

REMI COUSSENS

TAPE 2, Side 1

July 25, 1996

M.O'R.: This is a continuation of the interview with Remi Coussens on the 25th, July 25th, 1996.

Well, one of the things that I guess people were trying to get at with forming the USA and putting the building moratorium on the county, they were concerned about the pollution levels in the Tualatin, and then of course that came to a head again in the mid-1980's when there was a lawsuit filed to force the Environmental Protection Agency to enforce the Clean Water Act on the Tualatin. And you told me when we spoke months ago that you thought that the standards that came out of that process were too strict?

R.C.: Well, they were trying to talk about the phosphorus levels in the Tualatin.

M.O'R.: That's right.

R.C.: The phosphorus levels were set by somebody from an imaginary standard, and the imaginary standard was brought on by what, I don't know, but nevertheless the phosphorus levels in the pristine areas where there's no human beings are higher than the minimum levels that they've set. And those have been tested for several years because the Forest Service, the Irrigation District and the sewer agency have been drawing these water samples and bringing them and they've been tested, routinely. So some of these standards that get set I think sometimes are dreamed up.

M.O'R.: So you think the standard is a little too strict, then, in terms of phosphorus?

R.C.: Well, maybe it's been changed now that it's proven that they were out of balance a little bit, and I'm satisfied they will change them.

M.O'R.: Well, I don't think it's been changed yet, but there is some discussion of this same point, I think, in terms of whether or not it's a realistic standard.

Have you seen any improvement in the river since all of this activity has taken place?

R.C.: You mean the Tualatin River?

M.O'R.: Yeah, the Tualatin.

R.C.: Well, I'm not paying any attention to the tests and so on and so forth, but I'm satisfied that the tests are - sure, there's an improvement. There can't help but be, when you've got better water quality going in from the sewage treatment plant, and you've got a stream flow enhancement coming out of the dam. If you want figures, the specifics and so on and so forth, you'll have to go to the Irrigation District office. They can probably give you the numbers.

M.O'R.: Sure. Well, I didn't want the figures. I just wanted your own sense of it, your own feeling about it.

Have there been any - I know on the Tualatin, you know, there's a real attempt now to manage it in a certain way in terms of farmers, I think, can't even like cut trees on the banks of the river anymore. They have to let nature sort of take its course. Are there any similar restrictions here with respect to the creek going through your place?

R.C.: I think there is. Yeah, within so many feet. Some of that is realistic and some of it's unrealistic, depending on where it's at.

M.O'R.: Well, we're getting quite a bit of the machinery there, but I think we can still hear you.

R.C.: Well, somebody's running my Honda lawn mower over there.

M.O'R.: Well, they seem to be going off.

R.C.: Well, yeah, but it will be back. I don't know how much more you've got here.

M.O'R.: Well, we're getting towards the end of it. Maybe I'll take you back just a little bit to your early days, your earlier days. We got into the Tualatin and the farming here a little quicker than - I mean, before we really exhausted that subject; let's put it that way.

So you - we dropped it when we were talking about your attending the one-room school over there, Jackson School. Did you go on to high school, then, after that?

R.C.: Well, I didn't finish school there. My parents moved to Lycee, and the Lycee district which is about three miles north of Hillsboro. And then I attended the parochial school in Hillsboro, St. Matthew's, and then I graduated from there, and then I graduated from Hill High.

M.O'R.: And so the St. Matthew's experience, was that ...

R.C.: That was - at that time there were, I think, four grades in one room.

M.O'R.: Okay. So it was a little bit ...

R.C.: There wasn't eight; there was only four.

M.O'R.: Right. Only four. And was that experience any different in town than it was out here at the Jackson School?

R.C.: Well, I couldn't say. I'd say it was a good experience. But a kid growing up, why, you go to school and then you go home, and ...

M.O'R.: What were your favorite subjects in school?

R.C.: Well, I'd rather do arithmetic. I didn't like English.

M.O'R.: But you didn't mind math, then?

R.C.: No. And had you decided all along that you would become a farmer?

R.C.: That's right.

M.O'R.: You knew that from a very early age, then?

R.C.: Right.

M.O'R.: And were you the eldest in your family?

R.C.: I was the eldest of nine children.

M.O'R.: Nine children? Wow. That's a different experience in itself. Most people don't grow up in such a large family these days. What kinds of things would you do as a kid to have fun? What was your recreational activities like?

