

Collection Name: **Bellingham Centennial Oral History Project records**
 Repository: **Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA 98225.**
 Interview Title: **Interview with Betty Russell.**
 Interview Date: 2003 November 20
 Interviewer: James Hillegas
 Location: Bellingham, Washington
 Duration: approximately two hours (two 60 minute audio cassettes)
 Original Transcription by: James Hillegas, 2004 March 15 (edited 2004 August 27)
 Transcript revisions: Additional editing by R. Steele, 2007 June 28.

[Tape 1, Side 1 of 6]

HILLEGAS: . . . November twentieth two-thousand three, ah we are at three eight seven nine Fort Bellingham Road. My name is James Hillegas and I'm interviewing today Betty Jane Russell; Betty, do I have your permission to record this interview?

RUSSELL: Yes you do.

[Recording stops then starts again after testing]

HILLEGAS: Ok Betty let's start with a simple question: please tell me when and where you were born.

RUSSELL: I was born right here in Bellingham, Washington, in nineteen twenty four, March the eleventh. Um, I was born actually in my grandmother's house, Minnie May Day was her maiden name, and she was married to Samuel Jackson Robertson, and then later she married Oscar Olsen and they lived on Meridian Street.

HILLEGAS: What's your earliest memory?

RUSSELL: I think my earliest memory must have been in February of nineteen twenty eight, when my younger brother was born, and I was put to bed upstairs in a crib. There was a hole in the blanket, and I took the stuffing out of the blanket and my grandmother gave me the dickens for it.

HILLEGAS: So where did you and your family live at the time?

RUSSELL: We were living on Park Street and I think it must have been about the twenty-seven hundred block, and from there we moved, when I was about one-and-a-half or two years old, to the Smith Road, to what was called the Little Slater house. Then we moved east onto the—still on the Smith Road, and rented a house, lived there until nineteen thirty-two, and then it was back to Bellingham.

HILLEGAS: For what reason?

RUSSELL: My older brother Harold had been critically ill with earaches and the dressings on his head and on his neck from the surgeries had to be changed every day. It was five dollars to drive to the county for the dressings to be changed and two-fifty in town so we moved in town. Financial reasons exactly [laughs]. He'd been very very ill and they really didn't think he was going to live at all, and when he rallied why they did almost anything to see that he turned out okay, which he did.

HILLEGAS: Why was it that you were born in a house and not in one of the hospitals around here?

RUSSELL: Home births were what was going on at that time; very few babies were ever born in a hospital, unless there were, you know, complications of some kind. There were a few women who made their living by providing a place for the children to be born, for the mother to stay, but only very severe cases went to hospitals; common practice.

HILLEGAS: What did your parents do for work?

RUSSELL: Pardon?

HILLEGAS: What did your parents do for work?

RUSSELL: My mother was a house-wife and my dad was a longshoreman. My dad had worked in the woods from the time he was ten and even before that he'd spent his entire life in the logging industry. So, that goes back to the fact that his father was a so-called 'lumber king,' owning the land, the mill, the railroad—at least these are the stories that I've been told—and that's where my father was actually born in the logging camp, near Lake Sammamish, and that particular lake—Sammamish—is east of Everett, Washington.

HILLEGAS: What kind of a house environment did you grow up in?

RUSSELL: Small houses, there were—I had two brothers, one older one younger, and I think all the houses we lived in were only two-bedroom, small houses. Longshore work was not well-paying in the early days, and, so, small houses were easy to rent.

HILLEGAS: Did you have gardens growing up?

RUSSELL: My mother did the gardening. She loved to garden, she loved to grow flowers, and as my father grew older then he grew flowers, but he never particularly grew vegetables. There were always some members of the family—my mother's family—that had big gardens, and there was lots of produce available and my mother canned hundreds of jars of stuff every year. And then we'd live on it during the winter. She canned chicken, she canned beef, all of those things. Very little—coffee and tea and sugar, flour were about the only purchases; never did buy canned goods. I could remember when my father brought me home for my birthday, a great big can of Ghirardelli cocoa so I could have

chocolate in the mornings because I hated milk [laughs]. And if I put cocoa in it then I would drink it, but, that cocoa I can remember that big, tall, thin can, and it was around for—the empty can—for many, many years. Those were kind of fun memories to look back on.

HILLEGAS: Did your parents keep any animals?

RUSSELL: Not very often—we had a dog on occasion, my dad had an English bulldog, a Brindle, when I was twelve or fourteen, and other than the fact that my mother raised rabbits, which she canned and we ate like most people eat chicken. That is the extent of animals that I remember. It was a quiet family. My father worked very hard and when he'd come home why, my brothers and I would play quietly. Bed time was very early, because he got up and went to work early in the morning. So, it was mostly quiet activities and that kind of thing, for us kids especially.

HILLEGAS: What time was bed-time on a typical evening?

RUSSELL: Oh, by nine o'clock, every light in the house was off and everybody was in bed. Even when I was in high school; I used to hate that [laughs]. There was too many things I wanted to do and too many outside activities, and my folks didn't have a car so I had to rely on bus or city transportation: streetcars in the early days, and so it was a matter of you didn't belong because meetings didn't get over with, so if you didn't get home before nine o'clock you didn't go! [laughs]

HILLEGAS: So, what time was reveille in the morning?

RUSSELL: Dad left for work shortly before six, and then us kids got up because we had to catch school buses shortly after seven, by seven-thirty, so we were early up in the mornings, and it was a cooked breakfast—no such thing as cold cereals, you had to have breakfast, yucky mush. Times have changed, I've learned to like oatmeal myself now! [laughs] But I sure didn't as a kid, but, you know, that's what everybody had for breakfast, unless, you know, once in a while on the weekend or something you might get pancakes or something else that you know took longer to cook. On the weekends my father was partial to milk toast. When I think of that, when I say that people think 'ew, I don't want hot milk poured over toast.' Well, that wasn't what he wanted, his mother had always made—and I assumed this was from the logging camp—a thick sweetened gravy and then the toast was put in that, in this thick, sweet gravy stayed on the toast, and that was a good breakfast. In fact my mother and dad were married on the thirteenth of June, and the next morning my mother cooked breakfast for my dad in an apartment. He wanted milk toast and she poured the hot milk over toast and he got up and went next door to his mother's house and had breakfast. So . . .

HILLEGAS: How did the weekend schedule differ from the week-day schedule?

RUSSELL: Other than we got to sleep in a little bit later, in the mornings, ah, it was no different, because kids didn't have activities to go to—a football game or a baseball game

or any of those things, activities—you made your own enjoyment, your own activities. On Sunday- Saturday night or Sunday evening were special occasions because they only happened a few times a year, so, you just made your own games and had your own toys, and it was a real simple life, very simple, as far as I was concerned, I mean, you know, in my dad's family, in my mother's family's all lived on that kind of a schedule, very very relaxed and very very simple. Birthday parties on occasion, we'd get together, but even they were few and far-between. My brothers had birthday parties, I never did, never had a birthday party.

HILLEGAS: Why was that?

RUSSELL: I have no idea. Birthdays were February, March, and April, but I never had a birthday party until I was seventy-five and then my daughters gave me a birthday party. Then I had a great big one, and that was enough to make up for all those I never had. But it was just one of those things in the family, I guess.

HILLEGAS: How many siblings did you have?

RUSSELL: Just two brothers, none of the neighbors particularly had children that I- or girls that I would have been neighbored with or friends with, so who was there for a birthday party? Nobody, really, but I've no idea why. Just one family.

HILLEGAS: And where were you in progression of your siblings?

RUSSELL: I was the middle child. Who knows why things work out in families? If you don't have sense enough later on to say "why?" and ask questions. Well I guess it didn't bother me because I didn't ask any questions. Just the way it was [laughs].

HILLEGAS: Did the family attend church services on Sundays?

RUSSELL: No. No. We did not, as a family did not go to church, and again I have no idea why. My mother and father apparently had gone as young children, occasionally for my father because they spent nine or ten months of the year out in the hills logging. I don't know why my mother didn't go, I have no idea. Religion was just never—any form of it—discussed, ever, I've never even thought of it before but, no, there was no religious discussion whatever.

