



The OSU Extension Service Centennial Oral History Collection, June 19, 2009

Title

Linda Modrell

Date

June 19, 2009

Location

Benton County Commissioners Office, Corvallis, Oregon.

Summary

Modrell recounts her upbringing in Albany, her time as a Girl Scout, and her experiences working in the fields. She then discusses her first Extension Service job, as a temporary secretary, which she obtained right out of high school. She goes on to describe a series of secretarial jobs that she held with the Extension Service, followed by a break from Extension as an administrative assistant for the Dean of Veterinary Medicine. She mentions taking college courses while working, eventually ending up with an associate degree, followed by a bachelor's degree, and then a master's degree. From there, Modrell describes the difficulties that were encountered in creating an administrative computing system for Extension. She also speaks about a later job with the College of Health and Human Performance, and discusses a series of county and state government offices that she held after leaving the university. She concludes the interview with a description of the Oxford Round Table Conference that she attended.

Interviewee

Linda Modrell

Interviewer

Elizabeth Uhlig

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/extension/>

Transcript

***Note: Interview recorded to audio only.**

Elizabeth Uhlig: Linda, to start with, do you want to tell us something about your background? Where were you born and when?

Linda Modrell: I was born in Eugene in 1943. My parents had grown up in Albany but my dad was working down there at the time. When he went into the service, then we moved to Albany to be with my grandmother and moved back to Eugene when he got out of the service but not too terribly long after that, like three years or so, my father died and so we returned to Albany to be with my mother's family. So that's where I grew up, was in Albany.

EU: Did you have brothers and sisters?

LM: Yes, I had one brother. My mother remarried and so then I had a stepsister and my parents had a child together. So we had two different last names in the family; we had theirs, and his and hers and for us it was a pretty normal situation because we were not that old. I think I was seven when my mother remarried and my brother was just three and my stepsister just a year younger than I so we had a life before we came together although my brother that was just three doesn't remember any of that. But our half-brother, that was a normal situation for him and so our father's brothers were actually like his own uncles. It was just all one family.

EU: Your family, then, was all centered then in Albany.

LM: Yes. My mother's family came to the Albany area in 1851 and so she had a lot of roots in that locale.

EU: Did her grandparents come over on the Oregon Trail?

LM: Yes, one part of my mother's family came across on the Oregon Trail and that part of the family, the original pioneer in the Oregon Trail part, Martin Payne, he became a county judge in Linn County and then his son, Nimrod Payne, don't you love that name? He was a county clerk in Linn County. But Nimrod who was not born in Oregon but walked across the plains with the rest of his family, he met a little girl who had come to Oregon with her father by sea. They came the ocean route and they married. And so that is the genesis of the family in Oregon. And this is just a side note, but it's kind of interesting about degrees of separation. The current city manager in Albany; turns out that he is related to Martin Payne's brother and so we he first became city manager over in Albany we were talking and realized that we had an ancestor in common. Just a side note.

EU: So government service is in the family, then?

LM: Seems to be. I don't know about Martin's brother to whom the city manager is related but we need to go back another step or two and see our great great great grandfather that we would have had in common.

EU: I'm curious. Does your family have records and photos and documents from way back then?

LM: We have some and I just haven't taken that step to....I found out I was related to some people that I didn't know and what happened was this Martin Payne, when my great great-grandmother died he subsequently remarried and he remarried when he was sixty or something and had a whole new family and so I think it's that part of his family that has some records. In addition to that, he came from a pretty big family and then the son Nimrod that I talked about, you know that name has kind of died out, don't you think? He had a huge family so I'm not connected with those folks back in that generation and their offspring. Need to get connected.

[0:05:48]

EU: Were your grandparents, great-grandparents, farmers? Did they work in the city or?

LM: They did farming but the grandfather that immigrated here across the Oregon Trail, Martin Payne, he, when you go back in the books and when you find little histories about him, he was frequently called the richest man in Linn County.

He did some farming, but he didn't come here to make a fortune. So I don't know why he came here because to drag a whole bunch of kids across the plains when maybe there was opportunity but you were not in a dire situation from whence you came, is just a complete mystery to me. I did walk part of it; just a short jaunt of the Oregon Trail over in eastern Oregon and thought, "oh my gosh," walking through the wagon ruts you know. Oh my gosh, I can't imagine that particular adventure. I would have been more up for the sea voyage, I think, although that part; their name was Colver, Amos and his daughter Rosina. She was a little, little girl and so they had to disembark at the Isthmus of Panama and cross that and then get on a boat again, a ship, and come north.

EU: It seems neither of them was easy. I can't think that I would have the ability to do that.

LM: It's pretty daunting to me and clearly once my family got here into Oregon they didn't go anywhere else. They are pretty much, as far as I now, West Coast. I now the Colver family had tried to entice my grandmother when she was a young gal, "come on up to Alaska. You can cook." Or whatever was going on up there and she declined to go and that was a good thing she refused because the ship she would have been on sunk. I always thought that I couldn't imagine my grandmother doing something like that and of course she didn't.

EU: So you went to grade school and high school in Albany?

LM: That's right. And so did my mother and my father. His parents I did not know. They were gone by the time I was born but on my Dad's side of the family you had school teachers and missionaries. And in fact, his mother was born in Turkey because that was where her parent were living. Her father was a physician and they spent their entire adult lives in Turkey but they sent their children back to the United States to go to school when they got old enough to do that. But her father and mother died in Turkey and when she came to school here she went to Oberlin in Ohio then she went to Hawaii to teach school and that's where she met her husband, my grandfather on my father's side. And they came to Oregon from Alaska. They were in Sitka and Juneau and so they came in the early 1920s.

[0:10:17]

EU: So your grandmother, then, was in Hawaii teaching?

LM: Yes. As was my grandfather. He had gone there. She was teaching girls and actually I visited the school where she taught on the big island. And I could find, I knew the general location and I could find it because of the photographs. My grandfather was a big photographer. I mean he was taking pictures of every place that they went and they are on glass slides. And so I had taken photographs of those slides and could use them to go around and try to find locations where they had been. So their first child was born in Hawaii and their last child was born in Alaska.

EU: So, your family has been around.

LM: When I think about my Buchanan side, that's my father's name, my birth name, those folks were on the go and I really am discomfited by having to get on an airplane to get to Washington D.C. because it's so uncomfortable! [laughter]. And of course these folks were all at a much slower, much more civilized pace, but I do have a diary from my grandmother's father who was the physician in Turkey and he periodically, not very often, but periodically would come back to the United States to raise money and to also get up to date information on the latest surgeries and medical practices and so he had this little bitty diary, maybe about five by three inches and I tried to transcribe his handwriting and he had his first car ride in the Chicago area. Never had been in a car and he just thought that was an amazing thing. He went to the movies, could not understand that. But he describes his journey; he would record the temperature and it was a cloudy day, just the climatic conditions and talk a little bit about the country. The pages were very small so it was just very brief notes, but he talked about taking the train...his family was in the Minneapolis area and going around through to Seattle, down through Oregon, stopped in San Francisco and described just a smidge about the San Francisco earthquake. It had occurred a little before that, the year before or something like that. And stopped to see Leland Stanford you, know just little things as he went around the country and then stopped in Missouri because that was where my grandmother was at that time. And talked a little bit about her second child, my uncle John being born while he was there. And then when he gets on the boat to go back to Turkey, they couldn't get off the ship in Port Said because there was a labor strike. So finally they get off there and they do a whole wagon trip to get to the southeastern part of Turkey. And he describes it just a little bit. But I just shutter to get on an airplane to go to Washington D.C.

[0:14:52]

EU: It's a great diary. It's nice you still have it.

LM: Well, one of my cousins had it and I tried my best to transcribe it, but the unfamiliarity, some of the terms and names and place names was difficult, but I took that on as a project as a gift to my two sons for Christmas one year. And boy, that was a bigger project than I thought. But I put that together and gave one to my brother and to my cousins. I just am so sad that I didn't know them, of course, my great grandparents or my grandparents.

EU: So getting back. So, after you graduated from high school. Let me ask first, were you involved with the Extension Service, 4-H for example?

LM: I was not. No, I was a Girl Scout. But I had no exposure to 4-H whatsoever. I was totally unfamiliar with Extension, agriculture. Other than I worked in the fields every summer. So I guess I had a great familiarity with agriculture. Because in the Willamette Valley at that time, there were all these crops. There was mint and strawberries and pole beans and orchards; cherries and all of that sort of thing. Corn. And so it was a great opportunity for kids to be outside and experience physical labor and make some money. I needed to make money in order to buy what I wanted for school clothes. My family didn't have any money, but neither did anybody else, so I didn't feel poor. Looking back I didn't feel poor. Thinking about that and thinking everything that kids get to do today. I don't know, I don't think it's completely a good thing. I think that being out in the hot sun and doing physical labor is a good thing. It burns off all that energy and all those hormones – not completely, but it keeps you occupied. It also gave me an opportunity to take a look at how the kids whose families is part of the Bracero Program that was going on then who would come up and follow the crops.

EU: They came up from Mexico?