R.C.: Well, at what stage in life?

M.O'R.: Well, let's take maybe some of the earliest things you remember that you used to do?

R.C.: Well, you know, you used to play ball. There was enough of you around so you could play ball, and at that one place we had a garage that wasn't too high, and we could play ante over the garage, you know, and you could get all the way around this thing.

Of course, you didn't have all that much time. About the time I was about 12, why, you'd take a pitchfork out when it was time to shock hay and go out there and shock hay. Or you'd go out in the corn field and hoe corn. And then every morning and every night you had to sit down and milk cows.

M.O'R.: So not a lot of time for recreation?

R.C.: No, not a lot of time for recreation.

M.O'R.: You must have enjoyed the farming life, though, even as a kid?

R.C.: Well, it was the way of life, you know. And of course we didn't get electricity till I think we were - I think I was - we got electricity when I started high school. I was in high school already before we got electricity.

M.O'R.: And what - you mentioned earlier Camp Ireland and swimming down on McKay Creek?

R.C.: Yeah, before Camp Ireland went in, why, we were swimming at another spot.

M.O'R.: And is that anywhere near where we are now, either of these spots?

R.C.: Well, it was on McKay Creek, and yeah, it's probably four miles from here.

M.O'R.: Okay. And Camp Ireland, was that mostly a swimming place, then?

R.C.: No, that was put in for Boy Scouts.

M.O'R.: Oh, it was a Boy Scout camp?

R.C.: Yeah. Still is. I haven't been there in years, so I don't know what it's like. We could hike through the woods from

our house, you know. It was about three-quarters of a mile through the woods to Camp Ireland. We'd come in the back way.

M.O'R.: And so then you would - what would you do at Camp Ireland?

R.C.: Well, we'd just go swimming.

M.O'R.: And then one of the things I was going to ask you about was what are your siblings, what did they wind up doing? You went into farming. Did any of the rest of them go into farming as well?

R.C.: My brothers - yeah, my brothers farmed, my two brothers farmed. And then I've got one brother-in-law that's a farmer.

M.O'R.: And so you have six sisters, is that right?

R.C.: [No audible response]

M.O'R.: And did any of them wind up in farming as well?

R.C.: Well, one of my sisters married a farmer.

M.O'R.: And what are the other five up to?

R.C.: My sisters? Well, one of the married Volker, who's a shop superintendent at the yard. I guess he's been there for 50 years.

M.O'R.: What was her name?

R.C.: Madeline.

M.O'R.: And then Margaret married Bert Lillegard, and Bert and Elmer Lillegard ran Lillegard Motors.

M.O'R.: Okay. In Hillsboro?

R.C.: Yeah. And then - well, then there's my brother Art. He was farming with my brother Al. My brother Al was just younger than I, and he died a couple of years ago. And Art lives a mile down the road from me.

Then there's my sister Agnes, who became a nun, and she's still a nun. So it won't be very long she'll be a nun 50 years. If she isn't this year, it will be next year. And then I've got a sister Alice, her husband did a lot of truck driving, so I'd say that was his basic operation. And then Sylvia married Brandeis, who is a farmer. Then my youngest sister, Anne, she married a guy named Bickford and he basically was a salesman all his life.

But all the girls live close by now. The youngest one that married a salesman, they lived in California and they lived the last 15 years in Houston, and then they moved up here.

M.O'R.: And your parents were Catholic, then?

R.C.: Excuse me?

M.O'R.: Your parents were Catholic, then?

R.C.: Yeah. <sup>MDR</sup> And you sister became a nun. Were your parents fairly religious, or was church a major part of your growing up as well?

R.C.: Well, we went to church every Sunday, of course.

M.O'R.: And you said you went to parochial school, as well?

R.C.: Yeah. Well, I think about that time I don't think - well, there - well, there was [indiscernible] was the only one here that had a parochial school outside of Roy, Verboort, Hillsboro.

Now I see they're getting - well, we're getting more parochial and private schools because everyone at this time - this day and age everybody wants to send their children to a parochial school or a private school. So the pendulum has swung too far. They figure, well, we've got these individual rights. Well, the problem is the - democratic society, we've set up all these rules and regulations, and people say, well, they're getting their rights infringed on.

And I don't believe that at all. I mean, this is for the enhancement of everyone's life, so it's all for the better, rather than the worse.

