

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #429 Side A

Subject: Sylvia Saum

Place: The Aspens – Burns, Oregon

Date: April 9, 2002

Interviewer: Christine Stott

CHRISTINE STOTT: It's April 9, 2002, and this is Christine Stott. I'm interviewing Sylvia Saum at The Aspens.

SYLVIA SAUM: My father was born in Eugene in 1861. Mother was born in 1874. Their family was some of the first settlers that settled around Vale. Mother came in a covered wagon when she was 7 years old. When they were 20 and 33 they got married and lived on a cattle ranch. They had my sister, and then ten years later me, and then eight years later my sister. I didn't have anybody to play with so when I was about 5 years old I had a dog and a horse. The dog liked to ride with me on my horse. And I'd ride up to a wagon and he'd jump up on the wagon and then jump on behind the saddle.

In the summertime my folks would go camping in the mountains for two weeks. Leave the hired man to take care of things. When we came back this time Tippy didn't come out to meet me. He was a black dog with a white tip on his tail. And I said, "Well where is Tippy?" Well the man said, "Well he got lonesome while you were gone and he started chasing the cows and I killed him."

CHRISTINE: Oh!

SYLVIA: I was broken hearted. The next year we went up to the mountains, when we came back my horse was dead. And I just knew that he had killed him too. But he said no, that the horse was old and got down in a ditch and died.

We went to school, a little country school, and we had teachers that were very timid, they were from the east.

CHRISTINE: Where was this, Sylvia?

SYLVIA: Out of Vale.

CHRISTINE: Out of Vale, okay.

SYLVIA: Ten miles from, left of Vale. One Halloween we put a big black cat in this girl's desk. And when she raised the lid up to put her lunch in the cat jumped out and squalled and she fainted. We had a big pond by the schoolhouse. We liked to go down there and skate. One day we were having fun, and the neighbor's pigs came to see what all the noise was about. We had heard the saying; well somebody was independent as a hog on ice. So we decided to find out. We got one pig out on the ice, he didn't slide around, he was independent. But the ice caved in and it drowned.

CHRISTINE: Oh!

SYLVIA: And my dad had to pay for the pig.

CHRISTINE: Oh dear.

SYLVIA: We --- oh, we moved up to the Turner Ranch out of Jamieson, and my dad and I were driving a bunch of cattle up a canyon, and we heard a noise and looked back and the canyon was on fire. It was rushing up towards us. We ran our horses up the hill,

there were some rocks fell out of the brush, the cattle was --- the fire went by and the cattle were rolling. And we just knew they were all burned up, but the fire stopped. And we rode down to see what happened, and the cattle had run across a sheep dead ground, and that's where the fire stopped. So the cattle were scorched a little bit, but none of them really bad.

CHRISTINE: Oh my.

SYLVIA: Then we moved up to the Turner Ranch above Jamieson, and --- oh, that's where that fire was.

CHRISTINE: Oh, at Jamieson?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: Uh-huh.

SYLVIA: While we were there my uncle was herding sheep up on Cottonwood Mountain, and one day he brought a sack of bones down to the ranch. And he said, "Now I didn't know whether these were White, whether this was a White man or an Indian." Why dad said, "Well it was Indian, I know where he was buried." Said some Bannock Indians from Idaho came over here and joined up with the Paiutes and they stole some rancher's horses. They caught up with them on Cottonwood Mountain and they were roping --- they only wanted the gentle ones. So they roped them, and if they weren't roped to lead they would shoot them. Well they shot this Indian and got away, or the Indians got away. They got some of their horses back. I can't think ---

CHRISTINE: That's all right. Do you want to take a little break?

SYLVIA: I got mixed up. (Pause) Father went back up with this band of sheep and he hung the bones on the barn. So they would rattle when the wind would blow, and my mother couldn't stand it, so she took them out and buried them.

