

Washington County Museum
Oral History Interview with Roderick Lou Bunnell
Date: May 7th, 2013

Informant: Roderick Lou Bunnell

Interviewer: Liza Rosier
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L: Liza
R: Roderick

L: My name is Liza Rosier and this is Washington County Museum. Today's date is May 7th, 2013 and this is an oral history interview. So first of all we'll begin with your full name and date of birth and where you were born.

R: My full name, Roderick Lou Bunnell, B-U-N-N-E-L-L. Date of birth, August 4th, 1930 in **Emmanuel** Hospital in Portland.

L: Okay and what is the family heritage on both of your sides, if you know?

R: Well, British Isles with a great deal of variety in location and timing.

L: Do you know when your family came to Oregon or Oregon territory I should say?

R: Well, part of them came in the late 1840s, 1850s in covered wagons and others came by railroad later on. So scheduled over time when they arrived the Bunnell ancestors were in the covered wagons and one of the ancestors on one of my grandmother's sides guided the wagon train.

L: Do you know what her name was?

R: Nichols.

L: Hattie Nichols?

R: Yeah.

L: And let's talk about your grandfather. What was his name?

R: Well one grandfather was Zachariah Bernard Brown and he was born in New Brunswick. And his brother grew up in Maine and he and his brothers as they got older would go down in Maine and visit their grandparents because schools were free in Maine. We had to pay in New Brunswick so they went down for school so he pretty much grew up in Maine.

L: So they would travel back and forth to school.

R: They travelled back and forth and one of his older brothers lied about his age and volunteered in the army in the Civil War.

L: Went in very young.

R: And grandpa, getting? in Maine in the logging business and came out west as a logger in California and came up north to visit his brother who's still in the army or was in the army again actually. He was stationed at Fort Walla Walla and got up there and discovered that--this was 1877 and the army was off chasing Chief Joseph so his brother wasn't around.

So he went on up to Spokane. He heard there was some timber up there and he looked around, decided there wasn't enough timber around there any worthwhile. So he got a short job for the army doing some cruising and then went off to southwestern Washington where there were more trees.

In the process he was offered while he was in Spokane, offered to split a fellow's homestead right around the Falls over in downtown Spokane. And grandpa could have had half of it. He decided there weren't enough trees up make it worthwhile so he went off and settled in Pacific County right in the southwest county of Washington.

L: Interesting. So now the story about Portland's electric street lights—is that the same grandfather?

R: That's the other grandfather.

L: Okay and what was his name?

R: His name was Bunnell, John Frederick Bunnell I believe. And he was born probably around the Oregon city area somewhere although his family ended up in the **Tualatin** area sometime later. But the story about the lights was that the electricity first came to Portland as a civic project for street lights and streetcars and so on. And they had the generator for the streetcar so somebody decided they should replace the gas lamps in the city with electric lights.

And one of the city officials figured out that the electric lights are so much brighter that they wouldn't need as many of them but they'd have to get them higher so to get one lamp higher so one light could illuminate all of downtown Portland. So getting the light that high wasn't the problem--there's lots of loggers around that knew how to cut tall trees and **[inaudible]** spar poles. And so this was back in the highly logging days.

So they had the loggers cut a Douglas Fir many, many feet tall, drag it into Portland, stand it up in the main intersection and with the street light on top. And when it got dark they turned the light on and you could just about see it up there. Complete botch of an idea of trying to light downtown Portland—it was completely worthless so they realized

they'd have to drop the log again and get it out of there. The problem was that it was the most expensive lamp they had and if they dropped it the way logger's dropped trees it would smash.

And so my grandfather was apparently a young man around town at the time and he volunteered. I don't remember if he got paid \$10 or \$2 but he said he was way up a hundred some feet up the pole and got the lamp and brought it back down again. And he was apparently quite the figure around Portland for a few weeks. But he left soon after and spent the rest of his year up in [inaudible] Columbia area in Klickitat County.

L: Doing work up there logging and things like that?

R: No, he was up on the farm, a rancher.

L: What kind of crop?

R: Well they did mostly hay and cattle and then sheep and hay and that of course led to a controversy between the sheep men and the cattlemen.

L: Oh yeah. Is it over ranch land?

R: Well over the grazing. Sheep have incisor front teeth and they can cut the grass much closer to the ground and after the sheep have been through a pasture the cows can't get anything to eat or the horses.

L: That makes sense. So let's go on to your parents. What were their names? Let's start with your father's name and date and place of birth.

R: My father's name Clarence Orville Bunnell. He was born in Centerville, Washington in Klickitat Country. He grew up in his younger years in the farm [inaudible] River where the Maryhill Museum is now. And that was their farm and I think he lived there until he was 14 or 15. He was born in 1891 I believe and died in 1951. He was just short of his 60th birthday.

L: And your mother's name and date.

R: my mother's name was Lulu Maud Brown Bunnell and she was born in South Bend, in Pacific County and grew up there. Her father started out in lumber and then he had a bad leg from a logging accident. And so he became a cruiser doing that kind of clerical work in the lumber trades and then got into local politics. And I think he set the record in Pacific County for being longer in office than anybody else starting out as Deputy Sheriff, then Sheriff and then Auditor and Assessor and went through all the offices.

