

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #346 - Sides A/B/C

Subject: James Weston – With Video

Place: Weston Home – Burns, Oregon

Date: October 8, 1993

Interviewers: Dorothea Purdy & Barbara Lofgren

DOROTHEA PURDY: This is Dorothea Purdy, and today we're visiting with Jim Weston at his home, along with Barbara Lofgren. And the date is October the 8th, 1993.

Jim, can you tell us your name?

JAMES WESTON: Name?

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

JAMES: James Weston, yeah.

DOROTHEA: James Weston. And do you care if we call you Jim?

JAMES: No that's all right.

DOROTHEA: Okay. Where were you born?

JAMES: In Michigan, East Jordan, Michigan.

DOROTHEA: East Jordan, Michigan. And how many were in your family?

JAMES: Well let's see, there is one sister and four brothers, yeah.

DOROTHEA: One sister and four brothers. And what did your parent do?

JAMES: Well my father was a stonemason and bricklayer.

DOROTHEA: And when did you move to Oregon?

JAMES: Well I moved to Oregon from California. We came west to California first.

DOROTHEA: Oh, did you?

JAMES: Yeah, San Francisco.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

JAMES: And in 1922 we came to Oregon, to Bend.

DOROTHEA: And when were you born?

JAMES: October 8th, 1905.

DOROTHEA: Oh, today is your birthday.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA LOFGREN: Happy Birthday.

DOROTHEA: Happy birthday then.

BARBARA: If we'd have known that, we'd have brought you a cake.

DOROTHEA: Okay, tell us something about what your parents did, and why they moved to California.

JAMES: Well my brother Charlie he was in California, in San Francisco, he was working in San Francisco, he had a job there. And so we were going to move out to San Francisco with him, see. And my father went out there in 1918, and we got a letter from him and he said oh there is a lot of work there, and you can get along fine. And about the same date we got a, my brother-in-law came up from East Jordan, we were out in Bellaire then on a farm. And we got a --- that he had died.

DOROTHEA: Your brother passed away?

JAMES: No, my father.

DOROTHEA: Your father did.

JAMES: Yeah that was during the flu epidemic you know. And then we were in San Francisco for quite awhile, for about a year I guess. And then we went down to Ontario, California; I worked on a dairy farm there with my brother Fred. Then we came up to Auburn, California, and there Fred and I, we went out, we went to Susanville looking for work. And then we kept on going from Susanville, up through Oregon, and up through Montana, and back through the Middle West clear to Arkansas.

BARBARA: Oh my goodness.

JAMES: And we come to the end of the road in Arkansas, and it was just a trail, you know, out from the --- and we walked back. And we asked somebody where, we were looking for work see, and asked somebody if they knew where we could get a job. And well there was a preacher up on ---

DOROTHEA: I can't hear you very well, so ---

JAMES: Anyway there was a preacher they said up there, up on the hill there, and so we started hiking up that way and there was a, looked like a big building up there. And it was smokey country, you know, and when we got up there it was just a corncrib. Anyway, so this preacher he wanted somebody, you know, to stay there that winter and cut wood and help him out there, see. So we cut wood for him all winter.

And then we, finally we came back to Auburn, see. And then my brother George, see, he was working for the PGE then. And we decided well, Fred and, I had an Uncle Fred worked in a mill out of Bend. And so we come back up, you know, to Bend and went out there. I worked in the mill there in the summer, during the school vacation, you know. And then that winter we moved out to, Uncle Fred and Mike and I moved out to a place out from Tumalo.

DOROTHEA: Now did you just come up with your brother Mike then, to Bend? Or did the whole family move up?

JAMES: Well it was Mike and George and I, yeah. Fred ---

BARBARA: Your uncle?

JAMES: And my uncle was there, yeah.

DOROTHEA: Now what are your brother's and sister's names?

JAMES: Well my sister's name was May. And then the oldest boy was Charlie, and Fred was the next, then George, and then I, and then Mike. We didn't call him Mike then, because his name was Marion Francis. And he didn't like that name, and Uncle Fred he didn't like it, so he called him Mike when he come out here, see.

BARBARA: So he just acquired a new name then?

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: So did you have your grade schooling when you were in San Francisco?

JAMES: Yeah, I went to, started sixth grade in San Francisco.

BARBARA: Uh huh. And then when you came to Bend you went to your high school there?

JAMES: Yeah went to high school in Bend. Well it was the Tumalo High School; they had a two-year high school there.

BARBARA: Oh, uh huh.

JAMES: And then went to Bend for the other two years, yeah.

BARBARA: Last two years. Did you go on to college or anything like that?

JAMES: No, no, just a graduate of high school.

BARBARA: And so after you got out of high school, did you continue to work around the Bend area?

JAMES: Yeah, first I worked for a farmer out there, rancher they called them, you know, on a farm there. And ---

DOROTHEA: What was his name?

JAMES: Oh ---

DOROTHEA: Can't remember?

JAMES: No, Jones, yeah his name was Jones. And I worked there for Jones for most of the summer. I saved up enough money to buy a Model-T Ford, you know, I think I paid a hundred dollars for it.

BARBARA: Well that was probably a lot of money then, wasn't it?

JAMES: Oh yeah, yeah.

DOROTHEA: What were your wages when you were working for that rancher?

JAMES: Well I got thirty dollars a month.

DOROTHEA: Thirty?

JAMES: Yeah. And ---

BARBARA: Did you board and room there also?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah. Well I slept on a little cot out in a tent. Anyway I forget where Mike was working there; he may have been working in a sawmill.

But anyway my mother had gone to Greenville, California; they ran a little restaurant down there. So we thought we would go down there and I could help her in the restaurant, see. So we went down there to Greenville, California. And I worked in that restaurant for, with Uncle Fred and Mother, see. Then that winter why Mother she went to, back to Michigan to help take care of my sister, she was sick, had an operation. Let's see, oh Fred and I we spent that winter, Uncle Fred and I run the restaurant, see. And the next spring we sold out to some guy, and so I came to, went down to San Francisco.

And at that time you couldn't get a job because of the depression, you know. When you get a job, then just get it a little while and then they'd close up, see. So I was out of work so darn much, you know, and finally got on WPA and from that why I got on pretty good.

And then I got a job on the YMCA Hotel running an elevator. And from that why I had got in a union, I got into a big building, see where they paid more money. And then when the war came why I joined the army.

DOROTHEA: That was probably better pay than any job that you had had. Or did they pay very well in the army?

JAMES: Well no, it wasn't too much. You see I went to radio school to start with, see, there in, and I went through what they call these different levels, see. And I got to the fourth level, and I was in limited service because of my eyes, you know. And I didn't think, got sent down for radar school, you know, but I went down to Camp Murphy, Florida to go to radar school.

BARBARA: And what year was it that you went into the army?

JAMES: '41.

BARBARA: '41.

JAMES: And anyway, I went to school there for, studying radar, you know, and we went to --- Oh at first we learned the big radar on a tower, see. And then we went up to Fort Monroe and studied on a little, what they call, it was in a, looked like a water tower, see, and the radar is inside that water tower. And we finished the course on that one, and then we went up to Fort Monmouth in New Jersey, and we studied on another one. It was supposed to be at the front lines, you know, up close to the front lines. And the radar was in a tent and just the antenna sticking out, see.

BARBARA: They thought they were being pretty sneaky did they?

JAMES: Yeah. Well when we got through basic training, actually then we went into what they called teams, four man teams. There was a lieutenant and two sergeants; well there was three sergeants. There was a master sergeant, buck sergeant, or D-3 they called

it, technical sergeant, and a buck sergeant to take care of our motors. We had a big truck with a trailer, see, and the trailer had a motor in it for running the radar, see.

And from there we went down to Fort Bliss, Texas. And we were there for, we were supposed to be shipped out to the Philippines, see. And only one team got shipped out, see they were about, oh they were thirty-five people in all different --- team see. And one team, that one outfit they went to the Philippines and the rest of us never got shipped out anywhere.

BARBARA: You did state side duty then?

JAMES: Yeah. Going to school all the time mostly. And then one that did go they got blown up there on the beach.

BARBARA: Oh.

DOROTHEA: So you were lucky.

JAMES: Yeah. Anyway, that was attached to the Coast Guard artillery, see. Well what we did we, well we would have the planes going overhead, see, well you get the radar hooked onto it, see, and then that controlled the spot light, see. And then they just turned those on and they was right on the plane, see, they didn't have to search for them.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: So then what did you do after you got out of the army?

JAMES: Oh, I come back to San Francisco.

BARBARA: And when was that, when did you get discharged?

JAMES: 1945.

BARBARA: 1945. And you returned to San Francisco then?

JAMES: Yeah. My brother George he had a jewelry store, and watch repairing stuff, see. So I'd been doing watch repairing just as a hobby, see, and anyway I went to work there for the watch repairing.

DOROTHEA: Do you still do any of that?

JAMES: Well not now, no.

DOROTHEA: Not now.

JAMES: No.

DOROTHEA: I've got an old watch I thought maybe you might want to look at.

JAMES: Well I had a lot of equipment when I was down in the dugout, I had my watch base there, you know, and I did quite a few watch repairs then for people around, you know.

DOROTHEA: Did you?

JAMES: Not charge them anything.

BARBARA: Just kind of a little hobby then for you.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: So how long did you do this watch repair and watch making down in San Francisco? How long did you work down there?

JAMES: Well let's see it was ---

BARBARA: From '45 to ---

JAMES: '55 --- what was it, '58 is when I came up here.

BARBARA: And during this time that you were in California, were you married?

JAMES: I was married when I went into the army, see.

BARBARA: When you went into the army.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: And who did you marry?

JAMES: Her name was, what the heck, can't think of the last name now, Alexander. She was from North Carolina.

BARBARA: You met her when you were in the service, or before?

JAMES: No, I met her when I was working in that hotel.

BARBARA: Oh, okay.

JAMES: And we got divorced in 1937, I think it was.

BARBARA: And do you have any children?

JAMES: No, no children.

BARBARA: Okay. And so you worked from '45 to '58 then with your brother in San Francisco. And what made you decide to do something different?