HILLEGAS: Your father's parents, father's family was down near Lake Samamish—

RUSSELL: When he was young, after- when my grandmother—his mother—May Erikson, remarried, then they moved to Bellingham and her husband Oscar was a longshoreman, as my father was. They lived in the Birchwood district, through about nineteen thirty-seven or thirty-eight, then they moved over on James Street, just off of Alabama. After Pappy, my grandfather, was killed long shoring, happened to be that two gangs were working loading logs for the Orient. They used a single sling and the logs shifted and swung wide and pinned my grandfather to the mast of the ship, and then my

dad went over and literally peeled him off the mast, laid him down and covered him up with his own coat, he went and called for an ambulance, but of course Pappy was dead, and . . .

HILLEGAS: How old were you at the time?

RUSSELL: I was between nine and ten. I don't remember much about it because it was, again, it was not discussed at home other than the fact that Pappy was dead and he'd gotten killed long-shoring. Us kids were not allowed to go to the funerals. The first funeral I ever attended was my own father's funeral in nineteen forty-seven. Kids in any part of the family were not allowed to go to funerals, again I have no idea why, that's the way it was, and it shouldn't be that way. You need to learn young that, and accept the fact that there is death, and it is explained to you, whatever your beliefs are then you explain them to your children and it makes it a lot easier. I was traumatized when my father died, and that's what I remember. It took me a long time til I could remember the good times with my father, because all I could remember was going to that funeral. I've always thought that was wrong, and with my own children they went to family funerals; you learn to change things and hope you make it better [laughs].

HILLEGAS: Did you mother's side of the family live up here?

RUSSELL: Yes, my mother's family—my mother and her family came from Michigan, about the turn of the century and Joe Lindsay, my grandfather, and my mother's step-father came to Blaine, Washington, Joe Lindsay owned what was known as the Lindsay Stable in Blaine. When that went out of favor—because times were changing—they moved to Bellingham, and he became an employee of the electric company (whatever it was called then I have no idea) but he got fired from the job. It was always a family joke: he could read the meters from the sidewalk, and the company didn't like it, so they fired him. [laughs] After that he went in to the poultry business out on the Smith Road. They had a big hatchery and shipped baby chicks all over the United States. And that was interesting because they had the big incubators, big tables with enclosed top on them where the eggs were kept and turned every day. When I was born, premature, they threatened to take me down and put me in the incubator, but the German midwife said "No!" She fed me whiskey instead [laughs]. She apparently pulled me through, her name was Misses Roaddy, she was a well-known midwife at that time, and assisted the doctor.

HILLEGAS: How was that last name spelled?

RUSSELL: R-O-A-D-D-Y. I have no idea what her first name was, she was always referred to as just Misses Roaddy. One thing she [laughs] but, I grew up where people were not called by their first names unless you tacked Aunt or Uncle in front of them; elders were respected, first names, for adults were just not acceptable.

HILLEGAS: 'til when?

RUSSELL: 'til I got to be an adult myself and were given permission to call them by their first names rather than "Aunt" or "Uncle." [laughs] But my kids have had names like that for our- my husband's and my friends; met a neighbor when my youngest daughter Becky was little, and her name was Virginia Whitcomb, and Becky would call her "Virginiawhitcomb" all one word and she could spit it out even when she was real little, so, it was a form of affection for her. Kids will name people something that means something to them, and I don't think you question it, you just accept that this is what they do, as long as its respectful its acceptable. It took me years to learn to call one of my favorite teachers from Bellingham High 'Margaret Gray,' and of course as a kid in school I called her 'Miss Gray.' Years later she became a family friend and a much cherished person for me to look up to. She said "You can call me Margaret," and I said "But you're not Margaret, you're Miss Gray," she said, "No, I've become Margaret," but it was hard growing up respecting people, it was hard to but I eventually did. Now many of my friends from high school when I speak of Margaret they say, "which Margaret are you talking about," because apparently, thinking back, there were quite a few Margarets in the class, and I would say "oh, Miss Gray to you!" [laughs] But she became Margaret to me after many years, but those things are fun to look back on and think 'why did you change?' 'What was accomplished by changing?' The relationship, especially with Margaret, she became a friend rather than a schoolteacher. There was always the tremendous respect there, but also there was another feeling with the friendship and the things she did for my family and for my children. Especially for Julie, my middle daughter, because she was Julie's godmother. The little things she did for Julie, are still very important in Julie's life. Margaret's been dead for a long time now, she died in nineteen sixty-six, but we still talk about the little things she did for all of us: cards to Julie for all occasions—Easter, Thanksgiving, St. Patrick's Day—and Margaret's retirement pay from teaching was low, but never a card came but what there was a one-dollar bill inside it That's not a lot but it's a memory that she cherishes In fact, Julie still has the last dollar that Margaret sent her. She had mailed it and then went to the grocery store to pick up some rolls for company dinner that night and had a stroke in the parking lot of the grocery store. It was a good twenty years later going through some things and here's the card to Julie saying 'I hope you're feeling better,' because Julie had fallen on the high school stage, and it was the one dollar bill from Miss Gray. She had forgotten it was even in there, she hasn't spent it to this day, she still has it.

HILLEGAS: Do you remember what age you were when she became Margaret to you?

RUSSELL: Oh, probably, either in my late twenties or early thirties, so I was well grown up.

HILLEGAS: What subject did she teach in school?

RUSSELL: Oh, she taught, well, history, and then she was the stage director, taught all the school plays. She worked with John Roy Williams who was the musical director at Bellingham High in the late thirties and early forties; in fact I don't know how long John Williams stayed. But the stage productions were important to Margaret.

HILLEGAS: Were you involved in any of those?

RUSSELL: Yes, some of them. But on the stage crew end of it rather than taking part in the play; that was more fun, I thought. I didn't want to be up on the stage for everybody to look at but doing back stage work was a lot of fun. Did a lot of costuming. When Julie was in high school at Bellingham High I did all the costumes for Fiddler on the Roof, and that was a lot of fun, to go back to the old stage and do it all.

HILLEGAS: When you were involved in the theater activities, how did that change the curfew that you had, the time that you were supposed to be home?

RUSSELL: It didn't, I had to be home on time, nine o'clock, there was no exceptions.

HILLEGAS: How were you able to do that?

RUSSELL: Well, most of the productions in those days didn't last more than, til, they'd start about six and by seven thirty, eight o'clock, you were able to leave, and get home. We walked home, but in those days it was safe to be out on the street at night; I wouldn't let a daughter of mine walk home, or a son either for that matter, so it was perfectly acceptable to walk, and two or three or four of us would start walking from the high school and, you know, we'd get to the first person's house and they'd drop off, I was the last one but I went home alone it didn't bother me. But, you don't go anywhere alone anymore.

HILLEGAS: Do you remember when you were growing up if there were any parts of town that were more 'sketchy' than others?

RUSSELL: Oh sure. Lower Holly Street, down where Whatcom Creek empties into the bay, and other than the buildings were in very dilapidated condition, I think it was safe, it was just not a good place to stay for any length of time. There were no restaurants there; the Ritz Hotel was probably about the cheapest one in Bellingham, had a wild reputation, it was right on the edge of the creek, it must have been three stories high, and of course there were a lot of—shouldn't say "a lot," there must have been four or five—Chinese-owned stores in that area. But, if you had to walk through it you just walked through it and minded your own business and didn't talk, you know, didn't look at people on the street or anything like that you just went through it and went on out of it, of Holly Street Hill, and as soon as you got most of the way up Holly Street Hill, as we called it, up towards Broadway it was family neighborhoods again. But of course Bellingham had its red light district too [laughs]. Railroad Avenue had a number of brothels, and there was one or two as I understand it up on State Street.

HILLEGAS: How about riding the electric rail through Bellingham—how often did you do that?

RUSSELL: The interurban you mean?

HILLEGAS: Well, the interurban also but just the one in town.

RUSSELL: Because my folks didn't have a car so consequently anywhere we went was on the, was public transportation, so, yeah, I didn't mind it, the so-called streetcars were, they clinked and clanked along the track, that's the only transportation there is you just take it, it's fine. It cost a whole dime to ride from downtown Bellingham to the end of the line, which was the one I took most of the time, was Holly Street to Eldridge, and then to the bridge, and that was the end of the line; the conductor got out and switched the connections, whatever they were, there was a big, long arm, very narrow, probably only an inch, inch-and-a-half in diameter, it went up to the light wire, to the electric wires, and he switched them from one end of the car to the other, and they got back in and the streetcar took off!

