

**Oral History Interview of  
Joe Flores**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson  
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Stratford, Texas**

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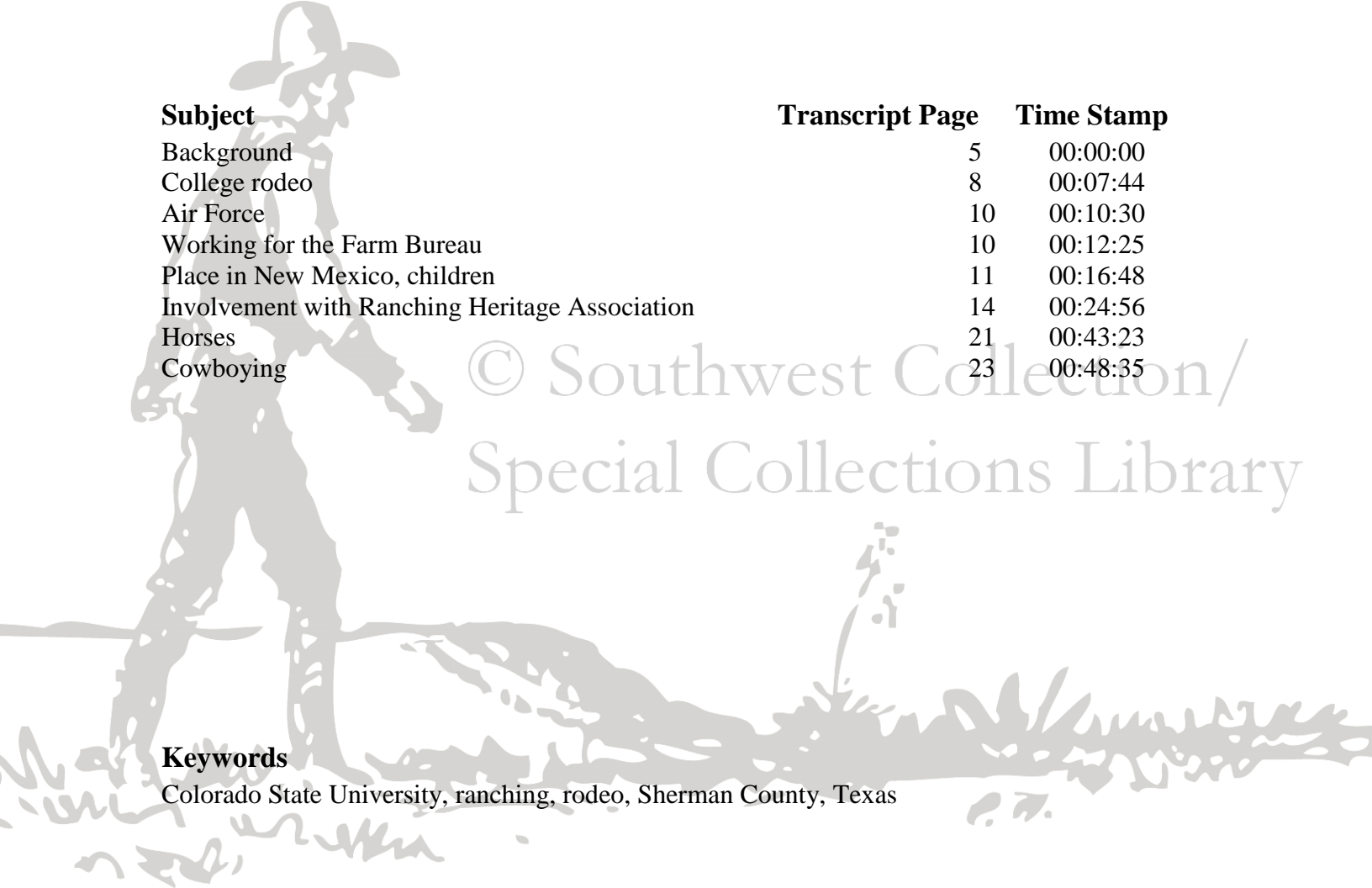
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## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Joe Flores. Flores talks about his involvement with rodeo at Colorado State University, his ranch, working for the Farm Bureau, and cowboying.

**Length of Interview:** 00:52:59



Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Background	5	00:00:00
College rodeo	8	00:07:44
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Place in New Mexico, children	11	00:16:48
Involvement with Ranching Heritage Association	14	00:24:56
Horses	21	00:43:23
Cowboying	23	00:48:35

### Keywords

Colorado State University, ranching, rodeo, Sherman County, Texas

**Andy Wilkinson (AW):**

That way I don't miss anything.

**Joe Flores (JF):**

Oh well I'm done so I'll wait for you.