LM: Yes. And, but you know, this isn't something I would want to do lifelong and my two sons had an opportunity to work a little bit in the fields but it was in the Christmas trees or strawberries and not to the extent that I did but they thought, "this is not the way I want to spend my life."

EU: So when you worked those summers, did you work alongside the Braceros?

LM: Yes. They were there and, you know, when I say working alongside, I'm thinking now that you mentioned that they were kept a little separate. The local kids. And I hadn't thought about that until just now, but my particular interest was in the good looking teenage boys, you know. I could have cared less which part of the field they were in. I was very interested in who was out there; there was the whole social thing, but I was also very focused on how many beans I could pick, what I could do to accumulate enough money to get what I wanted for school clothes.

EU: Did you ever give any of that money to your parents, or was it just your spending money?

LM: No. That was just our spending money. That was what we were doing generally in my family. I guess I can't speak for everybody but we bought our own school clothes. And so that would be a relief to my family. My mom and dad couldn't have bought what we did with our own earnings. But it also meant that we got to have more and also it kept my mother busy sewing clothes too and my sister and I learned to sew—straight skirts, how hard is that? You learned that and took a yard of Pendleton wool and make something nice. Never went the pleated skirt route. That was more than I could deal with.

[0:21:11]

EU: When, then, did you start working for the Extension Service?

LM: The summer that I graduated from high school.

EU: And what was your first job?

LM: I worked in Extension Hall and I worked in the business office area and they had something called the central filing system and a woman worked there whose husband was going to school and she was in charge of the central file and I went

to work there typing file folder labels on a manual typewriter and I thought I had died and gone to heaven. It was inside; it felt like a professional kind of job and I was going to get married that summer after high school. I did get married the summer after high school so that was a way to earn a little bit of money for the wedding and I also was looking for a job. And it had happened, the neighbor lady that I babysat for had worked at the university as a secretary putting her husband through school and so she had called the person who was in charge of personnel, a man with the last name Riley, and so when they had a temporary kind of gig going on they gave me a call and that gave me a start.

EU: So was that a permanent, full-time job or was that temporary part-time?

LM: It was a full-time job but it was just temporary. I can't really remember how long it was; a month maybe. It was not a longstanding job. But it gave me a little bit of a start. The next job I had with the Extension Service also was a temporary job and it was in the fall of 1961 and I was filling in for Mabel Mack's secretary. Mabel Mack, I'm not sure what her title was. She was like an assistant director, associate director or a high level administrative position and Mabel, I'm pretty sure wasn't five feet tall even with high heels on and she was an older lady but I was eighteen so that's relative. I'm not sure how old she was but she did have gray or white hair. Just a beautiful dresser. She always looked just wonderful and at the time it was sort of in vogue to have a purple rinse in your hair and so she had this purple tint to her hair; not a pretty woman but somebody who commanded respect just by her presence. But what I was totally amazed and struck with was you would go into her office and her office was in the front of Extension Hall and so she looked out onto the Home Ec building and you would walk into her office and somebody would ask for a particular file or a publication or something and she had this filing system on the floor—stacks of stuff on the floor—and Mabel could just go, think a minute, identify a stack and she could reach right down in the bottom of that stack and whip out whatever it was that somebody wanted. I was so impressed. I just could hardly stand it. I thought she was a miracle worker and there again, that was just while a secretary was on vacation or something. Then I got a permanent job about January of 1962 with Elvera Horrell. Mrs. Horrell worked on the second floor, I think, of Extension Hall and she worked with the economists and statisticians gathering data on a variety of things relevant to the Extension Service.

[0:26:28]

EU: So would that have been specifically for Agriculture?

LM: Yes, right. And for me, she was hard to work for.

EU: What kind of work did you do?

LM: Secretarial work. And she put out a newsletter, it must have been monthly and you typed them on these long green sheets of coated paper and then you would take them down to the printing department which was on the ground floor of the Extension building and they would run off however many copies and I could not suit Mrs. Horrell, oh my gosh! And what it was, naturally, she wanted the newsletter to look really nice when it was printed copied and you are using a manual typewriter so you needed to have an even touch on the keys so that the impression on that kind of waxy coating would produce an even type. I'll tell you at one point, now mind you I was 19 and really didn't have extensive secretarial experience but I was like 19 and when I had to go back for about the third time and the woman down to the printing thing, the woman who was running that show, her name was Ellen Jimmerson and I mean there were all kinds of mailing activities that went on down there and everything. And Ellen took a look at what I did and she could see I was about ready to burst into tears and she took that and said, "here, let me just redo this for you." And she did it for me. I'll never forget that. Because Mrs. Horrell, very smart, she benefitted from the war, she was the only woman in that office and she had had that opportunity because men had left for the service. Other secretaries in the office who served other economists and statisticians and so on said, "You know, we've never seen her behave that way." So I don't know if it was a bit of a personality conflict or when I thought back on it, there may have been other things going on that didn't have anything to do with me. I may have also been hypersensitive.

[0:29:26]

EU: So at the time you said she was the only woman....

LM: In that area of work. You had secretaries, you had 4-H agents, you had home economists and I'm only speaking from my experience. I'm sure there were others outside of those areas but Mrs. Horrell was, as far as I know, she did a really good job and she had a sense of humor; small woman and she had white hair and in the fashion around World War II she would have a roll in the front and I don't even know what you call those little rolls. She was always very neat and tidy and a nice woman. But I'm telling you what, typing those darn things....

EU: Well, when you mentioned statistics too; doing that kind of work before computers I imagine was a completely different and difficult.

LM: Right. In that same office complex there was Steve Marks, Mrs. Horrell, Marion Thomas, Manning Becker, Lee Garoian and Chuck Sutherland who was actually in the School of Forestry. They didn't have colleges then; it was Oregon State College, and so each of the subject matter areas were schools, they weren't colleges like the College of Business was the School of Business. So over in the School of Forestry, Chuck Sutherland was laboring away as an Extension Forester. He may have had a split appointment, but he would bring statistics over about the sale of logs, and so on. And so we would see Chuck every once in awhile. A very, very nice man. And Steve Marks did a radio program; a regular radio program over at KOAC and talk about what pork bellies were selling for, and cattle, and wheat and so on. He did that, probably on a weekly basis, I don't remember exactly. And Chuck provided information for the radio program as well as the newsletter.

EU: So then these statistics that you compiled, those went back out to the agents in the field?

LM: You know, I'm sure they were available to the agents in the field but for sure they were used as a basis for forecasting and projecting and also an historical record for the prices and acreage, and so on and so forth. They used that data quite a bit. And I'm sure the agents in the field used it; I just didn't have anything to do with that.

EU: How long did you work there for Mrs. Horrell?

LM: Not all that long because then in March of 1963 I had my first child. So while I was working there for her I became pregnant; all the girls in the office were pregnant; like it's catching you know. And I intended to work through the end of March of 1963 and then leave in anticipation of having my first child, but I gave birth five weeks early, so I worked all day on a Monday for Mrs. Horrell and went home that evening and ended up in the hospital and never came back. But I was interested in continuing to make money but not necessarily going back to work at that time.

[0:34:28]

And so Gene Todd, who was the head of personnel for the Extension Service and was for years and years. A very nice man. He went on to be the Human Resources person for the university all together but before that he was in charge of personnel for Extension. And so Gene was really good about ...he liked to have me available to come in and fill in or do projects that I could do at home; typing that I could do at home; that sort of thing. And so I did that for quite awhile. It was a real gift to me and also allowed me to work in various places for short periods of time so I wasn't leaving my children in child care for an extended period of time. So I got to work in Extension Communications for a little while, I worked doing a special project for Ted Sidor and I've lost the name of the graduate student that was helping him who went on to be an agent and I think actually you talked to him. It seems to me his name was on the list of folks you talked to. Oh my gosh....so I did typing for those folks at home and working for Extension Communications was just a hoot. Greg Tillson was the graduate student.

EU: When you worked with communications, did you work with Len Calvert at all?

LM: Len was there; Ralph Salisbury was there. A number of other people were there. Arnie Ebert was there. Ralph Salisbury just recently passed away and Ralph was always smiling, always kidding around; a practical joker and I remember going into Extension Communications to do some work; they needed somebody for a week or whatever and so I went in and they put me at this desk with a manual typewriter. You had to justify buying an electric typewriter, anyway, had this manual typewriter and so I'm sitting at the manual typewriter and those were the days of carbon paper and all that and I sat down and rolled the paper into the typewriter and I'm typing away and then you flipped the carriage; it's a manual thing. And it just exploded; I mean there was this big bang! Well that Ralph had figured out a way to hook

up a firecracker onto that thing and you go like this and the thing went BANG and I thought, "Oh my gosh, I've ruined something here!" I was stunned and I can take a joke, but I was stunned. I thought I had broken it. Pretty soon I hear this laugh; he's laughing so hard the tears are running down his face. Everybody in the office got a kick out of that. And another time when Extension Communications was located in Waldo Hall, I went in to work; somebody was on vacation; this was sometime after the first incident and I walked in there and this time I got mad – Ralph was shooting me with a squirt gun and I got really mad at Ralph. So it took me a little while to get over that; probably made an ass out of myself but I got mad about that. Another time, it's raining, you know, and you have your umbrella and you walk outside and of course Ralph always set things up where he could witness the results, you know. This was in Extension Hall and I walked out the back of Extension Hall and I opened the umbrella and the thing is full of the punches, you know the punches from a three hole punch and it's just raining these punches. Laughter....Ralph was absolutely the greatest guy and just fun to be around.

