

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #473

Subject: Pete Runnels

Place: Harney County Library, Burns, Oregon

Date: March 22, 2010

Interviewer: Ken Peckham

Note: The sound quality is not good. Hard to understand

KEN: This is Ken Peckham. Today is March 22, 2010. I'm speaking with Pete Runnels regarding music in Harney County, in the Oral History Room at the Harney County Library. And here he is, and quite a musician. When did you come to Harney County?

PETE: I was born here (laughter). 1959.

KEN: 1959. And how did you get started in music?

PETE: Oh, about in fifth grade was my first music with... And band. I started with the clarinet. Mrs. Johnson was the teacher.

KEN: Oh, Ethel Johnson taught?

PETE: Yeah.

KEN: Is that right? Okay, that is good to know.

PETE: And that would be my fifth and sixth grade years. Seventh grade I switched to tenor saxophone. And then all through high school, sax. In my junior and senior year, experimented with a lot of things. Trombone... just different things. Even sang in the swing choir... which—I'm much better with an instrument (laughter). Let's see, played guitar, probably about the same time... fifth and sixth grades. I played guitar, and played in church...

KEN: Took lessons?

PETE: I don't remember the people's name. My cousin and I took lessons in a little house across from

the sheriff's office, in that parking lot. There used to be a little house there. And I don't remember the couple's name with that, but I was trying to remember... And I remember it being, oh, I want to say hippie type stuff... the color of the house was bright purple, greens and... but they were very nice people... I also took private lessons from a band teacher who was here... was it Ron House? Took private lessons for tenor sax.

KEN: That helps a lot.

PETE: Yeah...

KEN: When did you graduate from high school?

PETE: 1977. Think you came the very next...

KEN: I might have been here. I was doing elementary school and ... school.

PETE: Four years in high school...

KEN: All four years?

PETE: All four years: freshman to senior. I guess we wore him out (laughter).

KEN: Yeah, that would be the year. So he was your teacher senior year?

PETE: Yeah... Okay.

KEN: Because the person that followed him was Hugh Anderson.

PETE: I remember the name, but I never did have him. The University he came from... I think he came out of the U of O.

KEN: I think so, too.

PETE: And he was assigned to us for his first job.

KEN: Yeah. Very enthusiastic. We actually did some marching on the field during football games. And I was a drum major at one point also.

PETE: Also, yes. There were a lot of us. But we did attempt it.

KEN: Well, he must have been a man of about sixty years old? About sixty—the new man?

PETE: Oh, yeah. Probably, yeah. Maybe sixty. Yeah. It was before the mill went down and the numbers went down. Right near the end.

KEN: Right near the end, yeah. Any special events that you were involved in?

PETE: Big highlight for me when I was in seventh grade [1971-72], Ron House took us to... we went to Hawaii, to the Waikiki Music Festival. It was a combination of junior high and senior high school kids.

KEN: Jazz band?

PETE: Uh-huh. Ron was very big into Big Band and that's what we played. We had... actually had mics plugged into our... guitar and saxophones. We had the boxes, we had everything... He had ties in the California area. And ...Lawrence... no, won't say Lawrence Welk, but there was a singer there named Sandy Kenyon...

KEN: Jensen.

PETE: And she came then as fund raising project for us, a concert in the high school gym.

KEN: Wow. That was one of our big fund raisers, you know. Parents making tons and tons of candy, bake sales.

PETE: Fund raising nightmares.

KEN: Yeah.

PETE: Been there, done that. There were three bands... By that time I think they hoped to be annual... there were three bands-- we of course, were the smallest by far. We played the...banjo. We got third out of three. But it was a good experience. Good trip, good trip. I was one of the youngest, and I went in seventh grade. I went through seventh grade with the seniors. I can say, a select group. I don't mean to .... Away but there is those that .... played that could handle music...

KEN: Right. Long bus trip to Portland, ride.

PETE: We had another... come to town for a fund raiser. It was... sponsored that. That was probably one of the biggest events. And then after school... or I intended to go to college as a music major, but that lasted about two months (laughter).

