

CHET BLACKINTON

**Seattle, Washington
Interviewed by**

**JonLee Joseph
For
The Southwest Seattle Historical Society**

December 10, 2000

CHET BLACKINTON

**Seattle, Washington
Interviewed by**

**JonLee Joseph
For
The Southwest Seattle Historical Society**

December 10, 2000

JonLee: I'm interviewing Chet Blackinton, Seattle, Washington. We're live!

Chet Blackinton: Hmmmm.

JL: So, it occurred to me that the first question I would like to ask, is how did you come by your family name of "Blackinton"?

CB: That was an English name. My grandfather came from Maine. My great grandfather came from Maine.

JL: Was that Lucius? And who did he marry?

CB: My grandfather married an Indian on Guemes Island, in the state of Washington.

JL: Yesterday when we talked, you said that she was called a Princess. So she was royalty.

CB: Yah.

JL: So you descend through English and Samish ancestors.

CB: Yah.

JL: So, where were you raised?

CB: Guemes Island.

JL: Is that what was left of a homestead claim?

CB: Right. He homesteaded 160 acres and then he sold most of it. Ten, twenty acres here and there. Right down to the last part of it. There was twenty acres between us and the beach. And he sold that to the shipyard, during the First World War.

JL: So, you didn't have any personal beach property left?

CB: No.

JL: You mentioned that your father had a farm, and you were raised learning how to farm with horses and a garden.

CB: We had horses that we used to farm a little farm, but not anymore than three at one time. Usually we had one, and then to get a team, so we had three.

JL: To plow? And to carry loads? Is the soil rich up there on Guemes Island?

CB: It was pretty good. The main thing we raised was rocks! (laughs).

JL: So, it was a glacial till that left rocks up there?

CB: Everytime you plowed you turned up rocks. We had a whole fence about a half a mile long and about four feet deep and six-eight feet wide. It was nothing but rock.

JL: It's like New England.

CB: (Laughs).

JL: Now, when you were in school, Merrilee told me you were an all-season, year round athlete. So, would you talk about the sports that you were engaged in?

CB: I played football, and basketball, baseball, and on the track team. Football, I made a name for myself. I was a punter and all-round good fullback. And basketball – at that time we didn't have so many big players. I was 6'1" and starting center, on the basketball team. Now you're short!

JL: (Laughs).

CB: Baseball, I played a first baseman. And, after I got out of school, I very seldom played first base. I played (chuckles) everything else! Track – when I was a freshman and sophomore, mainly a freshman, I ran, in a sprint. They had me running an anchor on the relay team. After that, I didn't run, because I had gained a little weight. Couldn't outrun those guys!

JL: Were you a short distance, or long distance runner?

CB: Short-distance.

JL: What was your best time in the 50 or 100 yard dash?

CB: Hundred-yard dash was only about 10.2. But, that was pretty good for high school. After that I took part in what they called, "Field Events." Shot put, discus, javelin. I didn't do real good, but I picked up a few points here and there.

JL: Did your athletic abilities and skills get you a scholarship to college?

CB: Yes it did, but I didn't take full advantage of it.

JL: So, how long did you stay in college? Where did you go?

CB: I went to the University of Washington, first quarter. And then I quit and that was a big mistake because I had made the first team, and after that I went ('37, '38, '39), three different years at Western Washington. And I still didn't get any degree or anything.

JL: I just want a date for a moment. When did you graduate from high school? What year?

CB: 1936.

JL: Now, I want to ask about being raised on Guemes Island and the Anacortes area, because you're Samish Indian and English in your background. Did you experience any attitudes or discrimination for being Indian?

CB: Not really. One of the things that happened when I was a little kid would make you want to fight the kids, but it wasn't really discrimination. It was just name-calling. There was quite a few other kids that had the same nationality. I wound up with six different nationalities.

JL: Would you tell me what they are?

CB: Scotch, English, Irish, Dutch, French, and American Indian.

JL: Yesterday you told me a saying that your Dad told you. Do you remember that? Don't pick a fight, but don't run from one either.

CB: He told me that. (Laughs). It probably got me out of a lot of fights when I was little.

Merrilee Blackinton Hagen (daughter): Tell the story about what the neighbor asked, and how your mother fed you, to make you so fat.