M.O'R.: Oh, I see, you mean the rules and regulations of society, is that what you mean?

R.C.: Yeah. Well, you know, "You're infringing on my rights. You're infringing on my rights." Well, gol dang it, when you violate the rules, why, you don't have any rights.

M.O'R.: As sort of a general question here - Scoggins Dam has been a big success story on the Tualatin, and the various other decisions made, like to get the sewerage agency set up, et cetera, have also been positive, at least in some ways. But there's also been, of course, costs associated with all of those things. I'm just wondering if you feel that things have pretty much gone the way they should have gone out here in terms of all these issues?

R.C.: Well, first of all, we've got lots of politicians, and a lot of them have gotten in there because they're community activists, and a lot of them have never met a payroll in their life, and now they've got some authority, and that a lot of times becomes quite dangerous.

M.O'R.: Do you have any examples of problems that have been caused by this?

R.C.: Well, we don't know what the problems will be, but we've got - well, even our County Commission Chair, there was a lady that couldn't handle her job over in Forest Grove, she got fired. So the County Commissioner hired her, found a job for her for double the salary she had before. I wouldn't mind getting fired in a scenario like that.



But we have a lot of these folks that - but then, I guess maybe it's the people's fault themselves. They don't want to put themselves out and do these jobs, you know? I mean, a lot of times this political situation is an ego trip for a lot of folks.

M.O'R.: Yeah. Well, you asked me when I first got out of the car here if I was an environmentalist. I wasn't sure whether it would have been a good thing or a bad thing if I'd answered yes?

R.C.: No, it wouldn't have made any difference to me. But the thing of it is, they don't seem to think about their fellow man. They figure, "Well, this has got to happen, and that's got to happen." You know, you can't cut a tree down. Well, that's a renewable resource. Why not cut the sucker down? He'll die anyway. Plant a new one. But no, you can't cut this down because it's going to spoil this.

Why don't they do something constructive rather than something - and I don't - I agree that there has to be some ground rules and some hold-ups on some of this stuff, but I can't understand why in the Sam Hill we should allow a lot of waste going on, either. You know, you can't have a fire. It makes pollution in the air. It's ridiculous. Our pollution is not coming from fire. That leaves smoke, and then you've got carbon out here. A good rainstorm will clear that out. But the automobile emissions you can't see.

M.O'R.: So you go partway with environmental restrictions, but you think they're carried too far; is that a fair statement?

R.C.: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Well, these extremists, now, who in the Sam Hill is footing their bill? What do they do for a living?

M.O'R.: Well, I guess there's pluses and minuses on all of these activities. I mean, to some extent some of the clean-up of the Tualatin River was prompted by, you know, environmental activists.

R.C.: No, I don't think so.

M.O'R.: You don't think so?

R.C.: No. That Tualatin River didn't - those activists weren't around in those days.

M.O'R.: Okay. So you think the big decisions were already made by the time they came along?

R.C.: Oh, yeah. Hell, yes. They're after the fact, those guys. They came later. They're Johnny-come-lately's.

M.O'R.: So you wouldn't consider someone like Henry Hagg, then, to be - well, of course he wasn't really an environmental activist, but, you know, some of the actions that he took and that you took and other people took did have a positive effect on ...

R.C.: That's what we were looking for. We were looking for people. It was going to help agriculture and it was going to help people. We weren't looking for a - we weren't looking at the community activist part of it.

M.O'R.: You know, I should ask you a little bit about your own service on the board of the Irrigation District, too. Can you tell me just a little bit about that? What kind of decisions does the board have to make, and have there been any difficult ones over the years?

R.C.: Oh, yeah. There's been some, but in general, why, it mostly enhances around good common sense business judgment. We've had it where one of the fellows said, "Well, now the manager has

promised us water." Well, things happen, the water didn't come because of problems on the pipeline. Well, the manager said, "We'll have water, if it will come, if we can get it there." Well, he sued - he wasn't going to - stood right here in the yard and sued the District. He wasn't going to sue the District. He tried to sue the government; they threw that out. Then he sued the District. Eventually he lost.

And we have water that was known as interruptible, and that if we've got the water, you may be able to buy some. So after going through that experience, I said to the - our attorney, I said, "Well, we've got to sign - figure out a way for this interruptible water." "But," I said, "You write up a contract so when a guy wants interruptible water he's got to sign his life away because it's going to be all in the board's favor and not in his. Now, if he wants to accept it under those terms, that will be okay. If he won't accept it under those terms, he won't get any."