KEN: Where did you go?

PETE: Southern Oregon University it is now... Southern Oregon College...

KEN: Why did you switch? There is a lot more to it than just playing instruments (laughter) A lot more theory and...

PETE: Yeah... I guess after you go through just your basic classes first, scared me away from it.

KEN: So, what did you major in?

PETE: Actually, didn't. Didn't even finish my first year of college... came back home and started working... went from local jobs until I started my own business. And about the same time started playing the saxophone again (laughter). Didn't play... for twenty-five years.

KEN: ... How about...?

PETE: ... saxophones, trombones, trumpets, drums, clarinets—anything associated in a big band.

KEN: ...

PETE: Maybe if I look in my book... Yeah, a thought wave.

KEN: It happens occasionally. How long was Ron House here?

PETE: It might have been just those two years.

KEN: You must have had him as a ... seventh grade... I was thinking it might have been just those two years, seventh and eighth grade... which would have been ... graduated in '77. '72 and '73? Something like that?

PETE: Another memory I have in music—Ethel Johnson, every Christmas, in the halls at Slater, from long hall and where the wing meets, all the classes would gather and she'd be up on a ladder directing everybody to sing Christmas songs. And I can always remember her singing "*Up on the house top, click, click, click.*" And she'd snap her fingers on top of that ladder. I think she did it for years.

KEN: And years and years. Well, she was there ten years, I think, or eleven years.

PETE: Yeah.

KEN: We were talking to Lois White, as she came in '57... the first... and taught for years...

PETE: Well, I filled a hole there.

KEN: Fill the hole, yeah. Thank you (laughter). Good to know.

PETE: If I remember.

KEN: And so you had... high school years.

PETE: Right.

KEN: ... and still playing. I saw him...

PETE: Still down in the Eugene area. Yeah, I guess...

KEN: Right. He was... became a Mr. Music at a Baptist Church at Ontario...

PETE: I saw him last February at... in Spokane, playing with the Oregon Concert...

KEN: Do you have any favorite pieces that you...?

PETE: ... I didn't. I truly did favor the big band era... My dad was very fond of it, always heard it in the house growing up. Big on car trips. They had music in the cars. Just any of those, any of those entertainers from back then, or big band records, would definitely be our favorite.

KEN: Big stuff.

PETE: Yeah.

KEN: And for a lot of years.

PETE: Yeah.

KEN: ... it has evolved... How about fellow musicians in your group?

PETE: Well, the only—Chris Raymond played tenor sax with me, when we were first chair, second chair, back and forth all through our years. Having a great time... and the last I heard he is also in the Portland area, and I believe he is playing in the—I want to say, with a... not a drum and bugle corps, but something like that.

KEN: Uh-huh. He is still active also. I remember, oh boy,... still playing or active... Can you think of any...?

PETE: There are a lot of names, but none really ever stuck... stayed with it that I'm aware of.

KEN: Yeah, yeah. Anybody still in town that you played with?

PETE: Ted Tiller was in our band—our high school band. Played music on the side after school... Jim Hammon was in the high school band. Janet Braymen... I can't remember... she was just in high school, I guess. I was going to try to... I think there is a lot of pictures. Of the three bands...third

place was back to the trip to Hawaii. A team from Washington was first, and the team—a group— from Phoenix, Arizona was second. So it...big stuff. I don't have any more... Benne Cramer was... her son Andy was also in the group... the mother that spearheaded everything. She was very, very active helping us get there. Fundraising...

KEN: And George.

PETE: Her kitchen was used for a lot of candy making (laughter)

KEN: Do you remember how much it cost to send them?

PETE: No, oh no. I want to say eight or nine thousand dollars, but...

KEN: Over the years... How many days were you there?

PETE: Ten days.

KEN: Ten days? My goodness.

PETE: ...the students, chaperones will be making the trip, and we'll leave April 3<sup>rd</sup> at 9:15 by Pan American... spend ten days participating in the first annual Hawaiian music festival.