AW:

Well it's just real simple, you know one of the things that we do at the Southwest Collection is, besides our archive of materials, papers, letters, photographs, that kind of thing, is an archive of oral history interviews, which we started back in the 1950s and we have tens of thousands of them now, and I particularly like that program because it's— you know if you think about 200 years from now, somebody wanting to know what life was like in Sherman County, instead of reading about it, they can listen to somebody who was there at the time and in their own voice, in their own language, talk about their own story. So that's what this all about. At the end of it I'm going to ask you to sign a release that lets us let people listen to that.

JF:

You bet. No problem.

AW:

And if during the interview you have any, you want to stop just a minute before you answer, let me know and I'll pause it because one of the things we don't do is go back and alter it.

JF:

Oh okay, whatever's there is there.

AW:

Yeah and for the obvious reason, we want people to have confidence that what they're hearing is actually what somebody said and not what we changed it to.

JF:

Oh okay.

AW:

Yeah, the whole value of this is to be able to not have anybody between the person talking and the person listening you know no editing, no change.

JF:

Okay.

AW:

So that's it, and let me start by just getting a little basic information. What is your date of birth, Joe?

JF:

February 12, 1931.

AW:

And were you born here in Sherman County?

JF:

Eight miles west of town, in Dallam County, and the old house is still there.

AW:

Really? When did your folks come out here?

JF:

They came to that ranch in 1916; they'd been in the Panhandle area since right after the buffalo hunting times.

AW:

Really?

JF:

Yeah.

AW:

So for a long time. Before they got to the Panhandle where did they come from?

JF:

They just kind of started out and drifted, after the buffalo were gone my great-grandad became a trail driver. If he were alive today he would be a cattle trucker (laughter). He had of four sons, brothers, brothers, had a lot of horses, had a wagon, and a cook, and he'd hire out to drive your cattle someplace. But he was sorry as hell he never did amount to anything, except he would do that and he was a law man in a lot place.

AW:

Really?

JF:

A man in Abilene, kind of got Abilene off the ground and going I can't remember his name, and he decided to go down and follow the railroad to Amarillo and go to Amarillo. So my great-grandad went to Amarillo with that man.

AW:

What was your great-grandfather's name?

JF:

James Peter Flores.

AW:

And is your name Joe, or Joseph or—?

JF:

Joe J-o-e P-e-t-e. There's a book in the house I'll show you.

AW:

With family information?

JF:

Yeah, the Flores family, they came from Spain in 1725, and that's when this book starts.

AW:

Really?

JF:

And they lived somewhere around Nacogdoches. Nacogdoches wasn't there but that's kind of where they first—and they had some land that somebody in Spain had given them a grant and they drifted out in various directions from there. And some of those early people, they were kind of outgoing and they'd get in trouble a lot, they wanted to march them to Mexico City once or twice. But anyway, that's where they came from; the original guy had to leave Spain because he married an Irish lady, and he was some kind of a lesser person in the deal, and he married this Irish lady and it broke the rules so they gave him the La Tortue grant and told him to get on the boat and leave, so he did (laughter) and that's how it kind of started. My grandad came down the road, started out up there around Eastland and he just moved down and down and down finally. And he worked in Tulia for a long time, and in 1916 or '17 he bought this place out west of town and came there, and he died when he was fifty something years old, he died way too young. He died in '37 which was a bad time to die and leave it, and the federal land bank almost got that place. They were in the process of closing on it. But my dad had a brother that worked in the



bank here, and they were able to kind of get it connected someway and hold onto that place, and they paid it off for my grandmother. When my grandad died, he had six kids and each one of them inherited a sixth of that debt but my dad and his brother, the banker, got the debt paid off about '42 or '43 and my grandmother had it free and clear.

AW:

Yeah, that's an unusual story for that time and place.

JF:

Yeah. My dad when he died, it was many years after my mother died, and my mother's will said she left her half of whatever they had to the eight grandchildren. Well, my dad was kind of hard headed and he said, "I don't care what she wanted to do with it I made it, I put it together, I'm not going to do anything with it just drive on," and he did. And so I had an idiot brother-in-law who had three daughters that needed money, and it looked like they're probably going to sue my dad, and he would've shot somebody for doing that. So I got him to put it in an irrevocable trust for those eight grandkids. That cut me out of the program which kept it honest, which I now regret, I'd like to have a piece of that thing because those grandkids didn't have it two years till they cashed it and just a bad deal. But I was just trying to look after him, he died when he was almost ninety-nine, and I spent a lot of time freighting him around for fifteen, twenty years. But that's the story of the place.

AW:

So if you were cut out of that, how did you get into the business of owning land?

JF:

Well I'd always wanted to be a cowboy, that's all I ever wanted to be. I went to college because I had a rodeo scholarship.

AW:

Where'd you go to college?

