Voices from the Past

History of the Teton Stage Lines

Interviewee: Leon Stratton

October 22, 1983

Tape #87

Oral Interview conducted by Harold Forbush

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Harold Forbush: Oral history of the Upper Snake River Valley, this is an oral history project whose purpose this day will be to interview Leon Stratton pertaining to the major subject of the operation of the Teton Valley Stage lines. It’s a real joy on my part to welcome this 22nd day of October 1983, Mr. Leon Stratton who did operate this line, bus line. Leon, I’m going to ask you if you will give me your full name and the place and the date where you were born.


HF: But rarely do they call you Bill?

LS: Never do.

HF: Leon.

LS: It’s always been yes.

HF: Now who was your father?

LS: William Stratton

HF: Was he an early immigrant to the Victor area?

LS: Yes, he came there I’d say in about 1895, he came from Cache Valley, he was born and raised in Cache Valley, Logan.

HF: Came about 1895?

LS: Yes.

HF: Was he married at the time?

LS: No, he married a local girl there in Victor, out of Burger.

HF: And so your mother’s name is?

LS: Elizabeth Zerelda Burger, that’s her name.

HF: And was she a sister to oh,

LS: Jim Burger?

HF: To Jim Burger?

HF: It was apparently a pretty good sized family.

LS: Yes, I’d say it was a good sized family.

HF: And, had your folks and your mother’s folks, in other words, had your parents come up there as early pioneers to farm, or were they involved in business, in a business venture?

LS: No, they come up there to farm. Dad worked for B.F. Bliget for years and years, oh, what did he work for, he quit in about 19, let’s see, I started to drive about, oh he must have worked for Bliget close to 50 years.

HF: As a farmer?

LS: Yes

HF: He rented from him?

LS: Rented his farm, yes.

HF: I see.

LS: 160 acres straight south of Victor.

HF: Now that was down in the area where Fred Dirksen…

LS: No.

HF: Oh wasn’t it?

LS: Fred Dirksen was West.

HF: Oh.

LS: This was straight south, one mile out on what they call the Sting Canal.

HF: And you were born on the Homestead?

LS: On the ranch, yes.

HF: On the ranch, and you’ve indicated the date, you grew up and got your schooling—

LS: In Victor, yes.

HF: In Victor.
LS: To the 8th grade.

HF: You quit at the 8th grade?

LS: Yes, there was too much to do, chores to do so I quit at the 8th grade. I never went on to high school.

HF: Did they have a high school there at Victor at the time you were grown?

LS: Yes. It was there until the schoolhouse burnt down. There was a high school in it.

HF: Do you recall, as a personal question to you, Leon, any particular individual when you were growing up who played a vital role in your rearing? Some person that you respected very highly and admired and who really contributed a lot in your early life?

LS: Boy, I can’t, I couldn’t say as to that. I guess it’d have to be my dad, because my mother died when I was 4 years old, I never had a mother. Dad raised us. Well, it wasn’t exactly, it was my grandma, Grandmother Burger, my mother’s mother. She’s the one that raised and my youngest sister, that’s what my mother died of was child birth, my youngest sister. She raised, she spent a lot of her time there. She lived just about a quarter of a mile straight east of us, and she spent a lot of time down there raising our family, and we had a lot of different housekeepers, I’ll tell you. Some of them was good ones, some of them was out of this world. One stole everything that was in that place but the furniture.

HF: Your dad never saw fit to marry?

LS: No, he never, as far as I know, he never went with another woman.

HF: What did you do in your teens, and up until you commenced to work for, you got your job with the stage lines?

LS: Well, I was farming, I farmed out there, and one year I went to Utah, Eureka, Utah when I was 20 years old. I left in the Spring, that would be 50, that’d be 52 years ago, so that’d be what, 30, 32?

HF: 31.

LS: 31? I worked in the mines, the ore mines in Utah for one year with another guy in Victor, up there, Clark Reagan. Then we come back and I started working on the farm again and the next year I was married, the next summer. And I continued there until I was married, and then…

HF: You married a Kallen?
LS: Yes, Lucy Kallen, Jack Kallen’s daughter, yes.

HF: Was that his oldest daughter?

LS: Nope, His oldest daughter was, what was her name, she married Les Henry.

HF: Ok, I can’t, I—

LS: The next one under her was Shelly and then there was Florence, was her name.

HF: And you’ve had a family haven’t you?

LS: We’ve had four girls.

HF: And you continue to reside in Victor?

LS: Yes, I’ve lived there all my life, other than that one year.

HF: Isn’t that interesting.

LS: Then we left that, we left the ranch and moved ¾ of a mile North, just a quarter of a mile out of Victor, I bought a place there. It was 40 acres and I’ve lived there ever since.

