Valerie Schafer: —14, 2001, and I'm interviewing LeRoy Robinson. This is interview by Valerie Schafer. All right, Mr. Robinson—

LeRoy Robinson: Ready?

VS: Yep, I'm ready. Are you ready?

LeR: Okay.

VS: I thought I would start with asking you some of these questions about your time at Garnet. I thought I would start by sort of getting your biographical information. Maybe if you could start by telling me about your parents.

LeR: My parents were originally farmers. And well, I'd better start with this. I was born in Jasper, Colorado. September 10th, 1922. And my folks, when I was about six months old, they moved to California. We were there, oh roughly a year, year and a half, and moved to Wyoming. In Wyoming 'til I was about fourteen years old. Graduated from grade school there. And my dad, at that time, had been farming, in the Depression, and drought, and was starved out. So he worked around, he worked with the Park Service, any odd jobs he could get, carving work, cement work. He did fairly well with it. But when all of that run out, he thought we could do better by moving to Montana. So in the fall of 1937, we moved to Garnet. My uncle, Lauris's dad, was already up there. And, see, then we started off, we'd start screening the old Nancy Hanks dumps. Chipping through these, made a little bit of money, enough to live on anyway. Of course then wintertime come, couldn't do that anymore, so they, my dad and uncle, go to this mining claim that was, well, actually it wasn't legal but they staked it out anyway. Little bit illegal, but the only way they got it, it happened to be in Granite County, right on the Granite County/Missoula line, and the fellow that owned it had staked it in to Missoula County. So, anyway we staked that out. We worked that claim for, how many years, Lauris?

LaR: 'Until '41.

LeR: No, I don't think 'til '41 because then we left and went with the Grant and Hartford. You know, so a year maybe. We had the Hartford and the Fourth of July both, so I suppose 1940 we quit that and went to another different mine and worked there for a while. Then we got a lease
on another mine and we worked there for a while. And it was real low grade, and it really didn't pay very good, so about that time the Depression started tending to be over, so they, my folks, my dad and my uncle, went to the phosphate mine in Garrison, and they got jobs there. So that's then. We left Garnet of course, and my folks went to Drummond and Lauris's folks went to Deer Lodge.

[Off-subject discussion about taking away the paper that LeRoy is holding.]

VS: What were your parents' names?

LeR: Roy Robinson and Marie Robinson.

VS: And where did they come from?

LeR: My dad was born at Yuba, Wyoming, a coal camp. My mother was born at Colorado.

VS: And you said your father worked in the mines, and you helped him, how old were you?

LeR: Fourteen, sixteen.

VS: Do you remember Davey's store, Frank Davey's store?

LeR: Yes.

VS: What do you remember about it?

LeR: It was just an old, felled-down building. It wasn't very clean.

VS: Was Davey still there?

LeR: Oh yeah. Davey was still there until 1948, or '47, he died. Yeah, he was there all the time.

VS: Do you remember what he looked like?

LeR: Well, he was short, light, small, balding guy. White-headed, and he had a big red nose.

VS: Did you know the Dahl family?

LeR: Yes.

VS: What do you remember about them?
LeR: A couple of drunkards. There was a girl and a boy. Girl's name was Marge and the boy's name was Raymond. And Raymond wasn't right in the head. Marge, she was a pretty smart girl. Marge went to school in Anaconda. Raymond, he didn't.

VS: Were you about the same age?

LeR: About the same age as Raymond, yes. About the same age.

VS: Did you play together, or too busy mining? [LeRoy shakes head no.] Do you have any other memories of the downtown, or other miners?

LeR: Yeah. Pete Shipler. He was an early day Garneter. He had his names on a lot of claims. Most of them weren't worth much. I remember we used to, he had one claim, Copper Cliffs claim. It's a considerable distance from Garnet, I suppose, five, six miles or maybe a little more than that. And he'd go over there with his broom and do his assessing work with the dumpoff. And then he had another one right down at the Gold Center, and do the same thing there. Then he had one leased, Mountain View mine, he had that leased out and they did work that, and he did make a little bit there. A mill and a mine, Mountain View.

VS: He was a bachelor, right?

LeR: He was a bachelor, then he got married. Wasn't a bachelor anymore. [Laughs]

VS: Do you remember him getting married?

LeR: Huh?

VS: Do you remember his wife? Did you ever meet her?

LeR: Possibly. I don't remember.

VS: What do you remember about your times at Garnet? What are your favorite memories?

LeR: Oh, I don't know. Going out, I guess. We'd get to go hunting and fishing, and skiing, and all different kinds of mischief.

