

## HARNEY COUNTY BASQUES

### Oral History Project

This interview of Nicholas Vidonda took place as a part of an historical inventory of Basques in Harney County for the Harney County Historical Society. The purpose of the interview was to acquire information about historic sites in order to establish a database for historic resources. As a result, the book *Harney County: An Historical Inventory* was published in January of 1978 by Royal G. Jackson and Jennifer A. Lee. Jackson and Lee taped this interview with Nicholas Vidonda on September 7, 1976 in Bums, Oregon. At the time, Jackson was an Associate Professor in the Department of Resource Recreation Management at Oregon State University and Lee was a student in that department fulfilling an internship requirement. Amanda B. Purkey created a transcription of this interview in March 2001 as a part of an independent study project at Oregon State University.

**HARNEY COUNTY BASQUES**

Oral History Project

NICHOLAS VIDONDA  
September 7, 1976  
Bums, Oregon

Interviewers:  
Royal G. Jackson  
Jennifer A. Lee

**LOG**

[001-020] Why he came to the US, what province he is from, languages he speaks.

[020-040] When he came to the US, more on why he left Spain.

[040-060] Land inheritance in Spain, family in Spain, English knowledge.

[060-095] Story of how he was sponsored to come to the US.

[095-125] Details about sponsorship to US, details of trip to US.

[125-145] Arrival in US, weather differences in California/Spain.

[145-160] Travels to Elko, NV for work.

[160-180] Acquires job shepherding.

[180-200] Loneliness, paying off debts.

[200-220] Working in Ruby Mountains, number of sheep, necessities brought to field.

[220-240] Horses, dogs, English speaking, visits with other Basque shepherders.

[240-260] Naturalization, details of herding job.

[260-280] Wages, savings, living conditions as a shepherd.

[280-310] Family death back in Spain.

[310-340] New job in flooring business.

[340-375] Cuban Missile Crisis draft letter.

[375-410] New job at Ranch in Oregon.

[410-2:005] Learned English, sold ranch.

[2:005-2:030] Married, moved to Bums, managed City Center Motel.

[2:030-2:050] Opened floor covering business, economic status, family back in Spain.

[2:050-2:070] Picnics in Bums, misunderstandings among Basques in Bums.

[2:070-2:090] Basque traditions, details of misunderstanding.

[2:090-2: 11 0] More details of the Basques' misunderstanding in Bums.

[2:110-2:130] Split in Basque community, independent nature of Basques, festivals.

[2:130-2:160] Traditional dances and games.

[2:160-2:180] Future of Basques in Bums, immigration laws.

[2:180-2:205] Wealthy Basques in Spain and the US.

[2:205-2:220] Basques as hardworking, Basque language, tradition dying out.

[2:220-2:240] Basque and American friends.

[2:240-2:250 end] Language use in school.

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September 7, 1976 Burns,  
Oregon

Interviewers:  
Royal G. Jackson  
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[001] {R} Let's just start it doesn't really matter that you haven't lived here a long time, let's just start by talking about when you decided to come to the United States.

Oh I decided a long time ago. I hear so much about United States you know, the older people came over here and seems like when they talk about there and it seems like you come over here and to make a living's so easy. Sounds that way you know, but,

{R} In Spain it sounds that way.

Right, we think that way when we're there, but then when we come over here we fine out it's real different.

{R} It's not so easy, huh?

No, well it's a lot easier is in there you know quite a bit easier.

{R} What part of Spain are you from?

I came from Navara. It's in the northern part and more like eastern part.

{R} The province of Navara a now is one of the seven Basque provinces right?

Right that's the biggest one.

{R} The biggest one, and you do speak Basque.

Yeah we do.

{R} Evidently some Basques come from Navara that don't speak Basque.

No, but part of Navara is the southern part they no speak Basque at all, but the north right where I come from, the French line, we still speak Basque.

{R} Do you speak French as well?

No, I understand a few words, but,

{R} Not too much.

Not so much no, because in the other side is Basque, in the French side. But Navara is been divided in two. Half of Navara is in the French side now. But at one time it was all one country.

{R} What year did you come to the United States?

I came over here in 54.

[020] {R} 1954.

Mm-hmm.

{R} And how old were you then?

Twenty, twenty-one.

{R} And what made you decide to come, you had heard stories about it, or?

Yes, I heard stories and another thing, the first thing that was the dollar was so high compared to the Spanish money. Well, I figure if! go there and sacrifice lets say six, seven years then I go back and that exchange I got a quite a few thousand pesetas back in Spain and then I can start my own business or you know. Because there it was pretty hard to start it because the competition was so hard. It's more country like that and the competition like that is really hard.

