LENA ERICKSON JUSTICE First Interview

> Interviewed by: Laura Schrager

Oral History Project Latah Ccounty Museum Society I. IndexII. Transcript

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LENA "MOLLY" ERICKSON JUSTICE

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Lena "Mollie" Erickson Justice

minute

Side B (continued)

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Breakfast at 6 and some ate in five minutes. Jacks fixed their own lunch from a spread on one table. Starved by night--girls kept busy filling plates. Stove had three ovens. Tried to get baking done in the morning.

> with Laura Schrager August 20, 1974

II. Transcript

LENA JUSTICE: On Saturday, why, after we got everything done at home in our apartment in Deary, why, we decided to walk home and the railroad track was really the shortest way for us to go. We didn't want to go clear around the road. So May and I, we stuck out. And we got to Hog Meadows, and that was about a mile and a quarter from our place. Mr. T.P.Jones picked us up and gave us a lift. The snow was clear up to our knees or better, I guess. And the folks hadn't broked the road yet, so it was deep and we were so wet and that was about ten o'clock at night that we got home. That was miserable. So the next day we walked back, it was on a Sunday, get back to school again. I can name about the months I had gone to school. It wasn't very much. Got to the fifth grade, anyway. But May, she went through, I think May finished high school. She'd work awhile. I think she was smarter than I was.She could sure skip through.(laughs) But anyway, she was...

LAURA SCHRAGER: Was that many years that you went into Deary?

LJ: No, the first I'd go to school at Helmer. I'd ride a horse, you know, in the fall, when you could go up until the snow fly. And then I'd be home maybe all winter. Then maybe in the spring I 'd go until school was out. But I'd go to Deary and you could always work for your board and room. Go to school. And that was hard. 'Cause you had to do youn dishes in the morning, you had to get breakfast. And then come back, help with the lunch. In the evening, why you had the lunch dishes to wash. This lady was kind of lazy, I think. She'd always leave it to me, anyway. I'd wash the dishes and start supper. By the time I'd done all that and studied a little bit, why, I was all in. Clean house on Saturdays and Sundays. She was an old schoolteacher. I think she went to school af4er that and got the job teaching school. But it was rough. I think I stayed three different places, three different winters. There was one place that I really enjoyed, and that was Mrs. Wesby. I was just like one of the

family there. They just, you know. She'd do a lot of "work and if I wanted to do this why, it was alright. Help her with the dishes, but I never had to do anything alone like I did at the other place. And then from there, I came to Spokane. Stayed with a cousin and went to school. For a few months. And then I got a job. At Kemp and Hey "Running the elevator.

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- LJ: Kemp and Heberds in Spokane. They used to be a store by Kemp and Heberds. And I worked about let see, four months, I guess. And I thought I was pretty rich, I was getting thirteen twenty a week. I can remember that check. The money would be cash and they'd put it in an envelop, and every week, I'd pick up that, and I thought, "Oh boy, that's a lot of money." Then I had to go home. And help.
- LS: Would you send a lot of it home?
- LJ: Oh yes, I'd send some. Not much. I tried t spend it having a good time my going down to the park every Sunday.(chuckles) .other cousin and I. I went home and they thought I was, my brother said,"Well Gee, you haven't got any tan. You won't be that way very long when you get out in the hay field."I was gonna go to work in the hay field.
- LS: You said you were quite a tomboy. What kinds of things would you do? Heck J'd LJ: Ride horses. I'd like to been in the show, I guess. I'd stand up and I'd turn around and ride backwards and ride way up on their neck.I'd rather work outside than inside. Try to walk tightrope to**0**. My brother always done that. Wasn't as good at it, though. Doing a little acrobatic stuff.
- LS: Would you go to Bovill to chataquas that they had?
- LJ: Yeah, I did. Then they had moving picture shows there. In the old opera house. And they had dances upstairs. It was, they used to have quite a lively town there. Years ago. They had ballgames, good ball players.
- LS: Do you remember any of those things well enough to give a description of them?

Did you go to a lot of dances?

