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Oral History Number: 041-002
Interviewee: Ole Bodin
Interviewer: Diann E. Wiesner
Date of Interview: July 18, 1978
Project: Ole Bodin Interviews Oral History Project

Interview conducted in Florence, Montana.

Diann Wiesner: Would you describe your trip from Sweden?

Ole Bodin: Well, I took a ship from Denmark and landed in Halifax, Canada. That took seven and a half days. A lot of people got seasick. God, that was awful. It didn't bother me much.

DW: Had you ever been on the ocean before?

OB: No, but I had been on the lakes, a lot of water and big waves too, so it didn't bother me any. Then there was a couple of days they closed up the deck. We couldn't go up on the deck, too rough. It was an old boat. Its name was Oscar the Second. It never run anymore after that either, too old. So then, we were under the waves off and on and then on the top. I had an upper bunk for sleeping. Pretty soon the ship leaned this way, and I almost rolled out of bed. Well, then I turned over on the other side in about an hour, and the ship turned the other. I had to keep turning. So finally it stopped. It lasted a couple of days. Then the next time we could see the water, it was just like glass, shining all over. You could see whales squirting the water way up in the sky and sharks. You could see their fins sticking up like that...whole flocks of them. Others—sea lions—and all that stuff sticking their heads up. Oh, ya, it was nice to look at. Finally we ended up in Halifax, and then it took a week on the train to go through Canada. Canadian Pacific I believe it was. There was wooden seats and steam engines. Dust was coming in through the windows. I had a hard time ordering something to eat. I couldn't talk, or I couldn't read the menu or nothing. Finally there was someone what had been here in the United States three or four years so he helped me, so then we made it all right.

DW: Was this a fellow that you met on the train, or was he an immigrant too?

OB: Ya, on the boat, too.

DW: Oh, but he knew some English?

OB: Ya. So then I went through Blaine into Washington. Then they took my papers—the pass and all that. So then I came into Everett, Washington and then into Monroe. I met that friend of mine there. I sent him a telegram, told him I'm coming up.

DW: Oh yes, told him when you would be there. Do you remember how much that whole trip cost?

OB: Something like a 150 dollars.

DW: From Sweden?

OB: Ya. It didn't cost much then, but it took a lot of days. Now they can do it in one day. That's how I ended up in Washington.

DW: When you were on the ship were you in a room with a lot of other people? How did they put you up at night?

OB: Well, there were small cabins, they called them. Double bunks. Put four of us in there.

DW: Four in a cabin, that's not too bad. What did you do for food?

OB: We had board on the ship.

DW: So the ship served you meals?

OB: Three meals a day. But most of them didn't eat much.

DW: Too sick...

OB: Sick, laying on the floor, messed up all over, toilet and everything.

DW: Oh yes. I've been on a deep sea fishing trip where we hit really rough water. It's terrible, and you just can't control you sickness at all. Oh boy. That would be rough for two and a half days. Did it seem strange to you that it took a week to travel? Had you ever spent a week traveling anywhere else in Sweden?

OB: No.

DW: When you got to Washington you got a job as a sawyer, didn't you?

OB: Ya.

DW: What was it like? Where did a sawyer live in the late 1920's when he was working?

OB: In logging camps—

DW: Would these be a long way out of town in the mountains or...? What were the ones you were in like? That's what I should be asking.

OB: Oh, 15 miles or something.

DW: Did you come and go on foot?

OB: Twenty to twenty-five miles and then we would have to walk 15 miles.

DW: Walk to town?

OB: No, up to the camp. There was no roads then, we carried our bundles, sleeping blankets to sleep in but then they got the modern union and went on the strike for better accommodations. So we got bull cooks, they called them, and bedding and beds.

DW: What kind of cooks?

OB: Cooks.

DW: Oh, they hired cooks, I see, and had beds.

OB: Best cooks in the country.

DW: They would have to be to keep you guys fed.

OB: And pastry cooks besides. There could be 200 men in one camp.

DW: How did you get out to work? Did they take wagons or...?

OB: No, the company had their own railroad and a smaller size steam engine. They go one way, and then they have the switchback. Got the logs on the train—

DW: Is that what they mean by narrow-gauge railroad, or is that different?

OB: No, there was no narrow-gauge, no. They had to be the full size to get down to the main track.

DW: The regular track, yes, so then they would drop you guys off at different places in the woods.

OB: Ya, but that was a different setup for that. They called it the “speeder” for transportation—gas motor that pulled us up on the flat cars.

DW: How did they get the logs after they were felled to the train?

OB: Oh, they had “steam donkeys,” they called them. They fired them with wood, something like a locomotive but they stood on skid. Great big things with cables. They had the spar tree they called it, and they were rigged up with big pulleys, blocks. Pulleys—they called them—

cable go through. They were as big as your arm. So these big blocks, pulleys, it took something like a five gallon can, ten gallon can. You go up there and oil them blocks—not a little squirt can.

DW: Goodness.

OB: Laying on the ground it took three or four men to lift one side of it. That's how big they were. Great big heavy things.

DW: Now they hooked this big pulley up to a large tree?

OB: To pull them up—

DW: To drag the trees out?