JAMES: Well I used to come up to Oregon here, and Mike had some claims down there in Harney County, you know, on the Steens there. And then he had a copper claim down in Nevada. And I used to come up here and help him with his assessment work, see. And after I had been doing that about four years I said, well I've got to live out here. Get away from that city, you know.

BARBARA: Oh, uh huh.

DOROTHEA: You liked the quietness out here?

JAMES: I liked the, you know, the climate, and it was nice, you know. And so we come up, and we went out and we built that dugout then, see. Mike had that Quonset, steel; it was shop steel, see. He had it there at home in Bend, his place there in Bend. And then we hauled it out to, it was just pieces of steel, it hadn't been put together, see. So we brought it out there and put it together and buried it there in the, made a dugout.

DOROTHEA: Now how did you stay warm in the wintertime? Did you have a, was the dirt and being dugout ---

JAMES: It was kind of warm; it didn't take too much to keep it warm. We had a stove, you know, we had a heating stove, big heater.

BARBARA: Wood stove.

JAMES: Wood stove, yeah.

BARBARA: Okay, how did your brother Mike come about acquiring this claim? Did someone else have it before him and he got it from him, or was it something that he discovered on his own?

JAMES: Well at first my brother Fred was with him out there, and they were looking for cinnabar, you know. And was probably looking for gold to start with. But they found some cinnabar down in, up in Indian Creek there. And they fussed around trying to get that out, but it was just some that had kind of come down from above, see, and it was just a little ---

BARBARA: Just a little deposit then?

JAMES: Yeah. But then he talked with him --- there was a Harry Alexander that had that mine up across Indian Creek from the dugout. And Harry was, he told Mike that there was a, there was a little cabin, a shepherd's cabin there. But it was, no one living there, see. And that's where we lived first before we built the dugout. And then there was a claim up Indian Creek on the left hand side that Mike worked on, that's before I come out there.

DOROTHEA: Now was it cinnabar too?

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Well how did he find the --- you mined mercury, now how did you find that?

JAMES: Well we didn't find, we didn't continue to work that one because Harry Alexander he got tired climbing that mountain there, see, to go to that mine. And he come down and he said, "Well you can have it, see." So he moved down to the other side of Andrews where he had a copper claim.

BARBARA: So you just took over his?

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: So there was no buying of anything?

JAMES: No.

BARBARA: He just gave it to you? Was this on private land, or government property?

JAMES: No, government property, yeah.

BARBARA: Oh, okay. So did you have to lease this from the government?

JAMES: Well you do assessment work, see, and you don't pay any money.

BARBARA: I see.

JAMES: You have to file your assessment work at the county here, county courthouse. Anyway we, there was a shaft, we started going down in a shaft, see, and bringing up the ore. And we built a tramway up the side, rocks there; to get the ore down to the road, see. And we had a counter weight on that thing so we could let the ore car come down that track, see, and we had a brake up at the top to brake so it wouldn't go too fast. And when the ore got down to the, ore car got down to the bottom there it automatically hit, the front would hit and it would open the door up and the ore would spill into a bin there, see, ore bin.

BARBARA: Well you guys were pretty clever then.

JAMES: And then we would just go down, up there with a, well with a tractor, and pull the ore out from that bin, see, and dump it into the tractor.

BARBARA: So you say a shaft up there, was this shaft dug by this Mr. Alexander first, and then you just developed it more? Or was it something that you and your brother did initially?

JAMES: Well to start with the ore was up above there where the shaft is now. And there was quite a bit of ore up that way, see, and then ---

BARBARA: And then you dug this shaft yourself?

JAMES: Well apparently he --- he said something about that the ore was right down there about twelve feet. What we found out was that he had filled it in. I don't know

why he filled it in. But he had gone down below and put in a tunnel about, oh three hundred feet from the bottom there. He was going to stope the ore down, see, from below instead of pulling it up the shaft. Well the ore never went down that far. We hit the bottom of it in '83, and got to the end of the ore.

BARBARA: Oh. So how deep was this shaft that you worked?

JAMES: We went down about forty-five feet.

BARBARA: About forty-five feet. So ---

JAMES: It was straight down.

BARBARA: Did you have bracings on this shaft?

JAMES: It was in a fault. Actually then the fault was about four feet wide, see, and we didn't have to have any shoring, there was just rocks on each side.

BARBARA: That was lucky.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: Did you build kind of ladders or something down there?

JAMES: Oh well we had to have ladders going down, yeah.

BARBARA: Okay, you'll have to clue me in on --- you mine cinnabar.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: And then you extract the mercury from that, is that right.

JAMES: Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA: Okay. And what does cinnabar look like?

JAMES: Well it's red.

BARBARA: It's a red rock?

JAMES: Yeah, and it's soft rock too. They make carvings out of cinnabar. Actually they, the Chinese did lots of carving with cinnabar, see. And, but it's soft. You can scrape it with your thumbnail, see.

BARBARA: Oh.

DOROTHEA: Oh.

JAMES: And anyway we ran out of ore there, and we never did get enough ore to make it pay, see. No, we built a retort and we had it working fine. It was automatic, it run automatic, see, and we had it so that, it was a shelf furnace they called it, we called it, see. The shelves come down one over the other, see, forty-five degree angle so when the ore poured out of the bottom, the ore would come down through those shelves, see. And the fire went under the shelf, and over top of the shelf, see, back and forth, and through on the sides.

DOROTHEA: But how did that separate it, just the ---

JAMES: Well the cinnabar is eighty-five percent mercury, and fifteen percent sulphur, see, and the sulphur --- the cinnabar vaporizes at 600 degrees Fahrenheit, see, and then the sulphur burns at 900 degrees. And then we had our, that's what we called the retort, see. We had the firebox and it would be about 1100 degrees. And then of course the sulphur would burn, see, and that helps keep it warm, you know, help the heat. It didn't cost much; we used propane gas for the burners, so it didn't take much to heat to get the mercury out.

And then we had the condensers up above, and we had hot water, yeah old hot water tanks, you know, we put them together in a long row and then we had an eight inch pipe going down through that with an auger in it so the fumes had to go, circle around that so the mercury would gather that way. Otherwise if you just had an open pipe, the fumes would go right up the stack, see. So anyway, so the fumes --- and then when we wanted to clean out, get the mercury out we just turn the crank up there and auger it down, see, and it run down below into a receptive.

BARBARA: That's very interesting. So you really worked at it from about 1958 to '85 you say, it ran out during that time?

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: And you just did a certain amount each year?

JAMES: Yeah. A lot of the work we did was helping the ranchers down there, you know. We'd go down and fix their hot water heaters, and their refrigerators.

BARBARA: Oh, so you were the local repairmen then?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA: Oh, I see. So you made a little money doing that then too?

JAMES: Yeah, but most of it was for free though.

BARBARA: Being a good neighbor huh?

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: When you got this mercury divided, how did you store it?

JAMES: Well we store it in flasks we call it. There is 76 pounds in a flask. Well it was about that tall see, and about that big around. We sold four flasks all the time we was mining it.

BARBARA: Only four during all those years?

JAMES: Yeah. Well we got five out actually.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

DOROTHEA: That's all you got out was five flasks?

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Who did you sell it to?

JAMES: Well we sold it to, first we sold it to some mercury outfit in San Francisco; ship it by freight, you know. And I did sell some to a place in Los Angeles. And it, at one time the mercury went up to \$700 a flask, but it --- and everybody was looking for mercury mines then. I think it's something about the mines in Spain had flooded or something, so they weren't getting mercury from Spain, see. And then the price dropped down to a \$100 a flask.

BARBARA: Oh, from \$700 to \$100.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: And you say there was seventy-six pounds per flask.

JAMES: Pounds, yeah.

BARBARA: Okay.

JAMES: So anyway all the mercury or cinnabar mines in the United States closed up, they all closed up. The only one that did run was the one in McDermitt. They had an open pit mine over there, and they just --- the cinnabar had deposited in layers in that lake pond, see, the old lake pond. So they did pretty good down there. But they closed up here a couple years ago.

BARBARA: And so what is mercury basically used for? What is the need for mercury?

JAMES: Well you've got your mercury switches for light switches in the wall here, you know. You just flip the switch; they're mercury switches. And then some in, let's see some sewers they had big gates, you know, so they could open and close them. The iron gates floated on that mercury see, so they could swing those big gates easy.

DOROTHEA: Oh, kind of like your heating elements to your thermostats.

JAMES: Yeah. That's got that mercury switch, yeah.

BARBARA: Thermometers?

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: A mercury thermometer is pretty expensive though, isn't it?

JAMES: No, I don't think that they are. There is not much used in it. It's pretty small in that little thin little tube, you know, going up with the mercury. But they can't use mercury switches in Alaska because the temperatures get too cold.

BARBARA: Too cold.

JAMES: See mercury ---

BARBARA: And it won't flow then.

JAMES: --- mercury hardens at forty-seven degrees below zero, see, Fahrenheit. So then you can use it for a hammer, you know. (Laughter)

BARBARA: Is it dangerous to use mercury; is there a danger with it?

JAMES: Well we never had any, because we had our, fumes went clear up and we had a stack, see, with it. Had a blower on it to blow the fumes up.

BARBARA: Could it be toxic to you if it's not taken care of correctly?

JAMES: Yeah, it could be. They used to, in the old days they had the, the mercury would condense, the sulphur, it would be sulfate see, and it would be like a soot. And they had men with a hose, hoeing --- to bring the mercury out of the soot, see. And sometimes they'd get salivated doing that kind of work because breathing the fumes so much, see.

DOROTHEA: How did you know how to build this furnace and --- so that it would work and divide the two, the sulphur and the mercury?

JAMES: Well I had a book on mining and on furnaces, see, or retorts. And there was one that they called a shelf furnace you know, shelf retort. And of course that was a big tall thing, and we used that for an example, sample, to build from. And we used ... tile, we cut the tiles to shape with a saw, see, with a diamond saw. And then we could put that together, you know, to make the retort. And then we put barrels around it and had the diatomaceous earth between it and the actual retort, see, so that it would hold the heat in. You could put your hand on those barrels and it wouldn't, you know, the heat wouldn't come through.

