for ambulance service. Now we would go for donations, and what insurance money we could take in. And so things seemed to work, we accumulated some money.

We found out after the first year that the Packard just wasn't suited for our type of service that we had to give, because of our trips. Bend didn't have a hospital much better than the one Burns had. So Portland --- it was downtown Bend, and it was a good hospital but just didn't have the services they have today. So our trips was to Portland and Boise, and I'd say seventy-five percent to Portland.

And so the old Packard just, although it had been completely gone over, just didn't

quite suit the bill. It wasn't equipped with oxygen, and a lot of stuff that you need on those trips. So we drove the thing for about a year and decided we needed a new ambulance. And we had a little, we didn't have a lot of money, and how was we going to pay for it?

So Purdy and Sons was in the ambulance business in Portland, sold Cadillac ambulances, Superior. And we talked to those people and they sent a salesman over. We met with them several times and the original ambulance that we bought cost \$7500 and we didn't have --- I mean \$75,000, I'm sorry, and we didn't have the money. \$7500 I don't ... \$7500.

Anyway I went to city hall and talked to the council and they were budgeting \$2500 a year for fireman's wages and training, and most of the years we never used the whole \$2500. So I said, "Would you give us that \$2500 the first of August for three years in a row, which is \$7500?" And they threw it around awhile, and I explained to them that if we fought less fires than \$2500 they didn't get no money back. And if the fire calls were over \$2500 that we wouldn't come to them for more money. In other words it was a flat \$2500, and they finally went for it.

So then we go back to Purdy and Sons and say, "Well we got the money, but it's a three year deal." Well they said, "Well they'd never sold an ambulance on time, it was always cash." So we dickered back and forth, and we said, "Oh we can guarantee the money the first of August for three years." So they furnished us with an ambulance, \$7500.

CATHY: And that was a Cadillac ambulance?

AVEL: Cadillac, uh huh. So that was our first Cadillac.

CATHY: How many patients would that one carry?

AVEL: It would just carry two.

CATHY: Carry two.

AVEL: And that was one of the things that we found out, being new at this racket, that even the Cadillac wasn't quite what we wanted. The vehicle yes, but the equipment wise it wasn't. A run from here to Portland, we'd have to pack four or five extra bottles of oxygen, and always have to disconnect and connect. And so we come up with the idea that there was some way in that ambulance that they could put a regular hospital size oxygen bottle in it. And Purdy says they never heard of it. And so we drove this thing for a year and a half, two years, and got about eighty, ninety thousand miles on it.

And when we bought it --- and there were times that we had more than two people to take to Portland. We made a lot of trips for families that had automobile accidents in this country, stabilized them here and then we'd take them to Portland, Medford, to their home base, where they put them in their local hospitals. Well we weren't quite able to handle them. So back to Purdy, and a lot of miles, we need another ambulance. And so we need an oxygen deal, and we need some stretcher hangers, and believe me folks, ambulances didn't have them in those days.

CATHY: So Burns was the forerunner in that area?

AVEL: Right. So back to Superior Factory in Dayton, Ohio, and they come up with a model where they could put oxygen bottle on the floor underneath one of the bunks. And we were able to hang two patients and a gurney on the right side, and a bench on the other with equipment and stuff. That's where the oxygen bottles fit underneath that thing.

And it worked. We were able to transfer more than one person at a time, or two.

So as things progressed, why we, people started donating money. And before the three years was up with the city agreeing, we had been able to pay that ambulance off ---

CATHY: And what year was that in?

AVEL: --- with donations. Huh?

CATHY: What year was that?

AVEL: Oh, we had, say --- I lose track of years, probably was in '58, '59 when we bought the first Cadillac, so --- and we were supposed to pay, say in three years, we paid it off in a year and a half.

CATHY: Because of the donations?

AVEL: Donations then, and money. And so then another thing was, does the city get their money back or not, we didn't sell the city nothing, we just took our \$2500 every year and just put it in the bank, because that was the deal. And so as things went, why then a training program, you know, none of us was qualified.

CATHY: What kind of training did you ---

AVEL: The Red Cross.

CATHY: You had Red Cross.

AVEL: We all took advanced Red Cross Training. And the guys, Dr. Campbell, and especially Dr. Campbell, he was really good to us. He give us more training than even Red Cross had, he really worked with us. He spent a lot of time.

So we had ranchers in the community, Drewsey, down in the South End, every year would present us with a check for a thousand bucks, every year, just automatic without --- we had one local man, furniture, I think I can give his name at this time and age, Harvey Lehr come to me, and he says, "Let's go back to buying the original," after we bought the original ambulance, the Cadillac, he said, "if you people keep buying Cadillac ambulances, why, and don't de-grade yourself, I'll give you \$2500." He wrote out a check for \$2500. And he didn't want no publicity out of it. And even now, you know, unless somebody looks at the tape, why I think it should be on record that he did this.

Willie Racine and Goldie, owned the theater, they come up with \$2000 bucks after we had started to buy this thing, after we bought it. Well that's why we accumulated some bucks.

Cleveland from Drewsey/Van, Victor, he give us \$1500 every year, he's the one that left the money to the ambulance when he died here a year or so ago. And he always told me that, oh he had an invalid wife and we hauled her a lot, a big woman. We'd go to Drewsey, pick her up, take her to Boise or Portland, bring her here. And they well paid for it, you know, no problem. So he always told me, he said, "Diaz when my wife and I are both gone, the ambulance is going to be well taken care of." And apparently it came to pass.

So then we went on a program of buying an ambulance every two years. And the reason for that was we wanted good equipment, our trips were long, and when we started having breakdowns and stuff between here and Portland or here and Boise, why it wasn't worth it, better to have good equipment. And yet, like I say, we never got rid of an ambulance until it had over 70,000 miles on it.

VALORIE DAVIS: Did you keep any, did you run two ambulances at a time, or just one?

AVEL: Huh?

VALORIE: Did you have just one ambulance at a time, or two?

AVEL: Yeah, for two --- the first four or five years, it's hard to keep track of time, we had just the one ambulance. So then that little '76 that you got now, I think, or '79, the little Chevy.

CATHY: Medic Three is 1970, I think.

AVEL: Yeah, I don't know what you call it. It's got a little history behind it. There was three retired people in Ventura, California that wanted to put older people to work, so they started building ambulances. They'd buy a Chevrolet chassis and they'd put this thing together. If you'll look at that ambulance, even ambulances today, that thing has got a fiberglass back on it that's that thick. And they'd pride in what they were doing. And so three old people come up here and talked us into buying the '70, I think it is a '79. You

still have it.

CATHY: Yeah, it's a '70, I think.

AVEL: Is it?

CATHY: Uh huh.

