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Oral History Number: 052-005

Interviewee: Joe Hughes

Interviewer: Jo Rainbolt

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Jo Rainbolt: We'll see how it sounds. We'll see how it—

Joe Hughes: [unintelligible] I can read them. My own [referring to poems he's written] because I don't know them.

JR: You don't remember those.

JH: [unintelligible]

JR: How about "The Wandering Puncher"?

JH: [laughs] That's an old thing I wrote long...I never thought she'd even write that down.

JR: Okay, why don't you pick one out that you like?

JH: That's all right. Well, I can read that.

JR: Okay. And then we'll play it back and see how it sounds.

JH: "Just a wandering puncher in camp all alone. I'll bed myself down on the cold frozen ground and dream of the firesides I've known. And watch the moon rise in robes of pure gold. Her beauty will thrill so my heart it will fill until I've almost forgotten the cold. Just watching the stars and clouds rolling round, all drifting and flowing like they know where they're going like sheep drifting into the [unintelligible].

[Break in audio]

JR: Okay, this is a poem by [unintelligible] called "Quitter".

JH: Yeah, my [unintelligible].

JR: Okay, I'm ready whenever you are.

JH: "When you're lost in the wild and you're scared as a child and death looks you back in the eye. When you're sore as a boil, it's [unintelligible] to cock your revolver and die. But the code of a man says fight all you can and self-dissolution is barred. So in hardship and woe [unintelligible] as a blow is [unintelligible] served for breakfast that's hard. You're sick of the

game and now that's a shame, you're young and you're brave and you're bright. You've had a raw deal I know, but don't squeal, buck up, do your damndest and fight. It's the plugging away that will win you the day. So don't be a piker, old pard. Just draw on your grit, it's plumb easy to quit. It's keeping your chin up that's hard. It's easy to cry if you're beaten, and die. It's easy to crawfish and crawl, but to fight in a fight when the hope's out of sight, why that's the best game of them all. And though you come out of each grueling bout all broken and beaten and scarred, just have one more try, it's easy to die. Just keeping on living, that's hard." Now that's Service (?).

JR: It's a wonderful poem, Joe.

JH: Now, I call that poetry.

JR: I call that poetry too. When did you learn that?

JH: Oh, about the time he wrote it, I guess—30, 40, 50 years ago or so. Let's see...was I married then?

JR: Forty, fifty years ago.

JH: Fifty years or so ago.

JR: That was after you were through cowboying?

JH: Well, it's while I was. I think so. It had to be 60 years because I wasn't married yet then.

JR: It was more like—

JH: Sixty years ago or so. Yeah, that's right. About the time he wrote some of that stuff. I knew several of his, and I loved them. That niece that was here last weekend...See that thick book laying there, right there? That's Robert W. Service's poems. You know, he was an Englishman, and he's been...Canada and the north country's where he lived a lot. That's where he wrote a lot of that stuff. That's where he wrote all those, the "Spell of the Yukon" and—

JR: Oh, mostly cowboy things? Outdoor?

JH: No, no cowboy at all. He never wrote cowboy stuff. No, he never was...Well, he wrote some things had a little to do with it too, but not very much. It was all mountain men and—

JR: But it appealed to the cowboy?

JH: Well, it appealed to a guy...Well, like "The Shooting of Dan McGrew?" All those, remember? I know that one too, yeah.

JR: Would you recite that one for me?

JH: "Dan McGrew", gee whiz. [laughs] [unintelligible], what the heck. I haven't—

JR: Do you want me to look it up in the book?

JH: It's pretty long. No. I can think it up myself. If I do, I think I'd do better than trying to read it. Could read it, but I can recite that. I do better reciting it. Remembering, I can feel it better if I say it than reading it. Let's see... [pauses] Well, I know how it starts and everything, but I'm just thinking about as I go through. Maybe it'll come to me.

JR: Go ahead and try.

JH: I'll try it anyways. Is this—

JR: It's on. It's okay.

JH: Is this on?

"A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the Malamute Saloon (?). The kid that handled the music box was playing a ragtime tune. Back of the bar, in a solo game, that dangerous Dan McGrew. Watching his luck with his light-of-love lady that was known as Lou.

When out of the night that was 50 below and into the din and the glare, there stumbled a miner fresh from the creeks, dog dirty, and loaded for bear. He looked like a man with his foot in the grave with scarcely the strength of a louse, yet he tilted a poke of dust on the bar and then called for drinks for the house. There was no one could place the stranger's face, though we searched ourselves for a clue. I turned my head and there watching him was the lady that was known as Lou.

There are men somehow that just grip your eyes and hold them hard like a spell. Such was he, and he looked to me like a man who had lived in hell. With a face most hair and the dreary stare or a dog whose day is done, as he watered the green stuff in his glass, and the drops fell one by one. I got to figuring who he was and wondering what he—

[Break in audio]

His eyes went rubbering round the room. He seemed in a kind of a daze, but at last that old piano fell in the way of his wandering gaze. The rag-time kid was having a drink; there were no one else on the stool, so the stranger stumbled across the room and plopped down there like a fool. In a buckskin shirt that was glazed with dirt, he sat and I saw him sway. Then he clutched those keys with his talon hand—my god, but that man could play.

Was you ever out in the Great Alone, when the moon was awful clear, and the icy mountains hemmed you in with a silence that you could most hear. With only the howl of a timber wolf, and you camped there in the cold, a half-dead thing in a stark, dead world, clean mad for the muck called gold. While high overhead, green, yellow, and red, the north lights swept in bars. Then you've a hunch what the music meant: hunger and night and the stars.