OB: Ya, they had a “high rigger,” they called him. He climbed up there with the rope around him. He had it so he could adjust it, see? And spike shoes to climb the poles—telephone poles. Then he could tighten that rope and flip it up, and then he would cut the branches off. He had the saw about that long (measures 2-3 feet with hands), hand saw and an axe. Then he flipped the rope up and then he climbed up higher and higher. Finally he got up a 180 feet. Then he stood there and put in an undercut, regular undercut, you know?

DW: Yes, I know what that is. I don't know what a lot of this is but—

OB: Then he hung the axe on something. He took this saw and starts sawing. Pretty soon we heard him holler, “Timber!” and see the top go. Then, that stump, what was left was swaying like this (waves hand back and forth). Finally it came to a stop, and then he stood up on the top of that. It was big yet. Stood on his knees and showed off.

DW: He was a show off!

OB: Some people ain't scared of nothing. He was up there like an eagle (extends arms like wings). So then he climbed down with the rope. Then there was a different guy that went up with a smaller cable and rigged it up to pull them big blocks up, and then he fastened them, see. Then another block he pulled it up with a smaller cable. Then he fastened that and pulled the end of the big cable up there and got it through. Then they got it connected up, and it worked so you skid the logs in. That's the way they skid them.

DW: Okay, they skid them in and then...?

OB: In a big pile.

DW: Deck them? Is that what they mean by “decking?”

Then the steam donkey would tem them to the train.

OB: Ya.

DW: Is that about right? Or did I leave something out?

OB: Well, they had another rig with tongs and a different crew to set that tong on the log—

DW: Oh, sure, they have to be loaded.

OB: —and lift them up on the railroad cars.

DW: How did the tong operate?

OB: With steam.

DW: Oh, it was steam operated too. Oh boy, they were getting pretty sophisticated by then.

OB: There was no diesel then. Then they pulled ahead and then another one.

DW: Then when they cleared them out of that area, they would take those pulleys down and go find another, what did you call it? A sparring tree?

OB: The spar tree.

DW: Then they would knock the top out again and...

OB: Well, they moved to another territory then, oh, about 1,000 feet.

DW: Each time it would do 1,000 feet in diameter? [area around spar tree]

OB: Ya.

DW: Could it circle all the way around the area? Goodness, that's a lot of cable isn't it?

OB: This was Weyerhauser, the biggest out in the west. So they took 40 carloads.

DW: How long would that take to take out 40 carloads?

OB: A day.

DW: A day!

OB: Ya.

DW: Oh, you said there were several hundred men working.

OB: Well, there could be 200 or 250 men, but not just on that. They had to be falling and bucking them.

DW: What does bucking them mean? I have forgotten.

OB: Saw them off into logs.

DW: What did you do?

OB: Sawing.

DW: Okay, this was done with a cross-cut saw. A man on each side.

OB: Ya.

DW: You were telling me when we first met about the holes that were cut into the trees.

OB: The springboard holes...

DW: Springboard holes, yes. Did you always use them or just for certain trees? Or certain size trees?

OB: Oh, for most of the trees, for all of them almost. The smaller trees we could get up through them. All depends on the side hill. It could be steep. The other guy had to be on the upper and the one on the lower couldn't reach up that high. In them days they cut higher stumps than they do now, but now they got more modern machinery in the sawmills. They call them hogs and all that. They chew them up and make pulp out of the chips. They don't waste nothing now. It only lasted a couple of years, then the Depression came in.

DW: Let me ask you about this springboard. Did you use the springboard just for—?

OB: Falling.

DW: Just for falling, and you only had to make one hole per tree, wouldn't you?

OB: The bigger trees we had to make, oh sometimes, three holes to move. Sometime I had to put in one hole down here and stand on it and make another hole up here and drive the axe in and then hold myself like that (clasps hands above head) and grab a hold of it and stick it in that hole. Then I jumped up on that to get even with the upper guy.

DW: He would be so far above you, is that right? So you would be about 12 feet off the ground.

Or more?

OB: Or more, ya. I was so high I was scared to jump off when the tree fell. I drove my axe behind the stump like that and hung on (demonstrates by clasping hands). I hung there.

DW: I see, oh dear, that sounds awfully dangerous because those things buck back. Of course, you knew what side of the stump to get on, I guess.

OB: You know all about that, kick back, went down and probably we didn't see no more. It went down a mile down below. "Vroom." Can hear it. No limbs or nothing left on it, all broke off.

DW: That is some sound to hear a tree fall.

OB: Could be a ten footer across the stump.

DW: All I've heard is a couple of two footers.

OB: Well, they've got some here too, but not that big.

DW: What kind of timber did you cut mostly?

OB: Douglas fir. Then we have tamarack...No, not tamarack, spruce.

DW: In some parts of the Northwest the white pine, or white fir use to...Was there much of that white pine in Washington or was that more in Idaho?

OB: That was more in Idaho.

DW: So there was a lot of Douglas fir out there.

OB: Then we had hemlock. We had to long butt them. They were full of water. In them days, when they come down to the sawmill they rolled them off into a pond and they sunk. So we had to long butt them out in the woods and leave that long butt.