But anyway, no it's a simple thing, that mercury just goes up there, and the liquid mercury and it comes, the fumes, you know. It starts out; it floats, you know, in the air, in the draft, and went through into that auger. Well the mercury would gather on the side, see.

DOROTHEA: Huh.

JAMES: And we had a, when we had a thermometer with a hand on it, you know, and when it would, when the temperature got to the right temperature it would cut off on the electric eye, you know. The light sensitive eye, you know.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

JAMES: And then that would start a motor, a scavenger motor, and then we had an auger that went into the long apron on the bottom and that would pull the burnt ore out, see. And as soon as it cooled down enough why it would shut off, see, and then it would wait until it got hot again.

BARBARA: You guys are pretty clever with all your little gadgets to make things work. You sit all day trying to figure out, let's see how I can do this and that.

JAMES: No, it didn't take too much figuring. But we was just able to get --- actually my brother Charlie was in San Francisco, or Berkeley, he was in Berkeley then, and he got that thermometer for us from an old dump somewhere. It worked real good.

BARBARA: Did you ever work any other mines right around this area, or just that one?

JAMES: No, just that one.

BARBARA: You say your brother had had other mines prior to the time that you came. Did he continue to work any of those?

JAMES: Well when we come up there, we just concentrated on the mercury mine there.

BARBARA: On the mercury. So he really basically gave up the other ones then?

JAMES: We gave up, yeah, yeah.

BARBARA: It was too much trouble going back and forth to the different ones then?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA: Okay.

DOROTHEA: Well what did you finally do then when you quit?

JAMES: Well in 1987, Mike died in 1987, see, and we had, well we were just living there then.

BARBARA: So from '83 to '87 you were jut living there and doing your little odd jobs around the area.

JAMES: And Mike was sick, he had diabetes, you know.

DOROTHEA: Well how did you take care of the diabetes? Did you have to doctor a lot?

JAMES: Well at first he had pills to take, you know. Then there was, the kind of pills that was doing any good, the government wouldn't let them sell them anymore. And then the next ones, the others didn't do much good for him. But anyway he finally ended up, then they found he had cancer of the pancreas, and that --- after they couldn't give him, no insulin, see. Also they had, the pancreas produces enzymes for digestion, see, so he was suffering from you might say, lack of food, couldn't digest the food.

BARBARA: After you moved there in '58, how long was it before you brought the Quonset hut over from Bend? You lived how many years before you got that in there?

JAMES: Well we built it, had it finished in '58, by fall, by November. Actually it was, we closed it up tight, see, and left it there, and we went to Bend and spent the winter in Bend.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

JAMES: From Bend we went down to New Mexico to get that windmill. We got a windmill. That had ---

DOROTHEA: Now what was the windmill for, just to pump your water?

JAMES: No that was for electricity.

DOROTHEA: Oh that was ---

JAMES: It was ---

BARBARA: To generate your electricity?

JAMES: Yeah, be DC electricity, see. And we used that ten years for electricity. Of course it wasn't like, well we could use it for lights and power tools, AC/DC power tools, see, and tools and stuff like that.

DOROTHEA: Did you have an electric stove or anything like that, or did you use wood stove?

JAMES: Wood stove, yeah.

DOROTHEA: To cook with.

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Where did you get your supplies at?

JAMES: In Burns.

DOROTHEA: In Burns.

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: I understood you had a large garden also.

JAMES: Yeah, yeah, we started out we had corn and all kinds of, you know vegetables.

DOROTHEA: In the Steens, how did you grow such a garden?

JAMES: Well it was warm, warmer there than it was down next to the desert. See the cold air would come up --- the air would come over the mountain, and the warm air would go over the top and the cold air would go back down to the other side, the westside. Actually the cold air around that, where we were, would go down to the desert, and we would be in a layer where there would be warm air, see. So we'd be warmer up there in the winter than sometimes than it was down below. But anyway, yeah we had pretty frost-free there.

DOROTHEA: You grew all kinds of vegetables, potatoes?

JAMES: Potatoes, squash, beans, peas, and lettuce, yeah.

DOROTHEA: Lettuce, grew that?

JAMES: Yeah. Anyway, Mike at first he put some, planted some peach seeds, see, down below there, we had a fill there, you know, a steep bank. He planted some peach seeds down there and they came up, you know. And we had peaches, and they came up

good peaches, they weren't all the same, they would be clingstones, and freestones, and little and big, you know, but they were all good peaches.

DOROTHEA: Are the trees still there?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah.

DOROTHEA: Oh goodness.

JAMES: I went down there with Ellis Mason here a while back, and we got, picked a lot of peaches.

DOROTHEA: Well good.

BARBARA: Did you have any other kind of trees?

JAMES: Oh yeah, we had apricot, cherries, and apples.

BARBARA: Well great.

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: You fed the deer good then.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: Did you have much trouble with the critters around there with your garden and your fruit trees?

JAMES: Not too much, no. I actually let the cows go in there even, to eat the dead grass, you know, because the grass growing around there would be a fire hazard.

BARBARA: Uh huh. Tell us how your home there was arranged. What all did you have in your Quonset hut?

JAMES: Well we had an electric range, and a gas range, and a wood stove for cooking stove, yeah, and a washer and dryer.

DOROTHEA: And that was all run off of that windmill?

JAMES: No, no we didn't have it then. Just after we got the power, see REA power.

DOROTHEA: Oh.

BARBARA: And that came in what year?

JAMES: It would be, let's see, '76 it was, I guess it was, yeah.

BARBARA: Oh, okay.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: And did you have a freezer or anything like that so you could store your food?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah. We didn't do that all at once though.

BARBARA: Over the years, huh?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA: Like we all have to plan for something new every year, huh?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah. The first thing we put in was a sewer line; see, so it would run out. And we had a cesspool for the sewer to run into. And it never did fill up all those years; it's still there.

BARBARA: Oh, for goodness sakes.

DOROTHEA: Who did the cooking? Did you take turns doing the cooking? Are you good bachelor cooks?

JAMES: Well I did most of the --- I used to bake bread and make pies, you know, and make cakes and stuff. Mike he'd do some cooking, but usually I did all that, the main part of it.

BARBARA: So you kind of divided up the household chores, did you?

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

JAMES: And we had a, what they call a cold room, you know. We put in a refrigerating unit, and the coils went into this --- made some coils, you know, out of copper tubing and used wire to run up and down to let the coolant get out. And we kept it about 34 degrees on the floor of that little room.

DOROTHEA: Well so you could store your vegetables and things in that room.

JAMES: Yeah, yeah.

DOROTHEA: And your fruit. How long would your peaches and your cherries and things last? Or did you can them?

JAMES: Well I used to can some and then I used to freeze some, see. And I finally got a big chest freezer, you know. And it was one that you could just push a button and it would defrost right quick, defrost, see. And I used to keep that pretty full, we used to get it pretty full of stuff.

DOROTHEA: So you didn't have to buy much, you did a lot of your own ---

JAMES: Oh yeah.

DOROTHEA: So as long as you had your staples like your sugars and flours and things you had ---

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: What about your meat?

JAMES: Meat, yeah.

BARBARA: Did you go hunting; kill deer and birds and things at all?

JAMES: Only in the hunting season.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

JAMES: No, we didn't, we used to buy beef, you know, come to town and buy meat. It was easier than trying to kill a deer, you know.

BARBARA: But I thought maybe you enjoyed going hunting at one time did you? Or no?

JAMES: Well yeah, for quite a few years.

BARBARA: For entertainment.

JAMES: We used to hunt every year, used to always get a deer.

DOROTHEA: And you're in the Steens area, so you had to get the what, four point or better?

JAMES: Well some years, some years you could even get a forked horn, see.

DOROTHEA: Oh, could you?

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Well our tape is almost ready to turn over, so we'll pause for a little while and turn this tape over.

SIDE B

DOROTHEA: Okay, what were you talking about a cassette recorder you had?

JAMES: Yeah, I had a microphone on the roof, and I plugged it into that recorder. And you could listen to it; see, without it recording, you know.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

JAMES: And so we had all the bird sounds, and we could hear people clear across Indian Creek, you know.

BARBARA: Oh.

JAMES: Out to the point, you could hear people coming, coming down the road, you know.

BARBARA: So you knew when you were going to have company then?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA: You weren't caught by surprise, that's pretty good.

JAMES: That worked good.

BARBARA: Yeah.

JAMES: Especially the bird sounds, man they were lots of orioles and birds, songbirds there, you know.

DOROTHEA: I tried recording some of that, and it come out mostly static. I guess I didn't try to get just bird sounds; I was trying to hear everything. A creek was going by, and the birds were tweeting, and it ---

JAMES: I didn't have so much trouble with anything like that, because maybe it was the recorder I had.

DOROTHEA: Could have been.

JAMES: It had Dolby and ---

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

JAMES: No, we used to get the bird sounds real clear, and you could even hear the water running down Indian Creek.

DOROTHEA: Oh, yeah. And did you ever record this on a tape?

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Did you?

JAMES: Yeah, a regular cassette tape, yeah.

DOROTHEA: Oh that sounds good.

JAMES: Used to have some of those tapes, but I don't know, I don't know where they are now.

BARBARA: You didn't move them back to town with you?

JAMES: No.

BARBARA: Well when you left your --- well before we get to that, what are, what did you do during your days when you were down there? You say the first winter you went back to Bend. From then on did you spend your winters there also?

JAMES: Oh yeah.

BARBARA: Okay, when we had bad winters and a lot of snow, were you pretty much isolated there, or were you able to get in and out okay?

JAMES: Well most always we could get down the road, down to the mailbox.

BARBARA: And how far were you off of the main road there?

JAMES: It's a mile and seven tenths.

BARBARA: Oh, so that was not too far. You could get out most of the time then if you had to.

