

**Oral History Interview of
John Lapp**

**Interviewed by: Monte Monroe
January 10, 2020
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*American Agriculture Movement Interviews***

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

**Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library**

15th and Detroit | 806.742.3749 | <http://swco.ttu.edu>

Copyright and Usage Information:

An oral history release form was signed by John Lapp on January 10, 2020. This transfers all rights of this interview to the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University.

This oral history transcript is protected by U.S. copyright law. By viewing this document, the researcher agrees to abide by the fair use standards of U.S. Copyright Law (1976) and its amendments. This interview may be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes only. Any reproduction or transmission of this protected item beyond fair use requires the written and explicit permission of the Southwest Collection. Please contact Southwest Collection Reference staff for further information.

Preferred Citation for this Document:

Lapp, John Oral History Interview, January 10, 2020. Interview by Monte Monroe, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

The Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library houses over 6,300 oral history interviews dating back to the late 1940s. The historians who conduct these interviews seek to uncover the personal narratives of individuals living on the South Plains and beyond. These interviews should be considered a primary source document that does not implicate the final verified narrative of any event. These are recollections dependent upon an individual's memory and experiences. The views expressed in these interviews are those only of the people speaking and do not reflect the views of the Southwest Collection or Texas Tech University.

The transcribers and editors of this document strove to create an accurate and faithful transcription of this oral history interview as possible. However, this document may still contain mistakes. Spellings of proper nouns and places were researched thoroughly, but readers may still find inaccuracies, inaudible passages, homophones, and possible malapropisms. Any words followed by "[?]" notates our staff's best faith efforts. We encourage researchers to compare the transcript to the original recording if there are any questions. Please contact the SWC/SCL Reference department for access information. Any corrections or further clarifications may be sent to the A/V Unit Manager.

Technical Processing Information:

The Audio/Visual Department of the Southwest Collection curates the ever-growing oral history collection. Abbreviated abstracts of interviews can be found on our website, and we are continually transcribing and adding information for each interview. Audio recordings of these interviews can be listened to in the Reading Room of the Southwest Collection. Please contact our Reference Staff for policies and procedures. Family members may request digitized copies directly from Reference Staff. Consult the Southwest Collection website for more information.

<http://swco.ttu.edu/Reference/policies.php>

Recording Notes:

Original Format: Born Digital Audio

Digitization Details: N/A

Audio Metadata: 96 kHz/ 24 bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Related Interviews:

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: Monte Monroe

Audio Editor: N/A

Transcription: Bill Corrigan

Editor(s): Kayci Rush

Interview Series Background:

The American Agriculture Movement grew out of the populist agrarian protests of the late 1970s. Officially chartered in August of 1977, it remains active. Materials in the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library reflect principally its formation, the tractorcade protests of 1977-1979, and the farm and rural suicide hotline prevention efforts of the 1980s. Materials include oral history interviews, photographs, video and film, and miscellaneous papers.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features John Lapp and his family as they discuss his past service in World War II and his farm. In this interview, Lapp begins by explaining growing up during the great Depression and Dust Bowl. He then moves on to describe his service in World War II in the Navy. Lapp then moves on to recount his involvement with the American Agriculture movement and participation in the Tractorcade. He closes the interview by discussing his adventures in the dairy farming business.

Length of Interview: 02:20:30

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Introduction and background information	05	00:00:00
Depression; school	09	00:09:48
The character of his parents	14	00:17:54
His memories of the Dust Bowl; working on the farm; World War II	15	00:20:16
Facing discrimination for being Russian Germans; service in the Navy	21	00:29:17
Landing in Guadalcanal; fighting in the islands	28	00:40:45
Getting to Mindoro and getting hit by a kamikaze	32	00:48:56
Getting sent back home	35	00:55:39
Working after the war; farming	41	01:04:00
Doing dairy work and returning to farming	51	01:15:15
American Agriculture Movement	58	01:23:44
After the Tractorcade; impact of the farm crisis	68	01:36:43
Tractorcade to Washington D.C.	71	01:41:27
Traveling to Washington D.C.; arriving in D.C.	78	01:50:03
Linda Lapp's recollection of working in an office in D.C.; soybeans	84	01:59:59
Farm Aid; renting his land; political views	91	02:10:57

Keywords

Farming and Agriculture, American Agriculture Movement, Tractorcade

Monte Monroe (MM):

This is Monte Monroe, I'm at the MCM Eleganté in Lubbock, Texas, it is 1/10/2020, we are interviewing Mr. John Lapp who was a member of the American Ag Movement, still is. He is ninety-seven years old. He's here with us in Lubbock, Texas today, and we've got a series of questions for him. And John, are you ready to go?

John Lapp (JL):

Let her go.

MM:

Okay. Tell us a little bit about your family background, John. Where were you born and what were your parent's full names?

JL:

My parents came from Frank, Russia, my dad come over in 1903 and my mother come over in 1907. And they migrated to Loveland, Colorado, and there was a family, I've got six sisters and four brothers. And we've been farming, my dad was a farmer over in the old country. They raised sugar beets over there and cattle and wheat.

MM:

Now tell me your father's name.

JL:

My father's name was Jacob, and my mother—Jacob Lapp and my mother's name was Marie Bath.

MM:

Okay, Marie Bath was her maiden name?

JL:

Yes. Was her maiden name.

MM:

Okay. Did they have middle names?

JL:

No, they had no middle names.

MM:

Okay. And what drew them to emigrate from Russia and come to the United States to farm in

Colorado?

JL:

Well, they got tired of paying taxes over in the old country, and they were promised a lot of things over there, and it didn't hold out. Great Western Sugar Company built a beet factory in Loveland, Colorado in 1907. And they brought a lot of these people in here to do sugar beets. And in those days, sugar beets, there was a lot of hand labor involved. They used to do them top them by hand, and they had to be thinned, and that's what brought a lot of these people over.

MM:

Okay, so they came as part of a larger group then, right?

JL:

Yes.

MM:

Seeking economic opportunity here, particularly working for the beet factory.

JL:

Working for the beet factory,

MM:

Okay. Did your grandparents come with them? Any other family members come with them that you—

JL:

My dad's side, my mother lost her father and mother when she was over in the old country, but when my dad come over they came over as a family. But when mother came over, why two of the brothers brought the girls over.

MM:

Okay. Now do you remember your grandparent's name on both sides? And start with your father first.

JL:

Well my dad's—grand—his name was Jacob, and my mother, I can't answer that. I don't know what her name was.

MM:

Okay. Did they all—what was their experience coming here as immigrants? Did they all—were

they proud of their previous heritage in Russia, and or did they just move into the United States and want to become American citizens?

JL:

They came over here and they wanted to become American citizens. Around our house after they got married and had a family, taxes was the first thing that had to be paid. I mean they was very loyal people and they went through the Great Depression and never did ask for no help. They were—and a big part of them were very successful. They came over here and they worked beets for Great Western maybe for a couple of years, but about the third year they had their own horses, they had their own stuff, and they were buying a forty or they bought an eighty or whatever, and they had taxes and they paid the taxes. And after they was over here just a short time they used to have to go to a—they went to school to get their naturalization papers.

MM:

Okay. Now, tell me—you mentioned that you had all these siblings. Can you list their names for me, your brothers and sisters?

JL:

Yep, I can. I had—my older brother's name's Henry, then next one was Jacob, the next one was Connor, and then there was a girl by the name of Ruth, and then we had another girl by the name of Marie, and then there was Frida, and there was Emma and then there was myself and there was Molly and then there was Helen and then there was George.

MM:

That was quite a herd.

JL:

I'll tell you, when you eat breakfast and they only had one sugar bowl and if the cereal—if you was last on the cereal, it got kind of lumpy before the sugar got to you. But Mother said, "How was the cereal?" You said, "Just the way I like it."

MM:

[Laughter] That's great, that's great John. Now tell me a little bit about your family farm. And you were talking about how they went through the whole Depression and never had to take any aid or anything like that. Tell us what it was like growing up as a young boy in Loveland, Colorado.

JL:

Well they went to Loveland, then later on they moved out into the brush, Fort Morgan brush area, and rented a farm out there, and I was born in Hillrose, Colorado. And that was—would be

about—we left Hillrose about I'd say 1927, and they had done real well and saved some money and we bought a farm south of Windsor, Colorado. Well in 1929 when the stock market crashed and wheat dropped to seventeen cents a bushel and hogs dropped to five dollars a hog and you threw in the little pigs, they didn't lose the farm but they finally did get rid of it and salvaged some land south of Kersey. And in '29 we moved to a farm north of Johnstown, where we had irrigation water where we could raise sugar beets, and my older brother stayed on the farm there at Windsor and farmed it as dryland. And it was pretty tough in those days. Well then in 1933, we moved out to south of Kersey, oh, about seven miles south of Kersey, and at that time the rattlesnakes wanted to know what we were doing out there. So.

MM:

It was tough country.

JL:

It was tough country, and about that time the—it didn't rain. The Dust Bowl, the chickens did roost about ten o'clock in the morning, why, everything would get dark so the chickens thought it was night. So that was—it was pretty tough out there.

MM:

Now you mentioned y'all moved to Kersey in 1927. And I just remembered one of the things that I forgot to ask you: please me, if you would, when you were born. What your birthdate is.

JL:

Oh I was born in 1923 on the twentieth of February.

MM:

Okay, twentieth of February, so you were about five years old when y'all made the move to Kersey, right?

JL:

No, see we moved—in about 1920 we moved to Windsor first.

MM:

Oh Windsor first, okay, uh-huh.

JL:

And then from Windsor we moved north of Johnstown.

MM:

Okay, Johnstown.

JL:

Yeah. And my older brother stayed out in Windsor, farmed as a dryland, because there was no water out there. We had a lot of stock in the reservoir, but when the reservoir's dry you haven't got no water. So, and those German people made their cash crop with sugar beets. So we come down to raise sugar beets. Well then in the meantime after we was there, why, they acquired that land south of Kersey where I said the rattlesnakes was at. And we moved out there, and from there, then, that was in 1933, and then about 1939 why, we started getting a little rain and things started, the farmers started making a little money. They could raise a crop. See in those days we didn't have irrigation wells like we got now. You had to depend on the reservoir. If you got water up in the mountains, why—or snow in the mountains, why you had water in the ditch. If you didn't, you just had a dry ditch.

MM:

Okay, so tell me a little bit about the reservoirs. I mean how frequently did they dry up during this period of the Depression there when the droughts were in?

JL:

Well in 1934, we had one run of water. And we had sugar beets and they made about three tons to the acre. And if my memory's right we got about twelve dollars a tub for them, so you'd be about thirty-six dollars an acre. And sugar beets, they grow long with the—you could almost use them for a whip, they got about an inch and a half in diameter, but they got real long.

MM:

Tell me how—okay, getting the water from the reservoir into the beet field, tell me a little bit about that process, because people years from now will want to know that.

JL:

Well they made ditches. This would be ditches from the reservoir, that went throughout the country and put this land under irrigation.

MM:

Okay, okay. How did you regulate the water coming through the ditches from the reservoir into the field?

JL:

They had dividing boxes, and it come down this ditch and there might be four or five farmers that had a check and water would go different ways. And you divided the water right there.

MM:

Okay, okay, very good.

JL:

At the head gate.

MM:

What was it like growing up during that time period, I mean it was tough for everybody at that time.

JL:

Well I'll tell you—

MM:

Or did you even realize it?

JL:

No, we didn't realize. We weren't poor, we were rich. We had plenty of sauerkraut to eat, and we made a lot of German baloney and pinto beans and we topped sugar beets, and I don't know, it was a great time, I think I'd live it over again if I had to. Gathered lots of eggs. I was gathered eggs when I was still in diapers. You've never experienced nothing until you take an egg and put it in your pocket and you think, Now I'm going to be real careful here getting it in the house, and somehow or other you break that egg, and then you get in your pocket to get that mess out of there—it's just a different feeling.

MM:

I've done that, I've done—[Laughter]. You just brought back an interesting memory of mine. Well so what were the schools like at that time, John, and where did you go to school as you were growing up?

JL:

Well I went to school, I started school in Windsor. The first and second grade. And there was a little country school that was eighteen, we had a teacher, she was just out of high school, she taught all eight grades.

MM:

Do you remember her name?

JL:

Bethke.

MM:

Mrs. Bethke.

JL:

B-t-h-k-e I think. B-e-t-h-k-e.

MM:

Very good. Go ahead, you were talking about—

JL:

And her husband was a—he had an electric shop in Greeley. And it was very—and we used to—I walked to school, we had to walk a mile and a half. And coming back to—they used to be years ago they had these beet dumps, these high dumps, and you take a horse and wagon and you'd drive up there, and then they'd dump the wagon into the—well now on the way to school, about a quarter mile to school there was this beet dump. And real high on one end and kind of sloped. Well, there was—me and my two sisters we went to school there so we walked to school, go across the railroad track, and then we'd give her all we had, we'd run up that beet dump on one side and down the other about a quarter mile there was the schoolhouse. And the schoolhouse was at the head, the coal down the basement, us kids we made like we was tough, we didn't like the teacher but she got anything out of us you wanted. When she needed coal we'd almost fight, who's going to go down and take the coal bucket and bring the coal up to—put it in the pot and let it stir [?] [00:14:09].