CB: Ohh ho. Yeah, the guy that lived across the street from us was the manager of the shipyard. I was about five years old, I guess. I was fat. My mother told me that I fell down and have to roll over to something and get up. (Laughs). This guy from across the street, he was talking to me one day and asked me, "What do you eat to make you so fat?" I said, "Spuds, mush, and taters!" (Laughs).

JL: So, how did you get slender? Just by growing, and being such an athlete?

CB: I've never had any trouble. After I was a few years older, I slimmed up and I stay within a few pounds. By the time I was in Junior High School, I weighed about 190 pounds. And when I went to college, I weighed 196. I spent a summer in a boat in Alaska, hauling salmon. I came home, and I weighed 208 or 210. After turning out for football for awhile I had come back down to 196. I stayed that way, most of my life! I've never had to worry about what I ate, or how much I ate, or anything.

JL: (Merrilee has gotten me a framed photo of CB with sports letters also in the frame). You look like a young Bill Bradlee!

CB: When I started high school, I didn't know what a basketball was. We didn't have anywhere where we could have played basketball. I couldn't dribble or anything else. And one of the Assistant coaches said, "You've got a lot of ability, and if you want me to teach you, I'll work with you." Well, I wound up starting center. And we wound up at the state tournament here at the U of W. Took seventh place in the state!

JL: Maybe that's when the scouts from the University of Washington saw you? Noticed you. Now, would you tell me how you met Mrs. Blackinton, your wife? That part of the story.

CB: I was in Jerry's Italian Restaurant, and she walked in with her girlfriend. And, Jay's one daughter was there, and they were all sitting there in a booth in the corner, and Jay's daughter invited me over, and I sat down with them. And, that's when I met her.

JL: Did she catch your eye right away?

CB: (Laughs). I don't know.

JL: And then you started dating?

CB: There was a dance out by Ferndale and she had come out there with her girlfriend. I invited her to come home with me, and I had a model A coupe. And I had my two sisters and my brother-in-law with me. And they were riding in front. And, her and I rode in the back, coming home.

M: In the rumble seat?

CB: Yup!

JL: How much longer after that before you were married?

CB: Oh, must have been a year at least. I forget just what it was.

JL: Would you tell the story, for the tape, about after you were married. You went to work in Bellingham, and you went to work in a liquor store. And what happened?

CB: I don't think we were married then. I was working in the liquor store writing orders. And, people came in and got their orders and went down to the clerk and paid him. And I'd run the orders to a clerk, and he would hand them to them when they went out the door. And, I had worked for a week or two, I guess. And, I come in one morning and the boss took me aside, and said he was going to have to let me go, because I was part Indian and couldn't work in a liquor store. And I said, "Well, there's nothing wrong with that. I don't live on the reservation. All I do is work and sell them."

He said, "I got to protect my rights." So, he let me go. I saw him about a week or ten days later, and he had been fired! So I guess it was somebody were in politics, that had to do with it. But, that was about the only time that I ever had anything like that happen.

JL: Thank you. Thank you for repeating that story. I wanted to ask you now about moving to West Seattle. Because yesterday you said you remembered the trolley swaying on its trestle.

CB: (Laughs).

JL: So, would you talk about that? Then I'll ask you another question.

CB: Well, the old trolley that used to run in Seattle. They ran on steel rails that were in the center of the street. In '36 when I was at the U of W, we used to ride downtown. If I remember right, it was only about a nickel a ride! But, I didn't know anything about West Seattle at that time. After we came back in '41, June of '41, I hired in at Boeings. And, they were starting, they had changed quite a few of them. And they were running regular buses.

JL: Now when you first moved to West Seattle, Merrilee mentioned that you moved to a house down by Alki that was, pretty much of a beach house. And that your yard, and you remember plank sidewalks or plank roads? And that your yard had been a garbage midden, and you had pieces of china, old pieces of dishes? Would you talk about that house, and what West Seattle was like, down around Alki, at that time?

CB: West Seattle was more or less all beach houses, clear down to Alki. Recently they built condos all over the place. When we first moved down there on 59th, just off of

Andover, the house we moved in, I think it had, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, seven rooms.

JL: How many children did you have at that point? Did that make it kind of tight? Were you working at Boeing then? What did you pay for that house?

