

Interview with Ed and Opal Patzke, May 10, 2000

Interview by Eliza Buck from the Oregon Arts Commission

Ed Patzke, born in Indiana, came to Bly in 1935, did from time to time leave for a month or so. Worked in the sawmill for 15 years, worked in the shipyards and had their own business for about 30 years. Retired 20

Came to Bly on a freight train from Minnesota, had an aunt and uncle here named Protsman. He was a good carpenter. A lot of the buildings are still here.

I came with another young fellow from Minnesota. We planned to stop in Bly for two weeks, and then go on to Las Vegas, and then get on the boats, at the coast, and go. The other fellow went on to Vegas. He decided it was too cold in OR and too hot in Vegas so he went back to Minnesota. Had a wife and twin boys that all died.

I lived here all this time and don't want to go anywhere else. Protsman built the grocery store here. They came in 1928 or 29 from Minnesota.

Went to Ag school for one year before coming to Bly. I was 20 years old when I came here.

Opal came to Bly in 1934. I came here all my school years in Keno, Worden and Doris. My parents came from LA. I was born there. They came to Worden. I started my 8th grade, in Bly, and finished here. Opal's father's name was Thomas J. Saunders and he was a saw filer and timber faller. Mother Lottie was a homemaker. They usually lived out in the woods at one of the logging camps. Logs were hauled to the Crane Mill. The kids had to be driven to school and after about a year they moved to town. They lived in two cabins that were connected in the middle. When they moved to town they hauled the cabins on logging trucks. They had an early day mobile home. Moved the cabins up by where the grade school is. Opal's folks built the two-story house that Dean and Marty Lawrence live in now. The CCC camp was right across the road. They had barracks built with room for beds, had 260 people. They built, F.S. offices, and the Sprague River Park. Ed knew a lot of them and they would invite Ed to eat with them and play basketball. Ed refereed games around here. Ed played basketball for 20 years. Opal played basketball also. Ruth Obenchain was one of Opal's teachers.

How did they meet? Ed was working for his uncle shingling a roof. He threw a shingle at her. He said hello sunshine and that got me. Opal was 16 when they got married. Got married in 1938. 62 years the 14 of May.

What was Bly like? Bly was mostly a tent city back then. They called it a rag town. People would usually leave before the mill shut down and go into Klamath Falls to sign up for relief. There was no unemployment insurance at that time.

Bly used to have a dentist and had a fake doctor at one time. He left town in the night. There was a drugstore, a men's store, and a laundry. There were two newspaper printed here. One was in business about a month and the other just a little longer. It was a very good place to live. You could get a beefsteak for \$0.25 to \$0.30 per pound. The stores would buy the meat and cut it right here. At one time there was an Ice plant here, rooming houses, hotel, and three grocery stores. This was before Opal and Ed were married. Ed thinks there were at least five that sold groceries; there were also 4 that sold gas. Tikkanen's, and there were 2 Shell stations and one Chevron.

Eliza asked if the back part of Leonardo Antique Shop was the oldest building in town. Back part probably is. They think it was built in 1899. Ed and Opal bought it and joined the two together. They lived in the back part. It used to be a grocery store and meat plant. They later bought the grocery store across the street that was built by Ed's Uncle Slim Protsman. Hwy 140 was then hwy 66. It was changed to Hwy 140, known as the Winnemucca to the Sea in the late 50s or early 60s. This wasn't the famous route 66. It just

went to Lakeview. Hwy 66 goes from Klamath Falls to Ashland still.

How was it owning two different businesses? Had lots of stuff at the Service station. We sold paint, clothing, sporting goods, and tires and tubes. We took part of the stuff across the store. There was a restaurant in the building. The business was registered as Bly Shell and we bought it in 1951. We bought the store in 1960. It wasn't closed but needed repairing before we could open it. The previous owner had pots and pans sitting around to catch the leaks from the roof. He had run everybody out and it was 6 years before we could build a good business. We sold the station 3 times before we got rid of it. Ed doesn't think they should have mini marts in service stations. The prices are very different than they were years ago. They make more in 5 minutes than I did in a full day. Gas was in \$.20s. Ed sold gas in Minnesota for \$.10 per gal. When they retired in 1967 gas was \$.75 to \$.80 per gallon.

Eliza asks how as Bly changed? It was really good when I first came and there was lots of work. You could look around and see a fight going on somewhere. The town went down here when the mills started going out of business. There used to be the Ivory Pine Mill, Weyerhaeuser had a circle mill, and Crane had a mill. Weyerhaeuser had the mill for a while and built all new stuff before they closed it down. There were 3 mills in Bly when we got married; Woodcock, Weyerhaeuser (small) and Crane. Crane sold out and it went through several owners before Weyerhaeuser bought it. Weyerhaeuser had plans to make Bly a big city in about 1975. Ed attended a Chamber of Commerce meeting in Klamath Falls and was asked how he felt about Bly being the second largest city in Klamath County? He replied that he felt they were trying to sell people a bill of goods. Weyerhaeuser had said they had about 50 years worth of timber in this area and that is about what it turned out to be. People may have felt that they left us high and dry when they actually didn't. Timber was getting harder to get. Weyco sold out to U.S. Timberlands.

