

STERLING PLATT

Interview 105a

December 10, 1986

Jeremy Barnes, Interviewer

Dorothy Farley, Transcriber

Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: In this short interview with Jeremy Barnes, Sterling Platt describes some of his past jobs. He worked as a shepherd in Utah, in the stockyards in St. Paul, Minnesota, and in slaughterhouses collecting blood and offal for fertilizer.

Jeremy Barnes (hereafter JB): I am Jeremy Barnes and it is December 10, 1986. I am interviewing Sterling Platt about what young people, what jobs young people might get when they graduate. When you started out, what kinds of jobs did you get?

Sterling Platt (hereafter SP): When I was a young men, boy, possibly I was ten years old, that was in 1934. My father worked in Ogden, Utah. There used to be a man there by the name of Marriott who was the grandfather of the Marriott who started the large hotel chains. Marriott was in the sheep business. He used to run huge flocks of sheep up on the mountains which was north of Ogden, and in the springtime, for about two months, my parents used to leave me with the sheep camp. In the spring when they sheared the sheep, the lambs would be born about the time I would be let off and I used to herd sheep with a sheepherder. He had small collies for sheep dogs and then he had a large type dog, which was a guard dog. That was the first time I had ever seen a guard dog, but they are more popular today, guarding sheep. That's all he did, was guard them. He didn't herd them or anything. He was trained to do that – guard against coyotes, etc. Anyway, I would go to the sheep camp and would meet with this guy. I had a little single shot .22 that I had with me. We'd camp out sometimes under the sheep wagon. We would take the sheep. We'd be up pretty high or way down deep, winter would start. But as the summer would go along you just keep going higher and higher up on the mountains. During this particular time the herdsman would pick out the older ewes and the older sheep and he would kill those, slaughter them, and clean them out, and he had a large bucket, or kettle on the back of his wagon. He kept this constantly full of mutton, or old sheep. Then each evening he would heat this back up again and skim off the tallow, or fat that had formed. That's what he would use to make candles. That's what we would eat. He would get vegetables here and there and pretty soon you get pretty tired of that so I would take my .22 and shoot a sage rabbit. I'd clean it, drop it in the bucket, anything you picked up you would drop it in the bucket. That's what I did for some three years, was herd sheep in the mountains. Got acquainted with that particular country. It is now some of the main ski resorts in Utah.

Throughout my young life I've spent time herding sheep or taking care of cattle in the summer by working in the stock-yards. That's where I spent my young life during the summers. Later on when we had a team of Clydesdales, those are the large horses and there were six of them. We had a large wagon and we'd train these horses to pull the

wagon. Later on they were sold to a famous beer company, the Budweiser team in the stockyards. I used to ride them.

Later on when I got into high school I got better and better jobs around there. One summer when I was in high school, I was in St. Paul, Minnesota and I worked with the South St. Paul stockyards and was able to get the job of working in the packing house. It was right at the time when we were starting our war efforts, right before World War II. We weren't in the war yet but we were getting close and we did what they could to form the wings on air planes, this type of fabric and this came from blood which was high in protein. Before they had been using this blood mostly for fertilizers, but they decided they needed this for the war effort so they hired me. One of my first jobs was on the killing floor, and on this floor they bucked the cattle. There was a fellow that came up and would stand there at that particular time and he had a sledge hammer and knocked them out. The gate would open up and swing out and they had a fellow that would shackle them, pick them up in the air and there was a man we used to call the "sticker," had a long curved pin knife and he would reach in with this knife and cut the jugular vein of this animal while he was suspended in the air. Then he would take the heart of this bleeding animal and this blood would spurt out. During this particular time they dressed me in a kind of a rayon and I had an ice cream can. I'd run out there and I'd grab this blood in the ice cream can, as much as I could. Then I'd take it back and pour it into a 50 gallon drum. When we'd get the drum full, we'd seal that drum. They would put some preservatives in it. I had that job for about four or five weeks and I was getting sick. I just couldn't take it any more, blood spurting all over me. I was completely covered with it some times, didn't get much protection. So I went to my foreman and I can "I can't take this any longer, I would like to go over and find another job some place. Do you have something else I could do?" He had another young fellow that was quitting that job and they moved me down to conveyors with this packing house. The packing house, in those days, was built on floors, three and four floors, and the animals would walk from the top floor, work their way down and as they worked down there was an offal of waste that was thrown off the animal: it went down a long shoot to the basement, and from this basement they had a conveyor chain that took this waste, or offal, up this big conveyor into a fertilizer plant, next to us. So I ended up down in this basement shoveling this off fall into the conveyor into this fertilizer plant. That went on for another three or four weeks. Finally got out of that and they put another fellow in there. That same summer I had three different jobs.

We walked around and shackled hogs. We shackled them in the back leg and then there was this big conveyor would come around and jerk them off in the air. We'd go past these stalls and kill the hogs.

Those are some of the jobs I had during the summer and some of the experiences I had as a young man growing up. There hasn't been a summer since 1934 that I haven't worked. Now is there anything else you want to cover.

JB: Not now.

SP: You know, about this time when I finished that work I went into the service and I had gotten a job that summer with the Union Pacific Railroad in Denver, Colorado and

that's where I signed up for the service. The war had just barely got started and I got to washing the streamliners in Denver, usually washed them with soap and washed them off with water. I did that for three or four weeks and they needed some fellows to fire a switch engine so I volunteered for that and made considerably more money and we'd be twelve hours on and twelve hours off, be on the job five and six days a week. What they had done is bring back old engineers to run the switch engines and, of course, the engines in those days were coal into a fire box. This switch engine was fired by shoveling coal into a fire box. When I first started out I was shoveling coal into the fire box. I didn't know any differently and the engineer wasn't about to tell me so for three or four weeks I just did nothing but shovel coal into the fires and burn it up.

END OF INTERVIEW