

**Oral History Interview of  
Elvin Wilson**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson  
August 25, 2015  
Hereford, Texas**

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

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## Interview Series Background:

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

## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Elvin Wilson. Wilson discusses his life as a farmer in West Texas and his involvement in the National Farmers Organization and the American Agriculture Movement. Wilson also recounts his experience in the navy during World War Two.

**Length of Interview:** 01:42:01

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### Keywords

American Agriculture Movement, National Farmers Organization, Hereford, Crosbyton, agriculture, United States Navy

**Andy Wilkinson (AW):**

This is the twenty-fifth of August. Andy Wilkinson with—I saw it said Thomas Wilson. Is that...?

**Elvin Wilson (EW):**

That's my first name. I go by Elvin, but it might have Thomas there.

AW:

My first name is not the one I go by either, so you and I share a common—

EW:

Yeah, that was on my Medicare and everything: Thomas, and they've got it down there.

AW:

Let me start off with just one real quick little bit of information on the background. So it's Thomas Elvin. Is that E-l-v-i-n?

EW:

Yes sir.

AW:

What is your date of birth?

EW:

3/23/1926.

AW:

Great, and where? Where were you born?

EW:

Here in Hereford at the farm.

AW:

Oh really? What direction out of town was it?

EW:

It was ten miles west of Hereford.

AW:

Where were your folks from before they got here?

EW:

They were originally from Crosbyton, Abilene.

AW:

Oh really? Were they farmers there?

EW:

Yes.

AW:

Did you grow up on the farm?

EW:

Yes, started driving tractors before I was ten years old. You know, I was about six when he put me on there just as a [unintelligible] (1:46). Anyway, that's when I started.

AW:

What crops did you grow?

EW:

Milo, corn, we tried some potatoes. I grew potatoes once here, and wheat, mainly. Mainly, it used to be wheat, and then we got milo, and then we started growing corn.

AW:

Now, was it dryland in those years?

EW:

It was to start with. Dad built his first irrigation well in 1937.

AW:

Really?

EW:

Yeah.

AW:

Was that a little early for this area? That sounds a little early to me.



EW:

Yes it was early, earliest one on it. In that ten miles there was only one other irrigation well between our place and town. There was a few irrigation wells around, but Dad drilled that one in 1937.

AW:

Which is in the Dust Bowl?

EW:

That's after the Dust Bowl. We went through the Dirty Thirties back in '33 and '34, whenever they had bad dust storms. Anyway, I know that bad one had come in on Sunday and—

AW:

'35.

EW:

—yup, and it rolling up. I had some greyhound dogs out rabbit hunting and about a mile from home when that thing hit. These dogs catch rabbits, and they had a bounty on ears, so you get a penny a piece for rabbit ears. So I cut their ears off, and I bring them to the courthouse here in Hereford, get a penny a piece for them, a little money.

AW:

How many rabbits would you get in an outing with those dogs?

EW:

Oh, about four or five a day.

AW:

Yeah?

EW:

Yeah, enough that I could go to the picture show on Saturday. (laughter)

AW:

So you were a mile and a half from home when the high roller came in?

EW:

Yeah, I didn't know what—you know, at that time they was talking about the end of the world, and I thought that was it probably. Anyway, I followed them dogs home, we hit the fence, you couldn't see nothing, and hit the fence, and I followed them dogs to get home. You couldn't

hardly breathe; it's dirty, and it's still to start with, you know just rolling still. And then that wind hit; I don't know. Back then we didn't know how fast it was blowing, but it was bad, and it blowed for three days and nights. Anyway, it covered up the fences and blowed out everything.

AW:

I've spoken with people who've said that inside the building you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. Was it that bad?

EW:

Well, it got dark, yeah, it got dark. Of course we didn't have refrigeration, and what foods you had out on the table you had to put a blanket or a sheet over it or something, get dirt in it. Them old houses back then didn't have the weather strip or the double windows in it. Dirt would come in. Yeah, it was tough. I could remember most of it.

AW:

Did you have brothers or sisters?

EW:

Yeah, I had three brothers and four sisters.

AW:

Oh gosh, what are their names?

EW:

Okay, Estelle.

AW:

E-s-t-e—

EW:

t-e-l-l-e. Polyene, Gertrude, and then I'll start with the boys: Grady, Jr.

AW:

Grady? That was your father's name?

EW:

Donald, Larry. Where are we?

AW:

Junior, Donald, and Larry.



EW:

Yeah, it doesn't get me in there. I'm in here somewhere.

AW:

Between Gertrude and Junior?

EW:

Between Gertrude and Donald.

AW:

So you weren't the youngest, but you weren't the oldest.

EW:

I'm about in the middleways. My sister, Estelle, she's 101, and still living.

AW:

Really? Where does she live?

EW:

Sturgis, South Dakota.

AW:

Wow, that's a long way from here.

EW:

Yeah it is.

AW:

Is she the only one of your siblings that's still alive?

EW:

Yeah, Gertrude and Junior and Polyene are all gone. I'll be ninety in March. Anyway, they're all gone. Brother in South Dakota bought Dad's ranches up there—Larry.

AW:

Your dad had ranches up there?

EW:

Yeah, of course we farmed here and had grassland here, and in 1948, I guess, '49, we went up to South Dakota pheasant hunting and liked that country, and then he kept going back till he bought

a ranch up there, and then the kids all moved up there except me. Then I bought a ranch in 1954 up there, and I've run cattle and sheep, cows and sheep. And I moved back to Friona in 1960 and started farming again here.

AW:

So did you sell out your place here? When everybody moved to South Dakota did you sell your place here?

EW:

Yeah, yeah, and I bought a ranch up there and come back and bought some places here.

AW:

Just out of curiosity, why did you move back to farm?

