

**Oral History Interview of  
Mark Moseley**

**Interviewed by: Robert Weaver  
July 13, 2012  
Lubbock, Texas**

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### Recording Notes:

*Original Format:* Born Digital Audio

*Digitization Details:* N/A

*Audio Metadata:* 44.1kHz/16bit WAV file

*Further Access Restrictions:* N/A

*Related Interviews:*

### Transcription Notes:

*Interviewer:* Robert Weaver

*Audio Editor:* N/A

*Transcription:* Elizabeth Groening

*Editor(s):* Kayci Rush

## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Mark Moseley as he discuss his career working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Mark describes his background that led him to pursue a career with range management, and how the agency has changed over the years.

**Length of Interview:** 01:55:49

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### Keywords

Agriculture, Ranching, Farming

**Robert Weaver (RW):**

Too many stories, we're going to be in trouble. This is Robert Weaver. Today's date is Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, 2012, and I'm here in Helotes, Texas, with Mr. Mark Moseley and Mr. Moseley, if we could get your date of birth?

**Mark Moseley (MM):**

August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1949.

RW:

Nineteen forty-nine. That's right next to my mom's birthday. She was born just right before that.

MM:

Yeah.

RW:

So okay. You were just saying something about a judge in Brady. What was his name?

MM:

He was an attorney in Brady. His name was Sam McCallum. One of the earlier ones and he was involved with a trial where there was a lot of fraud in some land deals with the state lands and it got pretty close to home for some folks there in Brady and they tried to blow his car up to kill him, but anyway, he donated a lot of his papers. He's passed. A lot of his papers came to the McCollum County Historical Society. In those papers, among other things, are some land grants signed by Sam Houston.

RW:

Oh, wow.

MM:

Originals. And they've got several of those there, so you might want to—

RW:

You know, and I bet we talked to—there was an older woman that I talked to there that does all the history in Mason and Brady.

MM:

Redheaded? Marsha?

RW:

She was much—no, she was in her seventies. I think I met Marsha.

MM:

Marsha—

RW:

She's about in her fifties, maybe?

MM:

No, Marcia would be older than that.

RW:

Well, she might've been.

MM:

Lee Reinisch [?] [00:01:24], is my sister and she's on that and my brother, Kyle Moseley, is also on that. There're several. Marsha Aarons. She's a huge, huge fan. There's another guy and take several tapes with you if you go see him. Alvin Bolton. Alvin Bolton at Rochelle. That guy, he has every cemetery in McCollum County cataloged and he's the local historian for McCollum County. I mean, Rochelle, that guy knows it all. He's a retired AG [**Agriculture**] teacher there and he's got it all archived. That's another guy you need to think about archiving with. Alvin Bolton.

RW:

You said he lives in Rochelle?

MM:

Lives in Rochelle. I'll give you his number before we leave.

RW:

Sure, sure.

MM:

In fact, I'll even call him for you if you want me to.

RW:

I don't know how quick I'd be able to get down there, but what I might do is when I am able to do it, I'll give you a call so that you can ease him in. Unless I met him already down there.

MM:

He's a rather rotund fellow.



RW:

Does he wear weird hats? Because there was a fellow down—I'm not saying he [wore] wired, but wears a straw hat everywhere. There was a fellow like that. He was a character.

MM:

Well Alton's definitely a fit to character bit. He would. In a good way. I say that in a good way, but if you want to know anything about history, he's the go to guy. The one that was the go to guy, Kenneth Mitchell, or Tootsie Mitchell, unfortunately passed away, but he has all sorts of records that he did. But anyway—

RW:

Wow. This is going to be a profitable trip.

MM:

Good. Alvin Bolton would certainly be one and my brother and sister too because they're also very historically interested and would make good—my sister taught school. She did a lot of interviews with veterans as a class project, which turned out to be—I guess you'd say she hit some veterans at times when they were finally ready to talk about their service.

RW:

Yeah. Get them twenty or thirty years down the road. We got a big Vietnam archive that we share space with, and part of their thing is they've got thousands of oral histories interviews and now that, strange enough, these guys are as old as World War II vets, where when I'm growing up, they're ready to talk.

MM:

Yeah. Mark Dave would be one of those.

RW:

Yeah. I've wheedled some out of him.

MM:

He was kind of tight about it.

RW:

Yeah. He's tight about everything. I got him to tell that horse story, though, where he got kicked off the horse and busted up real bad, and that guy, he's like two different people. He's a lawyer over here and then had all this successful career and then he'd rather just break horses.

MM:

I was younger than he growing up, but I got to know him best when he was—I lived at Junction for a while working there and he was the county attorney and his wife, Betsey, of course, was from Brady and her dad was the rainfall recorder there for years, and years, and years.

RW:

Have you been out to that place they have now on top of that hill that looks down? It's a little place that –

MM:

No.

RW:

Yeah, I guess it's their retirement place. They put their money in it and it's nice.

MM:

Oh, cool.

RW:

You know, I was down in Junction and I interviewed a couple of people down there. One of them was an attorney. Had a little attorney thing right on the square and he was the mayor for a little while.

MM:

You're not talking about Andrew Mur.

RW:

No, I've interviewed so many people. I feel like his last name was something or other, Hart. Lockhart or Barnhart or—it wasn't Barnhart, that's a town. At any rate, yeah. Him too.

MM:

Well I'll give you another. Speaking of Junction, if you're interested in old ranch history—

RW:

Oh, yeah. That's what we do.

MM:

Okay. Art Mudge.



RW:

M-u-d?

MM:

M-u-d-g-e. Art has a—his family, in fact, his wife, Deborah—they were Dutton's. Both come from a lot of ranch history. Still there. They still ranch out west of Junction about ten miles.

RW:

Do you know what the ranch is called?

MM:

It's called the Owl Ranch or the Inn Ranch. I forget now, but—

RW:

Al, like his name or owl like—

MM:

Owl as a bird.

RW:

Like a bird.

MM:

But anyway, Art's family goes back to, oh gosh, they were sailed by a sea captain that came over and served at Fort Sam, if I recall it right.

RW:

Wow.

MM:

But anyway, he would be—both of them are also Red Raiders.

RW:

Well, if I can get enough of them down from Brady and Mason and Junction, that sort of area, then I can get a bunch at once, and that's easy to get the state to do.

MM:

That's one thing about, one of the fortunate things that I've enjoyed about my work is you know, working with ranchers for thirty-eight years and some. You know, you get to know people and know their inside story, so to speak, and Junction, a lot of history there in Junction and that

would be—another fellow to write down while I'm thinking about it is a guy named Frank Price at Sterling City. His family, a long time—he's also a Red Raider, and a long time history in the ranching business there in west of Sterling City. Well and he ties into other families. I mean, it's just like a cobweb.

RW:

I mean, that's what we run into. All of a sudden, you've got more people than you can possibly interview in a reasonable time, but if—might make a clean sweep down there if we've got all these names.

MM:

I'll give you another name right quick, then I'll shut up, but there in Brady, another long-time ranch family that has a lot of roots there and in other places is the Jones family. In fact, Johnny Jones, who recently passed, he was a regent at Tech and his son, Clay, is there in Brady. A banker in the National Bank in Brady. And another son, Mark Jones, is a banker over in Menard. But their country—their ranch has the ranch where the heart of Texas is. The official heart of Texas in.

RW:

Oh, okay. Wow.

MM:

And so, but anyway, they'll go back to some G.R. White stuff, and a wealth of history with that family as well and good service.

RW:

Might have to buy me a house out there in Brady before it's over. I go there so often.

MM:

Well, I tell you what, you just give me a call. I've got a house. I'll give you the keys to it. Won't cost you anything out there, but you can stay there, so that'll—anyway.

RW:

Well, I'll hop backwards, I guess, into the formal stuff.

MM:

Okay.

RW:

So you were born in '49. Where at?

MM:

In Brady.

RW:

In Brady. And what did your parents do there?

MM:

My dad ranched and all his family before him. We settled in Rochelle, 1892. Or bought land in 1892 was the first land that they bought there. It's still in the family. It's not considered a heritage ranch because during the—there's a certain period of time when dad died and we leased it out. We broke that chain of management, which is fine, but we have owned it continually for that time. I think the family actually settled there in 1880—four, five, or six—somewhere in there when they actually moved there from Kentucky. So they ranched from stock farms there and my dad, I guess, endured the drouth of the fifties.

RW:

I can tell you're from there. You're a drouth and not a drought person.

MM:

Yeah.

RW:

There's an area right through there, especially in the fifties, that's what it was. Yeah, drouth. Anyways, I'm sorry.

MM:

No, no, no. That's interesting. Of course, I was a little kid and remember some about it, but you know, for him and many of the other ranchers, it was so devastating, you know, financially for them, so he ended up getting a job as the post master there in Rochelle and he went into that job about 1970—no, '65, or '66. So I graduated from high school in '67.

RW:

I don't know if I got his name.

MM:

Oh. His name was Hubert Jack.

RW:

Hubert Jack.

MM:

But most people called him, Tuffy.

RW:

Tuffy.

MM:

That's what most people knew him as was Tuffy. And he went to Tech. He went there in '37, in 1942, enlisted in the army air corps. I think he was within a semester of getting out and never went back. You know, circumstances were such. And at that time, I guess they weren't giving much leeway to awarding veterans there a diploma anyway. So anyway, he never did finish, but he left there in '42, and then enlisted in the air force, or army air corps, at that time.

RW:

Was mom stay at home or?

MM:

I'm sorry?

RW:

Did your mother stay at home?

MM:

Yes. She stayed at home. She was a home worker. She was raised—born in Lomita.

RW:

Lomita?

MM:

Nineteen twenty-six, and then her dad, my grandfather, moved around a lot. They lived in Eden for a while and Menard and she had two siblings, Robert, Kyle, and Mohler was their names. M-o-h-l-e-r. And her sister, Helen, and they're all deceased. But then they moved to Brady in the thirties. He ended up graduating from high school in Brady.

RW:

Oh, and that's how they met then?

MM:

Yeah. And so she went to school for a little while in San Marcos and then never finished there, but she was a stay at home mom, yeah. Stayed home and raffled us kids or we raffled her. I'm

not sure what the case is.

RW:

Well so now, your father served, then?

MM:

Yeah. He was enlisted and came down here to Kelly Air Force Base. At that time, 1942, he said at that time, they didn't even have any barracks for him. They had to sleep in tents for a while. They were spooling up. He was in the army air corps. He took his basic training there at Kelly, and the first time he had to bail out of air craft was down there at Kelly. They were doing aerobatics when a mechanic had left a hammer in the plane, and it lodged up and blocked the controls, and probably cost that mechanic his job, but they both bailed out and were—safely. And then from there, he went to—let's see, from there, he went to Victory Field in Vernon, Texas, and from there, he went to Perrin Field, which is now right outside of Sherman, what's left of it. And then he went to Dalhart. He took B-17 training there and the co-pilot of the B-17 bomber. One of the more memorable things he did there was on July the 7<sup>th</sup>, 1943, he put a—he had to land that thing. Crash land that thing in a commercial air field in Clayton, New Mexico, because of the sandstorm. [Laughter] They got in. They couldn't fly it out because they went through and took out fences and everything else, but they got lost somehow, and I don't know, had to crash land that thing. And that thing sat out there, they said, for the—until the end of the war until somebody finally came and got it out of there, but then he did that and he flew over and went to—was based in England.

RW:

Where at? Do you know?