L: All kinds of different jobs. Can you elaborate on the kind of upbringing you had. I know that's kind of a broad question but maybe, politics, any major mottos or morals that your parents really instilled?

R: Well the kind of interesting thing in that area was that I grew up during the Great Depression. My dad's career was with Pacific Power and Light. He started out as an engineer, served there and had worked his way up to assistant to Chief Engineer by the time I was born. Then the Depression hit and they reduced staff very substantially and he had a number of 10% salary reductions and was fortunate to keep his job at all. He ended up in what they called the right-of-way claims. He would be in charge of buying right-of-way. There wasn't any construction going on so there was very little of that during the Depression.

L: How did that affect farming like for his own farm?

R: He didn't have a farm.

L: So that was just your grandparents that had the farm and then your father [inaudible0.

R: My grandparents and actually they sold that when he was 13, 14 years old moved to Idaho. He did his high school years in southern Idaho and then came back to Washington College at Washington state western State.

L: You mentioned the Depression so that really affected the status of the whole region. And what do you remember about going to high school in Hood River maybe during the 1940s? You want to go back?

R: Just a bit before we get to that—we lived in Portland when I was very small boy. And I was technically an only child but when I was a couple of years old one of my aunts died. And my mother took in her three daughters which were older than I--three girls older than I by four year increments, four, eight, and twelve years older than I and so I grew up with three big sisters.

But the interesting thing here is that when I was six years old we'd been living in Portland and I'd gone to kindergarten in Portland. We moved to an obscure tiny town in Central Washington that nobody had ever heard of which later became world famous. So I started the first grade in Hanford and went first and second grades in Hanford which was—.

L: Maybe explain a little bit about the town for people that might listen that don't know about it.

R: Well, I think everybody has heard about the Hanford project and the Hanford radioactive issues. But Hanford before the war was just a tiny little village. The downtown area consisted of a grocery store and a library that was open Tuesdays and Thursdays and Saturday mornings and a tavern. That was about it. It was a very tiny little town.

L: What did all the kids do for fun around there? Just kind of play games and play outside?

R: Well there was a lot of space to run around outside. The town had been built by real estate developer and he didn't sell nearly all the property he had so the houses were scattered out. There was lots of free space and vacant lots among and between the houses. So there was lots of room to have games and play outdoors.

L: Did you ride a lot of horses or anything at that age?

R: We didn't have horses. My dad grew up in the horse era and had all the cowboy skills. But when he was in the service during the First World War on two different occasions he had horses rolled on him. And both times he was off doing things outside of the assignment so he didn't want to report the injury. So the end result is that he never rode again and so I never learned. He taught me to lasso and some of the other cowboy skills but he never taught me to ride and so I never--.

L: Scared for your safety. Let's talk a little bit more about his occupation with Pacific Power and Light. What did he do for them?

R: As I say he worked up to right-of-way claims and was an assistant to the Chief Engineer and then when he moved to Hanford they moved into Marketing. And the idea was to build electricity on the farm marketing program.

And the Hanford area was one of the most highly electrified farming areas in the west because it had been developed. Just empty land by a developer who built a place where you get a run of water to run a generator in the Priest Rapids and then pumped water out of the river and into the irrigation system in the Priest Rapids valley. And also cut lines and send electricity out to the farms so they could pump water out of the ditches.

L: A huge project.

R: So the developer that set this up went broke and they declared bankruptcy. And the biggest claimant was General Electric for the cost of the generators. And General Electric found itself owning similar situations all over the west so they **farmed** the men to electric companies to Power and Light, to Northwestern Electric. All over the west there are companies that were formed by General Electric. And finally the federal laws made them break them apart and so they were no longer a single company but were separate units. And he worked electricity on the farm.

Now this was during the Roosevelt era and part of Roosevelt's plan was to nationalize the electric business. And so he planned to have all of the electric companies taken over by local PUDs (Public Utility District) and then he would have the federal government build dams on the rivers and furnish electricity cheaper than they could make it themselves in the private market because and pay taxes.

And so this became dad's main function for awhile was working on these PUD campaigns ready to defeat the election when they would set up a county PUD and have an election to take over the power company.

One of the things I grew up with the family was always in a political controversy and people on both sides and arguments and so on. So this is one of the things I grew up with. You hear it at home you don't talk about anywhere. Be quiet about it and never say anything about it and get used to taking shots from outsiders.

Early in my first grades, some girl told me--I remember this very well—it snowed and my mother bought me a pair of boots. And she said, "You can have new boots co's your daddy steals from the farmers."

L: And she's only six years old and she's telling you this? *[both chuckle]*

R: And she sure heard it at home.

L: Let's go into your father's dealings with the Klickitat and speaking the language and your story about that?

R: I understand that the Chinook it started out originally or so they claim is the language of the Chinook tribes along the Pacific Rim but as the explorers and traders came it began to expand and it became kind of lingo fracas of the entire trade area of the west and included Russian words and French words and English words and Spanish words. All the different explorer groups added words to it so it became very different from the original Chinook tribe language but it was the common tongue that everybody spoke.