Let's see. And we sold those ranches and went to Logan. Well a friend and I, we were about 15 years old, and we climbed up in a cherry tree and we ate some green cherries and smoked a cigarette. And it made us so sick, neither one of us ever smoked.

One day my sister and I had been riding all day in the hot sun. We came to this big ditch full of water. And we decided to go --- we didn't have any place to put our clothes so we hung them on our saddles, and decided to go skinny-dipping. Well we were having a good time, and the horses snorted and ran for home. Well we looked up the ditch line and here come a cougar. He was, the slobbers were coming out of his mouth and we figured he had rabies. Well we went under the water and stayed as long as we could. And when we came up the cat was gone, but so were our clothes. We had to wait until after dark to go home, because there was a bunch of men down at the house. We just knew that cat was going to jump us almost every step of the way.

My sister and I milked seven or eight cows every morning and night. We would milk the cows, separate the milk, take the separated milk out to the pigs. Then we'd go to the house and get ready for school. She was the janitor there. And then --- oh, there was only --- ... only had three years of high school. So I took the junior year forenoon, and the senior year in the afternoon, and got a diploma that way. The next year I went to Vale to a post graduate course. While I was there this young fellow, they had his trial for murder, because he had shot Sheriff Goodman the Harney County Sheriff. He brought

these horses and he was supposed to pay for them when he got home, and the owner got worried and sent the sheriff after him. Well he went around his horse to take the gun out of the scabbard so he could unsaddle his horse. The sheriff thought he was going to shoot him so he was shooting at him. Well the kid thought he was going to kill his horse, so he shot the sheriff in the leg, but he couldn't stop the blood, so the sheriff bled to death. Well he couldn't prove that the sheriff had shot at him. And I bought the saddle and sometime after they had hanged him I found the bullet imbedded in the saddle. If I had found it sooner, it might have saved his life.

CHRISTINE: Oh my goodness. So he was convicted and put to death?

SYLVIA: Yeah, they hung him.

CHRISTINE: Wow!

SYLVIA: Then I married Roy Johnson, he had a cattle ranch south of Vale. And we ran wild horses, and we rode in the rodeo. I rode in the races, and he was pick-up man. We heard the ... two saddle horses because we had a team of workhorses to trade. So we went over there through the hills. Stayed all night. I rode the horses with Buck, show him how gentle he was. The next morning we went to ... and hooked the team up to a wagon and they ran away and kicked it all to pieces. And the horse that I had ridden over bucked the camp tender, kicked him and broke his leg. So I guess that was ... deal.

The moonshine days --- and this old moonshiner was about to run out of supplies. He was way out in the hills. And the men that were haying didn't have time to go out there so they asked my sister and I if we would take the packhorse with a load of supplies out to him. Well we went out there, but when he saw us coming why he was going to

shoot us. And we had to talk like everything to make him understand that we had just brought his supplies out. But when the whiskey was all done they fill it in gallon jugs and brought it up to the ranch. He had been the grain ... end of the grain. Well Margaret and her little cousin decided to go out and play in the grain. Well they found these jugs of stuff, so they took the lids off and put grain in it. Ruined the whiskey.

CHRISTINE: Who is Margaret?

SYLVIA: My daughter. Oh, didn't I say.

CHRISTINE: Oh, okay.

SYLVIA: Well I had two girls.

CHRISTINE: You had two daughters?

SYLVIA: Yeah, Mary and Margaret.

CHRISTINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SYLVIA: When the girls were 10 and 12, I got a divorce and went to work on a lookout that summer. We had to haul water about a mile from the house and one evening we went out to get some water and Mary decided she wanted to walk home. So it was getting late, was getting dark, and Mary hadn't showed. So I started calling, and she answered, and she had slipped off a deep canyon. And I guided her back to the house. There wasn't anything but timber and trees, brambles, where she was headed. That night a cougar chased a deer through the yard.

Then I married Fred Weesner and we lived at Seneca. He was a truck driver for Hines.