MM:

The town was Bury St Edmonds. It was called Rougham Field at that time. He made—flew a few practice missions. He flew one mission. At that time, it was the longest penetrating un-escorted mission in Germany and it was Schweinfurt. It was a ball baring plane, and they got shot down, and so he—they were going over the target and I guess the air craft got beat up pretty bad and they were on fire, and then they shot the oxygen out. And when they did that, well then they couldn't stay up at thirty-five thousand feet, so they had to go down. When that happened, you know, all hell broke loose and so they got—kept getting shot down, and shot down, and then they shot up and lost all but one engine. They were flying along on one engine trying to get back to the English Channel, and the air craft was on fire and all that kind of stuff and they got—a lot of crew got out. They actually bailed out and got with the French underground, and the bombardier, and he wrote an account that I've got, and so he got out with the French underground.



RW:

Oh god. We've got to have a copy of that. Just a copy.

MM:

Yeah, and three of them got out. They crossed and that's quite a story too. But dad and the other pilot stayed with the plane. They threw guns out and all that kind of stuff, trying to keep that thing in the air and finally, it got to where they just couldn't make it anymore on one engine and it was an outboard engine and they—when they bailed out, pilot went out the front of the plane. Dad went out the back. When he got out to the Bombay doors, they were on fire and doing this. The radio man was on the other side and was kind of frozen up. He couldn't jump and daddy was trying to throw things at him and get him to jump and he couldn't get to him because of the fire and finally, he said he fainted and he fell out and then so dad was timing. He jumped out and pulled his rip cord and it opened each one time and hit the ground. He had an old football injury to his knee and he hit the only rock pile in the field. That time, the airplane, he said it was right about dusk and that airplane circled around like this, started coming right back around and he thought, you know, this is ironic to jump out of it and then it come back and hit him, but it didn't. He said the left wing hit the ground and it spun around like that and landed. There was a squad of Germans there cutting hay for horses and they arrested him right there and took him in, so he spent the rest of the year in a POW [**Prisoner of War**] camp. The first one was at a town of Zagan, Z-a-g-a-n. It was in Poland at that time, and then Germany overran it and I don't remember when it all came, but it was—he stayed in that one and then the Germans did not want to be captured by the Russians, and so they were digging these tunnels. That story, The Great Escape?

RW:

Yeah, yeah.

MM:

Dad helped dig some of those tunnels. He wasn't high enough up on the—he was a little man and so he'd go in and dig and he'd take—they put the dirt in their pants and pull the string and that's how they distributed the dirt so he helped dig the tunnel, but he wasn't in there when they did the escape part. But anyway, they, the Germans, apparently, were treated rather roughly by the Russians.

RW:

I've heard that.

MM:

And so when they began to come in and the Russians were coming on the Eastern Front and the Americans were over here. Well, the Germans didn't want to be captured by Russia so they



marched them out—I got a book about that—in January, one night, in forty below zero and they marched them and got them on those old cars, those boxcars, and they carried them down to Moosburg in Southern Germany and that's where they finished the war down there. So anyway, they had quite an experience with that.

RW:

Yeah. That's a hell of a story. My grandpa was a B-17—he was a tech sergeant, headed a crew that repaired B-17's and he was in Northern England. He was in the base Clark Gable went to famously and then he went down to France. I think, Holland and then France. As the line moved over, he went through there and that's as far as he made it, but he had some good stories too.

MM:

I'll be darned.

RW:

Yeah. Everybody was over there.

MM:

Yeah. Daddy, I really learned more about his service after. He died in '51—not—he died in 1970. You know, he never talked a whole lot about it. He'd tell some of the funny stuff that happened. There wasn't a whole lot funny.

RW:

Did he have a nickname while he was in the service? My grandpa got stuck—got Tex, just like something out of a movie. You know what he said—I asked him—it was just a couple of years before he died, I said, “Did you have a nickname?” and he said, “Tex,” and I said, “You're lying to me. There is no way.” Tex's in every movie you see. There's a Tex, and a Red, and a Brooklyn.

MM:

Yes. I'll be dang. We actually went to England a few years ago in a kind of a house swap thing while we were living up there in Oklahoma and went out to that base and got to see that base where he was stationed, and I mean, it's not a flying base now. It's a farm. You know, they—it's just—but we did get to drive down the runways. The terminals are now the runways and the old tower's there. He was in the 94<sup>th</sup> bomb group. 331<sup>st</sup> squadron and they've got a little museum there and it was kind of fun to see that. We actually got pictures of the plane after it went down, and we're still not in total agreement on how he got those photographs, but my brother thinks, and maybe rightly so, that a friend gave them to him and his name was Wes Bratton. It was a buddy of his in the war, and he flew P-51's, and some thought maybe another guy, the bombardier, gave them to him because he came on. But anyway, long story short, we do have

three pictures of that air craft after it crashed over there, and he crashed near a town called—in Northern France called—I'll think of it in a little bit. But I actually rode over there to see if there's still anybody that remembered that happening and people say, Yeah we kind of remember that. But you know, there was nobody that came forth and said, yeah here's some pictures, because they said that with the French underground and the German occupation, nobody wanted to know very much because if they were captured, you know? It made sense, but for that reason, not a lot was known, and not a lot was shared for security reason. Well, I guess so.

RW:

Yeah. Fair enough.

MM:

Crepey le Bougnais [?] [00:19:11]. I don't know how you pronounce it. But anyway, that was the name of the town that they crashed in. But anyway, that's kind of his career, I guess, in a nutshell as far as the military goes.

RW:

Well, then he got back here and you told me what he did. So you went all the way through high school in Brady, then, from middle school?

MM:

In Rochelle.

RW:

I mean in Rochelle. From there on up.

MM:

Yeah.

RW:

So it's a pretty small place so what was that like?

MM:

Well, I thought it was great. You know, we grew up on a ranch. Had horses, and cows, and sheep, and goats and hunted. I mean, what more can you ask for in high school? My graduating class, we started out with thirty-three in the first grade and by the time we got to—it was the largest class in school as I recall—by the time we got to be seniors, it was down to fifteen of us and probably two-thirds of us, at least, were original. We all went through together. You know, the families lived there and some still do and that was the largest class in school. We played

eleven-man football until my senior year and then we had like seven eligible boys, as I recall, so we went six-man football.

RW:

Had six-man football been there? Or this was just?

MM:

This was a first.

RW:

Do you remember it being anywhere else around there? Because I know it came to the state late. I remember we—I edit this historical journal and it didn't—it sort of took off around that same time. Maybe twenty years, fifteen years before. It was little bitty at any rate.

MM:

Yeah. I guess that's right. If there was some, we didn't pay a whole lot of attention to them and then there was eight-man schools, and I remember eight-man schools. At the time, it was sort of a bitter pill to swallow. We thought how—I guess in one way, we thought it was degrading to have to go to six men, but we were forced to it, but after we got it, I loved it because I was a little guy. I wasn't very big. I was built much more suited to six-man and thoroughly enjoyed it.

RW:

Yeah. You got to be fast and you're hitting people your size usually.

MM:

Yeah, that's right. Usually high scoring games. It was an action packed game. Kind of like watching Mike Leech football.

RW:

Oh boy. Don't get him started on that.

MM:

Yeah. But you know, it's either pass or run and usually, a wide open—kind of a cross between basketball and football in that regard. I really enjoyed it. They're still playing six-man today. But our senior class was—I was the only senior on the team. Well, we had two, but they got hurt. There was three senior boys. I had three boys and twelve girls in my class.

RW:

That's a good ratio.

MM:

Oh, it was pretty good.

RW:

Except you grew up with all of them, I guess.

MM:

Yeah, that's right. So we did that, and not many people had cars. I think I only remember one kid in our class had a car that he drove to school. Most people rode the bus. Never thought anything else of it.

RW:

So what'd y'all do for fun? You don't have to fess up to all of it.

MM:

Well we'd go down to the Elton Grove Rodeo and steal watermelons. In the summer, everybody—a lot of everybody—a lot of participated in rodeo events, and there were stalk shows and we'd go down to the creeks. At that time, it was a different time. Leasing was not very—deer leasing or recreational leasing was not very prevalent at that time, and so a lot of the big ranches—we didn't have any deer on our place at that time when I was growing up early on. So they would let you go hunting and so forth, but I think I was about fourteen years old when we saw the first whitetail deer on our place. A whole lot of things probably contributed to that. One was—my dad talked about when he was a kid, they hardly ever saw deer. In fact, antelope were more prevalent than deer. There was one ranch down there that used to have a pasture called the Antelope Pasture. I don't know if that's still called that. The ranch is owned by Luther King. 4K ranch where that particular ranch is, but the country was more open. Between that and the screw worms that they had and was in that country in the fifties, that was really, really hard for the ranchers and the livestock and the wildlife as well is doctoring the darn screw worms. In '64, I guess they began to drop those little boxes of flies. I guess you're familiar with that process.

RW:

Yeah.

MM:

And I still remember the last screw worm case we had was an old sheep out by our barn, and I saw it and it was so eaten up, the bones were actually protruding from the hip and you could see the bones. It was just horrible and the smell, I still remember it today. The old medicine and stuff, like we got some old cans here just for nostalgic reasons. Not many people would be sick enough to want screw worm medicine for a display in their bookshelf, but we do. So we did that and so by that time, the deer began to come to the point of overpopulation. We have to really

actively manage the herd now to keep them from being overly populated. We have a lot of sheep and goat, so they were pretty direct on competition and so living—goats put me through college. Angora goats. They were registered Angora goats and I made a lot of money on those things. Showed those silly things growing up. There was always something that dad kept us busy with. Hauling hay and driving combines and you know, just typical things everybody did growing up, but it was really—it was enjoyable. You know, it was a lot of hard work, a lot of freedom, a lot of comradery, really.

RW:

Well, so did you graduate in '67?

MM:

I graduated in Rochelle in '67.

RW:

Sixty-seven, and did—first question I usually—well you only had three boys in the class. Did any of them head off to Nam?

MM:

No, none of my class did. In fact, I never thought about it. You just mention it, but there were not a lot of people in Rochelle that went to Nam. There was one fellow, Harry King and he had a leg shot off. Another guy, Steve Neil, he flew. He was two years ahead of me. He flew forward observation planes, and I know I'm missing some, but there was not a lot of people that got caught in that. In the class before me, I don't remember anybody. The class after me that went—yeah, I never thought about that. Wasn't impacted that much.

RW:

Now, did you go straight to college?

MM:

Yes, I did.

RW:

Did you go to Tech first or somewhere?

MM:

I never even considered any place else. It just was a good fit for me. Pardon, but the Longhorns didn't fit for me. The Aggies didn't fit for me, I didn't think. We had a lot of heritage. My dad went there. I had uncles that went there. Cousins that went there. My brother and sister. I'm the



oldest of three. My son went there. He's a third generation Red Raider. So my brother-in-laws. I mean, I could go on for days about people that were going to Tech.

RW:

Well, when did your son go, by the way?

MM:

He went. He started in 2000 and—oh gosh, '01, I believe, and graduated in '04. Or maybe started in 2000. He started—he left Stillwater. He graduated high school, in Stillwater Oklahoma. Both boys did. Matt's our oldest and Will's our youngest, and Will's the one that went there and he graduated in '01 from Stillwater and graduated in '05 at Tech, and he had a degree in wildlife, like I do and my wife did. That's kind of how we met. My wife actually graduated from Brady, but she never lived there while I lived there. Her dad moved around a lot. Jim Allen, and he came back to Brady after I had already gone to school.

RW:

What's your wife's name? I don't know.