HF: Now, Floyd was an older brother?

LS: No, he’s a cousin. He’s from Utah.

HF: Isn’t that interesting? I always associated you and Floyd.

LS: No, I was the only boy, I had one older sister and one younger sister and that’s all I had. Just the three of us.

HF: But you are a cousin to Floyd?

LS: Yes, he’s my full cousin. He was born and raised same place my dad was down there, I think the same building to tell you the truth, just west of Logan in Smithfield.

HF: Now, let’s turn to the subject of this interview, that of the operation of the Teton Valley Stage Lines. When did you commence to work and drive for them?

LS: Well, I think it was in, I drove for 22 years, and I’ve been off late, and I’d been through nine years, so that’d make 31 years ago wouldn’t it? 31 from 83 would be 52.

HF: 1952?

LS: 1952 and I think it was at about September when I started.
HF: Had Wells Grover purchased?

LS: Yes,

HF: And do you know from whom he purchased?

LS: Yes, Raymond Beckstand.

HF: Did you know Raymond?

LS: Oh yes, very well.

HF: Did Raymond operate the lines personally or—

LS: Yes, I’m pretty sure that Raymond done most of the driving himself, he operated mostly himself.

HF: And he was a fellow from in the valley was he not?

LS: uh-huh, they was in Driggs, and the of course he moved to Victor.

HF: And that was the---

LS: He married a Kunz.

HF: Pearl?

LS: Pearl Kunz.

HF From over on the west in Cedrum.

LS: Right, and they lived, didn’t they live out in Sugar City afterwards?

HF: They could have.

LS: Ya, just as you, coming from the valley through Sugar City and you turn south along there. They had a home right in there, they lived there.

HF: Now, did you know the prior operators and owners of the Teton Valley Stage Lines? There was a Moulton, Albert—

LS: Albert Moulton.

HF: Did you know him?
LS: Oh yes, yes. I knew Albert, and then let’s see, Raymond Beckstand bought it from Albert, I think Albert, was Albert the one that started it?

HF: Well, I think there was a Wess.

LS: Wells?

HF: No, a Wess Hovel.

LS: Wess Hovel that started it?

HF: Ya.

LS: And then Albert Moulton bought it from Wess, and then Raymond Beckstand bought it from Albert, and then Wells bought it from Raymond.

HF: Right. I think that’s the chain, the way it went. Do you recall specifically of knowing that Albert Moulton operated it?

LS: Oh yes, you bet.

HF: Did you ever ride the line? The Stage?

LS: I don’t think I ever did. We’d never go out of the valley, until, the only time we ever left the valley would be to, we’d go to Logan, that’s where Dad was born, his sister lived down there and she lost, well, when we’d go down there she hadn’t lost her husband, we’d go down there on Christmas, spend a week down there for Christmas and that was the only time that we ever left the valley.

HF: Had no reason to come out to Rexburg or Idaho Falls?

LS: No, we never had a car or anything, we couldn’t. And we, the only, we’d go to Driggs about once a year, and that’d be in the fall after the snow come we’d take a load of grain down and have it chopped for the pigs. That’s the only time we would leave Victor.

HF: Isn’t it amazing how provincial people were, they hardly knew what they’re next door neighbor is.

LS: Ya!

HF: And yet, you were neighbors, you were good neighbors and you had good neighbors I suppose.

LS: You bet.
HF: But the people didn’t move around much did they?

LS: No, they sure didn’t. All they knew was work, work, work, work. We didn’t have tractors, we had horses.

HF: Leon, what got you into being a bus driver? What were the circumstances?

LS: Well, to tell the truth about it, I really don’t know why. We moved when we bought that place, 40 acres and we bought that, and then I went over to Jackson that fall, went about that. Worked over there for a month haying and we come back, the 40 acres wasn’t big enough to, I had to work other places, so the next summer, somebody, Edwin, a guy by the name of Edwin Bates drove the bus and somebody told him about me. I don’t know, I can’t remember who it was now, but somebody told him about me and he come out and seen me and wanted to know if I wanted to drive the bus. He was gonna quit.

HF: Had he been working for Wells Grover?

LS: Yes, he was working for Wells driving bus. He come out and seen me and wanted to know if I wanted to drive it. So I thought about it for awhile, and I decided I would, so I went to Rexburg and, I think I rode out with him to Rexburg and seen Wells. I guess, he was, Edwin wasn’t very good, he died about two to 31, I was talking to his wife last night and she said that he died 27 years ago, so I must have drove it about three, what, been about three years I drove. It would’ve been 31, about four years I guess, three or four years and he died.