JAMES: Yeah. But sometimes we got practically snowed in. I know we used to, I used to, sometimes I'd drive down with the pickup, you know, and I couldn't get back up, and I'd just leave the pickup down there, see, somewhere.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

JAMES: And then we hiked down. And I remember one winter I had a Bronco, and I left it way down there to the, well not too far from the county road. Well maybe about a half-mile from the country road, and Carl Thomas come up with his motorcycle and bring the mail up to the Bronco, and then I'd carry it on back up the hill. Quite often it was pretty --- I remember sometimes, I remember one time it took four hours to walk down there and back on account of the snow, see.

DOROTHEA: You sunk down in, you know? I mean you would sink and then have to

JAMES: Yeah, yeah, I'd sink down. I know sometimes I'd sink down and hit, maybe the snow would be melting, you know, and my feet would go clear to the ground. And then the next thing it would freeze, and then those tracks were all frozen ice, see.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

BARBARA: And that's hard work too.

JAMES: Well yeah, then you had to step on those --- oh yeah.

BARBARA: And so when you were kind of snowed in, in the winter times, what did you and your brother do to entertain yourself and not get on each others nerves, or whatever? Did you read a lot?

JAMES: Well I used to read a lot. But of course I had that ham radio I was telling you about, you know. I got that in about 1964, I guess, got the license. And anyway, of course at first we were just doing Morse code, you know. And I used to talk to, on Morse code all the time.

DOROTHEA: Now where did you talk, who did you talk to?

JAMES: I had a friend in Elmira, John Fox. He used to; we used to, every Sunday night we'd talk for about an hour in Morse code. And then we, yeah, I used to talk to people in New York, and sometimes they call it DXing, you know, long distance.

DOROTHEA: Did you ever talk to anybody in Burns? Did you know many people in Burns?

JAMES: Well I used to, Ellis Mason was, he is a ham, you know, and I used to talk to him all the time.

DOROTHEA: Ellis is retired now too, isn't he?

JAMES: Yeah, oh yeah.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, we haven't done him either, we're going to have to get a hold of him and find out his --- wasn't he a wildlife manager?

JAMES: He was a, he worked for the game commission, yeah.

DOROTHEA: Game commissioner, yeah.

JAMES: He used to count the deer down there, ride horseback and count deer. And yeah, I used to talk to him. And then of course when they got the single side band, and they got, I had a single side band transceiver. And of course with the old type receivers and transistors why you had tubes, you know, and you had to be replacing tubes, and you was always having something to fix on them. With these new ones why you can't even work on them they're so complicated.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, yeah that's kind of like TV's.

JAMES: All solid state, yeah.

DOROTHEA: Solid state.

JAMES: Yeah, just like the TV, all solid state.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh.

BARBARA: And so did you pretty much visit with a lot of different people then, all over the country then that way?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah. Well I got to where I would only check into, we had a weather net that the hams checked in and gave the weather, see, where they lived. And so we had a regular weather net, hear all the weather all over Oregon, see. And then we had a civil defense net they called it at night, and check into that see. And if somebody wanted to talk to you why they just asked for you.

DOROTHEA: You said you had TV, what kind of stations could you pick up?

JAMES: Well we had, the television was from Idaho, see, and they come in on a translator down below Fields; around on a butte down there, see. There were three stations we could get from Boise. We could get ---

DOROTHEA: Could you get them pretty good, or were they pretty snowy?

JAMES: Well at first we had pretty good down there, but before I left it was getting so we couldn't, it wasn't very good at all. And even now, Carl Thomas even, he has trouble getting very good pictures. I don't know what happened.

DOROTHEA: Tell us what a typical day was like. What time did you get up, and what time did you go to the mountain, and where did you have lunch? Did you fix lunches?

JAMES: Well we used to, when we was mining, why we used to come back down for lunch. And we worked up there in the morning, and sometimes it was pretty hot, you know, in the summertime. So we would, I used to hike up to the mine and Mike would go up with the tractor, see. And it was pretty hot sometimes going up there and back on that side hill.

DOROTHEA: And then what did you do then, rest in the afternoons because that was the hottest part of the day?

JAMES: Sometimes we'd stay inside there, because it was cool inside.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh. When did you do your gardening?

JAMES: Well, in the evenings after the sun went behind the mountains. Quite a long evening, you know, after we got shade there from the mountain.

DOROTHEA: Where did you get your water from?

JAMES: Well we had a spring about, oh a mile and a half up toward the pinnacles, and we brought that down to where we had, what they call barrels, we had the pressure on, see. The barrels get full, why the water would run over; see, and that would let the pressure off. And then we had sixty-pound pressure from there on down to the house.

DOROTHEA: Oh, yeah. So you had pressured water then?

JAMES: Oh yeah.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, oh you were really --- Did you have a hot water tank, or how did you heat?

JAMES: Oh yeah, had hot water tank, we got it off the dump. (Laughter)

DOROTHEA: How did you take your showers and things like that? Did you have ---

JAMES: Yeah, we had a shower.

DOROTHEA: Bathtubs and ---

JAMES: No, had a shower, yeah.

DOROTHEA: Shower.

JAMES: Yeah, it's still there.

DOROTHEA: Is the house still there?

JAMES: The dugout?

DOROTHEA: Your dugout?

JAMES: Well Carl Hair he was going to pull it out of there, see, and we did have a big tin building that we did pull out of there and take it down to Carl Thomas' place, over in there, see. But Carl Hair he dug the dirt out from one side, and I thought he was going to dig it out from the other side too, you know, before he did anymore. But I don't know what happened, he dug it out on that one side, and then one day he was down there, and his son was there with him, and his son thought he was going to tear it down, see, and he went inside and took the bolts out on that side, and the thing just caved down. Caved down in the middle even.

DOROTHEA: Huh. Was that before you left, or after?

JAMES: That's after I left, yeah.

DOROTHEA: Okay.

JAMES: I wasn't there when they did that. I was down there, you know, to pick those peaches. That was the first time I saw how it was.

BARBARA: Did that make you kind of sad to see your home collapsed?

JAMES: Well I thought before I went down there, I thought it was just the one side that fell, but it fell right in the middle, the whole thing. And I walked along the side there where that steel was, and I could go clear back to the bathroom.

BARBARA: How big was it, what dimensions was it?

JAMES: Oh it was twenty feet wide, you know, and we had, we had about thirty-five feet long, see. Because past where the steel was, we had a skylight, and it was covered over, see. We had about ten feet more than the steel.

DOROTHEA: Well did you have separate rooms in there, or did you just have one big room?

JAMES: Well we did have, Mike slept, he put in a waterbed, see, and it was partitioned there. And I had my, let's see at that time I had the computer out in the front, and I slept in the cot. Well I had a bedroom across the draw, you know, I slept in there in the summertime especially. And in the winter I'd sleep in the dugout. I had a cot in the front, see.

DOROTHEA: You like your privacy huh?

JAMES: Oh yeah, yeah.

BARBARA: Did you do a lot of reading down there? Do you enjoy reading?

JAMES: Well I didn't do too much reading until after Mike died. When I was there alone I did a lot of reading. I had a lot of Reader's Digest condensed books, you know.

DOROTHEA: What did you do to entertain yourself after Mike died? I mean is that all you did was just read? Or did you hike, or did you wander, or ---

JAMES: Well I can't remember anything in particular about what I did. I was always busy; I always had something to do.

DOROTHEA: And how many, did you just move to Burns from there?

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Or where have you lived?

JAMES: No, I came right, I just moved to Burns here in June.

BARBARA: In June of this year?

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: So what were your neighbors like down there, can you tell us about some of the people that lived in the surrounding area, and some of the things that you did with them, or for them?

JAMES: Well ---

BARBARA: Who was your nearest neighbor?

JAMES: Well Carl Thomas, he lived down there, he lives on the edge of the desert down there. If you ever go down that way, you'll see the trees over to the left there. And he was the nearest neighbor, and he used to come up quite often, see. But then there was Carl Hair and his wife, Levina; they were down, well the other side of Andrews. And then of course Dora Zorrozua and Patricia Frazier they lived down there. Oh, they were about fifteen miles I guess from our place.

DOROTHEA: So what's happened to your trees? You said you went down and picked some peaches, are any of the others, do they bear fruit yet?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah. Well before, you know, we had a big dry spell, you know, and for five years I never watered the trees at all. And they still, don't have to water them,

they've got their roots down to water see, their taproots are down to water and so they don't have to be watered. So the only danger they have is porcupine.

DOROTHEA: Porcupines.

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Are they pretty bad on them?

JAMES: Yeah. There used to be lots of them there.

DOROTHEA: Have they killed off some of them?

JAMES: Well I used to get rid of them before they killed them off. One winter I couldn't get down there, and they got in, and they skinned off all the big limbs, you know. And Carl Thomas and I had to cut a whole lot of big limbs. One little cherry tree it died even. But otherwise the trees are doing pretty good. And they multiply, the peach trees they're coming up all over the place, see.

DOROTHEA: Now when a peach seed falls off of a tree will it start growing?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah.

DOROTHEA: Really?

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: I never can get anything to grow.

JAMES: Well peach pits, they'll grow.

DOROTHEA: If you just plant a peach pit it will grow?

JAMES: Well, they ---

DOROTHEA: Does it have to be a certain peach, or can you get a peach out of a store and stick the seed in the ground?

JAMES: Yeah, well you take that; yeah stick it in the ground.

DOROTHEA: And it will ---

JAMES: Somebody here told me about they planted one, one time, and it grew.

DOROTHEA: Huh, that's interesting.

BARBARA: Down around the Alvord Hot Springs, did you ever go down there and sit in the hot water?

JAMES: Oh when we first went down there we used to do that. When we first went there, there were a lot of chiggers in that bathhouse, you know.

BARBARA: Oh really?

JAMES: Yeah. And the first time we went in, Mike he looked at the water and he said oh there is none there that day. And we got in there, and the first thing we know, oh ---

DOROTHEA: Itchy itch.

JAMES: We sure got out of there. But you put gasoline on top of the water it kills them, because they float on top of the water. Actually what they do they hatch out up in there, up farther in the grass, see, and they float down in that water when it comes down from the spring, see, to the bathhouse. But I don't think they're in there anymore, because I never hear anybody complain about them.