[End side 1 of 4]

[Begin side 2 of 4]

RUSSELL: . . . in my own mind, how far south, toward Mount Vernon, that interurban went. And it did go north through Bellingham and it crossed Whatcom Creek just above the little falls, and then it went north from there into the Fountain District, but how far from there I don't know, because when we rode it, it was just to the one block north of Broadway to my grandmother's house where we got off, so, I have no idea where it went to, not too much further, I don't think. It was fun, but I wasn't very big, I think by the time I was in school they had discontinued that, at least the Bellingham part of it, through the city, because they had the streetcars.

HILLEGAS: What was "fun" about it?

RUSSELL: It went much faster than the streetcars, that was the fun part for me, because it went faster, and it wasn't as noisy, and I have no idea why because they both ran on tracks. Something you never think about at the time [laughs].

HILLEGAS: Did you not ever have the occasion to take it all the way down to Mount Vernon?

RUSSELL: No. No, my family were- my mother and dad were real stay-at-home people. Like I said dad worked hard and he was tired at night, and then on the weekends, I mean, he always had wood to cut; he'd go to the beach, we'd go to the beach on one day on the weekend and take a picnic lunch and then he'd fill the truck with wood—big chunks of wood—and then bring them home and split 'em or saw them up into lengths for the stove.

HILLEGAS: Squalicum beach?

RUSSELL: No, we went on to what was referred to in those days as the Indian Reservation, out near where the Lummi Ferry is, and they didn't mind if—the Indian people didn't mind—but then my father had long-shored with John T____, and I

remember—I wasn't in school yet. Dad went out on the reservation to get salmon so mother could can salmon, and he went out and talked to John I was standing there between the two of them and both of them were over six foot tall I can remember turning and looking at my dad's face and looking at Mister T___s' face and thinking, you know, how tall they were. I went- there were, thinking back, I've thought of it often, three younger children there, the one was my age, a boy, and there were two little girls. Sometime after this, by the time, I was in first grade or so, and my dad and I went out there and the children weren't there. It wasn't until many years later that I learned that these children had been taken away from the family and sent to school in Idaho. It took me a long time to reconcile the fact that the children were taken by force, and supposedly educated with the white man's education, and that was wrong.

HILLEGAS: Did your parents help explain that to you in any way?

RUSSELL: No. I don't think they even knew what was going on. It was only in- in fact I think I must have been married and living here at the edge of the reservation when I learned where all these children had gone, and the boy had become an alcoholic. I realized that the reason he became an alcoholic was because when they took everything Indian away from him he became nothing: he was not a white man, he was not an Indian, he was nothing, and he became an alcoholic, and, you know, yeah, he could have done something else with his life but you make mistakes when you're a teenager because we don't know the answers and then you're stuck with them, I don't know. But I remember those children *not* being there, so . . .

HILLEGAS: Did you go to school with any Indians?

RUSSELL: Yes, well, I didn't so much; they had their own school at that time. But, my children all went to school with Indian children. Didn't have any problems with them. One-fourth of the, well, hundred or so kids that went to Marietta school were Indian, they unfortunately did not have paper and pencil and crayons like most of our kids have. They were delighted when they came to school and be given plain pieces of white paper that they could do anything they wanted to with. They were a little slower in learning in first grade because they did not have the advantage of paper and pencil and books, but that's changing now. It was more evident when my son was in school, he being the oldest, and then the younger children weren't given the help that—by the time that Becky was in school—that they were given the help at home and it made a big difference. But you go to school and if the parents would accept the Indian children like the kids do. What difference does it make whether they have blue eyes or brown eyes or yellow skin or white skin or brown skin? I can't see that that makes any difference, and that's the way my kids were taught, so we never had any problems with them at all, and I still don't.

When I was Commander of the American Legion, District Commander, and had to travel through the northern part of the state of Washington—Seattle north for district meetings, group meetings and whatnot—went to the Lummi Indian post, American Legion, and I attended those, and learned a lot, and was highly respected by those people. I was doing a

job that they understood, and they knew that I was trying to help the Legion post, and that I wasn't looking down upon them. Had some wonderful good times out there.

HILLEGAS: How about when you were growing up, how about any African-Americans at school?

RUSSELL: No. I never went to school with a Negro child, there weren't any that I'm aware of, in Bellingham until after World War Two. I was gone during the war and they may have come then but when I came back to Bellingham to live there were a few Negro families then. But there's still only a few, that is families, Negro families, there are a number up at Western, but they're just Western students. I guess I still have that attitude that, you know, it doesn't matter what color their skin is, or anything else, that, you know, as long as you do what you're supposed to do and don't get in to trouble then why should I care? And I really don't, it doesn't make any difference to me, and no, I have had very little personal contact with them. When I was with the Hydrographic Office in Washington D.C. during the war we had a Negro draftsman. My commander told me that this gentleman wanted to talk to me, and would it be alright if he came over to my office and talk to me when the commander was in the room, I said "What difference does it make who's in the room"; I grew up on the West Coast and, you know, I guess (according to my commander) there were two types of Negroes, the one I had grown up with and another group that was in Washington D.C. I said "Well, do you know what he wants to talk to me about?" "Yes, something about a fish," and I said, "Well, is there any reason I can't go talk to him?" and he said "No," so I went over to another office and talked to him. He seemed quite surprised to see me but what he wanted to talk about was, he'd read an article in a magazine about fishing here in Washington State, but he couldn't find the article. When he learned where I was from, which was the very northern corner, he wanted to talk to me because he thought maybe I'd remember the name of the fish. All that he could remember was that it had to do with money. I said, "Oh, you mean silvers," "Oh!" he said, "You do know!" "Yes. My reason for being here in the Navy is my two brothers are going to—after the war; they're both in the service—and we're going to take our money and buy fishing boats; now, I won't be allowed to go north to fish in Alaska, because women don't do that, but," I said, "I can hire a captain and he can go, he can take my boat and go north, but I could get the money. In fact," I said, "I can get two shares, my share and the boat's share," and so then he wanted to know about silvers. And we talked, off and on through the next year or so, until the war was over. We talked about this and he was glad to learn that Indians didn't live in teepees and we didn't have Indian wars out here, it was just nice and calm and collected and everybody lived in houses. But, you know, he wondered if it was okay if he came and talked to me. Well, of course, he'd grown up in Washington D.C., which makes a big difference. But, didn't make any difference to me! [laughs] I had answers to his questions and that was all that mattered. But Washington D.C. as a different, altogether different, [laughs] the whole attitude, the whole way of living was different.

HILLEGAS: In what ways, specifically?

RUSSELL: Well, out here we talked to everybody, your neighbor, someone walks by, on the street and you speak to them, whether you know them or not. And back there you could live next door in an apartment house to the same people for five years and you never spoke to them. That was the one thing that affected me the most. Why be stand-offish? I mean they're human beings, and you could at least pass the time of day with them. You don't necessarily have to neighbor with them, and we don't necessarily neighbor here with everybody, but you do speak to them. Before World War Two there were very few apartment houses in Bellingham, and most of New York City that I saw, especially out in the Bronx, was all apartment houses. And that was different to me, but I think that the fact that people didn't talk to each other—not my thing! [laughs]

HILLEGAS: By the time you left to go to D.C.—the time you enlisted in the Navy—there were roads inside the city limits of Bellingham that were still dirt, right?

RUSSELL: Yes, some of the areas between Fairhaven and Bellingham were still dirt, and out in what we used to call the Cannery District—out, oh boy, off of Alabama and North, there was a cannery there, Hale Cannery—and there were lots of dirt roads out there—in fact there still are some, they're a little bit better gravel. In fact Northwest Avenue was paved. I don't know when they had paved it exactly—but there were times that after, in the early spring (after we'd had a few silver thaws) that the logs that were the first Northwest Road was made up would punch up through.

HILLEGAS: So they just paved right over the corduroy roads?

RUSSELL: They paved over the corduroy roads. I don't remember the corduroy roads too much, but I am aware that the logs did come up through it. My dad used to take us on Sundays for a drive through the foothills, and they were all just lots of ruts on 'em and so on.