CHRISTINE: And how do you spell his last name?

SYLVIA: Huh?

CHRISTINE: W I E S N E R ? Weisner.

SYLVIA: W E E S N E R.

CHRISTINE: Okay.

SYLVIA: The girls went to high school in John Day. Then in '69 --- oh, they were married. Mary married Rusty Drewett, and she was a real estate dealer. And Margaret married Ruel Teague. They are the ones that started the Teague Motors Company.

I bought and sold horses and fished and hunted, and was a rockhound. Fred passed away later in '73. He was a rockhound. No, that's wrong --- he died in '73. Later I married Steve Saum, he was a rockhound. He had a rock store and we made lots of pretty things with a slicer, blocks and tabletops and jewelry. Steve liked to play bingo and pinochle. But he had poor eyesights, and we wanted to travel in the summer and I'd drive the pickup and pulled a fifth wheeler. We went lots of places from Mexico to Canada.

CHRISTINE: Oh.

SYLVIA: He is gone now. And enjoy the family and bingo, and meals down at the Center. I'm 97 years old. I have 7 grandkids, 14 great-grandkids, and 10 great great grandkids.

CHRISTINE: Wow. So when were you born Sylvia?

SYLVIA: Huh?

CHRISTINE: What's your birthdate?

SYLVIA: June the 14<sup>th</sup>, 1905.

CHRISTINE: Wow.

SYLVIA: I don't know what that sounds like, maybe sounds bad.

CHRISTINE: No, it's fine, it's fine. I know my mom told me about the skinny-dipping one. She said, "Oh I hope she tells that one, because that's so funny." Were you born at Vale?

SYLVIA: Yeah, on a ranch out of Vale.

CHRISTINE: And when did you come to Burns?

SYLVIA: In '41. Fred came and worked for Hines, and stuff like that.

CHRISTINE: He worked for Edward Hines Lumber Company?

SYLVIA: Uh-huh.

CHRISTINE: Uh-huh. And you went, you say you went to school, post graduate school in ---

SYLVIA: In Vale.

CHRISTINE: --- in Vale. Studying what?

SYLVIA: Teachers training. Didn't sound like it --- is that thing still on?

CHRISTINE: Yeah. Do you want me to turn it off?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: Okay. (Pause)

SYLVIA: Because I don't talk like a teacher. Two young men came from Seattle, and they wanted to go for a horseback ride. So we took them out in the hills, and we saw a coyote, and they were thrilled about that. And we were going to come to a river, so we galloped our horses on ahead, and went around a hole in the river. And then we ... just



opposite the hole. Well when they came down they came across the river and they went clear under. And they said, “How in the world did you get across here and not get wet?” We didn’t tell them.

CHRISTINE: You didn’t tell them?

SYLVIA: No.

CHRISTINE: Now how did you?

SYLVIA: We went around the hole ...

CHRISTINE: Oh I see, you didn’t go through the water at all. (Laughter)

SYLVIA: Then my sister and I we were at Vale practicing for the rodeo, and we had our good clothes on. But her horse was scared of cars, so we decided we’d go across the river below the ridge. Well she went in first, and her horse swam around like a little duck, and she didn’t even get her boots wet. Well my horse went in and he walked on his hind feet until his nose went under, then he ... and swam out, and I was wet, my 4<sup>th</sup> of July clothes were ruined. I can’t think of anything else.

CHRISTINE: Okay. When you do, let me know and I’ll turn it back on.

SYLVIA: In ’69 we came from Seneca down to Burns to run the airport. We worked there four years. I guess --- anyway, that’s all.

CHRISTINE: Okay.

SYLVIA: A lot of things happened when we were there. Jack McAllister brought a brand new plane in, and the wheels didn’t come down and it burnt up, and he got out just in time.

CHRISTINE: Oh. I don’t remember that. Wow.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: So you like to go to the Senior Center, right?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: I know you like to play pinochle.

