



Rollie and Laverne Bilyeu Oral History Interview, March 26, 2015

Title

“Married Life on a Muddy Campus”

Date

March 26, 2015

Location

Bilyeu residence, Albany, Oregon.

Summary

In the interview, the Bilyeus discuss their upbringings in two rural northeast Oregon communities, remarking in particular on their memories of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. From there, they recount the paths that they took to Oregon State College, their living circumstances at OSC, their memories of academic life, and the hallmarks of campus traditions that were prevalent in the early 1950s.

They then describe the physical make-up of campus during that era, including the preponderance of Quonset huts then in use as well as the mud and inconvenience that arose during the digging of the campus steam tunnels. They share their memories of campus social life, noting the important role played by formal dances, and relay the story of their first date, subsequent courtship, and eventual marriage. They likewise reflect on the changes in their lives as students that came about as a result of being married.

The remainder of the session is devoted to the Bilyeus' pursuits following graduation. In this, they outline the details of Rollie's military service as well as the various jobs that they have both held, including Laverne's work with multiple county Extension branches. The session concludes with reflections on their family and words of advice for young people today.

Interviewees

Rollie Bilyeu, Laverne Bilyeu

Interviewer

Mike Dicianna

Website

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

Transcript

Mike Dicianna: Today is March 26th, 2015, and we're here to interview two members of the class of 1955, Rolland R. Bilyeu and Dorothy Laverne Key Bilyeu.

Laverne Bilyeu: Drop that.

MD: Why?

LB: No, drop the Dorothy.

MD: I know, you're just Laverne. And we're here at their home in Albany, Oregon. And what we're going to do is kind of give a life story of some Beaver alumni. First thing, let's get a brief biographical sketch a little bit. Rollie, where were you born, when were you born, early childhood days, that type of thing?

Rolland Bilyeu: Well, I was born on a ranch in eastern Oregon near the town of Condon and grew up, until the middle of the fourth grade, on a ranch there in eastern Oregon, wheat ranch, rode a horse to school, for a, one-room school, for two and a half of the years. And then came World War II and we moved to the town of Klickitat, Washington, across the river from The Dalles a ways. And spent the war years there and finally moved to Tygh Valley, Oregon and spent my last two years of high school at Maupin, graduated from Maupin. So eastern Oregon and a native Oregonian.

MD: Kind of a rural upbringing.

RB: A rural upbringing, very rural. When I ended up at Oregon State, I was a very green, naïve guy.

MD: Now this is interesting, you were a youngster during World War II.

RB: Correct.

MD: So what were things like on the home front in Oregon? And the other thing I always love to ask people, do they remember December 7th, 1941 and what they were doing on the day Pearl Harbor was attacked?

RB: It's amazing you ask that because I have a vivid memory of December 7th. We were at a friend's, a family that lived maybe six or seven miles away, a close farm, and they were over for Sunday, we were going to have a special Sunday dinner that day and somebody happened – we didn't have electricity, we had a battery-powered radio – and somebody happened to turn it on and heard the news announcement. And the majority of the family all gathered in our front room and listened to news announcements coming out of Pearl Harbor. And in the family, there was one boy my age and he and I, we took off and went about a quarter mile down where the county road went through from the house and we built a cannon. We found an old tire and a fencepost and we set up and built a cannon to protect things. And we were, of course, 1941, why, let's see, I was seven, eight, something like that, eight I guess.

MD: But you still understood there was something happening?

RB: Oh, very much so. But the day is one that I remember and the interesting part about that, I called a lady and her name is Lila, oh I can't say Lila's last name now, she taught school at Fairmont for years, taught the kids, a number of our friends, and Lila was a part of the family that was at our dinner, but she wasn't there, she had already gone to Oregon State. She was already at Oregon State. She's still living. So that's my vivid memory, that's one of those, you know you have impression memories of things, of events that happened in your life. And December 7th, I can remember that day.

[0:05:04]

MD: Yeah, to me well it's the day that Kennedy was shot. That was my first impression.

RB: Same thing. I remember where I was and what I was doing the day that Kennedy was shot. I do that too.

MD: Now did you get involved with some of the home front things like scrap iron drives and things like that or were you more, too far away from town?

RB: Well no. Well, for all of 1942, we ended up living on that ranch still. But then near the end of 1942, we moved into the town of Klickitat, Washington, which is a lumber mill town. And it was a very small place. And yeah, there was scrap iron drives and things like that that went on in the little town there. So we would do some of that stuff, make people think that we were doing something good. Of course, all the kids were after their parents to save money for the war bond and war stamps. You get a book to put stamps and when you have eighteen dollars and seventy-five cents in stamps, then you get a bond. That's a twenty-five dollar bond. And I think all the time during school there was saving in the stamp books to buy war bonds.