[0:40:22]

EU: Did it make you want to do jokes on him then?

LM: Well, I didn't really think about that too much because I was in and out; I never worked there on a longer-term basis and besides that I just wasn't as clever as Ralph. But I did enjoy it when he did it to other people too.

EU: Well, I'm sort of impressed with the flextime; the varied schedule that Extension gave you and allowed you to work at home. Was that common?

LM: It was not common; that I'm aware of. It was not common and it had to do with Gene Todd working the system so that I could do that. He eventually created a situation where you didn't have to hire and terminate; and hire and terminate me, like for three days or a week. It was a lot of paperwork. I'm not sure how he did that but he figured out a way to be able to just have me in reserve as it were. And I didn't have benefits or anything like that, he would just call up and say, "Can you come in to cover for so and so who's going to be gone for a week on vacation. Or could you do this or that. It was a wonderful situation for me because I didn't want to have my kids with a caregiver all the time but I wanted to earn a little money. That was a great thing. Gene set that up for me. He and I had a difference of opinion several years later when the job that I was in was eliminated and it had to do with bumping and so on. He was actually wrong [laughter]. He had forgotten how long I had been there and how things had changed and that I had experience at a level that he had forgotten about. But that's a whole different story. But it was handy for the Extension Service, it was handy for him and it really benefitted me a lot. And I got to know a lot of different people. So that was great.

EU: Let's take a break. This is the end of Part 1.

[0:43:14]

Elizabeth Uhlig: Linda, you were talking about your job, basically working at home. In that time period did you know Frank Ballard? Was he still around at that time?

Linda Modrell: He was around. I have no way to gauge the period of time so much as that he was around in 1961 when I first became involved with the Extension Service and then I don't have a memory of when he was no longer coming into the office. But I did not know Frank Ballard other than I saw him around and he had a roll top desk in an office set aside for him which was a little hole in the wall on the main floor of Extension Hall and it was about mid-way, it wasn't in the front of the building or anything and it is true he did have whiskey in his desk. I heard lots of stories; he was an old man at that time and I heard lots of stories about Frank from agents and Extension specialists that had been hired by Frank in airports. So the whole affirmative action and equal opportunity and huge processes that we go through now to hire people, Frank had the luxury of identifying people that he thought would complement Oregon Extension Service and just hiring them on the spot.

EU: In some of the other oral histories they have talked about being hired or interviewed in a train station in Cheyenne or in a bar somewhere.

LM: Oh yah. A lot of bar activity [laughter].

EU: So how long did you continue on this part time basis working at home? Well, it was a combination. If there was a project I could do at home then that worked, but it was a combination with that coming into an office somewhere where the person, always a woman, had gone on vacation, maybe left to have a baby, something like that and there was a need to have some temporary help in the office. So that went on from 1962 to 1970 let's say. In about 1970 I went to work on a regular, part time, in the office situation for Joe Capizzi who was the Extension Entomologist and that was a half-day gig, you know, every day and you just never met a nicer person than Joe Capizzi. Smart, funny. He could tell a story and just have you dying laughing and just always had a smile on his face. I liked Joe. Joe's gone now too; a World War II veteran had only one eye; had a metal plate in his head and this was a result of the Battle of the Bulge. And he married a person who had been a Home Ec/4-H agent in one of the southern counties. That was before I knew him of course. And while he was significantly older than I, our children were pretty much the same age. He got married a little later in life. And Joe, what a gentleman, what a lovely guy. I enjoyed working for him. He put on short courses and one thing and another both on the campus but I think he put something on in Portland one time, so I got to help organize these short courses or conferences. I didn't get the speakers or anything like that but it was support work, secretarial type support work.

EU: He was Entomologist for the Extension Service or for the University?

LM: He was an Extension Entomologist. The Extension Service has recreated itself several times on the campus. Sometimes your appointment was strictly with the Extension Service and you didn't have any supervision from the department if you were a specialist, then other times you would be part of the department that would be your principle supervision as opposed to the Extension Director. It just gets reorganized every so often; as does the whole University, but it seems to be a circular kind of thing, you know. But Joe was in the Entomology Department but his appointment was with the Extension Service. So he was a joy to work for. It was an interesting department to work in; this was in Cordley Hall. And it was a relatively new building at the time. A lot of interesting people that worked in Entomology. But Joe was just a prince, really. And because of what Joe did, he had a lot of interface with a fellow named Jim Witt who was in Ag Chemistry and Jim Witt had varying degrees of Extension appointment in addition to research and other kinds of duties in Ag Chem. And Jim Witt – Jim Witt is still around. I saw him not that long ago. And Jim is a talker, I'll tell you. He can tell you a million stories and Jim was the only person I knew on the campus who could manage to keep, I'm exaggerating here a little bit, three or four secretaries busy and he would have separate offices. He'd have an office maybe in the Ag Chem building and then one over in another building and one someplace else and I'll tell you he produced more paper than OSU Press [laughter]. And so he and Joe worked closely together because of the pesticides, you know, that sort of thing that were related to Entomology.

[0:51:44]

EU: Was your work then, always in Corvallis or did you travel on Extension business?

LM: Well, I went from working for Joe then Gene Todd, and I don't know if you want me to take this in chronological order, but Gene Todd who had been the personnel director for Extension had become the personnel director for the University and Gene Todd called me and said, "You know, I think maybe you are just the person to go over and work in Vet Medicine. The Dean over there, he's having trouble keeping anybody in his employ and I think maybe you could go over there as an administrative assistant." Oh jeez, I didn't know if I wanted to work full time because of the children, but I decided that I would and this was outside the Extension Service. Ed Wedman was hired to create a College of Veterinary Medicine, not by the Extension Service but by the President of the university and so Vet Medicine had been like a department within the College of Agriculture and there was an Extension Veterinarian, Guy Reynolds, he had been with the Extension Service for a lot of years but Ed Wedman was one of these creative, high energy guys who had a vision and you had to keep him busy because the minute that he wasn't busy he was repainting rooms or changing peoples' offices when he was in Corvallis and before I went over there I talked to him because I didn't want to be in a situation where I would be under a lot of stress because of a difficult person and that was his reputation. And he said, "I'll tell you what. Let me give you the name of the woman who worked for me [in whatever the state was he came from, I don't remember, somewhere in the mid west] why don't you call her and ask her how I was to work for. So I did that and came back to him and confirmed that she thought he was a pretty nice guy and not all that hard to work for. And he just laughed and said, "I can't believe you interviewed me." I couldn't either. I thought, cool, yah. [laughter]

So I agreed to go to work for him and he was an amazing guy to work for. I remember one time he had a state car, a university car, and he had turned it on out in the parking lot to get it warmed up, I mean the guy was jetting here

and jetting there, constantly in the car. Wanted to have the lights in his office always on so if the President of the University came by he would think he was in the office. I thought that was the silliest thing. This was over in the old vet med building where poultry was down on the mall. So he had gone out, started the car, run back into the office to get something. And then accidently dropped his keys down the elevator shaft as he was stepping into the elevator. So I didn't know his car was running and I'm walking outside with him and the car was running, the doors were locked. I'm laughing. This guy throws open the hood and starts pulling wires. Oh gosh. Anyway he did establish a college. I don't think the guy gets credit that he deserves, but then I got a call from Curt Weedman. I'd been there about seven months. I got a call from Curt Weedman who was the business manager for the Extension Service and said, "You know Linda, why don't you come on over here and be the office manager for the business office. Because you know a lot about how the university works and everything and I just think you'd be the right fit for the job. So, I thought about it. That meant working full time and so I thought about that for a little while and I was flattered that he reached out to me. And I went over there to work. And my office was in the same location that I had typed these file folder labels, so this was about 1975 something like that when I went back over there. And Curt Weedman was one of the smartest guys that I ever knew. And he was smart, not only did he know the budget backwards and forwards but what he had the ability to do was, if you wanted to get from point A to point G it might take you two years and here are the chess pieces you need to move in order to get to where you want to be. Well, I'm pretty much of a, you know, direct, straight at something and he was a much more strategic thinker than I could ever be. But I learned a lot from him and he was just, I doubt that Extension has ever had anyone any better in that role. He cared about the Extension Service; he cared about serving people, just an incredible person. But he retired while I worked there and I missed him.

EU: I know then at one time you went back to school at Linn Benton Community College? Was that about this time?