JF:

Colorado A&M, which is now Colorado State University, and I had a strong desire to be on their rodeo team so that's why I went up there and rodeoed real hard all the time I was there.

AW:

What were your events in rodeo?



JF:

Calf roping and team roping, bulldogging. If they didn't have enough events then I would get on a bull once in a while, just get on the bull and hold the back of the gate and say unchain him (laughter), save my life. But after you do so many events you couldn't be on a team, anyway—

AW:

I'm just amazed I see that you got all your digits which is pretty good for a roper.

JF:

Yeah, well we tied hard and fast back then in team roping.

AW:

Oh so in team roping you were hard and fast and not downing? That's interesting.

JF:

Much slower, longer ropes. Yeah, in 1953 I graduated from college, and I was third in national intercollegiate rodeo calf roping standings for the year.

AW:

Oh that's great.

JF:

Yeah, so that was the biggest deal I ever amounted to. I've got a pair of spurs they gave me; the guy that won it got a saddle. Anyway, the day I graduated I was in advanced ROTC with the air force, and there were about 300 hundred of us in this ROTC program, they were really pushing for officers back then at that particular time, '53, '54', '55 they needed ROTC officers, and if you wanted to stay in college, you better get in ROTC or they would draft you.

AW:

Right.

JF:

So anyway I—and the day we graduated they had us in our caps and gowns and marched us by and shook our hands and gave us a diploma, and they shot us right back into the field house and we took off our caps and gowns, and we had on our war suits (laughter), our uniforms, we held our hands up in the air and they swore us in and the next day we left on our senior trip.

AW:

And your senior trip was to where, Korea?

JF:

No, it was after Korea. Korea was winding down, and Vietnam was starting up, I spent forty-eight months there which was a lifesaver because it had not rained here all through that period of time and they didn't need me there out on that ranch, there were no cattle, there was no nothing, nothing happening. So I had a good job in Air Force and I was the first lieutenant, and finally it rained, and I asked to be released and they let me come home in 1957, been here ever since. I stayed in the Air Force Reserve because I kind of liked the idea, for twenty years, and when I was discharged somewhere around here I was discharged as a captain out of the Air Force Reserve, now I can't see, but it's here, and I liked that two week summer tour because I was working for a \$160 a month on this place of my dad's and grandad's with as many kids, we had four kids, it just didn't go very far. But it didn't take as much either, so those summer tours with the military were great and I had about ten of them. So finally in 1963, we were just starving to death; I was a member of the Texas Farm Bureau which I had joined to buy Blue Cross Blue Shield for my big family of kids, and they needed a farm bureau agent here. So the county farm bureau president talked to me, and he says, "Why don't you go to work for farm bureau," so I did, went to school, started May 1, 1963 and we had our county convention a little later that year and this dinner that you and I just left was—that's the last county farm bureau—and I have not missed a one of them.

AW:

That's amazing.

JF:

It is; it is.

AW:

I'll say for the record, first of all I should've said this is the twenty-fourth of September 2015, and we're here in Stratford. But just before we started this, Joe was kind enough to invite me to have a really good chicken fried steak with the farm bureau annual meeting, which you've not missed since '63, that's—

JF:

No.

AW:

That's a record of some kind.

JF:

Why I sure as hell don't want to do it again.

AW:

Well now when you started in with the farm bureau, did you have time to continue to cowboy?

JF:

Yeah, it's kind of funny, I spent a lot of time changing clothes. Every morning I was up early, you know at daylight I was looking after something, bovine. Come home and put my clothes on and go to work, and maybe somebody'd call and say, "Hey I need some help pulling a calf," or "I need this," or "I need that." So I changed clothes, I spent a lot of time changing clothes, but I finally grew out of that day working deal and the farm bureau got to where it would make me a living in about, so quick it'd blow your mind.

AW:

That quote about changing clothes, I've got to write it down (laughter).

JF:

Okay. Anyway for all those years I had two jobs, I was in the cattle business pretty big time until about 2004, and I went to kind of phasing it out. Stayed in the farm bureau until a year ago, and it was a good job, a good career, good people to work for; they were customer minded, and there's thirty-six hundred people here in this county, three-thousand people in this town, and our products were so good that we just pretty well sucked the market up. When I left there a year ago the membership was right at a thousand, Sherman County Farm Bureau, in a town of three-thousand, a county of thirty-six hundred, you know we've got country farm bureau members all over everywhere. But they grew up here and went to school here, and went away, I've been their agent forever, and they just stayed with this county farm bureau. They're moving now and they're changing to wherever they live, which is good and they should. The farm bureau has been a good job, it's a good place it's an honorable organization, its run by the members like you could tell from that Mickey Mouse meeting we just came from. Anyway, having two jobs forever and I had six kids to raise, it was a—as you can see these pictures around here, I had them pretty well raised on horseback, and it was quite an ordeal to keep them, horses of the right size, equipment in the right size, and all that kind of stuff. It worked the hell out of them.