DW: Then they wouldn't sink?

OB: No, no in the woods.

DW: No, I mean once you long butted them you took the pond...

OB: The rest of it wouldn't sink, it was light wood in the top end.

DW: How much of the butt would you have to cut off?

OB: Oh, something like ten feet.

DW: Did you fell it before you long butted it, or did you just cut high to start with?

OB: No, we had to fall it first.

DW: How long did you do that The Depression came and you were laid off.

OB: A couple of years. '27 I landed there. Then in '28 it started, and '29 we talked to the "bull of the woods," we called him.

DW: What? You called him what?

OB: We called him "bull of the woods." He was the main guy that would tell you what to do. "Go and take that stick!"

So we said to him, "We don't make enough money."

"You had better stay with it because they are all closing down the camps." Then we stayed, and the next week they closed our camp down too.

DW: So this was '29 or '30?

OB: Oh, '29.

DW: Boy, it hit pretty fast then didn't it?

OB: Then after that there wasn't nothing. Most of our men dropped in to cut cord wood for the farmers, you know, maple trees. There was a lot of maple. Then they had a hard time getting money to get paid for that. I never done it but I heard about it.

DW: What were some of the other expressions you used to use when you were a sawyer, like "bull of the woods" or decking logs? What were some of the other terms that the loggers used?

OB: What?

DW: Other words, other expressions...for the boss or did you have a special name for the cook?

OB: No, there was no name.

DW: What about your saw? Did you name your saw?

OB: No...crosscut. We had saw filers in the camp. We took the saw home every day.

DW: Did that have to be done every day?

OB: Ya.

DW: Someone would do it for you, though—the filers.

OB: The saw filer, and they had a special room for that with light on and set up for that.

DW: Boy, they would have to have quite a few of those.

OB: Oh, two or three of them and a lot of saws in racks. Different sawyers have their [own] number. We had one number, me and my partner. Then I was the second faller and he was the head faller, but he was an old timer.

DW: What was his name?

OB: Carl Heilman, he was a Swede—an old timer. He had been here about 30 years then, I guess, maybe 40. I couldn't talk so I was put with him, see, only about a year. I could talk, start talking, and then I took off with an American. Then I learned faster, and I was head faller. He was the second faller.

DW: Boy, you learned fast!

OB: Well, I done it all my life in Sweden.

DW: Were the trees that big though?

OB: In Sweden? No, but I learned it from him, see—the old timer. Then the boss, he kind of bragged me up, too. I done a good job. I didn't split them or nothing.

DW: You didn't what?

OB: Split the tree, you know. Oh, you hit a rock and bust them all up. They are heavy, when they hit something they bust all to pieces. You lose a lot of money on that. So when you put in your undercut you got to look (indicates by looking upward). Then you cut the axe in there like you aim, ya, you'll miss it and then you start sawing. You call that when you're drawing it that way.

DW: Drawing it, is that sort of like aiming it?

OB: Then you start sawing on this side and then it opens up or sometimes a little bit of wind might blow it back so you put in a wedge—a long one—drive in there, so the wind wouldn't interfere with it.

DW: Were these big iron wedges?

OB: Ya, they weighed 10 pounds apiece. Not these little bitty ones like they use today.

DW: How much did you weigh in those days?

OB: Two hundred, up to 205.

DW: I believe it, sure. How much do you weigh now?

OB: Oh, less than 170. Oh ya, I was big and fat. High balling too, hardest work there is, you know.

DW: That's what I've heard. You always hear about the lumberjacks and loggers, how much work that is. What did you call it? Highballing?

OB: Ya.

DW: What's that?

OB: Highball? Work hard.

DW: It's an expression for really working hard?

OB: You work harder than usually. Just keep going—highball.

DW: Okay.

OB: That's an American word, you know, highball.

DW: I just know that it's a drink. Highballing?

OB: They always say that, "He was really on the highball." Every day you can hear that.

DW: I don't think you hear it so much anymore.

OB: Some people say, "He was really hightailing."

DW: Yes, or like [hard] driving. Speaking of driving, were you ever involved with driving the logs on the river to the mill?

OB: No.

DW: Sounds as though you were always working in the mountains

OB: Ya. They all had their own job, whatever you hired out for.

DW: That's true. So if you sawed, you sawed and if you drove the logs, you drove logs and that was different. What happened to that log, what lengths did they cut them into—the buckers?

OB: Forty-two feet long.

DW: Then they would load and take them down to the pond.

OB: Then they were shorter too, 32 feet.

DW: Oh, they cut them two lengths mainly. Was the sawmill at the camp?

OB: No.

DW: Where was it?

OB: It could be in Everett, Washington. Ya, Everett, that was the biggest sawmill around there...and Snohomish. Snohomish is a little town not so far from Everett.

DW: So that's where the sawmill was?

OB: Ya, I don't know how many million feet they would cut in 24 hours. They would cut about a million feet, I guess.

DW: Oh yes, with a crew like that. How many logs do you figure they could load on one car?

OB: I seen one log on one railroad car. Then they had one little one here and one there to keep it from rolling.