MD: Now what basically influenced you to go to Oregon State? Did you apply to other schools or was it just kind of a foregone conclusion?

RB: No, it was a foregone conclusion. My mother, when she was much younger, had dated a guy that was studying engineering at Oregon State and all the time that I was growing up, all I heard from Mother was "You're going to go to Oregon State and study engineering." And I started out that way, but I changed from engineering to business at the end of my second term. I saw that engineering wasn't my forte.

MD: Well let's go into Laverne's history.

LB: I grew up on a farm also. We were about five miles out of town in Milton, Oregon. That's over between Pendleton and Walla Walla. The first year I went to school, Mom drove us to school because we'd moved in the district of a country school and she didn't want us going to a country school, so she drove us into town. And then the next year they had a bus route, so we were legal.

MD: Now back then it was just Milton, Oregon, and now it's Milton-Freewater.

LB: Right. It wasn't consolidated until I was about seventh grade, I think. I had to write papers about why it should be or shouldn't be.

MD: So how about your early days as far as school? How about December 7th for you?

LB: You know I don't remember December 7th so much. But for school I went to, it was the same grade school my mother went to. And then when I got into high school, my English teacher was an English teacher that she had when she was in high school. She was a long-lasting teacher but she was one of my favorites.

MD: And then also, what influenced you to go to Oregon State?

LB: Well, I had a cousin who went there and she was in home economics and she majored in dietetics and I thought "Well that sounds like an interesting place to be," so that's what I did.

MD: And you applied right out of high school?

LB: Yeah.

MD: Went to the big city.

LB: Went to the big city. My best friend also went there and she went into pre-nursing, but we were roommates in the dormitory and so we were roommates for two years and then both of us got married after our sophomore year. So we just changed roommates.

MD: That's a good way of saying it. Roommate for life. Let's start talking about Oregon State College from the early fifties, 1951, through 1955. Now you did say that you started out in engineering but you changed to what was known as business and technology.

RB: Business and technology, that's correct.

MD: And what some of your coursework and what was your minor that you had to do?

[0:10:02]

RB: Well, I had already taken a considerable, they had slotted me, well I stayed out of school for a year, worked on a farm, and so when I started, tested, and I was deficient in math, massively deficient in math. And so they slotted me, well you're not really going to fit into any of the specialized electrical engineering or mechanical, put you into industrial engineering. Well that turned out to be quite interesting for me. I had already taken considerable amount in the first two terms, so I ended up with an additional engineering minor. And it worked out very, very good for me.

MD: Yeah, because you had a lot of the business administration classes. I see quite a bit of accounting and a lot of those straight business admin classes like they would have today.

RB: But at the same time you ended up with the industrial engineering time and motion studies, work improvement studies, things like that, that dovetailed and fit with accounting and business administration. So it was a quite good program. Turned out to be. And of course, in 1951, every incoming student, unless he was a veteran, had to take two years of ROTC. That was a mandatory class that was taught to every male student, I'll put it that way. Since I was starting in engineering, at that time they had four different branches being taught in the army at Oregon State and they slotted me into engineers. And I elected to continue in ROTC junior and senior years to go ahead and get the commission. And I stayed in the engineers then.

MD: Now was that during the time if you stayed for those other two years you got some tuition?

RB: You didn't get tuition, you got a very small stipend. You got a hundred dollars a month as a stipend. You didn't get tuition.

MD: Yeah, because that changed over the years.

RB: There was a scholarship available, if you would apply. The best scholarship was the naval ROTC scholarship, which was a full ride tuition, books, room, and board. And a hundred dollars a month. I mean, it was the same as going to the Naval Academy. And that was, if a person could get one of those, it was a real good program. But we didn't have that.

MD: Now I see some photographs of you in the Society for American Military Engineers and you were involved with organizations like that, and also the accounting organization. Were there any other clubs or organizations other than your fraternity? I understand that you were...

RB: Well, yeah. I was a member of Chi Phi fraternity. And that turned out kind of nice. It was the closest in to the campus at the time of all fraternities. It was really just right down the street, a block and a half, to the then commerce building, which is where the majority of all your business classes were. So I could roll out of bed and make it to class pretty fast for that year and a half or year and three quarters that I lived there.