HF: So, from him, you were hired by Wells to manage the, to drive the bus?

LS: Yes.

HF: What were the terms and conditions of your employment if you’d like to talk about them a little bit?

LS: Just work is about all that was. There was no conditions, just work. It was six or seven days a week, seven days a week we left there on, I think it was, if I remember right, it was 9:00 I left Victor, or six days a week, and then got to Idaho Falls and then left Idaho Falls at 4:00. On Monday, I left at 7:00 in the morning, Monday morning to take college kids back to Rexburg. Then I’d leave at 4:00 down there and back to Rexburg and Wells had the school bus district for the county, for Rexburg around there, see, and he would gather the kids, he had all the school busses, he owns the school busses and he would come up into the valley there at the Felt road and get kids and haul them out to Rexburg to school. I would pick up the kids that he took from, lets see Newdale, or Teton, I think Teton on up. I would get them there in Rexburg and take them on up the valley. Wells would from Newdale and Clementsville, haul out the kids that he would pick up, see, so it saved him that trip going back up there at night so that was saving him quite a bit of money in gas there. Then, I don’t know exactly how many years it was that I drove that Monday morning, that 7:00 but I finally—
HF: To get college kids out here?

LS: Yes, I hauled college kids out, and then they, well there was none going, they was no kids going out here, so we quit that because I would leave up there and get down to Idaho Falls about 9:00 I’d get down to Idaho Falls about 10:30 or 11, and a bus left before they’d ride out with me a 7:00 in the morning they had to wait for that bus, there was no passengers, so he stopped that.

HF: Do you recall what type of a paycheck you would get? Was it on a monthly basis?

LS: It was monthly yes,

HF: Every two weeks?

LS: No, it was a month.

HF: Once a month. Now was that based on any type of a commission besides your—

LS: No.

HF: In other words, you got a flat amount? Whether you hauled 10 passengers or 50 passengers?

LS: That’s right. It was so much a month, if I remember right it was $150 a month. And I drove for the 22 years and when I got through I was making $250 a month.

HF: So you didn’t get an awful lot more did you in that 22 year period?

LS: No, I’ll say I didn’t. No retirement of any kind.

HF: No retirement at all?

LS: Absolutely none.

HF: Now, you would pay in social security?

LS: Oh ya, for the whole 22 years!

HF: But there was no retirement program?

LS: No, no none.

HF: Now, the terms were that you would work six days a week or seven days a week?
LS: Seven to start, then we finally got Sundays off, then I finally got the legal holidays off. What is that, five days?

HF: Something like that.

LS: Four or five days a year, legal holidays, I got them off.

HF: You hauled passengers?

LS: Yes.

HF: Freight?

LS: More freight than anything.

HF: What kind of freight?

LS: Everything there was, you mention it and that was it. Slessers out there, I went out there every, I think once a month I’d go out there and I hauled slessers, well, out at Teton, Newdale, Tetonia, Driggs, and Victor.

HF: What were the slessers?

LS: It was a all kinds of, just a variety of just about everything, it wasn’t clothes or anything like that, or food, it was just a whole lot of, what would you say…

HF: What would people call, or they would write?

LS: No, they’d be a salesmen go up in there Slessers salesmen would go up in the valley once a month and they’d take it out there and I would go out the first, what was it, the first or second of the month and get it, and I would have a good load I’ll tell you. I hauled hundreds and thousands of tons of it up here as long as the 22 years.

HF: So freight, items that you could, maybe under 100 pounds—

LS: Ya.

HF: Rarely did you get into things that would weigh more than—

LS: Not very many. But that was the main thing. That’s where he made most of the money, I honestly believe was the freight.

HF: Do you know what the passenger rate was in the beginning years?
LS: I think it, I think from Victor to Idaho Falls, I think it was $1.90 one way. Round trip was twice that less 10%. From Victor to Driggs, if I remember right, I think it was 35 cents.

HF: What was the mileage to start with from Victor to Idaho Falls?

LS: 85 miles.

HF: 85, now did road changes, improvement of the highways, actually lessen that a little?

LS: No, very little. There weren’t many changes in it.

HF: But that wouldn’t be true now would it?

LS: No, I think it’d be shorter now.

HF: It would be shorter now because of the freeway. That probably would be. But you would always; you had a schedule to follow.

LS: Oh yes.

HF: Which communities would you stop at? Going from Victor to Driggs, and coming down the valley, which communities would you stop at?

LS: I’d stop at Driggs, I’d leave Victor see, and stop at Driggs, stop at Tetonia, stop at Newdale, then stop at Teton, but if I stopped and picked up any passengers in Sugar City, they had to flag me down because that was Greyhound. That was a Greyhound right from Sugar City to Ashton, so you couldn’t have a bus depot or anything along there.

