

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #333 - Side A

Subject: Peggy Sitz

Place: Harney County Library - Burns, Oregon

Date: April 27, 1989

Interviewer: Paquita Garatea

PAQUITA GARATEA: Today is April 27th, 1989; we are in Burns, Oregon at the Harney County Library. The interviewer is Paquita Garatea, interviewee Peggy Sitz. Could you please state your name, and date and place of birth?

PEGGY SITZ: Okay, Peggy Sitz, November 20th, 1929 in Bismarck, North Dakota.

PAQUITA: And why did your family, and when did they migrate to Burns?

PEGGY: Okay, my dad was a principal of the schools, and I came in '44 from North Dakota.

PAQUITA: To be the principal of the ---

PEGGY: Burns Grade School.

PAQUITA: Burns Grade School. And what was your mother's occupation, did she work?

PEGGY: She taught school for about three years, and then she was the Harney County Librarian for twenty-four years.

PAQUITA: And so you were, how old were you when you moved here?

PEGGY: I was a sophomore in high school.

PAQUITA: Sophomore in high school. So you attended Burns Union High School?

PEGGY: Three years.

PAQUITA: Three years. And graduated?

PEGGY: Yes, from Burns High School.

PAQUITA: In what year?

PEGGY: 1947.

PAQUITA: And then did you further your education?

PEGGY: I went to college for three years. I went to Willamette one year, and OCE for two years and received a teaching certificate.

PAQUITA: And you've always lived in, and you've lived in Burns the remainder?

PEGGY: Yes.

PAQUITA: How many years now?

PEGGY: Well from '44 till now.

PAQUITA: Now since my thesis is about the Basque community, when and how did you become acquainted with the Basque community?

PEGGY: Okay. Margaret Osa Garatea was my first encounter with the Basques, and she was a classmate and friend, and she took me under cover, and it has been friendship from then on.

PAQUITA: So the first time you went to her house, it was, can you describe it? What was your first impression?

PEGGY: Oh, I was impressed with the hotel, living in a hotel, that impressed me very much. I liked that style of life they had there.

PAQUITA: Could you, could you describe it? Did it seem foreign?

PEGGY: Oh yes it did, because I felt like sitting there they were always talking about me, because I couldn't understand what they said. But, however they weren't. And I think perhaps what impressed me most, or perhaps not most, is the way the men were fed and the women ate later. They never seemed to sit down with the family.

PAQUITA: And the atmosphere, was it happy?

PEGGY: Happy, loud.

PAQUITA: Loud.

PEGGY: The Basques in their talking were loud, yes.

PAQUITA: You thought it was loud?

PEGGY: I thought it was loud, yes, everyone talking. That's, appeared to me that everyone was talking at once. And perhaps they weren't, but that's how I felt, it sounded like to me.

PAQUITA: Did they make you feel welcome, or did you feel like an outsider?

PEGGY: Oh no, they made me feel welcome, yeah, oh yes, uh huh.

PAQUITA: The boarders too?

PEGGY: Uh huh. Oh yes, and I felt the men were more friendly than the women, or else they were more cordial than the women, because I wasn't around the women as much. It was just usually Margarita there.

PAQUITA: Uh huh.

PEGGY: And then all the boarders, so not too many women were around.

PAQUITA: Uh huh. Did you interact with the boarders? Could you, since --- did they speak good enough English for you to talk with them?

PEGGY: Some of them did, and some of them didn't. Some of them just spoke Basque and that was it, or Spanish. So ---

PAQUITA: Did you ever eat with the family?

PEGGY: Oh yes.

PAQUITA: Could you describe the food?

PEGGY: I loved it. I liked the soup, and that perhaps is my favorite. Well I like most of it, uh huh. I think, looking back now, there were never many cakes or pies, no desserts as such other than the flan.

PAQUITA: Uh huh.

PEGGY: And I don't think they are very prevalent yet, you don't hear of many Basques baking cakes, or being famous for their baking.

PAQUITA: No, they're not. Could you describe your perception of the division of labor in the house?

PEGGY: Well the women did all the work. (Laughter)

PAQUITA: All the --- did you ever see the men ---

PEGGY: Perhaps chopping wood and yard work, yes, perhaps they did that. However, I don't remember that much. But looking around now I can see a lot of them do the yard work.

PAQUITA: Could you describe their work, did you ever hang around there the whole day to see what the running of the boarding house would entail?

PEGGY: Well Margaret and Connie did a lot of cleaning all the time. And the cooking, I don't remember --- well I'm sure Margarita cleaned, but the kids did most of the cleaning. And she did the cooking, so ---

PAQUITA: And did they have to, they had to make the beds every single day?