- LJ: No, I didn't go to A many dances because we didn't have the clothes to wear. Mostly overalls. I did go to dances there alright, a few times. And the shows. But we didn't have the money. And...
- LS: Would you go to town much when you were young?
- LJ: Oh yeah, we'd go maybe once every two weeks or maybe sometimes once a week. It all depend. Mother had a lot of chickens. And we'd take eggs up there and trade 'em for sugar or coffee or whatever we needed, you know. Sometimes flour. We always could get rid of the eggs. We didn't sell much butter though. That was kind of out of the question. But eggs and stuff like that was the main thing. And $\frac{4}{4}$ we always had a nice big garden, so that helped.
- LS: Did you have trouble with frost?
- LJ: Oh yeah. We used to have a lot of frost up there.Be early in the fall and we'd get it, it'd be late in the spring too, before you could plant anything, you know. We have to plant like carrots and stuff like that that would stand for NIP⁵ and rutabagas and beets. Peas, you could plant peas, they'd get ripe. But you couldn't plant corn or beans or anything like that.
- LS: Those meadows get a lot of frost.
- LJ: Yeah, there was quite oh the frost would come early and seems as though, course we're getting 'c^M here, in Spokane, seems like in the last few years. Mr. Pope was saying yesterday, last year we had frost the first of September I think he said. I don't remember it. And he's 93 years old. (chuckles) Hope my memory's like that when J, if I live to be that old.
- LS: Sounds like you had to grow a lot of the same kind of...
- LJ: Yeah, grow a lot of the same kinds of carrots and stuff like that.
- LS: Is that what you'd end up eating the year round?
- LJ: Well usually, like our potatoes and stuff like that, we could raise nice

potatoes and we always had enough til the next year, til the other crop come on again.Course we'd use those potatoes for seed. But no, in the fall of the year we'd go out, on the ridges and pick up apples and squashes $\frac{1}{4}ha^{t} y_{o \cup}$ and some pumpkins, stuff like that, you know_j couldn't raise.

- LS: You'd trade for them?
- Yeah, sometime. And then one time, that was during First World War, Emil, LJ: that's a brother, he was ill and he couldn't go so we fed a couple of pigs, I think there was \tilde{h} four of 'em for a guy on the ridge. What was his name now? Jim Holt. And we said if we fed 'em through the summer we could have two and he would take two. So we had to deliver those pigs. And he said if we came down there, we could get a truckload, a wagon load of apples and pumpkins and whatever he had to give. So May and I we thought we could make it. So we had to hitch up the horses and started out. We got down Ð. there, took all day to get down there. And you know what the Kendrick grade is like. Steep. It's good grade now, compared to what it was then. It was just winding roads. So we got down there and I think we stayed a couple days. Let the horses rest. And they loaded us up the next day and we had such a heavy load on there. We had to block the wagon every time they wanted to rest. It was so steep, you know. You go around a curve and let 'em rest and then we'd pull 'em on again and then we'd let 'em rest. And iwe'd have to put a block behind. So when we got halfway up the hill, the harnass broke, or the tug, I guess it was. And I had to get haywire to wire it up.And the poor horses, they were so tired and we were tired. And before we got to Deary we stopped at some people there. We thought, maybe we could stay overnight here. And it was muddy. The roads, it had rained. Slippery and everything. Anyway, we stopped there and asked this lady if we could stay overnight. She said. "No!" I never will forget that. I thought that was awful mean of her. 'Cause we were just young kids, kind of. So we went the horses was on to the Wesby's and that was about a mile and all in. Course, the only thing they had to feed the horses was straw but

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they took us in and fed us and fed the horses. So the next day we went home, and that was eight miles more. And the roads were terrible. Boy were we ever glad when we got on the old farm. We had too much stuff on that wagon. I don't how many sacks of apples we had. All that. I think it was that fall we lost one of the horses. I don't remember now. Memory's getting shorter and shorter.