MM:

That's great. Now that in the elementary school, right?

JL:

That was in the elementary school.

MM:

Now back in your day they didn't have junior high school right? Or did they?

JL:

I'll tell you where I got my high school. Well I graduated from the eighth grade, why, I went out there and there was plow and four head of horses, and my dad said, "There's your high school." And I plowed for sixty days that year. I used to plow all the ground, and my dad would prepare it, plant stuff, you know. So that's why—I don't know what kind of school you would call that.

MM:

The school of hard knocks.

JL:

Well, but the trouble is I got a phone call the other day, one of them through the deal, and they

said, "Good news, good news," I said, "What's the good news," the lady said, "We're going to wipe off your student loans." I said, "Oh, what's that?"

MM:

[Laughter] That's great, John. That's great. The—so you didn't have any formal schooling after the eighth grade?

JL:

No, no.

MM:

Okay, that's good, that's interesting. Which was not uncommon for people of your generation.

JL:

Well the eighth grade, that was enough. And then when I went to the Johnstown school, there was thirty kids, and that was after you had been in a room all by yourself, and I'm going to be honest with you now, I was one of them little Russian kids. When we came over from the old country, I mean my mother and dad did, when you went to school about the first—oh, up to the fifth grade. It was a battle. And your fists got kind of tough, I mean they'd call you Russian and—but it was just part of history.

MM:

Yeah, it made you tough, they picked on you.

JL:

Yeah, but it all worked out pretty good. And then I graduated from Valley View school south of Kersey, that was five in my class, it was Janet Day, Florence Herbs, Virgil Singlekey [?] [00:16:23], Joe Kramer and myself. That was the graduating class from the eighth grade. And I'm not bragging—I was the top honor on that, I was the top dog.

MM:

That's very good, that's very good. So then you go into the school of hard knocks out there operating the plow for your dad.

JL:

Operating the plow and planting the corn and topping sugar beets.

MM:

How many acres were y'all running at that time?

JL:

At that time we was running about two hundred and forty.

MM:

Okay. And is it still a lease land or is it rented land or is it their own farm?

JL:

No, no, my mother and dad finally bought it.

MM:

Now how were they able to save the money? Were they very frugal types that saved their money to buy that farmland?

JL:

Well I'll tell you most of them old German people if they made a dollar they could save ninety cents. They only had to spend ten. I don't know how they done it. And now we make all this money and we can't even save a twenty dollar bill.

MM:

Well if you break a twenty dollar bill it's gone, I know that.

JL

So it's—and it was all made by chicken's egg money and raising sugar beets and selling hogs.

MM:

I assume that all those brothers and sisters worked the farm all the time.

JL

All the time, everybody worked, yeah.

MM:

That was the labor for the family.

JL:

That's right.

MM:

Okay, and your mom took care of all the cooking in the house and cleaning and all that kind of—

JL

Yeah, she cooked a pile of stuff.

MM:

Tell us a little bit, just for posterity's sake, about the character, the type of people—your mom and your dad, were. What would you say about them, if you could talk to your great grandchildren many years from now, what would you tell them about these folks?

JL:

I would say that if there's a front row in heaven, my mother would be there.

MM:

Now why is that?

JL:

She was—in the old country she'd lost her parents when she was just a girl. And she used to have to take care of a blind girl for somebody. And my mother had a rough life. And then after she got over here she had eleven children and worked out in the field and cooked for—but she could always sing a song and she was always happy. It didn't make no difference. In 1929 I was only six years old but I remember Dad said, "What are we going to do?" And Mother said, "We're going to make it." And she did. She loved the lord, and it got us through.

MM:

What church did she go to?

JL:

Lutheran.

MM:

Lutheran church. Do you remember what the name of the church was?

JL:

No, just Lutheran.

MM:

Just Lutheran. Now your dad, what was he like?

JL:

My dad, he was more high strung than mother. I mean he was—things bothered him more. But it

didn't make no difference what come along, Mother could handle it. And Dad sometimes could get a little out of control, like we all do sometimes.

MM:

No doubt about it. Well was he a stern taskmaster for you kids?

JL

Yes, when he said something he meant it. And he taught us from the time we were small, if you borrowed money, you got to pay it back, and if you tell somebody you're going to be there on time, be there. And it stuck in my mind.

MM:

Did he have any other life lessons like that that he used to share with y'all?

JL:

No, he was—he always provided for us, I can't complain. We always—even during the Depression and Dust Bowl days we always had something to eat, and—

MM:

Do you remember during the Dust Bowl times when the dust storms would come? What was it like? I mean, we always talk out here in West Texas about "Black Sunday," and everybody knows what that is. Gerald McCathern told a wonderful story about how his mother would get them in and cover the bed with a drape and put rags, wet rags over their faces and everything like that.

JL

Well most generally, like babies, they used to put damp rags over babies so they wouldn't breathe it. But it would just—in 1934, all the years of the Dust Bowl, I talked to an old timer out in our area that'd lived out there for years, and I said, "What year would you think was the worst of the Dust Bowl?" He come right out and said, "1934." And that's what I remember is I was going to school then and all the—you'd get up in the morning, wind would be blowing a little bit, about ten o'clock the clouds would roll in. And right by the schoolhouse, north to the schoolhouse there was a piece of land, it was blowing. And those days we had inkwells, if you know what an inkwell is.

MM:

Well tell the recording what an inkwell is.

JL:

Well an inkwell is something you had on your desk, and you had this pen with a point on it and

you dipped it in the ink and then you wrote with it. Well the dust would come in and finally it would fill that ink well with sand. So you had a mess. So it was a—

MM:

It was a challenge.

JL

Yeah, it was different.

MM:

Yeah, yeah. Now, so you worked through your high school years, what would have been your high school years on the farm. And did you enjoy doing that?

JL:

Right. Yes I did.

MM:

And tell us a little bit about your experience. What was your daily habit in working on the farm?

JL:

Well the day, you got up in the morning and you took the horses and you'd milk some cows, and then you'd put the horses in the barn. And the horses in those days, they had to be cured, curried cleaned up, and you fed them oats and you harnessed them. Then you went in and ate breakfast, and then you come back and you got the horses out, filled the water tank so they could drink the water. And you were out the in the field, hooked up to your disc or your plow or whatever and went about your day's work.

MM:

Do you know what particular breeds of horses y'all were using at that time?

JL:

Mostly Belgians.

MM:

Belgians?

JL:

And they were big—they all weighed anywhere from sixteen hundred to two thousand pounds.

MM:

How many hands high were those things? Do you remember?

JL:

I don't remember that.

MM:

Well they were big animals, I know that.

JL

They were big horses.

MM:

Now, so even though you didn't have the opportunity to go to high school, and you worked on the farm, is that what gave you the love of being in the outdoors and working on a farm and making it your life's career?

JL:

Yeah, it's—if I had to do it all over again I'd probably do the same thing. I love it. I love to farm.

MM:

Well tell us what you loved about farming—

JL:

Well it's just the idea—

MM:

From a young man to a more mature man.

JL:

Well to see things grow and to plant a crop, to plant a crop and then finally about a week later you go up [inaudible] [00:24:01] you get out there and look and then you start to see that stuff up the row, why that's coming up. And you get out there and the cows are in the spring of the year, they're all having calves, and them calves would take all the tail up in the air just to go lickety-splits you know. Just that kind of stuff. I got a—that was my enjoyment.

MM:

Yeah, yeah. I lived all those things too. I know what you mean. Now, when the war came, and of course, in those days you had, oh, radios, things like that at home, I assume y'all had one.

JL:

Yeah, oh yeah.

MM:

Did you realize it was going to become what it became? And did your older brothers volunteer to begin with, or where they drafted or how did you wind up getting in the service?

JL:

Well, I had two older brothers and they were married. They didn't go, and then my third brother, he was twenty-six and he drowned, he had an accident, and drowned. And then that was in 19—let's see, Pearl Harbor was in '41, wasn't it?

MM:

Yes sir.

JL:

And in 1942 why, went ahead and got—that's the year my dad raised sugar beets. That fall I scooped four hundred tons of beets and I helped pick the corn, and then I joined the Navy, I went into the Navy. And I never did wear any gloves, so when I went to Denver to take my physical that guy looked at my hands and he said, "What have you been doing?" And I said, "Sir, where I'm from you've got to work for a living." And I joined the Navy and went in the Navy in the twentieth of October, 1942. And—

MM:

The twentieth of what? November.

JL:

Twentieth of October.

MM:

October 1942.

JL:

That's when I took my physical, and I left Denver on I think the eleventh of November for San Diego.

MM:

Okay. Okay, now why did you pick the Navy versus one of the other service branches?

JL:

Well, I talked to some guys that was in the army and I talked to some guys that was in the Marine Corps, and they talked about digging foxholes and I got to thinking, you know if you're in the navy, the navy custom is they've got to have the coffee on twenty-four hours a day no matter what. And you have a place to sleep, so—

MM:

That's what you decided to do.

JL:

That's what I decided to do. But if I had known there was the Seabees at that time, I would have joined the Seabees.

MM:

Joined the Seabees? Yeah. Yeah. Okay. So your brothers were already in the service.

JL:

No, my brothers, never did go to the service.

MM:

Oh they didn't go.

JL:

But they were married and had families, my two older brothers.

MM:

Okay, I thought you said they went in, now I understand.

JL:

Excuse me.

MM:

Now, do you remember hearing about Pearl Harbor on the radio that night?

JL:

Yes, it was on a Sunday morning and we were—electricity came to our place. Mother and Dad went to Montgomery Ward's store and they bought a radio and a washing machine and a drier, all in the one shop. Now that was big time, I'll tell you. So we was listening to this radio—

MM:

Do you remember what brand it was? Was it an old Atwater Kent?

JL:

It was an old Motorola.

MM:

Motorola, yeah.

JL:

Anyway it was on a Sunday and there was a German church program on that my mother listened to all the time. My mother could talk English, she learned to talk English but she was very shy. If there was people out, she wouldn't talk. And my dad could talk. Anyway, then about half through then the announcer said, "The Japs bombed Pearl Harbor."

MM:

How did that impress you as a young man?

JL:

Well I guess at those times they had the CCC camps, and in those days, why they said, "We've got plenty of gun fodder, we can go to war." So they just classified everybody as gun fodder, I mean they needed somebody to kill I guess, so they just schlepped us over there.

MM:

Yeah, yeah. What did your folks think when you went ahead and joined up? Where they for it or against it?

JL:

No, they were for it.

MM:

Okay. Now—

JL:

And I'd have went—I just felt it was my duty to go, and I would have went anyway.

MM:

No matter what they said.

JL

Yeah.

MM:

And I assume that most of your friends and fellow, former classmates and people like that all joined at the same time.

JL:

Yeah, at one time they did, yeah.

MM:

You know something else reminds me here when you're talking about your German heritage even from Russia. Was there discrimination against y'all? Because you were of German extraction, and your parents spoke German, you went to the Lutheran church. When Hitler started to move in Europe and take over the various countries there. And then once we finally became involved against the Germans. Do you remember anything like that?

JL:

There was some friction that if they caught you talking German, if you came from the old—there was a threat. They'd send you back to Russia. So the people were very cautious.

MM:

Okay, okay. I was wondering about that. Was there anything ever said in the home around the dinner table about that?

JL:

No, not really, it was—and I learned to talk German before I could talk English. But then as—when my two older brothers went to school, the teacher said, “Where were you born?” and the boys didn't know any better, and they said, “We were born in Russia.” Well, the school bus driver went by and he saw Mother out in the yard, stopped and said, “Where them boys born in Russia?” And she says, “No, they weren't.” Well they didn't know any better, but see as the older ones went to school, they learned English and then us young ones, we just picked it up.

MM:

Yeah, yeah, yeah, of course. Well now, so let's talk a little bit about your service. You were inducted there in the Denver area, you had your physical, and then you went out to the West Coast.

JL:

Went to San Diego.

MM:

Went to San Diego, and which base were you at first to go through basic?

JL:

Naval training.

MM:

Naval training.

JL:

Yeah.

MM:

Okay. And tell us what that was like and then how you got assigned to whatever ship you got assigned to and just carry us through your military career in World War II.

JL:

Well when I went up to boot camp, why I—it was not a struggle for me because I'd been used to working, I'd been used to getting up at four o'clock in the morning, and you take a lot of them fellows from back east, from New York and stuff, they had to drag them out of their nest, they didn't know how to get up, them buggers was lazy. So I just got up in the morning, went up out—I was done showering and shaving and all them before half of them even thought about getting up. It was just how you were—

MM:

Raised.

JL:

—I was used to it, I was already doing it. And boot camp was not hard for me. Your shots was worse than anything, but we had them fire drills, they'd always have—they'd gather in great big tanks, they'd set a fire and we'd have the hoses and put the fire out and all that, and it was good training.

MM:

Yeah, of course.