Not a hunger of the belly kind that's banished with bacon and beans; the knowing hunger of lonely men for a home and all that it means. For a fireside far from the cares that are, four walls and a roof above, but oh, so cramful of cozy joy and crowned with a woman's love. A woman dearer than all the world and true as heaven is true. God, how ghastly she looks through her rouge, the lady that's known as Lou.

Then on a sudden the music changed, so soft that you scarce could hear. You felt that your life had been looted clean of all that it held most dear. That someone had stolen the woman you loved, and her love, the devil's lie. With your guts all gone, the best for you was to crawl away and die. It was a crowning cry of a heart's despair and it thrilled you through and through. "I guess I'll make it a spread misere," said dangerous Dan McGrew.

The music almost died away, then it burst like a pent-up flood. It seemed to say, "Repay, repay." My eyes went blind with blood. The thought rose up of an ancient wrong, and it stung like a frozen lash. The lust awoke to kill, to kill...then the music stopped with a crash. The stranger turned and his eyes, they burned, in the most peculiar way. In a buckskin shirt that was glazed with dirt, he sat and I saw him sway. His lips went in to a kind of a grin, he spoke, and his voice was calm, "Boys," said he, "You don't know me, and none of you care a damn. But I've this to state and my words are straight and I'll bet my poke they're true, that one of you here is a hound from hell and that one is Dan McGrew."

I ducked my head and the lights went out; two guns blazed in the dark. A woman screamed and the lights went up and two men lay stiff and stark. Pitched on his head and pumped full of lead was dangerous Dan McGrew while the man from the creeks lay clutched in the arms of the lady that was known as Lou.

Those are the simple facts of the case. I guess I'd ought to know. They say the stranger was crazed with hooch, and I'm not denying it's so. I'm not so wise as the lawyer guys, but strictly between us two, the woman that kissed him and pinched his poke was the lady that was known as Lou." [unintelligible] Now, that's quite a poem.

JR: Yeah, that's wonderful you remembered it all.

JH: I get a little screwy there but, by god, it's been—

JR: It all came back to you.

JH: Well, I think most of it. [laughs]

JR: Seventy years.

JH: Well, I've probably said it since that, but it's been all...well, that's been all of that or more since I've learned that way back.

JR: Are you 87 now?

JH: Yeah.

JR: And you were only 17 when you went over to the...

JH: Well, I was about 27 when I was married—26, 27.

JR: That was when your cowboying was all done?

JH: Pretty much. Well, I rode. Let's see, did I when [unintelligible]? No. The last—

JR: You ranched, but—

JH: I ranched [unintelligible] but I rode...I broke horse. I broke lots of broncs during the time I was riding ditch, the eight years that I rode this, boy, I broke a lot of horses. [unintelligible] I always had three or four extra horses to ride, you know, breaking horses all the time. I guess the last cowboying—took a trainload of cattle to Spokane and just before I was married for a cattleman here, yeah. I helped...my own brother was running the ranch where they raised these cattle up on the Lost Horse country...called Lost Horse Charlie they called him. He had all that range land in back there in that country, and he bought a bunch of beautiful short-horned steer, mostly steers. I think he was running steers. Several carloads. They loaded them up that fall. My brother, he was a little touchy about going out with them. He'd never...well, worked around ranches and things here, but he'd never been out with cattle much. Too much, not really with a big outfit. So he wanted to know if I'd...trying to get me and he got this foreman that...The owner would hire me to go with him with these cattle. I got off from the...got a man on my place from [unintelligible].

JR: Oh, you were riding [unintelligible] for the big ditch company?

JH: At that time, yeah. That's the same fall that...before I was married, that was '19. As I say, that's the last actual, you might say, cowboy stuff I done.

JR: That was the end of your batching days. [laughs] Joe, where did you first go when you left Hamilton to cowboy over in the plains.

JH: [unintelligible] the eastern part of the state.

JR: Yeah, that was your first.

JH: Yeah. I went to Hardin first. And I worked for some other jobs there before I went riding with the cow outfit. That's where one of your...that little mistake you made. You had kind of talked to me kind of [unintelligible], and I didn't know what you was putting down.

JR: And I quoted you.

JH: You said about...well, just talk about the ranches. I said the ranch was 25,000 acres. Well, that was bands of cattle you was talking about then. I remember 25,000 head of cows because I had worked for around 35,000 head of cattle.

JR: Your outfit in Hardin.

JH: Thirty-five thousand head, yeah. They had 137 brands. Bought out the cattle, bought the brands with it. That's how you get—

JR: What was the name of that outfit?

JH: That was the Antler spread, belonged to Heinrich (?). He belonged in Wyoming, but he was [unintelligible] how they came to be so much of them in the Crow [Reservation] as [unintelligible] because I was in the Crow. I only worked the one spring for him. I was cowboying for him, I got on that following spring when we lost so many cattle in the roundup.

JR: Right, but it was called the Antler spread, but did the seller live in Wyoming?

JH: The Antlers was their brand because Wyoming—

JR: He didn't even live here. He lived in Wyoming?

JH: No, he lived in Wyoming, but he had a [unintelligible]—

JR: He must have been German. His name was Heinrich?

JH: Well, I think he was. Yeah! He was. He even talked broken. I rode with him. He rode on the [unintelligible].

JR: He would come up and—

JH: Came here and helped.