VALORIE: I'm not sure; I read in the paper it's a '70, so ---

AVEL: It's a '70 then, whatever it is. (Laughter) So we used it to go in the hills and stuff, because we was taking this Cadillac to Timbuktu, you know, and it was rough on it.

And then we made a deal with Bob Salladay. We bought a used Jimmy through Purdy, four wheel drive, again, to go --- I forgot when I told you this before, to go in the hills and stuff with, and car wrecks, extract people from wrecks and stuff. And he was going to use it, and we were going to use it. He would use it when he had a death call up in the hills. And for some reason or another him and the fire chief got --- who owned the ambulance, we both had money in it, the mortuary and us. And so it ended up being sold. Now I fought that for a while, didn't want to sell it because we needed it.

So then, I can't give you the years, but then when the State Board of Health and everybody said you people got to have more training, and other fire departments start furnishing ambulance service, we were one of the first ones in the State of Oregon that started the program. And then the State Board of Health got into it. Everything was going good until they decided that we weren't qualified.

CATHY: And you'd been scraping people up off of the highway for years, and you weren't qualified.

AVEL: So then the EMT program and stuff come into fore, and then the Department of Energy, or Emergency in Washington had a program where they would furnish you with ambulances. So we had the little '70, or whatever, and the Cadillac. And was one of the first people in the State of Oregon, believe it or not, there was thirty-six of them come to

Oregon at one time, these cracker box type ambulances, all furnished by the Federal Government, we didn't have nothing in it. And if we run it right, and had no complaints, why they would turn the title over to us after five years, and we got the title to ours within three years. And so there we are in the three-ambulance bracket. And so ---

CATHY: Who gave you your EMT training?

AVEL: Dr. Campbell gave us; we did it, that's when videotapes first start coming out, and VCR. And we borrowed a VCR unit from Ray Weeks at the Ford Garage, and bring it up to the fire hall. And Dr. Campbell would put, we'd go through the tapes, and then Campbell would demonstrate for us, and spend a lot of time with us.

CATHY: Was it a written test, or did you also have to take a practical?

AVEL: We had to take a written test, a state test. Probably like you do now, I don't know what the procedure is now.

VALORIE: Was it strictly written, or did you have to do practical ---

AVEL: Well we had to do some work, yeah, we had to do some physical work. And of course by the time I quit, they were getting into IV's and --- see we didn't do IV's for several years. And then they've got more, you know, more ---

VALORIE: Technical.

AVEL: Technical.

CATHY: How many volunteers did you have in 1956 that went on the ambulance?

AVEL: Oh, probably around twenty, if not that many probably, say twenty more or less.

CATHY: That included most of the firemen?

AVEL: That was all the firemen.

CATHY: And when a person wanted to get in touch with the ambulance, how did they do this?

AVEL: Now that's --- when Jim Richardson was alive, the fire chief, he took most of the

calls. And then he would call me, and I would call somebody else, and then he'd go up --- he wasn't able to drive, he was an older man and had breathing problems. So he would run up to the hospital, we had a base station in those days in the hospital. A county radio system, but our base was at the hospital, and he'd go man the base at the hospital. And if he couldn't, he'd get somebody else. But we always, always dispatched three people, one to the hospital and two in the ambulance. Then we'd, back and forth, radio calls between the hospital and us. And on emergencies, and then we would tell them what we had, compound fractures or head injuries, or whatever, and if we wanted two doctors or three doctors. And we'd be there at a certain time, and what we had done to the patients, and what we thought their condition was. So it worked real good. Every time we got to the emergency room, the staff was there, the emergency staff was --- we didn't have to wait.

CATHY: Did the doctors instruct you over the radio?

AVEL: Yeah, some, some, depending on --- Like Dr. White, he'd say, of course I don't know how you people operate, but he'd say, "You guys drive too fast." He'd tell us, "Where you at now?" And we'd say, "Well we're at Folly Farm, and we'll be there in fifty minutes." I'm just; you know --- He'd say, "No, you're going to be here in an hour and a half." He said, "I don't want to be patching you up too, see." Well, you know, how do you handle it? A lot of times he'd, I want this on tape, a lot of times we'd go out in the country and doctor, and especially Dr. White would say, "Take those patients to Caldwell, or Boise, or Ontario." Say we were --- we drove all the way to Burns Junction, see, and halfway to McDermitt from there. And he'd say, well take them to Winnemucca. And, "No, we're not taking them to Winnemucca, we're bringing them here." And so he'd say, "Well you're going to have to transfer them later anyway." "Well, we don't care." You know, we didn't want to go to a strange hospital with an ambulance that we had no, you

know, communications with.

VALORIE: Did your system cover the country pretty good? Did you have any radio dead spots or ---

AVEL: Now we had dead spots, but the thing you got to remember in those days, there was a radio, a county radio in Diamond, Andrews and Drewsey, so we were always fortunate, very seldom it didn't work, we could get one of those radios. And then they would call by phone to Burns.

CATHY: Make a relay system.

AVEL: Yeah, oh they'd just call long distance to Burns Hospital, say hey the ambulance has got this, this, and this. And these people were good, we'd tell them what we had.

Now we're talking about radios, well this is a "Ripley Believe It Or Not", but in March one year, I forget the year in March, cold, clear day, got a bad wreck a mile this side of Burns Junction, a husband and wife in the barrow pit. Her leg compound, in fact she looked for an ax to chop it off so she could save her husband, because he's down face deep in the water and drowning. Oh, they're beat up, and Julio and I, Julio Urizar and I --- he wasn't a fireman. A lot of times I'd get in a problem and I couldn't get a fireman to go, they wasn't available. So I'd just go down Main Street pick up Craddock Blackburn, Carroll Rose, Julio, whoever I could get and say, "I'll take care of the patients, but I got to have somebody to drive." We'd take off.

Anyway this particular trip why we got some people that are really in bad shape, and I can't get Burns, I can't get Diamond, I can't get Drewsey, I can't get Andrews, and we're, you know, trying every few minutes. Finally somebody from West Virginia answered the radio.

CATHY: West Virginia?

AVEL: Uh huh. Clear as a bell, just come in booming. Says, "You people need some

help?" And, "Yeah, we need some help." "Well where are you at?" And, "Well out here in Eastern Oregon." "Where you at?" "West Virginia," I forget the town. And kind of give them a rundown right quick what our problem was, we were miles from the hospital, and we need to communicate with them. Well they wouldn't believe us, they thought we were a couple of cranks on the air, you know. And, "No, we're serious, we need some help." And, "Would you call 6138, or whatever it was, in Burns, Oregon, for us and tell them what our problem is?" And they did it.

CATHY: They did it.

AVEL: They called them. The people up here couldn't believe it, what was going on either. I always like that one, because it really worked, it just come through, boom! And that's a long ways. So we, very seldom that we weren't able to communicate.