{R} What did you do there, what kind of job?

Well, I did working. I did carpentry and then we got, my parents got a farm and we take care of the farm and a lot of things you know. Then finally I decided, see in the old country back in the old country generation after generation they stay right there where they're born you know. Now for like my father, when one of my brothers took over the farm you know usually the older brother takes over you know.

{R} Is that a custom in Spain?

It's a custom in Spain yes.

{R} Not just with the Basques?

No it's all over.

{R} The oldest son gets all the,

Right the oldest ones, the oldest kids in the family. No matter if it's daughter or it's a son.

[040] {R} Oh I see, son or daughter.

They get everything then this son or daughter takes over the farm he's gonna give so much to the rest of the family. Out of a small part, you can't get much you know well then you just free to go anywhere you want.

{R} Did you have an older brother or sister?

Oh yeah I got, in my family we are nine kids. Two die when they were only about six months old and we still seven of us. And I'm one of the last ones you know and that's,

{R} One of the youngest ones, huh?

Oh, I mean one of the youngest ones yes, and that was nothing for me to stay there.

{R} So that's one good reason to leave then.

Right, that's one of the reasons and then the reason I told you earlier, because the dollar was so high and to come over here and it seems like it's so easy you can come over here, but you know when you come like we did you don't know the language, the only thing we can work in the really low class work where there was no money. Like in the sheep town, or ranch. And what the ranchers they pay those days, nothing. \$125 a month.

{R} Did you speak any English when you came?

No, none at all. I just came over here and see you've gotta have a,

{J} Did you have friends here when you came?

None, none at all. I got this, I came over here to, see we live right in the French boarder you know and it's quite a black market going on there in the boarder. There's a lot of stuff you can buy in France cheap, take back to Spain, sell and make some money. Vice versa there's a lot of stuff from Spain back to France and we do like a market. In those north boarder towns a lot of these thick with police. They speak three four different languages you know and they dress like farmers you know, but they might set in the restaurant in there and they look in every conversation what is going on. If there's any politics or anything like that. And a friend of mine and I we went to there one day and we went to eat breakfast in this restaurant and we sit in the table and we talking in Spanish and all the men were sitting in the next table, looks like old farmers and then about a few minute

later he got up and said he come to our table he said you mind if! sit here, in Spanish, and no, no go ahead sit down and then he came to me and one of this, one of this,

[075] {R} Secret police.

Secret police you know. And he said are you guys from Spain? We said yeah, we can't lie because we're talking in Spanish, I said how about you? He said no I'm from France. *Dh*, you speak pretty good Spanish to be Frenchman. And then he said, well, I was there 29 years in the United States and I worked for Spanish people that's where I learned Spanish. And then I say just like that I say you know I like a whole lot country, I always like a whole lot country. The man said, you want to go there? I say yeah. Well I, see you have to have some sponsor when you come over here like we did.

{R} Sponsor.

Yeah, we came, like when I came, I came permanent resident and you gotta have someone here to respond you and there's a lot of things involved you know and well, yeah he said that he told me, I will find someone there United States who can respond you. I said okay that'd be nice. But you know after I, we say goodbye and I say well that's just table talk.

{R} Didn't expect anything.

*Dh*, no. Nothing at all. I even told a lot of the guys, this is just table talk. We never see that man again and about nine month later I got a letter from the American Counsel in Spain. To this certain date in the American Counsel they want to talk to me. I said what the American Counsel want with me? I can't figure out. I just forgot about the man. And then I went to there anyway see what they want. That's what it was. The man found me a sponsor in Las Banos, California. And he put the money for the plane ticket and so on and that's what I did.

[095] {R} And the sponsor had your ticket and everything?

*Dh* yeah, they pay the ticket and everything. Then you pay them back.

{R} You work for them or you,

You gotta work for them, yes.

{J} Isn't that taking a big chance?

Well, that's what, when you live in the country like we did, you can't see nothing, I mean you want to do something and you got no chance. And you say well I can

do nothing in here, I can't do less in there, I just take a chance and go. Then I actually come. And then I came over here to Las Banos. When they respond me and I came and I got a picture of the man. When I came over here I,

{R} How did you come, by airplane?

By airplane.

{R} To where to New York, or?