JR: —worked the outfit, but he lived in—

JH: [unintelligible] men—riders and cowboys—but he wasn't here all the time. But he come looking over the deal that spring, he lost so many cattle through this Bighorn country and all the way down by the thousands.

JR: What were they dying? Was it drought?

JH: Starvation. Starved. Nothing to eat.

JR: Rangeland and—

JH: Blizzards, and they drifted off of their feed ground and drifted into the river bottoms and the creek bottoms, and piled up there was a little brush or anything that they could eat. They just died. They were in the little coulees that had a little brush in or anything like that there. They found them everywhere [unintelligible] spring.

JR: And that was your first year cowboying?

JH: Well, I was 17 then, I'd been breaking broncs and driving cattle. I drove 300 head of cattle through the Bitterroot since I was a kid.

JR: Yeah, I'm talking about over in the eastern part of the state on the big plains—

JH: Yeah, that was the first one.

JR: —where they ran so many cows.

JH: Yeah, that's right. [unintelligible] took 200 head of cattle through the Bitterroot. I drove lots of cattle through the valley before they had trucks. [unintelligible] horse or two you could always get a little something to do.

I stayed in Darby, took care of a bunch of cattle. I was driving them through, and you got to be a pretty good hand—in fact it was a damn sight harder work working on these little spreads. They get one man to do a lot of stuff, and you [unintelligible]. That was harder work than it was working for a big outfit if you was riding.

Now, that thing is [unintelligible] off again pretty quick. Maybe it won't.

JR: No, it's fine. It's not too noisy.

Well, you worked for that great big spread, and then they didn't own a lot of property. They just grazed their cows.

JH: No, they didn't...Now, that there outfit did pay for their lease. See, they were leasing Crow land, see? That was a different deal down there.

JR: So they paid for their place.

JH: They were paying the Indians. That was Crow Indian land. That was the Crow Indian reservation. Heinrich had most all of the reservation leased at that time, yeah.

JR: Did Heinrich have a main cookhouse, bunkhouse?

JH: Well, their main spread was in Wyoming. I never was even over there.

JR: Right, so what did he have here?

JH: He came over [unintelligible] had a chuck wagon over here when he was around. They'd have a chuck wagon, and some of the crew. Boy, his men were, they were quitting and everything because their horses were starving to death and everything. They didn't have horses enough to ride. Some of the boys that rode...Now, I happened to be breaking horses for an Indian and hired this Indian and hired me with the Indian and he furnished horses. So that's how we got horses enough. The Indian had plenty of horses.

JR: Oh, the Indian was your friend, and he furnished the horses.

JH: Well, I was working for him to start with. The outfit hired the Indian and me with him because I could get a change of horses every day, see. The Indian horse I would break them because I could get...He had about 100 head of horses.

JR: Well, that's one of the things that confuses me. You worked for different people at the same time? You were working for the Indian—

JH: Well, I worked for the outfit then, but this Indian, I was breaking horses for him—with him—for horses. Something like I did with Old Coyote, when I lost the horse. But this guy didn't. His name was Real Bird, Mark Real Bird. He's the one that taught me the Crow language too. He's the one who taught me to talk Crow.

JR: Mark Real Bird, and he's the one that provided the horses because you broke the horses.

JH: I was breaking horses for him, see? I'd break three and get one.

JR: Sounds like an interesting life.

JH: Oh boy, it was.

JR: Now when did you work for the fellow that you lost the horse that you worked so hard to get?

JH: Well, that was...Well, that was that same fall—late in the fall.

JR: You crammed a lot into that first year.

JH: That's right. Yes, I did.

JR: That was the same fall that you went to work to get your horse.

JH: [unintelligible sentence]. Fall of '11. Yeah.

JR: Did you go over in 1911 or 1910?

JH: Yeah, I left the early spring of 1911 here. See, and come back here from Deerlodge on crutches. I was crippled up then. I had to get some more of that kind of stuff, so—

JR: You were crippled up from rodeoing?

JH: Well, no, from breaking horses. The ranch were we went to work there in Deerlodge, why, I got busted up breaking horse there. The bronc, we were breaking him to work, and there was a few there to ride too but I never did get around to ride any of them. But Warren, my pal, did later.

Big old outlaw...they was harnessing them in the stall, he cracked a couple of ribs on me in the stall. Got me kind of smashed up. Then I had typhoid fever. I was developing fever all the time even before I...I wasn't eating, was half sick, and finally one morning I couldn't get up. I got up and I fell up, and I couldn't get up to stand up and get my clothes on. [laughs]

JR: How'd you get typhoid fever?

JH: Well that was when I was working on the Stevensville Bench, and I figured that drinking water out of an old well. We never give it a thought those days but we knew later that's what caused it.

JR: Well, did you get over it completely? Isn't it one of those things—

JH: Well, I pretty near did after a long time. I was in there from July to November in the hospital and come out on crutches. In November, yeah. I passed my 17th birthday in the hospital. Yeah.

Then I come back home for a while that fall. Then I was helping the old man on a slop wagon hauling slop for pigs and rolling barrels onto a wagon, one thing or another, and using the crutches to get around with. Boy, I really went to work when I got back to the ranch I'll tell you. Didn't last long. I got played out there pretty quick. I fell out with him again, just got home in late November, and I pulled out again in December, just a little a while. Just a few days before Christmas I left home again, and I went out on the Willow Creek Ranch, helping the guy haul rocks with a team out of a field. Clearing rocks off a field they were going to plant orchards to. On a big ranch up on top of the hill that's still there—big old place.