Dad had a knack for languages that unfortunately I didn't inherit. But he could speak a number of languages and was literate in several of them and Chinook was among the languages that he spoke.

L: What other languages did he speak?

R: He could read and write French and speak several dialects of French and Spanish, Italian, Serbian, Croatian—.

L: That would make sense considering his time in Europe.

R: And a little German. Not much of the Scandinavian languages and several Indian languages in addition to the Chinook.

L: Did he have many friends or what are the stories revolving his dealings with them? Was it trade relationships? Was it to do with the Pacific Power company?

R: Well when he was growing up, as I say they had their ranch right along the Columbia and the tribes from the east when you coming down to Columbia fish and trade for fish. And this was a convenient stopover at their ranch. So the Indians would stop and some of them would stay for a week or so. And so he got acquainted with them, picked up some language and begin to collect their stories, their folklore. And got interested in that and got a pretty good collection of stories that he picked up.

And then one particular source was a lady in Mud River named Martha Alec. It's spelled four or five different ways so you can't misspell it. E-L-L-I-K, A-L-E-X and a variety of ways. Including on the family's tombstone there's three or four spellings on their tombstones. But at any rate Martha was very elderly when I knew her. She lived just east of Hood River in a little one room house—well actually two rooms. There's a bedroom and a kitchen. That was it.

But Martha was very interested in preserving the culture and it seemed to her that all the people younger than her were trying to join the American culture and give up their own. So she was very enthusiastic about somebody like dad that was collecting the folklores so she was very helpful with that. This also led to the situation I mentioned earlier where I was sold to the Indians.

L: And tell us about that story.

R: Dad as I say was buying right-of way for the power company and they were building a line from Hood River to the Dalles but instead of going along the edge of the river like the highway does it was going over the hills and between, over the mountains and between. And just east of Hood River the hills right against the valley is a patch of land that is still owned by an Indian band and it's called Indian Mountain and there's an Indian encampment up there.

And I think they're officially part of the reservation but the land is technically trust land that is held by the government on behalf of the Indians. And the line went across this land. And dad went up to talk to them and none of them were interested in giving right-of-way but somebody told him that the wind whistling through the wires would kills their horses. And this was completely untrue and dad tried to explain it was untrue and just got nowhere.

His friend Martha Alex--they called her 'Indian Martha' which was not a term of denigration incidentally. They showed her a lot of respect because she had done a lot of work as a practical nurse for families in Hood River and was well-known for that. But Indian Martha offered to help him. She said she'd bring the key people into her cabin and have them meet with him.

When I was four or five years old he took me along with him and we were up to the meeting with Martha and the Indians. And I remember we were in this room maybe twice as big as this one but we were in this room sitting on the floor in a circle.

Everybody [was] just sitting cross-legged on the floor—Dad, me and Martha and all the Indians.

Well there was one woman in the group of Indians. All men except one woman.

L: And that was Martha or a different woman?

R: Different, a woman from up in the band in the hill. And this says something of that people don't recognize now that the women in the tribes were very influential not in combat or in hunting but in food and any negotiation women would be involved in. And dad tried to get them interested those young white men that visited Martha from time to time and he had developed a written form of their local language and had translate done of the chapters of dad's book into it. And he read that out of dad's book to them in the local language and they were all interested.

And then dad had brought the money because they didn't trust banks. He brought the money for the right-of-way and all the forms and the maps and spread it all out. They wouldn't have anything to do with it unless this one woman—she was the key. And if she didn't move none of them would move. She just sat there with her head down and her arms folded and would not even look up. And it was just a dead issue as far as doing any business because she just wouldn't move.

Finally dad put his hand on me and says, “[inaudible] How are you old woman, old mother? What will you give me for the boy?” Now they were talking in Chinook but I knew exactly what was going on. I never understood the language. Well she came alive. She pulled me over, sat me on her knee. “Ah [inaudible] papoose.” And she says, “Four ponies.” And dad says, “A big boy like that it would be worth at least eight ponies.” [inaudible]?

[Inaudible] “Six ponies?” Dad says, “Well do I get to pick out the ponies?” All the rest of the Indians all laughed, broke out laughing because apparently she had a reputation for sticking people with bad horses. And so he'd nailed it right there. All of a sudden it was fun. Everybody was having a good time. There were offers. Offers went back and forth and people were making deals and she was involved. Everybody was talking and having a good time except possibly for me. I thought I was going to spend the rest of my life on Indian Mountain.

L: Doing hard labor somewhere.

R: But at any rate after an hour dad had the signed right-of-way. They had the money and he had me. Everything worked out right. He was telling stories that I grabbed a hold of his hand and wouldn't let go until we were in the car.

L: So you knew that you were at least going home with your dad. That's funny. Any other stories about him and them that you can think of? Just off the top of your head?

R: There are a lot of stories about dad's involvement with the Indians. One of them I particularly remember because I have somewhere a record of '78 where the **KON** radio did a radio program on it and I happen to have the record. He was in the Dalles on business and went by one of the tavern and there was a lot of Indians and went in to visit with some of them. There was one old man, I think it was Chief Tommy Thompson who wanted to get back to Hood River to the band and was looking for a ride so dad said, "I'm going that way. Come on with me."