MD: Yeah, because originally you were at Hawley Hall when you first got here.

RB: First term.

MD: First term, yeah.

RB: Everybody had to stay in the dorm first term.

MD: Which Hawley, wasn't that part of Weatherford?

RB: That was part of the Weatherford Complex. There were, I don't remember, there were, I think four halls. Weatherford, of course, was the tower in the center. And then right next to it was Hawley and then there was one down was Cauthorn, I think.

MD: And Poling was one of them.

RB: And Poling was one of them, yeah. And Poling was right next there.

[0:15:05]

MD: So then you moved out after that first term, you pledged.

RB: And then moved to the fraternity at the end of the first term.

MD: And you only lived there until you guys got married and went off on your own.

RB: Correct.

MD: Let's talk a little about your initial college experience. You were in home economics. Now I haven't had a chance to talk with anybody that was dead in the middle of the high point of what they call home economics. It's totally changed its name now.

RB: Oh, totally changed.

LB: At that time, Oregon State was number one with Cornell for home economics. It was rated really high.

RB: Extremely high, for the quality of their program.

LB: I went into foods and nutrition and so they have it all categorized. If you're going into education, you took curriculum A, and if you were going scientific, you took curriculum B, and you had chemistry and physiology and all that kind of stuff mixed in with foods and nutrition. It was a tough course. I kept telling my folks, I'm not going to get a very good grade in chemistry, but I had enough chemistry that after I was out I qualified to work in a steel foundry. Rolland said, "Well you're still working with iron."

MD: Yeah, there you go. Now you lived in Waldo Hall, the women's dorm, which...

LB: Third floor. It was funny. Whenever a janitor would come up or something, they'd have to holler, "Men on third!" All the girls who weren't dressed would dash into the nearest room. Couldn't be seen.

MD: Now, you lived in Waldo. Where'd you guys eat?

LB: Waldo had a dining room.

MD: They had a dining room at that time, okay. Because Waldo Hall now is offices.

LB: Yeah.

MD: The days of it being the women's dorm... Now, some of your favorite professors, now, did you ever have a chance to meet Ava Milam Clark.

LB: She was there, but I didn't.

MD: She was dean at that time, I think.

LB: Yeah.

MD: What were some of you guys' favorite professors and classes, that type of thing?

LB: Well, it was interesting. The Monday eight o'clock class –

MD: The first one.

LB: We were in the same class. Didn't know that anything would happen at the time.

RB: It was your first term English class and the professor, or the instructor, I should say, he was a New Yorker –

LB: From Boston.

RB: Was he Boston?

LB: Yeah.

RB: Oh okay. Had a decided accent. And he seated everybody alphabetically and you had to be seated alphabetically and you had to sit in your same seat because he took roll routinely and he would call names. So, well after me, why long after me, he would call Key and then Kott. And I never was able to turn around and look behind me very much. But we didn't associate at all in that first term. You say favorite professors? The dean of the business school was a fellow by the name of Clifford Maser, M-A-S-E-R, he was an interesting person. And he ran a senior class seminar that I think about fourteen of us were picked to be in that seminar. We met at his house, read a book a week and then went over the impacts of the books. And he was a fascinating professor. He was a nice guy and a really, really, quite inspiring professor.

MD: Yeah, I've seen his name on a bunch of things.

RB: And then I had, he started out as my first year accounting professor, named Ed Easton, and he continued throughout my accounting classes all the way through the senior year.

[0:20:04]

MD: How about you, Laverne? Anything strike out?

LB: Well, I had to take an accounting class too, so I had help at home.

RB: At the end of the first year accounting that I took, well, you take it sophomore year, so we did that. And all business students have to take a year of accounting. But then he asked for volunteers to be a grader, and I ended up being his grader. And had a lot of red pencils and would make lots of checkmarks on lots of papers, grader for beginning –

MD: For undergrads yeah.

RB: And the graders got paid. You turned in your hours and you'd get a check every quarter for doing something, so, had to get a little pin money.

MD: Well you guys were both at OSC, Oregon State College, during the height of some of the greatest traditions of the history of the college and they're sadly gone now. But you were both, as freshmen, considered to be rook, or a rookess.

RB: Oh absolutely.

MD: Did you have the green beanie or the green ribbon in your hair?

LB: The men did; had the green beanie.

MD: And the women had to wear the green ribbon?

RB: Yeah, we had to wear our beanies.

MD: And repercussions for doing infractions at all?