HF: On over to Rexburg, didn’t you stop at Rexburg?

LS: Oh, you’d bet I stopped there every morning and gassed up.

HF: Ok, at what point?

LS: Behind Wells Grover’s garage.

HF: That was at 23 East Main, wasn’t it?

LS: Yes, right.

HF: 23 East Main, you gassed up there, did you stop over at the bus depot?

LS: Oh, you bet. Ya, I stopped there, there was a hotel.

HF: You had the franchise to pick up any passengers going down to Idaho Falls?
LS: Must have done. I guess he did because I picked them up there.

HF: Picked up passengers and freight?

LS: And freight.

HF: And then you went from Rexburg. Did you stop in Rigby?

LS: Ya, they had a sign there, if they had it in the window I would stop.

HF: Where was that, at the Drug Store?

LS: I’d have to think, ya it was in the Drug Store.

HF: Reid Drug?

LS: Reid Drug, ya it was. Reid Drug.

HF: Then, how about Ukon or some of those places. Did you stop there?

LS: I hauled passengers there. There was one woman I hauled about every once a week for as long as I drove the bus. I can’t remember her name; she lived just right in town, just the other side of Ukon on the east side of the road in a big two story home there.

HF: Did you accommodate people if they wanted to stop out at the house along the rode?

LS: Criminy sakes yes, I’ll say I picked a lot of them up and let them off there.

HF: Even though it was not a stop, you accommodated?

LS: Oh yes, yes, you bet.

HF: Now, your terminal in Idaho Falls was where?

LS: Greyhound bus Depot.

HF: That was on A and…

LS: Right against the river down there.

HF: A and Capitol?

LS: Ya, A and Capitol, the corner of A and Capitol.

HF: And you would arrive at Idaho Falls at what time each day?
LS: I think it was 11:00 if I remember right, I think they figured two hour trip. I’d leave Victor at 9:00, well, that was after, there were so many different schedules, see, that was the regular schedule for a long, long time and finally, I’d left Victor, there was a bus got in, oh ya, I still left Victor at 9:00 and there was a bus got in at 11:00. No, the bus got in at 1:00, the bus got in at 1:00 I guess, and then I finally talked Wells into letting me leave at 2:00 so we could take the passengers on up the country, up this way. We could haul them up if they wanted to get on our bus, we’d accept Greyhound tickets if they wanted to go to Rigby and Rexburg out up this way, so we helped him out quite a bit by coming back up so we got quite a few more passengers that way. That’s what it was when I left. I’d get down there at—

HF: But at first, you didn’t leave Idaho Falls until around four?

LS: no, it was 4:00

HF: And then it’d take—

LS: Two hours, two hours both ways, it’d be 6:00 when I got, unless I had slessers, then it’d be seven or 7:30 8:00 because I had to deliver them along the way.

HF: Do you recall the first bus that you drove? What type it was and how many passengers?

LS: Yes, what would you call it today, built like a car only it was a 12 passenger. Its low like a car and them we’d pack the freight on top, it had a ladder in back and a fence around the top of it. It was a 12 passenger.

HF: Could you enter the seat from either side?

LS: No, just the one side. That was lawful see.

HF: And that was on the…

LS: It was on your right Sam side.

HF: On the passenger side.

LS: UH-huh, there was two sides to the front seat, but only one side to the other side. That was the way it had to be for the law.

HF: And so, actually, you had four seats?

LS: Four seats and they was a little place in the back for freight and that too. They had a back door, had a ladder up the back door on top for much freight. If I had much freight I had to use that al the time.
HF: And you had mentioned that you transported passengers, 12 passengers, and the freight. Did you find that you were hauling as many people out of the valley as you hauled into the valley or visa versa?

LS: I think I’d haul more in, more in than I did out. But after we changed, after I got the change down there, then there was quite a few more people that went out. They’d ride out with me and do their shopping and then they’d come back with me, but they didn’t want to sit down there all day. Where I only stayed down there, let’s see, I’d get down there at 11:00 and leave at two, that’d be about three hours. People liked that better than staying there all day.

HF: And primarily, I guess this was why people rode from Driggs, or from the valley, out to Idaho Falls, just to shop?

LS: Yes, they done, a lot of them went out there just to shop.

HF: Kind of discouraging for the business people there in the valley.

LS: Yes.

HF: For people to just go out and shop out of the valley.

LS: Ya, there’s quite a few that done it.

HF: And they’d bring there whole, they’d bring their items home?

LS: Yes.

HF: Groceries?

LS: Some of them bought groceries.

HF: But usually it wasn’t groceries?