Well they got just beyond Mosier. The old road used to go up the side hill west of Mosier. And in the loops there is some very interesting archeological evidence of early occupation. There's a slide of rocks, big rock jacked around and so they're into trenches and ridges and bowels and so on along this slide. Something and the trees were all down and you could see for miles up and down the river.

So dad stopped and wanted to know if Chief Thompson knew anything about it. He got very **closed**. He wanted out of there. He wanted to leave right now. Those were the people that could change. The people that were there were the ones that were there before the Indians came and were there when the Indians got her. And they had the ability to change themselves into animals or trees or bushes or make themselves invisible. And didn't want anything to do with it—just get out of there as fast as possible.

This had been years later and he still—now of course the Indian tradition is is they were the first ones here. There was nobody here before them and that--.

L: They were like the fathers of the country.

R: Probably. I read some of the controversy about the Kennewick man they discovered.

L: Kenneth Ames. He was the archeologist that studied the whole Kennewick man.

R: Well they found the skeleton back several thousand years and the DNA is not related to the Indians. It's related to Asian and so--.

L: So it's a big controversy because of the repatriation act.

R: And should the skeleton be given to the Indians to bury and so on.

L: They just found Joseph **Meeks** supposedly four of his children are buried out in Hillsboro and Judy Goldman who's one of our board members—I just saw her on Monday and I thought that was interesting and that has a lot to do with local history.

Tell us about the 1894 the high water mark.

R: Another time when I was travelling with dad and I was preschool we were in the Dalles and he noticed that they were tearing down the last remaining wall of Umatilla House hotel. Now the Umatilla House was kind of the legendary inn at the Dalles in the

early days where if you had the money this is the right place to stay and the right place to eat. And they were tearing down this last wall and the wall had a watermark from the height of the 1894 flood and as far as dad could see was the oldest building in town still standing to have that watermark.

So he had a survey crew in the area at the time and he had them go over and measure how high the water mark was above the ground and then run a line of levels to the new post office at the other end of town go up to go up that high on the wall of the post office and set a brass marker, like he set benchmarks on the side of the post office.

Now the post office has since moved to another building. It's on the other side of the street now. But we up in the Dalles a year or so ago and looked and the mark is still there on the old building that. And if you walk up several steps up on the sidewalk to a patio in the front of the old post office and then over beside the door more than head high I think that's how deep the water was in 1894. If that much water came down again with all the dams would be able to control it or—hope we never have to find out.

L: Look at Vanport. Of course that was '48 that was before a couple of the dams were up but still that's scary to think about all that water coming down from the mountain every year.

You explained about the levels. You mentioned your father's role in World War I. Did he have any kind of role during the Second World War? You would have been too young to be drafted.

R: I was a little kid but this gets into a political situation because he had become well-known by this time as the spokesman for the anti-nationalization of the electric business. And as such in the Democratic administration he was not welcome in military service. Why this is but the word was out that he would not be accepted so a number of his friends, people who have served with him were in but he was not acceptable for some reason.

L: What did he do during the war? He still worked with the power company and did that role?

R: He worked at the power company. And these controversies went on when we moved to Hood River. The reason we moved there was because they formed a PUD in Hood River and went on the ballot and there was some kind of loophole in the Oregon law that if they could get a big enough bond [inaudible] from Hood River they could buy the entire Oregon Civic Power and Light facilities. And so there was something like Hood River PUD had \$117 million bond issue and dad was heading the team that was proposing it. And the local area manager was very much involved and had a heart attack and died and they appointed dad as his replacement.

And so we lived in Yakima at that time and we moved to Hood River and during the war so we were there when the Japanese came back. We weren't there when they shipped the Japanese out.

L: What was the atmosphere like when they came back?

R: Very mixed. There was a lot of—Hood River was kind of the high point of the anti-Japanese feelings in Oregon and to the extent that the American Legion went out and erased all the Japanese names off the honor rolls on the courthouse and pulled the people that were in the service. And these were guys that were in combat in Europe at the time and doing very well. Many of them wounded. Some of them were killed and their names were painted out.

L: How did you feel about it?

R: I thought it was wrong and my dad did. My dad belonged to the American Legion and because he had all these other political stuff going on he just had to keep quiet—couldn't take a leadership position on this. So he had to do his best to keep out of that controversy.

L: So we talked about their attitudes towards the Japanese and of course towards the native Americans. Do you know either of your parents attitudes towards Latino population or African Americans?

R: There was very little of this. Almost no Latino population in the area until, was it the Braceros situation came along.

L: Yeah the Braceros after World War II.

R: And in the area there were very few African Americans. My mother had one friend. During the war she substituted in the schools. That was the time when married women did not teach school and after she was married she quit teaching. But she substituted during the war and in a part of Yakima—we were living in Yakima and the school she was substituting in the area where the railroad African Americans lived. And so she had some African American children and became friends with one of the mothers and so we saw something of her, something of that family.

L: So you had pretty good opinions then since you knew them and spent time with them and so there wasn't any animosity.