RB: Well our fraternity would enforce it. And they had the hack paddle systems and you could get hacked if you turned out in the wrong thing. And you weren't allowed clothes of choice. You were allowed tan pants, essentially. Tan pants, not Levi's.

LB: Cords.

RB: No. You couldn't wear cords as a freshman. You could only wear those as a junior. You had to be a junior to wear corduroys. But then, I'll say it was almost a uniform, for going out to dances or going out anyplace, was a pair of gray flannel slacks and a blue blazer. That was the uniform. And if you didn't have that, why, so you were standing out as somebody weird.

MD: Well, what about homecoming and the homecoming bonfire? Did you guys... Memories of that?

LB: That was a big thing. Huge, big fire and parade.

MD: The Noise Parade?

LB: Yeah. Everybody went.

MD: You were just expected. Homecoming was the event.

RB: Well, yeah. And you were expected to turn out for this.

MD: Especially as a freshman you were expected to go to those sporting events.

RB: Oh yeah.

LB: And the conference, or conclaves, they called them?

MD: Convocations?

RB: On what was that, Tuesday at one o'clock?

LB: Something like that, it was regular anyway.

RB: There was a dedicated time and there were no classes scheduled for the time.

LB: Interesting speakers.

RB: And some great interesting speakers. They brought pretty high level stuff.

MD: Where did they have those?

RB: Gill Coliseum.

MD: Oh, okay.

RB: They would, well of course, what was it, there was four-thousand five-hundred in our class? I mean in school. Four-thousand five-hundred in Oregon State College in 1951 because all the veterans had just—

MD: Had just cycled out.

RB: Yeah. And the college was adjusting, we didn't recognize it at the time, but the professors were adjusting, everybody was adjusting. We still had classes in Quonset huts. You know what the Navy ROTC is there? Well they had some more of those Quonset huts out on the main drag there going by, and the English department had some of those. I had an English class in one of those.

[0:25:09]

MD: How were they? I mean, were they pretty bleak, or?

RB: No, they were comfortable. They were comfortably fitted.

MD: Yeah, they were meant to be temporary and they lasted until the 1970's.

RB: 1970's yeah.

MD: Now, one of the things I'm always interested in is social life and things that happened – campus life. How about dances?

LB: Oh the dances were big. The girls all wore long dresses.

RB: Formals.

LB: Had corsages and big bands.

MD: Dance cards?

LB: Yeah, but they didn't fill them out. The men were supposed to write a poem in it.

MD: Because I've seen many of those. We have a large collection of those dance cards. And they're kind of themed with the themes of the dances.

RB: It would be big dances, the campus dances. And then in between that you'd have your fraternity/sorority dances on their own. And so there was quite a bit of that kind of thing going on, if nothing else, if nothing else was going on, why they'd have a –

LB: Sock hop.

RB: A sock hop at all the sororities and all the dormitories. And we'd go down, more than once, went down to Sackett freshman year, because they had them down there.

MD: Okay, one of the things also that is real important with the campus life is, how was the Memorial Union part of you guys' experience while you were there? Did you spend much time socializing and doing things there?

LB: There's where they had a lot of the dances. And also they had a coffee shop that was very popular with everyone. [laughs]

RB: Laverne laughs. They did. The MU ballroom was an extremely popular spot for lots of the dances. They didn't use Gill except for maybe one dance a year and the rest of them would be at the MU. And neither one of us participated in the MU, oh what would I call it, political activities of the MU. But the coffee shop was an extremely popular place. I had a, sophomore year I had an econ class that, it was kind of strange in that it was straight out of the book, the professor would stand up and lecture straight out of the book and if you read the book, you could pass the test. And he never took any attendance whatsoever, so twice a week out of three classes I would go to the coffee shop and associate with a lot of people. John Pias, who was the Yell King for a while. And a local resident here, Marilyn Weimer, her name wasn't Weimer at that time, was on the Yell squad. Don Weimer's wife, if you know him. And a lot of folks would associate there at that time and it was just a nice social place in the MU.

MD: Called the "living room" of the campus for many, many years.

RB: Well, of course, freshmen, the first term freshmen, that's where the dining room was for Hawley Hall. You had to get up, walk down there. That was where I was introduced to green eggs. And they were using powdered eggs from World War II rations. And some of the old-timers would growl about their green eggs that they served. Well occasionally they would slightly turn green, but scrambled eggs, powdered eggs mixed and scrambled, there would be a little green tinge to them but they were good eggs. If you were hungry, why, you ate.