LS: No, it usually wasn’t. Very seldom groceries, mostly for clothes and that

HF: For clothes?

LS: It was just across the street from the bus depot was, was it Sears across there? I think it was Sears and Robuck that was just across the street, wasn’t very far, it was just around the other ways was JcPenny’s, everything was right in town then.

HF: And so it was very accessible to your passengers?
LS: Ya, and I done a lot of driving, I’ll tell you. People in valley wanted me to pick up something somewhere and I was going part of the day driving around Idaho Falls picking up stuff for people.

HF: Trying to accommodate?

LS: I done a lot of accommodating of people, I’ll tell you.

HF: Did Wells urge and approve of you doing this?

LS: He didn’t urge it, but he didn’t ever said anything.

HF: Because he knew that it was part of the game I guess.

LS: Then if there was ever a small item, I’d never charge anybody for it or anything, but if it amounted to anything, then I’d charge freight on it. I think the minimum on freight was 75 cents up to 100 pounds, and then it was a cent a pound.

HF: What did you have to report of the daily returns, or the weekly returns?

LS: Oh, you bet. Every week,

HF: Every day?

LS: Every day I had this slip of paper and I had to put down every bit, of course, I kept the money see, all the money and I had Monday morning I had a slip of paper that I’d put in there, showed all the passengers, price of the passengers and all the money in freight.

HF: And you would deposit that where?

LS: Oh, I’d just give it to Wells.

HF: Oh, in other words when you came down to fill up,

LS: Yep, when I came down to fill up with gas, at the back of the garage I’d give it to Wells there. He’d usually be there on a Monday morning to get the money.

SIDE TWO:

HF: Continuing the interview on side two. Now, do you recall any major change in the bus that you drove during those 22 years?

LS: Yes,

HF: The design and the…what?
LS: I drove that until it was, it was completely wore out when he changed it and then he went to a—

HF: Do you remember what that first one was?

LS: I think it was a Chevrolet. And the next one was a, oh what would you, it was more like a, it was a 12 passenger, but it was more like station wagon, taller. That’s the kind a drove then. I drove two or three of them, but that was no, there was no big bus up in there.

HF: All pretty small and economical.

LS: Ya.

HF: What kind of gas mileage would you ordinarily get?

LS: I’d usually get, what was it, around 9, 10, 11 miles to the gallon. Of course that was pretty good for one of them bigger busses.

HF: Actually, with his business down here, he would always get his gas from his own tank, or from his own facilities. So the valley up there didn’t really receive any benefit, any moneys that would be spent up there from him.

LS: No, not a bit.

HF: He would go get his passengers from there and so on, but he really didn’t help the economy unless there was some kind of attacks that the county or the city got up there, and I don’t think there was any up there was there?

LS: I don’t think there was, was there?

HF: I don’t think there would be any particular financial benefit to that valley at all from that operation.

LS: No, I don’t think so either.

HF: Would he ever maybe go up there and make a deal with some of the car dealers to get his busses out of there?

LS: He never went up in there.

HF: But you changed a few times the bus type of bus?

LS: Oh yes. When they wore out and couldn’t go any more. And I’ll tell you, the tires, when he put in a set of tires, they was wore out too when he took them, when I, he changed tires.
HF: As an economical business, wherein he derived a lot of income, it probably just wasn’t there, wasn’t too much involved.

LS: No.

HF: Now you had commented that your wages were, when you quit, somewhere around 250 a month.

LS: 250.

HF: Did he provide any wearing apparel that you had to wear?

LS: No, we had to buy all that.

HF: Did you have, was it prescribed that you wear a certain uniform?

LS: Oh ya. We had a certain uniform, a cap and a shirt, well, it was a coat. I guess we didn’t have to but we all wore it because, then we had Teton Stages on the cap. I drove quite a bit of charter for him all the time. He had a lot of charter. He charted all over the country. We went up through Canada, I took a charter up into Canada once or, once I know. See he had the school, the College see, and they had a band and they traveled all over the country and he, well he got all that.

HF: He also took tourist groups too didn’t he?

LS: Ya.

HF: But not so much, not like it is today?

LS: No.

HF: A lot more today.

LS: We went up to Moscow for oh, crimeny, how many years, 12, 15 years we went up to Moscow. Too the Four-H kids up to Moscow.

HF: And you were in those trips?