JL:

And then after I got through boot camp they sent me to Los Angeles, and I went to the Hemphill Diesel School. When you're going through boot camp they give you an aptitude test, and I always liked engines, I knew a little about engines when I went in. And that really helped me

because I loved it. And then after I went to Hemphill Diesel School two months we got a thirty day leave and I come home, and when I went back, why, on Market Street in San Francisco they had a big—it was just barracks, and we stayed in there and every morning we had to watch the bulletin board to see if your name come up. Well there was one morning there was four of us went to school together, George Heard, Lloyd Ganville, Lithcomb [?] [00:33:30] and myself. So the got a yellow taxi cab, hauled us down to the ship, well I didn't know nothing about ships. The one guy said, "Oh this ship's got doors on the front, and it opens up and the ramp goes down," and we looked at him and said, "There ain't no such thing as that." And it was, he was right. And you've probably seen them on the History Channel. LST's?

MM:

Oh yeah.

JL:

Well that's where I spent my time.

MM:

Okay, and so what was your ship?

JL:

The LST-460.

MM:

Four sixty, okay. And so you entered the docks there at the—around LA, and you get on your LST, and then what happens?

JL:

We got on the LST in San Francisco.

MM:

San Francisco, okay.

JL:

Well, the ship was commissioned at Bremerton, Washington, but I wasn't of the original crew.

MM:

Crew, okay.

JL:

And the ship went to Coronado down by San Diego, went through the maneuvers and all that.

When they went down there, why, they had a pilot was going to show them how to dock this thing, and he said, "Full speed ahead," and he run that thing clear up on the beach and knocked a hole in the bottom, so they towed it to San Francisco for repairs and that's where we got on, at San Francisco.

MM:

Okay. So you took a troop train, I assume, from LA up to San Francisco, right?

JL:

Right, took a troop train.

MM:

Where they just packed? I've heard the stories about how packed.

JL:

Oh them old troop trains, they were kind of fun. They were packed, but everybody was happy. The—just a story, I didn't see it, but that buddy of mine from Mississippi, he was on the troop train, he said there was one older guy there and he was—everybody had their bottle, and he was drinking and he was pretty well—and he says, "Young man, you're too young to die." And just things like that that happened.

MM:

Now. So then y'all departed. Did you depart as part of a convoy out of San Francisco and into the Pacific?

JL:

Yeah, there was probably about four ships I remember—

MM:

And what time period is this? Is it already '43 by then or not?

JL:

It was about '43, and I think May, May of '43. We headed for Pearl Harbor. And there was I think a couple of LSTs, I remember a Russian ship, and something else.

MM:

Okay.

JL:

And it took us fourteen days to get to Pearl Harbor. And I puked from the very time I left until I

got to Pearl Harbor. Sick as a dog, if they'd have thrown me over the side it'd have been a blessing.

MM:

[Laughter] But I take it you finally got your sea legs.

JL:

But then when I got to Pearl Harbor I felt real good, had me roll out for government practice, and I got sick one more time and then from then on I could stand it with the rest of them.

MM:

What was—could you see any of the scars around Pearl Harbor at that time?

JL:

Oh yeah, there was still—the old ships was still laying there, some of them. All they did was move them to make a passageway for the other ships to go through.

MM:

Did y'all get a chance to walk around and look at it all? Did you see the Arizona before they cut everything off of it?

JL:

Yeah, we saw the Arizona, and they had some other ones in there.

MM:

I'm sure that caught your attention, seeing it in person after hearing about it on the radio.

JL:

It did.

MM:

Well, so tell us about your gunnery training and then how y'all started moving out into the Pacific.

JL:

Well, a gunner—I didn't have not—all I ever did with gunnery went on to boot camp, I shot twenty-four rounds of twenty-twos. But they sent me in the engine room—my time was all spent down in the—

MM:

In the engine room. Okay, all right, very good. So where did you go throughout the Pacific during your service?

JL:

Well we left San Francisco, and when we left San Francisco, an LST was made to make one beachhead and get blowed up, and we left they said, "Well boys you look that Golden Gate Bridge over good, because there's a good change you ain't never going to see it again."

MM:

That caught your attention too.

JL:

Well, you know when you're just out of boot camp and you've got bald, and they cut your hair all off, you don't think—I don't know how you would say it, but you really didn't give a hoot.

MM:

You're young, you're invulnerable, aren't you?

JL:

So and then when we got to Pearl Harbor, why we loaded up and went to New Guinea and we went to some more islands and we landed up at Guadalcanal.

MM:

Okay. So you did go to New Guinea. I mean did y'all land there? Land troops there?

JL:

No, no, we didn't land no—we just passed through New Guinea, I mean we might have stopped there, but we didn't start hauling troops until we got to Guadalcanal.

MM:

Guadalcanal, okay.

JL:

But when we left San Francisco they said, well, LSTs were—we didn't have the best—oh, like a lot of your other ships have got better radar, you know, and we was lucky to have the van [?] [00:39:12] that shot the stars, to see where we were going, what do you call it?

MM:

Navigator.

JL:

Yeah, navigator. And they said there's several of them left and we never have heard from them. We don't know where they're at.

MM:

My god.

JL:

So anyway, when we got to Guadalcanal, why Guadalcanal was just secured. They had just secured it.

MM:

Yeah, just secured it.

JL:

They were still having some dog fights.

MM:

What was it like there? Was it just bombed out? Did you get to go ashore at all or not?

JL:

Not very much, we didn't get to go ashore there. All I know about Pearl Harbor, when we got on that LST, they give us a twelve quart pail, and that was our—to wash our clothes in. You ever try to take a mattress and wash it in a twelve gallon—

MM:

No.

JL:

Well try it sometime, it's fun. And when we got to Pearl Harbor, why the Seabees had a whole bunch of washing machines piled up there on the beach. I don't know what had happened but one of them showed up on our ship. So we took the motor—

MM:

You must have had a good scrounger.

JL:

Yeah. So we took the DC motor off—AC, and put a DC motor on it, then man we was right—

MM:

Changed your life.

JL:

We was right up town there, we was just washing with the best of them.

Jim Lapp [?] (JIML): [00:40:35]

Sounds like you were stealing from the government to give to the government.

JL:

Well no, it just showed up.

MM:

[Laughter] Well, okay, so y'all get to Guadalcanal. What do you do there?

JL:

Well Guadalcanal, then we go—there's a little island called Tulagi. And Tulagi, we used to go to Tulagi to fill fresh water. And well, we'd fill fresh water, we'd go to Henderson Field and we'd load up and we'd go up what they called "the slot." I don't know if you've heard of it—

MM:

Yes, I've heard of it.

JL:

Some people called it "The iron clad bottle." There'd been more ships sunk in that—we went from there, we went to Bougainville, we went to Vella Lavella, we went to Ludlow and [inaudible] [?] [00:41:21] coming back, a bunch of them islands. But we always took troops in and sometimes we'd bring prisoners back or sometimes when we took the troops in we'd take the tags back—army cots would bring casualties back.

MM:

Now you were working in the engine room this whole time?

JL:

I was working—

MM:

Did you ever get up on deck during some of the landings?

JL:

Yeah, sometimes what you had to do—it was a little bit illegal, but I was down in the auxiliary room, the auxiliary room we had three motors down there running generators. And there always had to be an engineer down there and an electrician. Well, the electrician kind of taught me how to take care of stuff and I taught him, so every once in a while we'd sneak up on top and see what's going on. It was kind of interesting.

MM:

Yeah, what was it like?

JL:

Well, one time we pulled into a landing [?] [00:42:23], and we was supposed to unload this load of ammunition, and about the time we was about ready to get on the beach Jap planes came over and dropped a bomb in the middle of that thing, and about blowed me off the back of the fan tail, I had to hang onto the—I wished I'd have stayed down in the engine room. Had to hang onto the rail to keep from getting blown over.

MM:

So it actually hit the LST there?

JL:

It was just the concussion.

MM:

The concussion of it, okay. Well so, talk about some of those places that y'all went to.

JL:

Well it used to be a convoy, three LSTs and a tin can, and a tin can is a destroyer, but the nickname was tin can. That was a convoy. And we went to Vella Lavella, there was three LSTs and a tin can. Well they torpedoed two LSTs and sent us up a river and we knocked our screws all out of line so the destroyer took us crippled LSTs, we went back to Guadalcanal.

MM:

Is that where they did repairs and stuff like that, is it Guadalcanal?

JL:

Yeah, at Tulagi actually.

MM:

Tulagi, yeah.

JL:

Tulagi, it's only about twenty miles from Guadalcanal. So we thought Boy, we got to be able to go back to Pearl Harbor to get some living in [?][00:43:47]. So we parked up to the water hole and they said, "Pop the ballast all out" Well popped the ballast out, the screws come out of the water, and here come the Seabees with their big barge and two brand new screws. The next day we was in operation, that took care of our liberty at Pearl Harbor.

MM:

There wasn't anything that they couldn't do at that time.

JL:

Oh they would do anything.

MM:

At that time, yeah. Well what other experiences did you have while in the service there, out in the Pacific? Because those were tough times, I mean did you ever have kamikazes trying to attack y'all?

JL:

Yeah, we've had—and then after Guadalcanal we conquered Hollandia. And then the supply depot was moved to Hollandia and we used to go load up at Hollandia. And we made the invasion on—and to show you, there used to be three LSTs and a tin can that was a convoy, but when we went to Leyte there was eight hundred chips in that convoy. And the battle wagons was shooting over the top of us.

MM:

Did you ever get up top to see any of that, those big battleships and heavy cruisers bombarding there at Leyte Gulf?

JL:

Yeah, and when we got to Leyte that's the first time we run into kamikazes, we'd never run into them before. And they're a pretty wicked tool. I mean if they got your number, why, so we went to Leyte, we made D Day on Leyte, you've probably seen the picture when MacArthur was walking in the water about that—well we was in on that deal. And when we went into Leyte that's a bit harbor, and wherever you looked you saw ships burning. kamikazes was getting—well we come back and then we loaded up and we made D Day on Mindoro, that was the other.

MM:

Were y'all delivering supplies or were you delivering men and supplies?

JL:

Mostly—I see the time on the LST we had all your aviation fuel was hauled in fifty-five gallon drums. And I seen the time we had the tank just loaded with just nothing but fifty-five gallon drums. And most generally when you took your troops in, you had your infantry, you had some aviation fuel and you had some guns, some trucks and that kind of stuff. And then you'd come back and you'd load up with Seabees or army engineers and they had Caterpillars and stuff to make air strips. So then you'd move, and when you moved them it well you always brought back either prisoners or casualties or one time we brought back the natives, something happened to the natives, they got some kind of a disease, we had a whole bunch of natives that we didn't know what to do with them so the deck hands built a deal on top deck and had them on top, because they had scabs all over them and stuff like that. So we, at times you would call us a hospital ship. Brought casualties back.

MM:

What about—did you have marines on board when they brought in prisoners or was it just navy sailors?

JL:

No, never had—when we had prisoners why just the deck hands, the deck hands, and that's one thing I'll—I think that is the reason American won the war. When we had Jap prisoners on, they ate what we ate. And whenever we got German prisoners, I know in Greeley, Colorado they had a prison camp there, when those prisoners went out and worked, they had their lunch, and I think god blessed America for that. But whenever they got ahold of our boys they starved and kicked them and tortured them. And I think god blessed America for that reason, because I've seen it happen with them Jap prisoners. They ate what we ate. We ate three times a day, they ate. If we got too many troops there wasn't enough facilities to handle everything, so we ate twice a day.

MM:

Did they have them in a little makeshift prison or cage or something?

JL:

No, we had kind of a brig there.

MM:

Okay, a brig there.

JL:

But them in—kind of a fence around it. And they were all—one time we had a bunch of them and we caught a pretty high official. And they always used to make him do the dishes. And the enlisted men—and that just bugged him, he could hardly stand it. The deckhands, they're not just

wrong in this [?] [00:48:45], they'd make this general do the dishes while them other guys just passed the time, you know. [Coughs]

MM:

Well so how long were y'all at Leyte, and where'd you go from there? Because that was some pretty heavy duty stuff at Leyte.

JL:

And then we went to Mindoro, we made D Day on Mindoro. And on the way to Mindoro there was the LST-472, and we operated it together, we was the 460. Well on the D Day to Mindoro, why an ejector went out in the main engines, we had to hold back, so we—472 took our place. Well it wasn't but just a few hours, a kamikaze got the 472. So we said, Well our time's numbered, so we dropped the troops off, come back and loaded up another time a week later, and went back, and that's when a kamikaze got us.

MM:

Got y'all.

JL:

Yeah.

MM:

What was that experience like? Describe it.

JL:

Well I was down in the engine room, and your reduction gears are aired, they're operated by air. And I remember the plane just wiped off the conning tower. And when it done that it punctured the air and the air buzzer went off. So later on, at that time instead of being in the auxiliary I transferred over into the main engine room. We was getting into some pretty hot stuff. So just amongst ourselves we figured we better know a little about it. So I was over in the engine room and I remember the air buzzer going off, and there was another kid there by the name of Ray Hamilton from Los Angeles. We was down in the engine room, well when you're down there you have a—well we lost—we had nine officers and seven of them got killed because they was in the conning tower. Well we lost all contact. So we was down, and I was on the phones and I couldn't get nobody and somebody said they run by and hollered down, well with the engines running you couldn't hear nothing. So finally the smoke started coming down, so he crawled up the port hatch and I went up the starboard hatch.

MM:

To get out.

JL:

To get out.

MM:

It is frightening isn't it, to be down in one of those confined spaces like that with that dark smoke in there.

JL:

Well, it was time to get out of there.