[0:30:04]

MD: Well during your time, you were going to sporting events. Now, during the 1952 season, was the first season that Benny Beaver was on the field. Do you have any memories of first seeing Benny Beaver? We just spoke with him a couple days ago.

RB: Well, the truth of the matter is, I don't recall a first event of Benny Beaver. I recall Benny Beaver. But I don't have vivid memories of him being on the field.

LB: And he used to have such a happy face. He was a cute little beaver. Now he's mean.

RB: Yeah he was. And I remember him more in basketball than I do at football. The football, well, the football team was not good. I knew a couple of the players on the team that were nice people, wonderful people. I think one of the first black men at Oregon State was named Dave Mann. And Dave was a really nice guy. A really, really outstanding guy. But the football team was not good. And there wasn't a lot of interest in the football. I think probably Laverne and I went to more games after we were married than either of us did before we were married.

MD: Now, Gill Coliseum was brand spankin' new basically when you guys first started going there.

RB: Two years old.

MD: Yeah.

RB: Two years old.

LB: Registration was a bear.

RB: Oh was it! It was unbelievable.

LB: Long lines and...

MD: Yeah because that was like just a big cattle call, where everybody –

LB: Yeah.

RB: Well, you would go by alphabetically. You were assigned alphabetically a time to get in line and you had to go, and mostly around the second floor, mostly around the interior of the second floor, and get into your class sections because you had to do it physically. Today, why, you register online sometime between now and then. And it all goes together. You had to physically go and get the section. Well, if you'd get to a place and that English class was full at eight o'clock at that time, you had to go back and rework your schedule so you could fit all of these things in that you had to take. And it was grueling to go through it. And then you'd wind your way downstairs and get in line to –

LB: Pay your money.

RB: Get your picture taken and pay your money.

MD: Now, one of the things that I'm really excited about asking is how did you guys meet and how did you end up being a married couple on campus and what was it like being married students?

LB: Well, we had another class together.

RB: In sophomore year.

LB: It was right after lunch on a spring day –

RB: Spring of sophomore year.

LB: In Psychology one.

RB: No that was freshman year. It was a psychology class. Yeah, Psych 101.

LB: But Rolland slept a lot, I noticed.

RB: Well, yeah.

LB: And then in the dorm, the girl across the hall was going with a fellow in Chi Phi, and he didn't have a car.

RB: This was in –

LB: And they wanted to go someplace.

RB: This was in spring, winter?

LB: I don't know.

RB: I think it was winter term, early winter term of sophomore year.

LB: But anyway, Alex said, "Well I have a fraternity brother with a car, if you get him a date." So Alice asked me and when I found out who it was, I said "I'm not interested." And my roommate said, "Well what else are you going to do that night? You might as well go." So I went.

RB: This was one of the campus dances at the Memorial Union, at the ballroom. So she had to come in formal. The tradition there was that you'd be hooked up for a date. First you'd meet for a coffee date, just to see if you were going to go. And so I think we met someplace for a coffee date and then she decided she'd go. That's how we met.

[0:35:14]

LB: So it was a half blind date.

MD: Half blind date?

LB: He didn't know who I was, but I knew who he was.

RB: Well, I remembered the name, but not the person. But she remembered me because I slept through that psychology class. One o'clock in the afternoon in the spring...

MD: After lunch.

RB: And Psych 101 is boring.

MD: Some things never change.

RB: We ended up with another psychology class from another professor; I don't remember what its name was, applied psychology or something. He'd been in the war and Laverne, I think, had a class with him too.

LB: I did. He was missing a finger.

RB: He was missing all three fingers on his hand. You never knew it.

LB: You never noticed.

RB: You never knew that the guy was missing a finger. And he was interesting. And a good teacher. His name was Hite, H-I-T-E, but I don't remember his first name. But he was a good psychology teacher for advanced psychology classes.

LB: But he was just dynamic and you were just so interested in him you never saw what he was doing with his hand, that it wasn't all there.

MD: And so you guys ended up starting dating on a regular basis.

RB: I asked her to go out, the night we went to the dance, I asked her to go out again. I don't know, go to a movie or something. And then we had the joke that we told our kids, or I told our kids, girls, for quite a while, that she ended up chasing me around campus for two terms. And they believed it. They believed it.

LB: For a while.

RB: Yeah, for a while.

MD: And so you guys ended up deciding to get married and so you got married during the summer?

LB: Yeah, in August.

MD: And now what was your living arrangements? So you're a married couple, have to find different arrangements. You're no longer in Waldo.

LB: We found an apartment. It was the second story of an old, old house on 13th Street.

RB: Down by the old high school.