R: Regarding the Japanese the interesting situation here was when they came back this was during the summer and there was all this resistance and bad publicity going on. And the people in the Japanese community were very concerned about their children going to school. And so when high school started that fall it was my first year in high school and there were only two Japanese students came out of the whole Japanese community came to school that first day. Actually both of them became good friends

later on and one of them is still alive. I see him now and then at reunions. It was very interesting. The two of them sat there. Nobody bothered them but nobody got up and got friendly with them. They just sat there and--.

L: Probably a kind of indifference not really knowing what to say or how to act.

R: This lady I worked with for many years, I hadn't realized she was from Hood River and I was visiting with her one time and she had been isolated at that time. And her parents had sent her over to Washington to one of the communities across the river to go to high school. She didn't try to go to school in Hood River because of the ill will.

L: That was a pretty big hub for anti-Japanese. So we'll go forward a little bit. Actually first of all I was going to talk a little bit about the building of the dam in '57 was the building of the dam because you mentioned you might know a little bit about the Celilo.

R: The Celilo Village was there of course until the dam was built. And driving back and forth we'd frequently stop off at Celilo and dad would go in and visit with some of the Indians. And if you [inaudible] up and down the little trail between the houses if you met an Indian and gave him a dollar and found out which car was yours when you got back there'd be a salmon in the trunk of your car. So always put some newspaper on the floor of your trunk so—.

L: How did your father feel about the building of the dam?

R: Well that was after he had died.

L: Oh that's right, he died in '51.

R: The Bonneville was built and Grand Coulee and his idea was that the private companies had intended to build dams in the Columbia and the government forced them out and took it over and built them instead. And now that the government had the dams they would sell electricity to the PUDs and the co-operatives cheaper than they sell the private power companies so they could give these people a discount and they'd have an economic gain by throwing out the private company and nationalizing the industry.

And he also, I was reading some history just recently of Grand Coulee and it said no one ever raised the question when it was being built the damage to the fish runs. That's not true because I remember dad and his acquaintances talking about that quite frequently and quite vigorously about how this was going to really ruin the Indians and damage their economy because they wouldn't be able to get the salmons ahead of the pass.

L: That's interesting that here you are refuting what's been said in history.

R: The other thing I remember about Celilo Village, it smells bad.

L: Oh really? Because of all the salmon are drying out?

R: Well because of the salmon and there's no sewage and people would just relieve themselves wherever they were.

L: Let's move on to your mom. I just wanted to ask about her as a teacher. So what grades and subjects did she teach?

R: Primary, first grade or primary depending on the school.

L: Probably would have been all subjects at that point, right teaching grade school?

R: Oh yeah for primary yes. One teacher covers everything.

L: And where did she teach?

R: Starting when she started to teach she would have been in Pacific County and then she taught east of Mountain. When she and dad met she was teaching in Richland and he was doing a job there. And they were living in the same boarding house and got acquainted in Richland.

L: Can you describe any early memories of her. For example what kind of house work she did. I kind of mentioned on your list here like baking bread or--.

R: I understand. We were an electric family so we had electric stove and electric refrigerator and electric vacuum cleaners and so on. And this was important the power company sold all these things in their office. They'd have appliances for sale,

L: So did they get discounts because your father was employed.

R: Oh yeah. Got a discount and it was important to let the neighbors see it that we were using this sort of thing.

L: What kind of advantages educationally do you think you had because she was a teacher? Do you feel like she--.

R: Well for one thing I learned very early to speak early and distinctly and with proper grammar which leads to another story that because I was the one always in the class that could speak clearly, that could recite a poem, that could read the thing, teachers assumed that I could also sing well. And I have no ear for music. I can recognize a tune and I can memorize the lyrics but I never stay on pitch in singing. So year after year I'd get picked out to be part of the special singing group for the class and be dismissed [inaudible].

L: We'll go on a little bit to your college, your career, maybe talk a little bit about Whitman College in Walla Walla.

R: Well Whitman was a little different. This is where we met, both at Whitman. But Whitman at that time the student body was highly selective. You had to do very well in the scholastic aptitude test to be accepted at Whitman. But the student body was made up of probably the first or second or third smartest kids in all the small high schools in the Pacific Northwest and a lot of the very wealthiest families in the big cities. And so there was an interesting mix the of the big city kids that had a very wealthy background and those of us from the small towns that were kind of squeezed to go to Whitman.

L: And what did you study at Whitman?

R: My major was English.

L: So in turn you ended up at Lewis-Clark (State college in Lewiston, Idaho) doing law school right?

R: Actually before it was Lewis-Clark.

L: Before Whitman?

R: The law school when I went was independent. It was organized many years before by a group of and judges and operated in a downtown office building—a grungy old building that's since been torn down. Now I think it's the back part of a business of a hotel but there's a crummy old building and on the second, third floor was the law school, strictly a night school operation.

I got out of the army. We were going to get married next year so I needed to find a job. I went to Portland State and took a **quarter** of business type courses and then went out and found a job with a very small health insurance organization and over the years grew into a largest insurer in the west.

L: And you stayed with them until retirement?

R: Yeah, 40 years.

L: What a career.

R: The Company was much bigger and broader by the time I left. At any rate so I had a job. I started out working in claims and various other aspects of the company and I got far enough into management that I realized that the guy that was the president was taking the company in the wrong direction. It was a loser proposition.