HILLEGAS: In his own car?

RUSSELL: Yes. Dad had a car until nineteen thirty-five, and then a gentleman drove it and had a wreck. We just never replaced the car.

HILLEGAS: How did he get around after that?

RUSSELL: City buses. They're not city buses so much as streetcar. He didn't mind, and he liked walking to and from the streetcars, and then dad and I would go down on the waterfront and walk along the beach when I was growing up, and, or going through the nearby woods—we lived on Patton Street, and, just off of Eldridge—and we'd go in the woods to go get our own Christmas tree, and that sort of thing. Dad liked to walk he was not afr- you know, he'd start out and walk anywhere, and I'd tag along [laughs].

HILLEGAS: I know you were only five years old when the Great Depression hit, but do you remember how that changed the family- er, your interactions in Bellingham?

RUSSELL: No, not so much the Depression, I remember the longshore strike that was across the whole United States in nineteen thirty-five and thirty-six. I do remember that, the lack of work and the fact that the other longshoremen helped. One of them lived out in the county, just off of the Guide, on Smith Road, and every day he'd save the milk, instead of shipping it. He brought it in and sold it to the other longshoremen for ten cents for a two-quart jar, and that kind of help, I remember lots of that during that longshore strike. The Depression as such, I don't know that it had much effect on me to think back on. I guess I was too little. I had enough to eat and a bed to sleep in; when you're four, five, six years old I guess that's all that matters.

HILLEGAS: During that longshore strike, just curious if you remember how the community reacted?

RUSSELL: I can remember very well how the community reacted. More than once my father was called a "communist." He was getting forty-five cents an hour when they went on strike across the whole United States. They pulled out New York harbor, San Francisco, others on the Gulf Coast, they stopped traffic tremendously. They wanted ninety-five cents an hour, which would have been a tremendous wage if you worked forty hours, but you worked in a gang. Bellingham at the most had four gangs—most of the time they had two or three, but I'm only aware that they had four; now, there could have been more, but that's all I'm aware of—and each gang worked before gang number one went back. So you were lucky if you got two shifts a week, so forty-five cents was an impossible wage to live on; ninety-five cents would have been much better—would have been a lot better, but it still wasn't good unless you work forty hours. After the longshore strike they did give them the ninety-five cents and if you didn't earn—depending on your family size—if it was a family of five, if dad didn't earn fifteen, then the union made up the difference between what he earned and twenty-five dollars, so he actually earned a hundred dollars a month, after the strike. And that was big money, a hundred dollars a month was big money.

HILLEGAS: You said some people called him a communist, were there –

RUSSELL: For going on strike.

HILLEGAS: Were there other places that supported the strike, other businesses, or community leaders?

RUSSELL: Well, ah, it stopped all industry, because when they wouldn't unload the ships, or wouldn't load them, the docks were either completely empty or completely covered with things that had to go out, so that stopped the trains from shipping freight, or receiving freight to go, you know that sort of thing. It affected the whole nation when they went out on that strike, and all over they were called communists for going on strike like that.

HILLEGAS: Do you remember the stand the *Herald* took on that?

RUSSELL: No, I haven't any idea. I don't know that my folks took the paper. I don't- on occasion, I'm sure they didn't take the paper as a regular thing because once in a while if dad had had a good week's work he would get the Sunday paper so we could have the Sunday funnies. They were a treat so obviously we didn't have the newspaper as a regular thing. No, I have no idea what their thoughts were. Might have to pull some papers and find out and read; things you forget about that you, you know, that you don't have the answers to because you never thought about them to go and look. But I do remember during that strike how everybody pitched in and helped everybody, the longshoremen and the wives, families, they all pitched in and helped so that we didn't go hungry. We didn't have a lot of anything but necessities, but then everybody else was in the same boat, so what's the difference? And the same way with the Depression: my father's best friend married my mother's sister, and so family- both families were quite close. If they had extra they shared with us or vice-versa. We always had the chicken ranch and there were chickens that didn't lay or whatever was wrong, that we always had chicken to eat, so I didn't go without the necessities, so I don't remember a lot about it, either way, either the Depression or the strike. Right after the strike the United States government came out with a new quarter, and I got to save all the new quarters that came in and get my first store-bought coat—*that* was a big deal, I do remember how shocked the clerk in the store was when I pulled out my little sack with a draw-string top and laid all the quarters on the counter.

HILLEGAS: How much did it cost?

RUSSELL: Around eleven dollars, because I got to keep three or four of the quarters, because I had too many. But I didn't really get very many back. But somewhere around eleven dollars.

HILLEGAS: Where did you buy that coat? What store?

RUSSELL: Probably Sears, Sears and Roebuck, which was at the top of Holly Street hill. [laughs] I mean, that's a reference. Holly Street went down and up—it still does—but I think it was even more. The end by Broadway, then the end on Bay Street, and Holly Street, you know that was the top of the hill.

HILLEGAS: Up to that point, did your mom make most of your clothes?

RUSSELL: Made all of my clothes. All of my clothes, except my socks, she never made socks or shoes, but, made us slippers out of heavy wool material, made all our pajamas, our underwear, my dresses. But it got reversed. By the time I was eight I was doing the sewing—I was making her house-dresses on an electric sewing machine.

HILLEGAS: So you had electricity.

RUSSELL: Yes. Yes, I never lived in a house that didn't have electricity.

HILLEGAS: What about indoor plumbing?

RUSSELL: When we moved in town, in nineteen thirty-two, we moved into a house with indoor plumbing; before that, no. None of the houses we lived in. Unless the one on Park Street. I've never been back in it and I was too little to remember that, but living in the country you had a path [laughs]. But it worked out alright.

HILLEGAS: What about appliances? A gentleman told me the other day that he remembers growing up with, instead of a refrigerator there was a hole over the floor with a grate over it and kind of like a chimney at the top, and a box so the cold air from the basement would go up.

RUSSELL: Mmm-hmm, there were those and there were also [Leonard interjects: They were called coolers.] There was a cupboard in the kitchen that had holes in it to the outside. In the summer time they were covered with screen and in the winter time you covered them over with a bigger board. That was the cooler, it kept the butter and the milk and that kind of thing in there, the lard. Yes, I remember those, and I can remember it was after World War Two before my mother got a refrigerator. As soon as my son was old enough to figure out how to get the door open, he kept blue cheese in what we referred to as the "fish jar," now those are pint jars but they're wide and squat, and she kept blue cheese in there and he discovered where the blue cheese was and he'd get in the refrigerator and of course the wide jar he could fit his fingers in; he ate that blue cheese like it was candy. He still likes blue cheese! [laughs] That was a great accomplishment for him to open the refrigerator and get that blue cheese out. [laughs]

HILLEGAS: I remember last time we talked you were telling me about living on Patton Street, and there used to be an airport just of into what is now the Squalicum ravine area.

RUSSELL: Yes, it was called the Graham Airport, and R.C. Graham owned it, he lived on the corner of Henry Street and Monroe, which is just by the little play field. And I loved airplanes, I loved airplanes from the time I was big enough to walk and know what an airplane was. I watched a bunch of kids in their late teens, early twenties, all chip in their hundred bucks or whatever it was—not much more, I'm sure. Two of the fellas went back to the Midwest and picked up a brand-new airplane and flew it back to Bellingham. Oh, they had more fun with that plane! The younger ones, the teenagers, built model airplanes with electric motors—er, gasoline motors they were—they were fun to fly. I don't remember the year, probably nineteen thirty-seven or thirty-eight, there was a group of Chinese—no, Japanese—that came over to the United States and flew little Ford motor-powered planes they traveled around the United States flying those little planes, and I was eventually to learn that they became—when they went back to Japan—the leads in the Japanese Air Force. They were nice people when they were here, very polite, very accommodating.

HILLEGAS: Did you get to meet them?

RUSSELL: Yes. Oh yes, I was answering the telephone at the little office a lot—

HILLEGAS: At the airport office?