LM: Actually, in about 1970 I started taking one class a term at Linn Benton and a woman named Kay Chapman, she and I car pooled together and Kay had worked up in an office with the statistics people and so on when I had first gone to work for Elvera Horrell in 1961 and so Kay and I did this going back to school sort of together. We would take some classes together and carpool so I was just knocking off one class a term and I had always intended to go to school and it was, I didn't go to school right out of high school because I got married and my husband didn't want me to go to school. I thought he would get used to the idea, well he never really did get used to the idea but the one class at a time didn't seem like much of a challenge and that was okay so long as it didn't interfere with anything and so Kay and I did that for years. And then when I went to work as the office manager for the Extension Business Office, by that time, like about 1976 my husband and I separated and I got real focused on, you know, I need a Bachelor's Degree. That was where I was headed, I was just thinking about it a term at a time. And so the business manager for the Extension Service who at this time then was a fellow named Comm Henness. He had come from the Athletic Department to take Curt Weedman's place. And he allowed me to take a class at staff rates, you had to have permission from your supervisor and so I did that and so that meant that I'd take a class like at 7:30 in the morning or at noon or at 4:30 in the afternoon.

[1:01:36]

EU: And that was here at OSU?

LM: At OSU. And I was transferring classes; at any rate, I got my AA degree. I had enough credits to get that and I transferred those credits to OSU and then I was going to school almost full time, doing what I just told you. I challenged like a speech class. I took a continuing education class, Economics. Bill Wilkins was actually the professor for that class, but you did that as an online kind of thing. Man, that challenging a class and doing it, that was too hard. But from 1976 until 1981 I was really focused on trying to get my degree. I wanted to get my Bachelor's Degree by the time my older son graduated from high school which was in 1981. But you know, Comm Henness was very accommodating. Eventually, I reduced my fte a little bit so that I was being fair. By this time, I knew the job. When you are in a job for awhile, you know it pretty well. You don't have to put the same kind of effort into some of the details; you just know the answers and part of this job required supervising the supply room which was down in the basement of Extension Hall. And the idea was they would buy in bulk and then the campus-based folks could come there and get supplies and they could also help the folks out in the county-based offices with specialized things and so they did some publications. They had some stuff down there; pregnancy test kits for sheep or something, I mean they had some very specific kinds of things; the person off the street would have no use for. And they also had a couple of games down there and one had to do with land use planning. So that you could do this board kind of game and see the results of some of the choices you had made. And then

another game had to do with senior citizens. And it had to do with sex and I thought this—I can't remember exactly how the game worked, but it was education was what it was about. It was developed over in Home Ec/Family Living kind of segment of the Extension Service. Those were distributed through that supply room down in the basement.

And a fellow named Steve Anderson was running that. He left the Extension Service and went to work for the Post Office and Louanne Greig was down there. The cutest gal you ever saw in your whole life and she worked down there for many years until they got rid of that supply room and we also, I mentioned earlier, this printing mailing service that we had. Well, between the time that I started with the Extension Service until I was then running the business office and these kinds of subsidiary things, that mailing/copying center had gotten Xerox machines, had a big press, printing press, that was better than the press that served all of OSU down in the OSU Printing Department. And so we had all of these hot shot things down there and it was so much different than the ditto machines, the mimeograph, oh my goodness. Carbon paper had pretty much gone. People had electric typewriters. The big battle was whether you could have a colored phone and get something other than a black phone, but Chris Moore who ran the telephone services for OSU allowed nobody to have a colored phone for many years. You had to justify it. We went through a period of time when we had to justify buying a file cabinet—that was a university type thing.

So a lot of things had happened between 1961 when I first started and the late 70s, huge changes and I didn't really think about it then. You know, affirmative action, you just couldn't go hire somebody in a bar; you know there were lots of things. The Sea Grant Program was developed and about five guys, all men, were hired and one of the fellows that went to work for the Sea Grant program, Extension Agent, Ken Hilderbrand who actually grew up here in Corvallis and I had known Ken since I was in high school actually, he was in the same high school class here in Corvallis as my husband. Great guy. Also smart, smart. And his focus was food technology. Well, you know they used to call things food technology. I don't know what they call it now. But he was on the food preservation end of things and so he was one of those fellows and Bob Jacobson, John Faudskar, just everybody to me was a lot of fun. And it's like I grew up with these folks. When you are 18 years old, I didn't know this at the time, but you're still in your formative growth period and so I was doing this growing in an atmosphere where there was to me a feeling of team, a feeling of comradeship, and mutual support. I wasn't an agent; I wasn't on the professional staff at all. But I just felt, I could see how important this activity was, what the Extension Service was doing and I got exposed to whether it was entomology or vet medicine or economics or 4-H; all the different things; family living kinds of things, foods and nutrition, engineering, chemistry, all of those whole, huge, public policy, all of this wide variety of things. And so that made a big impression on me and because I was working in, I never had anything to do with students, never. When I was in Entomology there were grad students that were working in the department, but I didn't have anything to do with students. It was all about this general public and sharing and helping folks across the state. And when I worked in the business office I had an opportunity to travel to the county organizations. And so I think I was in about every county.

And oh, when I first started there and Curt Weedman was there, Irma Sargent was hired; she started with Extension after I did but not too much after I did. And the difference between the two of us was that she worked full time continually through the years. I didn't. I had this in and out wonderful situation, but she ended being the personnel director or human resources director for the Extension Service. But anyway, before that happened, Curtis Weedman, myself, Irma Sargent and a fellow named Les Leach, who was an accounting kind of guy that got moved around in mid-level administrative roles throughout the Extension Service. We went to central Oregon for something, to visit some office I guess and I can remember Curt looking out the window at some hill-mountain in the Cascades, and he said, "Have you ever seen these side hill," [what did he call them, he was referring to some kind of animal.] No – what are you talking about. He just went on and on and on. He drifted into a story about Paisley, Oregon because he had relation in Paisley and the mosquito festival, and talking about these side hill winders, that's what it was. Side hill winders. What are you talking about? Well, you know one leg's shorter than the other. And he just took Irma and me down this huge winding road in terms of trying to fool us with this joke. Curt was funny and Les Leach was also a great guy. They are both gone. My gosh, everyone I know it feels like is leaving. Les was a very nice person and Curt was nice and smart and interesting.

[1:13:16]

EU: Was this about the same time, I've heard some stories with Tom Zinn and Harold about undertakers? Was this about the same time?

LM: It would have been, well...Tom, and I don't remember about Harold but Tom. lot of the agents were required to come back to school and get their Masters' Degrees because a number of them had Bachelor Degrees and I think that maybe some didn't have a degree at all. But at any rate, they were coming back getting their Masters' Degrees and Tom at least wasn't all that interested in doing it. And you have met Tom. Tom is a very personable (and so is Harold) person. Tom is much louder than Harold, but he would come by the Extension office, knocking on the windows talking to the women. And it wasn't all women who worked in the business office, but largely it was gals. And he'd knock on the window to talk to them and he made great friends with people, in particularly the travel reimbursement people and the purchasing people. Everybody liked Tom and everybody still does like him. But then it would be, well, you know you gals, usually it would be Irma and I because by this time Irma was not married and I was separated from my husband so the significance of that statement had to do with we could go out and have a drink with Tom or Jim or whoever it was and it was strictly a friends kind of thing. And those guys were kind of at loose ends.

So we went down to the Townhouse one time to have a drink after work and I said, you know, I hardly ever come down here. Which is the truth and we walked in and here's a guy a bartender, his name was Wing and he had gone to school at OSU and played soccer for Iain MacSwan, who Sue Bowman, then Sue Anderson worked for. He was a plant pathologist, Iain was. At any rate, here's Wing and he says, "Hi Linda." Oh right, I never come down here. And in fact, I rarely did go down there. But it was Irma, I'm sure it was Irma and Harold and there was a couple of other people in the bar. It was during the week and we were kidding around and this guy, I don't know who he was, he came over and he wanted to know what we did. He was just wanting to connect up, he was there by himself. So I don't know if it was Tom or if it was me, but we said we were undertakers and so we were in town for a meeting. Well, this went from bad to worse. And Tom can be relentless and if he can just gross somebody out then he's going to do it. I picked right up on it and we had a good riff going and this guy was believing it. He was believing everything we said. I tell you, I've never laughed so hard. I've said that more than once. And working for the Extension Service. It wasn't just Tom and Harold – it was Ralph Salisbury. It was Jim Witt and Joe Capizzi. It was a whole variety of people who could just simply keep you in stitches and at the same time highly professional, very bright, public service oriented and just all in all wonderful, wonderful folks. I've forgotten all of the details, some of which probably aren't worth repeating for posterity [laughter] about the undertaker story but that was obviously we still remember it. Maybe not so much the details of how funny we thought we were. Great guys.

[1:18:49]

EU: When you travelled, you said you travelled to most of the counties. What kind of work were you doing then when you were travelling?