MM:

Chris. Chris Allen. She was the first woman inducted into the Alpha Zeta AG Honorary Fraternity or Sorority or what it is. It's an honorary one. I was on the other end of the stick. She only made one B the whole time she went to school, and I think I made one B too, but the rest of mine was below B, while hers was above B.

RW:

Yes, indeed.

MM:

She was an outstanding scholar and still is today.

RW:

What does she do?

MM:

She's a professor at UTSA [**University of Texas at San Antonio**].

RW:

UTS—I think I knew that.



MM:

Yeah. So we met out there. She started out in biology. I'll tell a story on how we met, if that's okay?

RW:

Oh, yeah.

MM:

Okay. This involves Aggies. Her dad went to—class of '44 at A&M. Went back after the war to finished up and ended up class—graduated '46, but they kept class '44. And then, he got his master's degree and he was the first person to do research in the use of steer implant that they implanted in feedlots called diathystevesterol [?] [00:28:21], which is a fattening implant. He was one of the first to do research on that. But anyway, he wanted her to go to A&M. At that time, you could not get—women could not get into A&M unless they were legacy, and they had these big fights. My wife was never known for being—she was strong willed. Let's just say that. One of the things I like about her. But she and her parents argued quite a bit about where she was going to school and particularly, her senior year and they really had some arguments, and it was one strong willed person talking to another one. Let's just say it that way. I think she would say that too. And so they finally got into a fairly large argument there one day and she said—her dad said, "You're going to A&M." She said, "No, I'm not." And finally, and she said, "Damn it. I really wanted to go to A&M." She said, finally, he said, "Well, if you're not going to A&M, just where the hell are you going?" And she said, "Well, I hadn't thought about that." She said, "I hadn't expected that question." And she's sitting there thinking and she remembered a friend of hers, Ann Moseley, a cousin of mine was going up there and said, "Well, I'm going to Texas Tech." He said, "Okay." And so she went up there and he took her up there and dropped her off as a freshman, and he didn't come back until her senior graduation. [Laughter] So that's how we met. If it hadn't been for her strong willingness, we would never have met. If she'd gone to A&M, we never would've met.

RW:

So you started in fall of '67, when did y'all meet? Right off the bat?

MM:

We met—no, we didn't because she didn't come up there. I started out two years in mechanical engineering and that was not too good. I was too hardheaded to quit. I should've quit early on. I didn't, and I kept at it and it wasn't really good for me. Well, it was good in a way. But anyway, after about two years of that, then I switched my major to range and wildlife management and that happened in '70, and I met her. She was over—came over with a group of friends to our little apartment in October of 1970, and that's how we met, and we didn't really start dating. In fact, actually, my roommate dated her first. I sent him out as a scout.

RW:

That happens a lot.

MM:

Yeah.

RW:

That happened to me once.

MM:

Is that right?

RW:

Yeah, yeah. It's handy.

MM:

Yeah. It worked out okay.

RW:

It's ex-wife now, but I mean, it worked out for a good long while for what that's worth.

MM:

Well, that's a good run then.

RW:

Yeah, yeah.

MM:

So we married. Anyway, we started dating then, and then after a while, you finally—he moved on and I moved in, and that's how it worked out. So we graduated. My first—when I got out of the agency, or when I got out of school, I had the naïve idea, I'd go back and take over the family ranch and make a living, and then I knew why dad took the job as a post master. You know, it was not big enough. It was diverse farm. It wasn't big enough and just really, the reality is my mom was still alive at that time. So I moved back to Brady and worked at the Loadcraft, which is a plant out north of town. Made bush hog farm machinery and now, it's making oil rigs. They made big trailers back then. So I worked in the tool and dye [?] department there for a while and so I try to kind of keep things going on the place. My sister, a year and a half younger than me, Lee. Her name is Lee Reinisch. She was in school at that time and my younger brother, Kyle, is seven years my junior and he's a maintenance foreman of the highway department there in Brady now. Lives in the house we were raised in, and they were up there so I came back and was kind

of trying to keep the wheels on the ranch for a while and worked there, and my brother-in-law, Ronnie Reinisch, got out of Tech and worked for the Soil Conservation Service in Ballinger. And he calls me one day and he said, "Hey, have you thought about this kind of work?" I said, "Never heard of these guys," which was almost true. They did soil survey work. I knew about that. "Well," he said, "Go down to the interview," so I did and got hired on in April of '74, and my first duty station was Colorado City. Well, they offered my wife a job. She got out of school a year later. I got out in '73, and you can do the math. I started in '67, and crammed a four year program into six years there.

RW:

What did you finish up with?

MM:

Range and wildlife management.

RW:

So it was range and wildlife, like all these other folks.

MM:

Yeah. So she was in the department, but she graduated a year behind me. So anyway, when we got out, the agency was hiring people then and she—they offered her a job as a GS7 [**General Schedule Pay scale**] in Gonzales, Texas, and they offered me a job as GS5 in Colorado City. We had already agreed to get married at that time. We had set our wedding date, and so we asked around for a while. We decided, well, I like to work with people and she did too, but her strengths, she felt like, were more in teaching, so we got married and one of the fellows in Temple told her that if she would take this job with the SCS [Soil Consecration Service] at that time, that she would like it so well she would not want to get married. And she hung up on him and so we got married. She took a job teaching in Colorado City and worked on her teacher certs [**Certifications**] and when we were at Junction—we were in Colorado City only ten months and then in '75, we moved to Junction, which was—before that, they were going to send us to Brady, and we didn't want to go to Brady.

RW:

Already been there.

MM:

Already been there, yeah, and for a lot of reasons. So after a while, they relented and moved us to Junction, which was good. We moved there in January of '75. Chris started teaching school there in the schools and then—golly, she got so many hours out there at the Texas Tech center to get certification and so forth, and then we moved from there and moved up to a little town of

Jayton, out west of Post, and lived there for three years. I was a district conservationist there, and then in 1980, summer of 1980, it was so dadgum hot, we moved to San Angelo and she had already—and our younger son—older son, Matt, was born in Lubbock in 1979. Had to drive from Jayton in a snowstorm to have him, ninety miles, but we did it. Then we moved to San Angelo, and at that point, she decided to go back and get her master's degree at Angelo State in biology and was going to do a range project, wildlife project. And then Will, the second son, came along and she took a non-major in biology there under Terry Maxwell and Bob Steger and some others on her committee, and got her master's degree there. Will was born in 1983 in San Angelo and then about 1987, we got an offer in some opportunities and moved to Stillwater, Oklahoma, and I was a state range conservationist, and she was kind of a stay at home mom, and working, but she taught at all of these locations. She was the head science teacher at Jayton and fell into that job and did that three years. Then she taught and worked some and mainly, a stay at home mom in Angelo. Then moved to—one of the reasons we wanted to go to Stillwater was because Oklahoma State was there, and she could pursue her PhD, which she got hooked up and did that and got her PhD there in Stillwater, OSU [Oklahoma State University]. Her first job out of college there was at Phillips University in Enid.

RW:

Okay. Yeah, yeah.

MM:

In conservation education.

RW:

Yeah. I had a friend's dad that went there for music. I don't think it's with us anymore, actually.

MM:

No, it's gone. They fell on hard times. It fell on hard times while she was chair of the department there, and it was not—nothing pleasant about it. Just was nothing pleasant about it. And so when they fell apart, then she ended up getting a job in Langston University. The 1890 university there and taught at Langston for a year in science education and then her old professor's job. He retired and she ended up going back at OSU as a professor there in her old professor's job. She taught there nine years at Oklahoma State University.

RW:

When did she start?

MM:

She started there—let me think about that. I would say in the nineties, late nineties. I can't

remember the date. We lived up at Oklahoma seventeen years. Most every place else, I can remember the dates because it was the first, second, or third year we lived somewhere.

RW:

Yeah. That soil conservation, it just moves you every two years.

MM:

Yeah, moves us. So we could kind of get dates that way. When I'm at Stillwater, it gets cloudy a little bit because we were there seventeen years and really, really, thoroughly enjoyed the Oklahoma experience. Good place to raise our boys. A lot of experiences for them and older boy's is an engineer. He ended up—didn't want to go to Texas Tech, which was fine, but he ended up going to University of Missouri at Rolla and got a degree in mechanical engineering and minored in aerospace, and now works for StandardAero over here in San Antonio. So anyway, she worked there nine years and then an opportunity came to come back to San Antonio, or back to Texas. San Antonio, particularly, we moved back here in 2004. Summer of 2004. She got a job. That's what really started it all was they kind of found her, and offered her a position at UTSA as a professor in science amongst legal studies and multicultural studies and different things. She was a chair of the department for a while, and now the professor in conservation education and science education. That's what she's doing today downtown is in a water conference. So we've been here eight years.

RW:

Now, just as a personal question. I went to Edmond Santa Fe High School. Did your boy play ball up in Stillwater?

MM:

No. They played football a little bit.

RW:

Because he's exactly my age and there was a number fifteen. I don't know who that little—it was a black kid who played up there. So I assume your son went—graduated in '97 in Stillwater?

MM:

So you were born in?

RW:

In '79.

MM:

Oh, that's my older son. Okay.



RW:

Or the older son. Yeah. So I assume he went to college. At any rate, if y'all went to the games, there was a number fifteen. You probably wouldn't remember, but he just ran hog wild. I hated that kid.

MM:

Was his name Leonard?

RW:

It might've been. All I remember is the fifteen because that's all you had time to see.

MM:

Yeah. There was a—both boys played a little bit of football early on, but they chose not to go with football as they got into high school. The older son was asthmatic and diagnosed in San Angelo. We wrestled with him, wrestled with him, and anyway, he ended up going up there to Stillwater and the doctor told us, said, "Quit babying the kid. Get him in something that will build his system up." We hadn't heard that before, so he enrolled in wrestling and it literally made a man out of him.

RW:

Oh yeah. That's big, big up there.

MM:

I have a—[phone rings 00:39:00]

RW:

Uh-oh.

MM:

Such a healthy respect for—turn it off just a second.

RW:

Sure. [Pause in Recording]

MM:

Sorry for that.

RW:

No, no, no. It happens all the time. It doesn't faze me any.



MM:

All right. Let's see. And anyway, he was wrestling.

RW:

I guarantee you he wrestled some of my friends too. I didn't do it. Look at me, I couldn't do it.

MM:

Oh yeah. Edmond. We went to Edmond.

RW:

Edmond had some good ones. Yeah.

MM:

But he came in one day. He was in seventh grade and he says, "Dad, I ran three quarters of a mile today and didn't puke."

RW:

Hey, so he turned it around.

MM:

It was progress. He really did. And that wrestling made a man out of him, and we didn't know much about wrestling because it wasn't in Texas and they got their National Wrestling Hall of Fame up there.

RW:

Yeah, in Stillwater.

MM:

And man, I'll tell you what. Those guys—I have a healthy—the conditioning and the skills in wrestling, and both boys wrestled a bit. Being there with a small town of Stillwater and the university the size of Tech, there was lots of opportunity for them. And they both got into music there and both good musicians, but they both wrestled and so forth, but Will ended up—the younger one went into hockey, in-line hockey, and he did that and that's another tough sport. I tell you what. The older boy did wrestling. So they didn't do football, but there was a young man there that played in the YMCA basketball. His name was Leonard and he was one of the best natural talents.

RW:

Really?

MM:

And I don't know if that was the same guy or not because we really just got where we didn't do football after that, but a couple of guys that graduated from Stillwater did pretty darn good. Josh Fields was one of them. He lives right down the street from us.

RW:

Oh, really?