RUSSELL: Yes, at the airport office, and, you know, the people that owned the airport or were in charge of it were out flying, giving lessons, so on and they knew they could trust me to get the messages straight, so, I answered the phone and did that kind of thing for them—a lot of fun. And the teacher that was responsible for all these kids building model airplanes was asked to start a sheet metal school—

[End side 2 of 4; end tape 1]

[Begin side 3 of 4; begin tape 2]

RUSSELL: . . . here in Bellingham, the old Sehome School, Jim Bowen asked me if I wanted to learn to be a sheet metal mechanic and go to school there. I said “Sure, I’ll go build airplanes,” so I went to school in the evenings and after high school in the evening and on the weekends. In April of nineteen forty-two I went to work for Boeing. I wasn’t out of high school yet but they let me finish up my grades and I left. On the fourteenth of April nineteen forty-two I was Boeing’s first female sheet metal mechanic.

HILLEGAS: And that was down in Seattle?

RUSSELL: Yes. Down in Seattle. Stayed there for a while, and then got a chance to work in what was called the revetment, which was over on Boeing Field, and worked on one of the first experimental B-29s. Had a lot of fun. I mean there were no women in the shop when I went to work there, but they had allowed two women to work in a tool crib where they kept equipment and tools and so on, but they were boxed in. I worked on the floor, and I was the only woman on the floor for quite some time.

HILLEGAS: How were you received by the other employees?

RUSSELL: As another employee. The older man in the crew, the crew boss—must have been a man in his late sixties—and everybody called him Pappy. I hadn’t worked there a week when Pappy said “You’re going home to have supper with me tomorrow night. My wife said if there were women here she’s going to know who they are,” and from then on I was one of the crew, you know, no problems—never had any problems there. Eventually there were probably as third as many women as there were men. We were doing what was called “wing final,” and when the plane left- the wing left our section it was attached to the fuselage and the engines were put in, so we got them all ready for that stage.

HILLEGAS: Which planes were you working on mostly?

RUSSELL: B-17s. We built nine B-17s every single day, three a shift, and now they can’t build one in six months.

HILLEGAS: I've seen a photo of one of the—I can't remember which B-17 it was, one of the milestone, fifty-thousandth or whatever it was—were you part of that production crew? I remember there were signatures all over the plane.

RUSSELL: No, huh-uh. I wasn't there when they built that one; I might have been still working at Boeing but I worked in the revetment and then I came back up to Bellingham. Seattle got so crowded there was no place to live; people were living in their cars yet making good wages. There would be days when we would make sixty-two-and-a-half cents an hour. That was good money, five dollars a day was good money, and you worked seven days a week. Then I came back up to Bellingham to work because they put little plants, assembly plants in all the small towns. People came back to their home town and worked, and emptied spaced for those people that had come from too far away.

HILLEGAS: Was that a union job?

RUSSELL: Absolutely. Joined the union. It was interesting work, it really was. One of the tasks I was taught to do was putting a gas tank inside the wing. It had to be lined up so it could be filled from the top of the wing, and if it wasn't set exact it would leak. Of course, that would be the end of it, would be fire, and so I learned to set gas tanks while sitting up on the wing. I sat, you know, two- four- six, yeah, I sat at least six a day. Everybody was really really friendly. Usually the whole crew would sit one day that we'd- nobody'd bring lunch and then they had buildings with long tables, and outside with covered- they were tents [Leonard interjects: unintelligible] No, I don't think so [in reply] anyway then we would all plan to go have lunch out there together. It was fun, because of the ages, there was a group of young teenagers there, but most of them were older, old enough to be our fathers or grandfathers. We just became sort of a family. One young fellow in our crew that had just been married a short time, when his wife, had there first baby. Why, we harassed him, gave him a bad time, but it was fun. It was like a big family, you're in the whole of the work at Boeing.

HILLEGAS: Do you remember where you were and how you heard the news about Pearl Harbor, December seventh, nineteen forty-one?

RUSSELL: Oh, I remember. My dad was out working in his garden pulling up the sweet pea vines—we hadn't had a bad fall and he hadn't gotten the sweet pea vines out and his row of sweet peas must have been a hundred and fifty feet long. He was pulling up the stakes and the wiring and so forth and I'd been in the house making doll clothes for my doll. The radio was on and they came on and said they'd bombed Pearl Harbor. I went out and told dad they just came on and he said "Oh, is it another one of those 'War of the Worlds'?" and I said "No, dad, I think it's real." And he came in and we had a big hassock that sat in front of the radio, and he sat down on that and rolled a cigarette and listened. Finally he hit the edge of the table that the radio was on and he said "See I told ya! All these years I told you that we shoulda given the Japs half the ocean. See, I told ya; what I didn't tell you was we shoulda given 'em the bottom half," and he was just hitting his fists lightly. But he'd been in World War One [to Leonard: This is being recorded, honey] Anyway, that's what I remember him telling me that and then finally learning

what part of the ocean we should have given the Japanese after World War One. But he was- it was a sad day for him, it was just a sad day, he knew us kids would probably go to war and he knew he couldn't go—he tried, he went down and tried to enlist.

HILLEGAS: How old was he at the time?

RUSSELL: Oh gee . . . forty-six.

HILLEGAS: What was it like in Bellingham for the week or so after it happened—because I remember on September eleventh, two-thousand one when it was really surreal at the time.

RUSSELL: What I remember is the next morning going to school, Monday morning, and sitting in English class, we'd been reading *The Tale of Two Cities*. Then FDR's speech came on, he spoke and declared war.

HILLEGAS: And they had that over the intercom?

RUSSELL: It came over the intercom. The phone in the classroom rang, and the teacher answered the phone and she turned and said "Bob, you're to go to the office." Several boys looked up because there was more than one Bob, and so she spoke his last name, and he went to the office and never came back to class. I didn't know until after the war was over, when I saw him again, that he had enlisted already in the Navy. He came from a very poor family, and his enlistment date was the day after graduation, but because of the war they called him that day. He went off to war that very day. He never got his high school diploma.

HILLEGAS: Even after the war?

RUSSELL: No. He went down to Burlington-Edison and wanted to know what he had to do to get his diploma, and they said, "Well, did you quit school?" He said, "No, I didn't quit, the Navy said 'Now!' and I went." The principal at Burlington-Edison High School grabbed some paper, the proper paper, and wrote him out a diploma right then and there. Now, I finished up my work and had gotten my grades. Then three different teachers including Margaret Gray and Miss Millspaugh and Miss Miner went to the principal and wanted my diploma to give to me and he said, "No," if I didn't come back and walk across the stage I couldn't have it. So I missed two days of work to come back to Bellingham and walk across the stage to get my diploma. I wasn't the only one that they ever did that to. With all the boys that went to war before they graduated Bellingham High would not give them their high school diplomas.

HILLEGAS: And that was the principal's policy at the time?

RUSSELL: I don't know whose policy it was. I really think it was his from the comments I had later on from Margaret Gray when she told me about trying to get it, because she said- he just said "No." He wouldn't elaborate or anything. Gracey Minor

was the other teacher, and the story was the same: “No, she’ll come back and walk across the stage or she won’t have it.” But I had my credits and everything, and the boys that got drafted, what difference did it make? They were in April, May, graduation was the first week of June—six weeks at the most was all they missed, but nobody knew how to react. I think that was it. There was no policy, and so it was up to an individual principal or whatever and how he felt about it, would be the reasoning.

HILLEGAS: Were there city-wide blackouts in those first few weeks?

RUSSELL: Yes, everything was blacked out.

HILLEGAS: Did people actually feel like there was going to be an attack in this area?

RUSSELL: Not to start with. Everybody was too dumbfounded that they bombed Pearl Harbor in the first place. That- people just couldn’t believe that, that’s why they didn’t believe it was true because nobody’d bombed the United States. In fact, graduation night, rumor had it—and I remember seeing newspaper headlines about it a day or two afterwards—they had picked up rumors some way that the Japs were going to come across and bomb Vancouver and Seattle. They had every policeman, every sheriff, every fireman stationed all over at Bellingham High School, because they had built bleachers on the high school stage. We were all up on those bleachers, almost three hundred of us, and there were specific people that, ‘you take row number one and you take row number two to the right, and to the left, and there’s another person here that will lead this group out of the building entirely.’ They were all over that building, and I mentioned this several years ago to a group of high school- my class, students, class of forty-two, and they said “we never heard of that; where’d you hear that?” “Margaret Gray told me.” She was the stage director, and she said how hard they worked for a day or two when these rumors came through. The phone call came to the school, oh to the police department and then in to the school, from higher-ups, and I don’t know who that was. I have no idea, and she never said. They had to pull in all these people on just a few hours’ notice, literally.