DW: What a sight.

OB: We drove, oh just for fun, me and some other guy toward Bellingham and then we drove through a cedar stump. The highway went through a cedar stump.

DW: Is that right?

OB: They got a new highway now. So, we stopped there looking at that cedar stump. It was high, and the highway went right through. That was bigger than this house.

DW: Was it a paved road?

OB: No, it was a dirt road then.

DW: But it was a good two lane road?

OB Well ya, something like this old highway here (points out the window to old U.S. highway 93). There was no freeway.

DW: There is a place in California on the coast—

OB: In those redwoods.

DW: Yes, they have a road that goes through one of the trees. But I didn't know there was one in Washington. I wonder if it is still there.

OB: Oh, ya. They wouldn't destroy that; they would keep that to look at.

DW: Did you say that you were in a union?

OB: No.

DW: You said something about the unions telling the logging companies that they had to provide better accommodations for the crews.

OB: Ya, they had an organized union, they called it the IWW [International Workers of the World]. You've heard about the IWW?

DW: A little bit.

OB: Ya, that means "I Wouldn't Work." Oh they were awful. That's what they had to fight in them days. Well then, after that it didn't take long, AFL and CIO took over—a different union like we have today.

DW: Were there IWW members in your camp?

OB: Ya, but I wasn't IWW.

DW: But there were enough of them so that the union could tell Weyerhaeuser to improve the camps?

OB: So they put on the strike and had troubles, and finally they got what they wanted: a wash-house with water in it, shower—hot water showers and cold.

DW: In the woods?

OB: Well in the camps, ya...and a road you can drive up. That's before they had bulldozers and big Caterpillars. [Now] you could drive up with a car. Then the company furnished beds, blankets and sheets like this (points to his bed) once a week, a "bullcook" they called him, and a heating

stove. All he done was to cut wood—great big, dry logs—and skid it home. Then he had a gas saw, some kind of a gas saw. So he didn't have to do it by hand, no. He had a hammer and wedges and split them into kindling and bigger sizes and carried into each bunkhouse. Then there was another bullcook, one bull cook couldn't do it all, there was like 250 men. That's a lot of bunkhouses. So then, he sneak in and build a fire in the morning, cold and wet, in a regular heating stove—wood stove. Then he went to another one and another one...

DW: Was this while you were working at this camp that these changes took place?

OB: Ya, ya.

DW: It must have been a lot nicer.

OB: Then they blow the whistle. It was a steam whistle not a bell. “Whoo,” like a train, to get up.

DW: What time?

OB: Around seven o'clock and eat—wash and eat. They rung a bell then. They had a triangle deal, you know, clankety-clankety-clankety-clank. You've seen them. They all went and rushed in there. Long tables full of loggers. Loggers sitting there, cork shoes on. Full of corks underneath—spikes. Wooden floors—no linoleum or anything. Well, we could have hotcakes, eggs—soft boiled eggs or hard boiled eggs—bacon, ham, coffee—good coffee. Everything was good. We had waitresses—girls, women—come with hotcakes, three or four at a time. Just dumped them in the plates and took the other plate.

Then they [the loggers] grabbed them. “Pass the hotcakes.” Butter, no margarine, and syrup—good syrup. Everything was the best. Then we put up our own lunch. Not in all the camps. One camp we did or two camps that I know of. Then there was a special table, a long table full of food. There could be steaks, pork chops, leftover from the day before. Grab one and put it in your lunch bucket. Grab two or a pork chop. There was hardtack, if you wanted hardtack. You put butter on it. Some people like hardtack, I do too. And cake. There was no shortage of good, real good cake, cookies and then you could have...find an empty whiskey bottle and fill it full of mills. Take it with you. Good food, the best, yep.

DW: What time would you come home out of the woods?

OB: Oh, along 5:30, five o'clock. Then we jumped off and threw the clothes off and rushed in there in the showers. Put on clean things, clean clothes and then the bell rung. It was supper. Lunch, you know, we had that with us.

DW: What did you do in the evenings after supper?

OB: Wash up some sweaty clothes.

DW: You had to do your own laundry?

OB: Ya. They had scrub-boards and a commissary. You could get anything you wanted in it—soap—even a watch. You can buy a watch for a dollar and a half—a pocket-watch. They don't have that no more...or anything, underwear—wool underwear. It was winter time. There wasn't no snow, but still it was cold with rain and wet snow. Got to have khakis on you, slicker hat and so...or wool, underwear—real wool, you know, virgin wool. You could get for oh, I forgot now, around five or six dollars. Now I know it costs about 35 dollars. Then they had wool sweaters with turtlenecks, just wool. Put that on and all that. The rain fell often. There was no five minutes or take five or anything, just keep on a-working. Well, then, you could make 150 dollars at the most.

DW: A month?

OB: Ya.

DW: That was pretty good money then, wasn't it?

OB: Ya.

DW: Were you able to save any money?

OB: Oh, we tried to, but they stopped working so there was nothing to save. So that's when I ended up on freight trains out in the farming country. North Dakota, all over North Dakota—branch lines and up this way—picking spuds and sugar beets. Potatoes—loading potatoes and all this stuff after you had them picked, then running them through the sorter and grading them.