So if somebody wants interruptible water, they sign up for it, they pay for it, and the Board has the option to cut them off at any time, even though they may lose their crop. But that's the furthest from the Board's mind, to do any of that to anyone. The only reason that's done in that manner is to protect the Board from some guy that said, "Well, you cut off my water, so I can sue you." We don't want that kind of a hassle. We've had guys - asked them to shut down if we've had a problem, and they've always been cooperative; they shut down. It might only be for a few hours or it might only be for a day. Never has it been enough to cause a man to lose any of his crops or anything. But it has saved the

Board from a lot of problems. You get one guy that has a mind that loves to litigate, we'd have trouble. This way it's all over with.

Also we went - the County used to collect the assessments from the District. Well, then Measure 5 come through, and we went to our own assessment. So now we have the power of assessment and also if you don't pay your bill, you don't get no water. And if a guy doesn't want to pay his bill, we also have a right to condemn or - we've got a right to foreclose on his property. And when you've got first a right to lien, and if he doesn't pay then, we go for foreclosure. So far since we've been doing that the last several years, four or five, I think we've got one guy hanging in the fire at this point that hasn't paid, and it's only a small amount, but nevertheless he's going to get pulled on the carpet because when they want to play - why should the rest of the members of the District who pay their assessments, why should they subsidize somebody that's out here saying, "Well, the Board is mean; the Board is doing this; the Board is doing that." The rest of the constituency is happy.

All the people that are receiving services from the Irrigation District - some of them may have something we ought to consider, which is normal, but in general I would say 99 percent of the people you don't hear from, or if you do, why, it's on the complimentary side. But you might have one or two that are slow pay, or you've got to force them. But in general I'd say it's going very, very well.

M.O'R.: I understand that when the dam was first built people had to sign up for the irrigation, and as we already talked a

little bit about, they weren't used to paying for the water that they got out of the local streams at that point ...

R.C.: Well, yeah. Well, you see what you're doing, you're not paying for the water; you're paying for the service. And the service was provided by the Bureau, you see? They say it's a federally subsidized project, which is true, and of course agriculture is paying back \$6 million, and we've got 50 years to pay it off, so we're paying off so much an acre every year.

M.O'R.: I understand that some people, though, opted not to sign up and get involved in this at the time, and that some of these folks that didn't get involved at the time have since come back and tried to change their minds about that. Has there been - have they had any success? Has the water district been able to accommodate the ...

R.C.: No, there's only a very few that have had any success. The only ones that have had success, because there's also some folks that have decided, "We don't want the water." And they said, "Well, we'll turn the water back."

M.O'R.: So then you have extra water?

R.C.: Then those are the acreages that we have an opportunity to give some of the people who wanted water, but that's on a priority list, and some of them have been sitting on that priority list for 15 years, you know. So the wheels of that turn slowly, too.

M.O'R.: Sounds like it. Well, I want to thank you very much for giving me the interview today. Is there anything you can think of that we haven't talked about that might be interesting to include on this tape?

R.C.: Well, not at this time, but then there will probably be something come up later; who knows?

M.O'R.: Well, I might listen to this interview, and if I think that there's something we missed, I might give you a call back.

The other thing I might ask is is there anything that we did talk about that you'd like to add anything to?

R.C.: Well, I can't say offhand, other than as far as agriculture is concerned, it's helped this valley, this Tualatin Valley, quite a bit.

[end of side one]

REMI COUSSENS

TAPE 2, Side 2

July 25, 1996

M.O'R.: Now, what do you mean? What's helped the valley?

R.C.: The water.

M.O'R.: Oh, the water. I see.

R.C.: Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes. Sure, we've got more people - but the lake itself didn't bring the people in. Technology and changes in times, you know. And also there's a normal increase in population. But of course Washington County being a fast-growing area because of the influx of the high tech situation - we didn't know anything about high tech when we were looking for this dam project at that particular time, back in the early 50's. They didn't have those things. Now everything's computer age.

M.O'R.: Right. How do you feel about those changes? You've seen this area really change over your life span?

R.C.: Well, let's put it this way: I've gone from the horse and buggy to the jet age, now to the computer age. Years ago I asked my oldest son, I said - we went downtown for a computer session, and I said, "Would this help us any on the farm?"