LM: Well, I was working in the business services end of things and a new Dean of Agriculture rode into town, named Ernie Briskey. I refer to him as "Speed Briskey." And he had come of late from private industry and Ernie brought Tom and Harold into Corvallis. He brought them in from the outside into the point from which all knowledge emanates and made them part of the upper administrative layer of the Extension Service and Ernie had, I mean I really appreciated what it was that I thought he was trying to do. But he would forget to make sure everybody was in the boat and he'd be just paddling that canoe down the river and turn around and nobody else was in the canoe with him, you know? So he suffered greatly from that. But one of these things that he wanted to do was to combine the College of Agriculture and Experiment Station business operations with the Extension Service. So we moved our operation over to Ag Hall. So when that happened my being involved with the business services expanded a bit and we would go to county offices maybe to take a look at their revolving fund, petty cash, everyone of them had a bank account out there with a certain amount of money in it and maybe to take a look at that. You know, if Irma and I were together, maybe it was imparting information about personnel stuff, so there would be a variety of things. Or maybe there was a conference and maybe we would helping out with the conference, something like that. When Ernie Briskey wanted to create an administrative computing system, you can go one of two ways. You can get somebody who is expert in computers or you can get somebody who understood the system. And I understood the systems, I understood the accounting, the contracting, cash management, purchasing, all kinds of those sorts of things and he asked me if I wanted to give it a try. Well, I was intimidated because I didn't know anything about computers. But I was game to try. Part of setting up that administrative computing system also meant putting computers in each of the county offices and making sure that you could communicate with the computers that would be in some of the USAID offices where we had Extension personnel located.

[1:22:48]

EU: About what year was thing?

LM: That was about 1982 or 83 something like that. What a nightmare! There were several things going on. One, the computer center on the campus, Tom Yates was running the computer center at the time, they really didn't like this idea about desktop computers and what would that mean for the centralized computer system. So they didn't like that and so you had that going on. The state had a moratorium on buying computing equipment so the only way you could get it was to buy word processing, so we worked around it that way. And then what I didn't know is that everybody had their favorite, if they were interested in computing, they had their favorite whatever it was. You know, and I just referred to you know somebody likes their blue box; somebody else likes the red box. There were different manufacturers, different software, and so on. Oh my gosh. I never had any idea how hard that would be. One, I knew I was ignorant but what I didn't know was that everybody else was ignorant too but they didn't know they were and trying to put this together was very, very difficult because Ernie Briskey then went to Thailand I think, and he was gone for a long time. I don't mean a few months; I mean a year...he was over there quite a long time. And I was his person and I had no credibility nor would I even try to fake my way in terms of knowing computing but how did you get everybody lined up? And then Dick Craig, who was, gosh, what was his title? He was in charge of the business office, in charge of personnel, in charge of all the administrative kinds of support things for the Extension Service at that time. He goes out and gets his own box, you know, his own thing that wasn't part of this other system. I was so furious with him that I could hardly even see straight and I called him up, I was somewhere else and I told him what I thought and I'm pretty sure I just surprised the heck out of him because while I'm mouthy, I'm generally not combative, generally and I just felt that he had really pulled the rug out from under me. Which was probably not right, it probably wasn't really true. I was not knowing what I was doing. So at any rate, we got this administrative computing system set up. Ernie Briskey was no longer dean during the progression of events. Then there were folks who were interim deans and there was an interim dean who thought he would be dean and he decided to do away with the administrative computing system. So this had been in place maybe, this was about 1987 so like about four years or something like that and it had never really developed up to the extent that we had hoped, but that partly had to do with me not having the computer expertise and it also had to do with things were just changing so fast that you could not keep up with the changes and have the communication among and between the computers. Somebody would get a different piece of software and that was the other thing – we wanted everybody to have the word processing, the spread sheets, whatever, and then the office that I was in charge of would do training on those things too. Underestimated that training would be constant [laughter] didn't know that.

At any rate, getting rid of that was probably not a bad move; it was that somebody that was acting made that decision and he ended up not being dean by the way. And it meant that my job was being cut. And it was in the beginning of the 80s part when for the first time at least in my memory people were being laid off because of budget issues and so anyway, my job was being cut. I was hurt, I was unhappy, I was mad and Gene Todd, now in charge of OSU Personnel, I mean he wanted to keep people from bumping. He didn't want that to happen because it creates this whole ripple effect. There were jobs I knew I could qualify for that I could bump into. I didn't want to bump anybody out, but he and I were having a dispute about what I could bump into or not and he was looking for a vacant spot. And so there was a vacant spot over in the College of Health and Human Performance with Mike Maksud. And that is what he decided I would go into and it was a pay cut. And I said, "Gene, you know I've been here for a long time, okay, I'm mouthy and I think I know more than everybody else and I know that's a problem, but I don't see why I should take a pay cut." And he said, "Linda, it's more money than you were making before you had the job that you're in now." [laughter]. I was mad about that. He had made a request of me when we were still back in Extension Hall before there had been the combination of the business services. He said, "You know, Linda, my wife is looking for a job, no pressure, but if you had a place for her that would be a very good thing." Well, I mean this guy had done miles of favors for me. There was nothing wrong with his wife. I did hire her. And she wasn't there for a terribly long time before she moved on to something else, but darn, how could he say that. It had nothing to do with what I had made. It was more like you're lucky to have this and under his scheme of how this stuff could work and be the least disruptive for the university, that then I went over there. And I'm telling you, I was mad. Mike Maksud, what a guy. He never ever let on, but he probably didn't want me to come over there. They guy who had been in the job before had gotten a promotion but he had been there forever. He reportedly worked night and day, weekends and knew all about how to stripe a basketball court, you know. All about the golf greens, all about this stuff in addition to being the administrative services kind of person. So I'm sure Mike probably thought, "My God, his is going to be a disaster if she knows nothing about volleyball." And I went over there. What a pleasure to work for that fellow. Just really a prince and I'm working there and I'm thinking, "What did my predecessor do?" I couldn't figure out what he did that took so much time.

Well, he did things like guard the keys and wouldn't let faculty have a key to something. Stuff like that. Real kind of a control situation. So what I brought to the situation for Mike Maksud was the opportunity to see if he really needed that position. And I was there, oh not very long and I didn't have enough to do. And I asked Mike if I could for one term try working half time because I wanted to get my Masters' Degree. This was in 1987 and I had gotten my Bachelor's Degree in 1981. So he said, "Yeah, we'll try it for a term and see how it goes." It went fine. Nothing seemed to be falling through the cracks, or at least he didn't share it with me. But it really gave him an opportunity to see if the job could be done half time. Or at least so far as we knew. And I learned a lot there; learned about having a basketball floor refinished; learned about laundry and then was exposed to related things. You know, the PE stuff aside, research and so on that was going on in the public health kinds of things, and because I had gotten a degree in business, then to get the MBA was really just a yearlong endeavor, so I worked there part time, got my Master's Degree and it was such a much different experience than when I got my Bachelor's Degree. It took me ten years to get a Bachelor's Degree and when I really stepped up trying to make progress in that, it really, I had the situation where I was running the business office for maybe about a year and a half or so, taking what amounted to a full-time load on the class end of things; the horses were getting out of the pasture and running up to the neighbors, my older son was running amuck and I was trying to date. This was hard [laughter]. This was hard.

So then the Master's Degree thing in 1987 my older son was in college and my younger son had just gone off to engineering school in Troy, New York at Rensselaer and it was a whole different ball game. I didn't have all that pressure. The horses were gone, no animals at home, no fence to keep up, I mean there was nothing to keep in. Oh my goodness, what a different experience. It was my first experience at being a college student and so in 1987 I was 44 and I was with all these people getting their Master's Degrees. Some of them were older, but I forgot how old I was. I just forgot how old I was. It just felt like there was all this opportunity to be around that energy. It was just such fun. I went to student activities. Somebody would have a party at their house; I went to things like that. Made some friends much younger than I. I just totally forgot how old I was. It was just the most fun and I ended up getting a job offer from one of the professors, I don't know what his rank was because he was not strictly on the faculty at OSU who was teaching health policy. And I had taken some classes from him and he was appointed the head of health policy for the state of Oregon in Salem and so he asked me if I would come to work for him and see if I liked working in health policy. It was a short gig.

[1:37:11]

EU: Before we get into that, let's take another break. And then when we come back we'll start on that. One question, though. When you got your MBA what was your area of specialty? Was it in community health?

LM: Yes. I mean that was sort of, I don't know how it's set up now, but at the time, let me see. They wanted you to take something that you could apply your MBA stuff to. And I was on the Art Center board at the time I think and I got real interested in the arts and still am. And you know how you can be an artist and then take that to business. So I was really interested in that and I was also interested in health and that's why I did it. There wasn't any arts stuff for a minor concentration. And so community health was what I was then taking and did a bunch of gerontology stuff as well as the community health and so that was the equivalent of a minor. When I got my Bachelor's Degree the concentration was in accounting and the minor was in like psychology or something. So, I would never have gotten a degree in Business, excepting I felt like it was what was available during the times that I could go. That was one thing and I felt like it was related to my job, that that was important if I wanted to take OSU classes. I probably never would have gotten a business degree; I would have done something else.

EU: Okay, this is the end of part two. Let's take another break.

LM: Okay.

[1:39:42]

Elizabeth Uhlig: When we broke you were just starting to talk about your transitioning into work with the health field. Do you want to talk a little bit about that? How you made the connection and then the transition.

Linda Modrell: Well, of course at this time I was working in Health and Human Performance so I had an opportunity to see some of the research that was going on there and get exposed to some public health issues. So I took some classes

in community health and health policy and in gerontology and Clara Pratt who I remember being hired at the university; Clara Collette was her name and she married while she was associated with the university. Clara was running the gerontology program which wasn't a degree program but a certification program, at least at the time and ah, Clara. What a great researcher, what a great personality, a great teacher. I think she's retired now, I don't know if she has a hand in it at the university or not, but she could get you interested in dirt, you know. At any rate, she probably doesn't realize she had that affect on me, but I really got interested in gerontology and health in taking her classes.