- How did you lose it? LS:
- $$\mu ad$$ It just got sick. Well, it was a pretty old horse too, I suppose. Lived LJ: it's life. And then I think it was that winter when we had such a hard winter and we had to haul hay on a little sled. Horses couldn't make it. My gosh, it was awful. That's too sad to talk about that.
- Did you haul by hand? LS:

- We had to haul from . Meadow because it was water, it just began to LJ: break in the spring, you know. You know how the snow is crust on top and then underneath be water and slush and the horses would fall in here and there, jumping. So we'd haul on a little sled, a couple of bales or so. In the morning, early morning, when it was really good crust on it, you'd haul it for to feed the stock. That was during the First World War when my brother Alfred, he was away then. But Emil, he had to take over then. And of course, my dad wasn't home then. He was gone.
- LS: When you finished school, did you start working?
- LJ: Yeah, we started and then we after that, why, we got into logging camps, see. On the Shea Meadows and, from there ...
- LS: Why don't you tell me about what it was like to cook for that, what your job was?
- LJ: well, it was kind of a hard job. We didn't have much to work with, that was the worst of it. The camp was new and they had old tables, old bunk tables, I don't know what you'd call 'em. Long tables with benches. And seemed like it was hard to cook and just seemed like it was a little old stove that

they had in there. It was a Lange, but it was a small stove for the crew.

And I know we had a lot of milk at home at that time, so we, when I'd go home, I'd bring a lot of sour milk so we'd make sour milk hotcakes in the mornings. Hot cakes with bacon and eggs and hash brown potatoes. Toast and all kinds of cereal. They had to have everything, you know, the lumberjacks. But it was kind of funny too, you know the boss. (break in tape) May and I we got acquainted with a couple of, well, they were nice young fellas. They wanted to take us to a show in Bovill and May and I we thought, well that's alright, we can go to the show. And when we came back that night, the boss was kind of behind us. He had $\frac{\eta_1}{4}$ car, they had a pretty nice little car to drive in. I think they had a Ford or something. And this guy, he had a pretty nice car driving and he'd sneak up behind and we got through the gate. There was a barbwire fence and then they had a gate there. When we went through, one of the boys closed the gate. And this other guy, he about didn't bother open the gate to go through. This boss, he went on through and tore the gate all to the dickens. And the next morning he said, "Youse girls, you're not going to be chasing around. Or we're going to let you go." And he told my brother about it too. He said,"I don't want the girls to be going out with any boys." We thought, well it was none of his business. We was doing our work. If we wanted to go out, we'd go out. So about, must have been about a week after that, why, the boss got his walking shoes. He was so funny. He got canned. The superintendent, he came up there and canned him. He was drinking on the job. He like his liquor pretty well. So after that, I guess it was about a week or two after he got canned, why they laid us off. The cook and May and I. And they put in, they made a bigger camp out of it and they put in men flunkeys and cooks. A cook. I can't remember what year. Anyway, we was home for a while. I guess it was the next year when the superintendent came over and he said, "Would you girls like to go to work?" And we said yes.

LS: Was this T.P. Jones?

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- LJ: No. T.P. Jones was out of it then.Mr. Nogle. He was the superintendent of the woods then. So he came over.
- LS: He came out first.
- Yeah, he did. He rode a horse and buggy. Or did he have his car then? LJ: I think he had the horse and buggy and then he took us to Bovill and then we took the car. Now, I might be wrong. But anyway. So we said, yes, we'd like to go to work. Mother didn't like to have us go, but, so we got our clothes, what little duds we had. High topped shoes and all. (laughs)We Got down there and they had a went down to Princeton. Down to Camp one. big, fat German cook. His name was Herman. So the next morning we went to work for this guy. We stayed with the boss' family until they got a shack fixed for us. One of those marion shacks with two rooms in it. Course they had to wash it out. They steamed it out with the engine some way. Put the hose in there and got all the bugs out of it, I guess. Wasn't any bugs when we moved in anyway. Bedbugs. So anyhow, the girl that was working there, maybe I shouldn't tell this. If she ever had it read she'd know it was her. Anyway, we kind of took her place.
- LS: What was your job there?
- LJ: Waiting tables, peeling potatoes scrubbing the floors, washing the dishes just about everything we had to do. Frosting the cakes for the cook. He was a great big fat cook. German. "My little ones." he said. Always,
 ' "My little ones." So that went on, how long did we work down there? Several months, anyway. Anyway, this cook, he was giving away stuff to some friends up there. Asome other German lived up there. And they caught him, I guess. Well in the meantime they got aⁿ_A cook that didn't want women flunkies. So then they said, "Would you like to go up to Shea Meadows?" That's where we first started. They built that camp up real big then. They had the horses and barns and bunkhouses and everything there. So of course, we couldn't say no. We wanted the job and there was only about a mile and

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a half from our place and it was nice place. There's where I met my husband.