HILLEGAS: Did they try to keep it quiet to keep people calm?

RUSSELL: Yes, they never told anybody. The men were in different rooms, but they knew exactly where they had to go and how to get there, exactly what to do. Well, we never saw any of them, at least anyone I’ve ever talked to never saw any one. Margaret said there were a number of men that were in the office—which of course would not be suspect—and actually had chairs in some of the restrooms and other inconspicuous places, in the classrooms and so forth, but they just sat all over the building to get all of us kids off the stage and of course all the parents out of the auditorium. It didn’t happen, thank goodness, but she said they knew every detail. They got every person in any kind of a uniform to be there to help. This was shortly before they bombed Dutch Harbor. I have some little dishes that were picked up, restaurant dishes, on the street of Dutch Harbor, after it was bombed; I had a friend working up there and he picked them up off the street and brought them home to me.

HILLEGAS: This is a shift of gears a little bit but do you remember another community emergency situation: when the old Fairhaven School burned?

RUSSELL: That was on New Year's Eve and I remember when it burned and then we went to school at the end of the vacation. All the high school kids went in the morning, and the junior high went in the afternoon. It was a waste- a whole wasted year of school for all of us, because you weren't in the classroom long enough to learn anything or hardly get any instructions. Then by the time you got home, school didn't get out until five or five-thirty, (you're getting up at a normal time) classes started at twelve-thirty or one o'clock. I can't remember, but shortly after noon, and then you were there all day, but it would be dark, because winter came, and it eventually got light for Spring, but, it was just worthless. I regretted that year of school entirely.

HILLEGAS: Just the schedule was too hectic?

RUSSELL: It was too hectic and the short classroom time was nobody's fault. What else are they going to do? You have to make the best of those kind of things and just like families, make the best of it. When one kid is sick enough to be in the hospital everybody pitches in, the relatives come and help; what else are they gonna do? But it was also difficult for the teachers because they couldn't have a desk of their own They had to share a desk, and where do they put their supplies, where do they put their books if they need; it was just too hectic. It was better to keep the kids in school, and it was better for the high school to go in the morning. It gave them chances to work, and most of the junior high kids weren't old enough to work. It was the best situation but I just think as far as I was concerned I lost out.

HILLEGAS: Generally speaking, did you enjoy school or not enjoy school?

RUSSELL: Not particularly. I was a very shy, introverted kid, hated to talk in class. I was always afraid I was going to say something wrong and somebody would laugh. No, school wasn't fun, I wasn't popular; I had a few very good friends. One of my friends from that year of school, her name was Betty Jean Rapley, and mine was Betty Jane Robertson. We are still friends. We talk on the phone at least once a month. She lives in Seattle now, and I'm still here, but we have been friends all these years. Between us we got two or three others that we kept friends with, not as close as she and I have been. In fact her second child, her first daughter, I named for her, she didn't know what to name her, she couldn't make up her mind, and I said, "Well you're going to call her Paula." She says: "Paula . . . ?" I said, "Yes, after your brother Paul." "Well of course!" But it just hit me: she was Paula, and she's always been, Paula.

HILLEGAS: What kinds of things did you do for entertainment—either games or community activities like theater?

RUSSELL: I wasn't involved in any of those things. I wasn't allowed to get that far from home! [laughs] I really wasn't. I had a few close friends in the neighborhood but not

really my age. When I was eight I was making my mother's house dresses, beginning to make clothes for my self. When I was between thirteen and fourteen I started sewing for the public, I wanted spending money, and I was willing to sew. I started being a dress maker at fourteen and worked at that for forty-six years, then I said 'No more!'

HILLEGAS: When you were sewing for the public, were you working at a company or –

RUSSELL: No, I was working at home. The word got out through the wife of the family doctor and I started out by shortening winter coats. I got five dollars, so that would have been nineteen thirty-six. It was a lot of money, and I got to keep it. My dad didn't take it. I didn't have to share it. I shared it by buying ice cream and the extras that we didn't have [To Leonard: Yes, put the light on will you please? I didn't realize how dark it was getting until you turned that one on] but, you know, I was always willing to share what I had. I just kept on doing dress making, and did it all the time.

HILLEGAS: When you were answering phones at the airport were you getting paid for that too?

RUSSELL: No, it was just something I did for fun. Yes. I tried to get a permit when I was not quite eighteen to do a parachute jump, but they wouldn't let me have a permit. Oh I'd of gone then—I wouldn't do it now, but . . .

HILLEGAS: Your parents would've allowed that?

RUSSELL: I'm not even sure I would have told them. I probably would have, but, and I think they would've, my dad would've. If my dad said "yes" my mother would have had nothing more to say, because dad's word was final. It was my dad who raised me, not my mother [laughs] and that sounds strange, I know. Dad and I could always talk, and my mother and I couldn't. My dad taught me how to hold a fork and what to do with a napkin when you went to a restaurant, and all this kind of stuff. My folks didn't eat out, so, where else are you going to learn? When I worked at Boeing my father had become a stamp collector of U.S. stamps, commemoratives. He'd go down every once in a while to the stamp meeting there. It met at what was then the big hotel, the Mayflower Hotel, and he couldn't come and let me know ahead of time that he would be there. I'd come off work at three o'clock. I had to cross the Duwamish River bridge at Southpark, because we lived in the home of an old sea captain right on the edge of the river. Dad would be on the bridge, and he'd tell me what time to meet him at the hotel for supper. Then I'd go home and bathe and change. Then meet him for supper. I was glad that he was there because where he learned I have no idea, because he didn't, he never went to school beyond the fourth grade, 'cuz he went to work to help support the family when he was ten years old (he became a whistle punk). He knew all the proper things, and he taught those kind of things to me. I could hold my own with all these wealthy [laughs] stamp collectors, and they accepted him, because he was another stamp collector, and I was accepted . . .

HILLEGAS: You said he couldn't call you because—

RUSSELL: Well, he couldn't come over to the Boeing plant, because of the restrictions, so he'd just be standing there on the bridge waiting for me.

HILLEGAS: Now you said that you couldn't talk with your mother: why was that?

RUSSELL: I don't- I just couldn't. I got along with my dad so much better, and he wasn't a talker, either, and neither was I. When we'd go for long walks, like down on the beach and so forth, we'd talk, and I learned to talk to him. Growing up, we lived on the Smith Road 'til I was eight, if he was out sawing wood, or doing anything like that, I was right there with him; I just tagged him along. I suppose we were just closer for that than I was with my mother. My mother was very very critical of me, very critical. I was little enough that I was standing up on a table and she was marking the hem in a dress and I wasn't standing straight enough and she just ripped the dress off me and that was it, so . . .

HILLEGAS: Not a lot of patience.

RUSSELL: No, she didn't have, not with me. [laughs]

HILLEGAS: Sure.

RUSSELL: It's interesting, I don't know why, but my dad was real good to me; he was good to my brothers. He was a strict disciplinarian, yes, and if you deliberately did something that you were told not to, you got your back side tanned for it. He didn't *hit* us—he turned us over and swatted our butts for us. And each one of our kids got one or two swats when they were little. You learned to cup your hand. It makes a whole lot of noise, doesn't hurt 'em, but they know they've gotten swatted. My dad, when he'd give us a spankin' we know we'd gotten one alright. But we didn't get a lot of them. I suppose I had six or less in my life. And when I graduated from high school, or before that: when I knew I was going to graduate and went to work for Boeing, he bought my tool kit—'cuz I had to have my tool kit with tools in it for Boeing—and he bought me a suitcase, and that was my graduation present. When I joined the Navy I was living in Seattle, enlisted in Seattle, and then because twenty-one was the age of consent. I had to come up and get my dad's signature on my enlistment papers. I called and told my dad that I was coming up that night and I said I didn't know how soon we'd get there. He said well he'd go to bed but when I got there to wake him up—he'd had a heart attack by that time. I came up and it was eleven o'clock and the recruiter and I came in. She saw that dad was the only one in the room but she didn't go in the room. Then I handed him the papers and he signed my enlistment papers so I could join the Navy. But I don't know whether my mother signed both my brother's enlistment papers, but dad was the one that signed mine.