BARBARA: There are a lot of people still go down there and use that?

JAMES: Oh yeah, just lined up there.

BARBARA: Have you seen some strange goings on down there?

JAMES: I don't know.

BARBARA: What about on the desert, have you seen planes land out there?

JAMES: Oh yeah, they used to have most every Fourth of July the gliders would be pulled; they pulled gliders out there. Sometimes they used to pull them by, tow them from another plane in the air see. And they got so they were pulling them with a pickup on the ground. Yeah, there is a lot of, every Fourth of July. And then people with their land sailing, you know.

BARBARA: Have you ever, from the Steens up there, have you ever seen any of the hang gliders go off? Have you seen them in the air above you at all?

JAMES: Not in the hang gliders, no. There are hang gliders; they were up north of us further, farther north. But some of the gliders go over.

BARBARA: Did you ever go up on the Steens and hike around up there, or hunt around up on the mountain at all?

JAMES: Well I used to hike all around on the eastside, yeah. Just go around looking for ore, you know.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

JAMES: I had acids and stuff to test for gold or different stuff, minerals, you know.

BARBARA: Never found anything else?

JAMES: I used to think well maybe my testing isn't right, you know, but I'd check it out with some samples and it ---

BARBARA: And it worked, huh?

JAMES: Yeah. There was no gold, that's all.

BARBARA: No gold. Was there a lot of wildlife around your place there, did you see the numbers come and go over the years? Lots of herds, and then they dwindle down or ---

JAMES: Yeah, used to look across Indian Creek and see two hundred head of deer on the other side. But later years there weren't so many, probably twenty-five over there is all.

DOROTHEA: Do you think that the deer population for some reason or other has decreased?

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Because up in our mountain areas we don't see half, in fact we don't see a third of the deer we used to.

JAMES: Yeah, they thinned out an awful lot.

DOROTHEA: What do you think is the cause of this?

JAMES: I wouldn't know.

DOROTHEA: Don't know.

JAMES: Of course the coyotes did kill a lot of deer.

DOROTHEA: Do you think the hunting has caused a lot of the ---

JAMES: No. Oh, from natural causes.

DOROTHEA: Just natural.

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: You don't think they're moving out to somewhere else, you just think that the population has just been cut down?

JAMES: It's been cut down I think, yeah.

DOROTHEA: What did you do for hobbies while you worked up there? Did you have a hobby? Did you draw pictures, or ---

JAMES: No, just ham radio was the hobby, yeah.

DOROTHEA: Your ham radio.

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: Well I understood you were quite a runner. I read in an article once that you ran to school. Did you continue to run, and do you still do it?

JAMES: Well I used to run to the mailbox, you know, and walk back. I made a round trip to the mailbox in twenty-eight minutes one time.

DOROTHEA: Running?

JAMES: Well walking back.

DOROTHEA: Walking back.

JAMES: Running down and walking back, yeah.

DOROTHEA: Yeah. Do you still do a lot of walking; do you go out every morning?

JAMES: Yeah, every night, every evening I go out, yeah, walk up this hill here, you know, up past the library. Make a circle around the blocks up there.

DOROTHEA: So you're still quite active in other words?

JAMES: Yeah, I keep walking.

DOROTHEA: Do you have a car you drive, or do you ---

JAMES: Oh a pickup, yeah.

DOROTHEA: You have a pickup. When you moved into town did you bring all of your stuff into town, or did you ---

JAMES: Well I brought quite a bit of stuff, but not all that I had. I had a, I threw a lot of stuff away, took it to the dump, you know. Then we had a yard sale down there.

DOROTHEA: Oh, did you?

JAMES: At Carl Hair's place. Anything good like that refrigerator and stuff like that, cots and things, tools, lots of tools.

DOROTHEA: You sold all those?

JAMES: Yeah. Lots of tools.

DOROTHEA: Well did you own this house for quite awhile?

JAMES: What house is that?

DOROTHEA: This one.

JAMES: No, I'm renting.

DOROTHEA: Oh you're renting.

JAMES: Oh yeah, yeah.

DOROTHEA: So you don't own your home.

JAMES: No, I may have to move here, I think he'll probably sell the place, you know.

DOROTHEA: Oh, is it for sale?

JAMES: Excuse me a minute. (Pause in tape.)

DOROTHEA: Why don't you tell us something about your interviews, and how they came about being interested in your mining and such things?

JAMES: Well that book that you had there, you know, that was what started it. After that the Today Show came out.

BARBARA: Was that, that was the National Geographic that came to see you first?

JAMES: Well he was sponsored I guess by the National Geographic. See that was his, it was his project.

BARBARA: Yes, uh huh. And how did he happen to hear about you, and why did he come to see you, and talk with you?

JAMES: I don't know for sure, but he was going to do some, take pictures up in Montana or something. So I don't know how he, I don't remember just how he heard about us or something, or how he come up there. But anyway he did.

BARBARA: And then after his book came out then other people were interested in what you were doing.

JAMES: Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA: And this is when the Today Show people came?

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: Can you tell us about that?

JAMES: Well he come out there with a, at that time they had great big TV cameras, you know, great big things, you know. They had to have big lights in there. And it was, it

wasn't too interesting to me. (Laughter) I didn't care much about it. It didn't do me any good anyway.

BARBARA: They were just kind of bothering you, huh?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah.

BARBARA: Did they spend a whole day with you?

JAMES: Most of the day, yeah. I think they even came back up the next day. And one of them went up to the mine and took pictures up at the mine. You saw the pictures of me in the shaft there. And ---

BARBARA: And so the New York people were not your cup of tea then?

JAMES: No, no.

BARBARA: And so, because of this, were you bothered by a lot of visitors, or did you then get a lot of mail from people that had heard about you, and inquisitive?

JAMES: Oh, I got a few letters from people that seen it, seen those things. Especially like the Portland Station I guess. I guess it was Channel 2, where they have Faces and Places.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

JAMES: Yeah, I got letters from people that saw that, yeah. And, but it was kind of a nuisance to me.

BARBARA: So you had more people dropping by after that, did you?

JAMES: No, not anymore than usual.

BARBARA: Not anymore than usual.

JAMES: People have always been coming up. Some come, some people came up to see where the road went, you know.

BARBARA: Just curious to know where it led, huh? Yeah. What were some of the strangest incidents that maybe happened to you while you were living out there?

JAMES: Well I don't know if it was strange, but there was some strange, when we first, oh the first few years we were there, there was some strange things that seemed to happen. Because one evening we were just getting ready to go to bed, you know, and I heard, there was --- oh Lester Rhodes, he had a claim up the Little Alvord Creek, see. And I said, I heard his vehicle come down around the curve there, there was a road above where he come down the road and come, went back by our, passed in front of the dugout, see. And I said, "Well here comes old man Rhodes, you know, I can hear his vehicle." And he come down around that curve and he didn't have his lights on, and he went on past. And then not too far away he stood, there was no more sound, he stopped, see. And I said, "Well that's funny." And I had a little black dog there so I opened the door and the little black dog he run out, and looking and barking up the street, up the road, you know, and went up there, and nothing there. (Laughter)

BARBARA: Woo.

DOROTHEA: Oh. It was ---

BARBARA: You had visitors from outer space maybe.

JAMES: But a couple weeks later I asked. I saw Rhodes and I asked him and I said, "Where were you that night?" Oh he says, I was down, he was going by on the county

road and he was thinking about coming up here, and then he said well it's too late so he went on home, see. He'd been up the Little Alvord, so I don't know what happened. But that's what they call, the what do you call it, the poltergeist, you know.

BARBARA: Oh, poltergeist.

JAMES: Announces he is coming, announces he is coming the day before, you know.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

JAMES: And then there was another time that I lived, I was sleeping over there across in that bedroom, you know, across the draw. And I saw a light flashing in my window and I thought well there is somebody coming up that upper road, coming around, see. So I looked out and I saw a light coming, and it was Mike with his flashlight, see, coming down from up above, see. And it was funny, what was he doing up there with a flashlight, you know. And the next morning I didn't say anything to Mike, and Mike he says, "It was a funny thing," he says, "there was lights coming." He saw lights, you know, up there on that road and he'd gone up there to see what, with his flashlight. And he only went so far and he quit, see, he went up there with a flashlight to see if there were any tracks up there, you know. And that's when, and I saw him, and that's what happened. He saw those lights too then flashing around, but they never did show up, you know. And then the next day Bruce and Karolee (Ownbey), Mike's daughter and her husband they came up there. And I guess maybe that's another poltergeist thing, you know, letting us know ahead of time.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, you're going to have company, yeah. Well how many nieces and nephews do you have?

JAMES: Oh, I don't know.

DOROTHEA: Several?

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: So all your brothers had children?

JAMES: No, Mike is the only one that had kids.

DOROTHEA: Oh, Mike's the only one that had any?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah. He had ---

BARBARA: Was his daughter in Bend?

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: Is she still over there?

JAMES: Well they ran the Bangle Tree in Bend, that jewelry store in Bend.

BARBARA: Oh.

JAMES: And they closed up here a couple years ago, and now they've sold their place out from Bend, six miles out of Bend. They sold it and they're traveling, living in a trailer house now.

BARBARA: Retired and just doing their own thing, huh?

JAMES: Karolee got so she couldn't work, she got some kind of ailment that she can't stand on her feet, she can't walk, and she is in pain all the time. But, so they had to give up their jewelry business.

DOROTHEA: That sounds like that Lymes disease.

JAMES: No it's not, it's something, they had a name for it, it's not Lymes disease.

DOROTHEA: I know that sure cripples them up when --- my husband's cousins got it, and man she can't hardly get around.

JAMES: That's Lymes disease. Well I don't think this was Lymes disease, something else.

BARBARA: Can you tell us about maybe some of the funny things that happened to you while you were up there?

JAMES: Well, I don't know.

BARBARA: Nothing was ever very funny?

JAMES: No, I don't know of anything, not too much.

BARBARA: Did you ever have any trouble with people coming up and messing around your mine when they weren't supposed to be?