- LS: He was the cook there?
- LJ: He was the cook there. He and his brother. So they said they needed a couple of flunkeys up there, so the strawboss, I guess you'd call him, the assistant superintendent.Walt Pierce, he met us at the train at Helmer and took us on up the camp. There's where we met Al and Charlie, his brother. We worked there. And that was nice there, we could go home every once in awhile. It was only, in the evenings when we got through with our work, why we'd walk home. See how everybody was and same in the wintertime. We worked there, a year or two.And then the...

LS: Is there any difference between the way different cooks cooked?

LJ: Oh yes, there is a lot of difference. Some cooks is sloppy cooks just like this one that was down at, that German cook who was darn many flies in that place down there at Princeton, that was camp One. And he had raisins in his cupcakes. You didn't know if it was flies or raisins.(laughs) He'd be stirring away, and the cook usually used a hand them days. They $\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}\sqrt{d}}$ We didn't didn't have any machines to stir with. Stir: away there, dare eat any cupcakes. He had nice Cakes, He had beautiful cakes.

Fine grain and all from scratch, not like they have nowadays. Al was a good cook too. He was one of the best cooks.What he's got a name for, is one of the best cooks the Potlatch ever had. So ...

LS: Did he have a reputation for anything in particular?

LJ: Well his cooking was more like home cooking. I mean it was, I don't know. His food was good and clean. He always had, whatever he prepared was always good. He could take a tough piece of steak and he could make a tender steak out of it. He cut his own meat and everything. Some of those cooks didn't care how they cut it. But old Herman Byers, he was a pretty good cook alright, but he was a sloppy cook. You know, some are sloppy, they're kind

of dirty cooks. And he was awful fussy. Anybody talking in the dining room, why he had a gun on top of the shelf where he had his dishes. And anybody get smart, I don't know if he'd use it or not. But up up there reyolver . I didn't tell you about, I should tell you about when anyway. A we were working down at Princeton. whey we'd go out. Go to dances. you know. And we'd sneak out because the cook didn't want us, he was another one, you know that didn't want us -o go out at all. So the bullcook, he's the guy that comes and builds fires, carries the wood and all that, water, he'd come in to our, well, we'd call it the shack. He usually comes in there in the morning and build a roaring fire. You could see the fire come clear out of the chimney. Anyway, this particular, I think it was a Saturday night, we went to $\frac{fhe}{A}$ dance down at Kennedy Ford, that's pretty close to Palouse. And we got home, about three o'clock in the morning. And so May and I come in to work and the bullcook says,"Well girls, did you have a good time last night?" And the cook heard it. Whew! Was he mad!(laughs) "He said, "You little ones. Did you go to the dance last night?"We said yes. And he wouldn't talk to us. He was pouting. So he was mad and he had his bunk right along side our dining room there. So when he took his afternoon off May and I finished up, we thought, that old guy. We're going to have some fun. So we set the alarm clock and put it by his door and went over to our shack and let it ring. Kind of mean. (laughs) He was mad and he wouldn't even talk to us!(laughs) Made him madder yet. He thought he owned me, I guess.

- LS: Is that why the cooks didn't want women flunkeys? The figured they'd fool around with the men?
- LJ: I think so. Or the cooks would get jealous. That's qu'te a few didn't want women flunkeys. There was another guy up, his name was Burt Clarke. He, some of them wanted women flunkeys 'cause they said the women was cleaner. But some didn't. Course Albert, he said he'd rather have women flunkeys.

He said they'd keep things up much better than the men. Scrubbing floors and all yourdishes and things like that.

LS: How often did you scrub the floors?

We scrubbed

- LJ: once a week. With a broom. Pour the water on it. Brush it out the door. And just as white as could be. Use lot of soap and maybe some lye in it too. Albert, he wainted me to cut hot bread. He always like to serve hot bread out of the , right out of the oven practically. You know how hard that is to cut. You always had good sharp knives. And I said, I'm not going to cut that bread. Too darn hard.⁵⁰/_A He got mad and he come over there and he just sliced that bread. We had hot bread on the table. That's before I married him, of course. (laughs) That was a different song then. I got to be boss.
- LS: Did you keep working after you got married?