LB: It was quite a little hike to the campus but we did it every day.

RB: I was, at that time, driving the school bus. And I would take my car out to where the bus started, out beyond Philomath, there was a guy who had a contract with the school bus route. And I would take my car out there and leave my car there and drive the bus in. And take the bus and deliver it and then go to classes. And I had to work my schedule and then I had another guy in the fraternity that would drive on days that were conflicts, so our car was always out at the end of the bus route. So it was a pretty long hike. But we stayed there just one term. And then we found a place on Harrison Street, right across from the old hospital, where their contentions about building that, well I guess they're building it, that big apartment complex. Well it was right across the street there. I think it's still there.

LB: It was a triplex and we lived in the middle one. And we were just sitting there one day, we'd been home for lunch and we were just waiting to go back for class and this woman just walked through the front door and sat down on the couch. Kind of looked at her kind of funny. She thought she was in a doctor's office.

MD: A waiting room.

RB: She just opened the door and walked in. Sat down on our couch.

MD: So what was social life? Now did social life change, as being a married couple? Were there other, I'm assuming there were other married couples as kind of a group?

LB: No, this best friend of mine that I had been a roommate with, she and Dick rented a house –

RB: And got married in June, right after their –

LB: Their sophomore year.

RB: Their sophomore year. Same year.

LB: They had a television, which was new to us. So we'd go there and watch TV quite a bit. And we played cards.

[0:40:00]

RB: There was a group of married couples that all associated together. And we'd still do the school dances and the fraternity parties. We'd still do those. And we kept on doing those.

MD: Now did you ever pledge a sorority?

LB: I didn't. I stayed independent.

MD: So you end up graduating in 1955, but during that time, those four years you were at college, I understand there was quite a bit of change on campus, a lot of construction and digging the steam tunnels.

RB: That was the first year. That was 1951. The fall and winter and into the spring of 1951, 1952. They installed, well, that's when we saw it and I don't know how much planning had gone into it before that, but the steam tunnels, what is the sidewalks, between the main buildings all throughout campus. And the tunnel is a six foot tunnel that you can walk in. Or a six and a half foot tunnel that you can walk in, with the sidewalk above it. And it was a God-awful mess. They'd have duckboards in the mud that you'd walk across the duckboards and then you'd walk across a footbridge across where the trench was being put. And then up into your place and there was slop and mud everywhere. And I don't know, how was it over there at Waldo?

LB: Just as bad.

MD: Yeah, because they were all over campus.

RB: They were. They were all over campus.

MD: And they did them all at one time so they made basically the campus into a giant mudhole.

RB: They were digging them –

LB: And it rains in Oregon.

RB: And it rained that fall. Considerably. So there's a picture in, I think it's the 1951-1952 yearbook, of a fellow named Jerry Colona and he's wearing a hat down over his head and he's shown walking across the duckboards in the mud. He was a member of our fraternity.

MD: So what was graduation like? You guys graduated in Gill.

RB: We graduated in Gill, yep. They could seat us all on the floor; the whole class was seated on the floor.

MD: Your parents show up, that type of thing?

RB: Oh yeah. The ROTC held a commissioning ceremony early in the day so first we showed up in uniform down by the armory, for the army, and they held a commissioning ceremony down there for all of the people that had a commission and then we had to put on our caps and gowns. Took off the uniform coat and just put the cap and gown over the shirt and kept the pants and shoes. Laverne was there at the commissioning ceremony with the folks, her folks and my folks.

LB: To pin his bars on.

RB: And pin my bars on. And then went over and got in line to march to Gill Coliseum. And they had you lined up and I guess they still do it –

MD: They still do it. We're one of the few colleges that do.

RB: But at that time it was quite amazing they had you lined up. And you walked across the stage and you got your degree and it had your name in it. That was your degree by hand.

MD: And you guys were able to walk together because your last name.

RB: No.

MD: Oh really. They went by –

LB: They were schools.

RB: Yeah they went by school.

MD: Oh that's right, yeah.

RB: You were organized by school. So no, we weren't together. You were organized and it was alphabetically within your school.

MD: Within your school, yeah.

RB: Where the degrees were put through.

MD: So we've gotten through college in the fifties and your beginning a life. So as a commissioned officer, you ended up doing actual military. What's your military story?