EW:

I don't know, I kind of kid about it. I said I got homesick for some Texans. People I know, friends, I missed them pretty bad. Up there on a ranch it takes a long time to get acquainted in that country.

(Jared White, Elvin's grandson, enters)

AW:

What part of South Dakota were you in for your ranching?

EW:

Up north of Rapid City. Up pretty close to Mount Rushmore.

AW:

Yeah, that is pretty country. But you're right—it's pretty—there's not a whole lot of people scattered around there. So you sold out in South Dakota, and then came back down to Friona?

EW:

Friona, yeah.

AW:

And were you growing about the same things? Corn and milo and—?

EW:

Yup.

AW:

One quick question: when you were—when the family was here in the thirties, you said you had some grassland here, too. Were you running a cow-calf operation?

EW:

Dad was, yeah.

AW:

Just out of curiosity, what breed?

EW:

Hereford.

AW:

Herefords? Kind of what I thought, just was interested. So you're back in Friona. Now had you married?

EW:

Yeah, we got married in '44.

AW:

In '44? Oh, so before you went up to the —

EW:

Yeah, I got married and went into the service.

AW:

What was your wife's maiden name?

EW:

Barbara Robinson.

AW:

And was her family from here, too?

EW:

Yes.

AW:

You went into the service in '44 also?

EW:

Yup.

AW:

What branch did you go into?

EW:

Navy.

AW:

Where did you serve?

EW:

Johnson Island, Pearl Harbor, mostly. Johnson Island is about— I think they said it's 850 miles southwest of Pearl Harbor. It's only a mile long and a half-mile wide. (laughter)

AW:

Was it an airfield?

EW:

Yeah, it's an airfield and base.

AW:

So you weren't on a ship, you were on a—

EW:

I volunteered to go aboard ship, and that's the ship I got. (laughter)

AW:

You can't get seasick on that kind of ship. So how long were you in the service?

EW:

'44 and '45.

AW:

Just the two years?

EW:

Yeah.

AW:

Because the war was over with. So you came back to Herford because your family hadn't moved yet. Okay, got it. So in 1960, you're back in Friona, and you're farming again. You said you had some cows then as well?

EW:

Yup.

AW:

What got you into the—so that was sometime before the American Ag Movement and the Farm Crisis. What was farming like in this part of the world in the sixties?

EW:

Well, it was like always, it was just nip-n-tuck, pay for your equipment, and property, and stuff. It just was like always. You go in and say, "What do you give me for my crops?"

AW:

You didn't get to negotiate your expenses ever.

EW:

No.

EW:

Never, reminded me of a story Dad told me one time. He said this—you know, we used to take cream and stuff where we bought groceries and eggs, and they bought them. So this lady took the cream in and asked him, he said, "What will you give me?" And he told her, and she bought groceries, and the little boy told his mom, "That's the smartest man I ever saw." She said, "How come you think he's so smart?" "Well, he knew what all your stuff was worth, and his too, and you didn't know nothing." (laughter) So that's kind of the way it was. You take what you can get.

AW:

Yeah, I know it. It's been one of the problems about farming for a long time. By the time you were back in '60, was the drought of the fifties over with? Or was it still pretty dry?

EW:

It was dry. Of course this is dry country.

AW:

Yeah.

EW:

A new kind of submarine [spelling?], but we had irrigation wells. The place I had had I think I round up five irrigation wells on it, and then I rented some more. Finally after a while, had fifteen irrigation wells on it—on rented land. Yeah, it was pretty good, was back in the sixties, made pretty good crops under irrigation. A lot of work, and it's a whole lot harder than it is now. We had to dig ditches and a lot of shovel work.

AW:

Did you row-water then?

EW:

Yes sir.

AW:

Having to move those siphons.

EW:

You know, we used to water wheat flat, and you had to have the flattest land you've got for wheat. You couldn't grow wheat and irrigate on a hill. And I measured and measured forty-inch rows and that band-run drill I had, fit them rows two rows on top, two rows on the bottom. So I listed it in forty inch rows. I planted in those listed rows, and I could water anywhere I wanted to. Everybody said, "How are you going to harvest it?" He said, "They're going to be some way up here, some down here." I said, "I don't know; I just have to see." It all kind of leveled out.

AW:

Oh it did?

EW:

Yeah, it did. Bottom caught up to the top. Anyway, after that, year after year, more and more and more people did it that way because they had land that they couldn't irrigate in wheat because you couldn't flat bar it.

AW:

Right, of course now with center pivots they're back to wanting it flat, right?

EW:

Wasn't no center pivots. There wasn't any telephones to tell them to start. Dad put me out there with a shovel, just lead it around. He used to say that he'd drive a tractor all day and watch that water, and at night he'd go lay in that road when that water got there, it'd wake him up. He'd go change it.

AW:  
Really?

EW:  
That happened. (laughter) Yeah, it was quite different.

AW:  
The water was good though, wasn't it?

EW:  
Oh man, we had water just—those wells pumped a thousand gallons a minute.

AW:  
How far down did you have to go to hit water?

EW:  
The water level was about 90 foot, but we put them in at 160 feet. Now then it's two or three hundred feet.

AW:  
Before you can get a taste of it.

EW:  
And then you don't get much.

AW:  
Yeah, well that's something. What developed in your awareness about what we called the Farm Crisis of the seventies?

EW:  
The first time I ever had anything to do with it, a group of us went to Austin to see the governor about it, tell him our problem.

AW:  
About what year would that have been?

EW:  
That would have been—



AW:

In the mid-seventies, '74 or '75?

EW:

Yeah, somewhere along in there.

AW:

And do you remember who the governor was? Briscoe perhaps or—?

EW:

No, I can't think right now.

AW:

I can look that up. Well what even occasioned you or inspired you to go to Austin to talk to the governor? What was the series of events?

EW:

We didn't get much done there in Austin.