CB: Five thousand two hundred and fifty dollars.

JL: Was that a lot of money then? Was that in the '40's?

CB: '49. I think, when we moved down there. But, the house wasn't one of those that had been built – I don't know how big it was originally. But they had added on here and there. So, I spent a lot of time rebuilding the different parts of it, and it had had boards this wide (2 feet), and they were probably 8 – 10 ' long, and 18 to 24" wide. And they had those on the outside of the house. And they had a four-inch board over the crack. I put cedar siding all over that house, and did most of the work myself. But, it was a drafty house. (Laughs). Originally had wood stove, cook stove and a fireplace in the living room with a place where you could put a pipe in and have another stove. In the living room, we had an oil stove. That was the main heat. It had a furnace in the basement, but it was supposed to be hot water heat, but you couldn't control that furnace. It would get real hot or go out. At night, you couldn't bank it up so it would keep burning all night.

JL: Was it a wood furnace, or coal?

CB: Well, usually wouldn't use coal in a wood stove. Mostly wood.

JL: Did you get your wood from the beach? There used to be lots of log rafts going by, and logs would come ashore. I remember in the '50's.

CB: Yeah. Some of our wood from the beach.

M: I can remember going to the beach with him, and cutting logs with a cross cut saw.

JL: What was your front door like at that house?

CB: It was made out of lumber that was nailed together and it didn't look like an outside door, the way they're made now. It was just a lot of lumber nailed together.

M: It was heavy planks that were nailed together and it had a drunkard's handle so you could hold on, while you were finding the keyhole.

JL: So, whose parents were living there with you? Your parents, or your wife's?

CB: My wife's parents were living there with us. And after he died, she lived with us for some time, but not too long.

JL: Do you remember the plank road?

CB: Yeah. When we first moved down there, the street in front of our house was, well, you would look at it, and it would look like, I don't know what you would call it, it wasn't paving, it looked like they had oiled the street and put gravel down. And, up the street, away from us, and up over the hill, they had plank on the dirt. And, part of that street was just plain dirt.

JL: Were there sidewalks?

CB: No sidewalks. They decided to put in a new sewer pipe. And they ran it down Beach Drive. They came in on Andover and went down 59th and Chilberg to Douglas and back to southwest Beach Drive. They put in a sixty six-inch piping. That was the late 50's. They put in a new water main. That's when they really improved that street.

JL: Do you remember being at Alki before there was a grade school there?

CB: No.

JL: Did you ever take your family to Schmitz Park on walks or for picnics?

CB: No.

JL: Do you remember any businesses along Alki Avenue? Scotty Wilbur's grocery store?

M: Esther's.

JL: Esther's? do you remember the card room? A little two-story green building above Pepperdock's? I have one storyteller, Erna Albert. She remembers there was a card room up there. There used to be a little tavern at Alki. Do you remember? It got closed down by the PTA. So, from there, you moved to this house? What made you moved?

CB: We lived down there for 39 years. The house was too big. Three bedrooms was upstairs; no bathroom on the main floor. Difficult to hear this part of the tape. She (nods at Merrilee) brought us up to look at this and the way it was set up was real handy. And double garage, and not as much yard.

JL: So, were you retired then, or getting ready to retire?

CB: I was in retirement, all ready.

JL: From working at Boeing, and the shipyard? In your retirement do you do recreational things in West Seattle, like go for walks on the beach, or swim?

CB: I used to walk, but I can't anymore.

JL: Did you ever swim in the pools? In Lincoln Park, or before there was a pool at Lincoln Park? You're the primary breadwinner for the family, so you may have worked a lot and a lot of overtime.

CB: I did. One time I worked 76 or 78 days in a row. And I wanted the weekend off. I wanted to go to Grays Harbor. The Boss wanted me to work the weekend. I said, "You'll get a call in the middle of the week that I'm sick! What are you going to do about it?" He stopped in his tracks. He said, "How many days have you worked?" I said, "Seventy-something." "Well", he said, "I guess I can give you a couple of days." So, he gave me Saturday and Sunday off.

JL: Was that at Boeing, or the shipyards?

CB: Boeing.

JL: So, during the War, were you eligible for the Draft?

CB: I was eligible but I didn't get called until '44.