KEN: All that time playing music?

PETE: No, I think we had two performances. Wouldn't have been every day.

KEN: Oh, I'm sure it wouldn't.

PETE: And we had time for sight-seeing and running around. Hawaii... to get there. This is Bill Cramer reporting the goal for funds to send the Hilanders to Hawaii have been reached. That day a total of \$7,625 was sent in to pay for the trip for the students and the conductor and his wife. Also the chaperones that will be accompanying the group have sent in \$1525 to pay their own way. \$7,600 for twenty-three.

KEN: That was a good deal, compared to what you had to raise.

PETE: Yeah, that's right...

KEN: ...donations reported, other than those already reported, Lions Club light bulb sale, \$750. \$50 donations from Lloyd & Esther... and from John & Betty Penland, Fran & J.D. Pinkums... smiley faces.

PETE: Big smiley faces were very popular back then.

KEN: Well, the mascot...

PETE: Yeah.

KEN: The Portland director of the Chamber of Commerce voted to give \$250 to the state event. Plus a rock clock to be presented to the home of the Chamber of Commerce as a token of friendship from all the Chambers. Made everybody happy.

PETE: ...

KEN: Would you like the names of everybody that was in the group? I found it.

PETE: Wow.

KEN: Tony..., Gary Case, Jane Catterson, Gerald Cornwall, Raynae Cornwall, ... used to live here. Andy Cramer, Jackson Cramer, ... Debbie Kahn, ... David Larson, Gordy McDonald, Jerry O'Leary, DeWayne Patrick, Mike Patrick,...H. Ray, Chris Raymond, Scott Raymond, ... brother, myself, Mary Thompson—Dr. Thompson's daughter, eye doctor—remember? ... and Sandra Williamson. Chaperones Mr. and Mrs. Art Raymond, Mr. and Mrs. Ron House, Mr. and Mrs. Bob Tiller, and Mr. and Mrs. ... Tiller.

PETE: What a neat deal.

KEN: It was. The old bus we took, and brought back... was one of those old round ones. It didn't make many trips after that.

PETE: I can remember the diesel fume smell all the way up to Portland and back. Leaving here early in the morning...

KEN: Actually, I know that bus... the last trip that bus made was my freshman year coming back from Pendleton basketball tournament—basketball game. It blew up coming up Horse Ridge and it never moved again... That would have been two years after that.

PETE: (laughter) How is, how is music giving back to you?

KEN: A lot. I think it is a very necessary thing, it's a very important thing. I can't remember the wordage but music helps the student. And then you see some of your students accelerate. All have

music as part of their curriculum, or part of their growing up. I think there is a lot to it. Music soothes the savage beast (laughter)...

PETE: It's just a time to relax, if you appreciate and enjoy it—learn from it.

KEN: It's very important... a trip to Hawaii...

PL And also...

KEN: A bunch of good musicians when I was in high school. And then the senior year being rewarded with the John Phillip Sousa Award, which is given each year...

PETE: That's right. The one that you're...

KEN: Yeah.

PETE: That would be one of them. Nothing stands out, and I don't know why. Kristi Woodfin was competing for Miss Oregon-type... there was a local talent pageant, I guess, a local pageant to send to Miss Oregon. Ted Tiller and myself played the music for her to sing to as her talent. And the song was, "You've Got the Music In Me," and I can hear that today, just like we were doing it... that song comes...

KEN: You were on tenor and Ted was on the drums.

PETE: Ted was on the drum... and Kristi sang and she did a really good job. She sang in the choir in high school. She wasn't ... that stands out. Of course, the trip to Hawaii, and ... marching, winning the award. I was very involved with music. I think my senior year I had five music classes. Had, curriculum requirements were different then. So you kind of filled up your schedule. I would say it's probably too much now, looking back. But it was fun.

KEN: So, you were in stage band, concert band, swing choir, we had another class called music appreciation, I think. No music theory, yeah. I think the other one was student teacher of the schools—the grade schools. It wasn't music then. Five of my classes were just...