MM:

And the kid that's in baseball now that's doing so well. I think he's now back—maybe came back to coach. His dad was a coach there at OSU.

RW:

I think I know who you're talking about. He—we never had to play him, but I remember he pitched a game against North High School on the other side of Edmond.

MM:

Yeah. He played for the Colorado Rockies.

RW:

Yeah, yeah. Went to the Rockies. What is his name?

MM:

Yeah. Now, he's somewhere else, but anyway, he was a classmate of my son.

RW:

He went straight to—he might've done a year in college, but I'll remember his name after we—

MM:

Yeah, I'll think of it. Terrible, but anyway, they were all classmates. You know, being a small town, you knew a lot of people. So anyway, that's what they did in sports and they chose not to do football or basketball or some of the other ones like that.

RW:

And what did you say they went on to do in college?

MM:

Matt, the older, went to University of Missouri at Ralla and he—engineer.

RW:

Oh yeah, that's what I have. I was just in school with a girl from there. Her and her husband both went there.

MM:

Oh, really?

RW:

Yeah. That's a small world. I better tell her that actually.

MM:

Yeah. He was the class of 2001, I think.

RW:

Actually, what's his name?

MM:

Matt. Matt Moseley.

RW:

Matt Moseley. Well I'll run it by them. They may not know.

MM:

He was in a fraternity there. Kappa Sigs. But he did that. We really didn't know much about that school until—and he found—he was the one that located—he was good at looking up things like that. We looked at a lot of schools with him. Took him to a lot of schools. He even got a president's scholarship to Tech, but he didn't want that. That was fine. That was fine. He went to where it fit him best, but it was a very good school and once we began to know people, then it sort of—but can I tell you how he got his job?

RW:

Yeah.

MM:

When he got out, he—this may be too much. If it is, you stop me.

RW:

We don't know what history might be. You know what I'm saying? Some fool might come in and use this next year and it'll be his dissertation. You know, writing on kids wrestling and then going to engineer. We don't know.

MM:

All right. Well here's—you know, we always told our boys to do your best, stay sharp, stay prepared for everything you do, and never discount the value of luck in your life and chance in your life. But you got to be good and you've got to be up to date and you've got to be really there before luck will play out for you, you know? So when things come on, get ready. Well Matt, the older, the engineer kid, he was always the one that took stuff apart. He never put it back together for a long time. We knew when he was four years old, he was going to be an engineer. That's just the way he was. He worked one summer in a place where they rebuilt or serviced lawn mowers. He just did it to have a dang job, basically, and he liked the tinkering, but you know, working with some of the people that would bring stuff in, he'd just shake his head at what he saw, but he did that. He went off to college and as he began to do internships, American Airlines was doing internships in Tulsa, so they brought like several hundred of them over to Tulsa for interviews and they said, "Okay, everybody that can demonstrate that they've got documented experience with small engines, come over in this room. The rest of you, go home. Thank you for coming." Well, he made that big cut and then, he didn't end up getting the interview, but he got right down to the finalists for the position and didn't get the position, but there was a chance that you'll never overlook the value of any little thing in your life and keep it on your resume. And so he did that and then he interned with an outfit up in Lexis, Missouri, that was a Key-Wick Construction. Then he went to another place, Independence, Missouri, and they built ammunition. All the world army's ammunition—or the US army's ammunition. Then he interned with Union Pacific in Little Rock, Arkansas. So he got some good intern positions there, but when he got out of school, it was a little slim on the engineering side at that time, so he had to come home, which just about killed him. But they were having a job interview at OSU. Job fair. So he put his tie on and his coat and tie and he went up there and he basically snuck his way in to where they were doing the interview and he went around and interviewed with people when he got to Standard Arrow. He always wanted to be in the aviation industry. He loved aviation, and so he started talking to them and they got talking to him and they got pretty serious. Finally, he said, "Look guys, I got to come forth with you. I'm not from OSU." They said, "Really? Where are you from?" And he told them. They said, "How'd you get in here?", "Well, I snuck in, to be honest." And they offered him the job. Finally, I said, "Well, what did they tell you?" He said, "Well, one, you were dressed up. You were in a coat and tie. You looked professional. You presented yourself professional. You came in and plus, your ingenuity." So he started working for them about eight years ago and actually, moved to San Antonio before we did and he's still working with them for the time being. So anyway, chances played out there. Will, our younger, he did an internship there. No, not an internship. But the way he got his job was in high school, they had to a job fair thing, and so he went to Dave Ingle, who was a professor at OSU in the range department and talked to him. He didn't listen to dad, but he went to Dave Ingle. Dave Ingle said, "I've got a lady doing some wildlife research out here on our college ranch. Go do that." They were trapping coons, and possums, and skunks, and doing different things with weighing and measure. He thought, That's pretty cool, you know? And then, I also, as a part of

my job as a range specialist there in Oklahoma, would work with the Noble Foundation out of Ardmore, and they were really a great bunch of guys to work with and we would go down to their ranch and help them balance their deer herd. And so I took Will with me one time and we hunted down there and he watched those guys, how they cataloged the deer. At that time, that ranch was largest instrumented deer herd in North America. We could see their ear tags. We got to rattle up deer and see them come in to us. He could see their ear tag and he'd go back. He'd look them up and they'd say, "Oh yeah. That's this deer. His mother's this and his daddy—" had all this generational stuff on this deer, and he was very impressed, although, he didn't tell me at the time he did. But he said, "Right there is when I decided that's what I want to do." So he left and went to Texas Tech and he was like me. He never even looked anywhere else. Never even considered applying anywhere else. When he said he was going to go to Tech, we tried to talk him out of it. We thought, Why in the hell would you want to go there? Because we didn't want him to go because he thought we wanted him to go. We wanted him to make it his own decision. And he hung tight. He said, "Yeah. That's what I'm going to do." Probably what got him is that time when Texas Tech and A&M played and Tech won in the last minute there. That was a huge game, but that was so exciting. I think that got his juice flowing too. But anyway, he went there and majored in wildlife and took an internship with—several internships there with some people in the department doing Playa Lake research. That was working out for him. Then he interned with the Noble Foundation.

RW:

Now, who did he—what profs did he work with at Tech? Do you remember what? Because I know most of the range guys. Britain, and Sosebee and some of these people.

MM:

Oh okay. Sosebee started at Texas Tech when I was there.

RW:

Yeah, yeah.

MM:

So he taught both my wife and I. He taught Will, and he told us that he was not going to be teaching our grandchildren. [Laughter]

RW:

By the way, he still works in his office there. He hasn't left even though he was probably supposed to.

MM:

Yeah. We were on a committee together up there. I talk to him occasionally. But he—his



professor—he worked for our graduate student, whose name—he was from Taiwan. His name escapes me, but he was doing bird research in Playa Lakes. So his research was the bird population, and sedimentation, and range land watersheds on Playa Lake versus cropland watersheds. So Will's job was to go and find out the ownership, and to classify the plants, and get out in the water and wade, and carry the survey instruments while Cy—I can't quite think of the name—did the research. So he was actually working for the grad student and I'm not sure who the professor was. I should know, but I don't. Maybe it was Dave Wester. Maybe it was Dave Wester. Anyway, so he did that and then he got an internship with the Noble Foundation and his job was to—he worked for a guy named Mike Porter. Mike's a long-time biologist up there. He's known as SMIO, smartest man in Oklahoma. Mike had a study to look at the genetics and the production of Florida's strain bass versus regular large-mouthed bass in farm ponds. So Will was part of the crew that collected them and did all of the necropsy and all that and he had to fish. He had to do a certain amount of fishing to collect the samples. So he calls us one day and he says, "Mom and dad, can y'all come up here? I'm getting behind on my fishing. I need some help to help with this fishing." So sure enough, we were glad to help, and his mom skunked all of us. She caught more fish than anybody, which we didn't know how she did that, but she did. So anyway, he did that and he worked up there and he just knew that solidified he wanted that job, but you had to have a master's degree to work for the Noble Foundation in that capacity. So when he got out, again, a little bit of chance involved in, we said, "Will, if you're going to graduate school, look around, but probably the best place in Texas for you is A&M Kingsville, down at the Caesar Kleberg because of the nature of the work and well Allen Rasmussen's down there and Fred Bright's down there and a few people that have some ties back to Texas Tech. So anyway, he looked around at several places, but he ended up going down there, got a fellowship, and got his master's degree down there at A&M Kingsville, which was really wonderful the way they do their work. I mean, they have cohort groups. Like there were five of them together and they rotated off this ranch down in Carrizo Springs. Faith Ranch and the San Pedro Ranch. They were next to each other and he lived down there on the Faith. It was Faith is where he lived for nine months. So he would live on the ranch, collect his research and the research of his cohorts, and he'd go back to campus and one of them would come out and do that. So they got all that experience of each other's experience and they got co-authors on papers and really, a wonderful structure and they came in a real tight group and so when he got out of—got his master's degree and finished it up, well sure enough, the job came open at the Noble Foundation and he's there today. He's a wildlife biologist and working for them and working out very well for him.

RW:

Well, I guess—that was interesting. That's why I followed it up. I don't know how I got there. But so when you were going, you said you were in mechanical engineering and then you switched over into range wildlife. So you wound up in, you said, the Soil Conservation Service whenever that was. '75.



MM:

Yeah, '74. Yeah.

RW:

So were y'all following your two year, three year transfers around until you got here? Until you got to Oklahoma?

MM:

Um-hm.

RW:

And then what were you doing in Stillwater?

MM:

I was a state range conservationist.

RW:

Okay.

MM:

So what that meant was—had the leadership for the range discipline and the pasture—improved pastures, and plant materials. Conservation planning. Some programs there, statewide, and you know, technical support.

RW:

So was it the entirety of Oklahoma? Panhandle onward?

MM:

Yeah.

RW:

How did you come into that job? Because a lot of these other fellows, the reason I ask, wound up in Texas. You know, places they came from.

MM:

Well, that's another story, as is most things. I was in San Angelo. Moved there in 1980 and had been there seven years, and worked thirteen counties, I believe it was and right at the end, Texas reorganized, and I was working forty-four counties, which was fine. That was a wonderful, wonderful opportunity to learn out there, but for various reasons, the processor in Oklahoma had been there a long time, and this Red Johnson fellow caught me in the motel room one time in Big

Spring and he said, "You need to look at that Oklahoma job," and I told him I didn't want to leave Texas, but thank you. And then, later on, another guy named Harland Dietz, who was a national range specialist, called me and he said, "You need to look at this Oklahoma job up there," because he used to work there. I said, "Thank you, but I'm fine here." And then a third guy called me. He was the state conservationist, said the same thing. Well, I thought, Dang, all these people are talking about that job and maybe we ought to look at it. So we had never been to Stillwater, so Easter break, we loaded the kids up and we drove to Stillwater and spent a weekend there looking at it. Nobody bit us. Nobody threw rocks at us.

RW:

They didn't know you were from Tech yet.