AW:

Yeah, with all those different sizes of kids you had to have a pretty good cabby just to have enough head to—

JF:

I never had a hired man ever, had lots of day help, but never had a hired hand. In 1957 we bought a place in New Mexico and then we kind of added some more to that and we kept that place.

AW:

Where was it in New Mexico?

JF:

Twenty-two miles west of Clayton on the Raton highway, it was a good little ranch right on the highway, and we added another one close by and this and that.

AW:

That's nice country.

JF:

It is; it's good country. But I—all of these kids have done well. There were six of them and among the six they have ten different college degrees. I've got one boy that's got four degrees, he's a doctor. He was a chiropractor first. He's an MBA and some other I don't know what the other one is; he's a CPA. No he's a doctorate, and then I've got another one that's a CPA. He is a congressman from District 17 in Texas, Bill Flores, he's got two or three degrees. None of these kids played sports; they worked or they were horseback. We didn't need any coaches in our camp at all for anything, I'd had terrible problems with coaches in high school, still don't like them. But anyway, they all graduated from college, as I say ten degrees, and they're pretty good people. The second boy was killed in an oil field accident when he was a senior at Texas A&M, he was working on drilling rig because they kind of had to put their self through college, which started them a little old cattle company and they all were equal partners in this cattle deal, and they could write checks on this cattle account for their college or whatever, and the timing was good and the cattle cycle hit us just right and everything worked, and when the last kid graduated from college, they had thirty-two thousand dollars in the bank in that Rafter Old Cattle Company [?] account, and they had an old pick up paid for.

AW:

After everybody had gone to college?

JF:

They had all gone to college.

AW:

That is good.

JF:

There's no other way I could've done it, I wouldn't have—it just couldn't have happened. But they did the deal, they had their own brand, they went to the bank, you see a kid down there

fourteen years old wiring money, it speaks well for the bankers then compared to these—whatever we've got now.

AW:

Yeah, there's a big difference.

JF:

Yes. But these boys and the two girls, they did it all. The main thing I've ever done is raise some kids.

AW:

Yeah, well, that's one of the best jobs we can have, I've got to say. Where are they now? Scattered over what territory?

JF:

Everywhere. The youngest son is in Dalhart, one daughter's in Kansas, and one daughter's down by Fort Worth. Mike is a doctor, he's in Amarillo, works in Dumas in the emergency room, and Bill is, as I said, a U.S. Congressman from College Station. Pat was killed in that accident '65. That's where they are. I've not helped them a hell of a lot. They've helped their self but—

AW:

That may have been the most kind of help you could give them, though.

JF:

They didn't waste anything. The four boys could write checks on that Rafter Old [?] Cattle Company account, but they had three brothers to answer to, so they didn't waste any money because they knew they were going to college. Otherwise, they knew they were going to be up here like I was busting my butt, I had two jobs forever, and they didn't want any of that. So they got educated and not a one of them is in agriculture, I mean they left me like a dirty shirt. They did not need any more cow manure, got jobs and became important people, which suits me. We started adding to that place in New Mexico, and eventually we had right at ten thousand acres, and then I played divorce, and I wound up with five thousand acres, and it was kind of a hickey, but it went dry up there. The last time I shipped cattle off the New Mexico ranch was 2001, and they didn't weigh what they should've. We didn't have any cattle in 2002 or 2003, and it finally rained in 2004, and a lawyer from Scottsdale, Arizona, came and bought that place, and I was glad to sell it to him because the kids had all left, as soon as they could get away from there they left, so I had it by myself.

AW:

That's a lot to—



JF:

It's hundred miles from here to there.

AW:

Yeah, and that's a lot to look over even if it wasn't a hundred miles away.

JF:

Sunday night about, oh, dark I would get through up there, I'd get in my pickup and drive home, and Monday morning I'd get up and go to work at farm bureau, and after work at farm bureau I'd go build electric fence, or haul water, or whatever needed to be done because they ran a lot of cattle around here. We still got this country here, some of it, some of it I sold. But it's—I've had trouble changing wives and that's not conducive to wealth accumulation.

AW:

No. (laughter)

JF:

Which I don't know—one of those deals.

AW:

Well, it's probably hard to find somebody that can keep up with you.

JF:

Yeah probably. As I say the two job deal, until a year ago, and it got to where it—well I just kept cutting back on the cattle deal because the insurance agency paid a whole lot better than hoping for a rein cattle outfit. So I kept chopping it back and concentrating on earning commissions. The best part of my life was trying to keep all those kids horseback enthused, not fighting with each other. We got pictures where those kids got them tied up in a corner and they're holding them, and I go in there and do what needed to be done. But I was lucky I had six of them, put them horseback, take your finger and move them where you want them, and it was fun. I wouldn't do it again, but it was fun, I didn't know any better, I wouldn't do anything again. I wouldn't do anything different; oh hell I'd do it all different I guess. I'm just real proud to be an American and to be a veteran, and to have been involved in agriculture forever and had a job on the side that'd make me a living dealing with people. What else do you want to know?