So I figured I needed something else. And the one education that I could get and still work full-time was going to night law school so I went to night law school. And he let me

know that I would be out as soon as I finished and passed the bar co's he didn't want a lawyer around looking over his shoulder which is understandable.

Fortunately just shortly after I graduated he got a job with a larger company and moved on and the new president I came back after passing the bar and he made me General Counsel and kept me in the company. And so I moved on in management and retired as a General Counsel, Secretary and Senior VP [Vice-President].

L: And that was in what year did you retire?

R: Nineteen ninety-five.

L: A good long 40 year history. I can't believe the changes that you must have seen over 40 years.

R: It was amazing because I think we had \$237 thousand dollars of transactions when I started and when I left the company was doing \$5 billion dollars a year. And started we were limited to Oregon and when I left we were in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Utah.

L: Amazing that it could spread like that over really four decades. What do you remember about your military service from '52 to '54 right?

R: I got out of college and I was ready to be drafted and--.

L: This is for the Korean War right?

R: This is during the Korean War and the old-timers. The veterans that were still in college said do anything you can to avoid being drafted because if you're drafted they'll put you through basic training and send you out to Korea as a placement in a combat infantry outfit. And that's the worst possible assignment because as the new guy you don't have anybody watching your back. You got the worst assignments and it was just a fast way to become a casualty.

And so I tried several alternatives and the one that I finally stuck with was I came into Portland in the summer and applied at the local recruiting office for what's called a civilian commitment. That is I applied for Officer Candidate school, passed the physical, passed all the tests, the written, the orals, the whole thing. And I got a written confirmation that I was accepted for OCS (Army Officer Candidate School) and then enlisted in the army for two years.

And it didn't work because the prerequisite was you had to go through the basic training and then you had to go through leadership school for eight weeks and in the process with all the gunfight and exposure and so on damaged my hearing to the extent that I could no longer qualify to be an officer. So I spent the second year in the army as a clerk working in Alaska.

L: What was it like in Alaska at that time?

R: I was just outside of Anchorage so the weather was fine. It stayed sunshine all the time. It was interesting. Alaska was a territory then and I had some connections. I was able to spend some time with some civilians and see some of the culture, some of the society there. It was really an interesting situation.

L: Lots of local wildlife and you see lots of bears and salmon and I'm sure all kinds of beautiful things up there. I spent a lot of time in Canada but I've never been to Alaska. So the majority of it was in Alaska and then you just came home from there in '54.

R: I was about half and half. Between going through the two classes and waiting and other assignments I spent the first year in California and the second year in Anchorage.

L: Any special friends or commanders? Any stories from your service?

R: Well there's a lot of good stories. At one point we had a former child movie actor who was working in the theatre across the street from our office and he had been ordered to put on a play. So he was in the process of putting a play together and one of his actors quit just shortly before the opening. And he heard that I had done some acting in high school and college so he came over to ask me to be in the play. So I acted in this play and part of the play was about a couple of Hollywood train riders who discovered the secretary was pregnant and decided to make the baby a superstar.

You're probably not old enough to remember Baby Leroy was a Hollywood star at one point and before my time actually. Anyway the opening scene, the second act of the play was the theatre preview of the movie that they were making with the baby and I played down at the old time cowboy movie actor who was trying to make a play for the mother and rebuilt a career. And so I was the main figure in this preview so what it all comes down to is that I acted in the first western movie made in the Alaska under the direction of Robert Blake.

L: One of your greatest achievements right? I want to know the story about Governor Kulongoski.

R: One of my assignments for **OBS** was to take care of the problems of the legislature and I quickly found out what I needed to do was to hire a lobbyist because those guys are professionals. I could go down and testify and talk to people but I couldn't do the day-to-day stuff that they do all the time. So I hired a lobbyist and I was the one the lobbyist talked to and the one that came down and talked to people for them and testified.

When I first ran across Ted he was a State Senator very much tied in with the unions. He was pushing a bill that required whenever a person left the group you'd be entitled to buy an individual policy. Which was fine. All the **insurance** companies were doing that already so I had no problem with that. But then his bill went on and laid out what the

benefits in the individual policy would be and they were much worse than what the companies were offering already. And so I tried to get this through to him but the unions were pushing this bill and he didn't object to anything the unions wanted. And so I just couldn't get through to him that this was a loser, that he was taking things away from people. And he had enough clout. He got his bill passed.

Well two years later Ted is Insurance Commissioner and his staff comes to him and said we got this awful law that says that people who leave the group they have to take this terrible coverage that's worse than anybody else gets—worse than they can get if they didn't have this. And he says, "Well have a public hearing. We'll see about changing it."

So he called a public hearing and I went down to testify. And it was a big room, Ted up there in front of the table out in front and the staff lined up behind him at the table and the television camera and microphones. Then they'd take us out front where the witness would go up and talk. And all the lobbyist are in back. So it was my turn to talk and I figured this was my one chance. Actually when Ted became Insurance Commissioner I spent a lot of time with him. We got very well acquainted.

L: So you were able to talk to him on a more informal basis.