MM:

That's right. Yeah. We covered up our plates. You got it, man. But Chris, there at Angelo State when she got her master's degree, they didn't really have a PhD program that fit what she wanted to do, so she was kind of looking for a place there, so we thought, Well heck, there's Oklahoma State, and here's this job that I'd be interested in. And what they were looking for in a job was things that I really enjoyed doing and that was prescribed fire and grazing management. I really was interested in that, and that was an area that they were wanting some leadership in. So anyway, I applied and got the dang job, and that was another small connection. Maybe that's a good research project is how small connections work. We got to Oklahoma State. I had the job and Chris didn't, but she kept knocking on doors and trying to talk to people. You know, what she wanted. Everybody said, "Yeah, we'll call you," and nothing was really happening, and then we were at a society for a range management meeting in Abilene, Texas one time. And two guys that were ranked professionally at OSU that we knew already, came down, but we really hadn't yet got a chance to get to know them all that well and it was Dave Ingle again. His name comes up again and Terry Bidwell. And so the usual conversation, they ask Chris, say, "What do you want to do?" She told them and old Terry Bidwell said, "Well, hell. You need to go talk to Ted Mills." Well, she went to Ted Mills and [snaps] that was it. She's the last of—whose job she ended up getting up there, he was an outstanding, award winning conservation education educator there in Oklahoma State, and they just hit it off. It was a perfect deal, but it was that byproduct of one conversation over a beer. Isn't it amazing? But had she not been ready and had things together, it wouldn't of happened. But anyway, there's another little small connection. Go back over that question. You asked it and I think I diverged a bit.

RW:

Well no. Basically, how you got up there and then what you did. So seventeen years and y'all left so she could come up here? Or did you retire from the service then or are you still doing it right now?

MM:

Okay. Another story. We went up there to stay three years in Oklahoma and come back to Texas, and it worked out so well for us we stayed seventeen years. And could've retired up there and stayed up there for the rest of our time had it not been that we had family that we were away from here in Texas, and property. And so the boys were both gone and Chris had a colleague that moved from Oklahoma State, they taught together, she moved to San Marcos and taught there. She called Chris one day, said, "Chris, UTSA is looking for someone that's just what you are," and she said, "You ought to interview this." So she looked into it. She said, "Well, I don't know." So we talked it over a little bit, and she sent her resume down there and they said, "Well why don't you come down here for an interview?" They said, "well, \_\_\_\_\_ [00:57:09] nothing wrong with going down for an interview. So she really wasn't looking for a job. So anyway, she came down and interviewed. She came back. I said, "What'd you think?" She said, "Well, you know, that sounded pretty good, but I just couldn't even consider it unless they did this, this, and this. We just couldn't even consider it.", "Okay." She called me one day and said, "They met everything I wanted and more."

RW:

Should've asked for more. Okay.

MM:

Yeah, I said, "Well then, what are we going to do?" And so I was about six months away from my first retirement window, which would've been age fifty-five and thirty years of service, and we talked it over quite a bit. There was nothing noble about this, mind you, I got to tell you that. I said, "Well you've followed me around and it's worked out. We've done a lot of things together, but you know, this is a chance for you to do something that's of your choosing, and if we have to, if I don't find another job or a job doesn't come open in Texas that I would want in the natural resource conservation service, I'll retire. I'll find something else, and I'll live here until we retire." So anyway, we did that. We took that. Well, in the meantime, Texas did split one job and a job came open that I was qualified for, and I was selected, and so we both moved back to Texas here in San Antonio.

RW:

So what job did you get?

MM:

When I came back, there was a group. It's called Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative and it's a group of ranchers, private land ranchers, that basically their job was—let me preface this. In 1985, the Farm Bill required NRCS [**Natural Resource Conservation Service**] to write farm plans to keep farmers in compliance. In doing so, they moved a lot of people out of the range profession. You may know all of this from Dan and others, and they never moved them back.

Some ranchers said, we need the help on the ranches again. You've done that job. We need some help. So these ranchers went together. Lived by Chip Merrill out of Fort Worth, who's another interview. Top shelf interview there. Must do interview. He was the king pen, but they mainly went as private individuals to work with the congregational delegation and the agency to restore the technical assistance on grazing lands back to the NRCS, and they did that, and so each state or each group of states would have a coordinator that was a liaison to that group. In Texas, that job was shared by the state range conservationist, who, at that time, was Homer Sanchez, here. Up there, it was—when they first came out with that in the mid-nineties, I had—it was a collateral duty with myself as a state ranch con at that, but the job was—it needed—both of them needed separate attention. So we created a—split the job up there in Oklahoma, and then late nineties, in the first—when I had it and then we split it and the first person came up there was Melanie Sikes from Texas, came up, and she was the first dedicated liaison to the GOCI in Oklahoma and she kept that job when she moved back to Texas. She's now in San Angelo. So she had that job, and then—but Texas never had to split it, and they were making the decision to split it at that time. So when they split it, I came down and took that GOCI job, which headquartered here in San Antonio, and then Homer Sanchez remained as the state ranch conservationist, so he could focus on that. So that's why we—that's how we all ended up back here. And then about another thing that had dropped off the table for the NRCS through the years is we have a soil survey where people go out and they map the soils, and we also have documents where guys like myself, Dan Caudle, Rhett Johnson, and others would go out and describe the vegetation that would grow on those soils, and describe how to manage that vegetation for common good, and all the plants that grow, and we call those range sites in the early days. Range site descriptions, but they were tied to a soil and a plant community unique to that soil.

RW:

Are those those ecological site descriptions now? Everybody keeps telling me about those.

MM:

Okay. All right. Well you're pretty good up on things.

RW:

It's only because I've talked to five or six—I'll have a master's degree in it by the time I'm done with all of this.

MM:

Well, good for you. Usually, you talk to people and they just like stare at you like, what? So anyway, to accelerate that, it still was happening because the program emphasis. They were still not getting very much of it done because technically, it was still tied up. So about two years ago, at the end of about a ten year process, they moved the ecological site acceleration effort over into



the soils division to tie it with the soil survey so it would have its own funding and have dedicated people to work on it, and we've got like four or five here now. I took over leadership position in that about a year and a half ago as an ecological site coordinator, and right now, I guess my territory runs from the Gulf Coast to Canada. The Great Plains, for the most part.

RW:

Now, do you work with Dan Caudle on one of those?

MM:

Yeah.

RW:

The one down on the Louisiana Coast, is that right?

MM:

Yes, he did that. I was sort of—at that time, this effort wasn't in place. He did that under contract with Louisiana, and we also had several contracts here in Texas with different people to write these, but this reorganization and new effort came about, about a year and a half ago and Dan had retired by then. Dan was an early mentor of mine. He went to—you know, he was with the GOCI as well and we worked—Dan and I worked together. He was one of the first people I remember knowing in the agency and still know him. Last week, we buried a friend that was a mentor to all of us. A guy named Joe Norris. And so he and I and Rhett Johnson were there, as well as some others. So it's—another thing that's surprising me, and now my son—the one at the Noble Foundation, Will, is learning is even though it's a widespread industry, it's a very small industry.

RW:

I'm starting to realize that. Everybody knows everybody in this part of the world, anyway.

MM:

That's true. And he'll go to meetings now in Oregon and he'll run across people that went to school at Kingsville or at Tech or at, you know, wherever it was. People that know people. It's that network, and it's very small in number, but it's very widespread geographically and so it's not unusual to go to other states and immediately, you got a connection. It surprised him at first, and now he's beginning to say, "Oh well, just another connection." Now, he's making his own connection, and what I'm finding out is now they're coming up and saying, "Oh, are you Will's dad?" So he's established himself in the field, and is knowing people and so they'll come up to me now and say that, but I have not retired, much contrary to other people's opinion. I've been working over thirty-eight years now, I guess, with the agency. It's one of those things where I



started the job back when I was working in Brady until something better came along and I guess I still feel that way.

RW:

So what are you going to do when it wraps up?

MM:

Well, I don't know. I've got so many hobbies that I'm not doing now because of different things that I enjoy. We've always got the little ranch up there. We've got an ongoing brush control program and conservation program up there. It's hard to keep up with, so there's always that. It's just relentless. It's relentless to keep the land healthy and functioning without letting it get out of balance. It just is. I might even do some consulting. I might work with someone if we could do something that I could do it on my own terms part time. You know, I just—I might even like to do what you're doing. [Laughter]

RW:

Well, I mean it's—even if you don't do it on the state nickel, it needs to be done. There's people everywhere that—

MM:

Well, actually Dan Caudle and I talked about that—have been talking about that very thing. When we were up at Junction with the funeral, he and I were talking. He was telling me about you and how much he enjoyed your visit, and how much it meant to him and I said, “Well, you know, I found it interesting. I've always wanted to do something like that.” He said, “Really? So have I.” And so we communicated and it may be in a few years if we could get the right things together. We've got to both learn more about this, but we might both be interested because through our contacts through the years, particularly in the ranching community and associated people, we just by default learn about people and learn their story and those that would be willing to tell it.

RW:

And knowing—when you know somebody too, they are a lot more willing. The fact that y'all took that tour up there, you understood what we were doing. It was easy to round this up. I'm telling you what, all you have to do is talk about their early life and then their college and career and then people will talk.

MM:

Well it is. The thing both of us have enjoyed is the history. You get on a person's place and know people that have taken us to a place like one out west of San Angelo. This is where Black Jack Ketchup's cave—where he lived. I can't tell you how many famous people we've met and

people that take you to those little things. There's a place up in Menard County, right over the Kimmel County line. We're on this ranch and right out in the middle of a six thousand acre ranch and there's this marker. Marble marker. It says, "On this spot, the Doolin gang was ambushed." There's a tree there. A live oak tree. The limb is dead and they said that's where the man was hung, and there's a grave there and it's been excavated and they say, well they dug this guy up after they killed him and took him up, and he's buried in Menard now. That's just locals, you know, local history. I couldn't refute it, but you know, okay. But I never had seen that the Doolin gang ever came down here before. I didn't know about that. Well, moved to Oklahoma and right outside of Oklahoma is a little town of Ingalls, you may know about. Well the Ingalls got the heck shot out of them there at Ingalls. They had a big Ingalls gun fight, and that was the Doolin gang and they also had holed up in that little place south of Perkins on the bluff. There's a cave down there that they lived in that we got to go on. But anyway, there's a book that a guy named Shirley wrote called the *Battle of Ingalls*, there about the Doolin gang and in this book, I was reading this book, and this Doolin gang got shot up here at Ingalls and they went down to Menard, Texas to get away for a while and they got shot up down there. I thought, I'll be darned. I've been to both places, you know? All on private lands. And then in Guthrie, I think they were in there too. But anyway, there's all sorts of places. A place out in the Black Mesa of Oklahoma, where they had gun in placement set because that's when the outlaws were out there. If you know what you're looking at, you can see the old rock walls where they put the guns, and they fired back into the caves. Military fired back into the caves and tried to root those guys out, but you wouldn't know that. You'd just think it was a pile of rocks. Then I was on a place, I can't say where, but west of San Angelo when they've got those limestone buttes, and there was these piles of rock about—take about two people to reach around them. They were stacked up in plates about head high, and we kept passing these rocks. Near every one of those rocks, about near that house, there'd be another little rock wall sitting there. So as we went through these ranches kept noticing these rocks, "All right. What are those?" I thought they were an Indian thing. He kind of laughed and he said, "Well back in the days when we were trying the lamb, and eagles were so bad in this country, we put dead rabbit up there and top of that big one and we'd get over by that rock wall with a gun when the eagles come up there to get the dead rabbit, we'd kill them."

RW:

[Laughter] Wow.

MM:

Yeah. "Okay," okay. But that's not happening today. That's not happening today, that I know of. This was back in the days when eagles were just wiping out rancher's crops and they had to do—they were doing something, but that's what that was. You never would've known what that was.

RW:

Well you know, I mean, that's a change that happened. The one thing that I'm always wondering though is, how did you see from '75 on, stuff change?

MM:

Okay.

RW:

Other than computers because I know everybody has something to say about that, but I mean did the farmers get on board with it? Ranchers, rather. And stay on board with it right away or did that change over time?