AW:

Well, tell me when you got involved with The Ranching Heritage Association.

JF:

Oh that's cool. That old boy that has that other western thing there in Lubbock, Alvin—

AW:

Alvin Davis.

JF:

Had a story in a magazine somewhere I read about The Ranching Heritage Association in 1972, and I saw that and I thought this is bound to be something because I'm awfully history minded. So I sent them seven dollars and fifty cents and became a member, and I've got that membership framed in my bedroom from my 1972 membership.

AW:

That's a long time.

JF:

Yep, and I'm pretty sure I've never missed a year.

AW:

So you were there before the center was—

JF:

Yeah, now I never did go there I just was a member, and I would get whatever publications they'd put out, and finally I met Jim Pfluger at an auction sale of spurs down there. Oh I don't know what year it was, but he was there buying spurs for the chancellor who had sent him down there for certain spurs to buy, and I liked Jim, sat by him at that auction. So I just went over there and got acquainted with those people and stayed a member, still a member, always will be. It's my favorite place in the whole world, there's nothing like it any place, and never will be because that stuff is all gone, and what we don't have there ain't, and it's just so neat in the evening to be able to walk around through those buildings, kind of transpose yourself back into that time frame and see how you like it.

AW:

Yeah, it reminds you of how good it is now, (laughs) most of the time.

JF:

Yes, yes, yes.

AW:

Well, it's really impressive to go through there though and see what's been built over that period of time, I mean accumulated for that center.



JF:

The ability for somebody to be able to track people with the desire to maintain and preserve our history, and get it done to where you can go stand there and look at it, they had so many good people at Tech. Those old early people at Tech are the ones that made it happen, someone—

AW:

Grover Murray, you know it was his idea.

JF:

And as I say it's my favorite place in the whole world, it's two hundred miles away. Sometimes it's slower than I—well I'd like it better closer but that's where it is, and Anne Marion has done so much to keep the thing funded in the right direction. Pfluger is just absolutely fabulous; he was a great man, a good person, he did a great job, people liked him. I don't blame him for retiring because it was time.

AW:

Yeah, I sure hated to see him retire, Jim and I grew up together, and I've known him since we were, I mean, just little kids, and it's just terrific too, for me, to have seen to get to watch—

JF:

What area of Texas?

AW:

Lubbock.

JF:

In Lubbock? Okay.

AW:

Yeah, in fact Byron Price, and Jim Pfluger and I were all pals, and so it's been really fun for me to get to see the two of them be so successful at what they're doing, and both top notch historians which kept me honest and paying attention to history, too.

JF:

Yeah, I understand.

AW:

You know one of the things that strikes me about that time with Ranching Heritage Association is that it wasn't just Anne Marion, it was people like you and the other folks that have been such great participants that really made that place go. I mean Jim's a great leader and manager but—

could you say something a little bit about how you get that active a group of people together for that period of time to do something? That seems to me like—to be a really big achievement.

JF:

Well, here again I think the leadership is important, Jim was a great man, we could trust him, he knew what he was doing, and we all kind of wanted to do the same thing. Every once in a while there would be kind of a wild cat, some off the wall idea, but—and each of these people on the board sit around and have ideas, I'd come to those board meetings, and they'd bounce these ideas out there, and every time you'd turn around there's another good program or some project that needs to be done. The only disappointment I've had with my association with RHA is not being able to get the XIT office building moved from Channing to Lubbock. My oldest boy gave them the money to move the building, and it was a done deal, but we kind of had a bad guy that owned the building that used us and well it was a—someday I'll tell you about it. Anyway, we didn't get that building, and we should've had it; that's the only disappointment I've had there. It's just such a wonderful thing, and people in Lubbock love that place, they use it all the time.

AW:

Oh yeah, yeah, it's busy. It's such a great place to have meetings and events and when—I know from there at the university when we host an event there—

JF:

You bet.

AW:

—the people that come from around the state, and around the nation, and around the world, can't say enough about how much they like it, you know.