First I came from Madrid to Paris, from Paris to Ireland, from Ireland to Canada, from Canada to New York, from New York to Los Angeles. Yeah, thirty-six hours on the plane. And then from Los Angeles, Fresno. In Fresno my sponsor came to pick me up, but when I saw the picture and we are fifteen in the same airplane, and everybody else came and picked up everybody and there I am standing at the airport and nobody picks me up.

{R} How did you feel then?

Well I feel kind of sad you know.

{R} Kind of lonely.

Yeah kind of lonely, but I was young and I said well something will happen you know. I'm in here ten thousand miles away well just let's do it you know. You just find that you need to have courage. And I said to this man standing up in there, but is not the man I got on the picture. But in the same time this man looks to me, I said what? And finally he decided to come to me. He say, you Nick Vidonda? I say, yes I am. And he say I'm (indiscernible name), but my responsor's name was (indiscernible name) was different name. He say I came to pick you up, he say the man respond you here, he died in a car accident.

[125] {R} The guy that sponsored you died in a car accident?

Yeah. A couple of weeks ago.

{R} What a coincidence, huh?

Quite a coincidence. And the will she send this man to pick me up where he took me to Las Banos.

{R} This is in California now.

California, and then was nice to me you know he brought me to the hotel and say well you stay right here and rest few days.

{R} Now he didn't speak any Basque did he?

Oh yeah he did. Oh you bet, he was born in Spain. Like came over here when he was young and made a fortune in the sheep business and he was gonna retire a sheep man. And I say well okay, anything you say you know, and he took me to the hotel and I was in there for a week resting. And then I figure I gotta start working. I can't stay like that and I told the woman, well what I gotta do? Well, he say, he say you wanna work over here I will find work for you, but see the climate is such different from the place I come from to Las Banos and I came over here on April tenth and my hometown was twenty inches of snow. And Las Banos was ninety-four degrees.

[145] {R} Oh what a change.

What a change, I can't take it. I said I just gotta do something else. I can't stay here I was too hot and nervous. And the old man came from the sheep company he say, tomorrow I'm going to Nevada, I'm going to Elko, Nevada and that's a high country and if you want to come with me you're welcome.

{R} So which man was this, the one that came to pick you up?

No not that man, he was just herd sheep there in Las Banos.

{R} Was he a Basque?

Basque.

{R} Why was he in Las Banos?

Well see, a lot of these old men they used to the, they come up to the north in summer like Elko, Nevada, Idaho and then in the winter, the winter is kind of severe up here. Instead to stay here they go down to California and they spend the winter there and work for sheepmen in there in the winter, and they come in the summer when it's nice and cold up north. And that's what this particular man was, every year he goes to Elko in the summer and then every fall,

[160] {R} He was just a shepherd himself.

Just a shepherd, all his life. And that's what his routine was. Every summer go to Elko and every winter to Las Banos. And then he told me, you go ahead, you want to come with me okay I don't care I go anyway. I'm so new here I don't know, I go Alaska or Montana, Nevada anywhere you want. Well we got in a bus there in Las Banos and we drove and drove and drove all day and part of the night and we come to Elko, Nevada. Probably about one o'clock in the morning and the guy he already got a reservation made in the old hotel and there was such a shortage of men for the sheep men you know, cause that's hard work you know.

It's day and night work and it's raining outside no matter what it is you know you gotta take care of the livestock.

{R} Lonely too isn't it?

Lonely. And they were kind of short of men. Well we got there one o'clock there in Elko and we went to this old hotel and about three thirty in the morning somebody is knocking on the door. And there's a sheep man looking for men. And the guy who owns the hotel comes to my room and says, hey Vidonda do you want to work? Sure. There's a sheep man over here looking for men. And okay, I got up, I pick up my clothes I got, jump in his pickup and I don't know for three years, I don't know if it was north, south, east, west he dropped me there in the dark and I don't know what. And three years I never even come to town. I stay right there.

{R} Where was it in Nevada?

In Nevada.

[180] {R} You were out in the pasture for three years.

In the country yeah.

{J} Didn't you get lonely?

Well yeah, but what you can do? The first thing I did I paid my debt. You know I paid the money I owe the man down in California. I mean the man was dead, but his wife was alive. That's the first thing I told the man I was working for in Elko. I want you to send this lady, she put \$925 to spend on me for the airplane ticket and so on and so on.

{J} Was your sponsor Basque?

She was Basque, yeah she was a French Basque.

{J} So that's why she was willing to sponsor someone from her own country.

Right, and at the same time she was a sheep man in California. And then after her husband died she just sold out and then she started working. But she was willing to work right there in Las Banos only then I no want in Las Banos, I told you why.