AW:

I mean, what made you think to do down there? What were you hoping to get done?

EW:

I went down there with John Pitman, which had a big elevator here, and some elevator people. And we just went down and told them what our problem was.

AW:

Which was?

EW:

Cheap prices.

AW:

Cheap prices, and were there supports?

EW:

No.

AW:

No supports, right.

EW:

No insurance, no supports, not anything like that.

AW:

And the cheap prices, were they being driven by imports?

EW:

Well I don't know if you'd say that. Of course, I'm sure they had some, but we didn't know much about imports. You know, the cattle raiser at the feed yards, they want cheap grain. Everybody wants cheap grain. Of course, we had all of it, so that's where it come in "what'll you give me." We was trying to get something done about that. We didn't get anything done in Austin I don't think, might have a little bit.

AW:

Yeah, the state government doesn't have a whole lot of ability. So what was the next thing that happened?

EW:

Well, the next go at it was NFO come in here and told us we needed to organize, and we had several meetings, so we started organizing NFO. I was president of the NFO in Parmer County, Friona. And we sold West Plains Grain, and we made a contract with them. They'd always told us you get enough together, you name your price. We went out to get contracts, and before we got that contract, Cargill and Con—they told us milo was going to be \$1.60. And we knew that wasn't going to work for us.

AW:

At \$1.60 on the sale side, what do you figure it cost you to raise that milo?

EW:

Well I had it all down once. I think it was \$35-\$40 an acre. That won't buy the seed for corn now, but that was several plowings, and planting, and harvesting. Anyway, if you're renting you pay a third rent and, and you pay that third expense, and you haven't got much left. Pay the rent, and go to the bank and start another year.

AW:

That's what we did when I was growing up with cotton. Was there a lot of interest among farmers in Parmer County in the NFO?

EW:

Yeah, we had a pretty good group in Parmer County. Of course you had Farwood and Bovina, and down that-a-way. And they come from Muleshoe, too. Anyway, had pretty good interest. We held meetings probably at least once a week to try to get things done. We decided trying to sell something, several of us, we were looking for place and talking to feed yards and talking to elevators, and most of them didn't want to talk to us because we was trying to raise the price. But West Friona Grain did, and we sold them a hundred million pounds of milo, and I didn't know that was so much milo. That's a lot of loads. (laughter)

AW:

Especially if you had to do it a shovel at a time.

EW:

Milo was a \$1.60, and we sold that for \$2.00.

AW:

That's a big difference.

EW:

That is a big difference. You know, everybody wanted a part of that contract, and we started having to turn people away because they had already signed up enough people to fill a contract. You know, when it come time—of course those other elevators, they will hurt you, so they raised the price to \$2.10. We had a lot—not a lot—but some said the bankers told me that I had to have that \$2.10, or I just got to have that other ten cents; I can get it.

AW:

So the people that have already committed to the—?

EW:

Yes. You tell that banker, you know, you've got a contract; you going to stay with it or not? Well, some of them didn't, and some of them that lived—well I know a guy that lived over in Nazareth, he stayed right in there, had an old truck, tire wasn't too good, but he'd haul grain over, orange soda pop every load, go out and get another. And he kept up till he got all his crop over there.

AW:

Do you remember who that was?

EW:

No sir.

AW:

Probably a Birkenfeld or a Holting, one of those.

EW:

I really don't know. Then we had—

AW:

Yeah, you can keep talking.

EW:

That contract was hard to fill. Of course, people from Kansas, it raised the price of their grain too, so at one time they called and said they'd bring some grain from Kansas. One day they brought sixty-eight truckloads, little trucks—anything they had to haul it in. They unloaded them at West Friona Grain. Then after that, we all got together from Kansas and ordered them all a chicken fried steak down at Kasin House. We'd come in and eat supper and talked about it and how much we appreciate them helping us out. We worked on that thing, trying to fill it. I had two combines sitting out there, and my milo was already ready, but I was working on it, and I had never done that before in my life, let it sit. I did. Yeah, finally filled that contract; they said that was enough, but they wanted—from the start, they said, "Now, if we were contracted, we'll have to contract with you next year because everybody will be mad at us." That's fine, we'll contract who they'll have and maybe next year just do milo. So the next year come along and we got a little smarter about that, and we contracted. And you know, if milo went up to \$2.20, we got \$2.30. We got to get a dime over whatever the market is. So that wasn't hard to fill that one; people are going to fill that. But we had NFO—the national one—come down here and organize us. They made us think they knew everything. Well, I got in trouble with this contract, and they say all we have to do is just call us. I call them, ask them about what to do. Well, we never did sell any crops before. We sold hogs and milk, never had anything to do. I said, "I thought you said all we had to do is call you?" (laughter) "We don't know; you have to figure it out for yourself." Anyway, the farmers that brought crops in took \$3/\$100 to keep for the organization. I figured, Well, they're not going to help us. They don't know nothing. They're not going to do anything about it. They're supposed to send that three cents to the national deal. I said, "they didn't help us a bit, didn't do nothing." So I said, "Let's give it back to the farmer," which they did. But anyway, that done us up with the national. We found out that they weren't real honest with us. Then American Ag come along.

AW:

Okay real quickly, about what years were these two years were you working with West Grain and the NFO?

EW:

Probably '76 and '77, somewhere around there.

AW:

That's what I would've thought, but I wanted to just double check that with you. Okay, so how did you learn about American Ag?

EW:

We had people from Colorado.

AW:

Campo, Springfield.

EW:

They'd come down and visit with us, and we decided that's what we needed to do.

AW:

You know, the interviews that I've done with the people in Campo and Springfield and a lot of other people, they talk a lot more about organizing and working at the national level, a little something different than what you were doing with organizing your folks in Parmer County and then working with West Grain Elevator, that's a real hands on—this is, We're going to sell it right here locally. And you actually did something. You caused the price to go up for everybody. (laughter) For everybody on that side, but I guess the farmers weren't interested.