JF:

There's just nothing like it in the world; it makes you proud to belong. I'm going to get off the board. I've been on there a long, long time. I'm eighty-four, and I'm tired of that two hundred mile drive, but it's been a real enjoyable thing to be on that board and to watch stuff happen. My oldest son went ahead and funded a gallery there in the building with the money that he sent them to move the XIT building with. So the Flores family gallery is there, it'll be there forever, I guess, I don't know. I got a notion I wanted one of those old steers out front, and there hadn't been a new one installed out there in quite a while. So I had a little old pasture out here west of town, first piece of land I ever bought, it was 180 acres, and it hadn't rained on it in a hundred years, and it wasn't good for anything (laughter). It'd run two horses if I'd go out there and feed them about every other day. So I just sold—I gave sixty dollars an acre for it and I sold it for—well I gave fifty-six hundred dollars for it and sold it for a hundred and thirty thousand dollars. So cleared up some debt around here closer and had enough money to buy one of those steers,

and I thought that's the coolest thing in the world, we had more fun with that old steer. I named him Leon, and we had a lot of commotion about Leon and problems because he couldn't get there for a long time. But people that build statues, I don't know what the problem was.

AW:

The foundry, I think they were backed up. I think I was there the day they anointed Leon. I thought it was real interesting that that was the first day that I'd heard you named it (laughs).

JF:

Yeah and it's got my New Mexico brand on his right side and my Texas brand on his left hip; he'll be there forever. Current wife doesn't like Leon, she's jealous of a concrete steer, but anyway I didn't ask her, I didn't tell her, I just did it, and I'd do it again if I wanted to, and he'll be there forever, and I don't know if she'll be here tomorrow or not (laughter). Leon is forever.

AW:

Why did you pick the name Leon?

JF:

Oh hell I just made it up.

AW:

I think you had a good story.

JF:

Oh yeah I had a story, and it was a story, and it was just created for the occasion, it was a necessary event. There actually was a boy named Orville Lee Kirkwood that had brown stained teeth, and that's part of the story about Leon, he has brown stained teeth (laughter) like Orville Lee Kirkwood did. But Orville Lee Kirkwood was bucked off a horse and hung up to him and broke a leg, and they cut it off, and he got gangrene and he died and this was—I was fifteen years old or so, and I remember that real well for some reason, I don't know. But the steer's there, and he doesn't require any maintenance. He's there at Red Steagall's water event—Red Steagall is the greatest thing that ever happened, he does so much for Ranching Heritage Association just by being Red Steagall, he is my hero—I just—and he's going to emcee the upcoming Golden Spur, that's going to be really great. I graduated from college with Jack Maddux and Bob Josserand; both of them had been Golden Spur recipients, we all graduated from college the same day, and we all left the next day on our war trip. Anyway, we're all going to be sitting together down there this year at the Golden Spur.

AW:

Oh that'll be great, yeah.

JF:

And they've all been—what is that other thing?

AW:

Boss of the Plains?

JF:

Boss of the Plains, yeah, and we all went to Colorado A&M, were all on the rodeo team. They're all rich but me (laughter). Josserand had told me the other day that he and his son had four thousand cows in East Texas; I don't have a cow anywhere. Jack Maddux is a good man, Josserand is a good man and I've just kind of known them a long time and been there. That's it.

AW:

I'd say you've held your own, Joe. Were you old enough to remember much about the Dust Bowl?

JF:

You bet. I sure as shuck do. My daddy would have to get up early in the morning to milk a bunch of cows or whatever you know. He'd catch a horse and leave, and he'd go work for a neighbor, he would get a dollar a day for going and helping this neighbor, then he'd come home again and milk these cows or I don't know. Anyway, it was pretty tough, my mother had a big ole garden and we had pigs, and we had some chickens, and there was always a milk cow or a calf around there somewhere that she could butcher. One time we ran out of flour and didn't have any, so she—we did have a telephone; we were the last phone on the line going west. She called the closest neighbor at three miles east of us back toward town and said, "Yeah come on over here and we'll loan you some flour," so she got a little syrup bucket, probably held half a gallon. Well there's the lid you pushed on, it had a little bail on it, I was so proud of that little bucket, we went down there, got in that old Model A and drove over there, and they filled that bucket up with flour. We drove back and drove in [inaudible], and they drove in an old barn and I'm holding this bucket of flour because I'm so proud that we're going to have some pancakes or something, and we got out of the car and you could go through the gate or you could climb over the fence, or go under the fence or whatever, but you had to go through the fence to get to the house. So I run up there, I threw that bucket of flour over the fence (laughter) and slid under the bottom, and that flour busted open, and they beat on me around there for a longtime, sorted the goat heads out. I remembered that's my Depression/Dust Bowl story, that half a gallon of flour.

AW:

Sorting the goat heads out of the flour? (laughter)

JF:

Yeah, it's the truth, I'll never forget it.

AW:

I can see why.

JF:

We'd get that cream separated and we'd put it in that old car and we'd take it over to Column [?] which was about ten miles away, in these cream cans, and the train would stop and pick it up and take it to Trinidad to the creamery.

AW:

To Trinidad? That's a long way.

JF:

Trinidad, Colorado.