{R} Too hot.

Too hot, yeah, I mean a completely different climate you know. Cause see where I come from is in the winter 45 below is nothing and it's ice a lot of time and normal five foot of snow.

[200] {R} Where were you in the country in Nevada, did you ever figure it out?

Well I was in north, then I figure out after. But I was north from E\*o. They call them the Ruby Mountains.

{R} In the Ruby Mountains.

Right.

{R} And you never came to town, three years.

Nothing.

{R} Did they bring you groceries every six months, or?

Oh yeah, well they gotta come and the owner comes every so often, asks me how you are and you need anything, I say well yeah bring me pair of shoes next time, or whatever anything else and he brings it and so on you know.

{J} Did you have books to read, or what did you do for?

Books, hah! Sheep to feed and bother me.

{R} How many sheep did you take care of?

Oh about personally in one band they go 2200.

{R} 2200? That's all you had for three years?

Just herd sheep yeah.

{J} How was it did you, was it lonely or, did you hate it or?

Well it seems like finally you get used to that life you know. And I was young and yes I can't stand stay in one place in the summer there's pretty much nothing to do, lots of grass and you just all you got is a dog, a horse, and some places you got a couple of horses. One to take your you know like groceries and,

[220] {R} Pack horse.

Pack horse you know, and some places you got a burro. I got two horses. One to travel and the other one pack horse and the dog and that's it. And I keep just

keep moving you know. Just I say here two, three days and pick up my camp and go farther.

{J} You didn't know English even in the three years at all.

No, nothing, nothing.

{R} Did you meet other Basque shepherders sometimes?

Dh yeah, oh yeah we'd meet a lot of the, we'd meet the same, from the same outfit. The same man got six bands of sheep you know. And we all pretty much close together you know.

{R} So how often would you see another shepherder?

*Dh*, I saw enough every about week. And the camp tender comes there about every fifteen days and brings you fresh groceries and so on and so on. But I still lonely.

{ J} You must have been.

{R} So at the end of three years what happened then?

Well at the end of the three years, finally well the man say well it's about time for you to go to town, you know.

{R} What was the nearest town, Elko?

Elko.

{J} Did that have anything to do with being naturalized, what?

{R} Well, isn't there a process where you have to work three years before you can be a citizen?

No, no that time. Then after that they put this contract see, they only they come over here was in contract. And the only work they can do is herd sheep. I could do something else only thing this, the problem was I can do something else, but my language. Where I go?

[245] {R} So how could you even learn English out there with the sheep and the Basques?

I never did learn really when I was herding sheep.

{R} So then the three years then what did you do?

Well after three years, finally the guy asked me well you know in the summer you herd personally about 1100 sheep close to lambs, it comes about 2200. And then in the fall when you sell the lambs you put the two runs together to make 2200. See like if you herd 1100 sheep and I herd 1100 sheep with the lamb when you sell the lambs it comes about 2200 and then they put both together and they give you one then. But see the only men is three, at that time give you little bit case and so on and then when I come back there the guy goes and so on. But this particular man I was working for he was a kind of hind type looking man. He no want to give you no vacation, just work.

[260] {R} He wasn't very fair.

No, he wasn't fair, not even close to fair.

{J} Can, is it indelicate to ask how much you made, or did you have to buy the supplies, or?

No, they furnish the supplies. And \$200 a month.

{R} But you saved all that didn't you?

Oh yeah, except what you used when you go. Then the man keeps track on the list you know. You ask can he bring me couple of, new pair of shoes, or get me anything and then he keeps on the list and at the end of the year. He say well I owe you so much and you owe me so much and he give you the difference.

{J} During the winter months when there was snow on the ground, did you stay in one spot, or?

No, no.

{J} So you never really had a home, a tent or something?

Keep moving, oh yeah we got a tent, yeah. And we move the sheep from the summer range to the dessert where is a lot lower.

{R} From the summer range to the where?

To the dessert.

{R} To the dessert.

Yeah, where is the you know the winter they move back up here but still.

[280] {R} How much money did you save at the end of three years then?

In the end of three years I got about \$7000 in the bank.

{R} Did you think then how many pesetas that would be back home?

Yeah.

{R} Why didn't you go home?

Well, then after that, well I want to go home, but still I say well, another year you know. I will stay another year, cause if! sacrifice another year it's at least \$2400 more you know. But it comes, by the time you pay taxes and all it comes around \$2000 you know. I will sacrifice one more year, as I was sacrifice in this one year more, I got a letter from home, my mother died. I just grew up right there. Something came to me I don't know. I decided I no want to go.