HILLEGAS: Because your brothers went in before the age of eighteen?

RUSSELL: When my older brother was nineteen, he went in the Coast Guard. He went in in January of forty-two, right after the new year, and then Jimmy was sixteen, but he he was man-sized (took a size forty-two man-size jacket when he was fourteen, so he was

a good-sized kid) he lied about his age and went in the Navy. We all knew he lied but that was alright. I mean he was big enough, he'd quit school. His best friends, when he was fourteen, the two kids he played with, he held his arms out straight, and there is a picture of him with these two kids standing under his arms.

[End side 3 of 4]

[Begin side 4 of 4]

RUSSELL: He was aboard the—oh boy—he was aboard an aircraft carrier, one of the first ones; never thought I'd forget it but I hadn't even thought about it for so long.

HILLEGAS: Now growing up in the Birchwood neighborhood do you remember the Bellingham Coal Mine.

RUSSELL: Oh yes. I remember the big gate went across the front with pillars and posts, and there was a little railroad car that sat up on top, mmm-hmm.

HILLEGAS: Did you know anybody that worked there?

RUSSELL: Oh yes, my gosh. Hadn't thought about who they were, but yes, some of the neighbors. Boy, I hadn't thought about those names in a long time either. Yes, the coal mine was a way of life, and those jobs went from father to son, not because the father quit but when someone quit then, 'my son's old enough to go so he got the next spot,' although a lot of them were actual fathers and sons. That's how they got their jobs because there was your dad or your uncle worked there and got you in. [Leonard interjects: unintelligible] I'd always heard rumors about the Chinese that were trapped in there and died and left, they never took them out—never *got* them out—and I was reading recently in that classified paper [the October, 2003 centennial special edition insert] that the *Herald* put out with all that, that that was, did they say it was true or it wasn't true, I can't remember, anyway, they mentioned that about the Chinese. Bellingham has had a lot of Chinese workers in various industries here; fishing industries had a lot of Chinese, especially in the canneries, and that paper showed a picture of Goon Dip, and my mother had worked under him, at the cannery—

HILLEGAS: Oh really? Your mother worked in the cannery?

RUSSELL: For a short time. She and her sister both worked as cashiers in the theaters here.

HILLEGAS: Ah—

RUSSELL: Pantages.

HILLEGAS: Was that before you were born?

RUSSELL: Oh, long before I was born. I don't know whether the cannery work- Aunt Esther went to California and worked but my mother stayed here. She was married in nineteen seventeen or eighteen, I'd have to look it up, I can't remember offhand. She wasn't very old when she got married. But, that's the kind of work they did; Aunt Esther did theater work. It was interesting, but like I say, my dad either worked in the woods or long shored all his life. When the war ended in France he was with the Twentieth Engineers, building roads and bridges and so forth. They were going to stay in France and until a few years ago I had the letter that Mister Bloedel, from Bloedel-Donovan Mill, had written to his commanding officer wanting him to be sent home immediately. He said 'I need him on my waterfront more than you need him to stay in France,' and he got to come home.

HILLEGAS: Wow, what happened to that letter?

RUSSELL: It's another one of those things. [laughs] It disappeared, but he did get to come back. He'd been on a ship when he went to France, originally, he was on a ship that was torpedoed, and went ashore in Scotland, and then went back to his company. They brought them back to England and then he went on to France.

HILLEGAS: Before the war he worked—before he enlisted did he work for Bloedel?

RUSSELL: Mmm-hmm, yes. He had been there, I would say a good ten years, so, but he was born in the logging camp down near Lake Sammamish, east of Everett, and there's several Lake Sammamishes around here, but that's where he was born. His father left—he gambled and drank the business away—and he left a few months before my dad was born and then his mother became the camp cook to support her other three children—four when he was born. Then when he was- somewhat after he was three his dad came back and said he wanted to talk to his mother. He flipped my dad a silver dollar toward the doorway. My dad went and picked it up and went on outside. He didn't see his dad or hear anything or know anything about him until nineteen forty. We had moved in with my grandmother, who had been critically ill in the hospital, and then for, oh, six or eight months we lived with her, and my mother took care of her after she came from the hospital. I came home from school and I always went through the doorway into the dining room and talked to her, then went upstairs and changed my clothes and did my school work. I was talking to her—she said 'Aren't you going to speak to your grandfather?' Well the dining room's here and I'm standing in the doorway to the dining room and a living room to the left with sliding doors, the big ol' sliding doors across the wall, they were open and the heater was there. I didn't say anything, I just stepped on into the room—I knew better than to say anything. Over here by the stove was this wizened-up little man. I went and talked to him, and then I knew it was time to go change my clothes and do school work. I excused myself and left. I didn't get called down to set the table for supper, so I eventually went downstairs and my dad was home from work. He and his dad were talking and then Sam left the house. Two days later there was a phone call that Sam was dead. My dad made all the arrangements and got in touch with his sister and brother, made all the arrangements, buried his father who he had not seen but once in his entire life.

HILLEGAS: Did your father talk to you about that at all?

RUSSELL: No. He never talked about it, to anybody, it was just something that he had to do, and he would never talk about it. He'd never talked about his dad otherwise. He'd had a stepfather, respected him, long shored with him.

HILLEGAS: So, it was his stepfather that got killed?

RUSSELL: Yes, it was the only father that he ever knew. So, but, you know, odd family—but then things like that happen—now he didn't know any of his father's relatives at all, none at all. We still don't; tried to find some of them, but, have not been successful. Becky—my youngest daughter—is into genealogy, she's had very good luck finding my husband's family. They came to Canada, eastern Canada from France and then down across, but my father's family I don't know anything about. We tried to find them, but she can't find them either, so.

HILLEGAS: Now, living in the Birchwood neighborhood, what kinds of stores, markets were there?

RUSSELL: The only store was Carter's Grocery down on the corner of Nequalicum and Patton Street, right in there, and then a little house on the alley, there's an apartment house now on the corner, that's where the store was, and then the little house on the corner behind that apartment it was a grocery store there, Bowers' had that, and then—Bowers had it first—and then Carter had the one on the corner, and then Carter went down on the corner of Nome Street and Marine Drive I guess—no, that block is Eldridge there, between the two bridges is still Eldridge: confusing [laughs]—I remember going down there with a quarter, and getting—when Bowers' had the store—and getting a loaf of bread and a quart of milk, and there wasn't any change and I didn't get the penny for candy, 'cuz either the bread or the milk had gone up to thirteen cents.

HILLEGAS: You were accustomed to getting that penny?

RUSSELL: That was my penny! My brother was probably splitting wood or doing something, doing his chores, and my younger brother was too little to go to the store alone, so, I was the one that went, and I got the penny. I can remember 'wasn't fair!' I didn't get the penny back. [laughs] Pennies are important sometimes in your life. [laughs] But it was strange the things you remember that are important, to you.

HILLEGAS: About the penny.

RUSSELL: Yeah. And unknowingly, when my son was in high school he had to write a story, and he wrote about a penny, where it had—well, it wasn't a penny to start with, it had some other title, and how it had gone through and been lost and what it'd been spent for, you know always imagination, of course. Then how it was eventually found, and then it gets lost and that's the end of his story, but it goes through three or four stages of being

lost and found. It's all about a penny, and I thought, 'yes,' you know the penny was so important at that time to me and then unknowingly he writes about a penny. Raising kids has been fun. Sometimes I'd like to have hung 'em all, but, I'm sure all parents think that way. And the kids didn't like us any better, you know, it's okay, that's part of being a family, but my kids could all speak up, never got in trouble for voicing an opinion. My son was a teenager and I don't remember who did the record, he still has it, but it was "Rindercilla" instead of *Cinderella* and was a take-off, and it was the "Mugly Other," and I was his "Mugly Other" for a long time, but he'd look at me in the most disgusted way, 'Go do your share of the dishes' or 'get the wood in' or whatever, beyond words he'd say 'Alright Mugly Other,' and then laugh.

HILLEGAS: Could you have done the same thing to your parents?

RUSSELL: Oh no, oh no, absolutely not.