EW:

"What are we going to do next?"

AW:

What I was getting at—did the American Ag people coming down from Colorado—did they talk about action on a local level like that as well, or was it still pretty much—?

EW:

The best I remember they did. They'd tell us kind of what was going on, what they wanted to do. Of course, the Washington deal come along, the tractor, and Golden Stripe, and all that stuff, it come along. That's American Ag.

AW:

Did anybody in Parmer County talk about trying to do a strike? I know they're pretty serious about it up in southwest Kansas and eastern Colorado.



EW:

Oh yeah, we all talked about striking.

AW:

How were you going to do that? That was always my question.

EW:

Well, just not grow crops. They have no crops, let the bastards starve. I saw one bumper sticker like that. But that wasn't what we wanted to do.

AW:

Plus it's kind of hard; if you strike at the bakery you work at, you do it one day, but when you decide not to plant a crop, you don't the next day say, "Well, okay I'm going to go ahead and plant it."

EW:

You ain't going to plant it when there was snow on the ground.

AW:

Yeah. (laughter)

EW:

Most everybody planted anyway, and they told us they was. Anyway, that's kind of the way that was. Most people did what they said they wanted to, and input into it, had a good group of people. After getting out of NFO and getting into American Ag, we'd learned some stuff, what to do and what not to. Of course then we went to Washington. I didn't drive a tractor to Washington. I went but I—

AW:

Now, did you go the year before when no one was driving tractors, they just went to Washington in '78. There was a big march in D.C., but that was the year before they drove the tractors.

EW:

I think, yeah. Best I remember, we went up there to just talk to our legislator people. What's his name? Bob Dole?

AW:

Well Bob Dole is from Kansas.

EW:

Yeah, we visited with him a lot. He was really for us, and he was trying to help us. But anyway, we got to these people there in Washington. We told them we weren't second-class citizens. That we liked our towns, our churches, our schools, and we weren't second-class. You know, we wanted to try to be treated like first-class citizens, not second-class, which didn't sit too good with them I guess, I don't know. I remember them telling us that "You should have gotten somebody to come up here instead of y'all, to do this."

AW:

Hire a lobbyist.

EW:

Lobbyist, that's what I was trying to think of, and do that instead. I said, "Well, we've been doing that awhile, so we come up here to do it our self." Yeah, can you turn that off for a minute?

AW:

You bet. I will pause this—hold on one second. It won't take me—

Jared White (JW):

Look, I've got to go. I've got to get to work. I just wanted to come by and make sure—I can sure sign your papers for you.

EW:

Glad you did, Jared.

AW:

Yeah, let me do that while—before you leave.

JW:

Have a good day.

EW:

I will

AW:

Mr. Wilson I was just telling Jared, and I'm just going to put Elvin Wilson and Jared White. And you can just sign right on this top line, and we'll get your grandad to sign along with you.



JW:

Where do you live?

AW:

I'm in Lubbock with Texas Tech.

JW:

Okay, cool

AW:

Let me give you a card in case you have a question.

EW:

You at that museum there?

JW:

We got two kids at school down there.

AW:

Oh do you? What are they studying?

JW:

Well, my boy just is finishing at Rawls Business School. He'll graduate next fall, and my daughter will go into nursing school next fall. She's just started

AW:

Good. Well, you tell them if they need somebody, they are welcome to call me.

JW:

Sure. Yeah, they like it down there.

AW:

Yeah, well we do it. It's a good school.

JW:

Oh man, they've done a lot.

AW:

Well, we're in the best spot we've ever been in. We've got a great chancellor, Bob Duncan is incredible. We've got a very good president, provost. We've just got a really good group of people, you know, right now all here at the same time. It's a real good deal for us.

JW:

Well, nice to meet you, Andy.

AW:

Nice to meet you. Pardon my not getting up.

JW:

That's okay. Y'all have a good one.

AW:

Thanks for stopping by.

JW:

Sure.

AW:

And give us a call if you need something.

JW:

What will y'all do with this? Y'all write something or—?

AW:

Well, what we do—no—we're an archive, so we collect this material and we put it there for researchers. The whole topic of farming and the American Ag Movement is a really interesting subject, so we make that available. That's why you sign that is so people can listen to this and hear the information—something as simple as talking about how many gallons you were getting out of those wells. That information's not just readily available, so that's really important, important stuff, and we really hope that 200 years from now that somebody can sit down and listen to Elvin Wilson in his own voice talking about it and not have to read what somebody else says about it.

JW:

Yup, well good deal.

AW:

So that's it.

JW:

Have a good one.

AW:

So it strikes me that one of the big differences between American Ag and the other farm groups at the time, Farmers Union, or the NFO, or any of those was that American Ag kind of grew from the bottom up, instead of from the top down.

EW:

Yeah, it started in Colorado, and that touched us, and we started it, and it seemed like the thing that we should do. We were going to help our self, instead of asking, "What'll you give me?" We was going to put a price on it. And we did. And that grain over there that we sold, put a price on it, they bought it, and that helped some. But NFO—it was NFO went I sold that grain. Like I say, they didn't help me none; they didn't know what to do. For instance, the elevator called me and said that—the elevator always paid for the harvest, his crew, and took it out of the grain. We had the grain, and the company said, "What are you going to do about that?" I said, "We can't pay his harvest. If he's got to do it that way, you've got to do it that way." But he wanted us to pay the harvest of it because that's the way he'd always done it. The elevators used to do that kind of stuff. So I guess they went ahead with them and did it because we couldn't.

AW:

Yeah, because you already had yours harvested.

EW:

Well we was harvesting, yeah.

AW:

That's what I mean, but somebody else wasn't paying for it.