VS: What did you go hunting for?


VS: So you didn't go to school in Garnet?

LeR: No, no. I was out of school. I was too grown up.
VS: What do you remember about the food you ate at Garnet?

LeR: Well, it was just plain old food. We didn't have anything fancy. Beans and salmon was 12 cents a can, we'd eat a lot of salmon, potatoes, and go up the Bitterroot and get the apples and fresh produce like that. Otherwise, it was just plain ordinary food, I guess everybody eats.

VS: What chores did you do?

LeR: Chopped wood. Carried water. Shoveled snow.

VS: Where did you go skiing?

LeR: Just around Garnet. There's lots of skiing around Garnet.

VS: How did you spend a typical week?

LeR: Typical week?

VS: Did you mine seven days a week?

LeR: No, six days.

VS: Did you rest on Sunday?

LeR: Yeah, and play.

VS: Was there ever any church service? Any priests come for a church service?

LeR: Nope.

VS: Was your family religious?

LeR: Nope.

VS: What did you do in your free time, then, on Sundays?

LeR: Read and listened to the radio. [Unintelligible] most everything.

VS: Where was your family's cabin in Garnet? Where did your family live in Garnet?
LeR: I guess I don't know what streets were. We lived in, must have been, that was Dublin Gulch that went up past Ole's, wasn't it? And I don't know what gulch, First Chance? Last Chance? Something like that anyway, it's...

LeR: I don't know, you know it had been one of the main streets back in the early days. So I have no idea what, it was some creek, but I can't, or gulch, but I can't remember.

VS: Now, I know you've mentioned that you've made a lot of mischief. What were you doing?

LeR: Oh, just anything you could get into.

VS: Well, like what? [Laughs]

LeR: Well, these folks don't need to know, do they?

Lester Robinson: They'll keep it confidential.

LeR: Oh, he had an old Model T Ford we had a lot of fun with.

VS: What did you do with it?

LeR: Just drove it. Ran all over around Garnet with it.

VS: Would you play any games?

LeR: Oh, I guess we played a little baseball once in a while. I don't think there's too much.

VS: What stands out in your memory of any national or world events when you were living there?

LeR: Actually, other than the radio there wasn't that much contact with the world anyway. If you didn't hear it on the radio, maybe...oh, the big train wreck at...

LaR: Benita.

LeR: Benita? There was train wreck at Benita.

VS: What do you remember about that?

LeR: Okay, I remember that the locomotive went in the river. The fireman and the engineer were both killed. I think there was one other true man, a brakeman or conductor or something was killed in it too. And the fireman was famous, or the engineer was famous, for running a low boiler. He let the water get way, way down and that's going to generate a lot more steam. Well,
they let it get too low and it generated too much steam and it blew up. I think the fireman they
found, he was pretty close to the engine, but the engineer was found at the sandbar, down at
Rock Creek, about where the Rock Creek Lodge is.

VS: What do you remember about the social scene at Garnet?

LeR: Social scene? [Laughs]

VS: The bars?

LeR: The social scene. I guess they had a dance every now and then, but we never did attend
the dances. Most of the social scene was at Ole's bar.

VS: Did you go there?

LeR: Nope.

VS: Did your parents go there?

Robinson: No, not very often.

VS: Where did you go for special outings?

LeR: Oh, we'd go fishing. Over on the, we used to go over on the Clearwater River or sat on the
Seeley Lake, rented a place. I don't know, where did you go, Lauris?

LaR: Seeley Lake.

VS: Did you go down to Missoula a lot?

LeR: Oh, we'd probably get to Missoula maybe two to three times a year. We'd get to
Drummond about half a dozen times a year. Philipsburg, we'd get to go to Philipsburg once in a
while because my dad had to take ore samples and take them up to the assayer in Philipsburg.
And we'd end up going about four o'clock in the morning, and go up there, and that way we'd
get the results the same day.

VS: How successful was your mining?

LeR: Well, not too successful. Worked everything with hand. And we'd take some good
shipments. Most of the time we had grub on the table. It wasn't anything easy.

VS: What are your holiday memories?
LeR: Christmas and New Year’s.

VS: What happened then?

LeR: Well, we had a pretty good dinner on both of them. Christmas we'd get a few little gifts, and that's about it.

VS: Would you decorate a tree?

LeR: Yes. Not with the stuff you have nowadays.

VS: What would you decorate it with?

LeR: Well, we'd have a little tinsel and chains made out of colored paper. My mother and father make some decorations out of tin cans. She made flowers out of tin cans. As I remember, she made some decorations out of that.

