

Interview with Donnie and Sharon Wessel, May 10, 2000  
Interviewed by Eliza Buck

Donald Wessel, Born in Karo Iowa in 1934, came o Oregon in 1947. Came to Bly when he was 13, Had a tragedy in Iowa. Brother and relatives helped move the family had relatives in Bly. John Dillavou lived here, also had one Uncle that ran a garage. Mother ran the restaurant in the Logger's Club bar. Mother's name was Pauline Waters Wessel. Ran the restaurant until 1949.

Nothing similar to Iowa, Father was a farmer. Was overwhelmed by the mountains. Came to visit in 1946 to Bly and L.A. Remembers the trip and all the places they went. It was a different world. Ruth Obenchain was my teacher for the 6 & 7th grades. She was the best teacher I ever had. She was very strict but dedicated. Taught the full circle. I've had contact with here every since. Long-term friendship.

Has one brother 3 years younger. One sister was killed. Brother Ken lives out of Yreka. Went to High school in Bly. Everyone had to play sports to have enough to play. Remained friends and "had flashes of success." Had a winning baseball team. Bly had some good athletes.

What about Mike Mansfield? Donnie didn't really know him. He and a friend were out on Gerber Reservoir. Mike fell out of the boat and drowned. It was tragic for the school kids. Memorial trophy presented each year to an eighth grade student.

Went in the Navy as soon as I got out of school. Left ahead of the graduation caused problem with diploma. Was in Yokohama as a Commo tech. Never was near the war.

Came back in 1955 Worked on a ranch for a while and then went into logging. Married Sharon Melsness in 1957.

Worked on the BK ranch. It was the biggest ranch in the area at that time. Worked at haying, cowboy, etc. Worked on the ranches before going in the Navy. Some of the Bly guys worked over at Paisley.

There were lots of good people back then. Could go to the bar and play cribbage and hear old stories. All cowboys wore hats. Seen them ride their horses in the bar.

The Loggers Club bar and restaurant were hooked together. Could hear the talk in there.

Was there much difference in Loggers and ranchers? Some of them were one in the same. They always got along pretty good.

I worked for Weyerhaeuser for 30 years. Always in the winter was in a logging camp. Would come on Wednesday and weekend. Usually have 4 guys to a cabin. Big cookhouse, big maintenance shop. Food served family style. Had bakers in camp. Everyone had his own place to sit. They later changed to cafeteria style. Ed Murray was one of the cooks. He still lives in Bly. Never had a bad meal. Bull cook would make your bed everyday. It was always clean. Camp 14 had television. Mostly had radio. Camp 9 was 50 miles north of Bly, Camp 6 was 16 miles, Camp 14, and if you could go the back way it was 70 miles. Around the highway was around 115 miles.

Loggers get up and go to work at daylight. Avoid the heat. The cookhouse bell would ring and open at 5:30. The crew buses (called a crummy) left as soon as it was loaded. I was falling timber at that time. Good friend drove the speeder on the railroad. Started in 1961, Columbus Day storm blew down millions of board feet of timber. Never fell timber again until 1964, just processed blow down. Camped out on Yamsi Mtn near Callaghan Creek, Sharon would come up with the kids. Had to eat fish 2-3 times a day to keep from going to jail. Good thing I was home when the storm hit. House flooded. Water was so deep it was running into the toilet. Only good thing was that so many people came to help. Was full of mud but we had something to come back to. Storm? Rained for several days prior and wind blew one way. Trees all one directions. Hit Washington, California, winds up to 100 miles an hour. Flooded Wessel and Buchanan. State took out bridges and put in culverts that were not adequate. Water could not get across the highway.

Also flooded in 1964. Christmas tree was floating. The washer also floated and hit the wall. Had 4 kids at that time. Later had Dan. We bought land we now live on in 1971. Put fence up around the outside. We worried about how much water we would get when we drilled the well. We hit lots of water. Everyone was so excited that they picked Sharon up and set her in the water, nine months pregnant. Own 75-76 acres. Have pasture cattle, llamas, and sheep. Don't do anything with the llama wool.

What was it like to fall trees. Fell only in virgin timber. Now you have to worry about the stumps. Cut trees 7-8' on the stump. Still knows where a few are. Dangerous? Not if you are careful. Was never hurt in the 25 years.