{R} Oh you didn't want to go home?

No.

{R} Was your father still alive?

No my father died before I came over here. And then I just grew up right there. And I say well, then I came to town and I told him and I got a vacation. And was rob, they made a rob on us because they know they can do it. Because they know we don't know the language and,

{R} They took advantage of you.

Oh yeah they took advantage of me. See when I, the man I worked for I tell you why; he find, like I told you after they put the two bands of sheep together they,

(interruption by someone, tape shut off, restarted)

[310] {R} So what did you decide to do with the \$7000?

Well, finally I decided, I come to town.

{R} Elko.

No I think Eureka, Nevada. By that time.

{R} Eureka?

Eureka, yeah, it was a small mining town. Nothing much you know, but I just came there you know and I was resting a little bit in the old hotel and the man came from Elko to put some flooring. It was a floor covering then. He needs to

put some floors in the hotel. And he was kind of older man and he say, the guy in the hotel he say, well this guy here is doing nothing, he can help you, for me you know. And the old man asked me, you want to help me? I say, yeah I don't mind, I'm not do nothing anyway. And I help him two days and he's telling me something in English and I can't understand. And I say I don't know, I don't know what you're talking about. And then he went to the old man and told him that I'd like to have this man to work for me. And the old man told me, said this man want you to work for him. I say yeah, but you know my problem is the language as always and he said oh no problem he say. I got a man in the store who speaks some Spanish and we'll get along. Finally I decided to go to work for this man. And I worked for that man about a year or so, in the floor covering business.

[340] {R} In Eureka.

No, in Elko. This man was from El~. And I worked for him about a year this guy, and I was doing that travel they got. You know those missiles that going to Cuba you know, a few years ago,

{R} The missiles of 1962?

Right, 1960,

{R} The Cuban missile crisis.

Right, that time when Russia was sending missiles and Kennedy tried to stop them and, well I got a letter to be ready in case they need me, you know.

{R} The military?

Yeah the military.

{R} Were you an American citizen by then?

No, I was permanent resident, but they can pick me up in here if they want to. Well and then I got, I got to go to the war you know. And during the second war in here they no took Basque to the war, because they figure they need him in the ranches.

{R} They didn't take Basques.

No. No they no take no Basques they put them work you know in the ranches, with the livestock. Most of them they are livestock people you know, well I was a lady called me up if you want to go on the ranch for her, in Las Vegas, Nevada, close to Las Vegas. In the same town, well I quit this man and I went to work for this lady until everything settle down you know. And I working a year for her

and I came back to Elko. When I came back to Elko then I was working for her. She had a back problem.

[375] {J} You knew English by now.

A little bit yeah, well I can go by you know. And then I worked for this man a little longer and he decided to sell the store. And the new people from Winnemucca, Nevada bought his place, bought his store, I not like what I see there you know in the new people and I quit. And I come over here to John Day.

{R} Why to John Day?

Well, it was a wool buyer buying wool here in the west from Illinois. And this man he bought a guest ranch over here, ten miles from John Day and one night we talking there in the restaurant and he asked me well he said, I bought the guest ranch and I want somebody there to run it. And I'm willing to pay good wages and if is necessary I give you a percentage. And the guy was with us there in the restaurant and said well this is the man right here, for me, and he says, you want to go? And I says, well I don't care. He got his own airplane and says well lets jump in airplane and I take a ride, I take you there tonight and you can see the place and if you like it you stay and if you no like it I take you back. Well we flew that night, by the time we got here John Day was kind of dark, next day I look all over and I like it. I like the, more like it was in June and this John Day valley is really beautiful. It's green and timbers and it's a pretty much like the country where I come from. You know, mountains,

[410] {R} More like Navara, huh?

Yeah, more like Navara see, cause where I come from I come from the mountains and we saw rolling hills and green and I stay there eight years. I run that place for eight years. And after eight years finally we decided to sell the place.

{J} You were married by then.

No. No, then I,

{R} How was your English by now, are you learning?

Well yeah, by then I got a pretty good chance especially here in this guest ranch because there was so many people coming in and out and I got a lot of chance to talk to them and you know, and but I tell you it's a language that takes long time. It's one of the most difficult languages to learn because it's, you can say with the same word so many things. And if you don't know something what they talking about, now you know because you born in here, but for the, for someone like me. [440] [2-001] I find out a lot of, let's say like well. Well you can be you well or well can be hole in the ground. And if you don't know it confuse and you kind of

wondering, what is that you know. And it's a language takes long, long time to learn I tell you.