MM:

That took a long time to change and I'll reflect back about what I'd call first generation range people in the NRCS and they would talk about when they'd go out to the ranches and of course, these were people that took off—the range profession, really didn't get started until the early fifties. And the very first national range conference the NRCS ever had was in Oklahoma at the Wichita Mountain Wildlife Refuge.

RW:

Oh, I love it. I go camping out there all the time.

MM:

Oh, isn't that a beau—that's a spiritual place.

RW:

Oh, it is great.

MM:

And that was in 1954, I think, and somewhere in their Oklahoma files, they've got the original—because I had the publication, and I—dadgummit, those guys got away with it or I left it there and they can't find it. But anyway, so anyway, so the range profession or the understanding of rangeland management has come along about the drought of the fifties, I'd say. And so, they'd go out and talk to these ranchers and just try to help them understand the water cycle and the minerals, how plants grow and all that. These were substance people, hard people that had eked a living out of there. It was hand to mouth living, you know Depression and post-Depression and in the drought of the fifties. So they had everything at stake. It was so hard to get them to even think about vacating the pasture to get them to furrow. Even for six weeks, they just couldn't understand it, why they'd want to do it, and then a few would do it. And they worked, and worked, and worked at that, so there was that generation of people that worked with the ranchers

to try to help them understand—help them put together a plan that they could live with and not go broke, and learn it, and improve their ranch while making a living at the same time. Because back then, most everybody made their living off the ranch, most of them, and they were a generation—some of them a third generation by then that lived from ranching. Leo Marrow, who was a superintendent of the Sonora Experiment Station started in 1949, used to tell us when Dr. Bill Doll at Tech took us down there to the first time I remember going, except for when I was in range camp, but anyway, and Dr. Marrow told us, at that time, he said it takes thirty years for an idea to take place in the AG industry. What he was saying is it takes one generation's change and we didn't believe him, but he was right. He really was right because he developed a grazing management that was still enduring to this day and he developed it in 1949 in a four-pasture, three haired system. But anyway, that generation went to the floor working with those older ranchers, to befriend them and learn their—gain their trust and start experimenting and they'd find those five—there's 5 percenters out there. There's the people that will innovate. They're willing to take a risk. They're willing to do something and there's only about 5 percent of them. So you look at—you find those people and then there's a bottom 5 percent, they're not going to do nothing no matter what you tell them, so you don't mess with them. Then there's that middle group in there that's kind of a bell curve, I guess, that watched the five percenters and if it works for them, then they might try it. And so our successes are built a lot on convincing those 5 percenters to do something and working with them to help them, taking what they know and what we know and try to put it together, supporting them. Going out with them and showing them what we know and what they know. Learning from them. I got to say, learning from them. When it works, then everybody else, "It works for him, maybe it'll work for me." And so that first generation went through that stage, and then by the time the first generation that they coached and the ranching came a newer people came in. You know, more people started going to college. More universities began to offer ecological training, like range management training, and so those kids were exposed to that, and they went out and came back to the ranches and they'd begin to take the next step. They'd go—so when my generation came along, we still had to work hard to convince people to defer. There were those people out there. But by the time my generation of range people came along, it was more like, which grazing system fits your program? And so they were already over that middle hump of having to vacate pastures and help them with stalking rates. It was during my tenure in San Angelo was when Allen Savory came into San Angelo, which created a huge, huge stir in the industry, and we could talk about Allen Savory the rest of the day, but the thing he had going for him was he was one of the best communicators and charismatic people you'd ever be around. And so he made people—people believed him. They believed him to a fault, maybe. The other—his fault was, perhaps, is he told half-truths, and he alienated agency people from some of the ranching industry and there was all that going on, but the upshot of it was people were talking about range management that never talked about it before, and his ideas were somewhat controversial, but when you boil it down, they're basic high school biology. But he—anyway, he had a huge impact, really, and during that period of time was his hay day around San Angelo. A lot of people were going to his schools and



they were doing what he said to do and going on. Some of them were getting in wrecks because they weren't following even the rules he taught them. They were shortcutting it, and the whole deal, the big deal, was he promised them, and in writing, that if they would come out and go to his school, they could double the recommended NRCS stocking rate within one year or they'd get their money back from the school. And so many people did that, and you'd go out to their ranch and say, "How did you come up with this \_\_\_\_ [01:15:33].", "Well, Allen said we could do it." I said, "Well, did you measure the grass and reconcile that against the animals to make sure you were in balance?", "No, we just did it because he said we could do it." Well it's no trick whatsoever to take a well-managed ranch and double stock in it for one year. You could do that with anything. That's the half-truth part, and after the drought of 1983, summer of 1983 in San Angelo, so many of those people hit the wall. I mean, many of them came back in and said, Look, we're out of grass, we're out of livestock, we're had to liquidate, we got to start over. And then they came back to—and many of them, to this day, are still taking good parts that he said, and the good parts that they learned along the way, and are successful. But let's say a lot of those people heard what they kind of wanted to hear, and just did what they thought they were supposed to be doing, and it was a wreck. And I can't fault Allen entirely, and I can't fault the ranchers entirely, but it was just one of those things that revolutionized research, even. A lot of research mobilized. Let's say, to prove him wrong. They went into it to prove that you could not double your stocking rate without qualification, and we already knew that, but the ranching industry was not listening to that. They heard Allen say you could double your stocking rate if you put in sixteen pastures and rotate every three days, and so many of them did it and I don't know for sure—nobody's filed it for a while, but I bet less than 10 percent of those people are still doing that. That's a guess. I really can't validate that, but there are some, though, that have continued on, and used the process and gone through the process logically and thought it through and made it work for them, and it is working for them and they've never looked back. One of the positive things about it, and we've tried to move that way, but our resources are limited to getting this done, and we try to look at the people's plants, and their ranch, and we look at their animals, and we look at the people themselves. What's their goals in life? And they're all so interrelated. They tie together, but our agency is such that we're lucky if we can do a third job just on the plant part anymore, but we try to be sensitive to the people. That's the human side of it. We've got to get the human side of it because it's not just—my daddy told me too, and I didn't believe him until I started working for this output. He said, 80 percent of your success will be working with people. I thought, Yeah right. All I need to know is what grass is—are—that's all I need to know. I learned that, and I also learned you got to work through people to make it work.

RW:

Yeah. People are the ones that do the work.



MM:

Exactly.

RW:

And so you can't do the work yourself unless you've got the people doing it.

MM:

Yes.

RW:

It's a hard lesson to learn though.

MM:

Well it is. I had a person at one time that was giving me some advice and we were talking about this one rancher and he said, "Oh that rancher is stupid because he's not doing what I say to do." This was the employee talking. He said, "I told him all the right things to do and he didn't do it. He's just stupid." I thought to myself, That rancher was not stupid. That was a smart rancher. He just didn't believe you and you didn't put it in the right context that worked for him. You just gave him the technical data and then left and then when he didn't apply it, you took it personally. That's really what it was and it cost so much money that he never could have paid for what you told him to do. And this was an isolated case, but nevertheless, it stuck with me, and another thing that stuck with me at one time was there was a rancher over there named Joe David Ross at Sonora, and Joe David was a veterinarian and ranched over there a long time and he's got a sister over here, Betsey Ross, south of Austin. She does grass fed beef and just a wonderful job, what she's doing. Some of the best beef I ever ate was some she produced. But anyway, he began to—he was a forward thinker and he listened to everybody, but he was always—he was a 1 percenter, not a 5 percenter. He was out there all the time thinking, but we were having a meeting one day in Sonora and if you needed to be hit between the eyes with a hammer, Joe David would hit you between the eyes with a hammer. And he got up in a meeting—we're having this meeting. I don't even remember what it was about, and he got up and he said, "Do you know what's wrong with NRCS today?" and this is in front of these ranchers and I thought, Man he is going to whack us bad, and he said, "You do too much for the ranchers." I thought, What? He said, "Yeah. Y'all come out here. You send your people out to the ranch, you inventory our grasses, you show us where to put the fences, you do the—help us with the brush control, help us arrange the grazing, you help us with wildlife management. Then you leave, and the rancher doesn't know how to do all that. You don't teach them. You don't make them do it. You do it for them and you don't make them do it." And that has stuck with me all my career after that. I said, "He's right. He's right," and that's why some of our systems have failed out there is that very well intended, we'd go out and do that work for them because either they didn't have time to do it or whatever, when we should've been involving them more, and getting them more engaged in this. It's just kind of

like giving them a book and saying, "Go drive a Model T." Got time for another story?

RW:

Yeah, yeah.

MM:

I use this story a lot. My grandfather Moseley, Arthur Moseley, I never knew him. My dad's dad. But when he was—he was born in 1882, I think, and he rode from Kentucky on a horse to Rochelle, Texas, and he was four years old. So he was raised in that era, and he was a cowboy all his life and he broke horses for people in McCulloch County and that old Sellman Ranch down there, and he lived under a tree for nine months down at the mouth of little Brady Creek, and when he cowboied, that's just what he did. He loved it. He was a good worker and people talked to him about how he whistled when he worked, how hard he worked. He was one of those kind of guys that loved to work, and he used to go out to New Mexico and he'd get horses from McGonagall [?] [01:21:43] Ranch out at Monument, New Mexico, and he drove them back across Midland to Brady, and to the ranch, and he settled with the army up at I guess it was Camp Bowie. I don't know. Anyway, he did all that and broke all his horses and he did it so he married late in life, but he farmed. He farmed with teams and he bought—I've still got his books over there, 1921. All of his financial books. He handwrote every one of them.

RW:

Oh wow.

MM:

Yeah. We might get you a copy of that. So he was raised in that era of cowboys, you know? Like everybody else was that way. He wasn't special in that way, but he did that and he married late in life, and so when it came time when horses began to get out of vogue and he had to have a car, he got because he just had to have a dang car. He hated them. Kind of like a lot of us do computers, but they tell the story of him getting in that car and he—they sold him a car, but I guess they didn't teach him how to drive it, and they probably offered, but he wouldn't listen. So his idea was put it in whatever gear it was in and he'd drive in that gear for whatever trip it was, and so he—until the next time, then he'd put in some other gear and do the same thing. Well, he drove up to Brady one time, drove around the square and the light was red, and I want to say it was Miss Nyla White. It was G. Rally White's sister-in-law, was behind him, and when the light turned green, he crammed it in a gear, which happened to be reverse, revved it up and popped the clutch and just swam right into her fender. And he got out and he said—Miss Nyla said, "Mr. Arthur, I didn't know you were going to back up." He said, "Hell, I didn't either." [Laughter] And he took her car in and he paid for it, you know? And the way I use that story is the lesson is, you can learn on your own, but you pay for your mistakes. If you want to do that, there's a lot to be said for that independent nature, but it's going to cost you along the way. There was probably

people that could've taught him about driving, but he wanted to do it himself. He was a self-made guy, but so many—there's so many—still people come up to this day, not many of them left that knew Arthur Moseley and talk about one, his laugh. [Phone chimes 01:23:57] He had a vivacious laugh, but he died in 1946, before I was born. I wish I'd have known him because of all the stories. My gosh, the guy could've told about some things, but anyway, that's—I digressed a little bit there with that story, but it's sort of like that in those days, when we were growing up in the agency, we had been taught how to do those skills of helping ranchers and we did that because we, as a group, were a helpful group of guys. We liked to go out and work with people and help them, but at the same time, we might've—they might've relied upon us, and what Joe David said really made an impression on me, so after that, I began to try to use and teach myself teaching tools of how to communicate. Oh, I still kept up with my technical skills of rangeland management, also tried to increase my skills in the transfer of knowledge, which is a whole science unto itself. How do you teach people? And talking ain't teaching. You know?