Well, a fellow named Chad Cheriell, a fellow who is actually born in India was teaching at the university and he was tapped to head up the Office of Health Policy for the state. He asked me if I would be interested. I learned later that he's the kind of person who is doesn't matter so much what your work history has been if he thinks that you have potential for whatever reason, he will try to bring you along. Well, so Chad asked me if I would be interested. I went to work—I didn't move to Salem, I commuted to Salem—and this was a job that was going to be about a six month job, a temporary job, an opportunity for me to see if I would like to apply for it on a regular basis or not. And this was a situation where Chad was new to the office and there were factions within the office, rural health—they thought they ought to be split off into a separate entity. There were just all kinds of things going on in the office and I didn't feel like I knew enough. I just didn't feel like I was anywhere knowledgeable enough to really be a good contributor to that office. But more than that, I didn't want to be in a situation where people were maneuvering behind the scenes to try to work against what the leadership wanted. I just thought, I don't have to do this, I don't want to do that, I just don't want to be in that kind of a situation. I liked the work fine, although I felt pretty ignorant so that made me uncomfortable, so I decided not apply for the job.

[1:43:48]

But in the meanwhile, John Kitzhaber was the Senate President and he was birthing the Oregon Health Plan. And so some legislation was passed in 1989 about a variety of things and one of those had to do with creating the Health Services Commission and they were supposed to prioritize health care, health services, I should say. So they, meaning John Kitzhaber and his Lieutenant, Mark Gibson would be one that I was involved with. They were looking a national name in health policy to come and run that operation and they weren't having much luck. But they needed someone to get an office set up, get it running, anyway, Chad Cheriell recommended me. He said, you know, why don't you talk to Linda. That might be a good fit. So I talked to Mark Gibson and they decided to hire me as the Executive Director for the Health Services Commission, but meanwhile they were going to hire somebody, I mean, you know, you needed a PhD, you needed somebody who had some weight in the health field somehow. And I was happy to do that. Once again, involved in something where I was totally ignorant. I had an MBA, I know cost benefit. And so that was what I brought to the party in this whole operation, but I just dug in and hired a fellow to do computing, to track data and so on. His name is Darren Coffman and he's actually, it was going to be a six-month deal, he had just gotten a Master's Degree from a school in Utah and had just gotten married and I said, look Darren, this is a temporary deal so you need to keep on the lookout for other opportunities and he's still there. This was in 1989. He has progressed in the organization, but for a six-month job, this has gone on for awhile.

So we began that process. The Governor appointed people to serve on the commission and Alan Bates who is a State Senator now and a doctor in southern Oregon, he was on that commission and a doctor who is now associated with Samaritan Services but was and still is as far as I know a general practitioner in the Lebanon area, Rick Wopat. Those are two examples of the folks who served on that commission. And the commissioners worked. Sometimes they would meet twice a week. They worked hard. And we started talking about the first thing to figure out was what was the units you would prioritize? I mean where would you put fixing an appendix but who do you, that's not what you would prioritize. You needed a diagnosis or some sort of....you know you can have breast cancer but there's a lot of different treatments for it, so at any rate, talking about listening to them, the doctors, they physicians, nurses, general public, in the beginning for the first few years was a guy who owned a mill, and a social worker, and so on. There was sort of a balance on the commission, but certainly the professionals outnumbered the folks who were not professionals in the health care field. They worked very hard, very hard. It was a working board. It wasn't a situation where the staff brought the options and they chose. They were digging in just trying to figure out how to start. And cost benefit was my suggestion, but you know, that was all I knew. I knew nothing about medicine, that's not the same as health policy and that's what we were dealing with—medical diagnoses. Both in mental health and addiction as well as just your general health care. Even trying to talk about, well are you talking about physical—I mean which kinds of health are you talking about? That got to be a big discussion.

And so I worked at that longer than the six months but it was maybe a year and a half until the first report came out. Because a search for an Executive Director with appropriate credentials was continuing. They did not get what they wanted but they got somebody in there that had, she didn't have a PhD but it was DPA or something kind of odd, but a doctorate level type thing. And she did a great job. But I had hired the staff and also had set up the office and then I staffed some of the subcommittees and wrote most of the first report with the first prioritized list and that was an amazing experience to be involved in something that had so much media attention. And it may seem like a bit of an arcane area, this prioritization, but because it had never been done anywhere in the world before it was you know, the BBC came over and did a little bit of a documentary, and certainly the whole health care industry was watching what was going on and many refused to participate because what we learned there was virtually no data. Either for cost or for efficacy of treatment. Even something like fixing a congenital heart defect in a child which is pretty much run of the mill surgery now days, you didn't know if that child would live a normal lifespan yet. You didn't know that. I mean who thought about that? I didn't know that. I was amazed and the doctors were amazed that we didn't know the cost of things. That was really—one fellow who was the head of obstetrics at OHSU—he didn't believe it. I know we know what stuff costs and then he found out. Oh, my gosh, we don't know. And I was convinced that while the business office had one piece of information, you know for the report and so on, you had the real crosswalk in a book in the bottom draw that would tell you what the real cost was. And the issues had to do more with the physician saying, you know, everybody is different so you cannot make a statement that if we do x for this diagnosis for Elizabeth that you can do exactly the same thing for Linda and have the same outcomes.

LM: Well, I understood that, but I also thought that from a public health point of view, I mean if you use that sort of thinking and you are looking a populations, then on the average, what? You know. If somebody has breast cancer and you do a mastectomy then what's the likelihood that person will return to his or her former state of health? What's the probability that you will be left with some kind of impairment. Maybe your mobility, this wouldn't be the case so much there, but maybe your mobility would be affected or maybe there's some other kind of impairment that you would suffer. What about co-morbidities where you have more than one thing going on at a time. So this was all really confounding to health care providers and there are a lot of them that did not, think that it was against nature to think of this in some kind of a 30,000 foot level. But we did get doctors to help us and we tried to go to their societies around the discipline and go to their societies and try to get them to help out. The dentists, jeez, no way, we'll be at the bottom of the list. We will be at the bottom of the list because we don't save lives. It turned out that a lot of what they do, because the duration of benefits is so long, it was higher up on the list than they ever thought. They were saying, "Oh, my gosh. Our charging schedule is all wrong. We should charge more for this that lasts so long than some of the other things that don't last so long." I don't think they changed anything, but that was a very exciting time and really for me, I like to be involved in things that haven't been done before. And so I was really interested in that.

[1:55:29]

And along about that time I was appointed to the budget committee for Benton County. And I spent about seven years on the budget committee for Benton County. And so I was doing that, left the Health Services Commission and then I did some market research around health things—this was an independent kind of activity associated with a company that contracted to have research done in particular areas. They took me on; you got paid when you did the work. And I would get way to interested in researching what the market share for certain types of drugs were and what the research was going on and how that might change and when they might become generic, stuff like that, and what companies had what kind of market share and so that was great fun. But then I would get all interested in some detail that they would never keep in the report anyway. They had a boilerplate kind of thing. So at any rate, I did that for awhile and then got called back to come in and work on implementation of the employer mandate, once again doing research, and looking at how we could implement the employer mandate being that employers would either have to pay health insurance or would have to contribute to a larger pool. Looking for more toward universal coverage. By this time John Kitzhaber was out of the legislature and was not governor, yet. And the legislature would not go for this employer mandate but we had a huge grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation—we meaning the state government. And this Chad Cheriell and the Office of Health Policy.

And so I worked at this for awhile, and on the budget committee here at the county so I was moving around as grants expired and you know this and that happened. And I worked for awhile at the Department of Human Services and because the Department of Human Services in state government, they have such a connection to counties, county government

because the counties will deliver or at least oversee mental health services, a whole variety of health issues and other things that I came to really see the connection between the county budget and what was going on at the state and really got to appreciate that connection. And also became more and more aware of the importance of county government that pretty much slips below the radar of most folks. And county commissioners are paid and so wow, what can be wrong with that, but you have to run for office to get the job. That was a big stumbling block for me. It took me a long time to get up the courage to do something like that.

[1:59:07]

But like the Extension Service, county government has this whole range of topics that I really, having a whole variety of things and not focused on one narrow perspective of something is just right up my alley. And that is like the Extension Service.

EU: So you were living in Corvallis all the time you were working in Salem and Portland?

LM: That's right. When I was working in Portland and that was on the employer mandate, I would drive up there on Monday morning, get there at 8:00, which was easier than a lot of other times that you might travel up there and then I would spend the nights up there and travel back on Thursday night and work at home on Friday. And other than it was, I had my shoes in the car, I still have my shoes in the car and you know it's been a long time since I was doing that, but you are constantly sort of a little off-kilter but it gave me, I enjoyed that quite a bit. It gave me an opportunity to live in a very urban setting and be able to take advantage of going to lectures, going to book signings, all that stuff. So I really enjoyed that because, since I have been an adult and moved to Benton County, I've virtually never lived in town. I live 13 miles from Corvallis in the same place I've lived since 1966 and so I've lived in the same place out in the country for a long time. So, I was commuting. I never left my residence. And so the connection between the health/social services sort of thing and working with state government, I thought, you know, to work in county government would really be an exciting element. It's a level of government where you can make something happen. County Commissioners are able to that. Generally speaking there is just three of them. That's not completely the case. In Lane County, for example, there's five. But in this county there is three so you need one other person to agree with you. And you can actually make something happen. And in the legislature you have to have a lot of people agree with you. That's one thing. We're paid more than the legislators, a lot more but that's variable from county to county depending—in some of the small population counties not everybody is full time.