MM:

Yeah, there you go.

JL:

So I don't know why I done it, there is such things as guardian angels. So you take an LST, they got the conning tower, they got an escape hatch on this side, the escape hatch on this side. Well I crawled out of this side, and ordinarily I should have went out of the escape hatch.

MM:

The left side.

JL:

Yeah. But I didn't. For some reason or another, I went across the cruise quarters and went out the other side.

MM:

On the right hand side.

JL:

When I went up the cruise quarters well the whole thing was these soldiers injured, they was coming down to sick bay to get treated. I mean I didn't know what it was like up on top. So then I crawled out of that escape hatch, well when I crawled out of the escape hatch I got my head where I could see, well the water was full of guys, and some guy had went down there and shagged them soldiers all out of there. Some of them the soldiers there were putting a life jacket on, would throw, they absolutely wouldn't. Well you either. You either burned or you jumped. So, and they had two little pumps there, we called them handy billets [?] [00:52:46]. Well they're like these fertilizer pumps that we pump fertilizer with. So, a guy by the name of Donald Brown, he was from California. And there was two of them there were, crawled out of that hatch, he happened to go by and I said "You grab one, I'll grab one, let's see what we can do. I'll work on the fire." Well the swell's coming, we throw the suction hose over, well the big swell come over

the suction hose, you stood there and you had your hose—it was about trying to put a fire out with a garden hose. So we just gave it up and jumped in.

MM:

Did y'all have any kind of rafts or anything out there?

JL:

Well yeah, there was some rafts out there, but they had one particular raft that when you go aboard they assign you. And it was still hanging up there, and I looked up there, and I can't swim. And so I looked up there and that raft was still there, I thought, Well, I'll just cut that thing loose. Well, I started up this little ladder, and up there on top where that plane hit, all them—there was three twin forties up there on the back and a couple more twins out on the front. Well all that ammunition was going off. It was zing, zinging, I thought, This ain't smart. So I down, just jumped down.

MM:

Okay, so you jumped off, you jumped over, how'd you get picked up?

JL:

Well there was no life raft there, and everybody helped everybody. They'd stick those oars out you know, maybe so you'd grab ahold of it. The injured we put on the raft, so the rest of us was a hanging on—I was a hanging on the raft, puking, I'd took too much salt water, but anyway—

MM:

Was there any oil or motor fuel escaping from the LST?

JL:

No, not—

MM:

So you weren't in a fire situation on the ocean.

JL:

No, we weren't.

MM:

Okay.

JL:

And then they had—there were some destroyers and some more LSTs. And finally an LST,

another one, they threw the cargo nets over the side, that took the whole—well they'd get close enough one of them come around there. It looked like it was about time to, so I went ahead and paddled over there, grabbed ahold of that, crawled up and just got on top of it and here comes another kamikaze and I thought, Well, I suppose you're going to have to jump again. And it just missed it, and when it hit the water that LST bucked like an old bucking bronc. It just reared clear up in the air. You had to hang on.

MM:

Yeah. Well so did you stay on this LST until you got reassigned or—

JL:

No, we stayed on the LST and then we beached the next morning and unloaded, and then I got on an LCI.

MM:

Okay, tell us what that is.

JL:

An LCI is another landing craft but it's smaller than an LST.

MM:

Smaller.

JL:

And we went back to Hollandia, and then when we got to Hollandia—things are kind of blank there for a few days. Anyway, then they sent us over, we got on the Lurline. The Lurline was a passenger ship, they made a troop transport out of it. But that's what we come home on. There was seven thousand of us on that.

MM:

Wow, okay.

JL:

And that LST used to ride like a bucking bronc, they got tanks for the but oh, they were rough. And that Lurline would just cut the water, run like a Cadillac. Pretty nice.

MM:

Okay, so you got shipped home then.

JL:

Yeah we got shipped home.

MM:

Were you injured or anything, or were they going to reassign you, or they figured you had done enough?

JL:

I wasn't injured, but we come back and they give us a thirty day leave, and I went home for thirty days, when I come back, why I went to Treasure Island there. I was assigned to a YOL, that's a Yard Oiler, and was another first class and myself, we was in charge of the engine room. And we used to refuel submarines and stuff like that on Mare Island. And Mare Island was a submarine base.

MM:

Yeah, yeah. I have seen it, actually. So that's how you finished off your tour?

JL:

That's how I finished. And I was on that YOL and I got—they shipped me to Schumacher [?] [00:57:38]. Give me a ruptured duck and sent me home.

MM:

And what year was that, John?

JL:

Nineteen four—that was about January the fifteenth of nineteen forty-six.

MM:

Nineteen forty-six, they kept you until forty-six.

JL:

Yeah.

MM:

Same thing with my dad, they kept him until 1946. Well that was an interesting story—did y'all enjoy hearing all of that?

Unknown Speaker (US):

Sure did.

Linda Lapp (LL):

I have a question.

MM:

Sure, go ahead.

JL:

Could you tell us when you got sunk at Mindoro, what you had on and how many survived, do you know that?

JP:

Well we had—when we got into Mindoro we had a construction. We had about a half a tank deck of fifty-five gallon drums, then we had a bunch of army engineers and they always had dynamite and stuff for—

MM:

For landings.

JP:

For—yeah. And that plane, well that plane sheared off the—

MM:

Conning tower.

JP:

Conning tower, it landed right down in the middle of that stuff.

MM:

Just blew it all up.

JP:

Yeah, it blew it.

LL:

Did anybody survive?

JP:

Well we lost—there was what, a hundred twenty in the crew and we lost about a third of the crew. And I don't know how many—we had soldiers packed wherever there was a spare spot,

why we didn't even have enough—they soldiers, they slept in troop's quarters and in their trucks. They'd load them things down to where—

MM:

Yeah, they were fully loaded every time. Now your name is ma'am?

LL:

Linda. I'm his daughter.

MM:

What's your last name?

LL:

Lapp.

MM:

Lapp. Linda Lapp just asked that question of her dad. Alright John, now somebody was kind enough to bring you a little coffee there, why don't you take a swig and we're getting ready to transition to something else. Here. In Just a minute—

US:

You're doing good John.

MM:

Now before we stop, I want to ask you something—I mean move on to talking about your life as a farmer and the American Ag Movement and all of that, let's kind of tie a bow on this whole World War II service thing. So they shipped you home with a ruptured duck. Was your mom glad—of course you had just been back and had a thirty day leave so they had seen you fairly recently—

JL:

Yeah.

MM:

But where they glad to have you back in one piece?

JL:

Yeah they were.

MM:

[Laughter] She make you a chocolate cake or anything?

JL:

No, we just had the plain old sauerkraut and [inaudible] [01:00:18] and that kind of stuff. We lived pretty simple.

MM:

That's good, that's good. Just wondered if she did anything special for you when you got back.

JL:

Well all I remember is in Kersey, they said they had gas rationing. And the guy there at Kersey, when I was growing up, he told me, he says, "When you need gas and that car's empty you just come down here and I'll fill it. We ain't going to pay no attention to this gas rationing." So I'm going to admit I just drove the heck out of Dad's Plymouth.

MM:

What year model Plymouth was it?

JL:

I think it was '39.

MM:

Thirty-nine, okay, that's pretty good. Well, you felt like you had done your duty and you survived the experience. Especially that horrific—I'm sure it was a lot tougher than you made it sound when y'all were hit by that kamikaze plane.

JL:

Well it was—

MM:

Yeah.

JL:

But one thing I'll throw in, it don't make no difference how the guys that you were with, how goofy they were, some were—they were nuttier than a fruitcake, but boy when it was down to gritty nitty, everybody done his job. And that—I mean that was really something.

MM:

Yeah. Well, so—

JIML:

You want to tell him how you done your swimming test?

MM:

Oh yeah, tell that.

JL:

I really shouldn't be telling that.

MM:

Yes, you do!

JL:

Well, I didn't want to—if you didn't pass boot camp, your swimming test, you had to go back through boot camp. So, boot camp was a snap, I mean—but I didn't want to go back through it either. But one kid, he was about my size you know, and you had your name on all your clothes, you know, and man, he just went through there like a fish. And I caught him through the side I said, "If I give you a twenty dollar bill," so I pulled my jacket, pulled my sweater off and put it on, and I put his on, he went there, he went through there just lickety-split. [Laughter] And in those days twenty dollars is quite a lot of money. See when I went into the service, Dad gave me a twenty dollar bill and I swear I thought I was rich. I didn't know what to do with all of that money.

MM:

Yeah, yeah. But it was worth it to you. Well when you were talking about you couldn't swim earlier I was going to come back to that, so I'm glad Jim brought it up there. Before we move on here, do you two have any other stories that you remember him telling, that I need to tap into here? Okay, that's pretty good right there. I'm sure that happened more than just with you.

JL:

Oh yeah, it was pretty common, pretty common.

MM:

But no one ever caught onto it, even when you were out on the ship doing stuff.

JL:

Well when I was out on the ship, sometimes when we'd be out, anchored you know, we'd take the old small boat, we'd drop the ramp, put the small boat, I'd get on the back of the small boat and swim to the—about thirty feet.

MM:

So you could paddle around.

JL:

Well I guess somebody was always there watching so wouldn't drown. [MM laughs] Coming from Kersey, Colorado all I knew about water, you had to drink it to stay alive.

MM:

[Laughter] And for irrigation, right?

JL:

Yeah.

MM:

That's it. Well, so when you came back home, what did you, immediately go to work on the farm, or what happened? I mean did you start looking for somebody to get married to?

JL:

No, the girls scared me. I wasn't looking for no girls.

MM:

Obviously one caught you at some point along the way since your kids are—

JL:

I went ahead—there was no jobs so, I worked on the railroad for while.

MM:

Yeah. Oh really, which one?

JL:

For in Laramie, Wyoming, we used to in those days they used to ship cattle, and they had those loading—where they unload the cattle at the train.

MM:

Loading chutes and everything like that?

JL:

The guy said, "Do you own a saw and a hammer," and I said yeah, and he said, "I'll make you a carpenter," so we built those—

MM:
Chutes?

JL:
Yeah those chutes—

MM:
The corrals and chutes and stuff like that, yeah, okay.

JL:
And corrals, yeah.

MM:
Do you remember which railroad company it was you were working for?

JL:
I think it was Union Pacific.

MM:
Union Pacific. How long did you do that?

JL:
Oh, about six months.

MM:
Okay, and then what did y'all do? Did you just go and built different little shipping stations?

JL:
Yeah, we'd go to—what's that town there? There was Laramie and then there was other—

MM:
Cody?

JL:
Rock River or whatever it is?

MM:
Rock River.

JL:

Yeah we went there. Put a—see when we stayed, they had train cars there, cabooses and you just got a job, they furnished you board and room and [inaudible] [01:05:29].

MM:

Okay, very good. Well so that kind of got you through initial tough time there.

JL:

Yeah.

MM:

And what'd you do after that, and how did you ultimately get back to farming?

JL:

Well after that, by then I—that was in '46, well then Dad bought a place and I farmed for two years.

MM:

Okay, now a new place?

JL:

No, at Kersey.

MM:

At Kersey.

JL:

At Kersey, but the only thing, he bought a corner lot that joined it, and we moved a house on there and that kind of stuff.

MM:

Did y'all put it on sleds and move it over there or—

JL:

No, we had a house mover move the house.

MM:

House mover moved it over there. So you worked for him for two years. Were you still raising the same crops? What were they at the time?

JL:

At that time, I was [inaudible] [01:06:28]. That wasn't my type of farming. After I come back, I wanted to get something done. And there the land was rough and it was hard to irrigate and the government was paying 90 percent of getting the land leveled, and I told Dad I said, "Let's level this land," he says, "If I ever make another dollar there ain't nobody going to get it." And he meant just exactly what he said. So he was just—so I just—well I farmed, but there was a couple of years in there that was blank.

MM:

Yeah, yeah. What about—what was he farming at that time?

JL:

He put everything into hay.

MM:

Into hay, okay.

JL:

After I left, quit raising sugar beets, quit raising corn, and he just raised hay.

MM:

Because I remember you said that he had quit raising the sugar beets, okay. So then after you left him after working for two years there on that, what happened then?

JL:

Well there was—I ran into this red-headed woman. It's kind of a—well, I was going to church there in Greeley and there was this red-headed girl there. She was pretty nice. So—

MM:

Let's see, do you remember her name at all?

JL:

Yeah, her name was Marjory[.

MM:

Marjory, okay. What was her last name?

JL:

Boat.

MM:

Boat. B-o-a-t?

JL:

B-o-a-t.

MM:

Okay.

JL:

So I went ahead—she used to teach Sunday school. And like I say, I was afraid of girls, and I was in the midst of six girls, six sisters. I had six sisters, I was the middle one. Well any way I—

MM:

You knew that girls could be tough, didn't you?

JL:

I wrote her a little note, if she'd want to go out for a hamburger after church that night. Well, she was teaching twelve year old girls, and this note fell out of her Bible onto the—so one of the little girls said, "Oh, something fell down!" So Margie said, "Well what does it say?" Well—so I took her out and it cost me fifty cents. And fifty cents for me and fifty cents—you could get a hamburger for fifteen cents and coke for a dime. So I took her out and that's just the way things are. And then, well at that time Margie had went to Fort Worth, and she went to Bible school for a year, and then she come back.