CATHY: That's incredible. How many runs did you go on per week would you say as an average?

AVEL: Well in those days we would have lulls like you folks have now, I'm sure. I don't hear --- Air Flight flies over my house every time it comes in, so I know when they're coming and going. We had a lot more runs than you people have today for some reason. And I think a lot of it was Burns at that time was close to 4,000 people, and we had the Radar Base, and Job Corp, and Hines employed all those people.

And Hines was really good to us, because they were forced to have either a good ambulance service in the area, or put one in of their own. And so they made a deal with us that any of their employees that were on the fire department, like Dennis Richardson and Orville Cheek, and I don't know, there was more. If we needed those people to make a run, even an emergency, you know, like a car accident or a run to Portland, and I was having trouble finding people why I could just call out to the mill and say I need Dennis Richardson or Orville Cheek or somebody, and the foreman would get him, and he'd go.

And he got paid, he didn't lose any pay.

CATHY: He got paid by Edward Hines?

AVEL: Yeah, Edward Hines paid just like he was working. Which was a good deal for us, because they used it a lot, because they had a lot of wood accidents, and we'd, you know, take care of all their people.

So another good deal was, was Jim Ward and --- I didn't mention this the other day, Richard Watkins that runs the Palace now, they were both on the department, and they'd make deals out at the radio station. Jim would cover, he was the owner, one of the owners, he'd say yeah, you can take Rich, and I'll cover. Rich is supposed to open up tomorrow morning, but I'll open up for him. Or Rich would cover for Jim, and we could always depend on a real bad one, one of those two guys, because they'd work out something amongst themselves.

So it worked, I mean, the calls, I took all the calls at home, or at the cleaning shop, depend on where I was at. That's when I become fire chief. And I like to throw this in, I'd become fire chief on a temporary basis, and I was never appointed as a full time fire chief. I was temporary for thirteen years.

CATHY: Temporary for thirteen years?

AVEL: Yeah. (Laughter)

CATHY: What year was that that you were appointed temporary?

AVEL: Longest temporary job --- anyway that's a fact. And so I got all the calls, and I had a list of all the people I could depend --- on the department. And then the department got bigger, we was up to as high as forty men. We went from about twenty to forty --- and when I become fire chief, or whatever. And so ---

VALORIE: Was the fire chief always volunteer?

AVEL: Yeah, uh huh. So I'd take the calls at the cleaning plant, or at home. Unless I

was sick or something, I probably always had to call one person. I left the cleaning plant, I'd tell somebody to turn off that piece of equipment, or do this or that, that I had to be a going, and I'd make one call and we'd take off.

At night is when I got calls at home. Usually I would, if I couldn't get somebody right off the bat I'd tell my wife, I'd say, "Well there is a list, go down it until you find somebody, and I'll go down to get the ambulance started."

And when we first started out folks, our old ambulance was down here in Whiskey Flat, we couldn't find any place to house it, in an old warehouse out here in Whiskey Flat, and in the winter months the roads weren't plowed to it. And there was several times we had to have somebody hook on and pull us out of the barn.

And then where Safeway is now there was Johnson Pontiac, and somebody had a garage that they was going to demolish, and the fireman talked her out of it, I don't know who the gal was. And we jacked that thing up and put it on a trailer and put it in the back of Johnson Pontiac, and then we didn't have to have somebody tow us. And put a foundation under it, and that was our ambulance garage until they bought the old Consolidated Freight Station.

CATHY: And that's where Cramer's is now?

AVEL: Yeah, well where Nyleen's own it now.

CATHY: Oh.

AVEL: The old fire hall.

CATHY: Oh, okay, I know where that is.

AVEL: And the old --- none of the ambulances was ever around the old fire hall; there just wasn't room for it there at all.

So, I'm going to give you another incidence about it, I always thought it was kind of humorous. Get a call one morning, a car accident someplace, and I run down to the back

of Johnson's, and there is an old station wagon parked right in front of the ambulance door. And there is two drunks in it, and I can't wake them up. And I'm waiting for whoever is going to go with me, and I want these people out of there, and they got the doors locked. Used to have a lot of winos in Burns, and they'd come in there in the summer months and work in the hay fields and stuff, and then be gone. And this was a couple of those, and so I opened the ambulance door, or the garage door, and drove that ambulance up right next to the station wagon, the other guy had showed up, and I said, "Now watch this, I bet I get some attention." And I turned on that siren full blast, and that was a mistake, because they both bailed out of that old station wagon, and the last time I seen them they were going around Bradeen's there, which is the Castle now, they just, bare footed and all, they were gone. Because we had to push the old station wagon to hell out of there. But I got their attention all right. And so --- and I caught hell for that for a long time around the fire department. But it's just one of the fun parts of driving this thing I guess. Go ahead, ask me some questions. (Laughter)

CATHY: You're doing pretty good on your own. Tell me about the funniest run you ever made, involving patients that one was pretty good that you just told. But every medic, medical person has a story.

AVEL: Well, I don't know, we took Bob Smith, oldest boy, son, husband --- he joined the fire department for about a year, and I think the ambulance is what scared him off. And I think the run that scared him off was --- we took a patient that was really beat up to Woodland Park Hospital in Portland. And I got him to go with me; I think it was one of his first trips.

And we get to Woodland, and it's the only time I'd been to Woodland. It's a different hospital; at least it was in those days. And they got an emergency room, and their people --- motorcycle wrecks, and people that were beat up from family disputes,

and these doctors just can't take care of them.

I don't know if this was an every day thing, but it was that night, we get there about eight, nine o'clock at night. So we're waiting our turn, and we got two people that are really needing attention, you know. And I'm not getting no place, I'm talking to the desk, and, "Get in line." And fifteen, twenty emergencies ahead of us, and so we get in line.

Well Bob he, a little upset, you know, they're bringing people in. One young fellow just really beat up from a motorcycle wreck. He'd been there when we got there, and they'd take him in, and I don't even think they give him any shots, they just start working on him, you know, and he could watch him, you know.

And Bob, he's getting a little skittish, and so finally why I went and talked to one of the people again, and I said, "I'd like to get my patients out of this hallway because, you know, I've got them on gurneys." Well so they said, "Okay, well put them in that room over there." I wheeled them into a room, and Bob and I are kind of relaxing. Here come a couple of nurses and a doctor, and they got a patient, and they said, "What are you folks doing in here?" And well, "That's where they put us." "Well, get out of here, go out that door there."