R: This was the big thing. The television camera going I said, "Mr. Commissioner we knew when this bill came before the legislature that it was a bad bill. That it was going to take benefits away from people and give them less than they already had but there was this one Senator that I tried to convince him but I couldn't convince him. I talked to but this one Senator kept insisting but no matter what I said to him even though I laid it out he would not understand." Finally it clicked with him, Ted said, "Rod you son of a bitch." *[both laugh]*

L: He said that right in the microphone in front of everybody? I wonder what he thought to himself after. That's a great story. That's good. We'll talk a little bit about your immediate family so wife's name and place of birth.

R: My wife's name is Sarah Alice McMillan Bunnell and she was born in Coleville, Washington, April 12th 1931.

L: And name and maybe birth places of your kids.

R: The oldest boy is John Collin Bunnell and he was born in 1960. And his younger brother David Daniel Bunnell is three years younger. And John is over here in Portland. He's a freelance writer and editor and has a part-time job at the grocery store to cover when the checks come in regularly and to provide his fringe benefits – health insurance and so on.

And David is living in Los Angeles actually in Sam Pedro and he's a high school English teacher at the moment. He was originally a high school photography teacher but they

had cut back on the benefit and like all high school districts have had to and so he is now an English teacher with a whole lot of photography equipment in his closet.

L: He can put it to use on his own. Grandkids? Do they have kids?

R: John is not married. David is married and has two children. Bronwyn is about 14 now and she is very athletic. She is a freshman in four year high school but she turned out for the cross-country team and made the team. And her team won the Los Angeles district championship and placed eighth in the State championship. And so she's running against juniors and seniors.

Reese/Reece is three years younger and still in grade school. His sports are primarily basketball and swimming. Bronwyn also plays soccer, I think she would like to get out of the track and into soccer if she can make it.

L: She likes soccer better? That's more of a contact sport. Any family vacations or specific places in Oregon that are special to you?

R: The mountains are always special to me. I lived in Hood River. I got involved with the Hood River Crag Rats, the mountain rescue organization and did a lot of climbing and eventually voted into the Crag Rats.

L: That brings me into your climb on Mount Hood. So tell us about that.

R: Actually I've climbed Mount Hood 37 times and equal number of times there are various other mountains in the coast range.

L: What is it about mountain climbing that—?

R: Well it's physically demanding and it has a beginning and an end. You complete the climb and you've done it. You get to the summit you accomplish something. You get back down and there're some exciting things that you go through getting up and down and through the technology and the technique.

L: What kind of gear--over the years did your gear change? I would assume over the years your gear got more technological.

R: Not really. Boots over time develop fit better and get a little more flexible sometimes but during the time I was climbing the gear stayed pretty much the same. There have been some changes since. Ice axes are no longer as long as they used to be. People no longer use them as a walking stick or a cane. So they're pretty small now. Crampons are lighter weight than they used to be that's the device you strap onto your boots.

L: What kind of safety equipment--?

R: Well, rope is rope.

L: Did you have the same kind of the hooks that you hook—the grappling where you can just hook it on to the rope or--

R: Carabinger?

L: Yeah. They still have those then too?

R: Actually they came along the time I was climbing. They didn't have them at the end but they did by the time I was finished. I see a lot of people use them for key rings now. Every time I see them I say, "Hey I got one of those in the basement. I have 120 feet of rope tied to it."

But the climb I think you're referring to is when I wrote something about not too long ago. I talked about it. It was a climb when we got caught up in a cloud.

L: Oh that's right. The lenticular cloud.

R: Lenticular cloud. This was climbing the north side rock which is actually the east side facing the mountain up to Tilley Jane camp. This was the summer between my junior and senior years in college. And there were about seven or eight of us got together and were going to climb the mountain. And these were all guys that had been in high school except a couple of them were younger brothers of the guys I had been in high school with so we climbed together before. And I'd just recently been voted in the Hood River Crag Rats and so they appointed me the leader of the climbs. This is the first climb that I'd led on Mount Hood.

And the climbing route was up to the top of Cooper Spur and if you look at the mountain from the north side, from Hood River side you'll notice the left skyline drops down from the summit pretty steeply then swings out to a little point then goes off into the woods. Well that little point is the top of Cooper's Spur. And so we started out about two o'clock in the morning so it was just getting light by the time we got to the top of the Spur. And then there's a rock just beyond that that's called Tie-in Rock. Got off there. We got the ropes out and tied them in and explained to the novices who hadn't climbed before—there were a couple of the younger brothers—how you use the ice axe and how when you fall you do a self-arrest—stop yourself when you're falling, how you do all this sort of thing and explained all this. And then started up and just got up a little ways we popped into a cloud, a lenticular cloud,

Well a lenticular cloud if you're not familiar with them is shaped like a pancake. It's a big flat surface except that the top and the bottom are both lumped up a little bit. It's a little thicker in the middle than out towards the edges. And you find them around mountains. Apparently the wind will blow the warm valley air up against the mountain and grab it upwards in the cold air above. The mist freezes and you get this freeze and you get this lenticular shape that just sits on top of the mountain.