DW: Do what to them?

OB: Grading potatoes. Got to be a certain size to ship. They can't be no big one either or full of tits. Well at one place we had three dollars and board for loading spuds. Picking spuds we made five dollars, and we worked like hell—me and another guy. He hold a sack, and I'd dump mine by the bushel. Oh gosh, I couldn't pick half that much now. Well it didn't last only a few days.

DW: The job?

OB: Ya, in the fall for the spuds but then later on there was sugar beets and I made two and a half a day. This was at another place, then, for the sugar beets. They had Mexicans topping the beets. Cut the top off like them rutabagas. Oh, you could see that big long knife. There's a hook like this (curls finger) on the end of that big long deal [knife] for picking it [beet] up. Golly, they were so fast cutting and slicing it off, tossing it. Golly, they worked hard—them Mexicans. Then we had beet forks; that was a different crew. We had beet forks—me and the truck driver with side boards on it, ten inch side boards on the truck—dump truck. They had to be heaved on it. Just forked like hell. We had breakfast at six o'clock in the morning. Then we went out and

worked to 12 o'clock, like that. There was mornings I had one egg and one slice of toast and coffee. That was one place. Then at noon there was a little better then, but then you worked all afternoon until dark working the beets at two and a half a day and board. Well then, that only lasted so long—

DW: It was hard to find any work then in the winter time after the harvests, wasn't it?

OB: There was no more then. Just, oh, mounted the freight some place, you know.

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

DW: When we were in California two weeks ago we saw a truck with a redwood on it. That just had three logs on it. That's pretty big for this day.

OB: You know, I've never seen a redwood. I've never been in California.

DW: Is that right? They're very similar to a cedar.

OB: I hear they have different ways for falling those trees. They fall smaller trees to make a bedding for the big ones so they don't bust up. They are very expensive trees.

DW: You were talking about some of the different places you went in North Dakota.

OB: Ya.

DW: You went to Fargo and where else?

OB: Grand Forks

DW: So about the only time you could find work was during the harvest season?

OB: Ya.

DW: Did you go any further east looking for work or—

OB: I went clear to Minneapolis.

DW: You did?

OB: Just to see what was going on. We had to go—keep moving—but there was nothing there.

Do you have it on now?

DW: Yes.

OB: There was one time we ended up in Minneapolis—a whole bunch of us. We were looking for something to eat in a certain place. So then they give us some work, so we canned tomatoes, and it was hot, warm weather. Something like 90 degrees. Just a bunch of young fellows, we stood, didn't have a t-shirt on—nothing—and sweat was dripping into all that, you know. Canned tomatoes. We was looking at this and that, you know? So finally we got something to eat, and then we got the hell out of there. Went back west then, wouldn't go no further. Took a freight train and went back. Then took a branch line up towards Grand Forks and then there was nothing to do up there. Went to Fargo...No, it wasn't Fargo it was another town. I believe it was

Billings...Billings, Montana, at Laurel or something like that. We left our belongings in an old frame rooming house in the lobby. We asked if we could keep it there so we wouldn't have to carry it around. That was in the evening...No, that was in the afternoon. So we kept a walking and walking and 20 miles to a little town called Crystal. No water to drink or nothing. God, we were thirsty.

We got into that little town, Crystal, and then in a backyard we saw a well and a boom to pull down to get that water. See, like (demonstrates with hands). This old guy come out there. "What the hell you want to drink up all my water for?" He run us out of there. There was only a little bit in there—clay, muddy water. So we took off. Then on the street we walked into a barber shop and asked him for some water. Well, he had a pitcher that wasn't full of water either. He give us a half a glass anyway—warm, room temperature water. We drank that. That was all we could get.

We couldn't get no work around there so we walked back [to Laurel]. Then, we seen a farm building two or three miles off of that road. There was no trees down there. You can see as far as you could look. So we walked up there, me and another guy. We asked him, and he said, "No, we got one hired man and I don't know if I can keep him very long." Then he invited us to eat. It was supper-time. Food was on the table, full of potatoes and meat and gravy. Oh, did we fill up.

DW: That must have been a treat.

OB: Oh, then we was good for a couple of days. Well, then we went back and we took another branch line of the rail- road, and we walked another 20 miles down to some town. I can't think of it now...Oh, Red Lodge, Montana. We heard about some construction work down there. I said, "I'm going to walk with you." Walking on those railroad ties, you know, geez. So we couldn't get nothing. So we had to walk all the way back and we were so tired. We laid down here and there, listen to those birds singing. It was after midnight. It was early in the morning when we walked back. It got to be morning and the birds were out—red-winged birds—flying and singing. So finally we came back to Laurel. (pauses) Ya, Laurel. That was the name of the town. So then, we didn't have anything to eat. My partner, he found some raw potatoes along the tracks. He ate raw potatoes. I didn't eat any raw potatoes.