MM:

Okay, uh-huh. Why Fort Worth, what was the Bible school there?

JL:

A Bible Baptist Seminary.

MM:

Baptist Seminary, okay.

JL:

So she went there, and then after I met her, why then I went—

MM:

But she was teaching Sunday school in a Lutheran church?

JL:

No, she was teaching school in a Baptist. After I got out of the service and met her, I started going to Baptist.

MM:

Baptist church.

JL:

Yes. And then I went to Bible Baptist Seminary for about eight months.

MM:

In Fort Worth?

JL:

In Fort Worth.

MM:

Okay.

JL:

And then we come back, and well, we got married, then after we got—

MM:

What year did you get married? What day?

JL:

We got married, June 10, 1949. And I worked for Gates—and that was all right. And I worked for Gates Rubber Company, they make tires in Denver.

MM:

Gates Rubber Company, yes sir.

JL:

And in the wintertime it was all right. And come spring—

MM:

And where was that? That Gates plant at that time?

JL:

That was about 1950.

MM:

No, but where was it located?

JL:

It's south Denver somewhere.

MM:

South Denver, okay, yeah.

JL:

Man, I about went crazy in that place. You know, spring come and people were plowing and I told her, I said, "I'm going to take off, I'm going to be gone forty-eight hours. I'm either going to be get a job on a farm or I'm going to rent a farm." So, I took the pickup and I went to Greeley, and lo and behold this 160 acres was for rent. And it hadn't been farmed for a year, there was weeds, sand bergs, and the guy that owned it, he had plenty of money and he was over in Europe somewhere. So I rented that farm. And I thought I was really uptown you know?

MM:

How much an acre where you renting for?

JL:

Well it was crop rent.

MM:

Crop rent, yeah, how much?

JL:

So I come back and I say, "Well, I rented a farm." Well in those days they made the houses out of blocks. And this old guy that had this, he saved every dollar that he got plus his nickels too. And—

MM:

So he was like your father.

JL:

Yeah, similar. So all the windows you could open just like a door. And I had hardwood floors in this, made them red [?] [01:11:45] looked good to me. Well when I brought Margie out there, why, she was a good pioneer. She looked at that and she cried for a little bit, she says, "Well it don't look too bad." And we started farming, that's how we got into this here.

MM:

Okay. Well then when did these two come along?

JL:

Well—

LL:

Tell them where was the first farm?

MM:

Yeah, where was the first farm?

JL:

The first farm was at Gill, Colorado.

MM:

Gill, Colorado.

JL:

Yeah, that's right.

MM:

So it wasn't in Greeley, it was in Gill.

JL:

Yeah it was in Gill, and Gill was right east of Greeley, oh, twenty miles or so.

MM:

Okay. I'm going to get this up there closer, everybody around us is getting rambunctious. So now, so you started farming on this—you were basically a sharecropper almost, weren't you?

JL:

Yeah, well you gave a third of the beets, you'd have—

MM:

Yeah. So how long did you work the farm, and what did you raise?

JL:

We raised beans, alfalfa, I start milking. We ran a dairy for about twenty-five years.

MM:

Oh you did, okay, very good.

JL:

And then from there, we was there two years, and from there we moved down into Morgantown, east of Jackson lake. And we rented a farm down, it was four hundred acres, and we farmed there and then we got into the Wiggins area. We farmed north of Wiggins.

MM:

Let me ask you something. You know, money was sparse right after the war there. And so you're renting a farm, how are you paying for—were you using mules? Were you using horses? Did you have a tractor?

JL:

No, no. When I start—after I left home I didn't work horses anymore.

MM:

Okay, you didn't work horses anymore.

JL:

Well when I got out of the service I bought an H International.

MM:

Oh you did? Okay. Yeah. Okay, good. So you had that.

LL:

Was it through that program, was it through that veteran's program?

JL:

Yeah. You had to have your—it cost me 14,073 dollars. You had to go to the ASC office and—

MM:

ASC office.

JL:

Yeah, and there was—

MM:

And say what the ASC office is, John?

JL:

The ASC office is—

MM:

What it stood for, I mean what—it's an acronym for—

UP:

Agricultural Stabilization Act.

MM:

Yeah, Agricultural Stabilization Act, wasn't it? Or something like this.

JL:

Another Swivel Chair Service?

MM:

Yeah [Laughter] Swivel Chair Service.

JL:

Anyway, you had to go through there to get the—

MM:

Okay, so you got a loan, huh?

JL:

Well yeah, then the banks would—and in those days your older farmers if they liked you, they helped you a lot. If you needed a grain rail or something. People let you use the stuff. If you took care of it, it was—

MM:

Everybody was helping everybody.

JL:

Yeah. Then we started milking cows, and well these—

LL:

Where did you start milking cows? What farm?

MM:

Yeah what farm did you start milking the cows?

JL:

Well we started working on a farm at Gill about six—I bought eight head of heifers.

LL:

And then when did you start dairying and how?

JL:

Well, then from there we moved to Jackson Lake, and I dairied there. Well we did, then we farmed, and then I sold out. I got burned out I guess.

MM:

On dairy.

JL:

And then we sold out for a year and then we started again in 1962 when we rented the place right there by Fort Morgan.

MM:

By Fort Morgan?

JL:

Yeah.

MM:

Okay you rented another spot there.

JL:

Yeah. And then we started farming the second time in—

MM:

Okay. Now so in what time period was that, John?

JL:

That was—

MM:

When did you sell out and when did you come back to it?

JL:

I sold out in 1960.

MM:

Nineteen sixty.

JL:

It was 1961, I just kind of worked around. Then I started again a year later. And we farmed at Fort Morgan and at Wiggins and then we finally moved to Bijou Hill in 1965.

MM:

Bijou Hill?

JL:

Bijou Hill.

MM:

Okay.

JL:

And then we was there until 1974, then we went to Union County.

MM:

Yuma County.

JL:

Yeah we were—

MM:

Near what?

JL:

Yuma. Where we're at now.

JIML:

Union, Colorado.

MM:

Union, Colorado? Okay. I thought you said Yuma.

UP:

Yuma, it was actually Yuma, Colorado.

MM:

It's Yuma, Colorado and Union—okay.

UP:

Union County but it's Yuma Colorado.

MM:

Yuma is the town.

JL:

We were doing quite a lot of moving at that time. I was—I got burned out. I hit farmer—well I mean I hit her the first time, and I just kind of overdid it.

MM:

Yeah. Now, before we move into this second stage, or third stage of your farming career, let's talk about the kids that came along. You've had a great memory for remembering everybody's name, even your school classmate which I don't think I could remember one. But now, list your children, oldest to youngest.

JL:

Our oldest daughter's named Cheryl. And she was first, and then Linda, she was second, and—

MM:

And Linda's here with us today.

JL:

Yeah. And Richard, he's not here, he's third, and then Jim come along.

MM:

Jim's the baby.

JL:

No, we got another daughter, younger, we got, we had three girls—

MM:

And her name is?

JL:

Diane.

MM:

Diane, okay.

JL:

We had three girls and two boys.

MM:

Three girls and two boys.

JL:

And every one's got a different personality. I thought I might as well throw that in.

MM:

Which one has the best personality?

JL:

Oh they're all good kids. [Laughter]

JIML:

Here I thought I was going to butter you up—

MM:

Now, so you start back again in about '61, '62, right?

JL:

Yeah.

MM:

And why did you go back to farming? And what did you plan on doing differently, or did you do anything differently?

JL:

Well, the first thing I did differently, the sprinklers come along about that time, sprinkler irrigation, and I got tired of carrying irrigation boots. I was farming four hundred acres and sometimes running three or four heads of water, and I'd put the boots on about me, and I had them on all summer long until about September.

MM:

Now actually for the future audience I want you to kind of explain about that irrigation with the boots and all that kind of stuff, because that—

JL:

Well flood irrigation your ground was leveled, was machine leveled. And you had tubes or gated pipe that you run the water down the row. Well, and then about 1963, Roy Lunville [?] [01:19:20], he sold the old Valley Sprinklers, and he went where we lived just two miles from up on Bijou Hill, and he set up one of them sprinklers, and I watched that thing work and I said, Man, that's the way to go. And the guy said, "You're crazy Lapp, why if you put beans under there they'll blight, and they won't amount to nothing." But I said, "It's still a nice way to irrigate." So that's why what brought me down into Yuma County is sprinkler irrigation.

MM:

Sprinkler irrigation.

JL:

Yes.

MM:

Okay, okay. And how did it revolutionize farming for you?

JL:

Oh, the best move we ever made. You could farm more land and you could—when you raise sugar beets and you flood irrigate it, it probably took you ten days to water thirty acres in sugar beets. Well you could take a sprinkler and set it, and in forty-eight hours you could have it running and get your crop germinated.

MM:

So you were in on the early stages of sprinkler irrigation.

JL:

Yes, yes.

MM:

That's interesting. How would you compare that, John, to back when you were doing beets with your dad early on? I mean was it night and day?

JL:

Well, it's—now, the average family can raise about thirty acres of beets. Now if your beets—in those days if beets weighed twenty ton to an acre you got into ten high. And now they have doubled tonnage. Instead of twenty ton they're getting forty ton up as high as fifty ton. But it took us all fall, took us probably five or six weeks to do six hundred ton. And now they start after breakfast and by dinner some guys have already got six hundred ton.

MM:

Now are you talking about today? Or are you talking about in 1963 when you started back with irrigation?

JL:

I'm talking about, well—

MM:

The change from when you first started to now, is that what you're talking about?

JL:

No, well after we started farming again—

MM:

In '63.

JL:

In '63, we had—but we still had to thin the beets. You still had a lot of hand labor where now they've got Roundup Ready and they kill the weeds and it's just so much simpler.

MM:

Um-hm. What did you use for fertilizing and for crop insecticides and stuff like that at the time?

JL:

Well—

MM:

Or did you have crop dusters come in?

JL:

No, they had—when we started to raise beets a second time they come out with—I think you could spray them with Treflan at the right time.

MM:

Treflan.

JL:

And that—and—

MM:
Okay.

JL:
And then from then on, your corn, we got—I don't know half of these chemicals.

MM:
Did—now let me ask you this question. So you come back in '62, '63, you start irrigating, sprinkler irrigating. Was farming better for you then?

JL:
Yes it was.

MM:
Okay. And explain how and what it was like and how you move forward from there.

JL:
You could farm so much more, you could farm so much more land and do it so much easier.

MM:
Were you renting land at that time or where you—

JL:
We were renting some and we had bought some too.

MM:
You had bought some too, okay, by then. How many acres were you operating at that time?

JL:
Well, in 1969 when the beets froze in, it was a good year to have beets because I had eight hundred acres and five hundred—three hundred acres at Fort Morgan and I went to Yuma County and rented another five hundred acres.

MM:
Okay, okay. And who's helping you do all this? Were you doing most of it yourself, are the kids still there on the farm?

JL:
Yeah the kids helped a lot, then I had a couple of guys.

MM:

Okay you hired, had some hired hands, okay.

JL:

Yes.

MM:

Okay, do you remember how much you were paying them at that time?

JL:

I think about two hundred fifty or three hundred dollars a month.

MM:

A month, that's pretty good money.

JL:

Furnished a house and stuff like that.

MM:

Now when did you first hear about the American Ag Movement?

JL:

I heard about the American Ag movement in 1977. It must have been about October, Stanley Bore [?] [01:23:58], he was a farmer from Nebraska. And he came and he had a meeting in Holyoke. And I liked what he said. So I—

MM:

What did he say? What was it that motivated you to become involved?

JL:

He said we needed a price for our product. Well he didn't have to tell me that because I know that already because I was half-broke then. But anyway I just—this parity thing.

MM:

What was—okay, the parity. But what was he saying that farmers should do? Was he asking y'all to unite? What was he asking you to do?

JL:

Well, he was asking us to—we need to get together, you need to unite and see what we can do.

MM:

Okay, and then what was he wanting to lobby congress? Or what was he trying to do? Do you remember?

JL:

Well I really don't remember. All I know, right after that, that's when the Tractorcade started. And the strike offices all opened up everywhere in the country. They sprung up overnight.

MM:

Well let's go ahead and talk about that. Were you one of the only ones in the community, or were you part of the whole group in the community and everything like that? Where y'all met at Holyoke and heard this?

JL:

Well there was a big crowd there and there was a lot of guys for it, but a lot of guys weren't.

MM:

Okay.

JL:

And any time you farmed, and you could get a—you go for a better price.

MM:

Um-hm, um-hm, um-hm. Now, so that was how you first heard about it. What were your reasons for joining parity? Was it just to get the better price?

JL:

Well to get the better price and I don't know how else to put it.

MM:

Yeah, well that's as good as you can get. And did you see any action from the AAM at that time? I mean was what they were doing in terms of lobbying and stuff like that for parity, was that helpful?

JL:

Well, as we went along we finally did get the loan rate increase. I think ten cents a bushel. And then later on as you go longer, as American Ag got into it, taking the soybeans out of the elevator, we got the bankrupt laws changed and it just seem like—

MM:

Well just talk about—you're doing it. Just keep telling what turned out positive about it.