[0:45:06]

RB: Well, yeah, but very short term. The army was in a drawn-down after Korea and they decided in the fall and I was deferred in my reporting day to active duty until December of 1955. It ended anyway and then in September/October the army, in its wisdom, decided they didn't need all the officers they had so they offered you a deal of go six months active duty and then an eight year commitment to the reserves. And I ended up with that deal. And then I ended up, after eight years, I'd been in long enough. It was pretty good; I ended up staying in. And I completed a thirty year career in the reserves.

MD: And what rank did you end up as?

RB: I ended up as a colonel.

MD: In Oregon reserves?

RB: Well in the army. Not the Oregon National Guard. In the army reserves as differentiated from the National Guard.

MD: And so you ended up, was that active duty or was that the weekend type thing?

RB: It was primarily nights and weekends. And then training camp every summer, at least one and sometimes more.

MD: And so what was your job in the military?

RB: Well, I had a variety of jobs. I switched branches early on from engineers to infantry. I had jobs in supply. I commanded a battalion for three and a half years. I then commanded a division-level academy, training the drill sergeants up for the trainers and instructors. And ended up as a provost marshal, which – I was provost marshal because they didn't have any MP officers. And the provost marshal is the chief of policing of the division. And that was my primary duties.

MD: So what happened, what was your function during the Vietnam War, basically in the middle '60s?

RB: We were the reserve unit; it was called a training division. We were a backup in case the army had to ramp up fast, we could be called active duty to set up a training center and train recruits. So during Vietnam and all the time around it, we would spend our time learning how to do it and actually hands-on training recruits by going to various places: Fort Lewis, Fort Ord, Camp Roberts, California, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. We went to a number of places, trained recruits, full-time.

MD: And so you retired as a colonel. What year was that you retired?

RB: Well, thirty years, so I was commissioned in 1955 and I retired in '86.

MD: So that was basically your military career, but so, as life starts for the family, where did you go with OSU/OSC training as far as a career in civilian life.

RB: I had interviewed on campus and I went to work for, at that time, First National Bank of Oregon, which became First Interstate Bank which later became Wells Fargo Bank. At the time it was a period of rapid growth of First National Bank and we moved to Portland. I was in what they called an executive training program with them and spent six years there. And then Laverne's father had, well, Laverne's father was an amazing guy. He, how many schools?

[0:50:28]

LB: Twenty-one.

RB: Twenty-one schools that were graduating an eighth grade. He has between eighteen and twenty-three U.S. patents that he's created. He was creator and he created a lot of things. He and a group of farmers in eastern Oregon that started a co-op cannery and it had grown but it also had growing pains in its management. And he came to me and said, "Well you know something about banking, can you come and work for us because we need help." And so we moved to Milton-Freewater and I worked for the cannery for, let's see, 1962-1966, and we were able to turn around a losing program and turn it into a very profitable place that we were then able to merge into a much bigger company called Western Farmers in Seattle. And Western Farmers then took me to Seattle to be the product manager for the entire canning and freezing operation that they had, of fruits and vegetables only. And we were in Seattle until 1973. And then we came down here and went to work at Freeze-Dry for a while. And then got out of that and went into building business for a while. And ended up, after the building business, well I ended up with a thing that knocked me down and I couldn't crawl on any kind of ladders for anything. And I ended up with a job with the state fire marshal as an inspector, inspecting cardlock gasoline stations and hazmat facilities and sites.

LB: All over Oregon.

RB: All over the state of Oregon. The greatest job in the world. And you can publish this. The state gave me a car, a gasoline credit card, and a state police radio, and I traveled the entire state and got a view of the entire state of Oregon. It was a very good job. I enjoyed it very much. So the summation of a career.

MD: And you retired from that.

RB: I retired from that, yep.

MD: But you guys had settled, actually settled, here in Albany.

RB: We'd settled in Albany and been here in Albany since 1973.

MD: When did you guys get involved with First Christian Church?

RB: 1973.

MD: And obviously, your training and your coursework at OSC directly influenced, prepared you for your career.

RB: Yeah, no question.

MD: Same thing for you Laverne.

LB: Well, I graduated in foods and nutrition and planned to be a dietitian, but I needed a year of internship and I didn't do that. I went with him to Virginia when he went to Fort Biltmore. So I didn't get my certification as a dietitian. But I figured, well I've fed my family well for years and years and I didn't figure it was wasted.

MD: That's exactly what I hear from a number of folks, that they've basically kept the family going. You definitely applied this scientific home economics to life.

LB: And I was always involved in Extension Service. And so I was teaching a lot with sewing and food classes.

MD: Yeah, the home economics end of Extension.

LB: Yeah.

[0:55:00]

MD: For Benton County, or Linn County?