JAMES: No.

BARBARA: Nobody ever bothered that?

JAMES: Never bothered any.

BARBARA: Did you and your brother always get along up there, or did you have tiffs from time to time and kind of just leave one another alone?

JAMES: Well no, we got along pretty good. We would argue about how to do things sometimes, you know. But it was nothing, no fighting, just who knew how to do it, you know, how to do this, how to do that.

DOROTHEA: Well if you live together for twenty plus years, you must have gotten along pretty good as brothers.

JAMES: Yeah, we did pretty good, yeah.

BARBARA: Was Mike mechanically inclined too?

JAMES: Well he was a carpenter.

BARBARA: He was a carpenter.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: You were more the electrical type, and he was more the ---

JAMES: Well he knew pretty good about electricity too.

BARBARA: Oh, did he?

JAMES: Yeah, he did lots of wiring. Both of us get along with electricity all right, you know. And I was the, well you might say the ham operator, see.

BARBARA: Well I thought, well because of your training in the military that you ---

JAMES: Well I learned my electronics in the army, yeah.

BARBARA: Was Mike in the service also?

JAMES: Yeah, he was in the, he went in the army in 1928. And that's where he, well he first got sick in the army, he had peritonitis, you know. And actually the doctor, he couldn't get, couldn't get on sick call, you know. And so finally he went out to a private doctor, and I guess that private doctor why he got after them, you know. And they shipped him out to Denver, to a hospital in Denver. And he was there about a year, came out of there in 1933, '33 I guess it was. And, but that's when he didn't have --- oh the

doctors in Michigan they put him down as tuberculosis of the lungs, see. And for years, every year they had him down getting x-rays of his lungs. And that wasn't the trouble at all.

DOROTHEA: Well he is older? Are you the youngest of the boys?

JAMES: No, he was the youngest, yeah. He was fourteen months younger than I am.

DOROTHEA: Oh.

JAMES: They used to think we were twins, you know.

DOROTHEA: Were you both built alike?

JAMES: Similar, yeah, short. We were both short, you know.

BARBARA: When you left your mine up there, did you have to sign anything away?

JAMES: No.

BARBARA: You just left it then?

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: Since it quit producing you didn't have to do any paper work with the government or anything after that time?

JAMES: No. Before I left up there the BLM they came around and they wanted me to lease the place. No charge for it, but just lease it, see. And then they wanted me to give them a quitclaim deed when I left, see. Well I didn't own it; I couldn't give them a quitclaim. They could give me a quitclaim deed. If they'd have give me a quitclaim deed it would be all right, you know. (Laughter)

BARBARA: There is always some paper work connected with the government though.

JAMES: Yeah. So I didn't do anything about it, I just left. Just left that's all.

DOROTHEA: So you didn't have to, you didn't sell it or anything.

JAMES: No, I didn't sell, no.

DOROTHEA: You didn't own it, so you couldn't sell it.

JAMES: No, I couldn't sell it, couldn't sell it. Couldn't keep it, couldn't sell it.

BARBARA: Did you ever have any problems with the government down there at all?

Did they give you any problems?

JAMES: Well the, no I've been, we've been doing our, reporting our assessment work here at the courthouse, you know. And then they said well we had to send the copies of that to Portland, you know. And so I sent them down there for four years, or I mean, and about four years they sent them all back, all my papers back and said they considered that the claim was abandoned. And well, I said well we've been mining that there all this time it has been abandoned, why do any more with it. And oh, the BLM in Burns here, he says, "Well you don't have to have a claim on it, you can mine it anyway, you don't have to have it." The only reason you make a claim on it is to keep somebody from jumping it.

DOROTHEA: Yeah. I understand they are getting a little sticky about that now though.

JAMES: Oh, now you have to lease it.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

JAMES: You have to pay money out on it.

DOROTHEA: Got to keep it in certain condition.

JAMES: If we had gotten a patent, we couldn't have gotten a patent down there. First, you know, all you had to do was show that you were doing work and had some production, you know. Well then it got to where you had to make, in order to live on the claim, you had to make half your living off the mine, see.

BARBARA: Well you were never able to do that much then, were you, make half your living off of it?

JAMES: Oh, no. See we never did, never did make any money off there.

DOROTHEA: How did you live? I mean did you have a pension or ---

JAMES: Well of course Mike had an army pension for his disability, you know, from that sickness he had, TB.

BARBARA: And did you have Social Security then?

JAMES: Well after you're sixty, wasn't it?

BARBARA: Sixty-five.

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: So with your little odd jobs and things, you had a pretty decent living.

JAMES: Well, we didn't get much out of the odd jobs. Sometimes we'd charge a little bit, but mainly just pay our expenses in doing the work, you know.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh. So what do you intend to do now? Are you just writing your diary, and ---

JAMES: I'm printing it up, yeah.

DOROTHEA: Printing up your diary on your computer.

JAMES: Well before I came up here I did a lot. That's what I was doing before I come up here, I was printing this, writing up my diary. I got a whole suitcase full of hand written diary, you know. And it's all mixed up, and I have to sort it back out. I don't know how they got mixed up like they are.

BARBARA: They're not in sequence then?

JAMES: No, they're all just mixed up, dates and all that. I have to sort them out.

DOROTHEA: If you've got it dated then it's easier than trying to ---

JAMES: Some of them I didn't even have dates on it. That's when I first started keeping the diary.

BARBARA: Did you write something every day?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah, most every day.

BARBARA: I think that's wonderful. I know my grandparents, my husband's grandparents, they always kept a daily diary, if not only just to say what the temperature was, or what kind of a day it was.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: Or so and so stopped by, or we went to town and did such and such. But to read it, you can just see their life go by, you know. I think it's wonderful. It's too bad that more people now don't take the time to do something like this, to keep a record for their families to know what's gone on.

JAMES: Yeah. One reason that I didn't have a diary sooner was I couldn't write. When I was in the fifth grade in Michigan a teacher had a --- she read a story about Abraham

Lincoln when he was a boy, see. And it, in that story why the author called him Little Abe, see. And so I wrote, the other kids only wrote about one page, you know, half a page or something, I wrote three pages. And I was real tickled with what I had done. I thought --- And she read all the others and then she came to, didn't read mine, but she come back and sat down and said, "You did good," she said, "but you can't use that Little Abe." And I said, "Well he did." And she says, "Well he is a great writer, you can't do that because you're not a great writer, you know." Someway or other that acted like a hypnosis, you know, my mind thought I couldn't write anymore. And I didn't know what happened, you know.

Later on when I went to San Francisco I was going to write something about, some story about, you know, experience we had. And I was going to write about two people that lived on one of those little islands, one of those lakes in --- there is a bunch of little lakes in Michigan. I was going to write a story about that. You know I knew what I was going to write, but I couldn't write. And I didn't know what was the matter, I just sat like a dummy there, couldn't even move to write that.

DOROTHEA: Huh. You mean you couldn't write at all?

JAMES: Couldn't write at all, no. I made one sentence down and I couldn't go any farther. I knew what I wanted to write, but I couldn't do it.

DOROTHEA: Huh.

JAMES: And that bothered me all the time. Through high school I was in misery, just like a nightmare, you know. I couldn't make up book reports or, you know how it is?

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

JAMES: I couldn't do anything, couldn't write at all. It was just ---

DOROTHEA: But you finally got over that mental block.

JAMES: But what happened when I was doing the Morse Code, you know, you're spelling out the words and you're talking back and forth, and it's just like writing, see. But my mind didn't know I was writing, see, and that broke the block, you know. And when that ---

BARBARA: That's wonderful.

JAMES: And then from there on I could write.

DOROTHEA: Well we're about to come to the end of our tape. Is there something that you could visit with us for a while longer? Or are you getting tired? Because we're going to have to change tapes.

JAMES: Is those little flies surrounding you?

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

JAMES: You know they come out of these trees out here. I don't know ---

DOROTHEA: Is that where they come from?

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: There might be just a couple other little things that we want to close off with.

DOROTHEA: Maybe we better change tapes then.

BARBARA: Yeah, I think maybe.

DOROTHEA: Okay. Let's rest for a while then, while we make another change here.

TAPE 2 - SIDE C

BARBARA: You were telling us about you finally got over your writer's block.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: And worked on your ---

JAMES: That's when I started on my diaries.

BARBARA: When you started doing your diaries then.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: Can you tell us about maybe what you wrote down everyday? You know type of things that you wrote down, and what you wanted to keep track of.

JAMES: Like you say the weather, I told that, and what we were doing, yeah.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

JAMES: Describing the building the retort and the tramway up there. Just what we were doing.

BARBARA: Uh huh. And did you write down who might have stopped by, who dropped in to visit?

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: And what they were there for?

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: And that sort of thing? So how much would you write a day? Sometimes a page, sometimes two pages, sometimes a couple lines? Would it turn out ---

JAMES: Sometimes three pages.

DOROTHEA: Did you do this at the end of the day? Or did you write ---

JAMES: You know I don't remember. Oh, I used to do it at night when I'd go over to my bedroom there and sit there at night after I'd gone to bed, see.

BARBARA: Kind of contemplate what had happened to you during the day and just jot down what had transpired then.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: Oh that's great. And so your intent then is to compile this altogether for your family?

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: To make a record as to what went on in your life on the desert. And do you think you might consider giving a copy to the library when you finish this up?

JAMES: Well I could, I suppose, yeah.

DOROTHEA: I think it would be interesting for, to add on to this report that we're doing now. It's not really a report, but a ---

BARBARA: It's hard for us to cover everything that you did just in a couple hours of visiting time, you know.

JAMES: Yeah. I got it in these folders here, see, by the month. Now here is one that, you see ---

BARBARA: Maybe you can read to us what you had done for ---

JAMES: Now you can see how much there is for one month, you know.

DOROTHEA: Oh, uh huh. This is 1980. This must be when Mike went to the VA Hospital. He hasn't been told about the cyst on his liver. He says that they will be making tests to see what is wrong with him. I have a feeling he is being used as a subject for young interns to work on, and learning how to do various test procedures. They're doing a lot of tests that are not called for. Do you want to kind of hit and miss some of the things that you have written?