AW:

Yeah, that's a long way.

JF:

And they'd bring our cream cans back empty, and we'd skim, whatever the term is where you take the cream off the milk, and store it there in the well house, haul it over to Column, put it on the train. That's the only money there was (laughs). My daddy gave my sister a pig and gave me a pig and we were getting ready to start to school, and I'd gone to school a year and I had some shoes, but she didn't have any shoes yet, but she was excited about, she was going to sell her pig, Pollyanna or whatever its name was, to get money to buy her shoes to be in the first grade. One Sunday we had a lot of company there, and they'd killed some chickens and cooked them up, and everybody was running and playing, and these old buildings there had covered up with dirt where the sand had—chicken house used to be covered up with dirt, the fences were just you know four feet high solid wall of dirt, weeds around everywhere, right there playing and we found her pig dead. It'd eaten a weed and died, killed it, boy that ruined the party for everybody there, and she just didn't think she was going to be able to go to school because she didn't have any shoes. But somehow or other my daddy got some money for some shoes, and that was in '38; it was a bad, bad deal. There was a ranch laying there north of us on the Beaver River, it was empty, it had been repossessed by a bank in Kansas City, and the neighbors were just kind of reusing it or whatever, and this old banker came and told my dad, he said, "There's sixteen sections there, if you'll get the fence patched up enough whatever, keep the strays throwed out, fix a windmill or two you can just put whatever you want to in there and use it." So he and a friend, a neighbor got that place all fixed up, took a long time, but they just cobbled it around,



and he had about a hundred twenty head of whatever milk cows, anything, and that's all it would run, and they just turned them all out in there and kept the water patched up enough to where the—and it was that way until it rained in '40, '41, and now that place is all irrigated farms. It's all irrigated farms. But I remember the Depression real well. The pig dying and the bucket of flour, that's the things that—cow going dry, and you know I didn't pay much attention that just happened all the time. But he would get up and go over there and help the neighbor, got through there, he'd catch his horse back and come home, and he did that for a dollar a day, and that was the truth. And the neighbor's still out there, his family is still on that place.

AW:  
Really?

JF:  
Yeah, been there since about 1900, if you can hire help for a dollar a day you can stay (laughs).

AW:  
Hey if you own the land and you only have to pay a dollar a day, yeah.

JF:  
He came from England, and he had some money backing him and they stopped in Vernon and kind of got acquainted, bought four sections out there, and finally got up to where they had about thirty sections. Those old men have been dead a long time, and that old land's all been divided up. The neighbor didn't pay very good. I had a—there's a picture of a horse up here, right there, that was my first horse.

AW:  
Is that you on it?

JF:  
Yeah.

AW:  
That's a great picture.

JF:  
Yeah, I was about four years old probably and that colt's mother was an old mare named Pumpkin, and she belonged to a wild outlaw uncle that I had, he really wasn't an uncle, but I called him Uncle Buck, he was the neighbor who had the flour they loaned us. He had a lot of old mares, they were only worth eight dollars apiece, but he had these damned old mares and he had an old crazy stud horse, an old kind of an albino looking thing that he liked because

somewhere or other he had some Remount in him and so Pumpkin the mommy of that colt there fell in the tank and drowned, she couldn't get up and get out, and she drowned and they gave me that colt and brought him down there. My mother had an aunt that worked as a veteran's nurse in the hospital, VA hospital in Temple, Texas, and she sent me those clothes for Christmas. Those are all—a new sweater, new jumpers, and some boots. They got me all rigged up and put me on that colt, and that little saddle doesn't have a cinch on it, it's just a piece of junk there that was in that saddle house, and about that time well he shook real big and threw me off. And I didn't have a damn bit of use and didn't want any horse shit, but that colt in the yard and we raised him on cow's milk and whatever.

AW:

Yeah, had to bottle feed him?

JF:

Mhmm, never got very big, but I didn't have any neighbors I had this little sister and she wasn't any fun. But I had that colt and got along with him good, we had a good time and rode him around for four or five years, and one day my dad got on him, and he just took off to the west, and I was looking out the kitchen window, I said, "Where's Daddy going on Rusty?" said, "I don't know, he said he'd be back." He just rode off on old Rusty and later he came back riding this great big white horse, and one front foot was badly wire cut—he was club footed, and every time he hit the ground with that foot, why—he'd gone on and traded my colt for that great big perching thing. I said, "What in the world, where's my horse?" "Well that's your new horse right there, and I've traded Rusty to Mr. Allen because he's really little, and Mr. Allen could get on him, and I needed a horse to go in a team for that bunnel [?] wagon that remember old whatever Dunbar died here a while back, and I needed somebody to put on that bunnel wagon, and so I traded for this big white horse." Oh I hated him. Every time he hit the ground he'd just bounce you clear to the end of your hair. That was my horse.