[2-005] {R} So what did you,

And then like someone like me without going to school it's all I do just pick them up, just pick it up the words from somewhere and keep in my mind and sometimes it's difficult when you gotta work to keep things like that in your mind.

{R} Sure, what did you do then when you, you sold the guest ranch,

Yes.

{R} And you were in John Day, now what year was this?

This was about 1970.

{R} Okay what did you do then?

Well then I came, in 1970, I came over here.

{R} To Burns.

To Burns.

{R} Well why did you choose Burns?

Well, see by 1970 I already met my wife, she's from Prairie City.

{R} From where?

She's from fifty miles from John Day.

{R} Prairie City?

Yeah.

{R} And you met her when you were working in John Day?

Right, she's, her father's a rancher there and I met her uncle was in the same business that I was, in the guest ranch business. And we kind of competitive, but in the same time we are friends.

{R} So you managed a guest ranch. Is that right, someone else owned it?

Right, well I owned ten percent.

{R} You took your money you earned herding sheep and bought into the ranch.

Yeah, and the guy this wool buyer was the biggest owner, but I run the place. And then her uncle was the, ours was the J bar L Guest Ranch and her uncle's was the Harbor Springs Ranch.

{R} So what year did you get married?

In 1972 I believe, I came over here and then well then first I met her there and her father owned this motel.

{R} This City Center Motel.

This City Center yeah.

{R} And you came here again what year?

In 1972 I came over here and things were not looking good around here you know then we got the, you know she being a cow rancher and the cow, you know he don't know nothing about motel and he put the man so he'll manage the place and they kind of,

[2-030] {R} Didn't take care of it.

Not take care of it and then things looked pretty poor you know. Well in 1972 I come over here, we decided we talked and we decided to remodel everything. We started in one end and we went through room by room. Change all the carpet and put ceramic and the walls and so on, and so on. And then I got married and I still here.

{R} And then you started operating this hotel.

Right and the same time I got my own business you know, floor covering.

{R } You have a business in carpeting, and,

Right, I do finishing work in carpentry and floor coverings, carpets and linoleums,

{R } You have children?

No, uh-uh, I never had children, things like that,

{J} Dogs and fish.

Yeah, it seems the wrong place to have children here in a motel.

{J} Did you ever go back to Spain?

Never, never been there.

{R} Do you wish you could?

Too, poor. Yes and my wife wants to go now and my brothers they are all writing me you know, please come, please please come, you know. I tell them well you guys can come to see me, but it's pretty difficult for them you know. But it costs too much money.

{R} Now that you look back did you make the right decision in leaving home and coming over to this country?

Yes I did, yes.

{R} Did you look at your, the way you turned out and your brothers, do you think you did better than your brothers?

No, no I don't think that I got hard time than my brothers they're better there than I did here. They have their own business and they come out of it pretty good. But I'm not complaining, I'm in pretty good position myself.

[2-050] {R} Do you associate much with other Basques here in Bums?

Yes. I know most of them.

{R} Do you go to the parties and picnics?

Yeah, I do.

{R} Did you go to the last picnic they had?

Yeah, I was there.

{J} How was it?

Oh, there were not too many people. They kind of there's been a kind of a little misunderstanding between the Basques in this area.

{R} What misunderstanding is that?

Well, I'll tell you what. It used to be they'd make a good big Basque picnic, but then it was for money in the time, it belonged to the club.

{R} The Basque club or something?

Yeah the Basque club, you see you, every member pays five dollars for membership and then like when you make a picnic like that they charge you maybe say ten dollars for each person who goes in there. But when you cook for so many of them you can always cook cheaper you know. And it's always maybe it's couple hundred dollars less after the picnic is over it all goes to the bank. Now I can't remember exactly the year, but it was in 1966, I was not here then, but I used to come from John Day to here for the picnic and was really a good picnic you know.

{R} A lot of music and dancing?

Yeah and weight lifting contests and taking the weight,

[2-070] {R} Weight lifting and games with physical strength.

Physical strength yeah.

{R} It's a very long Basque tradition.

Yeah the Basque tradition you bet. And a lot of things like that you know, but then they got this I don't know probably a few hundred dollars according to some of the Basques here in the bank. And few Basques back in the old country they got in trouble. You hear many times when that,

{R } You mean with Franco?