LS: Yes, those trips up there, we were up there for a week. And then I’ll tell ya how we started out. We left here, there was 4 busses and we had four busses, and they was four of us drivers got in a car and went up to Dear Lodge, Montana, and the other busses picked up the kids, the Four-H kids around the country. I went down to Downey, I’d go to Downey and I’d stay there that night and then the next morning, I’d get up about 5:00 in the morning and I’d get a bunch of kids there, a load of kids, and then I’d come up here and I’d meet them up here in Idaho Falls. Then we would go to Dear Lodge, the four of
us in a car. One of the driver’s wives would take us up there and we’d go up there and then we’d go to bed. And then about 12, 1:00 at night, the busses would come up there and we’d get up and then we’d go on up to Moscow. Then we stayed in Moscow for one week, stayed at a motel there for one week, and then we’d leave about 9:00 at night and we’d come down to Boise and they was drivers that went to Boise and stayed there, and then they’d take the bus and we would come on home in a car. They’d drive the car up and then we’d fetch the car home.

Well, that was too much money to spend for Wells, so we got to staying in a hotel that was cheaper. We stayed in a hotel for a few years. Well there was still too much money going that way, so we’d leave here about six or 7:00 in the morning and we’d drive right on through to Moscow. Look at the money that he saved on the bus drivers, then when we left Moscow, we’d come right on back here again, there was no stopping in Boise. And besides that, we didn’t stay in Moscow the week, we come back when we got to Moscow, all of the drivers we fetched a bus back, and I drove the bus and the rest of them worked and then we left here at the end of the week. I think we left here on a Friday and drove straight on through, got up there around 10, 11:00 at night and then got up at five or 6:00 the next morning and fetched the kids back.

HF: Tremendous challenging experience wouldn’t it be.

LS: Oh, and you was only allowed eight hours, eight hours driving is what you should have got is eight hours driving. There was a law again over in case of emergency. We was putting 14, 16 18 hours a day in. Nobody ever turned it in. Look at the money that he saved, all them bus drivers up to Dear Lodge and back, hotel rates up there and the ones from Boise back, oh, he saved a lot of money there.

HF: Well now, since this was actually rather a rural pickup and transporting of passengers from the Victor area to Idaho Falls, I suppose you found people getting on your bus almost in their night shirts.

LS: Yes, you’d find them every way they was I guess they was dressed about every way. But average I think most of them dressed fairly well.

HF: To go out –

LS: Ya, to go out to Falls.

HF: And isn’t it a common expression people would always say up there, well, going out below today.

LS: I’ll say, out below.

HF: Out below.

LS: Ya.
HF: And everybody seemed to know exactly what that meant.

LS: Ya, that’s right. We’re going out below today. They wouldn’t say the Falls or Rexburg, out below. That’s right.

HF: As you pointed out, they’d go out to do their shopping or visit a relative or somebody sick in the hospital or whatever it might be, they would do that and come back with you at night.

LS: Ya, a lot of them did that.

HF: Did you ever have any problems with any unruly people on the bus? Did you ever have to get a little bit rough with anybody?

LS: Nope, I never did have to.

HF: Never had any episodes of where somebody tried to push you around and tell you where to go?

LS: No, never did. There were certain passengers they had, like that one; there was one in the Teton, a man in Teton, kind of an elderly guy. About every once a week he’d ride down to Rexburg or Idaho Falls and that woman, Mrs. Wolfe was her name, in Ukon, she would ride to, go down to Idaho Falls and then I’d come back at night and with this other guy, I had several passengers along the rode that I’d pick up every week or two weeks and they’d go down.

HF: So your experience with your relation, your personal relationship with people was always quite pleasant?

LS: Oh yes, I’d say it was.

HF: And you had occasion to visit quite a bit with the passengers?

LS: Oh yes, you bet.

HF: I mean if one or two people got on, you’d just have a nice visit with them as they rode down with you.

LS: Oh ya, you bet.

HF: I recall myself riding with you and we would visit. You was always interested in Well, where have you been, where you been to school, or this or this or this.

LS: Ya, I had a lot of good visits with, I got to know a lot of people I’ll tell you on that. Just about 99% of them were all good people that rode with me. I don’t believe I ever
had any trouble at all unless it was some school kids and they was a little rowdy and I had to quiet them down, but I don’t know, I’d just tell them to quiet down and that was it. I never had no trouble or anything.

HF: Did people come to you with a ticket or with the cash?

LS: Both. Well, ya, because they sold tickets in Victor, Driggs and Tetonia see, up there they sold tickets. The only place that didn’t sell a ticket, well I guess they did in everyplace. Driggs, in the valley and –

HF: Who handled the tickets up there in Victor?

LS: Harold Holmes in the Drug Store there.

HF: Ok, and Jack Harper in——

LS: Nope, there in the barber shop, Willis Moffet, he done and Marty’s there in Tetonia. Then they was Newbold’s in Teton.

HF: Newdale?