"Well," he said, "not unless you're willing to spend a couple hours a day on it."

And I said, "Forget it." So I don't have a computer, and I'm not interested in getting into a computer situation.

But yet my children are into computers. I think my son's got a computer at home, takes care of his farming operation with it. My daughter just older than the youngest son, the youngest daughter

and her husband, they were industrial engineers for Hewlett-Packard, and they've just moved to Ireland.

M.O'R.: So they have had one foot in the high tech area, eh?

R.C.: Yeah. And then my daughter here that was working in Rogers, Oregon, she's - her husband's a fireman - well, they've got a computer at home. And then my son Joe, he's a senior systems analyst for Nike; that's a computer programmer. And then the daughter just older than him is a legal secretary, so she's working with a computer. I don't know if she's got one at home or not; I don't think so. And then the oldest daughter, her husband's a research chemist for Exxon Chemicals, and so they're messing with computers, and they've got computers at home. So their kids know all about computers.

M.O'R.: The next generation, I guess.

R.C.: Well, I guess there's people my age, too, that like computers. But I haven't gotten interested in it.

M.O'R.: Well, you need, I think, to make that investment of time, especially the beginning investment in time to learn all the systems and get it up and running. You really have to have ...

R.C.: You have to have a desire.

M.O'R.: You have to have a desire and a real reason to do it, I think.

R.C.: Yeah. And I don't have the desire.

M.O'R.: I'm wondering, though, in terms of all of the farm land that has now been converted to housing developments, et cetera, how do you feel about that? Is it just ...

R.C.: Well, if you take all that land out on the east side of the Cornelius Pass and go to the east side of Washington County,



most of that stuff is clay with a little dirt mixed with it, and basically there's not much of that that's very good farm land - that is, in this immediate area just west of Portland. Now, if you go south by Sherwood or Scholls, I don't know the soil types over there.

M.O'R.: Right.

R.C.: But I know I farmed in close to Portland, like Oak Hills and Waterhouse and some of the property on the east side of Cornelius Pass, and our productivity here is 50 percent higher than it is over there.

M.O'R.: Because of the better soil, eh?

R.C.: Yeah.

M.O'R.: When you were farming, where did you - how did you market your products?

R.C.: Well, the milk, why, they came in with the tankers and hauled the milk away.

M.O'R.: Okay. Local dairies did that?

R.C.: No, it was in Portland.

M.O'R.: In Portland. So like Sunshine Dairy or something like that?

R.C.: Well, you'd have - there was Safeway, Dairy Coop and Carnation and Fred Meyer's. There was about four of them.

M.O'R.: And so you'd sell directly to those folks?

R.C.: Yes.

M.O'R.: And that's mostly what you did, was dairy farming; is that right?

R.C.: Yeah.

M.O'R.: One other thing I wanted to ask you, too, just real briefly is a little bit about your wife and how you met her and what background she comes from. Is she also from a farming background?

R.C.: Well, her dad was basically a dairyman. And he came from Switzerland. I don't know - if I recall my dad went to an auction sale over at St. Helens, and her dad was over there, and my dad bought a hoist for a truck. So her dad had something there, a pickup or something, to haul it back.

So my dad sent my brother and I over here to pick it up, and she was here, see. So that started that. I drove out and I told my brother, I said, "There's a little dish I'm going to take out sometime."

He said, "Why don't you?"

So we've already had our 50th wedding anniversary.

M.O'R.: So did she grow up in a family situation similar to hers where her parents didn't speak English?

R.C.: She was an only.

M.O'R.: Oh, she was an orphan?

R.C.: No, an only.

M.O'R.: An only. Oh, excuse me. Was there no English in her house as well?

R.C.: No, I think she could speak English when she started school.

M.O'R.: And so you started to date her and then eventually decided to marry?

R.C.: Mm-hmm.

M.O'R.: Where did the marriage take place?

R.C.: In Hillsboro.

M.O'R.: And then you decided to get this place from her parents; is that it?

R.C.: Well, we leased it, yeah.

M.O'R.: Okay. Well, that's just a little bit more background here on the story.

Unless you can think of anything else that you want to mention, maybe we'll call it a day today.

R.C.: Well, good. I've got to get finished with my work out here.

M.O'R.: Okay. Well, thank you again.

[end of tape]