JAMES: Well I kind of --- I don't know what to --- I don't know if I could or not.

DOROTHEA: Oh, okay.

JAMES: I don't --- it's just like this, you know. I even forget about what I write, you know. Now this was, I just printed this up quite recently.

DOROTHEA: Uh huh. So you're back quite a ways yet, you've got about thirteen years to go then.

JAMES: Yeah. Well I got some of them later than that and some earlier. Like I say, they're all mixed up.

DOROTHEA: But one day you'll get them all in sequence.

JAMES: Yeah, yeah.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, yeah. So that's okay, that kind of brings it back to mind, and tells you ---

JAMES: Yeah, when I read that stuff, it just brings me back to mind, see. I've forgotten most of it, you know, never think about it, you know.

DOROTHEA: Do you get some giggles out of it, and think oh gosh, you know that's ---

JAMES: Yeah, yeah, some of it I have, yeah. I say, is that me?

BARBARA: Did I do that silly thing? Did you and your brother do any traveling at all, after you moved down there to the desert? Did you take time off sometimes and go on little trips to visit someone, or visit different places, or not?

JAMES: Well one time I went down to Berkeley and helped my brother Charlie when he had a sick wife down there, see. And I helped him there, stayed there quite awhile. And then one time Mike went down to West Point and built a, helped build a house for George there, see. So he was gone almost a year and I was there alone, see.

DOROTHEA: So what did you do when you were alone, did you go ahead and mine?

JAMES: No, I didn't do any mining, but I worked in the garden, see, and so forth. I forget what all I did.

DOROTHEA: When you were gone was he then alone too?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah.

DOROTHEA: And what did he do? Did you see anything that he had accomplished while you were gone?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah. At one time that's probably when we got the power in there, see. And when I come back he had gotten all the wiring done inside the dugout. That was quite a job.

DOROTHEA: Yeah. So you had electricity when you came back?

JAMES: Oh yeah, yeah.

DOROTHEA: And that's when you started buying these newfangled things huh?

JAMES: Oh yeah.

BARBARA: Did you have your computer down in the dugout? Did you buy it while you were down there?

JAMES: Yeah, yeah. At first I had a Kaypro Computer. Have you ever heard of that?

BARBARA: No, huh uh.

JAMES: And then later I bought a, let's see I bought the IBM, yeah. Oh, I've had computers quite awhile.

DOROTHEA: You must have had one of the earlier ones too then. They only, you only could type on disks when you first bought it, or did it have a hard drive?

JAMES: Well the first one I had was just a floppy disk, yeah. Two floppy disks.

DOROTHEA: Do you think that they're easier with the disks than you do with the hard drive, or can you find things better with them?

JAMES: Well the hard disk, I don't use any; I just use the floppy disks now. With the Word Star you just switch over to your A drive, you know, and then you work on that. You don't have to work on the hard drive.

DOROTHEA: Yeah. So you don't use your hard drive much.

JAMES: No, no, because ---

BARBARA: Just put your programs on.

JAMES: Yeah, you've got your programs in there.

BARBARA: So did you ---

JAMES: When you switch it to the A disk or drive, the program goes right with you.

BARBARA: Oh yeah.

DOROTHEA: Yeah.

JAMES: So you don't even know it's on the hard disk.

BARBARA: So how did you learn to operate the computer, just by the manuals and books that came with it, and figured out what it was all about?

JAMES: Yeah. The first computer I got was the, what do you call it, Vic-20, did you ever hear of that?

BARBARA: Huh uh.

JAMES: And that thing, you didn't have anything on it like you got now, you know. All it had was one little, one thing that you had a memory, that you could put in about three sentences on it, that's all.

BARBARA: That wasn't worth a whole lot then was it?

JAMES: And then the next one I got the Commodore 4, is it? Four I guess, and it mostly dealt with making programs, you know. Because then people made their own programs, you know. And ---

DOROTHEA: And that's something I have a hard time doing.

JAMES: Oh yeah, I never got into programming, Now my nephew, or Karolee's husband he got so he could program pretty good. And he did a lot of --- well actually he

can work, he can work that program stuff. He corrected things on my programs here that was giving me trouble, you know.

DOROTHEA: How did you decide that you needed a computer?

JAMES: Well so I could do some writing, you know. Because I figured well you get your spelling on there, and dictionary and all that stuff, you know. And then you can correct your errors, you know.

BARBARA: It's a lot easier than a typewriter, isn't it?

JAMES: Oh yeah. But they've got typewriters now that will do that too.

BARBARA: Well yeah.

JAMES: With dictionaries in them.

BARBARA: Uh huh, oh yeah.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, yeah.

JAMES: Oh boy.

BARBARA: You mentioned something about helping your neighbors down there doing little chores for them. Did you ever do any ranch work for them; help with cattle roundup or branding?

JAMES: No, no, no.

BARBARA: It was mostly just ---

JAMES: Fixing their refrigerators and television and stuff like that.

BARBARA: I see, okay. More in the electrical line type of thing.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: And did your brother ever help building anything down there? Did he help neighbors build a shed or something like that?

JAMES: Yeah, like putting on a tin roof on a building or something like that, he'd do that.

BARBARA: Did you ever go down to Denio and do a little gambling in the slot machines down there?

JAMES: No, no I never did.

BARBARA: Did you ever go down there to Denio at all?

JAMES: Well ---

BARBARA: Have a meal or something and visit with people?

JAMES: No, never --- I've been to Winnemucca too, you know, and never did do any gambling there either.

DOROTHEA: You're not a gambler.

JAMES: No, I'm not a gambler.

BARBARA: So did you go into Fields and Andrews at all, very much?

JAMES: Not much, no. Sometimes, once in awhile I'd get down to Fields, but very seldom.

BARBARA: So mostly when you needed anything you came on into Burns did you?

JAMES: Oh yeah, yeah.

BARBARA: And how frequently would you come in, would you guess once a month?

JAMES: Oh about once a month. At first we didn't even go in even once a month, maybe three or four months.

BARBARA: I see. And so do you know many people in town, you mentioned this Ellis Mason. Do you know other people here in town?

JAMES: No. A lot of people know me though.

BARBARA: A lot of people know you, but you don't know who they are.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: Like strange women coming up to you at the library and introducing themselves, like yesterday.

JAMES: Yeah. You scared me to death. (Laughter)

BARBARA: Oh, I'm sorry. Did I scare you out of the library, did I?

JAMES: I still got that book that I got that day. It's the funniest; I've never read anybody that wrote that way. I never saw such an author. At first I'd go to sleep trying to read it, you know, but gradually got used to the way he wrote. It's getting a little more interesting all the time.

BARBARA: Do you go up to the library every few days to read do you?

JAMES: Well I go up there to get a book.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: It's kind of a nice place to go up and visit with other people too, you know. There are a lot of people that come up there every day, you know, and read the newspapers, and sit and read books and stuff.

JAMES: Well one time I was walking up this D Street, you know, and way up there past the library a woman come out toward the road and she greeted me, and she knew me, you know. I don't know her, Dora Johnson.

BARBARA: Dora Johnson.

DOROTHEA: Johnson.

JAMES: She knew me.

DOROTHEA: Do you ever go to the Senior Center and have dinner?

JAMES: No, I don't.

DOROTHEA: You don't do that.

JAMES: No. I have my ---

DOROTHEA: You just cook for yourself.

JAMES: Yeah, I have my own special diets and stuff, protein. I just went and got my cholesterol checked, you know.

BARBARA: Oh, yesterday at Safeway, or whatever?

JAMES: Yeah. Yeah, see what I got there?

DOROTHEA: Oh wow, a little high on the sugar though.

JAMES: No.

DOROTHEA: But you're okay.

JAMES: No, the sugar is from 75 to 110.

DOROTHEA: Oh, okay.

JAMES: I'm right in good shape.

DOROTHEA: Boy, you are good shape on your cholesterol.

JAMES: Yeah, 163.

BARBARA: Very good. You must be a pretty good cook then.

JAMES: It says a 164 isn't it?

BARBARA: Keep yourself in good shape then.

JAMES: So I guess I've got the right diet going.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, you do.

BARBARA: You have it figured out.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: Have you ever gone to any of the Historical Society luncheons or anything like that, and listened to some of the things?

JAMES: No.

BARBARA: Are you interested in clubs or anything like that?

JAMES: No.

BARBARA: No.

DOROTHEA: Well they do have a luncheon every third Friday of the month down at the Silver Sage, and we have some pretty good speakers and interesting programs. If you're ever in lack of something to do, well you can come down.

JAMES: I'm too busy; I'm too busy here.

DOROTHEA: Too busy doing your computer work, huh?

JAMES: Yeah, I don't know if I'll ever get those things up to date and all taken care of. It's going to take me a couple years anyway.

BARBARA: Did you and your brother ever play cards?

JAMES: Not for ---

BARBARA: You know with one another, playing back and forth?

JAMES: Just for fun, yeah.

BARBARA: Just for fun.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: Like you know in the evenings?

JAMES: We didn't when we were there together we didn't, some of our, like John Fox and his family would come up and they'd play pinochle or some other hand. But I never joined in much. I didn't care about cards.

BARBARA: And John Fox lived where?

JAMES: Elmira.

BARBARA: Elmira, okay.

DOROTHEA: Now he is the one that made the plates out of the clay?

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: And where is he now?

JAMES: Oh he died quite a while ago.

DOROTHEA: Oh, he is gone?

JAMES: Yeah. Sure missed him. There was another Jerry Debrokert in Bend used to come out and visit. He come out about eight times every year, he and his wife. And he passed away. His wife is, I guess she is dead now too.

BARBARA: What made you decide to leave your home there on the desert and move into town?

JAMES: Well the winters, you know how they are?

BARBARA: Last winter was a pretty tough one.

JAMES: Yeah, it was. But it wasn't as bad as '84, but it was pretty bad. I had quite a time getting up and down to get the mail, you know, and so forth. I thought well it's time I got out of here.