LS: Newdale, no, Newbold’s I think was in Teton and that, oh I forget the name of the store there in Newdale, and they handled it. But it makes some of them people, if they got on and never had a ticket and paid me the cash, it kind of made some of the people that sell them tickets mad. They didn’t like it.

HF: And you say it started out a trip to Idaho Falls from Victor was around $1.90 something?

LS: $1.90 one way

HF: But, what did it eventually end up to be? Somewhat higher than that I take it?

LS: Yes, I think it was around, I think it was about 3 ½ when I quit.

HF: Will you recall for me Leon some of the hazards of winter travel?

LS: Oh yes. Blizzards, you couldn’t see anything. I’ve been going over that road at nights, see it’d usually be dark when I got in the valley in a blizzard and if I could get somebody, I had a lot of times one guy look out the and see the side of the road and I would see the other side and that’s all that we could see, just the sides of the road going through there.

HF: Did you ever have occasion to be hung up during the night?

LS: Oh yes, yes.
HF: Had to say over someplace?

LS: Ya, there was one night out at Tetonia just as you got to the top of the hill there, somebody, it was a blizzard and oh, it was a nasty night and somebody was coming, started to go out and they couldn’t, they didn’t stay in there, they come out and it was slick too. Got cross ways in the road and blocked the road there, we was lined up there for oh, half, ¾ of a mile down there. We had to leave the bus there and they, I think I have four or five people on there and I had two kids, a woman and two little kids and we had to pack them two kids clear down that hill to the, well it was the white place they called it there that house there. Then there was people come from Driggs and Tetonia down there with the cars and picked them up and took them to Driggs. We just had to leave their outfits there, and I stayed with Marty’s that night. What was his name that used to be there, I can’t remember his name that used to work for Marty in there, he was kind of an elderly guy, and I slept with him down there in the basement of Marty’s. Next morning they fixed her, they went out with the plows early in the morning, all the cars and that and drove them down and then we went out and got the bus and come on into Tetonia and picked up the passengers and took them on up into Victor and Driggs wherever they stayed, but I didn’t have to go out that day.

HF: In the course of those 22 years of driving for Wells, did you ever experience any serious accidents?

LS: Yes, I had two or three accidents too. On the other side of Canyon Creek when I was going up that hill out there, it was in the day I was going out and it was a blizzard. We got stopped there, there was some cars spin out and we stopped up there waiting for them to go and an outfit come behind it and couldn’t stop and rammed into us and busted the back end of the bus all to pieces.

Another time I was going around a curve out there. I was going out and another, I can’t remember what it was, I think it was another kind of a bus that passed me and turned in too sharp and rammed my door and busted it all to pieces.

HF: Of course, he maintained insurance coverage?

LS: Oh yes. But that one never stopped. Then one time I hit a deer.

HF: Did you?

LS: Hit a dear, there was a doe deer, doe and a fawn. I couldn’t help it, they run right stern in front of me and I hit the fawn and killed it I guess, must have done. Well, when I got to Tetonia, knocked it off the road, when I got to Tetonia I was telling them about some there and one of them, well, some of the guys there come out and got it. It wasn’t there the next morning, so they must have come out and got it, that night. Ya, there’s things that happened just about every mile or two along that road clear out things happened.
HF: But none of them resulted in death?

LS: Nope, no injury of any kind.

HF: No injury, all those years?

LS: Nope. We never had anything bad happen in any way.

HF: That interesting. Did you occasionally have the need to get a relief driver for you?

LS: Yes well, when I’d go on charters I had to have a relief driver. I was in charter up to Canada, Utah, and Montana.

HF: Do you recall some of their names?

LS: Ya, Erma Henry done a lot of it, driving for me. Erma Henry and then Ruby Parsons sometimes did driving. But I think Erma drove most of the time, so when I quit she took over driving for me, no she didn’t either. She moved out to Idaho Falls and started working the bus depot. Pete Custer I think was my relief driver when I quit.

HF: Where was he from?

LS: He was from up there.

HF: In the Victor area?

LS: Then his, isn’t one of his, is it his daughter or wife is still driving?

HF: Is there any kind of passenger service in and out of the valley now?

LS: Ya, two days a week. Tuesdays and Thursdays I think the bus, now I don’t know just exactly what the bus schedule is, whether they go up there and, they did have it for awhile but they went on from Driggs, they went up from here somewhere on up through the Valley into Jackson and then went to Idaho Falls, so if you drove from the Valley, you’d have to pay a ticket over to Jackson and out the Falls. You could drive a car out for 1/3 of the price it’d cost you for tickets like that.

HF: Do you know who provides that limited service?

LS: I couldn’t tell you know who does own that.

HF: Do you think it’s the Teton Valley State line?