Well we got into this and we knew the route. We knew where we were supposed to go and [inaudible]. And we couldn't see as much but we knew where we were supposed to go up the mountain it's pretty steep because you can see on that side. Steep enough that if you stand straight up and reach out your arms straight out in front of you, you can touch the snow in front of you. And try that when you're walking upstairs next time and you get an idea of how steep it is. But you can go up that if you have the right equipment then manage it right,

And so we got up to the summit and sat around, talked a little bit and ate our lunch and then started back down. Walking down a deep slope like that is something you can do if you have the right equipment and the technique. And the technique is crucial because what you need to do as one step forward and the next step way down below you, lean forward so you drop straight down into that next step and drag your heel back at the same time so you get a good solid grip with your crampons when you come down and that's a very safe walk.

The problem is it's absolutely counterintuitive. Your natural inclination is to lean back against the mountain and, slide your foot out there in front. That means your weight is behind your center of resistance and so is going to push your crampon out away from the snow and you'll fall.

We explained this to the new climbers the ones that hadn't climbed before and even had them practice a little bit before we started down. All of them caught on except this one younger brother just couldn't get it, didn't click at all with him. And he started down. His big brother was right behind him on the rope and he took three steps and he fell. Well his big brother had his crampons and his ice axe and he got the rope around his ice axe and jerked him to a stop. And he got two or three more steps and he fell again.

Well he just kept bouncing down and finally his brother got tired of this so he let all the slack out between them so the rope was almost tight between them. And so when his brother started to slide he would just lean back and hold him with his own weight and jerk him to a stop. He wouldn't go more than a foot or so. Doing that he was able to come down and keep up with the rest of us and jerk him to a stop every few steps.

Well I was leader so I was ahead and got down where I knew we were below all the danger points and so it would be safe to cut loose and slide. It's called [inaudible]. And so I told everybody to stop and take the rope off. So I got loose first and I started to slide. Then 100 feet I came popping out of the cloud. It had just a sharp vivid edge the cloud and it was bright sunny day.

So I stopped and hollered to the rest of them that it was all safe to let go and so they began to come out. One by one they came popping out of the cloud except for little brother and big brother. And big brother called down and said, "I can't get the rope off. I jerked it so many times it's frozen and it won't come untied." So I said, "Let your trousers down and slide it over your hips. That may make your hips that much thinner and you can slide right over them." Well he tried it and it worked. The only trouble was it

got down to his ankle and his little brother fell again just standing; jerked the feet out from under him. So the two of them came bouncing down out of the cloud with his pants down around his ankles.

L: Poor guy. Probably freezing in the snow too.

R: I imagine. Neither one of them were hurt. But what I hadn't realized was that this was Sunday morning and there was a church service going on at Tilly Jane camp. The minister was on a little rise with his back to the mountain and the congregation had a little amphitheatre out in front of him. And these people had known it was coming up. This was Chinook [inaudible] service and many of them had brought their binoculars and were watching the mountain. One them happened to be looking up there when he saw me come out of the cloud and so he whispered to the rest of them and all these guys were watching by the time big brother and little brother came out.

L: They had no idea they had such an audience.

R: I don't know what we did to the sermon but when we got down there there was a crowd of people. "What were you guys really doing up there?"

L: What a cool story about Mount Hood. Just a few last significant memories—Columbus Day storm, 1962.

R: The Columbus Day storm—we were living at that time in a little court apartment in Beaverton. We had bought the house we are living in now and were just in the process of getting ready to move when the storm hit. And I was downtown working. My office was downtown but I parked up the hill up above the stadium.

L: What kind of car did you have at the time?

R: I was driving an MGA (Morris Garages sports car) Coupe at the time. At any rate I walked up to the parking place and got into the car and was driving home and I could tell we were getting a lot of buffeting from the wind. And the car handled quite well. It wasn't a problem but got home and I was able to park. Our other car—this was after John was born, we needed two cars. The other car was a Morris Minor and I was able to park beside it so it was down wind so it took some damage.

There's a church down the block that had shingles blowing off and those shingles took some paint off the Morris but the MG was protected so it didn't lose any paint. But in the course of the storm I decided I needed to check on the car and opened the front door. That apparently changed the wind pressure. The whole roof of the apartment went off.

L: Just because you opened the door?

R: I opened the door and it went off. Now this was a tarred paper roof and all the roofing went. The wood frame was still there and the wood slats the tar paper was nailed to was still there but the tar paper was gone. It was over in the neighbor's yard somewhere.

L: Did you guys have to hunker down and kind of hide or did you just kind of ride it out?

R: It didn't rain much that night. It only leaked in a couple of places so we were able to get through. The next morning the owner had a crew out with tarps spread over the building until we got the roof repaired. It did no damage to the house we were moving into.

L: Well that's good.

R: The scary thing is when I got back to work Monday morning the place where I parked up the hill from the athletic club, I couldn't park there because a tree had smashed down right down in the spot where the car had been. Who knows if I had worked half an hour longer and come up the car would have smashed or smashed while I was getting in or what. It was--.

L: Perfect timing.

R: Right.

L: I think that's it for some main questions. If there's any other things you want to mention, maybe I forgot about, anything you think is important to talk about?

R: Oh there're 800 things to talk about.

L: I know we could talk for another two hours. Thank you so much for coming and for telling us your stories. Maybe we can sit down again and do another hour.

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