Finally we ended up in Seattle again, and he met somebody that he knew. He was an American so he went out and got some work. I lost him anyway, and then I was all by myself. Then I seen guys lift up the lids on garbage cans and see what's in it. They'd eat it, you know. Old bananas and watermelon, something like that. Oh, you could see a lot of things. Salvation Army still out there preaching all the time, and then there was other religions somewhere else, another corner, playing, preaching gospel. I've listened to that. There was nobody inviting you—nobody. We took a train and went back again, back and forth. Took a branch line train and went back again. Well, I ended up in the fall in some little, old town down south of Billings. I can't remember the name of the little town that the railroad branched for...Lewiston or something like that.

DW: Is Hardin south of Billings?

OB: No. What was that little town? I can't think of it right now. So we jungled-up and found some tin cans and we had some meat or bones and spuds we cooked in an old kerosene can, a good clean can. We had another can for coffee. Two cops came in and tipped it all over, throwed, hacked holes. They had a little hatchet. Oh, we had the stew boiling. We hadn't eaten for a couple days then. Destroyed everything for us. We had to run out of there. I don't know if they had the right to do that or not, either,

DW: What did they say?

OB: Well, we were scared of the law, you know, so we had to go. We went through Billings, that's where it was. Then there was about 50 men of us that the big railroad cops rounded up. Chased us down to what they called the "dog house," an old cabin but the sign said "Unemployment Office." We didn't know what he was up to. So then one after another, he took us inside. "Where did you come from?"

Well, we told him. "Where are you going?"

Well, we didn't know. "Well, you rode 1,500 miles. You got to pay for some of it. Do you have any money?"

Well, they're scared, so they dished out a dollar and a half, or 75 cents or 50 cents or whatever they had. Then the next one or two would come, and pretty soon it was my turn. Well, I had a few paper dollars. I stuck them down here inside of my shoes.

I said, "I ain't got nothing."

"What are you living on?"

"Bumming it like everybody else. They took the money away from them other guys now they got to go bumming. They can't even buy meat or a bowl of soup. They had to go without." That's what I told the cops.

"Well, okay, go on."

DW: These were policemen?

OB: Policemen, railroad cops they called them. He put that money in his pocket. We could have went together and put in a complaint about that, I think.

DW: How many of you were there?

OB: Oh, about 40 or 50 men. Some of them guys probably had ten or twenty dollars, hard to tell.

You never know how much one man can carry sometimes and hang on to it. Like me, I had a couple of paper dollars, and I put them down here (points to his foot). Otherwise, he would have took it. So I answered him anyway. He didn't scare me any. If he had put me in jail, I would have got fed. So then we had to keep going. There was a couple of four miles from that road up to Billings. He said, "Now you go up there and catch the train and get the hell out of here"—so we did—"and walk up the highway up there. Don't walk on the railroad." There wasn't much traffic on the highway in them days—automobiles. So we got out of there.

DW: Did you ever find work around Billings?

OB: No, never did. There were too many men. A hundred men every day from that direction east to west. They come and go. Could be some of them never looked for work either. There's a lot of them. In fact there are a lot of them today, as long as they get food stamps. I never been on food stamps yet, and I'm 70 years old. I worked for my living. I'm getting Social Security...so then I don't know. Anyway I ended up in North Dakota some place. This town was Jamestown [North Dakota] where the cops came in and hacked holes in the stew pot.

Well, I ended up in some other little town, I can't think of its name. I went to work down there. Thirty dollars a month, board and room. And he was old, very old. He had six milk cows, something like that, and a few sheep. I don't know how many, about 100. Some hops, an artesian well. That's all they had in North Dakota in those days. Oh, he was up in his 80s, and she was younger. They were very nice people. So they liked me, but then in the meantime, I did work in that gold mine up in Rivulet, Montana, before. I quit that and went out looking for work. Well, I going to come to that again.

I stayed there haying. They had open prairie, there was no fence or nothing. With a team of horses, I had to cut the hay. With the mower I cut the best and squared it up, cut it all and then raked it up in windrows. Bunched it up in big hay bunches. Oh, we hauled it in and lifted it up in the barn and all of that. So then there was corn to be husked, and it wasn't very good. Only short ones six inches or so. There was no long corn. So I done that. Worked hard, and then I had to unload it every night, you know. Then in the fall they took off on their vacation—two old people. They left everything to me. I stayed and milked the cows, and they'd kick you. Oh, they kicked me out in the cold. I separated milk and then fed the hogs and all that, fed the sheep. Well then they came back. They stayed a couple of weeks, about ten days. They had been off joy riding.

DW: They had a car?

OB: Ya, it was an old car. Well, then, it was late in the fall. They didn't have no wood for heat. They had corn cobs piled up in the hay loft, big deal, to burn, to cook with and everything, but they had some coal that they bought uptown. They even burned cow dung. Oh ya. I wrote one of them guys at Rivulet in the gold mine—the placer mine. Before, when I was there, they didn't have no gold, but this time they wrote and told me, "I think we've run into gold. You can come back and work with us." Then I had earned enough so I took a passenger train.