AW:

I bet he wasn't very easy to get up on either.

JF:

No, no, but he was gentle and he liked me, and you know. In the thirties like that, that was in '35 or '36 right there, it wasn't—it was not too good. But that was my first horse, and I've had my last one; I don't want any more. That's a picture that was taken in South Dakota at our college rodeo.

AW:

Is that you roping?



JF:

Yep, that's probably the best horse I ever had.

AW:

What's that horse name?

JF:

His name was Dusty.

AW:

Dusty. Rusty and Dusty.

JF:

Rocking X Dusty—he was a good horse. I took him to the Air Force with me when I finally got settled down in Arkansas and I knew I was going to be there awhile, I rodeoed a lot in Arkansas.

AW:

Oh did you?

JF:

Yeah. Kind of went straight from the college rodeo to those pumpkin rollings in Arkansas/Missouri, but it was fun.

AW:

Well tell us about a pumpkin rolling for the tape.

JF:

Well, a pumpkin rolling, I don't know where the phrase came from, but it's an event that's not a very big deal, but the people putting it on want it to be very spontaneous and enthusiastic about it, and it's kind of like rolling a pumpkin down a hill, it doesn't amount to a hell of a lot, it gets to the end, it hits the rock and busts open, pumpkin roll. That was a college rodeo. This old house is the first place my wife and I lived when I came back from the Air Force; they were paying me a hundred and sixty dollars a month and letting me live in that house. It was in better shape than it is there, but I'll never take that picture off the wall because I left four hundred and thirty something dollar a month salary, free medical, free every damn thing in the Air Force and came home to a bunch of cows because I wanted to be a cowboy. I weren't real bright, but I wanted to be a cowboy and being a damn Air Force Lieutenant was a big deal, so I move in that house and my pay drops to a hundred and sixty dollars a month, and I have four kids when that happens and two more pretty quickly after. That's dumb, stupid.

AW:

That's a small house for that many people.

JF:

Yeah, it was four rooms, and then a north thing I built on. It sits out here beside a pasture that I've got, it's still there. But that was the happiest I ever was, that thing sat on ten sections. The people there had drouthed out had owned it. They'd inherited it from way back when they built the railroad track from Liberal to Dalhart, and this old man who was a railroader has bought this land then, and they starved out in the fifties and finally had to sell their cows, and then it rained in '57, and they leased that ranch to my dad and my uncle, and they called me and say, "Well you can come home now we got a job for you."

AW:

We had some rain.

JF:

So I came home, moved in that house and away we went.

AW:

Now if it was so tough, a hundred and sixty a month, little place, going back to cowboying, why is it that you just said that was the happiest you ever were?

JF:

Because I was a hell of a lot dumber than I am now (laughter). I was so dumb I didn't know better. But on Sundays they'd let me take the pickup to go trade horses, or day work, or go to a roping, whatever. On Sundays I owned that pickup; I could do whatever I wanted to with it. And if somebody needed a little bit of help, back then you'd go help somebody in the morning, ship some cattle or doctor two or three or something, you make ten or twelve dollars, usually that's kind of what they pay you. Now a day worker gets about a hundred and fifty or two hundred dollars, but I would go and help somebody and keep that money, anything I did on the weekends I could keep and I swapped a lot of horses. I was in the horse trading business a long time, and I had some idiots, and I had some good ones, and I had one or two that I'm ashamed of the way that they died or how I treated her or something like that. I spent a lot of my time now being ashamed of things like that (laughter) I really do. This horse should not have died, he foundered. A neighbor kind of wanted to buy him in Arkansas and I was getting ready to get out of the Air Force, and I thought I'd just sell him to that man for his daughter, he let him get in a hog feeder and he foundered. They called me and told me, your horse has foundered, so he died in Arkansas. I was at a rodeo in Utah, Ogden, Utah, and a horse trader offered me a thousand dollars for that horse. Now this is in '52, and I wouldn't sell him because I liked him, and I went back to that college rodeo the next year, and I was ready to sell the horse because I knew I was going in the Air Force. Found that horse trader and he said, "Well son that train left last year, don't know anybody that wants to buy your horse." So I took him to the Air Force with me, or came and got him later, rodeod on him over there two years, and let him founder. I wasn't there, he was at the neighbors place, and that one bothers me. I just—I've got five horses buried

scattered around here; there's three out here behind my house. I really have a thing about a good one, if they're a good one, they're here forever. I had to sell so many good ones when I was doing that hundred and sixty dollar a month, get one really going, maybe had some kind of a hidden bubble or a wrinkle or something. But I had him so damn tired, he didn't expose his problems until I was on down the road and cashed the check. But when I get a real good one they're going to be here forever and there's two buried on that little plain—

***End of Recording***



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