Then I got hurt again. That's where I broke my neck out there.

JR: How'd you break your neck?

JH: Well, that was the bronc—

JR: Another horse accident.

JH: [unintelligible] icy road and fell.

JR: Is that why you old live so long because you survived all the—

JH: Yeah, that's just it. Survived everything.

JR: If you didn't die young, you lived to be an old age. Because, gee, that's amazing, Joe. You broke your neck. What did they do to you then? Put you in a body cast?

JH: No, there was nobody, there was no doctors, nobody to go to. I just carried my head cocked over to one side. I don't know which side was cocked—this way I think. One side or the other. It laid over there to one side. I couldn't straighten my neck most of the winter, but I could still work and drive a team.

JR: With your head flopped over on your neck?

JH: Yeah. Hurt like hell. I used to rub it and twist it and try to straighten it.

JR: Well, it's straight now.

JH: Well, yeah, but—

JR: [laughs] You're lucky.

JH: —later on, I stayed at the ranch, I never knew it was broke. I knew it was kicked or hurt, but I thought, well, it'll straighten up towards spring all right. [laughs]

Yeah, went up to the ranch at home, well, about a year before [unintelligible] come to town I think, why, my neck had got hurt and I blamed the...well, I thought it was from cocking my head sideways looking at TV in the house at home. All of a sudden it started paining and so I got so I hurt like the devil [unintelligible] twisted and all that kept it kinked again. So I went to see a doctor then. Went to see [unintelligible]. So of course, right away the first thing he did was X-ray. He says, "When did you break your neck?"

JR: Oh my gosh! But they found that out like in 1950s, right?

JH: Yeah, something like that. Oh, it was later than that. Yeah, it was later than that. See, it was spring of 1911 when it happened—the winter of 1911—'10 and '11. Late winter, towards spring. With my neck broke, I had no business riding at all. I hadn't rode any broncs. I hadn't done any riding by the time I'd been in the hospital is all, but it made me so darn mad. A guy got a horse to break that was working there on the place. He was supposed to be quite a bronc buster, and I kidded him a little—it made me so sore. He got a colt to ride for a fellow, you know, was going to break it. Brought it up there, and what does he do, but—the Cayuse was a little [unintelligible]—he strapped a dummy on it and put it in the barn there. Turned the poor darn Cayuse with a dummy on him in the barn, let him run and tear around the barn. That's the way he was going to break him.

JR: I've never heard of that.

JH: A straw dummy. Fixed up a dummy like a man. They'd lash it onto the saddle, and have it wrapped up around and have a body built on it.

JR: But you didn't like that?

JH: Well, I didn't like the idea of them doing it. I just started [unintelligible], I said, "If you're going to break a horse, why in the hell wouldn't you get on him and ride him and bug him out and get it over with." That's all there was too it. That's all there was. I broke a horse, even broke my damn neck on it. [laughs]

He said, "Well," he said, "you think there's a better way to do it, go ahead." [laughs]

JR: [laughs] You did, and you broke your neck.

JH: So I did, then the day the horse fell...he was bucking on the ice, and his feet went out from under him. In them days, it was sleighs. They'd been sleighs up and down the roads. No cars at that time. Well, there was cars I guess. That was in...well, I don't know. Yeah, there was some cars, a few cars. I think a few cars in the valley [unintelligible]. But it was mostly sleighs in the winter they used to use. This horse bucked out of the yard, and he hit this where the road kind of went by, going up to Willow Creek Bench Road. And he hit the ice where the sleighs had

been going, and down he went. I plowed into the fence with my head. My horse piled up too, you know. So I had my head caught to one side.

JR: It's funny you didn't damage your brain.

JH: But this time, after he took those X-rays, he told me the materials and things to get and then wear one of those collars. I wore one of those collars all that winter.

JR: Fifty years later.

JH: Yeah, well, 60 years later. Just about. Then I had a pulley and a rigging to go around my neck, hooked onto my jaw and pulled my head up. Every night, or every time I had a [unintelligible] a day, or every time as long as I could stand it, kept me in that kind of a deal at home. Set me with a pulley and about 15-pound weight on it. Just almost enough to lift me off a chair.

JR: Wow! So that helped your neck?

JH: Yeah, and it kind of goes around. It did really. It stopped paining after a while. The growth or something around those bones, well, he just seen those bones that were broke, were cracked, showed on the X-rays. Showed him. This one broke clear off, but—

JR: When did you start writing poems, poetry?

JH: Poetry? Well, first thing is I was a kid going to school, I'd scratch little things like that. The first one I remember when I was—I don't know—when I was 17 years old, I guess. Old Matt [unintelligible] used to live up on the [unintelligible] used to catch lions to ship to those museums. He made a little money that way in the early times when there was lots of lions. He had this lion—he'd eat the bait, and he got in the trap but he drug the trap with him. He went up a tree. So old Matt, he went up with the tree and crawled out on the limb with the lion backed up, chopped the limb off and dropped him into a box. [laughs] Old boy, he was a nervy old boy.

But didn't tell him about it, you know, and he said he had a big chunk of fat meat that the lion seemed to like and liked to eat the fat. He was telling it, and I sat down and wrote...I was just able to write. The time I could write a little something. So I just said, "The lion jumped from the trap to the tree, and he says, 'Old Matt, I'll eat all the fat that you put in the trap for me.'" [laughs] That was my first poem.