EU: So as a county commissioner do you represent a certain area, or do you represent the whole county? Do you have districts?

LM: In Benton County we don't have districts. Our population isn't big enough to have districts. When you separate something into districts, I mean that is population based so whether you are a county commissioner or whatever, you are representing approximately the same number of people everybody else is. Because at least up until now and into the future here for awhile, Corvallis will have the majority of the population. So every district would have to include part of Corvallis in order to balance the population and it just doesn't make any sense. And as it happens, I lived 13 miles from Corvallis, I don't live in Corvallis. One of the other commissioners lives in Philomath and the third one lives in Corvallis. So you've got—and as it happens—over time there has been distribution. Not with each and every board, but generally speaking more distribution than you would think. So, it really hasn't been a problem. But at some point that's something that can be considered, dividing up into districts, but there will have to be a different population set up.

[2:04:20]

EU: Talk about your first election. How was it running for office?

LM: I just, for a long time I thought, under what set of circumstances could I just get appointed? [laughter]. And that would require a commissioner leaving and it has to be when there's less than two years left in the term that you can appoint somebody. So, I thought, man. I knew there were a couple of commissioners that weren't very happy and I knew they were considering leaving. So I thought, gosh if that could just happen, that would be really great. Finally, I had some encouragement to go ahead and do it and the job that was working at was going to run out and so I'm going to do it. And it was an open seat and I had two opponents in the primary. And I thought, how unfair is that. This democracy thing

works out fine unless you are the one running for office. [laughter]. And I just, the idea of putting your name on a stick in somebody's yard, of asking people for money, just was—I just didn't know if I could do it, so I just signed up and then you're committed and you're learning constantly. Because I had had no connection with a campaign.

EU: The budget committee was appointed, then?

LM: Yes. Oh yes. I think they are appointed in every county and every city in Oregon. I don't know. And I had no opportunity to like serve on the city council or anything like that because I didn't live in the city. So while I'd served on the OSU Credit Union board and served on the Corvallis Art Center and Linn Benton Council for the Arts, kind of one in the same thing, that board and done that kind of thing, running for office—I ran for student body president at Albany High School and there were five of us that ran. Who had cared until it was my chance to run for student body president and then everybody in the woodwork comes out to run. I lost. That stayed with me a long time. [laughter]. Anyway, it took quite a good deal to just work up the courage to do it. So, when I did it and I had these two opponents in the primary, one of them was an employee of the county and another one is now one of my colleagues. And I beat them both and I felt really good about that. And then I had a strong opposition in the general election. Somebody who had been in the community a long time and was very well known. And I didn't know if I could beat him. But as it turned out I beat him easily. I didn't realize there was a lot of bad feelings about him. But that was interesting and it was exciting and it was emotional—all of those things. Because everything was new but was one thing. Then running for re-election—I don't like running for election.

[2:08:57]

EU: And they are four-year terms?

LM: They are four-year terms. So I mean these people that are running every two years, I don't understand how they do it. But I would go door to door; I don't mind sharing if I have an opinion about something I don't mind sharing it. So that's not an issue, but I don't like the raising of money, I don't asking people to help and I'm much better now than I was in the beginning. But to ask somebody face to face, "Will you vote for me?" And I don't know if it's a girl thing, or a generational thing, but for me it's hard and I think it's kind of countered to the way I seem. I think people might be surprised that that would be hard for me. Because I'm not opposed to getting on stage. Although I don't feel a need to do that sort of thing. But basically, my attitude is why would anybody care what I think? [laughter]. So that's kind of—I don't know, that probably doesn't really fit. I like the policy stuff. I'm interested in the job more than I'm interested in the politics stuff.

EU: You're in your third term now?

LM: I am. I'm in my 11th year.

EU: I'm planning on it. It will undoubtedly be my last term. I'm planning on it and I already have an opponent and I am so jealous of those people that don't have opponents. I realize it's not the American way, but if it's you doing it. For me it's a huge job and I create projects; I create involvement. I work a lot because I am just so interested in almost every aspect of county government. And once again, it's connected to the Extension Services for its variety of topics and I can be interested in just about anything. And so, the policy issues and the developing discussions to try to create new policy or partnerships to work together on a wider basis, on a regional basis. Right now trying to work with Lane County and Linn County to develop an approach toward water – water quantity and quality. And that's just so interesting to me. Water was something that I didn't know anything about. Now I know a little bit about it. I'm just so interested and so I want to run again. I don't know if I will be able to defeat this fellow from Philomath that has decided that he wants to run too. But it takes a lot of time if you are going to really mount a full campaign it takes a lot of time. Going door to door takes a lot of time. Good news is, it's good for your health.

[2:13:08]

EU: You talked a little bit about water. What are some other areas that you have been particularly interested in?

LM: Well, I continue to be interested in health issues. And so when we had an opportunity to create a federally qualified health clinic in association with the county I was really involved in that and continue to be. I'm a liaison to the board. When we set that up we decided that we wouldn't have a commissioner actually serve on the board but I still have a heavy

interest in that and we have our clinic here at the main health department plus on in the city of Monroe and one that's connected with one of the primary schools and we have one set up in Linn County in the Lebanon area. When I say "we" I'm saying we because it's the county but we have somebody running that clinic now who is top notch and has years and years of experience in another state doing this kind of thing and she is just the best. But I can tell you, we went through the same experience that many other health clinics have gone through and that is losing a whole raft of money for awhile and oh my gosh. If that doesn't cause you to keep awake at night. Because we didn't that would happen but I was wrong and we lost a lot of money. So turned that corner and so I'm still interested in that.

And I got involved in transportation issues only because when I became a commissioner the other two people who were commissioners had no interest. They served one term each and at any rate some things were going on at the state level around transportation and they said we don't want to do this – Linda you do it. So I had no interest particularly, but after a little while developed a keen interest, especially in the railroad and so I continue to be really involved in that and serve on something called the West Coast Corridor Coalition which is Alaska, Washington and Oregon—four states. And we think of it as sort of BC to Baja. So you have two international borders. You've got not only the roads, you've got the air, you've got to the sea, you have all this stuff trying to figure out how in the world we will possible accommodate imports to the west coast without the federal contribution that would be expected given how much we supply the rest of the country and the failing infrastructure. And it's just a huge problem, but really interesting once you get into it. And I've had an opportunity to meet folks that really know what they are doing. Benton County is off the main trade route as it were, but this business of freight and its contribution to the economy and land use and water, all of these things so of overlap and intertwine and that's pretty interesting.

EU: I noticed there's a clipping up here about the Van Buren Project. It says, "Thank you Linda Modrell."

LM: We aren't going to get a new Van Buren Street Bridge anytime soon. Not anytime soon. And when I say we, this is basically a Department of Transportation project. It's on a state highway. So how much influence local government has all has to do with money. If you had the money, we would be doing it. But nobody has the money. The costs of infrastructure are so incredibly high; they escalated enormously in a pretty short period of time. Oil prices affect asphalt, the steel—basically we don't manufacture steel in this country any longer. Just paint to do the striping is like almost ten times what it was five years ago. It's just incredible.

[2:18:45]

EU: Have you noticed with the economy this past year or so, going downhill but then with all this stimulus money coming in, has that affected any of this?

LM: It does affect it and we have more money in the system but you have to spend that stimulus money within a certain period of time because county government and city government too but not as much city and county. Because they have a way to raise money that the counties don't have. We're just paving over some of the roads, that's all we can do. But we haven't been able to do any resurfacing and so we will be doing some of that. But you can have a whole lot of money and it does two miles. Our whole financing system for transportation is based on, and transportation meaning the roads, is based on gas tax and vehicle registrations. And while we are travelling more miles, our miles per gallon are improving all the time so we are travelling more miles but we are getting less gas tax; I mean comparatively speaking. We can't keep up. It's not going to work. We need to have a different mechanism to finance the infrastructure. And that's a national issue. In Oregon, to finance county government or city government or anything else and the way we finance state government is just not working. State government is based strictly on, pretty much, I say strictly, that's not one hundred percent true, but generally true on the income tax. So as the economy goes up and down, so does that. And then the voters have voted in this kicker thing. It's insane to return a billion dollars when you're going to have people on the street that can't get help, psychotropic drugs you know to keep them so they can function. It's not just that, I just picked that. And then the property tax system. Your property tax can go up three percent a year until the real market and the assessed value come together and then it doesn't go up at all. But it can go up three percent a year, well my gosh the employee health care costs go up. So the other thing you can do is grow. Look at Bend. Okay, you can just grow, but that growth doesn't keep up with the infrastructure when you have that growth. It's impossible.