I had some clean clothes, good clothes, then you know. I had saved up a little. So then I stayed for a while, up there at the gold mine. They don't do nothing just laid around eating beans and wild meat...oh ya, and bear meat too. Of course, you couldn't get them in the winter. Got them earlier in the fall before they go hibernating. Well, anyway, I stayed there about three years but then they got into trouble with the owner. They were supposed to pay 15 percent royalty. There was one of them guys that kept track of all that and he stole it—they claimed. He put it in his pocket, I think. I never did know. Anyway, they lost their lease, and I didn't have no lease. I worked on a percentage. I didn't make much money. So they lost out in court. So then I pulled out; I went to Minnesota. I had a brother up there, and he was on the WPA [Works Progress Administration] then. You heard about the WPA? So I stayed with him. I hadn't seen him since he left the old country. I was only a little boy. So he didn't even know me when I first got there. So he was married and there was nothing to do for them. They had WPA so I guess he brought home 50 or 60 dollars a month from that.

DW: What was his job?

OB: Digging ditches like on country roads, not on a main highway, and put drains in and all that, just to do something. To be working for the money they got. But I wasn't on that. I hadn't been there long enough in the county. He had been there 25 years or so. Well, then, he had a sister-in-law. She had her own house in Duluth, Minnesota. Her husband worked on Lake Superior all summer long and it was hard to get in on that. So they made pretty good, made a good living.

Then she traded her house in for a beer tavern out in the country. The beer taverns had started up in '33. So she knew me. I had been with my brother. She was his sister-in-law. "Ole, you stay there and help them." So they had over a dozen boats. There was a big river—a lake that it ran through. They rented out boats. Then, I caught minnows for bait, and she had a milk cow and chickens and I helped.

During the summer I cut hay with the hay scythe, by hand, dry it, haul it in. Then she bought me a Model T, and I had one of those minnow traps in a little boat on a trailer to go out to little, small lakes. The boat was so little I could drag it out, and I sunk that [trap] down and I caught minnows. Then we sold minnows for 15 cents a dozen. A glass of beer was five cents a draft in those days. She had dances like that on Saturday nights and made a few dollars extra. But then her husband was off all winter, the lake froze up—Lake Superior. Then there wasn't much to do to keep warm and milk the cow she had, feed the chickens and cut wood to keep warm. Could be 50 below.

So I stayed there for a year. Then, I met a dairy farmer that came in there [the tavern] quite a bit. He had around 60 milk cows—him and his wife. So I was kind of tired of...she bought clothes for me and all that but no money. So I went to work for him for a dollar a day, milking cows. Get up early in the morning, five o'clock. In the summer time we hauled hay. He bought the hay stumpage 15 miles out of town. They call it hay stumpage. They mow the hay and rake it up and pitch it up on the trucks and haul it home and stack it. God, that was hard work. Finally he was

kicking because they would come home with small loads. "You didn't have 200 pounds of hay on the truck." Then I come home with the truck and, gee, did he brag me up. I had a great big load. "Gee, that's the best load I've ever seen come in this yard."

"Oh, I done this before," I said. "I know how to do that, load up a load of hay."

So then he put me on that to do that for the others. "You put Ole on the truck; otherwise, you never get no more than 200 or 300 pounds on it." So we all had big loads coming home.

Then, in the evening we had to milk cows again—long hours, 12 or 14 hours. There was no regular time to eat supper either. Well then, after we got through eating we rested for a while. Then we go out there in the barn, clean down and bed them down. They had to be clean cows, dairy. So from then on I was working pretty steady, a dollar a day. So then, I bought myself a Model T Ford, a suit of clothes—a good suit of clothes for 15 dollars. Boy, I had that for a long time. You couldn't buy it for 250, now. I don't think they got the material even.

DW: Wool, right?

OB: Well, ya, a real good hard finish.

DW: Serge.

OB: Ya, that's what it was. Fifteen dollars. I know you couldn't get it for 250. In fact, they ain't got it.

DW: You're probably right.

OB: Then I had a Model T. I had a lot of fun with the Model T, Saturday nights. You could go out then with a couple of dollars in your pocket. Buy a few five cent beers.

DW: You could do pretty good on a dollar.

OB: Not to get drunk or nothing, you know. Then another guy had a couple of dollars...had a lot of good times. Now you have to have 100 dollars to do that. Gas, I don't remember, but it wasn't as much either, 17 cents a gallon or something.

DW: What year was the Model T?

OB: A '25 model and I bought it for 25 dollars. I can go any place where they couldn't go with a regular car.

They [regular cars] were low, get high center everywhere. There was no paved roads in those days. No streets out in the country, especially.

DW: This was still in Minnesota?

OB: Ya, I could drive through soft, muddy places with that Model T where you couldn't go through with a car. Big car—got stuck. I had a lot of good times with that Model T. So then I quit that place, and I went out to another dairy and I had my Model T. I went to work there for a while.

Well, then, I hired out for somebody downtown. They wanted somebody to work up in the tie mill, they called it. They make ties...you know, railroad ties. Way north of Duluth. Can't think of the name now. It was about 85 miles north up along the shore. So that was in the fall. Well, they had an old cook there and then they had double bunks in the bunk houses. A little, bitty mill with birch ties. You sawed some boards of the sides, one slab and then a board and then you turn it over—another board—and then you could make a six-inch tie. They were heavy, green board. One man to each tie to haul from there. Oh they were heavy. Then, the cook had to go to town. He was an old Dane, and he was a drunkard because he never came back. Well anyway, before he left, he asked me if I could cook for a couple of days. Oh ya, but that's about all. He never did come back so I stayed there about ten days to fifteen days, something like that. Oh I don't know I had about 25 days in all together.