So we go out that door and Bob is leading, taking the gurney first, and I'm going to come get the other one, and we're going out. He gets halfway out in the hallway and he won't go any further. And I push him, and he says, "Diaz, I can't go no further." "What's the matter?" Well there is a gal that somebody, and he watched her do it, they'd put a bedpan on this poor old gal, and it embarrassed Bob so much --- and they didn't even have a sheet on her. She was in a hospital bed in this hallway, and Bob ain't a going to go no further. And, "Bob, what's the matter?" And he said, "Well Diaz, come look." So I peered around, and I said, "Bob, that's just part of the game, you know."

So there this gal is on the bedpan, and here is our two patients, and we're in this

hallway, and Bob said, "Don't you ever, ever take me on another trip to Portland." I think that is about as humorous as I ever had, really. But, you know, it didn't bother me.

CATHY: That's good.

AVEL: I'd been in and out of them so much that --- go ahead.

CATHY: In the old original ambulance, I assume there was no electrical hook-ups for transporting babies and things like that. Tell us about those kind of ---

AVEL: Okay, again, beings you brought it up, we found out we needed a, because there was several times we had to haul preemies to Portland, and no way of hooking up an incubator. And so we'd use hot water bottles, and we had to stop and monitor the baby. And in those cases we always took a nurse with us. Teresa Clemens was good, and offhand --- and there was others. In those cases we always took a nurse with us.

And so, there again, back to Purdy and we got to have something in the back that will, that we can put an incubator or something, a 110 or something in it. So they come out with a generator underneath the hood and run off the engine. And so, I don't know whether it was our second or third ambulance that was equipped to haul, we could plug in anything we wanted.

And talking about Teresa, her and Todd Campbell and I took a baby from here to Doernbechers. Cold, wintery month, day, blizzard, and this little baby was born with no upper mouth and nose, a little preemie. And we had to shove a tube in its throat and feed it every few minutes. Then we'd have to have a bottle, and put that tube in a bottle. There was air coming out of it, we had it in the lungs instead of the stomach, and we stopped at Hampton and got some warm milk or something there, and we gassed up, and we had a hell of a time getting to Portland. I think it took us about eight hours. Storms, we run into a thing on Mt. Hood, a gas transport truck that had jackknifed and held up traffic. And we finally got around it after waiting an hour or so. We get to

Doernbechers and they're not going to take us in. No arrangements had been made apparently, they thought, for this baby. And, you know, we're not going to turn around and come back to Burns with it. So, I said, "Well there has been arrangements made." And the gal at the desk says, "No." And so about two o'clock in the morning I called Dr. John --- they wouldn't even let me use the phone, that's a fact; I had to go to a public phone. I didn't have no change, and I finally managed to get some change here and there, and went to a public phone and called Dr. John. And John can be pretty grumpy, he didn't like to be called on nothing at two o'clock in the morning. "John, this is Diaz, I'm here at the hospital and they claim that you didn't make arrangements for this baby, and what do I do?" And he says, "What do you mean, you hadn't made arrangements? I said, "Well that's what they said, there is no arrangements made and they won't take this baby in." He says, "You just hang up, I'll take care of that." I don't know what he told the desk, but things fell in place in a hurry anyway.

We got rid of the little baby, and of course I think it was a miracle, it didn't last; I think it died within three or four days. But we did our part; we did get the baby there. So, you know, everything wasn't --- especially when you go that far, and everything is done by phone, and once in awhile somebody would forget to tell them we were coming. And ---
VALORIE: So you didn't communicate directly with whatever your destination hospital was?

AVEL: No, we didn't have no way to communicating with them.

VALORIE: They'd communicate from here?

AVEL: Yeah.

VALORIE: Make the arrangements, and you just show up?

AVEL: Yeah, on the phone, uh huh. So we're out there in no man's land from the time we leave here, and we got there.

CATHY: Where were your stopping points as far as filling the hot water bottles, how frequently ---

AVEL: Oh, usually Madras. We'd stop at Northgate Union Oil Station there, north side of Bend, and then Madras, and then usually Government Camp, and then on into Portland.

VALORIE: Did you ever have car trouble on the way? What did you do, if you didn't even have change with you, if you had car trouble?

AVEL: Oh, we had car trouble, and we'd call --- it always seemed to be near Madras. And Oscar Lange that was from here, had come over here and picked up how we run our ambulance, and started an ambulance service with the fire department in Madras, so he was our out. Anytime we had problems in the Bend/Redmond, or anything going to Portland, we'd call Madras and they'd come pick up our patients and finish the route for us.

CATHY: How many, how often did you go to Portland?

AVEL: Oh, I'm not trying to shake you people up, because you're both on the ambulance crews, but it's going to scare you, we used to average darn near one a week.

CATHY: One run a week to Portland?

AVEL: Uh huh.

CATHY: And how often to Boise?

AVEL: Boise, about one a month.

CATHY: Well that's about what we average going to Bend, I think.

AVEL: Well that's what I say, you guys go to Bend, we had to go to Portland or Boise.

VALORIE: And how many hours, you said a long trip was eight hours to Portland, what was the normal trip?

AVEL: Oh, normal trip, we could leave here, if the patient wasn't an emergency, these doctors cooperated with us, they'd make our runs of an evening. So nobody would lose

work, you know, the working people that worked with us. And so we'd leave here say five, six in the evening, like to Portland. And we'd be back by, we'd get rid of our patient, gas up, eat, we always ate good, went to the best steak houses in Portland when we got rid of our patients. And we'd usually get back say six, seven o'clock the next morning, make a round trip.

CATHY: I think that's still part of the protocol, isn't it?

AVEL: Yeah, I imagine.

VALORIE: Does Dr. White know that?

AVEL: Huh? No. And I think the fastest trip we made was Al Wynn, there was a gal from Seneca, and we had to have her in Emanuel Hospital in, under five hours from Burns. And we had a police escort, we had a police escort from Burns all the way to Emanuel, and ---

SIDE B

AVEL: Al Wynn's dad and I went to Alaska --- and passed away up there, and his wife still lives, has moved back. So we took off with this police escort, State Police from here to Hampton, local, the Bend State Police met us there and they'd take us on into Bend. And then they took us on into Redmond. And then the Madras people met us at Redmond, and they took us to Mt. Hood, or Government Camp. And then the Gresham, this Multnomah County Police people, sheriff's people took over there, and they took us into the hospital. And it's no fun driving a big long seven-ton Cadillac ambulance following a patrol car. And they were driving a hundred; I'm not lying to you, a hundred, a hundred and ten miles an hour.

CATHY: And you were keeping up with them?

AVEL: And they'd give us hell, they'd call, we were able to communicate, and they'd say

you're not keeping up with us. And we could keep up with them on the straight stretches, but when they got to passing, going around traffic, they would just --- We just couldn't maneuver that fast. And especially, across the desert and all the way to Government Camp we didn't have no problems, but once we picked up the Multnomah County people, and through Gresham and Sandy traffic damn near bumper-to-bumper, and it was in the daytime, it wasn't a night run. And we stopped once for gas, and they argued with us on that, you know. Well we got to stop, because we're going to run out of gas. I think we stopped in Madras and got gas and was able to go on through. And we were there in about four hours, and as I recall about fifteen minutes from here to Emanuel Hospital.