SYLVIA: And bingo.

CHRISTINE: And visit with your grandchildren.

SYLVIA: What?

CHRISTINE: Visit with your grandchildren.

SYLVIA: Oh, yes!

CHRISTINE: Oh, yes. So you were married to Roy Johnson when and where?

SYLVIA: In 1925, at Payette, Idaho.

CHRISTINE: And do you know when and where he was born?

SYLVIA: Mary was born in 1927, and Margie in 1929. Let's see they were both born at Vale, or Ontario.

CHRISTINE: Mary was born first?

SYLVIA: Uh-huh, '27.

CHRISTINE: And Margaret in '29?

SYLVIA: Uh-huh.

CHRISTINE: And Mary's middle name?

SYLVIA: Mary Louise.

CHRISTINE: And then she became a Drewett.

SYLVIA: No, her birthday is in November.

CHRISTINE: And her last name is Drewett?

SYLVIA: It isn't now, no --- yeah, she married Rusty Drewett.

CHRISTINE: Let's see, D R E W ---

SYLVIA: D R E W E T T.

CHRISTINE: One of her kids was in my class. What's Margaret's middle name?

SYLVIA: Ellen.

CHRISTINE: Teague. And what's her birthdate?

SYLVIA: The 4<sup>th</sup> of September.

CHRISTINE: Two days before mine. And November ---

SYLVIA: 22<sup>nd</sup> for Mary.

CHRISTINE: 22<sup>nd</sup>. Okay, and your father's name?

SYLVIA: John Thomson, T H O M S O N.

CHRISTINE: Uh-huh. Do you know his date of birth?

SYLVIA: June the 5<sup>th</sup>. He was born in 1861.

CHRISTINE: Oh wow, you have that written down. That's great.

SYLVIA: In June --- no, in Eugene.

CHRISTINE: Okay. And when did he die?

SYLVIA: In 1920. No, wait a minute, 1925.

CHRISTINE: Okay. Did he have ancestors that came from another country?

SYLVIA: No, these were some of the first ones that came.

CHRISTINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SYLVIA: I guess my father was, he was Scotch. My mother was Irish and English.

CHRISTINE: And what did you dad do for a living?

SYLVIA: He was a rancher, cattle rancher.

CHRISTINE: Uh-huh. And your mother's maiden name?

SYLVIA: Boston. Lucy Boston.

CHRISTINE: B O S T O N ?

SYLVIA: Huh?

CHRISTINE: Boston?

SYLVIA: Uh-huh.

CHRISTINE: B O S T O N.

SYLVIA: Uh-huh.

CHRISTINE: Okay. And her date of birth? Or the year at least.

SYLVIA: January the 15<sup>th</sup>, 1874.

CHRISTINE: Wow that's amazing you remember all this. And she was born where?

SYLVIA: In Missouri. She came to Vale when she was 7 years old in a covered wagon.

CHRISTINE: Okay, and when did she die?

SYLVIA: In 1975.

CHRISTINE: Oh, she had a long life.

SYLVIA: 101 and a half.

CHRISTINE: Oh I see, wow!

SYLVIA: And she could read ... paper. She could get around real good. Her mind was clear.

CHRISTINE: Wow.

SYLVIA: She couldn't hear very good.

CHRISTINE: And where did --- did she die here?

SYLVIA: No, in Auburn, Washington.

CHRISTINE: Oh, Auburn. Well you certainly have a better memory than even younger people I've interviewed. (Laughter)

SYLVIA: Well it's a good thing I've got something.

CHRISTINE: Yeah. Oh no, that's great.

SYLVIA: Something to get around with I guess.

CHRISTINE: I'm so glad you're doing this. And when did they get married, do you know?

SYLVIA: Well she was 20, so that would be 18 ---

CHRISTINE: 1894 then.

SYLVIA: '94.

