

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #333 - Side B

Subject: Mary Salsbery

Place: Burns, Oregon

Date: May 1, 1989

Interviewer: Paquita Garatea

Release Form: Yes

PAQUITA GARATEA: Today is May 1st and we're in Burns, Oregon and the interviewer is Paquita Garatea and the interviewee is Mary Salsbery. Okay, Mary when were you born, and where?

MARY SALSBERY: I was born in Burns, Oregon on December 18th, 1928.

PAQUITA: And what was your name?

MARY: Mary Skiens.

PAQUITA: And your father's name and occupation?

MARY: Willis Skiens, and he worked in the post office in Burns.

PAQUITA: And was he born in Burns?

MARY: No, I think his family came here from Oklahoma when he was a young man.

PAQUITA: When he was a young man?

MARY: Yeah.

PAQUITA: And your mother's name?

MARY: Claudia Brown, Corrie now.

PAQUITA: And was she born in Burns?

MARY: Yes.

PAQUITA: She is from Burns?

MARY: Yes, she was born here, as well as her mother.

PAQUITA: Her mother was, and her father?

MARY: No, he came here when he was a young man.

PAQUITA: And what did he do in Burns, your grandfather?

MARY: He was a carpenter.

PAQUITA: A carpenter.

MARY: Yeah.

PAQUITA: Claude Brown?

MARY: Yeah.

PAQUITA: Right.

MARY: Yeah, that you've got the stuff on, he built the boarding house.

PAQUITA: Right. And so, you resided in Burns your entire life?

MARY: Yeah.

PAQUITA: Okay. And you were educated in Burns? And how far did you go?

MARY: I went through high school here, and two years of college. Not here, but ---

PAQUITA: Where did you go?

MARY: University of Oregon, Eugene.

PAQUITA: Okay. And how and when did you become acquainted with the Basque community of Burns?

MARY: Well, as far back as I can remember I grew up with them, you know.

PAQUITA: Can you name a few?

MARY: Well I remember Margaret and Connie, because we went to kindergarten together. That's about my first memory.

PAQUITA: Margaret and Connie Osa.

MARY: Osa, yeah.

PAQUITA: Okay. Okay Connie and Margarita Osa, you went to kindergarten together.

MARY: Yes.

PAQUITA: Do you remember any other Basque?

MARY: Oh, I remember the Ramirez, oh let's see, the Urizars. About it then, I think.

PAQUITA: And what was your first --- can you describe an atmosphere when you walked in to say the Plaza Hotel where Margarita and Connie resided, the boarding house, the Basque boarding house? Your first impression, or what can you remember of it?

MARY: Well, I don't know, it seems like that they were always cooking, there was always something smelled good. They were getting, you know ----

PAQUITA: Who is they, when you say they?

MARY: Probably their mother, Osa, Margarita Osa. And oh, sometimes it would be some of the, you know, Basques sitting around the table having coffee or a drink, or talking.

PAQUITA: Did they ---

MARY: It seemed like all the activity was always in the kitchen area. Everybody always spent all their time in the kitchen.

PAQUITA: Did you feel welcome in the home?

MARY: Oh yeah, they always welcomed you, and friendly.

PAQUITA: Did you have a hard time with the language barrier?

MARY: Yes.

PAQUITA: Did you ever learn any words?

MARY: No, not much. Those I did weren't worth repeating. (Laughter) We learned how to count sometimes, when we used to play twenty-one, or shoot craps and stuff. We had a good experience.

(Laughter)

PAQUITA: And did you like the food?

MARY: Oh, some of it.

PAQUITA: Some of it. What did you like?

MARY: Spanish rice.

PAQUITA: Spanish rice.

MARY: Yeah. I never liked anything with fish or anything.

PAQUITA: You didn't like the fish?

MARY: No.

PAQUITA: Did you ever see any dancing going on in the, and singing?

MARY: Oh, they used to have, yeah; they used to have the Basque parties and things.

PAQUITA: So, you attended a few?

MARY: Well yeah, kind of on the sidelines, you know, kids kind of were. But I can remember being in the other room when they were having their things in the other room. So ---

PAQUITA: So, did you ever interact with the boarders? Since most of them were from Spain, was it hard to?

MARY: Yeah, used to, you know, knew who they were, and say a few words to them and talk to them some. Yeah.

PAQUITA: Uh huh. And so, who did most of the work within the boarding house would you say?

MARY: The women did all the work as far as I could see.

PAQUITA: The women. Did you ever see the, Mrs. Osa, the woman, their mother; did you ever see her sit down any?

MARY: Not very often. No, she was usually, you know, up and doing something.

PAQUITA: And Margaret and Connie, did you feel like they had to work a lot within the home?

MARY: Yes, a lot.

PAQUITA: More than most of your other friends?

MARY: Oh yeah. Lots more than any of the rest of us ever had to, yeah.

PAQUITA: But did you think they, well did they complain about it?

MARY: Oh, not too much. But I would have, if it would have been me.

PAQUITA: Okay.

MARY: You know, when they complain, the way they had to do everything with those ---

PAQUITA: Did you think the house was clean?

MARY: Very clean, yes.

PAQUITA: Very clean, and that was, most of the work they had to do was cleaning.

MARY: Yeah, they did the cleaning. And like I said, their mother was tough on them, very tough.

PAQUITA: Did you ever visit the other boarding house, the Star? Have you ever been there?

MARY: Oh yeah, I have been in all of them, but you know, never very much.

PAQUITA: Did you ever notice a difference between them? Were they basically run the same with the women doing everything?

MARY: Yeah, I think that was true, yes. As far as the rest of it, I wasn't around them that much to --- yeah. If I was, it was when I was quite small and I really don't remember.

PAQUITA: And now that these boarding houses are no longer in operation, do you think the Basque community and the traditions are going to continue in Burns?

MARY: I doubt it.

PAQUITA: Did you think the boarding houses were a vehicle for ---

MARY: Yeah, I think that's where they had most of their social life, you know, I don't think they have anything around here, you know. Maybe like the Boise places they do, but I don't think here they have anything, you know.

PAQUITA: They were essential for the maintenance of the culture?

MARY: Yeah, I think so, yeah.

PAQUITA: What contributions do you think the Basques have given to this community?

MARY: Oh, let's see. Oh, there is just an awful lot of them here that, you know, that are all noted for being good workers. A lot of them worked at the mill for Bud, you know. And they are all real good workers, and they all seemed to be good family people. And let's see ---

PAQUITA: So economically they contributed their share?

MARY: Yeah, I think they, yeah, they do, yeah, they do, you know.

PAQUITA: Do you think they've done well for themselves considering the ---

MARY: Yes, I think they have all done very well. I mean they are noted for their, you know, they work all the time and they seem to be very --- well to be able to save a lot of money. I don't know how they do it, but they do, you know. I guess they are very frugal maybe, conservative, yeah.

PAQUITA: And so, do you think, also think the women, the Basque women themselves have contributed financially to their families as well?

MARY: Well I think so, because they ran, you know, they ran the boarding houses, and that supported most of the families.

PAQUITA: And then what about the first-born generation like Margaret and Connie, did they continue to work outside the home and contribute financially as well? So, do you see this continuing through the generations?

MARY: Yeah, they're ---

PAQUITA: The women don't sit at home usually?

MARY: No, no, in that way they are different. Of course, the whole culture has changed that way too. But they're all workers. I've never met any of them that weren't good workers. So ---

PAQUITA: Okay, thank you very much.

MARY: Is that it?

PAQUITA: That's it, good, good job.

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