And Al and I are, you know --- I told these doctors up here, I said, "Well if we had to do it, we probably would, but never, just let us take our chances, and no police escort that far because it just, it was just too nerve wracking. That's probably the most nerve wracking trip I made was --- I mean you're just under constant pressure, you're trying to keep up, and they're maneuvering, and you can't.

The gal had kidney failure, and we got her there in time, she lived and come back to Seneca. And they said if we hadn't of done it that --- and they was trying to fly that gal out, and couldn't make arrangements, the weather wasn't good.

And Mercy Flight, in those days, only way you could fly anybody out of Burns was called Mercy Flight in Medford. Because they were equipped, no other airplane was equipped in those days to haul patients. So you had to wait for Mercy Flight to come from Medford here, so time wise, you didn't save really a heck of a lot.

CATHY: What was the most traumatic run you ever made?

AVEL: Well there was so many of them. Probably the worst one was a local child about twelve years old got hit in the back of the head with a, kicked in the head with a horse. Well anyway, vegetable dead, and still breathing, and we met the mother and neighbor

out here to the Double O road. It happened out in the Double O country. And they loaded this child up and we transferred her in the ambulance. And I tried to keep the mother from getting in the back with me because, I would say ninety percent of the runs I made they were emergency. I always, I never drove back; I usually worked in the back. And here was this mother, you know, I'd be the same way. What are you doing for my child? And I realized I couldn't do nothing, you know. Although the child was still breathing and I put a respirator on her, and I forget what they call them now, where you ---

VALORIE: ...

AVEL: Yeah, we didn't have respirators like you have now. And anyway I just went through the motions for thirty-five, forty minutes that I was --- that's all I could do. Keep the mother calm and assure her that I was doing everything I could and save this person. Although I knew with the whole back of the skull was gone, just completely gone.

So, every time I see that woman, I see her, she's still here. You know --- the reason I hate to see her is this; it doesn't bother me as much as, not that she was unhappy with me, because I knew she realized I did everything I could. But I think every time she sees me, she thinks of that child, you know. And she doesn't need that, so if I see her coming down the street or something, I'll --- no use bringing up old memories.

CATHY: So those things hang with you for a long time.

AVEL: Uh huh.

CATHY: Evidently.

AVEL: Uh huh. I'm going to give you one more humorous, because you're all women. Dennis Richardson and I was called up to the Arrowhead Hotel, some gal had taken an overdose and she was --- and we go up in her room and she's got a girlfriend. And again like Bob Smith, this gal is in bed and she's --- and we want to get her up to the hospital so they could pump her out, you know. And she has no clothes on, but she is in bed, you

know, proper way.

And we had our own way, you people do the same thing, you throw a sheet over a patient and pull the covers out from under her, or off of her, and then wrap her with the sheet, no exposure, we didn't want to expose anybody, man, woman, or child, you know. But her partner didn't want that, she had to put a pair of baby doll pajamas on this gal to get her to the hospital, and I kept saying it wasn't necessary. And she insisted that we wasn't going to take her until --- okay, go for it.

But she can't get the pajamas on her, because hell she is just a rag. And I'd say, "Well forget it." And she says, "No, I don't want you people to see," you know. I said, "I'm going to tell you something," it was twenty below zero that night, cold, about three o'clock in the morning, I said, "I'm going to tell you something, and I'm going to tell you right, I probably left something better at home in a nice warm bed, and I didn't come up here to see this." And Dennis said, "Damn you Diaz, leave it to you." Well I was --- so we got her the hell out of there! And never did get no pajamas on!

But what else do you tell them at three o'clock in the morning. I said, "God I just left a warm bed, and I probably left something a lot better than this at home, and I don't need to come up here and do this, you know." Dennis said, "You son-of-a-gun you." Anyway, I thought that was kind of humorous. (Laughter)

CATHY: Yeah, that's good.

... (Pause for videotape change.)

AVEL: No, it was, you know, you could sit here and talk I suppose forever. But ---

VALORIE: Well it seems like there is always problems that we have a funny feeling, you know, that even if you did everything you could ---

AVEL: Oh yeah.

VALORIE: And then there is calls that you look back and you just crack up, there is just --

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AVEL: Oh yeah. And so anyway, that was another good one I think that always, I always caught hell for that one too. Dennis had to tell everybody in the fire department what I'd done. But I'm not bragging, but we usually, you know, we didn't dilly-dally around. And you can't, you know, you people the same way; you can't go pick up ---

CATHY: Right.

AVEL: --- a patient and be harassed by friends or family. I'm going to tell you one more. There was a family come into Burns, moved in here, and they weren't here long and they had a little baby that had to go to Mayo's Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, and no money. So Bill Allen and I got the husband a job with the road department, and the Jay-Ceetes had got a bunch of people together and we met at the Palace and we needed some money to send this family back to Rochester.

So Bill and I was in charge of the money, and they said it would take five thousand dollars to do it. So they got our five thousand and over, so Bill and I decided that anything over five we'd, you know, give it back to you if you give it, might need it some other time. And so these checks kept coming in, and we sent them back. And the family found out about it, that we had turned down these checks. And the next thing was the Jay-Ceetes was going to send the whole darn family, and Bill and I said, "No, you're just sending the mother, the child." And they took a local nurse with them, had a heart problem.

And so that finally come to pass, and the parents were mad at Bill and I. And so several months later after the little baby come back, and I get a call down by the, where the gas bulk plants are. And it was cold, another cold day, early in the morning, and I get Elmer Cooper to help me, and there is two families living in the ... neighbors there, they were relatives. Grandma lived in one, and the family in the other, and I had never met these people that we sent to Rochester, had never met them on one and one.

And Grandma is in the back porch in a chair, and she has passed away, she's had a heart attack. And we go, and I says, "Well, she's gone," you know. And how come she is in the back porch, it was cold, below zero weather? Well we moved her from the other house over here.

And well, you know, there is nothing we can do for you, and I've got to call Dr. John. And I called Dr. John up and told him what we had. And he says, "Well no foul play?" And I said, "No, it's definitely a heart attack." So he says, "Well get a hold of Bob Salladay."

So Elmer Cooper made a mistake of saying, "Diaz, let's get out of here." And the crap hit the fan. Hey, these people are going to kick all kinds of hell out of me. It was the same people that went to Rochester and they knew that Bill and I had cut their funds off at five thousands bucks. And boy, that was their money, that I was a no good cheap so and so. And Delmer, or Elmer, had to keep them from attacking me because, you know, I had even forgot about that kid.