Yeah, it's a group, it's only few of them. I didn't understand, I don't care, I had nothing to do with those guys you know. There are many people here many people there. Just a few people they want to just look for trouble. And they got their really trouble and they need help. Now this, they asked for help from the Basques in this country. And what they did here is between a few Basques, they were the oldest every year you put one the president of the Basques and vice president and the secretary you know. Something like this nothing much but anyway to take care of that, but what they did without telling the other Basques they sent this money from this bank to help the Basques in Spain.

{R } You mean the president of the club took the money that was left over,

Well the president and the vice president a few associated him. You know they sent the money to help the Basques. When the other guys they found out where the money was they were too late, the money was gone. Well they went to in court.

[2-090] {R} They took the president and the vice president and the group to court.

Yeah to court and the (indiscernible) he was the secretary of the state of Idaho, he was involved in the deal. They give the money to him, so he can send that money to Spain. And boy it was a big argument and well the Basques they want, they sent the money they lost the case, because they gotta have the signatures from the others in order to pass that money. True they got the authority to make the check as long as it's for the Basque club. Let's say you want to buy something for the Basques well then they got the authority to do it, but for something like that no, they gotta have a meeting and then they go by the vote or by the signatures, whatever or something like that.

{R} Who was president at that time?

At that time I believe it was, I'm not too sure, but I believe it was Salino Verenca, he's still here in town, married and got a,

{R} Elasma's husband.

Pardon me?

{R} Elasma's husband.

Right. He was the person.

{R} So he lost the case then, or?

Yeah they lost the case.

{R} Did they ever pay the money back?

Yeah they put the money back, I don't know how.

{R} How much money was it?

It was not much, it was only like five hundred dollars or something like that. But it was, well they was stubborn in both sides you know.

[2-110] {R} So now the Basques are divided.

They're kind of divided, yeah.

{R} Into what, two groups, or?

Well, yeah I'd say that it is two groups.

{R} The ones that were in favor of sending the money and the ones that did want it.

Yeah right, that's it. And they ones that were in favor of the sent now they never even show up at the Basque picnic and Basque dinner that every year we make a Basque dinner in the Pine Room Cafe. And those guys are never there.

{R} The ones that sent the money then don't come to events any more.

No, no they're never social.

{R} They're mad about it.

Yeah they mad about it you know.

{R} Is there any single man in the community among the Basques that you would see as kind of the leader, you know unofficial maybe, but everyone turns to for leadership, is there any Basque like that?

No, I don't think so.

{R} It's every man for himself?

Dh yeah.

{R} Basques are very independent aren't they?

Yeah very independent. Yeah, they don't want to be pushed around. That's one thing. They just like a (indiscernible) if you start pushing them around.

{R} Do you ever go to the festivals over a Boise, or?

Not Boise, but Elko. Elko's the biggest one for all the United States.

{R} Biggest in the United States, do you go to that?

Yeah.

{J} Do you know how to dance, any Basque dances?

Yeah, mm-hmm.

{J} Does your wife know how to?

No. No Basque kind in particular, but you know it's pretty fast music that Basque music.

{R} Is that what they call the Hota?

Yeah.

{R} That means J in English.

Right, uh-huh.

[2-130] {R} Is that a, that's a special type of dance?

Yeah.

{R} That's the main dance.

Right and it's awful fast and you have to, you have to be fast if you dance to something like that you know. They're teaching the kids that born in this country to dance that Hota you know, but seem like they I don't know if, seems like you gotta born where you belong to, to learn something like that you know. It's like handball you know, handball is one of the big traditions in the old country for Basques.

{R} Oh that's pelota, is that what you're calling handball.

Right well, no the handball is played with the hand, with the basket is the jai alai. But that's both things we play back in Spain. That's where they came that's game came from Spain from the Basque country and those are the champs believe me, you, what you see here is nothing but amateurs you know. When you see those champions they come from there.

{R} Where do you see them like in Nevada? Do they have a pelota court?

{R} Is that like jai alai in Mexico with the basket on the hand?

Well yeah the chances are the same.

They got in Las Vegas they made it last year, they made a new one and they brought the champions back from Spain to play the game you know. And they got in Florida. In Miami, Florida they got.

{R} Is that what's Froton?

Froton yeah.

{R} But that's the court itself, right?

That's the court itself, right.

{R} And pelota is what you call the game or do you call jai alai?