When did things start drying up in Bly? We think it was about 1975 to 1978. How long before people starting moving out of Bly? . Logs were still hauled to Klamath Falls and several of the Bly people worked at the Weyerhaeuser Mill there.

People from Bly were on bowling teams in Lakeview. Bly had a 2-lane bowling alley. And many people got started there. There were also two skating rinks at one time. This was about the late 30s or early 40s.

The railroad went out about 7 or 8 years ago. Where did the train go? To the mill site to Klamath Falls and up into the woods. Euwana Box Company was a logging camp (on Quartz Mtn). The train was primarily for logging, but at one time this was the busiest section of railroad in the country.

People would bring bands of Sheep through town on the main street. They came from every direction. Who was the first shepherd that they knew? Opal says Ed Casebeer was the first one she knew. Jack McCarty, O'Keefe's had sheep. When did they leave the area? It was about WW11. The war came along and changed things. Almost all of the ranches had a few sheep. The run cattle down the main street making it dusty and crowded. People waited for them to go by and didn't think anything about it. There were a lot of horses in town and people just turned them loose. Fences kept up better now. There were no herd laws and probably still aren't any.

Opal recalled an incident of a horse with rider (possibly V.L. Rentle) being electrocuted while riding near the Loggers Club. Leda Hunter knew that this happened at a mobile home owned by Glen and Barbara Hunter that and parked near where the Loggers Club once sat. The wiring to the older style metal mobile home was incorrectly installed and the horse was killed by electrocution. The cowboy took off the saddle and walked away saying "Damn good horse, too." There was a cow killed at the same location. Everyone touching the mobile home would receive a shock. If you went to visit you honked and they would open the door from the inside.

Did they have tie ups for horses around town? The old Shell Station to the south had a railing for tying horses and a watering trough. After they purchased the station they had trouble with watering coming up through the pavement and found the old line had not been removed. The kids used to ride horseback to school. There was a barn behind the gym where the kids could tie up their horses.

Do you know any characters in town? The old whole Obenchain and Campbell family have been interesting folks. Basil Hall was quite a character. Henry Gerber was good to help folks around town.

Some of the Indians were characters. There was one time, outside the station when they parked right by one window and then got in argument amongst themselves. One got an axe out and Ed took the ax away. One time he took some stuff away that they had stolen inside.

When the reservation became all the Indians within the reservation enrolled as Klamath Indians even though they were from other tribes.

There were some really good people here. Dally Givens was a cowboy pick up, best in the country.

Ed and Opal have two kids. Jim is in Kennewick Washington and daughter Betty has a beauty shop in Klamath Falls. Betty was a manager for JC Penney's for years. Jim works for the Burlington Northern Railroad out of Pasco WA.

What were some really memorable things that happened in Bly? The Japanese Balloon bombing in 1945. It was terrible because Ed's brother and sister were two of the children involved. Archie Mitchell, the minister's wife, and five kids were on a picnic. Archie later married Ed's sister and they became missionaries for the CMA church. Archie was captured in Viet Nam and never heard from again. Betty was captured and held prisoner for about one year before being released in 1962. Betty is now living in Greensboro N.C. They think the reason she was released was because she had malaria and they thought she might die. She was in the Hanoi Hilton for a while. Betty and Archie were dorm parents in a school in DeLott from 1949 to 1962. They later went to leprosy colony and treated with what ever they had to treat with. They found out they could help lepers by teaching them cleanliness. People avoided because they were scared of them.

Did anyone hear the bomb go off? Ed was working at the sawmill that morning. No one thought anything about it until no one would tell what had happened. They would only say that something bad had happened. They flew officials in from Portland and Seattle. No one else was allowed in. Archie was the only survivor. Was there a big town funeral? The service was held in Klamath Falls. Everyone was sworn to secrecy. The telephone office knew about it. The bombs came over on the jet stream. They sent 3000 and this was the only one to cause death in the United States. They would have sent more if they had known they worked. The bombs were meant to start fires and burn up the forest. Our military didn't know about the jet stream back then. Larger cities had blackouts and no night travel. We thought we had not reason to worry. The Town had an anniversary rededication in 1995. It was really something. Hard to believe it could be put on by a little place like this. They had ten big school buses to transport people to the site. There was about 600 people there and several different speakers, Ruth Obenchain, CMA church, and Nancy Rose District Ranger at Forest Service. They were playing taps and the bagpipes played Amazing Grace. Near the end they had a "Fly Over" by the fighter jets from Kingsley Field. Most of the town was there. It was very effective.

Did you remember anything about the theater? The grange owned a building that was used for a theater. It burned down. Opal remembers that the first church service was held at the theater.

They think the theater went in after George Fullerton came home from the service. He built the theater along with Alfred "Slim" Protsman.

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