JR: [laughs] That was your first poem. Terrific!

JH: [unintelligible sentence]. The lion told him he'd eat all the fat he'd put in the trap for him.

[Break in audio]

JR: I'm putting this on tape too. Did a lot of the cowboys write poems?

JH: No, I don't think so. If they did, they were like me, they didn't say much about it.

JR: Kept it to themselves.

JH: I did used to [unintelligible]. I said, well...used to more or less ridicule people for it. That was an awful habit of the early day cowboys to more or less...well, ridiculed everything kind of what they considered sissified, you know. Even somebody educated, they made...I'll have to tell you a poem that has to do with educated people pretty soon. They really...like these dudes outfits, they was a dude outfit then, it was the Eaton outfit, I think, one of the earliest dude outfits in the state. They had a cow outfit out there in the Little Bighorn country over on the [unintelligible]. They furnished chairs and they had tables and they set up and they had extra men to help these dudes. People would come out an pay them to stay with them, and they worked with the cattle.

JR: Oh, early dude outfit?

JH: Yeah. They used to call them the "soapies." They was always so clean. They used soap all the time. [laughs] [unintelligible] called that the soapy outfit. Sure, the soapies.

JR: The real cowboys didn't have a chance to take that baths.

JH: Well, we didn't have no soap.

JR: Didn't even have any soap? That's terrific. I've never heard that before. Soapies.

JR: Sure, they called them the soapies. They were kind of kidding.

JR: Well, what did they think about somebody like Charlie Russell that was an artist?

JH: Well, at that time, Russell wasn't so famous so they did think a lot of him.

[break in audio]

—famous. That one they used to talk about, that was the one mostly in them days that they did talk about, that *Last of Ten Thousand* [*Last of Five Thousand*]. That was pretty well known around the range country, and they talked about it. *Last of Ten Thousand* or *Waiting for Chinook*. They had a couple of different names for it.

JR: You didn't meet him did you, Joe?

JH: No, I never did. I can't lie as good as a lot of these guys, so I never met him.

JR: That claim that they met him. [laughs]

JH: Lot of them younger than me, they worked with him and everything. Even those guys in the Bitterroot that had been around that Great Falls, they knew Charlie Russell.

JR: They knew him well. [laughs]

JH: He was always good for some of those old buzzards for a drink or two. I went over into Great Falls a few times, and went to a bar where he [unintelligible], something on the wall, got looking at some of these paintings or pictures or something because they were all over Great Falls about every place you go in. You won't be there long, somebody will size you up a little, "He was a great guy, wasn't he?"

"Yeah, oh yeah. He was a great guy."

"Sure like Charlie."

[laughs] They all knew him. Everybody knew him, yeah.

JR: He must have known 10,000 cowboys.

JH: They wasn't dry behind the ears, but they rode with Charlie Russell, yeah, sure. I just got kind of a kick out of it.

JR: Now, what about the poem that you were going to tell me about the educated—

JH: Educated fellow. Just remind me, there was a schoolteacher come down and recite that in the school over here one time to these school kids over here. I told them they wouldn't be interested...I didn't want to...This teacher, but I knew his kids better than he knew them. "Oh, they'll be really something."

Those kids...I never went to school very much, but I knew how kids are. I couldn't see me going, talking to a bunch of educated kids, why, what the heck? I knew it was foolish because they didn't...I told him, "I'll answer questions if they had anything to do with range life or early day life." But I did recite that poem. They liked it all right. He took that down on the recorder too. He recorded it. It had to do with...well, it was an early day... you can tell about the time it come out was during the Spanish American War because he mentioned it to me.

Anyway,

The wagon was camped in the bottom out along the Cimeron (?), when in there dropped a stranger, one morning just at dawn. We asked about his breakfast, and of course he hadn't been, so we opened up the chuck box and told him to dig in. Well, he's such an educated feller, his talk just came in a herd. He was [unintelligible] all us cowboys with all his jaw-breaking words. He eat a pan of biscuits and some bacon and some beans, then began to talk about the foreign kings and queens. He told about them fighting with ships upon the seas with guns as big as beef steers and ramrods big as trees. He told about old Dewey, that old fighting son, he said he was the bravest cuss that ever pulled a gun. Well, he talked and talked and talked until the boys got kind of sick, thought they'd figure out a way that they could play a trick. Well, he said he lost his job up close to Santa Fe, was drifting cross country to hit the [unintelligible]. He didn't say what was the matter, but some trouble with the boss. He asked us if we'd lend him a fresh, fat saddle horse. Well, some boys run in the cabin and laughed down in their sleeve, said they'd lend him a saddle horse as fresh and as fat as he pleased. Well, Shorty grabbed a lasso and he roped old [unintelligible], turned him over to the stranger and stepped back to see the fun. Well, old Dunny was a rocky outlaw that had grown so awfully wild that he'd plow the white out of the moon for a quarter of a mile. But now he stood quite gentle as if he didn't know that the stranger had him saddled and was fixing for to go. When the stranger stepped aboard, old Dunny quit the earth, traveled straight up toward the moon for all that he was worth. We could see the top of the trees under Dunny's belly every jump, but that stranger he just rode there just like a camel's hump. He spurred him in the shoulders and he whipped him as he whirled, just to show us plunky punches that he's a [unintelligible] for all the world. When old Dunny was all through pitching and the stranger had to step down, the rest of us tame punchers come gathering up around. Said the boss, 'If you throw a lasso like you rode old Zebra Dun, you're the cowboy I've been looking for ever since the year '01.'