RW:

Some people get it.

MM:

Some people get it.

RW:

They got to do it on their own.

MM:

They got to do it on their own.

RW:

Take that info and yeah.

MM:

Yeah. But that's my wife's whole thing. If she was here, she'd really get up out of her chair now to hear this conversation, but her whole idea about teaching is sort of peer teaching. Using—being a facilitator. Facilitated teaching and having peer teaching among the students, and then experiential. They used to call it hands-on. There's a lot of names for it, but you know, letting people learn by experience, and teaching, and self-teaching, and exploration, and there's a lot of sense to that. And so we try to, as we train our people—throughout that era, I guess a lot of us intuit it—J.R. Bell. He's a master. A master at that sort of thing, working with ranchers like that. Dan Caudle was another one. Joe Norris. I could go on forever about people. Harland Dietz, who was a mentor of mine. Harland was—still lives in Fort Worth and he was born in Pratt, Kansas and raised up there in Kansas, and state range con in Kansas, but he worked in Oklahoma, and he

worked up in the Osage of Oklahoma and he—during the fifties. He was up there in this early generation, and he ended up being our national range conservationist, but he wrote books and I used to read those books and he would inspire me and I never had met the guy, but he was a communicator. Rudy Peterson, who just died, was another wonderful communicator. People would just eat out of their hands and not know they were eating, you know? Another guy—oh, what was his name? I'll think of it in a minute. Anyway, he had a book that he published called the *Art of Communications* and remind me to give you a copy, if you want it?

RW:

Sure.

MM:

In it, he talked about how to—for young people to read and how do you work with the ranching community—how do you do that? Because we do it all volunteer. We don't make anybody do anything. It's all by persuasion and so he gets at that very thing and Harland Dietz said he was Pawhuska one day, and he first got there and he said this guy said—there up at the old Osage ranchers were pretty well old time ranchers too, a lot of them. And he said there was a guy that called him Sunny Boy all the time. Said, "Sunny Boy, I got this grass out here at my place—" and this was in the spring. "It's the prettiest grass I've ever saw. It's green. You can see it as far as you can see. You've got to come out there." So Harland went with him and he said, "You know, that is a pretty grass. That's a real pretty grass, but there's another one up in Kansas where I'm from that looked a lot like that. It's called cheat grass. You know, in the spring it looked really good, and then by about May, it would seed out. It was a little annual, it'd dry up, and it'd be nothing. Yeah, you've got the prettiest green grass I ever saw." And they thanked him and he left. Well in June, he was in there eating in a restaurant, and the same rancher came back and Harland was in the back and he said—he looked back there and said, "Hey, Sunny Boy. Come here. What'd you tell me that grass was?", "Well, it was cheat grass.", "That's exactly what it is. I want to get you back out there. I've got to have some help because that grass is gone and I need some help." And that started a long relationship with that rancher. Harland never told him anything. He just asked him the right questions. And another time, when I first came to Oklahoma, Harland came up there and we—he showed me some ranches he'd worked with and introduced me around, and he went to this one ranch up at Blackwell, Oklahoma, right north of Kaw Lake. This guy had—where the Arkansas River—it's Arkansas up in Kansas, but it's Arkansas in Oklahoma, as you know? But as they—his ranch was on the Arkansas River and in that bottom and it came up like this on that Osage Flat country, and this guy was following the same grazing system. A two pasture switch back that Harland had helped him with in the 1950's. Still doing it. It was still working for him. And so anyway, we went out to it and he and Harland were talking over old times and he brought out his map and he said, "You know, Harland, I've still got a problem down here on the bottom. I can't get the cattle out of the bottom, and keep them up on the hill." Harland, he looked at him, he backed up, he said, "You know what? That is



kind of a problem, isn't it?" He said, "I wished we could figure out some way to get those cattle out of that bottom so you could control them a little better." That rancher looked up and he said, "Well you know, you think if we put a fence right there along those two slopes that we could do that?" Harland said, "Well, I don't know. It might be worth a try." He said, "I'll get the cowboys on it tomorrow." That was it. I mean, it would've been obvious to anyone. That's where you put the fence and you should've done that twenty years ago, but Harland never told him what to do. He just led him with a series of questions. So that's what we try to teach and encourage is foster that approach in our people today. So we were raising—I call it the golden era of rangeland management when I went through Tech. The professors up there were just wonderful. Sosebee was starting. Daryl Eckert was there at that time. Russ Pettit, still in Lubbock, and taught plants. I couldn't think—I couldn't say enough nice things about what he taught me. Bill Doll, another person from Seaman, Oklahoma.

RW:

Oh really?

MM:

Went to OSU, and his wife was from Stillwater. You couldn't ask for better people. We had people like him, we wouldn't need police forces. Henry Wright was just getting started there when I was there with prescribed burning, who wrote the book on prescribed burning in rangeland. It all started there at Texas Tech. Henry, I never took a fire course under him because he was just getting started. I'll leave some out, I know, but there was—that caliber of people. John Hunter, gosh. We can't say anything about the department of Tech without talking about John Hunter. He was the only non-PhD professor they had, but he gave so much of himself. He gave his money and students. He taught the non-majors courses and if anybody knows the department, it's because of John Hunter. He was just a prince, prince of a fellow. Beyond all descriptions. So those people were people that taught Dan and I and Rhett and those caliber of people when we went through there. Larry Butler is another one. Wyman Meinzer. I could go on for days about the guys that came through there. We were classmates, he went out and eventually worked for the agency. At that time, Texas A&M was more into—I won't get the right words here, but they were into the science or the clinical scientific studies a lot. Of course, we have land grant. They're doing a lot of the research so it was a natural fit and they taught habitat, but it was taught in wildlife and you had range, and wildlife sciences was different the range, pretty much. They were a separate group, animal science, that kind of thing, but at Tech, and I think this could be traced directly back to doctor Joe Schuster, when he was chair of the department at Texas Tech. He wrote them into one so that the range and wildlife was together. If you took one class, they were together. So range people were sitting there with wildlife people because you know, managing land, you can manage for cows or you can manage for wildlife. It doesn't make any difference. So serendipitously, several of us went through that program getting that blended type of education, and for working for the NRCS, we couldn't have asked for a better preparation



than that, working with the landowners. And so we did that and of course, that was about the time leasing started in the late fifties, and land and recreation took off, and recreation made more money than ranching did and still does, probably. Maybe not. Yeah, probably does. So anyway, that background had prepared us so well to go out and do the kind of work we do, work with others. So all those guys are gone. Most of them dead. Ron Sosebee's the only living, and Russ Pettit the professor that I had up there. Well Daryl Eckert, he's retired. He didn't stay with Tech all that long, but he was on one of Tech's first plant teams when he was there. So that era has gone at Texas Tech, and now being rebuilt. Now being rebuilt.

RW:

Yeah. That's the way the pendulum swings every time.

MM:

It is. It really is. It just does that. So we did that and then after our generation—when 1985 came around, it began to shift the culture to people that did not have time to sit down and talk to people about their cheat grass.

RW:

That's what J.R. Bell said. I mean, so did you see it move away from personal contact to these other things? I mean, how did you see it?

MM:

Oh yeah. You could see it coming. When that happened, we saw what was happening and people were forced by congressional mandate to do this. We had no choice. I mean, the agency had no choice.

RW:

He said there was a lot of technical reports. I mean, computers were on the rise too. They produce a lot of data, but unless someone walked in the door, you weren't going to see them and that was Bell's opinion anyway.

MM:

That's correct. Back at that time, we had a project called—or a program called the Great Plains Program. It was a conservation program and we offered cautionary moneys with federal dollars that would match the rancher's money. And to be eligible for that when it started, well or when I was there, not when it started, they were up to a ten year contract, and the only way a rancher could get into that was they had to sign a ten year contract to do a complete conservation plan. They had to agree to fix all the problems on their ranch, and so by necessity, that generally meant several years of working with them before you enter a contractual arrangement to make sure everybody liked each other, and you agreed on that because when the contract was signed, they

did it. There was enough money in those contracts to go quite a ways to help those ranchers and that program was so successful, and we didn't do a lot of them because the need. There was a financial commitment on the rancher's part, and a contractual arrangement on their part. So we wouldn't do a lot of them, but we would meet with those people at least a minimum of once a year to go over that plan and see how it was going, help them schedule it, supervise the installation of practices, coach them on it, change it if it needed to be changed. So we developed very, very close relationships with those ranchers and farmers. It was not just a ranch program. And so we had that, and then when that program went away, it went to this program that we're in now and we kind of figured the foundation was crumbling when that happened, because we went away from being total conservation planners with the ranchers to giving them a little bit of this. Giving everybody a little bit and by the sheer volume when it changed to that and tied it to the commodity programs. Instead of writing ten or fifteen contracts a year, you're writing hundreds of contracts a year. You don't have time to sit down there and talk to everyone and see. You know, a rancher might come and say, I want to dig a tank out here, dig a pond. And we didn't take the time to say, Why do you want that pond? What's your purpose for it? Because many times you ask people that and you get right in, you go through the whole discussion and find out well they really don't need that. They need something else. And so that's what we did in the Great Plains Program. They come and say, We want to spray brush. We say, Why do you want to do that? We asked that question. Then they said, Well, because that's what everybody says we ought to do. Well, that's the wrong reason, you know? So we coach with them about wildlife and leaving this, and doing that, and teaching them what the brush is. The good, the bad, and the ugly. Pretty soon, you got a really workable plan that they're proud of when they're through with it and other people want to do it. So people would come in and we had ranchers tell us—one of the guy's name was Bill Tullos. Ranches out west of San Angelo. He's still alive today. Boy, if you could get that guy, there's another guy. He'll tell you about Rocky Creek. T-u-l-l-o-s. Bill Tullos. Out near west of San Angelo. Long-time member, but he told us one time, he said, "I got into the Great Plains Program for one reason. The money's good. I like the money, but the reason I got into it is you guys are so busy when I'm in a GP contractor, a Great Plains Contract, you are under contract to come out to my place and help me." He wasn't the only one that's told us that, but he was the first. I never thought about that. So the money was good for him, but what was the most important thing was having someone that was training to come out and put their ideas with his ideas to improve his place, and I thought that spoke well. I hadn't heard anybody say that about these new programs. I mean, they're okay, but they give a part of a program. They're giving—there's a lot of work being done that's good. Don't get me wrong on that, but if a person comes in and they're an inexperienced landowner or they haven't got their plan really well formulated, they can—they may not make the best use of the money, and there's been a lot of good work done. I don't mean that, but we have gone away from the ability to council with a few good people well, very well. The people that taught other people, that multiplier effect, to just they come in the door, sign here, here's your money, go get it. You know? We're trying to fight back. We're trying to go back to that, but it was—we're just not having—and the other thing is

about—my era was the last generation to come from the farm in the ranch. Soon after that—we still get a few. Still get a few. But it's just following the demographics of the whole industry. There's just not that many kids living on ranches anymore. People have bought land that weren't ranchers. They're new to the land type people, and each has its good and bad side, but there're just not that many people that grew up having the benefits. You asked about what we did growing up, I took it for granted like my son with the engines, took for granted going out and hauling hay and chopping horehound, and spraying mesquite, and all those things that were mundane. Carrying goats in in an ice storm on top of the saddle, that kind of stuff. But it prepared me so well to go out and help other ranchers that had done the same thing, and anybody, if you have a tie or a common bond with them, your trust develops that much quicker. So if you go out and you've had some experiences, then your credibility is going up. You still have to prove yourself.