When did the camps go away? In 1973 built the stud mill at Bly. Was cheaper to drive than to maintain the camps. Camp meals cost \$0.90/meal so Weyerhaeuser contributed a lot toward the meals. Always brought pastries home on Wednesday for the kids. Brought home squirrels for them. Would sometime to Silver Lake and play basketball. Always a poker game going in camp. Went to bed early.

Would see deer and antelope, elk, coyotes, bear. There used to be a lot of deer. Could go fishing from camp. Still good fishing, lots of the lakes are planted.

Changes from 1947 to now? The size of the trees. The Forest Service has cut back so the private land has taken a beating. The system has changed, leave stands. Work ethics have changed. Never missed a days work in 17 years. Got a plaque for it. Never shut down for snow or anything. Worked clear through the winters.

When did the mills leave? Started to cut back in the 80s. Ran the sort yard in 1976. Ran heavy for 10 years. By 1990 the mills were gone. The Bly mill had lots of different names. What happened to Bly? Large tax base, justified the subdivision, fire and water and sewer district. Weyco left and devalued their property. Left more taxes for the residents. Was a shock to the community?

It was a sad day when they tore the train tracks out. Well-maintained tracks, good tourist opportunity. The train came to Bly in 1928. Sycan shop, out of Beatty, was the terminal. Goes north the 500 transfer. 85-90 loads of logs per day. Had transfer at Bly where they loaded the cars also. Weyerhaeuser managed line. Now it is Rails to Trails. Were there town meetings concerning the closure? Fixed fence along the tracks with Jim Buchanan. Sprayed noxious weeds along the way from K.Falls to Bly. Would take people on the high railer to see the tracks. To trail doesn't appear to get much use here. Had lots of pretty sites along the way. The supervisor's wives would get to ride the train. Went to Sycan Marsh, Camp 9, near Thompson Reservoir. Camp 6.

Ivory Pine had a mill. They tore the last building down a few years ago. Sharon lived there as a young girl. Moved there in 1945 and lived there until 1948. Mill moved to Danuba Ca. Several families lived at Camp 6 and kids were bussed to school, would pick up kids at Ivory Pine. Road was maintained because of using it for logging.

Bly was pretty wild. Made spending money setting pins at the bowling alley. Alley was hooked on to a bar. Called The Club. Made a nickle a line for setting.

Many buildings burned down. Wood heat, no fire protection. All volunteer no training. All you could do was watch.

Beatty was wild, used to hate to go through. Afraid you would get shot. Jim Anderson cut a guys throat in front of the Halfway House. Jim was one of the Beatty Indians. Tomahawk kid was pretty bad when he got to drinking. Spent most of his life in prison. Killed several and blamed for some he didn't. When I was a kid there was a black list to keep bars from serving them alcohol.

Kid at Beatty got shot through the back window of his car. Stored the car at Max's garage.

Harry Obenchain accidentally shot a guy while he was deer hunting. Lots of fights at drinking parties held

at the gym.

Old Swede named Cross Haul Oly. Always wanted to play cribbage. Used to watch him and Bart Shelly play and they both chewed. When one would lean over to spit the other one would cheat. Oly said he brought the game to Bly and then said everyone would beat him. He weighed 120 lbs, dried up Swede. Was head raker for Bell's haying. He had lots of logging stories. Robinson Springs, Ewuana Camp. He had an accent, but you could understand him. Ritchie Howard, from Ireland, married local girl, had four boys. Ritchie's wife brother was my best friend. Moved to Wisconsin. Most Irish men got their start with sheep.

Used to be lots of card games. Played at the bar, Walt Ellingston and Basil Hall.

Had 3 ponies that we brought from Iowa. Tied the pony up at the Loggers Club to eat. Jim Hall was staying out feeding cows at Bailey Flat and came to town to get supplies. Pony was gone when I came out. Willis Panky was the sheriff. Out by the Campbell Ranch, Jim was on his horse and Bud McCloud on my pony. Passing a bottle back and forth. Sheriff arrested Bud and tied pony to the fence. I heard him saying to mother "Surely Polly, you're not going to put me in jail, it's just a little horse." Willis turned him loose. Bud talked Mom out of pressing charges.

Owen Watts was a long time rancher. Died a couple years ago. Used to put up hay behind the house Go back with his team. Used to get a deer out of season when they needed. Ownie would kill the deer and then pitch hay on top of it. One time he came out of the gate and the sheriff came by. Stopped to talk and Willis said "You better go on home and feed that hay before it bleeds to death." Virginia Watts, lived here many years. They gave us the split rails for our fence.