'Well, I can throw a lasso and neither do I do it slow. I'll get the four pins nine times out of ten for any kind of dough.'"—So I'm going to put a little something on there. I'm going to add something to it, and I'll tell you about it later.—

"Now throw your bed on the wagon and cut you out a string. You can take your pick of the [unintelligible], you can have most anything. But there's one thing sure and certain I've learned since I've been born. 'Tis that educated fellows aren't all greenhorn.'"—

Now that last verse, I want to tell you. That's mine. I added to it because it didn't sound like it finished right to me. Went years and years and years and years, but I never heard it...And it used to finish right there, and it didn't have that last verse on. See, the boss had told him that he was the puncher he was looking for when he said he could throw a rope so he could get the four feet nine out of ten—course, that made him to be a pretty good hand. So then he told him to take his pick of the [unintelligible] and throw his bed on the wagon and stay there and give him a job, don't you see? Otherwise, the poem used to end practically right there. It used to be...yeah, "for any kind of dough," so that was all. Now, who said it or why it was said...course it sounded like the guy telling, "Then if there's one thing sure and certain, I've learned since I've been born, 'tis that educated fellows ain't all greenhorns." That was the end of the poem that I

put in there. See, the foreman told him then, he said, after he told him that he could do this roping and then he said he'd hired him, he said, "Throw your bed on the wagon and pick you out a string and give them your pick of the cavvy (?)"—of all the horses—he said, "you can have most anything."

JR: Right. Do you know who wrote the poem?

JH: No, I don't. By god, I don't know no more nothing...nothing about those old—

JR: I think it's wonderful that you remember all those poems, Joe.

JH: [unintelligible] never have the least idea.

JR: Do you have a favorite poem?

JH: Well, I'll tell you one of my favorites really. It has to do with the old saloons. Maybe because I could always get a good drink. [laughs]

JR: Yeah, you're such a drinking man. [laughs]

JH: Well, I drank my share. But it told a life kind of sort of, but I don't know, it's pretty long and it's...I wouldn't put it down on anything for anybody...I think I had it, but she didn't print it. Maybe I told her not to. I didn't want it to go on that.

JR: Why not? Is it X-rated?

JH: Well, it probably would be. I don't know. But there's a guy in Helena here back 40, 50 years ago that said he printed it, and hell, he wasn't as old as I was and I don't think he did because I think I knew it before he was born according to his age at the time. Never did know where it come, but it was an educated fellow that wrote it, that's a sure thing.

Anyway, I don't know...I believe you'd understand it, but I don't think I can tell it to you. I don't tell a lot, but—

JR: Do you want me to turn the tape recorder off?

JH: No, you can tape it if you want to.

JR: But you don't want it—

JH: Because it's rated pretty good. It has been printed since—

JR: But you don't want it used if it's on a radio show, or you don't care?

JH: No, I don't care.

JR: Okay, go ahead then. It's a saloon poem?

JH: More or less. It's about the old bars, old saloons, [unintelligible]. If I can remember it, [unintelligible], I'll try because it's pretty long.

"By the trails in the pass on the plains of nowhere, was Shorty's Saloon, but now it's not there. For Shorty moved camp across the Divide. The years long gone and nothing besides. A deep brand of memory brings back the old place with the drinks [unintelligible] and many a face. Looks out on the mists of the days that have fled, when Shorty sat back of his bar there and said, 'What's your's, cow pard?'

There are no fine drinks there are in this primitive bar, just liquor was heard and that seemed by far the properest stuff in the place you'll agree where life floated in like the tides on the sea. Unfettered by care or measured by time or innocent [unintelligible] first friendship with crime. And vacuous wild court held ribalderous sway, and Shorty on shift and waiting to say, 'What's your's, pard?'

[pauses] Great herds from the south swept by on the trail, and stages sped westward top heavy with mails. For camps far beyond where gold's [unintelligible] and freighters with bull teams sent whirlwinds of dust. They scattered and spread far out on the plains, and those men from the wild, the men from those trains, all stopped there, you see, and Shorty's brief welcome to each one would be, 'What's your's, pard?'

And up from the vast silent stretch of the range from lime camps and roundups and all of the strange, lone places in cowland, men came there to play. And that drama whose artists all lived by the way. There's skyline of life leaves crimson and gold, where hope gave them wealth and youth made them bold and strong in life's strife to dare any task and whiskey was there and Shorty would ask, 'What's your's, pard?'

Well, they danced and they drank and they sang that old song, "I'm just a poor cowboy. I know I've done wrong." Well, the click of the chips and the games that were played, and the sob in the music the violins made rang out through the smoke that clouded the room, for joy was top hand and drowned all gloom. What the future might hold for those who made gay, and life filled with sun beams when Shorty would say, "What's your's, pard?'

Some tragedies mar those trails of the past, some lone unmarked graves [unintelligible] of the last, and the story of those who lived 'ere the chain and the wild free life of the borderless range. Yet memories kind [unintelligible] falls gently to place when the drinks and the games and many face looks out on the mists of the days that have fled when Shorty stood back of his bar there and said, 'What's your's, pard?'

'Whiskey. I'll drink to that.'" [laughs]

I wonder if they [unintelligible] in the...That makes me want a drink.

Look it here.

JR: Sure! You better have it.

JH: I got some dice here. [laughs]

JR: That's enough for a shot, Joe. Here, "What's your's, pard?"

We better share it. I better turn the tape recorder off.