JL: But you had children by then, right?

CB: Yeah.

JL: Is that why you weren't?....

CB: Well, we were all excluded, working for the War industry. But they got around that. I had two girls by that time. I worked for the war effort. But the guy said I had a hollow chest (concave chest). I said, "It never bothered me. I played ball and everything.

JL: Were you 4F then, because of your chest being concave? I've looking at this framed picture with all of your athletic letters, probably not all of them. Isn't that amazing! So, what did you do at Boeing?

CB: ...I started in as a mechanic. When I first went to work for Boeing I started in a template shop demos for parts. Then they moved us into an assembly plant where we made different sections of the airplane. And after I was working there a short time, I got a raise. And they changed...leadership in the shop and a month later I was Lead man. I worked for them about two years. Then I left and went to Bellingham worked n the shipyard. It was a little more money. And Boeing put in a plant in Bellingham.

And in Bellingham I ran into somebody I used to work with (at Boeing). He was up there, and said, "What are you doing here?" And I said, "Well, I work down at the ship yard." He said, "I can get you a job up here if you want to come back." And I think it was 20 cents an hour more, when I went back. And, I had to wait a couple weeks. But, they told you at that time, that if you transferred and quit working for a war outfit, they would immediately take you in the service! Well, I never got called, either time.

JL: So, it was empty threat? Do you remember, would you describe the camouflage over Boeing, during the War? What that looked like. And, how was it hung up? Was it draped on the buildings?

CB: Well, I don't know how it was made, but I've seen pictures of it. And they had what looks like roofs and so forth painted. But, I think it was a lot of paint job more than anything else.

JL: Like painting on the roofs? Ah, that makes sense. Are there other stories that you would like to share? Will you tell about going salmon fishing, here in West Seattle?

CB: I fished down in the Bay down here, and in the River. We had our own boat for awhile. A twenty-footer. It was pretty nice to fish to with. Every Spring I would catch some.

JL: Brought them home for supper?

CB: Yeah!

JL: Nothing like fresh fish! Straight off the hook and into the frying pan. Would you talk about going hunting for deer? My Father still does that. He figures the meat costs him about \$80 a pound to go hunting.

CB: (Laughs).

JL: He likes to do it. My Mother got the deer this year.

CB: You can't say how much it costs you, but it's the fact is you get out and do something that you want to, and get away from what you're doing. And when you come home, you feel better, whether you get anything or not. I used to go back up to the islands – Guemes Island. My Uncle lived there for quite awhile. Used to go up and stay with them on Guemes Island. I went Orcas a few time, went hunting with my brother---in-law and my nephew and brought home a deer from there. But I haven't hunted (Laughs), I don't know how long.

JL: Mr. Blackinton, Thank you. I want to thank you. I want to ask you now, when you look back on your life, and ask, what's really important to you? That's really important to your grandchildren who've not been born yet? What's important about living life?

CB: Well, it's pretty hard to say. The main thing is, try to be truthful, as much as you can. And, respect your elders. They're not always right (Laughs), but you got to respect them.

M: Speaking of elders, Tell her about your grandmothers speaking the Indian language, when they didn't know that you could understand her.

CB: Yeah, when I was a little kid, my grandmother would have other women visiting her, and I'd listen to them talk, and I'd get so I could understand quite a bit of the Indian lingo. And, one day, some of them were there, and they were pointing at me, and talking to each other and laughing. Finally my grandmother said, "You better be careful of what you're saying, because he understands more than you think he does. They changed their conversation." (Laughs).

We had a meeting at Moran's estate on Orcas, a few years ago. And they had a guy from Canada that was talking in Indian language. And they were taping, and they were talking about something, and I was grinning. They guy says, "I've been watching you when I was talking about things. He said, "Do you know what I said?" And I said, "Yes. You were talking about crabs." The rest of them all looked, "How do you know that?" I said, "I knew that when I was a kid, but a lot of it, I don't remember." (Laughs).

M: He never spoke it, but he can understand it.

JL: Thank you then, very much.

(Tape II).

JL: Today is December 30th, the year 2000. This is the second tape. I'm interviewing Chet Blackinton, in Seattle, Washington. We're live! So, could you talk, please. I want this for the tape, even though I just said it. You generously donated, I think the whole family did, all of you donated, to the (Log House) Museum, for their exhibit, some beautiful baskets, a fishhook, and two paddles. Could you tell us about those items, and where they came from?