JL:

And they started having the Tractorcade and right there about '78 they plowed under a bunch of wheat in Johnson, Kansas, I remember that. Mother and I went down there and watched them. We just had too much.

MM:

How did your neighbors in the community react to your involvement in the AAM?

JL:

Well it was pretty well, pretty well.

MM:

Okay. Was there some opposition?

JL:

Oh, there was a few people.

MM:

Was it strong or was it just kind of a—just some resentment?

JL:

Oh, it wasn't very—we had some guys that said they don't believe in strike. Well, but when we got the loan rate raised ten cents a bushel they were the first one in the ASC office to get the money. So I don't know how you would put it.

MM:

[Laughter] Yeah. They were beneficiaries of—

JL:

I guess that's what you could call it.

MM:

Your involvement, right.

JIML:

When that was going on, a lot of the farmers that didn't participate would say, "Well the farmers

that are on strike are the ones that are going broke.”

MM:

Yeah, I see, yeah. This is Jim Lapp saying that. Now, talk about organizing and connecting with the other farmers. Were you involved in any of that?

JL:

No, not really. I never was much of a speaker. I didn't go out and do much.

MM:

Well I can't believe you weren't much of a speaker.

JL:

I didn't go out and do much politicking.

MM:

Now what about—you were talking about the Tractorcade. Let's talk about that just a little bit. Were you actively involved in the Tractorcade?

JL:

Oh you bet.

MM:

Okay so let's hear all your—start from the beginning, and take us right through to going to Washington.

JL:

Well for a long time I debated whether to go on the tractorcade or not. And I wasn't doing nothing anyway, so I said, “Well,”—we talked it over with Lyn and Jim and all, so we decided, so one Sunday morning, went down to the shop, we was getting the 1135 Masten ready, I put a spare tire on the front, put a sign on it, this farmer come and gave me a hundred dollar bill, and another farmer would come give me a couple hundred. Well I had plenty of money, it kind of—the farmers wanted to give you the money, that way they had an easy conscience, I guess. I guess that's what it was. Anyway—

MM:

Well did you decorate your tractor? And what kind of tractor was it?

JL:

Eleven thirty-five Massey

MM:

Eleven thirty-five Massey, okay. And so why were you hesitant to begin with, or you had to struggle with yourself as to whether you were going to do it or not? What were some of the things—

JL:

L-a-z-y. [Laughter]

MM:

That's hard to believe.

JL:

Yeah, I think it was just being plumb lazy, that's all, that's all I can say.

MM:

Okay. I don't think anybody at the table believes that today. That's all right. Did—

LL:

He was scared that no one else was going to do it.

MM:

Yeah, and did anybody else from your community go with you, or you the first one to strike out on the road by yourself?

JL:

No, well we went to Denver in 1977 on the fourteenth of December. Everybody was supposed to be from that county, and Colorado, you had to be in Denver. So that was the first Tractorcade so there was six tractors left Yuma, Colorado. Six tractors and one pickup. I drove the pickup, Linda drove a tractor, my other son Richard drove a tractor, Patty Stope [01:30:42] drove a tractor. What's that racecar driver's name? Ernie Mag drove a tractor.

MM:

Ernie what?

JL:

Ernie Mag, Dave Mitchell and one of the Corp [01:30:54] boys. So we had a meeting on a Sunday. We was going to go, a lot of farmers said, "Boy, we're ready to go." So come Monday morning why we went by this café. What was the name of that café?

JIML:

Near Yuma.

LL:

Near Yuma?

UP:

Bronze Landing?

JL:

Bronze Laner.

MM:

Bronze Landing?

JIML:

Laner.

MM:

Laner, Bronze Laner.

JL:

And there was a lot of noses looking up, they had their noses against the window seeing what farmers was heading for Denver. Those were the ones who was about ready to go broke. And there was six of us, and we went to—we was headed for Denver and finally, Dick was leading, the deal with an 1805 Massey. The patrolman stopped and asked what we was doing. He said, “Well we’re taking these tractors to Denver, we’re striking.” And then when we went to Wiggins we was supposed to pick up some more tractors at Wiggins. That’s a little town up the road. Well, them farmers had poor excuses. I don’t want to knock the farmer, but they couldn’t get their tractors started or they couldn’t get this. So we passed them. But when we got to the little town of Kingsburg.

MM:

Kingsburg?

JL:

Kingsburg, I don’t know what was it, there must have been thirty of them. Boy, them guys, they were ready to go. So we had a pretty good convoy, and we headed on into Denver to that—

UP:

That was the capital, wasn't it?

JL:

Yeah but we stayed that night at the fairgrounds in Henderson.

UP:

No that was in Brighton.

JIML:

In Brighton.

JL:

At Brighton.

MM:

Okay, did a sheriff or highway patrolmen escort you all in there or did y'all—

JL:

No.

MM:

Y'all just stayed on the side of the road and drove on in or did y'all just stay right in the middle of the road?

JL:

No, we just drove on the side.

MM:

Let me ask you this, did you decorate the tractors? Did you put any posters in there, in the windows or anything?

JL:

Well yeah we had signs on the side. I remember send a parity [?] [01:33:00]. I only got so many payments to make and this thing will be paid.

MM:

Okay, so you get to the fairgrounds, and how many folks show up from all over the state?

JL:

There was quite a bunch in Denver that day. [Coughs]

MM:

What do you suspect, a hundred? Four hundred?

LL:

Four.

MM:

Okay, Linda says four hundred.

JL:

Well them tractors come from different areas too. And we had—

LL:

That would be documented in newspapers.

MM:

Okay.

JL:

We had trucks with manure spreaders, we had a couple of combines and it was a good day.

MM:

What was everybody's attitude when they got there? When y'all all started meeting up and everything, I mean was there just a lot of talking about parity and about what you wanted to accomplish and everything like that? Were y'all in good moods or—

JL:

I'd say everybody was in a pretty good mood, yeah. That's just like at the Seabees [?] [01:34:10], you've got a few sore heads but the big part was—

MM:

yeah. Then, from the fairgrounds did y'all go the next day downtown to the capital? What'd you do once you got to the fairgrounds? Tell us about that.

JL:

Well the fairgrounds, we was at the fairgrounds two days. It got colder than the dickens. And we had a hard time getting them tractors started.

MM:

Now what time of the year is this?

JL:

Probably December?

MM:

December? Okay.

JL:

It was cold. Then the next night, why we got up, guys got up and started the tractors, why it was two or three hours, and I don't think it even froze that night. It was initiating us.

MM:

Yeah, okay. So what did you go do from there? What was the result of this big meet?

JL:

Well all I remember at the capitol building they had a bunch of crosses that that's supposed to represent something. Do you remember that?

JIML:

I don't remember anything.

LL:

It was for all the—crosses for farmers going bankrupt.

MM:

Farmers going bankrupt Linda says.

JL:

Yeah, I think you're probably right.

MM:

Okay. Yeah so you had about four hundred tractors there and how many farmers, equal number of farmers or more that were—

JL:

Oh, I tell you that was more than four hundred.

MM:

Six hundred or so?

JL:

I would say you're about right.

MM:

Okay. All right. Then did you have speeches and discussions? Did any politicians show up? I would suspect they'd show up.

LL:

There was some politicians came out at the capitol building and spoke, but I don't know the name—

MM:

Wasn't the governor or anything like that?

LL:

I can't recall.

MM:

Okay. Linda can't recall but there were some politicians that came out from the capitol.

JL:

Oh, I'm sure there was a few politicians there because no doubt they wanted to voter team [?]
[01:36:19].

MM:

Yeah. Did any of the farmers speak?

JL:

I can't recall whether Elvin Jenkins made a speech or not, Elvin or Gene or them guys. They could have, but that, I don't know.

MM:

Okay. Then once you met at the capitol there did any news media come out?

LL:

Yeah there was news media.

JIML:

There was news media—

MM:

Okay. Then after that, then what happened? I mean did y'all just return to your farms?

JL:

We more or less just returned to our farms, yeah.

MM:

Okay. And then what was the next stage in the action there?

JIML:

We just—was that before the Safeway?

JL:

Well then after that we went to the Safeway store.

UP:

I got involved in the Safeway deal.

JL:

And that was just—and we did go well and we did go Pueblo, remember we went down to Pueblo and stayed at that—that guy that—well, we had a tractor, that's when—Prioff [?]
[01:37:27] what's his name?

LL:

Richard Prioff [?]

JL:

Richard Prioff [?], he had John Deere's truck and him and I drove down there and we had a—I think tractor sprigs [?] [01:37:36] and two of ours I think, we hauled down there. And we stayed at that—they guys brought a fruit stand down there. They was very active in when we went to Washington D.C., but I can't think of their names.

LL:

Was it Mollihan? [?]

JIML:

Mollihan.

JL:

No, no, they did this with people from Pueblo.

MM:

Pueblo, okay. So this is what year now, again, '74, '75?

JL:

This year would be about '78, because we went to Denton—

MM:

Seventy-eight? So this is after the 1977 Farm Act, right? That congress passed.

UP:

Yeah.

MM:

Okay and just give me your perspective, John, on what you think the short term and the long term impact was of the farm crisis? Okay, in the seventies there. From just as a single producer. And then somebody part of this larger group, American Ag Movement.

UP:

Well, I don't know how to—all I know, you had to have a pretty sharp pencil or you didn't make it. You had to script wherever you could. If the old bolt was kind of rusty you put it in one of the grinders, polished them and used them again instead of buying a new one.

MM:

Do you remember any race or class issues surrounding the farming and farm crisis at the time?

JL:

Well all of us—

MM:

Your rich farmers versus poor farmers or whatnot?

JL:

All I remember is when Jimmy Carter put that embargo on them and knocked corn a buck a bushel overnight, and I come to John Deere's that next morning and I had a notion to punch the guy right in the nose. He made like I was pretty funny and I said, "Well how would you like to show up this morning at a job and have your boss meet you at the door and say, 'Well, I'm just

cutting your wages in half.” I remember Dean Fritz, I could have popped him one. But I thought I better be nice.

MM:

I know that the American Ag Movement had a farm and rural suicide hotline and stuff like that at the time, because there were a lot of people that were just distraught.

JL:

Oh yeah, yeah.

MM:

So tell about that a little bit, what you might remember about that.

JL:

Well I don't remember too much. All I remember is reading mostly about—what was the lady's name in Oklahoma? She just passed away.

MM:

Do you remember Dan? I can't remember. Mrs. Brock? Yeah.

JL:

Yeah. And I remember reading her articles, and American Ag put out a paper, what was the name of that paper?

MM:

I've gone blank on it myself. We've got some.

JL:

Oh, I've got a stack of them three feet high.

MM:

Well we need all we can get. That was the other thing I was going to ask about was initially how did y'all communicate with each other? How did you start the network?

LL:

It was the newspaper.

MM:

It was the newspaper? American Ag Movement newspaper?

LL:

Somebody in the community that was interested would just—just took the initiative to [inaudible].

MM:

So it was just in the newspaper.

JIML:

Didn't Linda Koontz, from Oregon, she was putting a lot of stuff in the paper.

MM:

Uh-huh. Now, let's talk—did you go on the Tractorcade to Washington D.C.?

UP:

Yeah.

JL:

Yeah.

MM:

Okay, let's talk about what got you motivated to do that, and about your experience being on that Tractorcade.

JL:

Well we—

MM:

Where you met up? What highway you took, all of it?

JL:

We left Burlington, Colorado on about the fifteenth of January, and we got to Washington, D.C. I think on the fourth or fifth of February in 1979. And I took the tractor from—Norm Kramer had a tractor and we had a tractor and a John Deere from Ray Hall, the two tractors to Burlington for us. And I took the tractors from there to Sedalia, Missouri, and we got snowed in two days at Sedalia, Missouri, and Mother and I had some business to do, so Linda and Mother come down and Linda took the tractor and Mother and I come back to do business, and Linda drove the tractor from Sedalia, Missouri to Greenville, Illinois, where we got snowed in another two days.

MM:

How many tractors were in the group you were going with?

JL:

Well we had—when we left Denver—

JIML:

Or Burlington.

JL:

Oh, when we left Burlington—pardon me. When we left Burlington fifty-odd say, maybe fifty tractors.

MM:

Fifty tractors. Were they all from the Colorado area or were y'all picking them up as you went?

JL:

It was mostly that they come into Burlington. And then we picked up tractors as we went. And when we got Topeka, Kansas, I think we picked up three hundred.

MM:

Three hundred.

JL:

Yeah.

MM:

Okay, so y'all—what was the total number by that time. You had three hundred at that time?

JL:

By the time we got to—I don't think we—by the time we got to Topeka I don't think we had three hundred yet.

MM:

Okay you didn't have three hundred.

JL:

But then when we got—

MM:

But it fleshed out to three hundred.

JL:

Yeah.

MM:

Let me ask you, going along the way there and all along the highway are people honking their horns at you? Are they showing any kind of support?

JL:

Oh yeah the people were—

MM:

And where did y'all stay every night along the way, and how did you get fed and everything like that?

JL:

Well there was—we got fed too much. But there was a fellow from Joes Colorado, his name was Rex Drullinger.

MM:

Spell his last name.

JL:

D-r-i-l—

LL:

D-r-u-l-l-i-n-g-e-r

MM:

Say that Linda, say that.