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- LJ: Yeah, I worked for a while. And then a year, two months, three months Betty was born so , I worked off and on. To relieve second cooks and all like that.
- LS: To give them some free time?
- LJ: YEah.

(End of side A)

LJ: ... got out logs, huge logs that they made those bunkhouses and kitchen and all that that they had. In ^{then} days they just had men cooks and flunkeys. I think my brother flunkied for a while. I can't remember if it was there or another camp. I believe it was Moose Creek. And they used to have separate tables for the Italians. Because they shipped them in from Italy. They said, they'd eat, butter and all that with their fingers. I guess they didn't use their knives. I don't know. I suppose didn't know how to eat or something. They had a bunch of those. I don't know. Other nationality. But they had separate tables for them. They used to talk about, I can't think of it. Snipe hunting. At night.(chuckles)

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- LJ: Silly. They'd take a guy out and, out in the woods, that's the^{l'}fun they' d have in the logging camps years ago. Say, "Well we got to go snipe hunting. You take the lantern and hold this gunny sack. Then we'll go round and the snipe chase the sack see."
- LS: What's a snipe?
- LJ: Supposed to be a bird, I guess. (laughs)So the guy'd be standing there all night. Holding the lantern and holding the sack.They guys'd go home and go to bed.(laughs)That's snipe hunting.
- LS: Who would fall for that?
- Lot of LJ: those green horns that would come to camp. Just like used to Albert'd use that a lot. Some new say in the logging camp, you know, girls come and go to work, "Will you bring me the vanilla bar." They'd wonder, what in the world is a vanilla bar?He says,"It's in there. YOu bring me the vanilla bar." And then he begin to laugh. Of course, there was nothing to it. Just trying to have some fun.Crazy things. When we lived up in Elk River in the logging camps up there, why, that's when Betty was about four years old. Anyway, he had two flunkeys there. One girl, she was real cute. Paulson girls. One of 'em lives in Lewiston now, Dorothy. But anyway, they were always fooling with Albert, either putting pepper down his neck scuffling, always scuffling around. So this Mildred, she walks up behind him and shakes the salt and pepper shake it down his neck, so he had some eggs, he was working there making a cake or something. Took an egg and he said he just put it on her head. Just rubbed it in real good. Oh, she was so mad, she had to go wash her hair. And it was dinnertime, practically. She had to wash her hair. She wouldn't talk to him for several days. The whole egg. Can you imagine what that'd be? What a mess. We used to have so much fun in camp, though. One time the boss, they had a little creek running across there from the warehouse to the kitchen. Little bridge there, you know. Here come the boss and I was standing there. And he come up and he talked

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to me and I had my back, no railing or nothing you know, and I was standing right here and the creek was down here. He politely gave me a push and I went in there and boy I was all wet, so I reached up there and I got him by the legs. I pulled him clear into that water. I'm telling you, he got wet.I told him, if I get wet, you're going to get wet too."Oh," he says, "My watch, my watch."I said, I don't care about your watch. How about me getting all wet?! It was fun. We'd have water fights. And this kid that used to be clerk there. I call him a kid, he's about 63 now, I guess, $N_A^c \operatorname{seem}_A^c$ like a kid to me. Anyway, he was the clerk there. He would always tease Betty. Betty was little and she says,"I'll tell my dad on ya if you don't quit teasing me." SO we got to scuffling around there and May and I got a hold of him, so we tore his shirt clear off, throwed him into the water. He was kind of a little guy.(laughs) Quite a character.

LS: Would you get to know the lumberjacks real well?