CHRISTINE: Okay. Was that in Vale?

SYLVIA: Huh?

CHRISTINE: Was that in Vale they got married, or somewhere else?

SYLVIA: Ontario.

CHRISTINE: Ontario. Okay. And you said her ancestors were from Ireland and England?

SYLVIA: Uh-huh.

CHRISTINE: And she was a rancher's wife?

SYLVIA: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: Did she ever have another job?

SYLVIA: Oh, she wasn't --- when they got married why she --- she was just a --- she wasn't a rancher. I don't know.

CHRISTINE: Did she have musical talents or something like that?

SYLVIA: Not really. Well my sister, well both of my sisters were artists. But she, they'd butcher, they would butcher a beef. They had no electricity. So she'd can that meat. And then they'd butcher pigs, and they had a smokehouse. They'd smoke the hams and the shoulders. And she always raised a big garden. And she always had a bunch of men to cook for, cowboys and hay men.

CHRISTINE: Uh-huh. So you had two sisters.

SYLVIA: Uh-huh.

CHRISTINE: And the first was?

SYLVIA: Gladys, Gladys Marie.

CHRISTINE: And did she get married?

SYLVIA: Uh-huh. And she had two kids.

CHRISTINE: What was her name?

SYLVIA: Thayer, T H A Y E R. The boy and girl that was here, was her daughter.

CHRISTINE: Oh, I didn't see her.

SYLVIA: I've got a picture of her up there, that ...

CHRISTINE: This one?

SYLVIA: No.

CHRISTINE: Oh, this one.

SYLVIA: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: Oh, okay. Yeah.

SYLVIA: She was blind all her life.

CHRISTINE: She was what? Blind all her life?

SYLVIA: When she was two months old her dad's brother dropped her on her head.

CHRISTINE: Oh.

SYLVIA: And it messed her eyes up so she went blind. She went to blind school, and she could sew, she made her own clothes. She could cook. She married a rancher and cooked for hay men.

CHRISTINE: Wow.

SYLVIA: She had quite a life.

CHRISTINE: Well good. And Gladys was born when?

SYLVIA: Ten years before I was. 1895 would that be?

CHRISTINE: Yeah. And where was that?

SYLVIA: At Vale.

CHRISTINE: At Vale.

SYLVIA: At the ranch at Vale.

CHRISTINE: Uh-huh. And then you were next. And then the last one was?

SYLVIA: Muriel, M U R I E L. And she married; well his name is Lee, Kenneth Lee. She didn't have any kids.

CHRISTINE: Okay. And she was born 8 years after you?

SYLVIA: Let's see, 9 years after me.

CHRISTINE: So in 1914.

SYLVIA: Uh-huh.

CHRISTINE: That's when my dad was born. She was also born on the ranch?

SYLVIA: --- ...

CHRISTINE: Oh, it is, it is so extensive. You would be surprised on how little I get from most people; they don't know any of these things. So that's great. Let's see, you married Fred Weesner when?

SYLVIA: In '41.

CHRISTINE: And do you know his date of birth?

SYLVIA: Yeah, the 28<sup>th</sup> of March.

CHRISTINE: You don't know what year though, huh?

SYLVIA: Huh?

CHRISTINE: You don't know what year?

SYLVIA: Well he was the same age I was.

CHRISTINE: Oh, okay. So, 1905. Okay. Well that should do that. Good.

SYLVIA: Can I hear that thing?

CHRISTINE: Sure.

SYLVIA: I don't know if I want to or not.

CHRISTINE: (Laughter) None of us like how we sound on tape.

(Pause)

CHRISTINE: Today is May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2002, and I'm with Sylvia Saum again. She has a little more she wants to add to her tape.



SYLVIA: Well I love my family, and I really appreciate what they --- the thoughtful things that they do for me.

CHRISTINE: Is that it?

SYLVIA: That's it.

(END OF TAPE)

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