LL:

D-r-u-l-l-i-n-g-e-r.

MM:

Okay, good, okay. Go ahead.

JL:

And he had an international pickup and he just had a little camper on the back, and him and I camped in that. And he was from Joes, Colorado, and the first night we stayed at Wakeeney, Kansas.

MM:

Well did y'all go into like county fairgrounds or—

JL:

Mostly county fairgrounds or sale barns or wherever they could park a bunch of us.

MM:

Okay. And was somebody birddogging all this along the way?

JL:

There was somebody, I cannot—last night I was thinking all night long. I can't think of his name, that went ahead for the Colorado group, and every night found a place for us to stay.

MM:

A place for you to stay, yeah. Now you said you ate too much. Who was feeding you along the way?

JL:

Well the first thing on the list, Rex's mother give him a whole bunch of stuff. And he was the batch type [?][01:45:12]. Then we get to Wakeeney, Kansas, and them ladies had pies there, and I think we had seventeen pies in that—two guys can't eat seventeen pies. Funny I told Rex, "But we got to do something to this food," I said, "We've got plenty of money, let's just eat at the restaurant and forget about this dried up batch [?] [01:45:36] stuff."

MM:

Yeah. But are these farm women bringing stuff, or—

JL:

Well every time you'd eat at night they had a big meal. The farm women would bring in pies and—

MM:

And are these people who were supportive of the American Ag Movement, or are they actually involved, members of the American Ag Movement?

JL:

I think some of them were members and some of them were—

MM:

Were just local farmers.

JL:

Were just local farmers.

MM:

Trying to help out.

JL:

And wherever you went at night they'd come and fill your tractor with gas. Co-op, Texaco, Skelly, they'd fill your—but I'll tell you a little story while we're at it. These guys didn't tell me, I took that little 35 Massey where when that gauge was at a fourth it was empty. And I learned that the hard way but that's on down the road.

MM:

[Laughter] There's nothing worse than being stuck on the side of the road with an empty tractor. All right, now so y'all head on in towards—after Topeka you're heading towards D.C.

JL:

We're heading for Kansas City.

MM:

What's your next stops that you can remember?

JIML:

They wouldn't let you on the turnpike.

JL:

When we got Kansas City they wouldn't leave us on the turnpike.

JIML:

That was Topeka. At Topeka you could have gone on the turnpike but they wouldn't let you on. Am I correct?

JL:

Well we took old Highway forty, wherever old Highway Forty is.

JIML:

That's outside of Topeka.

JL:

Okay. Anyway, they would let us get on the four-lane. They had cats up there, road graders and that. A lot of the guys got pretty uptight. Well, these—

MM:

So these are like the highway patrol or the highway department blocking y'all with Caterpillars and blades and stuff like that?

JL:

Blocking us off. Well us farmers, we can't fight the national guard, but the best thing that ever happened to us, we went on old highway forty, and we got more publicity. We went on down the road, and there'd be the schools that let the kids out, the school bus would be sitting on top. Them kids would be hollering, "Go farmers, go," and we went to another place and they had a bunch of hay bales laying out on the—made into "Go farmers go" out of the hay bales.

MM:

You mean on the overpasses or something like that?

JL:

You know kind of on a hill?

MM:

A hill, yeah.

JL:

Yeah, it was—we got a lot of publicity.

MM:

That's great, that's great. So when you're moving in, how many—as you start to approach Washington, how many tractors do you think you have at that time?

JL:

Well, Colorado was first. And sometimes when we'd try to get in about five o'clock or thereabouts, and you'd be in at ten, eleven o'clock there'd still be tractors coming. And then when you go in there, why, you headed for the first pizza parlor or the first Subway, and you just cleaned them up, you just ate everything they had.

MM:

Yeah. Okay now, and this is all along the route.

JL:

That's all along the route.

MM:

Okay. Now when you get close to Washington will you talk—

JL:

Well, listen. When we got to—well they didn't want to let us get on the four lane, we stayed on the highway all night long. I don't know where the voice come from, but the voice said, "Park 'em boys, park 'em." Everybody parked their tractor right along the side of the road. So we had cops there all night long you know, and then the next day we moved on.

MM:

Okay. Where you'd move on to? What was your next big stop? Heading towards Washington.

JL:

Well it'd be down—

JIML:

Remember we stayed at the racetrack at Indianapolis?

LL:

Indianapolis.

MM:

Indianapolis speedway there?

JL:

That was later, that was—

MM:

I was just there last year.

JL:

And then just along the way sometimes in the evening there's a lot of times people would buy your supper or they'd—a big part of the people were pretty nice.

MM:

Well when you got into these different locales did farmers come out and visit with y'all and talk about the issues that they had, and were they mainly supportive?

JL:

A lot of farmers were, but like I told you, I wasn't much of a talker. I done a lot of listening, but I didn't really think I had anything to say.

MM:

Yeah. But I mean did they—did you hear people talking about—

JL:

Yeah, we heard—

MM:

Okay. Farm issues and stuff like that, the crisis, and wanting more parity for their produce and things of this nature. Now, when you got to Washington, D.C. and you started to move into those big urban areas like that, what was it all like? And then you get there on Pennsylvania Avenue.

JL:

Well we got to Greenville, Illinois, that's where Mother and I caught the—and then we went on to the racetrack. We stayed at the racetrack I think it was on a Sunday. And that was real interesting because Linda drove the tractor and we had a pickup, and you could get way ahead of the caravan and then come—the face that you could see that trailer smoked just a going. It was pretty neat. And then from the racetrack why them Linda and Mother come back home and I took it on into D.C. And that's where we got up there in the—what do they call them mountains you go through?

MM:

Oh, the Appalachian mountains.

JL:

Yeah. Well that's where I run out of fuel with this tractor.

MM:

[Laughter] Goodness.

JL:

But Colorado had a fuel truck and they had a spare tire. He come along, we bleed [?] [01:51:19] it, got it going.

JIML:

One story you might want to tell about Mr. Mollihan getting lost and ended up at the girl's dormitory? I don't know what town that was at.

JL:

Well we got up there in the mountains and we got into a snow storm. And somehow or other the caravan got split up. Half stayed and half went. And I think we stayed that night at Terrehaute.

MM:

Terrehaute, Indiana?

JL:

And that's a college town. And Don Mollihan, he had an old beanie [?] [01:51:54], and you had to crank the thing to start it. And he hit this snow back and got caught in a snow bank, but he couldn't crank his tractor, so his tractor killed. So the highway department come along with a truck and they finally pulled him out, and that's a college town, and so these—Don Mollihan had a whole bunch of buttons on all the time, and these girls said, "Well you can just stay in my room, you can just stay in my room," and they just—this girl took a button and that girl took a button, they took all of Don's buttons.

MM:

[Laughter] Did he stay in their room?

JIML:

Yeah they moved over and took and then went to another room and he had—

JL:

And we stayed there, I think we stayed in our little camper that night there at the—but they had us move off early the next morning. We had to get out of there pretty early. But we went there and a lot of them kids going to college, and we hadn't ate for quite a while. We went to this pizza place, we just cleaned them out. They had no pop left, no hamburgers. They was out of grocery. That was a—and that's where there was a girl sitting kind of by herself. And Freddie Hilman was there, Freddie Hilman was a fellow from Yuma, very active in American Ag. And he went and talked to her. She had tears in her eyes, she says, "Well, my dad's a farmer. This is just kind of getting to me."

MM:

That's neat. Well what was it like going through the Appalachian Mountains there before you headed into D.C.?

JL:

Well, we got caught in a snowstorm. Going through there I got a big kick out of the Collin boys. They said, "There's a million of them coming." I don't know what else, but they got to be a million.

MM:

[Laughter] Oh my god.

JL:

And then they had the helicopters flying over the top.

MM:

Flying over y'all.

JL:

Oh yeah.

MM:

Now when you get into Washington D.C., what did you do and who takes over and how did y'all join up and where did you stay?

JL:

We was outside of Washington D.C. somewhere. We had them tractors all parked. I don't know what the name of that town was. Anyway, we had about one day there was a truck come through, we got so much of this salt on our tractors we had to high pressure wash them off.

MM:

Washed them off.

JL:

Yeah.

MM:

Okay got them all ready.

JL:

And we was right on the edge of D.C. somewhere in some little town up there.

MM:

Wasn't Pentagon City, was it?

JL:

No, it was—

JIML:

Fredericksburg, Maryland?

MM:

Oh, so Fredericksburg, y'all are coming in from the top.

JIML:

We come across seventy there, I can't think of it.

JL:

Well it might have been, it might have been.

JIML:

Fredericksburg, or—

JL:

If I'd have known all of this was going to happen I might have made a few notes.

MM:

You're all right John, you're all right. Should have sent you some of this stuff in advance. So you get into D.C., who wrangled y'all and get y'all in for the big to-do?

JL:

Well we left early that morning and we got into D.C., and all I can remember, wherever you looked there was tractors. And the first thought I got when I saw all them tractors running over Pennsylvania Avenue and everywhere, it reminded me of turning a bunch of calves loose that had been penned up, because tractors was just going—

MM:

You really got a sense that you were part of something big, didn't you?

JL:

Yeah. It was really something.

MM:

Now, I know y'all had a lot of speeches and stuff like that and some of the congressman and the ag commissioner and people like that came and met with y'all and talked. What do you remember about all these experiences, and how long were y'all there?

JL:

Well Rex and I stayed for a couple—we left just before they had the big snowstorm.

MM:

Okay, okay.

JL:

They had the big snowstorm and I think we left a day or two before.

MM:

What were your experiences there? Just describe some—give me some anecdotes.

JL:

Well we parked right there by the space center, that's where had our little trailer parked. And we just—and Saturdays and Sundays was a big day. Everybody from outside would bring their kids in, and we gave the kids drives. You just—you have a load of kids and you'd take them along the mall, when they come back and unloaded, another load was ready. You loaded them, up you just had all the kids you could get in the cab. That was a great—people brought their kids in just to— and people were very nice.

MM:

And did these people that brought their kids and everything they ask you what you were doing there and what the whole things was about?

JL:

Yeah they asked questions, we told them.

MM:

So it was a good educational experience for them.

JL:

Said farmers had a problem, they wasn't making the cost of production.

MM:

Now so after that, what was the aftermath? How did it impact farmers? Do you remember?

JL:

Well when you come back, some farmers said, "Do you think you done any good?" Well, yeah, I think we done a lot of good.

MM:

Yeah, yeah. You thought that you were bringing attention—

JL:

Yeah.

MM:

To the issue of not getting good prices for your production.

JL:

And it was something to see, that many black hats and denim jackets in the hall of congress. I mean it was just packed.

MM:

Do you remember any of the congressmen talking to you and the chairmen of the ag committee or any of those guys?

JL:

Oh yeah, there was—we had—what was her name?

LL:

Pat Schroeder.

JL:

Pat Schroeder.

MM:

Schroeder, yeah.

JL:

We went up there and there was a bunch of us that was going to meet with her.

MM:

From Colorado.

JL:

From Colorado. And she didn't want to have too much to do with us, until she heard News Four was there. And in just a short while, them big plush chairs, they just showed up everywhere, and man, the coffee and the donuts was coming in. The really big time. Pat Schroeder, why, she wanted to get some attention, well they got some attention.

MM:

Well that's what pressure's all about. Just what it's all about. Now, so after you get back—by the way, did you drive all the way back or did you put your tractor on a trailer and haul it back?

JL:

No, Rex had to get home, so him and I come back with his pickup. And then later on, John Stobe, myself, and Dick Taylor, we caught the plane and went back—they needed some more support back there. So we went back, and I think I stayed another week or two. Why don't you tell—remember you worked at the office there for a while?

MM:

Come around over here Linda, if you don't mind. So I know y'all had an office there. Y'all had a makeshift office, but what did—here, let me. You sit here and I'll sit right there.

LL:

Oh dad, thanks for getting me involved.

MM:

This is Linda Lapp, John's daughter, and she's going to tell us a little bit about what she recalls from being there. She worked in the office. Go ahead Linda, and get up close here so you can speak up.

LL:

I don't remember the dates, but I did work in the office with Ida Mae Arch from Joes, Colorado. Helped her organize it, and I typed speeches for people.

MM:

Who were the people giving the speeches?

LL:

John Stalp [?] [02:00:32] from Lamar, Colorado.

JL:

Bud Vitner [?] [02:00:35]

LL:

Bud Vitner was there, from Walsh, Colorado. I don't—that's all I can remember. There was other people.

MM:

Well aside from typing speeches what did y'all do? And where were you located when you were doing this at the office? Do you recall? I mean you don't have to remember the exact street, but I mean, do you remember any buildings there or anything like that you know about?

LL:

No, I don't. I stayed in a motel with somebody but I don't even remember that.

MM:

And I'm asking this to both of you. Were there other strikes and protests after this that y'all were involved in? I mean after the Tractorcade, the big Tractorcade.

JL:

Well then later on, why they took the soybeans out of the elevator. We got involved in that.

MM:

Tell about that a little bit.