Oh yeah. They were all nice guys. Always talking about lumberjacks being LJ: so rough, but they re not. They respected a person. They respected women. They'd all fight for us. Boy, anybody said anything, made any remarks about us, boy, they .. I know, said one time they said,"Gee she's getting so darn fat she's about two axe handles broad."I guess one guy said, "Now listen. You're not going to talk about the girls like that." Ready for a fight.(laughs)No,May and 🕇 thought we wer reducing. Instead That WAS of that we were gaining. Albert and his brother's trick too. We said, well we've got to go on a diet. We're getting too fat. So they had one of those big scales, you know you stand on like they have for hay and all that, moved them levers. Well every morning, Charlie'd drill out a little bit there, make it look like we was losing weight. When we got the right weight on there, I'll tell you, we'd ganined. That's why were so bread I guess.That was fun. Yeah, we had quite a time. Betty used to fight for

her dad.The girls pick on him, boy she'd pick up a stick or anything, boy, she'd hit 'em. She'd in there to fight, you know, scuffle. They start scuffling with him, boy she was right there.That little kid, I can just see her yet, how she'd walk along there and she'd"You leave my daddy alone!"(laughs)She said she can still remember that. The girls would be scuffling around, pick on him, you know.

- LS: Was it largely the cooks and the people that were centered in the camps that would get to know each other?
- LJ: Yeah. The boss and the cooks and the flunkeys and the clerks. And the barn boss. He usually come in and have coffee and cookies. They'd be eating all day there. They'd come in and have coffee breaks every once in a while. Coffee^{'5} on the stove all the time. Coffeepot.
- LS: Did those meals have to be ready right on time?
- LJ: Right on time. Six o'clock in the morning. We rang the bell at five thirty, every body was up. Then you ring the second bell and that was breakfast. They get in there and eat. And some of 'em eat in about five minutes, I think. Up and gone. I don't know how they ever put the food away. That fast, anyway.
- LS: I've heard that from other people. Were they pressured to eat fast?
- LJ: No, they didn't go to work til seven o'clock. But I guess they're always in a hurry. Some of them were gyppoers too. The sooner they got out there, the more money they made.Whatever they worked at. Logs. And out in the woods they'd go. Start cutting trees of course.
- LS: Would all the men make it back for noon dinner?
- LJ: No, they took lunch. They did put up lunch for 'em for a while, but then they let 'em put up their own, because some wanted this and some wanted that. Some wanted three sandwiches and some wanted two sandwiches. And they didn't want cheese and some wanted it, so they let 'em put it up themselves. And they had a long table with all kinds of food on it.

Cookies, doughnuts, cakes, pies. All that was on there and they could take what they wanted. They even had salt pork, Lot of them old guys make sandwiches out of salt pork. These Swedish people. They liked it. And have ham and beef and pork, the salt pork. If there was any bacon left from breakfast, he'd stick that on the table. Keep coffee on there. Let 'em fix their own thermos bottles. Then they always took so much stuff and then they'd feed the bears or the animals outside. Boy there was a lot of waste. Terrible. They'd eat and then they'd come in starved at night. Lumberjacks filling up the dishes. Go in and look it over, they'd see an empty dish come back and they'd fill her up.

- LS: You served 'em?
- LJ: Big plates. It's family style. But you had to see that everything was filled. Like potatoes and gravy and meat and in the mornings it'd be hotcakes. You'd be running with the hot cakes plates.
- LS: They'd have a big hot meal? In the evening.
- LJ: Usually have steak, pork chops, hamburger steaks. LIver, fish Fridays, usually. Cut up I don't know how many fish. He'd have to cut his own fish. Come in big hunks, fish.
- LS: What kind of stove?
- LJ: They had a big Lange. had three ovens. Three oven stoves. Albert had bread going in the oven bout the time they had breakfast or pies coming out or going in. They try to get all their baking done in the morning. Beside getting up the dinner. Maybe they wouldn't have too big a crew coming in for dinner like. The ones that was close in. Bake about a hundred loaves of bread. Buns. Doughnuts.
- LS: How often?
- LJ: Everyday.Raised doughnuts, bismarks maple bars. Gosh they, put the frosting on. And they'd bake cakes. Sheets. They used to make the cakes in sheets unless they had a smaller crew, then they'd make layer cakes. White

cakes, chocolate cakes. Pies. Berry pies.Apple, custards, pumpkin. Roast great, big pans of meat. In the morning have boiled eggs and scrambled eggs, fried eggs.

- LS: All of them?
- LS: Yeah, we picked one day.
- LJ: Where did you go?
- LS: Up by Bald Mountain.
- LJ: Did you get some good ones?
- LS: We got plenty for our needs. Made fifteen pints of jam.
- LJ: I sold quite a few berries. (more talk about berrying)

(End of tape)