And here we are six months later picking up Grandma. And Elmer makes a mistake of saying Diaz, and, "So you're Diaz, huh, well you're the son-of-a-bitch that" --- so then the fight is on, and then I get mad of course. Now I'm not a person that gets mad too quick, but I was a little upset that night. Go ahead.

CATHY: Well you're doing real good on your own. When the ambulance was first started, you were under Dr. Campbell's protocol?

AVEL: Mostly.

CATHY: Mostly.

AVEL: And he, in fact, I don't know, we had insurance and stuff through the city all right. We did make arrangements for that, city's blanket policy, well the ambulances themselves, in case they were wrecked. But Dr. Campbell some way or another had on

his policy, that if any of us was ever sued for malpractice, that his malpractice insurance would take care of us.

CATHY: Do you know when that switched over to being under Dr. Morrison's?

AVEL: Long after I ---

CATHY: It was after?

AVEL: Yeah, after I quit.

CATHY: Okay. What year did you quit?

AVEL: Because when I was still running it, Dr. Campbell was our main source of ---

CATHY: What year did you ---

AVEL: 1977 I think, it was the year after I become County Clerk.

VALORIE: I understand that Dr. Campbell actually wrote some of the protocols for the whole state.

AVEL: He did, that's what I say, he was --- again I'm giving Burns people a lot of credit here, maybe some of it is not due, but I think it is. I think we're the first ones that started an ambulance service through fire departments. Madras followed us, Oscar come over here and visited with us. They went on a different program than we did. They went on, like Air Flight, right off the bat, sold subscriptions for whatever, and then that entitled your whole family to ambulance service regardless.

We went to John Day and helped them get theirs set up. We went to Vale and helped them get theirs set up. I'm not trying to brag, but we're the ones that decided that you had to carry more than four people in an ambulance. You had to have more emergency equipment in ambulances because of our distances. And up until we really got into it, you know, most ambulances were city, I mean within cities, and ten, fifteen minutes from care centers and hospitals.

And the mortician when he run it, no first aid at all, just pick up somebody and take

them to the hospital. And then we started to improve on it, or give a little better care. And then that's the way the State Board of Health got into it.

And Orville Corbett was a member of the State Board of Health, and the years that, the last few years he was on the Board he kept these administrative rules down that were compatible to us. He fought him, bless his heart, he --- because we were getting into a world of, you know, paper work world of, you know, you people are under it today. You know how hard it is, we didn't have all that. And Orville, bless his heart, for I'd say, kept things under control for about five, six years. And then when he got off the Oregon State Board of Health, which is an appointed job, why it just boomeranged; it just went to where it is today.

VALORIE: So you didn't have to keep records?

AVEL: We kept records, but ---

VALORIE: Was it just like local records, you didn't have to send them in?

AVEL: Yeah, uh huh, we kept records. And I don't know where they are today. They were at the old fire hall. Yeah, we kept records, and we kept what we give people, what we did for them. And we had a regular check off to what we had to do and didn't have to do. But they got into, you know, as far as I'm concerned, you people are, not bragging on you, are far superior to what we were. Your training is better, and you people are closer to being doctors or nurses, you know. A lot of my people, when we started giving, had us start giving IV's and stuff, they just said no, we don't want no part of it. See, so ---

VALORIE: What did you give for IV's, what was the ---

AVEL: Whatever --- see that's it, we weren't that well trained. Whatever Dr. Morrison said, now you do this, or this, and that, and they'd give us --- see we were, we weren't as -- see I don't, we just weren't equipped to do what you people are doing.

VALORIE: Yeah, but ---

AVEL: Well we wouldn't give; we didn't give anything in this --- see we couldn't give anything unless a doctor told us to give it. And they would give us what we had to give, and they'd say --- I don't know what they'd give us, IV balls, going out here on a car wreck, and you put this in their vein. And we didn't know what we was a giving them. See you people know what you're giving them.

VALORIE: Yeah, but the training, that gives, you guys went out there blind.

AVEL: Yeah, that's what I'm saying.

VALORIE: And if the training helps, you know, but you had to go on guts.

AVEL: Yeah, we just, that's what I say, we run ---

CATHY: What do you see as the most beneficial advances and innovations that have come to pass on the ambulance?

AVEL: Since, from the time ---

CATHY: From 1956 until now?

AVEL: Oh, better crews, better equipment; you don't need big Cadillac ambulances like we thought we did. The reason we went Cadillac folks, is that was all you seen, you know, was Cadillac Superior ambulances. They didn't have vans and --- if you bought an ambulance you had to buy --- well, either a Superior, or there was another Cadillac ambulance, we finally bought one of those, forget what make it was, it wasn't Superior.

We found out as we went along that an ambulance on a truck chassis was probably better, more working room, we never had working room you people have. We felt we died and went to heaven when we got our first cracker box. You know you could stand up, and you could --- and those Cadillac's, you couldn't stand up in them. All your work was done --- but you know, things just changed.

You don't see a Cadillac ambulance anyplace today; they're just, their extinct. So there is an advance that we've --- they decided they didn't need all that fancy stuff, and

they are high enough as it is. I don't know what a new ambulance costs today, but the last one we bought was a Cadillac ambulance in about 1976, '75. We thought, my god, we paid \$47,000 for the damn thing, and probably \$20,000 of it was Cadillac. So I think you've advanced there, I think you're better equipped, you got more room to carry equipment, you got more storage space. Can you imagine crawling in the back of an old, well a hearse today, and having all the equipment that you have in your ambulance today? No, it just --- We were crowded when we got everything in our, back end of our ambulance. I stop by and look in yours every once in awhile and it's at the emergency room, you people are inside, and god it's super. So you guys don't know I'm doing that, see I'm not checking on you, I'm not doing it too often, but I know you got another ambulance or something. But god, look at this thing, you know, I'm envious.

VALORIE: In there drooling.

AVEL: Yeah.

CATHY: Maybe we should get him signed back up.

AVEL: And --- hey, that's one thing I really feel bad about, and I'm going to put it right out. When I quit, and I made arrangements with the --- I didn't have to, but I told the County Court what I wanted to do, because I was an elected official and the County Court didn't hold any strings over me.

But I wanted, and I told Jeff, and Jim, and Ward, and Mark Rines, and even told Briels, anytime they needed a driver, and I'm getting too old now, but this was say the twelve years I was up at the Clerk's office, which was sixteen, no it was sixteen years. That anytime they needed, got in a bind and needed somebody to drive, that I would take a little training and make sure that I was qualified in case they wanted somebody like an EMT. And I was willing to help them drive, because I could get away, because I knew how hard it was to get drivers at times.

And so help me god, nobody ever called me, so I just --- but I offered. Not bragging, I offered them all my services. And I was at the Clerk's office, because I could drop, unless it was election time or something, or a trial, I could drop everything, especially on a car wreck locally, or long runs.