EW:

That's right, that's right.

AW:

Now, pardon me for interrupting you again, but was West Grain—West Friona Grain, was it a co-op?

EW:

It was a farm owned group.

AW:

Yeah, a farm owned group.

EW:

Yeah.

AW:

So that probably explains one of the reasons they had paid for the harvesting. Now, the other elevators, though, that were trying to put the squeeze on you, were they also farmer owned, or were they—?

EW:

No, there was Continental, Cargill, and other elevators in that area over there. They just owned by different people.

AW:

Right, independent, as opposed to a co-op.

EW:

Yeah, independent. It was quite a deal, get all that done. We worked at it pretty hard.

AW:

Did you feel like your trip to Washington accomplished anything?

EW:

Yeah it did. It made them aware of what we were up against. You know, they didn't know, really. Bob Dole went with us, was pretty good. He told a lot of people, too. I appreciated him. We went to a meeting with him in Louisville, Kentucky, I believe. We met with him, and he stayed there all day, and he hardly took a drink of water and listened to us all day, didn't go to dinner or nothing; I appreciated him. When we got to Washington, he'd come see us and he said, "Well let me get go get some more of these guys right around here to hear your story." But he didn't find anybody that wanted to do it. To answer your question about why we went into American Ag—it was another way for us to do it, another way for us to make known that our prices were too cheap, and we couldn't live with it. And they're telling me that right now, today. I had a guy yesterday tell me that four dollar wheat wasn't going to work. Made a good wheat crop, but he said, "I'm just storing it. I'm not going to sell it for four dollars." He said, "I sold wheat for four dollars thirty years ago." That's kind of the way it is. We got up there and asked

him, "We want our price." And they said, "You know, if we get that done, it's going to cost the government fifty-five billion dollars." "What do you mean?" "Well that's what it's going to cost." "How could it do that?" Unless you've got it already sold to the foreign countries and stuff, if you've already got it sold, know what you've got for it, they never would admit they'd done that, but I think they had. Anyway, they didn't do that to bring us to a better price. They talked to us; they'd listen, but it was a tough old deal. They had some good speakers. I'm not a good speaker myself, but they had some good speakers that told what we was up against. They promised to get something done. Of course, part of that on that tape—I don't know if you saw it—Jimmy Carter? Have you seen that tape?

AW:

Yeah, and he was a farmer.

EW:

He said his sister was a farmer, and his brother was a farmer, and they'd asked him if he'd joined the American Ag if he still farmed. (laughter) Anyway, a lot of things happened.

AW:

So you didn't go back for The Tractorcade, though?

EW:

No, I didn't go back with that group that took the tractors. I was home making this film. Anytime they said anything that they was going to talk about agriculture, I was sitting there filming, and I got quite a bit.

AW:

Yeah, we really appreciate that, too.

EW:

That old deal, I bought the first one at [unintelligible] (43:37); it's old.

AW:

Yeah, we had a devil of a time, we finally had to send that film up to a place back east, where they had one of those machines that was still working, before we could get it off. We never could get that one fixed. It had a little thing, a sensor that told it if the tape was getting caught, and it would shut it down. And that sensor was malfunctioning, and it kept shutting the machine down. So we couldn't find one of those sensors to replace, but we found a company, I think in Massachusetts maybe, I can't remember now.

EW:

You had to buy one?

AW:

No, we sent the tapes up there, and had them transfer it for us and send them back.

EW:

I know this, but I gave a thousand dollars for it.

AW:

That's a lot of money.

EW:

Back then—that wasn't—that's all it was. I thought I'd save it for history.

AW:

Just making a note here. So after those two events in '78 and '79 in Washington, we know that Gerald went up later and served in the agriculture department for a time. How did things develop here locally? What was the impact of that work?

EW:

That's tract?

AW:

Yeah.

EW:

I know it done some good, made everybody aware. You know, these small towns, that's where they get their income is from farmers. If he don't make nothing, they don't get nothing. So we don't buy much if we don't have no money. They could see that we needed to get up and done. They put in good words for us. They didn't feel too hard at us. Some of them did; some didn't. They didn't feel like we ought to do that. I said, well, everybody else prices their stuff. Somebody said, You could do that if you had it all on one pile, you know, and you had it all. And well, we get all we can, and price all we can't.

AW:

So did you keep farming?

EW:

Oh yeah, oh yeah.



AW:

When did you get out of it?

EW:

Sold the last farm about ten years ago.

AW:

So you farmed right up—

EW:

Yeah, my son and I farmed together.

AW:

And that's something I haven't asked you. Your children, would you give me their names and kind of where they are?

EW:

Mickey Wilson.

AW:

M-i-c-k—

EW:

e-y.

AW:

And that's a he?

EW:

Yeah.

AW:

And is he a farmer?

EW:

Yes. Right now he's working with his son-in-law at Beeville, Texas.

AW:

Oh in Beeville.

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EW:

I don't know, he's watching after seven hundred cows. Anyway, he stays pretty busy. His son-in-law farmed about, I don't know, eight or ten thousand acres: wheat, cotton, corn, milo.

AW:

Do you just have the one child?

EW:

Yeah. No, well I've got two girls.

AW:

What are their names?

EW:

Diana Wilson.

AW:

And the other one?

EW:

Darlene.

AW:

Darlene. And I take it one of them is the mother of Jared?

EW:

Yeah, Diana is.

AW:

Do Diana and Darlene still live in this area?

EW:

Diana lives part-time here. She's at Ruidoso, at a place over at Ruidoso. And Darlene, they live at Kilgore, Texas.

AW:

Yeah. You've got them scattered all over.

EW:

And I'm close enough to take care of myself up in here.

AW:

Am I right in assuming that your wife has passed away?

EW:

Yeah, she passed away with ALS.