BARBARA: Well especially being by yourself, maybe it was, you know, a little harder to get around and do things.

JAMES: Well what I miss is going out on the road and getting a flat tire, and then have to do it all by myself, you know. Used to, Mike and I used to work good at it, see. It didn't take long to change wheels.

DOROTHEA: Did you ever have any accidents in the mine to where you were ---

JAMES: No, never had any accidents.

DOROTHEA: Never. Did you have any accidents around home or ---

JAMES: No.

DOROTHEA: I read somewhere where you had broken your leg, how did that happen?

JAMES: Oh, that was, that was way back in, real early, the second year I was there, I guess. Yeah, we had a donkey and I used to, Mike was in Bend, working on a house in Bend. And I used to put a chain on his neck, see, and let him go off down the hill there, you know, and eat grass, you know, and so forth. And I'd go down in the evening to get him and I'd hang onto that chain and he'd pull me up the hill, see. And I just got pretty close to the top of the hill, I knew he was going to take off and run down to the dugout because I had hay there for him. And so we got up there and he started going, and I dropped that chain and just as I got my right foot over the chain, see, and I was bringing up my left foot and the chain wrapped around my ankle, and it pulled my ankle out of joint, see. And I couldn't walk on it, you know. I started to walk on it and just flipped over, see. So I scooted down to the dugout, you know, and about four days later Mike came in and he said, "What's the matter?" "Said I broke my leg." He said, "Well let's wait awhile see if it really is broke."

So then we got to Bend; I guess about ten days, you know, to the doctor. He says, "What are you coming in here for, it's all healed up now," he says. But the bone though, the bone back here was broken, but it was healed up. But my joint here was all pulled out; see, and I could just move my foot back and forth in that joint, see. And it's, because it's all split apart here. He put a cast on it, and I figured well I can walk on it. He says, "Well tomorrow you can walk on it." And I went back up to where Karolee lived, you know, and I was staying there, and I got up the next day and I couldn't walk on it. I was going to call him on the phone and tell him I couldn't walk on it. Well he called me and

he says, “Well one of the other doctors noticed that,” he said, “you come on in we have to take that cast off.” So I went in there, and sure enough he took that cast off, and there it was, you know, you could just slide that joint back and forth. And then he put a real tight cast on it, you know. And so I had to go back there and see him. I said, “Well I might as well go down to the veterans, you know, and let them take care of it.”

And my brother Charlie was visiting then, so he, I rode down to the veteran’s place with it, and he let me off there and I took my suitcase and went up there. And I waited around and I had that cast on it, see. So then some guy he took that off, you know, and then I had to sit around there in the hall for oh pretty near all the rest of the day. And finally the doctor came around and he said well --- oh he took me down, had me go down and get x-rays for that thing. And he said, “Well it is okay now, you can, you don’t have to do anything with it.” He says, “Don’t walk on it, you go home but don’t walk on it,” he says. So I did, and went --- and I, keep that wrapped with a blanket, or a pillow around it, see. I had, I went down to the desert with that thing.

And that was when I first met Ellis Mason. I was going down to the mail; to get the mail going cross ... Didn’t go down the road. And he drove up there, and he says, “What are you doing here?” I said, “I’m going after the mail.” He said, “Do you live here?” And I said, “Well I live up there.” He didn’t even know I lived there. (Laughter) So that’s where I met Ellis Mason.

DOROTHEA: Did you have a cast back on it then, or just the pillow?

JAMES: No, no. Yeah, just used that pillow on there. Didn't need a cast anymore, see. He said, "It's all healed up now, see, but don't walk on it."

DOROTHEA: Just don't walk on it.

JAMES: Yeah, because I guess he didn't --- it could, you know, spread apart again or something. And actually it got, it worked better than my other ankle, you know.

BARBARA: Didn't bother you to run after that at all then?

JAMES: No, no. The only trouble I have here with this thing here, my toe, when I was in Michigan, a boy, my father cut wood, see, with a crosscut saw. And I was standing there, and I don't know, the handle slipped out, and that blade come down there and cut that tendon there, see. And I didn't know what happened. Anyway I noticed it felt funny, you know, and I was trying to walk. And what happens, the heel, the foot will just flop down like that, see. That's one thing I have to look out for walking on that.

DOROTHEA: When you're walking.

JAMES: If I step on that, if I'm going down steps or something, I've got to make sure that I have the flat ball of my foot on the steps, see. Because I can't put my heel on that edge, because it will just flop down.

DOROTHEA: It will flop down, yeah.

JAMES: But it really doesn't bother me too much at all. But it does when I'm walking along, it goes flop, flop, flop, you know, left, right, left, right.

BARBARA: Think you're back in the army again.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: You mentioned something; you had a dog early on. Did you have many pets while you were up there?

JAMES: Well when we first went up there we had a shepherd dog up there. And we were digging a ditch for the, to put the pipeline in for the water, and I guess I come in to rest up now. I was sitting there in the chair and the dog he come in there with me, and he acted like what am I doing in there. I better get out and go to work, you know. And then we had a, I don't know what happened to Shep now.

Oh that was, that first dog was a --- we called him Stubby, because he had a stub tail, you know. He used to go with us, that was before we had the mine, see. And he used to go with us doing assessment work. But sometimes we had a flatbed truck, see, and he'd go with us. And one time he got off the truck and he just wanted to run, oh he wanted to run outside, see. And finally he went clear off the road somewhere, chasing rabbits I guess. We had to go quite a ways before he finally ... We stopped and waited for him, see, and finally he come in and he got on the truck alright. Oh, that one, he wanted to ride in the front seat with us; he didn't want to ride back there. Then we let him ride in the front. Anyway the road that, we were there in Bend with that dog, and there was another --- Karolee and Bruce had a small dog, see, little dog. And one night we heard that little dog, and she was in there just a carrying on, you know, and I let her out the door and she went round and round the house, and just tearing the dickens. And what was happening there was a bobcat on the roof. And finally that bobcat jumped off of that roof and the little dog tore off after that bobcat and Stubby went with her, you

know, went behind it. And he never did come back. And that little dog come back to the house and she went under the house and she wouldn't come out. She was mad at us I guess. Anyway Stubby never came back.

DOROTHEA: Either the cat got him or something else did.

JAMES: Yeah, I think that a bobcat got him, yeah, because he didn't have any teeth. He'd have torn into that bobcat.

DOROTHEA: Did you have many bobcats and things down at Steens?

JAMES: Well at first when we had chickens there, the bobcats, boy they'd come up there, terrific.

DOROTHEA: Eliminate your chickens.

JAMES: Yeah, yeah.

DOROTHEA: How about snakes?

JAMES: Not many snakes, no.

DOROTHEA: No.

JAMES: Gopher snakes and bull snakes, a few rattlesnakes, but very seldom.

DOROTHEA: Are there many rattlesnakes down there?

JAMES: Not many.

DOROTHEA: In that area?

JAMES: No.

BARBARA: I understand that you and your brother did rock hounding for a while. Did you hunt rocks at all?

JAMES: Well I always hunted rocks, yeah. I never found any. We had lots of those geodes around the place there, were brought in, you know. And I let people take them off, carry them off.

DOROTHEA: Did you polish any rocks or ---

JAMES: No, I never polished any, no.

DOROTHEA: You didn't. You collected thunder eggs, but you didn't split them or ---

JAMES: No, no. I let people have them.

BARBARA: Were they easy to find?

JAMES: Yeah, oh yeah.

DOROTHEA: Did you ever collect some of that snake agate stuff?

JAMES: Snake agate?

DOROTHEA: Yeah, I think it was down in that area. It's kind of white outside, and it's all different shapes. It looks kind of like coral, only it's an agate.

JAMES: Oh maybe I think I have, I think I have had some of that, yeah.

DOROTHEA: Do you have any of your rocks now, or did you leave them all behind?

JAMES: I left them all behind.

DOROTHEA: Left them all behind, huh?

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: That's another world, huh?

JAMES: Oh yeah, that's another era.

DOROTHEA: Well is there anything else that you can think about that you would like to discuss, like some of the things that you did? How long did it take you to get a flask of mercury?

JAMES: Well it's hard to say how long it took, because we would be, we'd gather up, get some more ahead of time, you know to, and the ore was actually in between the rocks. It wasn't in the rocks; it was between the rocks in seams and in clay. And we'd get that, and we had a rotary, we built a rotary screen to screen all the rocks out, see, and let that fine stuff --- And when we would retort why, it would only take about five days to get heat up to temperature, you know.

DOROTHEA: Take five days to get it up to 1100?

JAMES: Yeah. And then get the ore hot all the way up, see, and then it would take maybe one day to actually start, the mercury start running. And we'd probably get one flask, see. That would take me about six days, or seven days to get a flask. But how much, it took quite awhile to get the ore together.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, in other words you would work say like a year or so in order to get all this ore together before you would work a flask full?

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: So you didn't make, you didn't do a flask very often then?

JAMES: No, no, no. See we would get into a pocket of ore and then it would be pretty good, you know. And then we'd have to go farther to get another pocket of ore, see; it would come in pockets like that. Just egg us on, you know.

BARBARA: They're saying just a little bit more, just a little bit more.

JAMES: Just around the next corner, huh?

BARBARA: Yeah. Just like all of our fortunes, are just around the corner.

JAMES: Yeah.

BARBARA: We never quite make it.

DOROTHEA: Well it's getting a little late, and I'm about out of questions. Have you got some more? Shall we do our little video? I told you about the video that we're going to do, is that going to be okay?

JAMES: Where is the video? Are you going to make it?

BARBARA: Yeah, we've got the camera here; we'll just take your picture.

JAMES: Oh, yeah.

BARBARA: We like to have a picture of you to go along with our tape here too. And then we transcribe this up. And I might need to get back with you again to make sure we have everything accurate.

JAMES: Okay, yeah.

DOROTHEA: Yeah, we typed it up and made sure the words were spelled right, and the names were spelled right. Well we thank you for the afternoon, and we will now pause and go for the video.

JAMES: Yeah.

DOROTHEA: So thank you very much.

JAMES: You want ---

(END OF TAPE)

b1