Say you've got to transfer somebody to Bend, and it was just a transfer, even I could drive that. I drove enough of them. Nobody's ever called me back; maybe they thought well he'd done his share, whatever. And I don't feel bad about it; I was available if they wanted me, that's the bottom line.

CATHY: When the ambulance was first started, it wasn't under the administration of the city, was it?

AVEL: No, that was, that was something that, I don't know, it had its good points, had its bad points. Where we did our own billing, and we paid for trips, and we had our own credit cards independent of the city, gas cards, our own bank accounts, our own savings.

We --- the only thing the city did for us, as I told you earlier, was insurance and license. And we bought our own tires, we didn't have to go to anybody for equipment, if we needed equipment, we had money. If something new would come up, why we just have a meeting, and we met just like you people do, and we always had one half hour that pertained to ambulance, and if there was anything the ambulance needed, why it was voted on.

And what got the ambulance in trouble was, financially was, there was a certain gentleman here that got on city council or something, and he got to feuding with the fire chief and thought all the money should go to the general fund. And then he, they bucked him. And then he wanted to join the Elks and several firemen went to the Elks and these are --- long before your girl's days, or even Briels' day, and they black balled this fellow,

and then the fight started.

So he went, he spent hours and hours, probably six months, going through all the ambulance records, got them out of the old fire hall, and check books and expenditures. And then he's the one that found that there were monies taken to make supposedly down payments on houses, and help somebody finance a pickup. And then in the due process he found for a period of, even when Jim Richardson was running it, so a period of maybe thirteen years that I run it, and probably five or six that Jim run it, say a period of twenty years where most of the money on night trips and emergencies come out of Quality Cleaners, because I owned the Quality Cleaners. So say you two people had to go to Portland, and I'd call you at one o'clock at night, and I never had a checkbook. Dan Kincheloe kept the checkbook at the bank, and I didn't keep any petty cash, so I'd run down to the cleaning shop and meet these guys at the fire hall and I'd give them twenty, thirty, forty bucks cash out of the Cleaners. And if it wasn't out of the Cleaners, if I had it in my pocket, I'd give them out of my pocket. And sometimes I'd wait, you know, I couldn't run up town every time there was a call to get my twenty or thirty bucks. But I kept everything on paper, though I'd take the trip cards and take them to Dan. I'd say, "Dan, I'm out a hundred and fifty dollars, two hundred dollars." And he'd make the checks out to Quality Cleaners, because that's, I felt that's where the money come from. And then I'd put it back in the bank.

And he found all these checks made out to Quality Cleaners, and I realized my mistakes now, that wasn't the way to run the ship. It was all innocent. And I could verify just about every trip on, against the checks that were written, and of course all the firemen ---

They had a grand jury investigation and it embarrassed the hell out of me. And although I wasn't involved with this gentleman being black balled, or whatever --- And

that's when the city, and then there was no money left anyway, I don't know what happened. When I left, and quit this fire chief, we had fifty-five thousand dollars in savings, about fifteen thousand in checking, and everything was paid for. And Dan Kincheloe's and my goal was, and we was working at that goal, was to get that savings built up to a hundred, a hundred and fifty thousand bucks and then have a perpetual fund to keep this ambulance going.

And after that aftermath, why the city got, you know, you people know a lot more about that than I do. But if I had to do it over again, I'd have went --- yes I've probably had, when I had money coming, instead of just having Dan make a check out to Quality Cleaners, probably should have gone through some law office, you know, to have some one like Bill Cramer and them have that part. Say okay; verify Diaz has got some money coming.

That part, because it was trust money, you know, people give you donations and they trust. And that's the big fight that this guy got into was the fire department at that time, Jim Ward, or Pat Ward, I said Jim earlier, but Pat Ward and Mark, and they were all good people, but they were trying to run it the way we run it, and things got a little different and they didn't think it was trust money. And I guess I didn't, and I knew it was trust money, and they just figured it was their money to do. There was just two conceptions, I knew it wasn't my money. If you give me a hundred dollars, I knew that you trusted me, and that was a trust, you know. And they were younger, and ---

But I don't know, I don't know how you people operate, I think being one of the old timers, and one of the originals, I'd like to seen it stay the way it was. I think you people -- - this is a personal feeling, I think the city has enough headaches without being involved in the ambulance.

Today if you need a new ambulance you've got to go through city hall. We never

asked the city for --- when we wanted an ambulance we bought it. If we wanted a set of tires, we bought it. And I'd go to all the service clubs once a year, and Chamber and tell them what we were doing, and give them some financial, not to the dollar, but how we were doing financially.

And now I'm bragging I guess, and I don't intend to. I walked up town a lot going to U.S. Bank to make deposits from the business, and I'd run into people and say, "Oh, how you doing Ben?" "Well I haven't given the ambulance any money yet," write me out a check for ten, fifteen dollars, you know. This was a fact, and I think it would work again today. But it won't happen.

DOROTHEA: That's something that I think should go down on this, is how you got your money from the patients. It was all volunteer services. They did not charge, the ambulance did not charge the people.

AVEL: No, we send you a bill. We billed everybody. And we send a card with this bill, this is not a bill, you do not owe this. Gosh, some of those cards ought to be around. And if you've got any insurance, would you turn this bill into your insurance company, because we would like to have that insurance money. But this is not an obligation, and we never billed that person again. You just got one notice.

VALORIE: Was that just for people in Harney County, or did you do that for everybody?

AVEL: Just Harney County people. Now out of town people we billed them, and we didn't collect all of those. Mostly, even those people, if they didn't have insurance, normally you know we weren't a viable business, so we couldn't go after them through J.P. or Small Claims. We tried to collect that money, yes. We'd send them people several notices, but they didn't get that little card. Anybody in Harney County is the only one that got that little card. And I would say off the top of my head, and I think I'm pretty close, out of those cards we probably collected forty percent on insurances. A lot of

people didn't have insurances. And the rest of the sixty, sometime along the line we might get a ten dollar donation for something. They didn't have the money.

CATHY: How much did it cost for a run to Portland?

AVEL: Well gas and oil and the meals, well the boys ate good, and if we took a nurse along we paid for her dinner, and we figured on the average run with gas and oil, and whatever incidentals, usually used to run about a hundred and twenty dollars counting meals and everything. Basic, give them forty dollars cash, they'd always give the money back.

There was something else, when they brought money back, they'd take it to the bank, they wouldn't bring it to me, because I didn't want it back, because it made bookkeeping for me. So I'd say, say you two went and you had twenty dollars, I gave you forty, and you used thirty of it, so the ten would go back to Dan Kincheloe.

CATHY: And your volunteers were never paid were they?