[Break in audio]

JR: Okay, here's a cowboy toast.

JH: Here's to the bronc that throwed me so high that my back bone scraped the deep blue sky.
Here's to old earth where when I fell come down from heaven like a bat out of hell.

There it is.

JR: It's okay. You won't get struck by lightning if you say hell.

JH: No, but if you get talking in cowboy language, that could get into most anything.

JR: Oh yeah, and you like to watch your language when there's ladies present, right, Joe?

JH: Right.

JR: I better be careful to watch my language too if we start having toasts. [laughs]

JH: See, I was thinking about what you told me a while ago, a short one that I just now
[unintelligible] I thought of it.

JR: Go ahead.

JH: It's kind of put together...I don't know [unintelligible] different poems, I guess it's my own.
Let's see...

“Across the plain the trails are lain, gone with the brand new fire. The prairie’s wild are tame and mile, all close corralled with wire. We dream back beyond the cramping lanes and glories that have been. The camp smoke on the sunset plains and the riders loping in. Loose rein and [unintelligible], the wind our only guide, but youth was in the saddle there with half a world to ride.”

JR: That’s one of your poems.

JH: No, but I don’t know where it come from. Just kind of mixed. I might have added a little to it. I don’t know. I mixed them up a little. I took some out.

That other poem, if you ever do see that, it’s printed. It’s been printed. I know since that...“what’s your’s, pard?” If you ever read it, you’ll see where...you’ll find where I made little changes in that too. Couple lines I didn’t like, I just took them out and put something else.
[laughs]

JR: That’s the mark of a true artist.

JH: That’s right. Well, I don’t know—

JR: Sure, you’re creative. You got to make things your own.

JH: I made it so it sounded different anyway, a little better. I didn’t like the little...there’s enough lines in it to make it [unintelligible] anyway.

JR: Joe, why don't we get down on tape the time you're in the saloon with that fellow that was getting a little wild. That said he was a wolf.

JH: Bill Anderson, or Bill Anderson...well, I have no idea. Well that's when I was working for the Horseshoe Bar cow outfit then. The Horseshoe Bar, I could tell you a little of the history of that setup. The Horseshoe Bar and the PN outfit were both running cattle at [unintelligible] and Musselshell country all of '15.

JR: In the Musselshell country?

JH: Musselshell country.

JR: Did you like that country?

JH: [unintelligible]. Yes, I did. I liked it.

JR: Big country.

JH: That's why...she was a big country then. They were just starting to homestead it. In fact, a fellow that I went through up in that country—packed his horses, packed through with a string of horses in '13—I had a horse so we took it up there. I done the packing. I'd only been on his place a few days when this boss over at the Roundup with the wagon, [unintelligible], he was a wagon boss for the Horseshoe Bar. He come by to pick me up at the place; he was looking for riders, they were short.

JR: Was pretty easy to get a job if you were a good cowboy, good wrangler.

JH: Yeah, that's right, if you was willing to stand the weather. I know that's about the first thing he said, he said, "Well, the guy that's...just made a trip across country like you fellows have—cold weather and snow and everything—wouldn't be a sissy like some of those guys I got down there." He said every time they come out with a drive of cattle, why, a lot of the guys wouldn't want to go back. They'd hole up or hide out or something because it's getting too cold.

JR: What did you wear to keep warm?

JH: Oh hell, you had clothes that you could stay out and sleep in the snow anywhere, yeah.

JR: Just wool?

JH: Well, of course, I had wool...well, we pretty near all did have wool chaps, but most everybody had chaps, leather chaps. But you wore heavy wool underwear all the time. They was heavy...we used to wear them year-round.

JR: Did you have any black wool underwear like the loggers wear?

JH: Well, red, or they had different colors—even greyish. But all wool.

JR: One piece.

JH: Yeah, I've still got a couple of suits out in my...haven't wore them since I come into town because I ain't outdoors very much. Used to be outdoors all the time.

JR: How'd you keep your hands and your feet warm?

JH: Well, you had gloves—you wore gloves or mitts or something. Mitts were all right until you get your fingers out of them. Course, they were no good if you had to do anything—rope or anything. They'd get cold. You could get boot overshoes. Sometimes the guys had them, but if it got real cold, we used to kick...If you had old, dry boots that didn't have any oil in them at all, you could kick them in the water when it was real cold. It would freeze a coating of ice over them, and that'd kind of make them air tight. Stick them in the stirrups, your feet could ride all day that warm.

JR: With ice on them?

JH: Yeah, you had a coating of ice on the outside of them, make them air tight.

JR: How about your ears?

JH: Well, you had your handkerchief over your ears.

JR: Oh sure, you wore your handkerchief over your ear.

JH: That's why you wore your big handkerchief, yeah.

JR: So you looked like an outlaw, right?

JH: Made use of that handkerchief, why, they wondered why guys got a habit of wearing those handkerchiefs so much. Guy wore them all the time. Pull them up over your face and over your ears.

JR: Handkerchief was a mighty handy thing, wasn't it?

JH: Oh, you bet your life. I've even...[unintelligible] nice, silk handkerchief, but one time, I'd come to [unintelligible] to ride a bronc...no use going into detail on it. I wanted some string or piece of cord or rope or something to tie my spurs down. That used to worry a guy, used to worry me a little...[unintelligible] used to worry me a little, my spurs would get...sometimes they'd turn up on your heels, pull up against your legs—kind of the back. If you happened to go down like that, then your spur would catch and turn up. When you was fouled up, you couldn't use that spur then. It'd be fouled up because it was hanging on your heel [unintelligible]. You couldn't get it loose. Well, if you was depending on that spur [unintelligible], grab you, might be in trouble. So I used to tie them down if I knew I was in for some rough riding.