RW:

Everybody does.

MM:

Everybody has to prove themselves. And they ask you questions. I know something about ranchers. They'll ask you questions and they dang well know the answer and they seem to want to know two things. One is, do you know what you're talking about? And number two is, will you lie to them? Because there's a certain segment of people that don't like to admit that they don't know something, so they just tell you anything. Well, you don't want to be doing that in our business, and when a rancher knows that you're prone to doing that, then they're through with you. They're not going to come see you again, unless they can hold you at arm's length and it's so hard in the AG community to regain a lost trust. It really is. It's just so hard. It is everywhere, but it's so hard with them because a handshake and a look in the eyes is a big thing. Now, we also—the other side of that coin, we have a lot of young folks now that are very bright. A lot of coming in with master's degrees and they're really good. They're sharp. They learn fast, but they don't have a lot of experience, but they also are working with landowners that don't have a lot of experience, so they get in those kinds of bonds.

RW:

I never thought about that.

MM:

That we don't get. And so there kind of is—I guess it's working. It's just change is always here. It's always changed, but that was a very, very significant turning point for us in 1985. It just really was, and we have only, in the last couple of years in Texas, rebuilt our grazing land skill people to the level that it was prior to that as a percentage of the workforce. Not the number of people, but as a percentage of the work force. When I started working for the agency in April of

'74, I think we had around 1400 employees statewide. Now, we've got about 753, I think. So in thirty years, we've cut it in half and it's going to be cut again next year. So it stretches your resources and we were having to use—we've gone more to using technology to replace lost resources, which is good in one way, but if you don't know the basis behind the technology, then if you don't have the technology, then you don't know what to do, so we're struggling with that. It's a new identity for us.

RW:

Well, as the technology changed, obviously, like I mentioned before, eighties, you got computers coming in. How did that affect everything? Obviously now, I'm sure it's everything.

MM:

It was—turn that off just a minute.

RW:

Sure. [Pause in Recording]

MM:

Back to computers, Wilson Skating was the chief of the Soil Conservation Service at that time. Wilson—it's sort of ironic—Wilson was probably the one that was the most biggest advocate for range that we've ever had. Rangeland and rangeland management, but he came at a time when the 1985 Farm Bill came around, and he probably, in a lot of ways, had no choices but to do what he did with the agency. And with the loss of personnel and other agencies moving to technology, you're almost forced to jump in and go to the dance. So he was wrestling with computers and whether to do them or not to do them and this kind of thing, and he was—I guess in Washington, they were pressuring him to go into a contract with the Forest Service and do a joint purchase, and this kind of thing. Wilson came out to far West Texas in the eighties when all of this was going on, and we used to give special tours to dignitaries out at the University of Texas lands near Fort Stockton because they had an experimental vineyard out there. And so they started the West Texas wine industry in the Saint Geneva wine is on that property. That was a project that grew out of that University of Texas research on UT lands out there, and they leased that land from the University of Texas, but the starter was the University of Texas and their experimental vineyard. So we used to take our dignitaries out there and give them a little wine tasting. A little—the Sunday tours, we called it. I don't remember the dignitary now that was out there, but anyway, we're in a van going back to San Angelo and Wilson was talking about these computers, and all the story about whether we ought to or ought not to, and whoever was in the van—I don't remember even who all was in it. I was a little guy. I was sitting in the back, and he was talking about the pressure and finally, he said, "Well, we're just going to do it," and he pulled over to—out there at—I can't remember that old town. There's a little mountain out there. A round top mountain right outside of Fort Stockton. Barstow or—I can't think of it.



Right under Interstate 10. All it is a gas stop and this little mountain out there. Squirrel Mountain, Squirrel Top Mountain [01:45:09]. Anyway, he pulls in. This is before the days of cellphone, and he just pulls into the little convenience store there on the edge of the interstate, and he calls Washington and says, "Buy those computers." That's where it happened was right there. So they did. And so they shipped us all those computers. We didn't know anything about them. We had no clue. There was no training. It was helter skelter, and some people really picked up on computers fairly quick, but I guess it all happened so quick, it just overwhelmed everybody. Nobody had any experience, but we did it, and started going and building from there and then first, one thing led to another and said, well we can do this. We can do that. Pretty soon it just escalated until we tried to structure everything to where it went into a computer, and the change, which is something we all have to learn to say we're going to adopt change as normal. Rather, not change is normal. That's just the way it is. But we went through so many different generations of computer programs, people were always learning one. Forget that, learn a new one. Forget that, learn a new one. So we were almost always off balance and we're right at that stage again, but GPS's came along and we use GPS's to help us navigate and they're really pretty good. You can find points. You can go back to those points. We have them in huge data bases at reference things, and that was a problem we had early on was getting that done efficiently without GPS's. But the GPS's and the art maps and all these things we can do now, and I'm going in to Monday to Temple to get some training on a thing called PCR [Polymerase Chain Reaction]. It's a statistical program to help us group vegetation and soils together. It's even so complex, we've never going to do it before. We just kind of look at it and say, yeah, that looks about right and we go on with it. These ETSD's [?] [01:47:07], we're now going to use this electronic tool or be taught to use it. I'm skeptical whether I'm going to ever be able to do it. But it's to help us electronically. It's been demonstrated and a guy showed us in five minutes, that it would've taken me three weeks to do this with a regular calculator, and I can do it in five minutes and I can change one thing and I can do it in another minute, and it would take me another three weeks to analyze that. So that's the good thing, but it takes a specialized skill because that's a skill unto itself, and so that's what we're drawn sometimes. You have to choose, are you going to be a computer person or are you going to be a field person? And that's where our agency is in conflict, I guess, at this point. We're trying to find that balance. We're trying to find it. We're doing training. We're still kind of getting back to doing that. There's so many people in the agency want us to be back in the field, and so we're trying to do it. It's hard to do it. It just all depends on what Congress is doing. Another big difference is seeing things shift from the agency being given money and you guys do with it what you think is best, to orders coming from Congress and from the White House directly, say, here's the money. Here's what you're going to do with it, and it all started in 1985 and just progressed to that point. We're also seeing a lot of our leadership, as we're sharing jobs with other agencies, we're getting people that come into our agency that have not had the agency experience and not that that's not all bad. But in an agency that serves a population of America is very traditional. Very trust. Very stable. To these people coming out, they've never ridden a tractor. They've never ridden a cow. They've



never roped a horse, you know? They pass policy. These are policy makers, and when policy makers come out and don't have some sense of that, sometimes what happens in Washington, doesn't fit very good out on the ground, and they depend on us sometimes to do it, but sometimes, they'll put too many constraints for political reasons on it. It just doesn't fit very well out here, and so a lot of compromises are being made. So we spend a lot of time now trying to find those compromises, I guess. Yeah. So that's what's happened to those that used to work with an old pickup. We used to have green—in the fifties, everybody that worked for the NRCS—I wouldn't say everybody, but many of them were ex-military people. They came with the military. Many of them were officers in the military, and so they were used to a line staff organization, and very frugal people. Drove green pickups, three speed, no air condition, no radio, nothing. Now, my dang pickup that I drive has got a CD in it, and a plugin that I plug my pod in and going down the road. Four-wheel drive, rare back, I mean, it's just—I never would've believed that our agency would be driving vehicles like that. Another thing that's just happened to me recently. Used to, because of this conservatism, if you were caught near your home, you could be reprimanded severely. Now, we're having to explain ourselves why we don't work at home. That's why I was at the other house. I had my office down there. I'm in the process of moving up here. So it's just different because a lot of people are—in my particular job, I could be anywhere. I really don't have to have an office. I still keep one up at Berny, because I'm required to do so, but our field people have to be in the office because they meet people on a regular basis. My work now is done teleworking with computers, email, telephone. What do you call it? Net meetings?

RW:  
Yeah.

MM:  
And those kind of things. I still travel. I still do some travel because when you're in a field position, you have to train in the field, but a lot of it I do just by teleconferences, net meetings. So I can be anywhere in the United States or in the world. I get—have access to the computer. So our agency has made some adjustments to accommodate those things. So there's been a lot of change that way.

RW:  
Wow. I mean, that's what I hear from everybody in it. But everybody's got a little different story to tell about it. Well, I've covered the things that I had written down, but is there something else that sprung to mind that you'd want on the record or that you think's important? You'll remember fifteen of them after I walk out the door. I guarantee. Everybody does.

MM:

Yeah, I don't know what to—yeah, I've just—I've started jokingly, but very serious, said that I got this job thirty-eight years ago until something better came along, and everything built. Sometimes not by my design, but by things that happened to me. You know, raised where I was in the family that I was. The people that were there that you grow up that kind of help coach you. Sometimes kick you when you needed it. Shape you. And then you go off to Texas Tech and that turned out to be better than my wildest dream. It was a good experience. Maybe I'd had it A&M. I don't know. I don't think so. Maybe UT. I don't know. It just is—but you know, it fit for me up there. Met my wife, you know, that kind of stuff, and so that then prepared me to be in a position to work with this, which is something I kind of always thought about for a long time. I envisioned myself—I'd like to be some \_\_\_\_\_ [01:52:39] to work with people. This has afforded that. And also, I still focus—I've been a technical guy. I like doing plant identification and that kind of thing. So it's blended all that and keep my foot in ranching, the ranching industry. Obviously, I'm not a producer. I don't even pretend to be, but my dad was the last one in our generation that will be a rancher. We're landowners. My sons will be fifth generation landowners someday, but to be ranching, no. That era is gone for us, for our family. But so I feel like I was the first one to have to leave the ranch fully. My dad did at the end. He had to have something else to keep us going. I mean, that's all there was to it. The harsh realities of a small place. My son did—he interviewed my aunt. She was the only the living relative left on dad's side of the family at that time, and she was in her eighties. His class project was to interview her about the Depression, and I'm glad he did. We've got that paper here somewhere because she told us things I hadn't thought about. She said—told him, said, “Well the Depression didn't affect us all that much. When we were growing up there at Rochelle, daddy, we raised chickens, hogs. Raised cows, oats, corn, wheat, and cotton. We picked cotton. Nobody had any money. We didn't have any money, but we raised our own food, and we bartered, we traded. Really, we did okay. Everybody was broke, but we did okay.” Then I think if I was forced [laughter] into having to raise my own food, I'd like to think that I could, but I couldn't. You know, that skill, that skill of survival. Most of us are getting too used to the surroundings out here. We really are. So I don't know. I just thought that was interesting that they were self-sustaining pretty much at that time. My dad's generation was the last one to be able to do some of that. Heck, we had chickens, hogs, sheep, cattle, and goat. We had a lot of stuff. Even raised corn. Sugarcane. Had to raise a little—it was a forest type of sugarcane because I remember peeling it, and cut our fingers. But you know, things like that you took for granted at the time, and that's what I tell our boys. They come up and they hunt, and they grouch about having to fix a fence. I said, “Well, look guys, there's less than 2 percent of the world can do what you do out here on this place, or the United States, I guess. Less than 2 percent have the opportunity you have here to do that. Never take it for granted.” And I don't think they do, but they'll never have the experiences I had, and it's just what they have to do is take their life experiences, and put it with what's going on today, and go with it. All of us. That's what everybody's done through time. So anyway, I'm talking too much.

RW:

No, no. Well, like I said, that's what I had so I guess I'll cut it off right here, but thanks for—

*[End of Recording]*