EU: Sounds complicated.

LM: Well, and then the voters did that, we understand that, but then somebody will put an initiative on the ballot about building more prisons, putting more people in prison and then that takes some money away. And of course the voters, with one of the first changes to the property tax system, the state income tax is now financing the bulk of the K-12. That was not the case before so that means that takes away from the state health programs—health and welfare, child protection, that sort of thing. So throw an initiative on the ballot, get what you want. [laughter].

[2:22:56]

EU: You mentioned one of your interests is the arts. Are you still on the Arts Council?

LM: No. I served, gosh, I don't know. Quite a while. Maybe seven years or something like that. And when I get involved in something like that, I really get involved. Develop ownership. But the Arts Center and the Linn Benton Council for the Arts and that whole things has been a tremendous resource and I'm continually amazed at all the talent there is out there. Musical as well as visual arts, performing arts, and all the different things. I wish I could do something. Writing poetry, that sort of thing. In fact, the first time I ran for office between Albany and Corvallis there used to be a drive-in theater. And the drive-in theater was long gone but the sign that said, "Mid-Way Drive-in Theater" still stood on the highway between Albany and Corvallis. And I wanted to put one of my campaign signs up there. I spent a lot of time at that drive-in theater, you know. It's too bad they are gone because that was really quite fun. So I asked the owner of the property who has a seed company there if I could put the sign up and we got to talking about the drive-in theater. And he said, "I'll let you do that, but if you want that sign you can have it if you'll take it away." Really? So I said, "Okay!" Then I thought well I can take the sign home but then I'm in the middle of nowhere and nobody will see it. And, Gary Feurstein who is the owner of Endex Engineering which no longer exists, he sold the company, but he and his partner own a bunch of property down on the riverfront and so I went to see Gary and Gary is one of these guys that I don't care what you want to do, "sure you can do this." I said, "Gary we own the sign. I don't really want to take it home, but what can we do with it; do you have a building we could hang it on or something?"

So he sold the sign and they completely restored it. Turns out Gary used to work at the drive-in. Completely restored it. Repainted it, fixed the neon on it and put it on the side of one of the buildings he owns which the Great Harvest Bakery is in and put it on the side of that building. I said, let's put poetry on it, let's have it be a venue for poetry. So poetry gets changed on that sign every once in awhile. It is just one of the best things I've ever been involved in. I really, really, appreciate the fellow who gave us the sign, Howard Roth and Gary for making something happen with it. But I feel just real good about it. Actually, the Credit Union was pretty interesting. When I first worked at the university, the guy who actually started the credit union also worked at the university in economics or something. He's famous for having a shoe box, he ran it out of a shoebox. Actually, I think he ended up spending most of his time running the credit union from his office at the university until it got big enough that it had an office and so on. When I got involved with that, boy was that—a credit union used to be able to make consumer loans and that was just about it. And then in the late 70s early 80s things got changed so that they could finance houses, they could do a lot of things that they couldn't do before. This whole computing thing was starting and so that was a project to not do the service bureau anymore but to have an in-house computer system and ATMs. And so I was on the board when, okay, do we want to do these ATMs because that would reduce the number of staff we would have to have. It would reduce the traffic in the building and we can also have this phone system so you can call in and do stuff with your account. Well, I wanted to do the ATM stuff but the other guys wanted to do the telephone thing but promised me we could do the ATM stuff. Anyway, I was on the board when we did that. When we went to checking accounts, or share draft accounts. And oh boy, there was all that change going on. The ATMs made no difference in terms of people being in the lobby and so on. Where it made a difference was in the grocery stores people writing checks for cash because you could get it out of the ATM. That's where it made the difference. But I learned so much at that. That was really interesting. So I bring all these little things into this office.

[2:29:28]

EU: Talk about a paper you gave at Oxford University?

LM: I got an invitation to participate in this thing called the Oxford Round Table. And it had to do with women, generally women. Title IX or whatever it was. And I was really honored until I realized that I had to pay to go. [laughter]. Okay, I want to go to Oxford and tell them about Benton County or Oregon's experience with same-sex marriage. And that's what the discussion was about and what Benton County did that was different than Multnomah County if you were around in

Oregon a few years ago. This was in 2004. Multnomah County was out there making noise and then Benton County had a request from the Quakers to take up the issue and so we took up the issue. The three commissioners didn't sit down and say this is what our position is going to be behind closed doors. We didn't do that. We had some research about what we could do legally and what we couldn't do legally and we were watching Multnomah County because they had a whole staff of attorneys. You know, it was a bunch money and more resources to deal with this kind of thing and they started issuing marriage licenses up there. So the Governor, the governor that we have now, Governor Kulongoski, you know just don't go there. He was really sitting on Multnomah County and didn't want to see this become a trend. So we decided after hearing testimony on both sides of the issue, we decided that according to the Oregon Constitution people were not being treated fairly. Not only that, it doesn't say anything about a man and a woman. You know that's what they intended, but it was a question of something that's in Oregon's constitution that has to do with equity and so on. So we decided, I was chair of the board, and we voted and two of us voted to issue marriage licenses but I just set the date off into the future like two weeks or something ahead and this is what the paper was about – this experience. So we set the date two weeks ahead which gave everybody a chance, those in opposition to go to court and have—I'll use the term injunction—but that wasn't exactly what it was. And the Governor was mad; the Attorney General was on the phone saying, "If your County Clerk does that, then we will have to act against him."

Well, our County Clerk is not elected. He is an employee. So we made that case. You can't go after our employees. He has no choice. We made the decision. Well, you know this is going to happen and this is going to happen. And so because I was the chair, I was talking to the Attorney General and our county counsel was out of town so we had a substitute who comes in and she was just great. And I had mentioned before that maybe what we should do is just not issue marriage licenses at all and so that's what we suggested. The outside attorney that was helping us came up with that one her own but I had already suggested it and it had fallen on deaf ears. So we were talking to the Attorney General and I said, "Well, what about this." And the Attorney General was just quiet because it never crossed his mind. He said, "I cannot give you legal advice. That's not my job, I cannot do that." I said, "Well, you can tell us, could you scan the law quickly." He said, "Yes, I'm going to have people look at the existing law whether or not you can refuse, as long as you are refusing everything. If you can actually do that and I will check with the Governor to see what they think. I said, "Well, our deal is we don't want our employees being in anyway endangered legally and so that's what I want to know." Okay. He comes back, "Yes, we're good to go." And he says, "You know that was really pretty brilliant." [laughter]. Yeah, we're thinking we are pretty smart about now. So we decided not to issue any marriage licenses, but we didn't do it cavalierly, meaning it's not that you can't get married, it's just the license. So get one in Albany or Eugene or if you live in the western part of the county, Newport. It's not like you're in Harney County or something. And so that was considered and from our point of view it put us in same stance as before; equal treatment. So that went on for awhile until somebody brought suit.

And so the judge who was not a Benton County judge, it was a judge -- you know once they retire they have these who go around to other counties – so it was a guy from southern Oregon who came up. I said, "You've got to be kidding, you have to issue marriage licenses." I think we could have won if we could have fought it, but I think we made the point. But until about August we weren't issuing marriage licenses. At any rate, my paper had to do with this whole saga around marriage licenses and there were cartoons in the newspaper around this issues and so I had some copies of those and talking about the Governor and the Attorney General so they were all real interested in hearing about that. But that was what my contribution was. The other women who were there some of them had some amazing things; enslavements of immigrants for the sex trade for example, a gal from California had a paper about that, so there were a whole variety of things. Being at Oxford...I had never been then and oh what a great experience just to walk around all those places where all that history had happened. Where we presented our papers was in this location in this building that had sounding board you know that was over Christopher Wren. I thought oh, wouldn't it have been fun to go to Oxford. And we stayed in the students' room and ate our meals together. Oh, it was just the most wonderful experience.

[2:38:18]

EU: How long were you there?

LM: Five days, something like that. I stayed a little bit longer in England. I would have paid twice what I paid to go. While at first I thought it was a huge honor, then I realized it's also a revenue stream for them. But that's okay. I got a nice thing...

EU: It's impressive.

LM: Isn't it? And I was very impressed with the whole thing. It was very nice.

EU: Well, I think we are coming close to the end. Is there anything else you think we forgot to talk about, that you would like to add?

LM: Well, I guess you know to go back and maybe just underscore the impression that the Extension Service and Oregon State University made on me. If I hadn't worked there I'm not sure how I would have gotten to school. I would have but it certainly guided my life in the direction that I wouldn't have been able to take otherwise and I was working at Oregon State because there was nowhere else to work. The other place to work was CH2M but my husband worked there and he really didn't want me working in the same company that he worked in or I knew he wouldn't be comfortable with that so and it was before HP had come to town so it really afforded me with some opportunity and going to school, I had two sons and they are both just smart, funny guys. They are great and I'm really proud of them. But they watched me go to school and so I don't know if that made a difference but they, especially as they have gotten older are more and more impressed that I went to school while I was working and doing Cub Scouts and stuff. So it made an impression on them.

EU: Well, Linda, thank you very much.

LM: Thank you; it's been fun for me.

[2:41:58]