LS: It’s the Teton State’s lines, but I don’t know who owns that now. They’ve got some big busses, they have some big, oh they’ve got 3 or 4 like greyhound charter busses; you
can see them being charted all over. But they only go two days a week and they don’t go to Victor, I think she stays, I forget her name, I think her last name is Custer, they don’t have any passengers, and they don’t even go to Victor at night. They usually leave the freight there with Leo Davis and he takes it up the next morning so he can go up. And they don’t haul but very few passengers up there.

HF: But there is freight?

LS: Ya, there’s freight. I know my daughter, my two daughters is with Avon and they have the freight come up there and they have to go to Driggs to get it from Davis house. They drop it off there, they don’t come to Victor, I guess they’d come up there if there’s a passenger, then they go up in the morning to get it, but if they don’t have passengers at night, I don’t think they even go up to Victor.

HF: The stage line has provided a real service for the valley though.

LS: Yes, yes, I think it has.

HF: Down through the years.

LS: Down through the years it has. Ya, when they used to drive it five, six days a week, they used to have good business in there, but it sure has changed. I think a lot of it they didn’t care about the local business and that, it was for the charter. That’s what the peoples bought it for in the first place is charter rights. It had one of the best charter rights in the country.

HF: The Teton Valley State Line?

LS: The Teton State Line, ya, it had good charter rights and that’s why they bought the different ones bought it, for the rights, the charter rights. It wasn’t for the money they made off from going to the valley and that, it was the charter rights, and that’s why they own it now. That’s why they just barely run up there two days, just keeping it for the charter rights. If they never had no charter rights I don’t think there’d be a bus in the valley.

HF: Have there ever been any hearings to which you’ve been asked to, or supine to attend pertaining to any changes, increase or more limited operation of the Teton Valley line through the, you know the PUC hearings?

LS: No.

HF: You’ve never had occasion to?

LS: Never had occasion to, nope.
HF: To attend. I would assume though that the states lines would be under the authority of the Idaho PUC?

LS: It was it used to be. I’d imagine it still would be.

HF: I would think so.

LS: I know they used to be.

HF: Now, let me hear your comment about your employment with Mr. Grover, Wells Grover. What about this man, was he fine, fair to you and did you, do you have any, I’d like to have you make a positive statement rather than a negative statement about Mr. Grover and his operation of his facility if this would be ok.

LS: Oh, he was always good to us. He always treated all the drivers good, we all, when we chartered, we always had good places to stay, good feed, and food to eat. We ordered what we wanted. No, he was always, he always treated us good, couldn’t say anything about him that way.

HF: Are you able to recall some of your fellow drivers, maybe on some of these charters particularly?

LS: Yes, Lynn Freeman was one, and then there was a, what was the other…

HF: Did you ever know a Harmon?

LS: No,

HF: Harmar?

LS: There’s one, there was two, they was brothers, one of them died and one of them still works, one of them still lives in Rexburg and works out to the, what is it?

HF: AEC site?

LS: No, the little hospital deal just west of Rexburg in the west of town out in there. Why can’t I remember, I should’ve put that down. I know their names. Eldon and Vernon Steiner. Steiner. Vernon died and Eldon is still alive, he works out to the, oh, what’s the name of that, I can’t remember it.

HF: I should’ve quickly picked that up because I know what these Steiner fellows.

LS: They are the only ones, well that’s just about the only ones that he had driving bus. Lynn Freeman drove bus all the time, he was his main mechanic.
HF: Now, you worked finally, to complete your employment, up to the point where you retired, you worked with Lynn Williams for awhile, did you not? Lynn Williams?

LS: Seems like I, oh! He was the one who owned it, wasn’t he? Ya, he owned it, ya, for one year, yes I did. Then when I quit, I was gonna quit on my birthday after 22 years, I was gonna quit and I went and seen about social security and they told me that if I drove till me wife was 62, I was 62 then, if I drove till my wife was 62, she was one year younger than I was, she could draw social security on mine. And so, then is when Wells, they flew him to Salt Lake and find out that he had cancer, so he sold out right then and this Williams took over and I drove for him for one year. My birthday was on the 19th of July, and I had so many vacation days, I had it figured, arranged, so I could quit on the 19th and still have my month in, and that was the day that Wells Grover died is on the 19th of July.

HF: That was about—

LS: 21, 31 years ago.

HF: 31 years ago. 1952.

LS: Must have been about 52.

HF: When you started, but you ended up your last year then was—

LS: nine years ago. July the 19th, nine years ago this, well, it’ll be 74 then wouldn’t it. 1974.

HF: 1974. Two years before the flood here when you quit.

LS: Ya, it was before the flood—

END OF INTERVIEW