HILLEGAS: What do you think that change is?

RUSSELL: Respect for your kids as human beings. And then children in my day and before that were part of a family to be told what to do and when to do it, and you weren't allowed an opinion. Then Julie who is much like her brother in disposition, she'd look at me and say "I don't want to but I will," when you'd tell her to do something, but she'd go right ahead and do it. She didn't want to do dishes; "I don't want to but I will" and do it—and what's wrong with that? You know, there's no fight, there's no argument. I accepted it. If I'd of blown my stack about it there probably would have been fights, no doubt about it. And when my son—of course is the oldest of the kids—and I told him to come in the house for whatever it was. He was just little, probably three or four, and he took off and went the other way. I took one step and I thought 'No, I won't chase you; this is no game, you have to come in the house.' I said "I'm going in the house and when you get ready to come in you will do what I told you"- whatever it was, I said "You will do it," and I turned and walked in the house. He came in behind me. If I'd chased him I'd of been chasing him the rest of his life. Somewhere I got smart, I don't know where, but, because it wasn't the way I was raised. Well I don't think many kids were raised with much freedom, there was just too many things to be done, not enough money to cover 'em all. Our parents had all come through the Depression, it was a whole different attitude in the whole world. I think children need discipline.

HILLEGAS: When were your children born?

RUSSELL: When where mine? Oh, my oldest he was born in forty-six, and Roxi in fifty one, Julie in fifty six; and when was Becky born—oh, Becky was born in, I was forty when she was born, heavenly days! [laughs] Sixty-four she was born.

HILLEGAS: Financially you were more secure—

RUSSELL: No—

HILLEGAS: --relatively in those days than in the thirties?

RUSSELL: Well yeah, we were, but, he did lawn work, and there's no work in the winter time. In those days I canned my fool head off, upwards of eight hundred to a thousand jars a year. He did whatever kind of work he could find the other months to get by but it was not big money, never was. So, you know, but you do lots of little things—Julie said one time “You know, we never had a lot of money,” but she said “you and dad taught us all to look at the clouds, to look at the stars. I love to just sit and watch the clouds,” and my two granddaughters—twins that are now eight—they have always been able to take clouds and find pictures. Well, this is so important, this is within yourself, and for us, throw something in the car to eat and take off and drive around the county, in the foothills, and we had a little tiny round barbecue.

HILLEGAS: Was that the family you were raising, your kids?

RUSSELL: Yeah, when the kids were little, and we'd put that in the trunk of the car and take some wood or coals or whatever we had to put in it and then we'd always camp we'd always stop to eat where there was water, and whatever was left in the bottom of the pan would go in the creek, or the lake or whatever, so we never started a forest fire, we always did that. If we were up higher or something, we always had a little shovel in that car, dig a hole and bury it, stomp on it, whatnot, you took care of what you were using, and that was a big deal, big deal. I can remember when I first went to Seattle to work, my mother said, “I thought it was such a great deal when we got to go from Blaine to Bellingham once a year,” she said “you're going to Seattle to live,” and she was kind of in awe, and, of course, my brothers went around the world, but, when my son enlisted it was even more around the world for him, to my way of thinking, and now I think nothing of it.

HILLEGAS: How long did it take to drive, before the war, between Bellingham and Seattle?

RUSSELL: About two-and-a-half hours, three hours, because you had to go through old Ninety-Nine, into Stanwood, and you had to go through all the little towns. It took two-and-a-half, three hours. Better memories is Christmas, I had a great aunt and uncle that lived at Weiser Lake. We always went to their house for Christmas dinner, and it started to snow—like I say, we didn't have a car—and Uncle Tom came and got us, and driving out it started to snow. By the time dinner was over and we'd had a pick-up supper, there was too much snow to drive back to Bellingham. This must have been, oh, probably thirty-seven, thirty-eight, somewhere right around in there. We got to stay with Aunt Jenny and Uncle Tom for three days 'til they got the roads plowed out and we could get back to Bellingham. It was a lot of fun for us kids, my two brothers and I. I don't think my folks particularly enjoyed it. They wondered what condition our house was in but us kids enjoyed it because they had a big farm, chicken ranchers; that part of the family was all chicken ranchers. That was such an unusual Christmas, because, in only one other—other than going to Aunt Jenny's and Uncle Tom's—we always spent Christmas alone, just the immediate family. In nineteen thirty-one, just before Christmas my mother got an

electric waffle iron. She invited her family down, her mother and dad and so on. My father had a fit: ‘you invited ‘em down for breakfast for waffles?!’ That was the first electric waffle iron in the family. I was too sick to be up out of bed. I had to be in bed that Christmas. I must have had the flu, but I do remember being in bed for a long time, but they did let me up long enough to speak to the family and have a little bit of breakfast and then I went back to bed. It was one I do remember even though I didn’t really get to enjoy much of it, but the fact that there was somebody there for breakfast—

HILLEGAS: Why did your father have a “fit?”

RUSSELL: He just wanted holidays to be alone. It was just his way; he wasn’t a very social person, he had some very good friends, but he was very uncomfortable. He knew the table manners yet he was so uncomfortable eating in front of other people, *very* uncomfortable. Like I say he taught me table manners, which fork, a whole bunch of forks and all the rest, he knew what to do with them all, which ones to use for what and everything, but he was uncomfortable eating in front of other people. [coughs] Excuse me for coughing, but I’m allergic to air conditioning.

HILLEGAS: For Christmas did you have a Christmas Tree in the house and gifts around the tree?

RUSSELL: Yes, we had no stockings, we never hung Christmas stockings. We always had Christmas, and a few packages, not overboard at all, no, no money. I must have been five or six, maybe even four, when dad brought home for my brother’s Christmas presents was a Lincoln Log set. He helped him build the first log cabin. We had the Christmas tree in the corner and then along the wall there was a window up high. He went out and got branches off the trees, and built a whole forest. Dad and my brother on Christmas morning built the long cabin, and then he brought out two little cast iron deer that were natural colors, about four inches long, and they sat those there, and up until long after World War Two. Maybe into the Sixties; mother got those deer out and gave them to my brother’s wife, she still has them and she gets them out only for Christmas. They don’t come out the rest of the year at all. With all the little trees for him to have, up until dad died, the little log cabin and the deer came out for Christmas. He would set up on the floor with some artificial trees eventually, but no other- just those three pieces, the logs and those two deer.

HILLEGAS: You said earlier that you weren’t religious so there wasn’t any Christian church or anything like that for Christmas?

RUSSELL: Huh-uh, no, no, no whatever, no. When my father died the minister that my mother called came out and talked to her and I, and when he was leaving, standing on the porch of the house, he said “Those flowers”—it was between our house and the house next door, there was a city lot and it was all in flowers—and he remarked how beautiful they were. I said—or one of us said—my dad had grown those flowers. He said “I thought you said he wasn’t religious?” Mother said “Well, he never went to church.” Then he said “Any man that can grow flowers like that must know God,” and now, I’m

sure he did. He was one of the most respected men on the Bellingham waterfront. If he said he'd meet you at one minute to one o'clock in the morning he'd have been there, waiting for you wherever he said, and the men on the waterfront knew it. They had gotten a new man, and there was a nor'easter blowing, everything was a sheet of ice. They were loading logs with a single sling, you know they're going to slip. Dad had designed a double-sling but they wouldn't put it in at all. And this guy was giving another man a push and getting some on the ice. So my dad finally told him, 'Knock it off!' and the guy wouldn't—he was younger than a lot of the fellas—and finally my dad said "Knock it off before somebody gets hurt, or if you won't quit," he said, "I'll take everything you're wearing and it'll go in the bay and you can find you way home." Well, the guy wouldn't quit, and my dad stripped him to the waist and threw his clothes into the bay. There's a north-easter blowing and there's ice, so he took his extra jacket off and gave it to him. But, it took that for that man to understand how serious it was, but he was one of my dad's best friends from then on. He never resented it he just didn't get it to start with. There was not a longshoreman, when dad died, who I called and told that dad had passed away in Seattle; there was no more conversation, those men could not talk. They eventually called me back, but the phones would just go dead. Well they had to have liked my dad or they wouldn't of done that. Yes, o he was very well respected along the waterfront.

I think that's enough for today. [laughs]

[End of recording]