AW:

Oh man, that's tough.

EW:

In 2007.

AW:

Well let me ask this, what should I have asked you about that I didn't?

EW:

I don't know what it'd be. We pretty well talked about the whole thing. And it's still I think still doing some good that we did that. I know people—I had a guy two or three days ago that said, "We probably need to do that again or something. These prices are falling like they are."

AW:

Yeah, I know in our country, Lubbock, we've had some good cotton crops, but it doesn't matter because it's not worth anything.

EW:

Expense takes it all up. I'm talking to Joe Nedals yesterday that lives at Tahoka, said they had some good cotton—it needed rain on it. And they'd started up the wells again—to water. He said, "Oh, I'm afraid you're going to throw everything off, it's so dry". I'll say this: I met a lot of good people doing this. You know, you lose touch with them, but at the time working with them, and working with them, everybody was about of the same mind to do something, to get it done, and we tried our best and give it our best shot. Of course, Gerald McCathern and several of them never did quit. They still hadn't quit. They went to American Ag meetings the whole time, and I finally quit. I just didn't go the meetings anymore. We'd done all I thought we could do with it.

AW:

That was true for a lot of people, wasn't it?

EW:

Yeah.

AW:

At some point you've got to get back to—

EW:

Get back to work. You know, couldn't stay gone the whole time.

AW:

And it's really interesting to me how much time people like Gerald and a lot of other folks put in.

EW:

Yeah, some of them lost their farm doing it. Gerald really did, too, and Don Campbell. Don, he was a worker in it. A lot of people worked hard at getting it done. I know one time the White Tractor Company was driving tractors across the United States, and at each state they'd have somebody to drive it. My son Mickey and then Dwayne Castle, they got a hold of them and wanted them to drive that tractor across. Yeah, they'd drive it. "But when we get to Amarillo," they said, "Would you talk to the press—the interview with the TV." Dwayne said, "I don't know about Mickey." He said, "I'm his best friend; he won't hardly talk to me." (laughter) He didn't talk much, you know. He finished school at Tech, but he's never done it talking, he does it working. But they got that tractor across the state.

AW:

I don't know anything about that White Tractor trip.

EW:

I don't know who was doing it, the White Tractor Company? Anyway, they drove it across.

AW:

Was that in the 1980s? The big tractorcade was '79. Was it after that?

EW:

It must have been 1980, somewhere along there.

AW:

I'll look it up. One of the other things I didn't ask, and I should have, do you have any— besides that nice video that you put together—do you have any photographs or any documentation like that of your American Ag or your NFO—?

EW:

I didn't even have a camera I don't think.

AW:

Well that's alright. I was just going to check to see if you did. Y'all used a phone tree, didn't you? Where one person would call five people, they'd call five people—

EW:

Yeah, we had them call five people. They call that the triangle deal, or whatever.

AW:

Yeah, I've heard them call phone trees, and it's amazing how well they work.

EW:

Yeah, it is. If you're going to have a meeting, you had one guy that you call, and he'd call five, and you don't have to sit there yourself and call them all.

AW:

Right. Plus it's faster.

EW:

Everybody could do their part.

AW:

One other question I'd like to ask—and I'm checking the time here to make sure you don't miss your lunch.

EW:

Oh no, wouldn't hurt me to miss lunch. (laughter)

AW:

You're like me; I could miss a few lunches. There were parts of the country, I know in Oklahoma and Kansas, I hear a lot more of this than I do in Texas, but in the eighties, by the mid-eighties when the next crisis came about, there were a lot of suicides that were farmers who just finally gave up on being able to ever get out of it. Was there much of that in this country?

EW:

No.

AW:

I didn't think so.

EW:

I don't know.

AW:

I wonder why that is, why it's different here than—

EW:

I don't know, maybe we're tougher. I don't know. (laughter)

AW:

I just wondered because I had never heard that until I got to working, interviewing people, especially in Oklahoma, seemed like one of the worst forces.

EW:

I know one guy, but this was after all this happened. He was farming—one farmer that committed suicide—he lost the farm and everything, driving a truck, he just finally got to Dimmitt and took his own life. But no, never even thought about it, you know?

AW:

That answers the question on that. And I think you've answered this question, too, but is it something that needs to be done again?

EW:

It probably is, but I wouldn't do it.

AW:

How come?

EW:

I probably wouldn't be any good at it to start with, and I'm not farming anymore. Farming's changed a lot since I've quit. To do it again—probably wouldn't do it the same way we did, tractors and stuff. Of course, they need to know that the prices are less. Of course, the farm program has helped them out a lot. You know, and that's probably one of the outcomes to all this, tracts and stuff, insurance and all that stuff has helped the farmer a lot. The program this year, I understand, not any good. They said it's bad. So if they let that drop—

AW:

There are not many farmers holding down the seats in Washington nowadays.

EW:

No. What was it that one guy said? "I can get more votes in Harlem than I can get from all the farmers."

AW:

Yeah, well and he's probably right, there's just not enough farmers.

EW:

Yeah, we're only a certain percent, but we feed the whole nation, one farmer feeding 168 people, or whatever it is. This country here has changed a lot. I used to think you had to plow mull-board ten inches deep, every year on every bit of it, to make a crop. Now they've got minimum till where you just go out and plant one crop right after the other, and spray and kill the weeds. You don't even have a cultivator anymore. The combines, thirty foot, forty foot, whatever they are, and go ten mile an hour.

AW:

And don't turn around and come back until it's time for lunch. Yeah, it is interesting. The other, I guess a question or getting your views on it, I suspect when you were farming, you weren't controlled by the seed companies and the fertilizer companies like a lot of farmers are today. Is that right?

EW:

Controlled?

AW:

Yeah, in terms of—

EW:

No, you was free to do whatever you wanted. You want to buy Dekalb or Pioneer or whatever you wanted.