AVEL: No, no, no.

CATHY: You guys did this for twenty some years on a strictly volunteer basis?

AVEL: Uh huh, yeah.

CATHY: How long did the firemen go without pay to help pay for the ambulance?

AVEL: Three years.

CATHY: Three years.

AVEL: Just --- we went on a three-year program, and like I say we paid for it in a year and a half, and then the firemen started getting paid again.

But there was another stipulation on that \$2500 see, we had to have that on the first of August, and the city was a little reluctant, because they were just starting a new budget year, and the tax dollars haven't come in yet. See they don't come in until November, and we had to have that money on the first day of August, because that's

when we bought our ambulance, see. So it was just starting a new tax year, and --- so they wrote out us a check for \$2500 the first day of August and we'd send it to Purdy. And there was something else, we got the check. They didn't send the check to Purdy; the check was made out to the Burns Volunteer Fire Department, city check. We put it in the bank and we'd send it to Portland. See, the city had nothing to do with it. They was --- but ---

DOROTHEA: Now you're saying a name, and you've mentioned it several times, and those days it was also called the Burns Volunteer Ambulance ---

AVEL: Yeah, ambulance.

DOROTHEA: --- and Fire Department. Now it is ---

AVEL: Yeah.

CATHY: Burns Ambulance.

DOROTHEA: Burns Ambulance.

VALORIE: Burns Ambulance and they say Burns Emergency Services.

AVEL: And I don't know how you people are doing, but we got so that, and Dorothea knows what I'm talking about, we had a little better cooperation with the radio station, because Jim was one of the fire officers, Ward, and Watkins, god he was super. And when somebody passed away, they just, for years it was just automatic, make your donations to the Burns Ambulance. And folks, we've got as high as a thousand, twelve hundred dollars from a funeral. And this happened not just once a year, but this would happen thirty, forty times a year. So you can talk about money, that's how we were able to pay cash and buy a thirty thousand dollar ambulance or a forty. Buy two of them, or, you see what I'm saying?

CATHY: Uh huh.

AVEL: Even I, for some reason, up until about five, six years ago, I used to always give

money to the ambulance on a death. I don't anymore, I got out of the habit, and besides I don't hear about it anymore. And you can remember when we used to ---

DOROTHEA: Everybody donated to the Burns Ambulance.

AVEL: And we didn't ask for it, it just got, a word by mouth, those guys are doing a good job, and that's a good place to put your money.

DOROTHEA: The guys belonged to several organizations, if they wanted to donate something; they always donated to the Burns Ambulance.

AVEL: And there is money out there. I don't know how to, you know, I'm in no position to say, nobody likes to collect money because somebody passed away, but we're all going to pass away. And I don't know if you people still get a lot of money that way or not. But I think the reason you don't, people are not going to donate money because it goes through the city coffers.

VALORIE: I think too, that whenever they do the obituary they ask the family to specify, the money that goes to the Cancer Society, and they are all good ---

AVEL: Oh yeah, I'm not ---

VALORIE: But the thing is, the ambulance is local, and we're going to use that money to -
--

AVEL: Yeah. And in those days I would say, and I think Dorothea will agree with me, probably seventy percent of the funerals in Harney County donated, donations were made to the ambulance, it was just automatic.

CATHY: I found out ---

AVEL: And then we would, what we would do, we had a card file, and say you send us money, two or three of us would sit down and send the family, not the amounts, that we received money from --- and then we'd send them a little card so they could send to the family thanking them for their donation. So we had a system. But I don't know.

CATHY: So you kept your own books as well?

AVEL: Yeah, up until the time George Sahlberg joined the fire department, well we had three bookkeepers in the time I was on there, they were firemen. There was Norman McRae, and then he left, and Dan Kincheloe, and then he left, and George Sahlberg. And then George was, he was still in the Armory and the National Guard, and starting to work at the hospital, and his time become more precious.

And Bethene Pulliam come to me and said, "I'd like to do your books for you." And god, would you, you know. And she took over all our books, and god she did a good job. She was billing, she was sending out the donation cards, she did the whole ball of wax. And this, you know, was time consuming. And there again, for one reason, for no reason at all, after I resigned why within six months she come talked to me, and she said, "Diaz, what have I done wrong?" "I don't know what you're talking about." "And they've taken the books away from me, and they want to do them." And it was a good setup. And she, you know, did a good job.

CATHY: I've got another question I guess.

AVEL: There is so many things into this, that you can, hell we could talk for a week and never touch all the corners.

CATHY: I have one question that I missed. How many patients, what was the most patients you ever carried in one run, in your rig?

AVEL: Had a truck wreck out here by Wagontire, and we just took one ambulance out, because we didn't know what we was --- and it was dark. And there was some guy from Texas with a truckload of wetbacks, and he rolled it between Wagontire and Riley.

And we'd get out there, and the State Police were there, and I forget who the patrolman was. And I said, "How many patients we got?" "Hell Diaz," he says, "I don't know," he says, "I haven't found them all." And (Laughter) I ain't kidding you folks, we're

going out through the sagebrush with flashlights, and they're not hurt bad, and they're scared, they're hiding, you know. They're in a, kind of like a cattle truck, and this old boy rolls it. And there were three that were hurt real bad, and the State Policeman put all he could in his car, and we had them packed like, I don't know, we must have had ten, fifteen. We had four or five in the front seat. Couldn't work on the ones that were hurt. And we had Mexicans jammed in the back of that ambulance like sardines in a sardine can.

And we stopped at the jail first and got rid of them, and then went to the hospital because we couldn't (Laughter) that was the most right there. And you'd shine your light out in the sagebrush, and pretty soon another head would pop up, you know. And come on

"no-habla," and I don't speak Spanish, you know. I speak Basque all right, but I don't speak Spanish. I said, "No-habla Amigo," and they'd --- I shine a light on, their eyes would get big, you know, and they'd say, well this old kid speaks Spanish, we're all right, you know, and then they'd rattle off Spanish to me, and I'd say, "No entendimiento, I don't understand you," you know. We were out there an hour picking up those --- Anyway ---

CATHY: How did all the work you, all the volunteer work you did for the ambulance, how did that affect your family life?

AVEL: You'd have to ask May about that. She never complained.

CATHY: She never complained.

AVEL: And I probably, probably donated more time to it than I should have, family wise. But that's not only that, I was tied up from so many other things that --- so ---

VALORIE: I think that's probably true now, if you're a volunteer, how do you draw the line and say this is enough?

AVEL: Yeah, you don't. You know, even now I find myself, somebody wants to do

something, god I hate to say no, but I'm learning to say no, you know. After all, about time I'm learning to say no.

VALORIE: You'll have to teach us a class on how to say no.

AVEL: Yeah.

(END OF TAPE)

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