Well the pelota we call jai alai they both are played with pelota, but jai alai is much faster and harder and is like violent game I tell you that ball I see it before but it carries amount of speed and you gotta have an eye like an eagle. And they try to learn in this country, but I hear in TV one night, hear the Basques talking about pelota game and the Americans they try to learn it, but it makes so difficult for them. It seems like for each game you gotta be born right there where you are and then it comes naturally. And it's like the basketball here, or baseball something you never see in Spain. Now they start playing basketball, but before we didn't know what it looked like.

[2-160] {R} Do you think the Basque traditions will continue in Harney County or are they gradually dying out, how do you see that?

Well, I say they will die finally.

{R} Why is that?

Because there is no new Basques coming from the old country.

{R} Not many new ones?

No, and the one's they born in here they go the other way.

{J} They turn American.

Yeah, fast. And the only one's can keep up is the ones that come from there.

{J} No relatives are coming as Basques that live here?

No not anymore.

{R} Why is that?

I don't know. The laws they change.

{R} Immigration laws harder to get in?

Right they no letting them come anymore.

{J} Probably, are the conditions better in the Basque country than they used to be too and so they're more satisfied maybe?

Yeah, well the Basque country's been always (indiscernible) to the rest of the Spain, it's a rich area, yeah. It's a lot of industries and parts of the Basque, like in the (indiscernible) in the coast, a lot of industry there. In Navara is a big farming country a lot of timbers and it's population is not that, kind of sparsely populated, a lot of livestock. The people they live well, really compared to a lot of that part of Spain. In the south they live pretty poor, but in the south is control more like with millionaire people, they own thousands of acres you know, for recreation.

[2-180] {R} Are there so many?

For recreation like hunting, fishing. And then there's thousands of people and they're just poor and,

{R} Are there some very wealthy Basques?

Oh you bet.

{R} In this country?

Oh you bet, quite a few.

{R} What fields have they made their money in usually?

I'd say in livestock.

{R} Livestock?

Yeah.

{R} It'd be natural.

Natural yeah.

{R} Also in politics, now there's a man in Nevada, (indiscernible). He's a Basque.

He's Basque born in this country.

{R} And Gurrian or something he's a state politician.

Yeah, lots of us is lawyers and like in Idaho (indiscernible) secretary of state. They keep in politics too.

{R} Do you think the Basques are any more industrious or hard working than anybody else, is that why they do well here?

I say that yeah, they kind of ambitious you know. They try to, they went all over, no matter where they went they did it well. They went to South America and they I hear, I read a book it says that 90% of the banks are controlled by Basques in South America. In Spain too. The biggest bank in Spain they controlled by the Basques.

[2-205] {R} In Spain the Basques are seen as very hardworking, and,

Yeah right, hard working.

{R} Industrious people.

They want progress you know and that's what they like to accomplish selves,

{R} To better themselves.

Yeah, to do better.

{R} Do you think it's bad that the Basque traditions will die or does that bother you at all?

Kind of yes, the language is dying you know because it's one of the probably the oldest language in the world. Cause still they can't find out the history of the Basque. They got a lot of might, it might come from here it might come from there, but still they never found definite answer for it. And it's a language is not like none of the languages in the world because you got French it's got a lot of Spanish words, English it's got Spanish words, French words, many others, but the Basque it's completely out of every one of them.

[2-220] {R} Are most of your friends in Harney, in Bums Basque or do you have other American friends?

Oh, I got a lot American friends, probably more than the Basques, because I didn't associate with them for years you know. I'd say I've got as many American friends as I got Basque. Now some of them they're still just keeps in that only the Basque.

{R} Do you think that's good or bad?

I think bad, I think that's kind of you know mixed up.

{R} But that's exactly why they're going to lose their traditions isn't it, cause they'll marry Americans and then,

Well yeah as far as that, that way yes, but even in themselves in the old country they losing. The kids they born today they no, they no want to speak Basque.

And when I was raised that's the only language I know when I was in school, when I was in school I got to learn Spanish.

[2-240] {R } You spoke Basque at home but you had to study in Spanish.

Right, right. So think when the, see the Basque they lost their independence long, many years ago you know. And then now they ask you, well a lot of people learn to know Spanish, well they say, what nationality you are, Basque you know. Some people they don't know what the Basque is, many of the people they told them where are those people from, Basque? Spain, oh Spain yeah when you tell them Spain they think you're Spain, but really, really we are only Spanish citizens you know we come from the Basque country but we're Spanish citizens you know.

{R} I think that's as much information as we need isn't it? Don't you think you've given us an interesting amount?

{ J } Yeah, that's great.

[2-250] {R} Thanks a lot. (turns tape off)