LB: Umatilla County. When we were up there.

RB: Started in Umatilla County up there and then did it Snohomish County when we were in Seattle. And then Benton and Linn counties here.

MD: OK, as we catch back up, there's a story from Home Economics, you were talking about what you learned from Home Economics, about a teacher – I gotta get that.

LB: [laughs] I'm not mentioning any names. But it was a class that we had to take, because it was about equipment in a commercial kitchen. And she lectured every day, and her notes were older than she was, it looked like, because the pages were yellow. And talk about ice boxes and stuff like that – nothing modern was ever mentioned.

MD: Using terms from the 1930s.

RB: And I got in on it-

LB: I'd come home and talk about our class and Rolland was having fits.

RB: Because they were talking about the cubic size of a freezer, and how you build a freezer with sawdust walls. And I had enough math that I could calculate the cubic feet that they were dealing with, and I'd point out to Laverne that, well, look you can go buy this freezer and stick it – it's a commercial thing. It's right there. And so we have always laughed about that class together.

MD: I've run into that a couple times with teachers teaching from their lesson plan from years ago and they just never change. So you guys raised a family, let's talk about family and kids and when they came along, that type of thing.

LB: We had a hard time getting a family started. Janine is our oldest and she's lives in Washington, D.C. now. And our second daughter is Lisa and she lives in the Seattle area. And then we adopted a boy.

RB: And that's Ron.

LB: And he lives in Jefferson.

MD: And grandkids?

RB: Yes, we have five grandkids.

LB: Just one granddaughter and when she was little she'd say, "I'm your only granddaughter!"

RB: She sent us a letter and spelled it D-O-D-D-E-R! [laughs] "Your only grand-dodder," when she was barely out of kindergarten. Great girl. She's a junior now at the University of Washington. And now we have two great-grandchildren. They're living up in the Seattle area. And so, they're going and doing well – good people.

MD: And so there you have this long legacy, how many of them wound up being Beavers? Any of them?

RB: Yeah, our daughter Janine wound up graduating from Oregon State.

LB: And so did Lisa.

RB: Lisa graduated from Oregon State. But the grandchildren, no. Janine is the oldest daughter, but she has our youngest grandson, and he's going to become an engineer of some caliber. And I keep saying that, well, "remember that Oregon State is among the top 25 engineering schools in the country." And Janine says, "I know, but he's going to MIT." He's determined he's going to MIT.

LB: He told us that a long time ago.

RB: I think if anybody can do it, he will. He just turned 16 and he's got one merit badge to go for his Eagle Scout qualification, already. And he's now planning his Eagle Scout project, to qualify. So he's a determined young man, and very capable.

MD: Well, throughout your life and the various different places that you've lived, what other activities and what were you guys involved with, other than career and family?

[0:59:58]

LB: Well, we love to travel.

RB: Yeah, very much so.

LB: We took a learn to ski week at McCall, Idaho one year, and it was a freak year and it was all ice. So that was a challenge, but we did stay on our feet most of the time. I ran right over the front of the skis of my instructor; he frowned on that.

MD: Basically raised a family and had a career.

LB: What else is there, huh?

RB: Yep. Involved in civic activities a considerable amount.

MD: Yeah, that's one of the things that I always like to do is get that picture of how a person developed from an active member of the Oregon State College life and how they applied it to their careers and the rest of their lives. And that's one of the things I always like to end with is, as a Beaver alumni, do you have any words of wisdom that you'd like to impart to the people that are enjoying these oral histories?

LB: Hmm. Just take time to enjoy life. When I look back, I spent too much time studying. I spent an awful lot of time in the library. [laughs] When he was out having coffee, I was in the library.

RB: Well, I was socializing. But you think you spent too much time studying? I don't know that that's the case.

LB: That's not a bad thing.

RB: That's not a bad thing, no. But as far as words of wisdom, why I would say, get involved with volunteering. Volunteer. Because you build your community through those activities.

MD: One of the things that we try to do with our oral history project is try to get the whole life story, and I really do feel like we've got a full picture of your lives together as Oregon State alumni. You still bleed orange to this day.

LB: Yeah.

RB: I'm still wearing it to this day.

MD: And on behalf of the OSU Special Collections and Archive Research Center, and our sesquicentennial oral history project, we want to thank you guys for participating in this project and sharing your Beaver history with the rest of the Beaver Nation. We really appreciate it.

LB: Well, thank you for including us.

RB: Thank you for including us, yeah.

MD: Thank you.

RB: We appreciate it.

[1:02:50]