PETE: That was when you...

KEN: Yeah... I think in senior you had to take English. Like science was a requirement. Other than that...



PETE: I remember my senior year was... had to have American government and economics.

KEN: Yeah.

PETE: I was involved in that...

KEN: And then you started playing in the ...

PETE: Five years ago. Actually I sold my saxophone to a kid... young kids and sold my saxophone that I got as a gift one Christmas as a surprise coming back into it...

KEN:... they bought you...?

PETE: My wife did, and the kids. Sax and tenor, some of my original ones...

KEN: What was your original sax?

PETE: Yellow [Yamaha?]...

KEN: Yeah. What do you have now?

PETE: You know, I can't find a name on it. The, some friends found it for my wife out of town—La Grande. And the guy at the music store said it was a very rare saxophone. I can't even pick a name out on it. It sounds like it's from ... it's ... I just don't understand it. It's... so I don't know if he was telling a story or not (laughter). I remember the saxophone buying was a burden form Mon and Dad...

KEN: Do you remember where they bought it from? Is it...?

PETE: In the fall when music people come to the schools and have the open houses and show you the different instruments. Hoping...

KEN: Yeah.

PETE: ... it was a big deal. Everybody thought the saxophone was a big as I was. I didn't even ... at the time.

KEN: But you started on clarinets, so you had some skills before you switched to...

PETE: Yeah... didn't switch over until seventh grade. Correct. I just started playing when the stage...

KEN: Oh, I do remember a town show... sixth grade.

PETE: ... on the clarinet, and my song was "Hawaii 5-0"

KEN: Oh, good.

PETE: Played that... we had, you know, assembly during the day for the students, and there was another assembly in the evening for the parents and the community. And the student assembly went fine, perfect. And the evening—the parents, I think my reed was too wet... nervous, and I squeaked and I squeaked all the way though it (laughter). Humiliated. But that didn't stop me.

KEN: That's good. Did you ever do solos like in district competitions?

PETE: Never remember having... we didn't have state competition for the bands. We would have district... I can remember going to Bend for... similar to what happens now. We might have had been... what there is now... District... but there was no state competition. There would be an honor band out of that... I can remember that. I don't remember any ... stuff. But I do remember going over to... houses... put up in people's houses. Can't remember ... I remember the... houses in Bend, but that's about it. Often wondered him.

KEN: L.T. Bowlen.

PETE: But the state competition was...

KEN: Must have been All-State.

PETE: Yeah.

KEN: ... Yeah, but you never practiced...

PETE: I remember... I remember going to the State Fair, but I don't believe it was music related (laughter). I don't know what else it would have been for. I didn't ... 4-H or anything like that... music now, it might have been some type of music. I don't know.

KEN: It must not have been that important (laughter)

PETE: Okay.

KEN: Is there anything else you would like to share?

PETE: ... No.

KEN: These photos that you have, would you mind if we make some photocopies of those?

PETE: No.

KEN: Okay. And then the books that... on the...

PETE: Some of them are kind of lost, but don't want to take it apart because I'm afraid I'll lose some more.

KEN: Right. But newspaper articles are all in pretty good shape... traced back to the Burns Times-Herald... We'll give it back to you. And Karen is very good about the...

PETE: All these... We went out to Pearl Harbor... There is a CD back... and then there is a retaining wall... A friend of my dad's was there, living the ... So he came out there to see it... and at that retaining wall, we were done playing, we weren't sitting in the seats, we were all back on the retaining wall, just... and he spotted us. And at the time... knew it had to be the Burns kids sitting on the ground (laughter)... And our uniforms were black pants, white shirts, and we had yellow jackets that...

KEN: sounds great.

PETE: ... because I'm her husband... and they had a patch on it that said Burns Hilanders... nothing fancy. But it was...

KEN: Thank you Pete for your information, and thanks for the sharing.

PETE: Thank you. I appreciate all your time.

End of recording

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