One of our boys almost got killed in the corral by his 4-H steer. Just before the sale, oldest boy went for his steer. Tried to get in the shoot and tied the rope around it. Going backwards down the shoot, drug him around the barn and around the corral. Knocked him out and kept dragging him. Jeff came back, jumped the fence and tried to get Dan loose. Hung on the rope until he could get his pocketknife out and cut the rope. Jeff thought Dan was dead. Dan was naked, skinned and bleeding. Went and got him in the pickup, had to take him in the ambulance. Did not have any broken bones. Had to go for therapy. Had really deep cuts on his arms. He was 18 when it happened. One other time Dan was in the front field, big electrical line and picked up an irrigation pipe to get a gopher out and touched a wire. He felt his hands tingle. It turned the electricity off to Bly for about ½ hour. Dan was riding three-wheeler with an inner tube and hit a frozen cow pie. Cracked his skull and had to go to the hospital. Had to pull the skull out and staple it together.

Not too many old timers left around here.

Sharon used to work at the post office. She thinks there are more retired people than there used to be. Forest Service is the biggest employer now.

Bly is a nice community to live in and can be as busy as you want. Bly is a divided community, 10 percent do the work. Incorporation in the 60s. Was 2 or 3 vote's difference. A lot of people would like to see more here and some want it to stay the same.

Ten years, brother Paul was killed in a truck wreck. The whole town offered to help. Took Father to the hospital and so many people came to help, 6 or 8 people came to help load him. Used to know everyone, now because of T.V. you don't neighbor like you used to. Newer developments, Bley Was, Pinecrest and Fishhole road all are newer subdivisions. Fishhole sold lots when the mill was running.

The mill contractors put in the trailer court behind our property. They didn't want to drill a well. They started digging ditches and water lines without our permission. Later became good friends. There are 34 spots in the park. There has been a few times when it was full. There are only 5 spaces rented here.

Are there local Mushroom pickers? Mostly pick Morels; Ed and Opal Patzke are the local authority on mushroom. Once they had a puffball about 30" around. They usually grow in logging areas or burned areas. Season is usually April and May and sometimes into June. They pick Matsutaki near Chemult. It is worth

more money than Morels. That season is later than the one here.

Indians used to dig Apos around here.

Sharon and daughter Donna pick boughs, locally, to make wreaths to sell at Christmas. Kids have Christmas tree lots down in California. We make about 600 wreaths each year. Send lots of them in the mail. We start in November and store them in a cooler trailer. We have been doing it for 9 years here. Grandkids help with cutting boughs and picking up pinecones. Donnie works with barn wood making wood projects.

Tickled to see the park where it is now. Would like to have a bike path. Interested mostly in things for kids.

Went to the first movie at the theater. Cousin, Jerry Dillavou, helped build the theater. Went to a lot of movies when we were courting. Think it was built in 1948. Opening day was standing room only. Think the movie was The Yearling with Gregory Peck. Debby and Wayne Baio recently bought the theater. Had a smoking room where you could watch through the window. Sherman Seastrong ran the movie projector. It was never a problem for a black person in Bly. Had all nationalities.

Benny Moore was in Don's grade, Could have been a professional basketball player if he wanted. Seastrongs and Lees had children. Tecumsees also lived here.

Bly has come back several times. Don't know if it will make it this time. Mill site and 16 acres of asphalt should be desirable. Not the work force that there used to be.

Can't make a lot of many on fund raising because of that. Sizzlin' Summer Fest brings in about 200 people. Vendors come with booths.

Are some people against tourism? Still some that does not want to be involved.

The Order Of The Antelope has been going since 1933. Held each year on Hart Mountain. Sharon fixes breakfast for at least 40 guys each year. Come from all over. Developed for an antelope refuge. Raise money for scholarships for antelope management and etc. Food, drink and sleep under the stars.

We had a school reunion one year and they all came to our house afterward.

Mitchell Monument is Bly's claim to fame. Patzke ask that I do the logging. In 1995 had a rededication of the 50-year anniversary. Forest Ranger, Nancy Rose, gave an excellent speech. Japanese came and sent cherry trees to be planted. Had a fly over by the fighter jets. We invited the governor, president etc but they didn't come. When Dan was in College he wrote about the bombing. Nancy used some of the info for her speech. Weyerhaeuser donated the land to the Forest service before they sold their land to U.S. Timberlands.

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