PEGGY: Oh yes. Yes they did.

PAQUITA: Did they ever get much time off?

PEGGY: Well I don't think, if we wanted to go to the dances I think she was, yeah, I don't think that was prohibited to her. But Saturdays was always a very busy day, as I remembered going through school.

PAQUITA: In comparison with the non-Basque friends that you had, did you think, did they have to work harder?

PEGGY: In relation to my situation, yes they did, uh huh.

PAQUITA: Uh huh.

PEGGY: I think one noticeable thing, which I noticed right on, and it continues now, is the

way they dress their children. They were spotless, and they were --- if the mother had any handiwork the children all wore it and it was lovely work. And they still do the same thing now.

PAQUITA: What other Basque cultural traditions did you observe that still existed?

PEGGY: The parties, they had New Year's parties when they used to have them here. I always was able to attend those.

PAQUITA: What did you think of the music?

PEGGY: I liked it, yes. I never did learn to do the Jota.

PAQUITA: You never did learn to do the dance.

PEGGY: I tried it, and ---

PAQUITA: Did you ever learn any Basque?

PEGGY: No, just a few words. (Laughter)

PAQUITA: And what about card playing, did you ever observe any of that going on?

PEGGY: No, no, huh uh.

PAQUITA: And not with the women either?

PEGGY: No.

PAQUITA: No.

PEGGY: No, I didn't.

PAQUITA: Uh huh. What about the men, you never?

PEGGY: No, no, not down at the boarding house. I don't remember them playing cards at all. They just would visit, they would eat and visit.

PAQUITA: Uh huh. And did they usually eat in the kitchen when you were there?

PEGGY: Yes, uh huh.

PAQUITA: And then if they had a big banquet they would go in the living room?

PEGGY: If they had a big banquet they went in the --- uh huh.

PAQUITA: So now that the boarding houses, the two of them, the Plaza and the Star aren't functioning as boarding houses anymore, do you think that the Basque cultural traditions will still remain in Burns?

PEGGY: Hmm.

PAQUITA: Well let me put it this way, do you think the boarding houses were responsible or helped to maintain the cultural traditions?

PEGGY: Yes, I do believe they did, definitely.

PAQUITA: And now that they don't exist ---

PEGGY: Now that they don't, they don't have that communication or meetings that they used to have.

PAQUITA: What do you think that the contributions of the Basque community have been to Burns?

PEGGY: I think they have contributed, if their children were in school, they always contributed there. And their work habits are excellent. Finances, they have a good grasp of currency and money. No, they contributed in any way and every way possible as far as I know.

PAQUITA: Economically and ---

PEGGY: Very much so.

PAQUITA: Culturally and ---

PEGGY: And they are very conscious of paying their bills.

PAQUITA: So you would say they have a good reputation ---

PEGGY: Very good reputation.

PAQUITA: --- in Burns. So looking back at it, do you think it was, are you glad you had that experience?

PEGGY: I am very pleased. I don't know when I've had --- the friends that I have realized

from it has been lasting.

PAQUITA: Great. Okay, thank you very much.

PEGGY: Oh, you're very welcome.

PAQUITA: Oh, I want to bring up another question I just thought of. Did you have a chance to spend any time at the Star, the other boarding house?

PEGGY: No, I did not.

PAQUITA: Never?

PEGGY: No.

PAQUITA: So you don't know, you can't make a comparison.

PEGGY: I can't make a comparison, no.

PAQUITA: No. Did you ever notice any competitiveness between them?

PEGGY: Well I knew that there was two sides to the problems that were going on in the Basque country, which divided the people here. But I was never involved in any of the conversations, or just hearsay is what I've heard. But there was a pretty strong division between them.

PAQUITA: And you know Burns is unique in that, because most research I've done on the Basques that have come to the new world, the political situation in the Basque country has not affected the communities. But Burns, most people are telling me, have told me that very definite division.

PEGGY: Well I think they were supporting one side or the other over there, which caused them to divide here then.

PAQUITA: And that didn't happen in any other Basque community.

PEGGY: In any other. Not in Boise at all?

PAQUITA: No.

PEGGY: Oh.

PAQUITA: So, do you think that they have made up over that split? Do you think that they have resolved it?

PEGGY: I think perhaps as much as it is going to be resolved. I don't think it is continuing on now, you don't hear it as much. I'm sure they've buried some of the hatchets.

PAQUITA: Uh huh. Okay, thank you.

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