But later, most of the time, I had a strap made...Have you ever wore spurs?

JR: No.

JH: Well, used to take a piece of strap about so long, or longer, or just split it back about halfway in. Then it put it on over your shank of your spur, and then pull it in around your heel and buckle it at one end so you could pull it tight. Well, if you had that on your spurs already, why you was fixed for riding broncs, but you didn't wear it all the time. Just for riding broncs.

Well, we didn't have them straps with the buckle so I would usually take a string and tie your spurs so they wouldn't get up. Well, [unintelligible] a handkerchief come in handy so I took a good handkerchief and rip her in two pieces because silk was good and tough. It was strong enough, but it spoiled a good handkerchief. We do things like that.

JR: Put it to a good purpose.

JH: Yeah. [pauses] Well, anyway, that...both before I got there that fall...See, I was only on one drive there after...one drive. Then I went with the wagon back into the brakes, and they were putting the cattle back and [unintelligible] pretty near Christmas after that last drive of cattle—beef. They'd brought out, I think either...I don't know, shipped two or three trainloads of beef that fall. They had those drives before. Well, the Horseshoe Bar and the PN Wagon had both...well, that's how the deputies happened to be there. Both wagons hit the town once with the first drive they made, they done it purposely. The two outfits [unintelligible] in order to have a lot of guys there, they have a lot of fun, I guess, together. Well, they raised so much hell around the town that arranged after that that only one wagon would hit the town one week, another wagon the next week. [laughs] They didn't want so many of them in town at once. Well, they didn't [unintelligible] shot things up a little, I guess. I wasn't there then, but as I say, when the two wagons were in. But one of the guys told me that they brought all the vegetables they had and they got into kind of a fuss between the two outfits. One of them [unintelligible], and then they got throwing eggs—all the eggs that the stores had—and threw them on one another across the street. [laughs] They plastered the town pretty bad, I guess.

Anyway, they raised quite a little hell around there.

JR: They'd been on the prairie a long time.

JH: Well, they hadn't been out so much [unintelligible]. Of course, it was—

JR: They just went a little crazy when they got to town.

JH: Well, they was going out with those guys with the wagon, it wasn't like a long drive or something. They went out and rounded up a few cattle scattered through the...because they drove the cattle right up into [unintelligible], and then it was just open range—all the country was open around. They just turned loose what they cut again when they cut again, then they just picked the beef out there and let the others go. Went back for another bunch of cows, see? But then all this cattle was scattered all over that country, then were all gathered later and put back on another part of the range for winter range. Kept most of the riders for that. They let a lot of them go right after that last roundup.

But anyway, when they set then...when they got from Billings or...where they come I'm not sure, Miles City maybe, some of them...Anyway, they had deputies there every time the wagons come in—they knew when they were coming in. So they had deputies there, and if the guys got a little bit uproarious, why, they run them in until the wagon went out. Just hold them...kept the wagon there a few days until they got these cattle all loaded and gathered—loaded a trainload up. Because they kept the wagon right there.

Well, I got pretty uproarious there when I thought they'd stolen my coat. I was even...[unintelligible] pretty bad. That was the first time I got money enough to buy a good coat—bought a good wool mackinaw. I was needing that for the winter anyway. So I bought that, but it was too warm to wear it in the evening around. I went up and left it after we'd turned our horses loose—we just afoot, the wagon was out on the end of the sidewalk out aways there, not too far from the shipping corral. I left this coat, threwed it in the bull tent on the bed—bedroll. Gosh, it got chilly a little later, just about dark when I went back to...on the way back to the camp I passed one of the cowboys [unintelligible], kind of big guy we called him [unintelligible] was his name. He was with the outfit. He'd been with them some time. He was laying off to the side of the...there was a sidewalk went out there for a ways. I was on the sidewalk, but he was laying off to the sidewalk kind of, in the gutter, and it was starting to spit rain. That's when I decided I'd get this coat too. It was raining, and he was laying there on his back. He was wallowing around, trying to get up, I guess, but he was just wallowing around. Didn't seem to be able to get up. So I finally helped him up. And he was cussing everything and everybody, "Oh, them sons of "b"s." Oh, he was cussing...he thought some of them other cowpunchers...

I, "What's the matter, [unintelligible]? What's the matter with you? What are you cussing about?"

"Well, some son of a "b" is pissing in my face." [laughs] Some of the other cow punchers—

JR: [laughs] and it was raining.

JH: [unintelligible] But them's the kind of things that happen.

JR: Did you get your jacket back that was stolen?

JH: Well, I did. Well, that's when the hid it on me.

JR: They hid it on you?

JH: Get out of the wagon and [unintelligible] get my coat, and my coat was gone. Boy, I was kind of mad. I went, "What the devil!" I though first of all, they put it somewhere and I went looking all around. The cook was there. I went in the chuck wagon, or the tent where the cook was, and asked him. "Well," he said, "there's been some of the boys around. And some of them putting on, getting slickers and things with rain, and went back to town."

But there was nobody there at the time I was there. He didn't know. He didn't think anybody wore it away. I just thought someone must have stole my coat. Of course, he—the cook—he wasn't really wise to what...he might have been to—

[End of Interview]