AW:

Yeah, and now they're suing people if they cross-pollinate some other crop, you know, for their genetics.

EW:

I didn't know that.

AW:

It's a lot different.



EW:

Well yeah, it's all different. I had a friend this year that I went out and see it, too. I got out here. He made round fit the bushels, dryland wheat. And I thought, Well you can't do that. And I went out and looked at it, and he was cutting it, harvesting, and it was. When we have snow in this country, we can probably figure on a wheat crop.

AW:

Yeah, because you get to keep all that moisture.

EW:

Yeah, it was the best dryland wheat I ever saw.

AW:

Now, is it still mostly wheat up here is dryland, but the corn and milo are irrigated? People aren't irrigating wheat much here, are they?

EW:

Irrigated wheat? Some, there was a little more last year than before because it's easy to put it in. I used to put wheat behind—I had corn, take the corn out, and plant wheat in there. Some of the best wheat I ever made done that way. Still had some fertilizer left, and still had another season from planting the corn. I had a head start. It worked pretty good.

AW:

So when you would do that, did you completely plow the stubble and everything under? A clean field when you drilled?

EW:

No, we didn't plow it under. Some people just planted it right in the stubble. One of the guys did it with airplanes.

AW:

Really?

EW:

It didn't work.

AW:

I was going to say. You can't grow or drill from an airplane.



EW:

Yeah, but we'd plant it behind corn. And we grew some ensilage, too, a lot of ensilage in this country, dairies and stuff.

AW:

We were seeing that driving up, you know, I saw a lot of stands of that. Am I right that the milo looked a little—is it a little late this year?

EW:

Some of it is.

AW:

I saw a lot more green.

EW:

We didn't get a rain to get it up until later. Of course, here it's September, and it could freeze.

AW:

Yeah, we had a pretty cool night in Lubbock just two nights ago.

EW:

You had to wear a coat around here. It could freeze. I had it freeze one time, and I think it was the thirteenth of September.

AW:

Wow, that's awfully early.

EW:

That's early. It's about a month early. I think the twenty-second of October when it's supposed to. Anyway, I've been hauling all those trucks, six little bobtail trucks, sixteen thousand pounds. Twelve thousand pounds of that's all I could pack on there after that freeze; it was light. But it didn't just kill it. We had a lot of hail around. Hail started south of Adrian and went clear across the canyon and out this way. It's about a mile wide and forty or fifty miles long across there.

AW:

We really haven't this year, thank goodness, we haven't had much hail.

EW:

Boy, one guy up north here, he got hail early, and he got another hail—got it going again, and then this last time it did beat it all up, all of it. They said it just left the corn to its stumps. But some of it still just beat the leaves off of it, and ears still on it.

AW:

The corn we saw coming up 385 today looked pretty good.

EW:

I was looking at it when I go from here to the hospital in Amarillo, and I don't get around much, but what I saw, I thought, Well, with the rains that we've had, probably have the best corn crop we've ever had, and it still might be. That hail got some of it, but it's probably going to be pretty good.

AW:

And I suspect that people that have grass pasture are really doing well, aren't they?

EW:

Oh yeah. Last 2011—I don't think we ever had grass greener. Had to feed them cows and was feeding them cows all summer, kicking and everything else. The grass now, it's pretty good.

AW:

Do you have any questions for me about what we're doing?

EW:

Yeah I do.

AW:

Good.

EW:

I'd like to know what y'all's motives and where we're headed from here.

AW:

You know our archive is like a storehouse of information. What we do is collect information, whether it's an interview like this, or photographs, or even business records, like we have the business records now for the American Ag Movement and the national office. Our object is to preserve that kind of material and then make it available to people who are studying it, or are going to write about it, or want to learn about it. One of the things we like best is what you're doing right now, which is, as I was telling your grandson, that we literally expect two hundred

years from now, somebody can sit down and listen to you tell your story in your voice without anybody interpreting it for you.

EW:

I hope it does some good.

AW:

I think it will. It's what we call first source information. You can't get any closer to the truth than that. By the time everybody tells it and retells it, something's going to change.

EW:

My thinking is everybody's used to professionals, and we're sure not professionals.

AW:

But when you get a professional telling the story, they're going to tell the story they want to tell.

EW:

That's right.

AW:

And you're going to tell your story. That's what we want, that's our objective. So if you think of other people that might like to do the same thing, if you'll just let me know. Or when you talk to Gerald let him know.

EW:

Gerald, are they interviewing him right now?

AW:

Yeah, I've already interviewed Gerald about the American Ag, but I didn't have time then to interview him about his Second World War experience. And so they're going to interview that. And we didn't do much on yours today, either. It sounded like you were at Pearl Harbor and at—

EW:

Yeah, that's where I went to start with. I married—well my wife and I, I met her when I was a freshman in high school.

AW:

Really?

EW:

She caught my eye pretty good. So when we was seniors we got married, and then we were married three weeks, and I went into the navy.

AW:

Did you volunteer or were you drafted?

EW:

I volunteered because I was fixing to get drafted.

AW:

You wanted to have your choice.

EW:

I wanted to have my choice. I went through San Diego. I was there forty-eight days, and they said we was going home on boot leave, and I'm going to get see my wife. And the morning we was supposed to go, they come in and got us all up, we had everything going and done up in C1 fashion. We put all our stuff on a ship and shipped us out and wouldn't let us go home. So I went over there, had a receiving station over there, and they didn't have a place for us, didn't want us over there, really. The only reason we was there was because they had a ship going there. So we sat there for a week on our sea bags. There's faucets there where you could get a drink of water, fence around it like a prison. We sat there, and they'd march us to a barracks over to sleep at night.

AW:

But you didn't get to stay there during the day?