Well then, that was the middle of April—that's what it was—and me and another guy that I knew from the dairy...He was with me and he was driving the truck, hauling some place—the lumber and all that—he quit too. He quit, and he talked me into going with him. “How about you and I going out to the coast?”

“Ya, we can do that.” Well, he had a home in North Dakota—a farm—but he had to go and earn a little money, so we took a freight. No, but anyway, we took off from the camp. We had about five or six miles to walk down to the highway.

DW: What had you done with your car?

OB: Well I didn't have a car, I sold that. So there was snow about that high up there—hard crust. You couldn't stomp yourself through it. Of course we walked on the road. Then we saw a moose coming, walked across, and the skin was all wore out on the legs. He walked two or three steps and was huffing and puffing, and then he walked two or three steps. “Well, what the hell is wrong with that moose?” Great big bull moose. We stood there watching her and pretty soon there was a police dog coming following him. Well, he was a pretty dog. He took off and then we kept walking, and then we stopped. “You know that was a wolf!”

“Gosh, let's go. Come on let's go!” Oh, we kept going, and we finally hit the highway. Could have been a bunch of them wolves. Well that's the only one that we saw though. He was after that moose. You know they hamstringing the moose so they can't go any place and then they kill it. So that's how it ended up. Well then, we got a ride into Duluth. Then we had a few dollars. So then we took off.

We took a freight train to North Dakota. Then there was a bus we took up to his home, a ranch home. He only had his mother, his dad had died, and two younger brothers. Well, they had an old lug-wheeled tractor to put in their crops. Oh, I stayed there about ten days with them. It didn't cost me nothing. They didn't charge me nothing. They didn't have much anyway. So finally we decided to pull out for the coast. So we took a freight train. Then we ended up in Montana over some place...I can't think of the name of it, they switched us off. Well then it was spring then, in May or something. But it was cold up there, but we had blankets. We sit down on the blankets, and we had a piece of candle. We lit that and kept warm with that candle, ya. Well, then we hitch-hiked down the highway—15 miles from Gold Creek. Then he decided to go back to North Dakota. Well, then I was all by myself. Then I had a suitcase and a passenger train come and I told them, "I'm going to ride out of here, I don't care what you say."

"Well, take your own chances," he said, "on the passenger train."

So I got in behind the engine on the step back there. Geez, I got cinders all over me. When I got to Missoula, well then, I went some place and washed up. Then I went back up to...No, I didn't go up to that gold mine then. I left the gold mine the second time because they got in troubles. They lost out. Well anyway, I can't think of it now where I did go. I went to work some place.

DW: You mentioned Philipsburg before.

OB: Ya, I think I went down to Philipsburg. I stayed there. I worked on farms then stacking hay and all that, harvest and so on.

DW: Do you remember the names of any of the farms or ranches around Philipsburg. Or of any of the ranchers?

OB: Oh ya, George Mungas up Rock Creek. Then Bill Stoddard, he was a millionaire—that Bill Stoddard. I ended up on a little sawmill down there to. I hayed for different guys up there in the summertime.

DW: What was the name of the guy up Rock Creek?

OB: George Mungas. Good place. Oh, I stayed mowing and haying. I was up there two or three different times. Oh, could be a couple of years between. Well, anyway, I went down to Oregon later on. He was one of the fellows when the war broke out—the Hitler war—he was on the draft board, and he drafted me. That was that, so I left then. I was in Philipsburg haying some place. I had to go in. I ended up in the army.

Had to go to Butte. Oh ya, ended up in Fort Douglas. Then the whistle would blow night and day. "Fall out, fall out." You would never know when they would blow the whistle. Then they would call two or three men or fifteen men or something. Could be 500 or 600 men there. "Get in the truck, get in the truck." Took them away. Well, pretty soon, my name was called...then I jumped

in the truck and I ended up in St. Louis, Missouri. Got into the Air Corps. So then I was there five months I think I got that on the recorder before. So I got discharged; I applied for a discharge. I was over 38 years old.

From then it was pretty good times. Then I went back to Washington. Then there was chain saws! Oh ya, modern. Well that didn't last long then either. Well, there were more strikes then, all the time. A fire broke out in the logging camp. We had to quit, fight fire for about three months I think. Over 15,000 or 20,000 acres.

Stayed with that, well then couldn't do no logging. So then we went to town and the next year they wanted us back to do some more logging off of that burned stuff. Oh god, I stayed there for a couple of weeks. Everything was black and ashes that deep. You got it all over you. You have to go in the showers, and it would take a half an hour to get all that off. Well, then I went down to Portland, Oregon. Then I ended up on cement work for some contractor in town. It was work then, here and there.

DW: Did you have a car again?

OB: No. Then it rained so bad you couldn't do any cement work either. So then I ended up working in a warehouse.

[End of Interview]