CB: Well, the paddle came from Samish Indian Tribe, and they were made out of the same log that the maiden pole was made out of. The one that now stands at Rosario Beach. The baskets, they came from my mother's place. I don't know how my sisters missed those! But they were in a pile of garbage. I went with a stick, and went through that pile of garbage on the workbench – and there was the two baskets. And, they have been in the family for about 100 years.

JL: Are they berry baskets? They're very tightly woven.

CB: Right.

JL: So, that would have been your grandmother who maybe made them? Or your great grandparents?

CB: Well, I don't know. Grandma Blackinton, I don't know whether she made baskets or not. But I think all the baskets came through her, one way or another.

M: Weren't those baskets part of a set of five?

CB: There was five. These were two smaller ones. The bigger one would probably hold 2 ½ to 3 gallons. (of berries). They were of different shape.

JL: Do you know what the material is? I looked at them, but I don't know. It's almost like there's an imprecation, a covering.

CB: They use the inside of the bark. You strip off the bark, and you get a white (inner bark). That's the material they use for baskets. If it's something else; I don't know what it would be.

JL: Did you ever help gather materials for baskets?

CB: No.

JL: I know, traditionally, it was more of a female occupation. (At least in this part of the world). But times change. In Suquamish, you have Ed Carriere, who carries on the tradition. Because, he used to help his grandmother gather materials.

CB: The women did a lot of basket weaving. I didn't think the men were too involved in that stuff.

JL: Now, where did the fish hook come from? Did you find that in the garbage? When you went through the garbage, was it because your mother had died?

CB: No. She sold the place.

JL: She sold the place, and the children came up and took the goods? And, where did the fish hook come from?

CB: Well, that one and another one, that they used for halibut fishing, were in the shed. I think they were hanging on a wall. My brother talked me out of one hook. (Laughs), years later.

JL: What material are they made out of?

CB: Well that one is like a big metal spike, heated up and bent. And then it has fish line woven into it in a rope. I don't know how it's fastened on.

JL: Could you talk too, at this time, for the tape, your part in creating that beautiful salmon maiden statue (at Rosario State Park on Deception Pass). The Maiden Pole. She's standing with her arms up-stretched, holding on to a salmon, and her body's beginning to be covered with scales (fish). Could you talk about the part that you played in that?

CB: I didn't do too much of it. When it was all carved, and ready to mount on that base. We took it over there with a truck with a hydraulic lift on it, set it on the base, and tied it down. Then, the salmon was put on it later. And another guy and I went up there and put bolts down through the salmon into the arms. And, it's like, construction steel we drove in there. I don't think it will ever come out!

JL: Now, do you remember that story? Was that told to you by your grandparents, when you were a child, of the salmon maiden?

CB: No, I never heard it until Mary _Hanson_____ ?? come forward with it. Her son is the chairman of the Tribe (Samish).

JL: Do you care to, do you feel up to, giving a little gist of that story, so that it's in your voice, and not mine. Rather than mine. If you feel up to it. (Chet Blackinton is not well, and has difficulty breathing).

CB: It's pretty hard to talk.

M: The Tribe had a huge potlatch when they installed the pole there. And did the traditional salmon roast and played the bone game, which is a traditional Indian gambling game. There must have been 300 people there. It was quite a party, and we had dancing and speakers. And when Indian speakers get up they ramble on forever. (Laughs). It takes a long time. But, it was a very nice potlatch.

JL: Do you remember the story?

M: Bits of it. I remember the Tribe was starving. And, in order to bring the salmon to the Tribe, the Chief's daughter walked into the water and became the bride of the King (salmon), in the water. And, when she came back out, her hair had turned to seaweed and she had barnacles on her. And, she brought fish to the people, so they would have something to eat. And the maiden pole is built so that on one side she looked as she did before she went in the water. On the other side, there's a face and it has seaweed and barnacles on her. That's about all I remember about the story.

JL: That's a lot. I wanted that story for this. Thank you. Is there anything else you'd like to add, at this time then?

CB: I can't think of anything.

JL: Okay. Then, I thank you very much.