JL:

Well, this guy had at [inaudible] [02:01:47] down at—

JIML:

[Inaudible]

JL:

Yeah. Wayne Cryts, he had thirty thousand bushels of bean in an elevator. Those brothers had eight elevators. Well, they only had enough grain to go—somebody tipped them off. So they'd haul grain from one to the other. So when the inspectors come, well they file bankrupt. And when they filed bankrupt, Judge Baker from Little Rock, Arkansas said that we're going to sell these beans as assets of the elevator. And Wayne Cryts says, no, he said, "I have warehouse receipts, and we're going to take the beans out." And they said, "You'd take them beans out you're going to be in contempt of court, and we're going to throw you in jail." Well, so it was 1981, the day before Valentine's Day, it was on a Sunday. We went down there and the next day there was three thousand farmers down there, and we took the beans out. Wayne Cryts said, "The next day, at ten o'clock, we're going to get this show on the road." And at ten o'clock, why, him and his wife had a truck, and the five guys that started American Ag, they was in the truck box. They throw the chain away, they drove on the scale and the federal marshals and the FBI was there, they said, "What are we going to do now?" And Wayne Cryts said, "You can do as you please. All I'm going to do is take my beans out." So they said, "Well you've taken possession," So whatever they weighed, they made there was an FBI agent and a farmer on each corner—it

was all on the inside when they teared the beans. They didn't have no juice so we had metalsmith. He made holes in his side, we stuck an auger in and got on the inside and scooped all those beans.

MM:

Scooped all those beans out. That had to take a while.

JL:

It was—my wife and I have got a golden scoop that the Colorado American Ag gave us for that deal.

MM:

For scooping that day.

JL:

Yeah.

MM:

My god.

JL:

That to me, of all the things that I was involved in or we were, in American Ag, I think that was the greatest thing.

MM:

Was getting those beans out.

JL:

Getting those beans out.

MM:

How many pounds, tons, did you shovel that day?

JL:

Well about thirty thousand, we had about seventy-five or eighty truckloads.

MM:

Wow, wow, wow.

JL:

And it got pretty hairy. Norm Cramer, he was—

LL:

He went with Daddy.

JL:

He went with us, that was a neighbor that went with us, and he was pretty gutty until it got down to the—then he start backing off, and that morning when we went there, why, I was ready to go. I was going to get some action going. He said, “What’s the matter John, you getting nervous?” “No,” I said, “I just don’t want to put my tail between my legs, and if I drove a thousand miles,—”

MM:

Yeah.

JL:

And I had enough money in my billfold, my wife was still alive then. Threw her my billfold, I said, “There’s enough money here to take you home. I might get thrown in jail.” But it turned out good, but that was quite an experience.

MM:

Well so the FBI and the other law enforcement guys, they didn’t stop you.

JL:

They didn’t, no. They let us go. And then it went—we thought we could get them out all day but then it got to raining, and we couldn’t do it all. So they had a—Wayne had them promise that if we come back the next day that we could finish. And they said—got their word. So there’s always a joker in the bunch. So there’s one guy from Kansas, he put a wheelbarrow full of beans on the scale overnight, and put a dollar bill on the other side, and says, “These are warehouse receipts.” Come back the next day and all them dollar bills was there and those guys could—they said, “What do you mean?” The dollar bills, you know the FBI figured somebody’d run off with them. Well the just said, “You’re not dealing with crooks. Farmers are—they’re honest. But they were—

JIML:

Questions from the gallery.

MM:

Okay. Well actually that's one of those things I was going to ask about here. So no, you're— that's good. What about the trip to the Chicago Board of Trade?

JL:

Well, I'll tell you. In those days we didn't have a whole lot of money. And my sister died. And when my sister died—

MM:

Which sister?

JL:

My sister Emma.

MM:

Emma.

JL:

And I had all my teeth pulled, I was a gumming hamburgers. And I got a thousand dollars out of the deal, I thought, well, I'm going to buy me some teeth. Well about that time American Ag said, "We need some help down at the Board of Trade," I told Mother I said, "Well let's go, we'll just use that thousand dollars to go there and I'll gum hamburgers for a little while longer. So.

MM:

What'd you do at the Chicago Board of Trade?

JL:

Well we just went there and more or less—

MM:

How many of you showed up?

JL:

There was quite a few farmers there, quite a few of them got arrested.

MM:

Okay, I mean are we talking hundreds are we talking fifty, sixty, what?

JL:

Oh there was several hundred I would say. I remember helping carry a flag down the street, and it carried some guy out the Board of Trade. Then about two guys must have gotten a fight in there, one was all bloody.

JIML:

Tell him how cold it was.

JL:

We got off the airplane it was sixty below zero. Oh, it was cold. But that was quite an experience too.

MM:

And what were y'all trying to do there at the Chicago Board of Trade? Get better prices?

JL:

I think what they were mainly getting at trying to get this thing. If you play the Board of Trade you have the product. Not just the paper.

MM:

Right, right.

JL:

I think that was the sticker right there.

MM:

Trading on margins.

JL:

Yeah.

JIML:

Tell them about they brought coffee and donuts out and pretty soon you had all the homeless people.

JL:

Oh yeah they brought out coffee and donuts. Following that they had a big crowd. All the homeless come and we just had a good time.

MM:

[Laughter] That's great.

JL:

A lot of it—we had—I had a lot of fun too.

MM:

Okay. Did y'all get a lot of publicity?

JL:

Yes. We definitely got publicity.

MM:

Okay. Now what—did you work locally or at the state level—I know about the national level—with any of the politicians at all? Or not? As a group, or individually?

JL:

I can't recall too many politicians.

LL:

Probably should have done more on that even.

Catherine L (CL):[?]

Wasn't Bob Dole involved?

JL:

Well yeah—

CL:

And in that book you loaned me I think he talked about how he made promises to be supportive, but then he backed out and told your local person, "You just don't understand politics."

JL:

That's right.

MM:

Okay so Catherine's made a statement here. So go ahead, respond to that.

JL:

Well—

MM:

About Bob Dole, or his support or lack thereof.

JL:

Donald Mollihan used to do a lot of work for him, take papers to different offices. And at that time they were voting on the canal. They was going to give the canal away or something.

MM:

Yeah, the Panama Canal.

JL:

He wasn't in favor—he always said he wasn't in favor—but he voted for it. So Donnie Moll had to approach him, he said, “Bob, you've said your soul to the devil.” And he says, “Donnie, you just don't understand politics.”

MM:

This was on the vote on the Panama Canal.

JL:

The vote on the Panama Canal.

MM:

Yeah. And explain to future generations how that vote affected farmers, you know?

JL:

Well that I can't answer. I don't—

MM:

That's all right.

JL:

It's coming a blank there.

MM:

That's alright. You may think of it later, you tell me later. Now, what about Farm Aid? Were you involved in Farm Aid at all?

JL:

No I wasn't. I went to several and really had a good time.

MM:

Did you get to meet—

JL:

Willie Nelson?

MM:

Willie?

JL:

Oh yeah, he had a big deal in Pueblo, and we went backstage and visited with him and he autographed—Mother had something that he autographed. Linda Koontz had something that he autographed. He was a great guy.

MM:

Yeah. Now, let's talk a little bit about—are you still involved in farming today, John?

JL:

No, I rent the land out.

MM:

You're just renting the land out. When did you finally cash it in?

JL:

The year 2000.

MM:

The year 2000.

JL:

The year twenty—twenty, twenty.

LL:

Twenty—two.

MM:

Two oh oh oh.

JL:

About twenty years ago.

MM:

Who old were you at that time?

JL:

About seventy-seven.

MM:

Seventy-seven, okay. And why did you decide to go ahead and start renting your land?

JL:

Well, Mother and I talked, we had everything paid for. And I love to farm, and it was a tough decision to make. But we finally just got together—you know, you'll keep farming and you'll get a hailstorm, first thing you know you'll be hocking a quarter here and you're hocking a—finally if you're not careful with what you're doing, and cash rent is up pretty good, so we just decided to cash rent it out. And if it's—

MM:

Okay. And how many acres did you have at that time?

JL:

About a little over eleven hundred.

MM:

That y'all had payed off and were free and clear.

JL:

Yeah. Right.

MM:

Very good. Now, you kids, do any of y'all farm anymore? Jim, do you farm?

JIML:

No.

MM:

Okay.

JIML:

We encouraged Mom and Dad just to rent it out because we did want to farm it and lose it for them.

MM:

And y'all are still renting it out?

JIML:

Same renters, same family.

JL:

Same renter for twenty years last year.

MM:

Well that's amazing. Now, how did American Ag Movement impact your view on politics, on farming, on work overall?

JIML:

Well I do remember when Dad come back from Washington, I do remember him saying that, "We're going to follow the farm program right down to the nitty gritty." And I know he done that.

JL:

We went to Washington D.C. to try to get a price. And the big boys up there said, "You've got the farm program." So there's a time in there we were thinking about maybe going into alcohol. A lot of guys that built—and we come close to build that—an alcohol plant, and I'm glad we didn't because I don't think it would have flew. So we just followed the government program. I will admit, ninety-nine, ninety-nine. And it worked.

MM:

Okay. So it worked for you all the way up to two thousand. And things go a little bit better.

JL:

Well after we got the land down, where everything didn't go for interest rate, then it filled up [?] [02:14:22]. Start making a little money.

MM:

Now the—so reflect—and you're still a member in good standing of the American Ag Movement, still involved with them and still here today, as a matter of fact. But how would you describe your overall experience?

JL:

Oh it—

MM:

And how it impacted your life.

JL:

Mother and I, we've been all over the United States with the American Ag things. We've been everywhere. They had a breadbasket tour, in Louisiana, we've just been every—it's been great. And it's the cause—I'm ninety-seven years old, if there was a cause I would still get on the tractor and drive it to Washington D.C.

MM:

That's great John, I don't think we could end any better than that. You kids have anything you want to say? Linda?

JIML:

I know they met a lot of nice people, a lot of friends, they made very good friends.

MM:

And you feel like that you gave back to the industry that you worked in, from the time you were a two year old?

JL:

I think so yeah. And if I had to do it all over again, I would farm. I love to farm. When you farm, you're where God wants you to be.

MM:

Yeah. Now what about that dairy farm?

JL:

Well, I'm going to tell you about the dairy farm. I always knew where the three girls and the two boys was at. They were home, Linda was my—she took care of the calves and I'm telling you she done a wonderful job. And when one of them was sick and about ready to die I said, "If you can keep it alive you can have it." And so help me, she doctored him until he could—she done it.

LL:

It put me through college.

MM:

Did it really?

LL:

That and grants and loans.

MM:

My grandparents, my grandmother was a dairy woman back in the twenty—teens and twenties. And all the way up until she died in her early forties. And my mother always said she worked herself to death on that dairy farm, you know? And my grandfather, he would take and deliver the milk on—he had a horse and buggy, you know with a little milk truck behind in there. And he would politick. He wound up being a politician.

JL:

Oh I see well—

MM:

We wound up living on that farm with him and stuff like that. And dairy farming, Mother always said dairy farming's not something you want to do the rest of your life.

MM:

If you're looking for a job, don't ever get you a job on a dairy farm. Get you a shovel and dig a ditch, because when it's five o'clock, you're done. You're done. On a dairy farm, in the middle of the night, you're pulling the calf or your pull—Linda'd get up at midnight, she'd feed these sick calves so to keep them going.

Todd (T):

It's totally something years ago, back in the day when you dairied, the bankers wanted you to dairy because there was always a little bit of income coming in.

JL:

Oh yeah, that's true.

MM:

Okay. That's Todd now, Linda's husband.

LL:

Yes.

T:

I remember you taught me that years ago.

JL:

Oh yeah.

T:

A banker always wanted you to have some dairy cows.

JL:

If you had some dairy cows you always had a little collateral. They did like that.

LL:

That check came in every month.

T:

He still calls it the milk check.

MM:

The milk check.

JL:

And I'll have to admit, I bought more stuff on time and paid it off in the month with them dairy cows.

MM:

So it did pay off.

JL:

But now I get social security just from milk cows. So these girls there at the bank, I go in there and say, "Is my milk check in?" Every month I make sure my milk check's in. So I go there that one time, they had a new girl there. And I said, "Is my milk check in?" She looked at me like as if what continent did you come from? So one of the girls went in the back, heard her and she came out laughs and telling her about—

MM:

Social security.

JL:

Yes.

Todd;

That's the milk check.

MM:

That's the milk check. This other person that was talking was Todd Von, and that's John's son-in-law. Well John, we're honored to be with you today, what a great gentleman you are. Ninety-seven years old, you're still sharp as a tack. And thank you for your service to our country, thank you for your service to the Ag Movement, and we're just honored to be here with you and interviewing you today.

JL:

Well, I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity of telling you what I know and God bless America.

MM:

Thank you sir. Okay.

JIML:

That's worth the trip to Lubbock. {inaudible}

MM:

Good to hear, that was great.

LL:

[?] figure out, he won't be ninety-seven until about February, Jim.

MM:

Okay all right that's good.

CL:

Jim, get over by your dad so we can click and get a picture.

MM:

Well thank you sir, I've—

CL:

It's almost time to go.

MM:

And I've got to make sure we don't have somebody else too—I'd love to come over, I know that y'all always have [inaudible] thing like that. I'm going to make sure that we get everybody in here and all that kind of stuff.

[Posing for a photograph]

MM:

Let's all get behind John here. Oh wait just a minute, let me turn this off here.

End of Recording



© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library