VS: Where did you get tinsel?

LeR: I suppose that probably that one of my aunts probably sent it to us.

VS: Did you shop at Davey's store much?

LeR: Not very much, no.

VS: What would you get from there?

LeR: Cans, canned peas or something like that.

VS: Did Davey live in the hotel at that time?

LeR: No, he didn't live in the hotel at that time. Old fellow, Billy Liberty, had a little house or cabin up back of the hotel.

VS: What do you remember about Billy Liberty?

LeR: Billy Liberty, he was a blacksmith. He was of course an elderly man then. He had a hat. Heavy-set guy, smoked a crooked stem pipe. He did a little leeching around and toodled along with being a blacksmith. There wasn't much blacksmith work anymore because there wasn't any horses or wagons or anything. And I remember Bob McMahon was a trucker, he'd truck the ore up from Garnet to Helena. Of course they had to leave Garnet early in the morning to get to Helena in time because you had to have your load, be in there to unload before dinner or you had to spend the night over until the next day. That's why they'd leave real early, and the only
road coming up to Garnet was to face the road. Haul that load in a Chevrolet, '36 or '37 Chevrolet. Had chains on it. Coming down to Garnet on the Chainsaw-to where the brake line was. So of course there was no place in Drummond to get a brake line fixed, so they, but he was a pretty good foot driver anyway, but anyway they made the run. Those old trucks didn't have too much brake anyway. Anyway, going down the other side of McDonald Pass, it broke down. They did get a ride in old Billy Liberty's [unintelligible].

**VS:** Do you remember any sicknesses at Garnet?

**LeR:** I think we was pretty healthy. I don't remember any of us getting too awful sick or anything. Just cause we were up there high where wasn't any germs, I guess. I don't remember we even had too many colds, do you?

**VS:** How do you remember your time spent with your family?

**LeR:** Oh, just kids. Just the usual, there wasn't anything, anything really.

**VS:** You worked with your dad? And Lester?

**LeR:** No, Lester was too small. Lauris and I worked together. Lester was too small. He's five years younger than I am.

**VS:** And you worked with your uncle then, too?

**LeR:** Oh yeah, my dad and my uncle worked together.

**VS:** Were they partners?

**LeR:** Yeah.

**VS:** And I think you said you worked in the Nancy Hanks mine?

**LeR:** I never worked at the Nancy Hanks mine, only at a later date, after World War II, when they started pumping, I worked at the Nancy Hanks. [Unintelligible]

**VS:** So you were in Garnet from 1937 to 1941?

**LeR:** 1937 to 1941.

**VS:** And then you came back after World War II?

**LeR:** No, no. I came back for just a while. I came back for six months?
Elsie LeR: I don’t know.

LeR: But anyway, Elsie and I, when we married, that's where we went, to Garnet. I was working for the Nancy Hanks when we got married.

VS: When did you get married?

LeR: October 26th, 1949. [Laughter as he tries to remember date.]

VS: Where did you get married?

LeR: Missoula.

VS: Did you spend much time with Lester? Did you play with him?

LeR: Oh, I suppose, I don't know.

VS: How was the community in Garnet? Was there much of a community? [Short pause] Well, you mentioned there were dances...

LeR: Well, that would be at Ole's Saloon.

VS: Oh, at Ole's?

LeR: Yeah, before we moved, the year that we moved there, they tore down the old miner's union hall down. [Unintelligible]

VS: The year that you moved there? So in 1937 they tore down the...

LeR: Yeah, September, I would guess, October, 1937.

VS: About how many people were living in Garnet when you were there, do you think?

LeR: Two hundred? In Garnet and surrounding area? 'Cause there was, you know, in all those gulches like Elk Creek and Deep Creek, and all around, you know, there was placer miners in there. So it’s really hard to tell, how many people actually did live, well, in the community or the surrounding area. [Unintelligible] also the people that [unintelligible].

VS: But they would all come to Garnet, to Ole's bar, or?

LeR: Well, yeah, some of them. They all didn't, they weren't all alcoholics.
VS: I guess I heard that Ole's was the main center of the social scene, I wondered if you had any stories about that.

LeR: I suppose that's what you would say.

VS: Do you have any stories about Ole's that you remember?

LeR: Nothing that I could repeat.

VS: Well, I guess we worked through a lot of our questions here.

LeR: Okay.

VS: Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about Garnet, your time there, your parents?

LeR: No, I don't. Lester's got some directions to make when he gets up here.

VS: All right then. I guess we can turn it off. Thank you.

[End of Interview]