EW:

No, we stayed out there in that bullpen we called it. That made me not think too good of the navy and the people that did it that-a-way. Anyway, we was assigned to Barbers Point there, refueling base there at Pearl Harbor. A guy came through one day—my brother was on a aircraft carrier. Of course, back in those days you couldn't—

AW:

Do you remember what carrier he was on?

EW:

*Hancock.*

AW:

My uncle was on the *Benjamin Franklin*.

EW:

Okay.

AW:

And killed on it, was killed on it.

EW:

Yeah. A guy came through and wanted somebody to volunteer for a little Boeing aircraft carrier. You know, my brother's on an aircraft carrier, I might just do that myself, too. I volunteered, and I wound up back at that bullpen for two weeks. (laughter) They said, "You've got to get ready. That ship's leaving out. You've got to be ready in two hours." I checked everything in at the station and took off with them, got there, and stayed there two weeks, washing pots and pans. Anyway, it was a little *Kankakee*<sup>1</sup> ship, we called it. It only had eighteen aboard it. It was a little wood ship.

AW:

Now say that again, what was it called?

EW:

Kankakee

AW:

Yeah, do you know how that's spelled?

EW:

I don't.

AW:

Yeah, that's interesting. I've never heard of that term before.

EW:

Kankakee: it's what they called it.

AW:

A little wooden boat that had a crew of eighteen?

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<sup>1</sup>Wilson is possibly referring to the *USS Kankakee (AO-39)*.

EW:

Yeah, that's all that was on it.

AW:

What did they do? What was the purpose?

EW:

They hauled stuff to Johnson Island, supplies. They put me on there and sent me to Johnson Island.

AW:

Yeah.

EW:

Anyway, I tried to sign up. I liked that little boat because you got pretty good eating on there. There wasn't so many people. Anyway, we got there, and stayed at Johnson.

AW:

What was your job there at Johnson?

EW:

Sir?

AW:

What was your job at Johnson Island? What was your duty?

EW:

Well the first time I got there, I wound up peeling potatoes in the mess hall. (laughter) I'd done that for a long time, and fruits and stuff to eat. I worked at that mess hall. You know you had to make all your own water.

AW:

Distill it?

EW:

Distill it, yeah. You had those big ol' furnaces.

AW:

So they'd heat up the steam, and then put it through a distill?



EW:

Yeah, and make drinking water, fresh water out of the salt water. I was on that for a long time. Sat there, didn't have nothing to do, just watch the pressure system. It never did change. You never turned it up because it didn't change anyway, but you had to be there to watch it. Yeah, my shoulder was tore up.

AW:

You tore it up in the service?

EW:

Well I hurt it in the service, but I had tore it up before. I don't know how in the world I got in there.

AW:

Yeah, gosh that's a big scar.

EW:

It's wired all together in there.

AW:

Wow.

EW:

Anyway, they sent me back to Pearl Harbor to a hospital. I stayed there awhile, and then sent me back to the states, San Francisco, stayed there awhile. They sent me to Seattle, Washington, hospital up there, stayed there awhile. Then they finally put me on a train, and I was supposed to be going to an Oklahoma hospital, but there's three of us, and this one guy that was ahead of us, he said, "No, they told me to take you to Corpus Christi." I said, "I ain't supposed to go to Corpus Christi." Of course that's closer to home." Anyway, he said, "Well you go on down there, and then you can come back." I finally agreed. I'd already got off the train. I said, "I'm going to stay here." Because I know that's where he said to send me, but that's not what the papers said. Anyway, we went on to Corpus Christi, and of course they ain't going to send me back up here in a hospital down there. Then I got a discharge.

AW:

And you were in Corpus Christi when you got discharged? So you still had to get back up here.

EW:

Well, this don't have anything to do with it, but back at that time, you couldn't buy trucks or new equipment.

AW:

Yeah, because of the war.

EW:

Yeah, that's 1945. There was a lot down there, and they had ten or twelve trucks there. I wrote Dad and told him that, and he sent a check back and he said, "Buy me one." (laughter) So I go down and buy a truck and give them a check, then put a white tag on it. And all it had was a rim up there, didn't have—for a spare tire. It didn't have no weight on it or nothing. So I was driving that truck as my transportation while I was in Corpus. My wife come down there, and they see me driving that truck, and I knew I was going to get stopped every time. I had all the papers. They thought I stole that truck off the lot, which I can see. Anyway, we drove that truck, and then we drove it home one night. Well, I'm just taking up your time.

AW:

No, this is interesting. I want to hear it.

EW:

My discharge there—Captain Thomas had told me that they never would operate on it. He told them to operate, and they never did. So anyway, I was in there; he said, "How would you just like to discharge?" I said, "That'd be fine to me. I'm ready to go home." So he said, "Well, I'll have you out of here by noon. You be discharged, and you can go home." So noon passed, one o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock, and I finally went up to the office where they did all that stuff, a bunch of people up there. I got up there, and they said, "What are you doing up here?" I said, "Well, I've come up to get my discharge." "Ha-ha-ha! This guy thinks he can just come up here and get a discharge." I said, "Well Captain Thomas told me I could get discharged. He was supposed to have me out of here by noon." I said, "Well, if you don't believe me, go downstairs and ask him." He said, "I'll just do that." He went down there, and he come back up them stairs doing three at a time. "Good gosh almighty, we was supposed to have this guy out of here by noon." This girl took my fingerprints, and in fifteen minutes I was out. I always have thought about that, those guys.

AW:

That's a great story.

EW:

I could see where they could say, "This guy just come up here and said, 'I want a discharge up here.'" They found out that I wasn't lying.

AW:

So then you drove that truck?

EW:

I drove that truck home, my wife and I at four o'clock.

AW:

It's a long drive from Corpus Christi to—

EW:

Huh?

AW:

It's a long drive from Corpus Christi.

EW:

We drove it all at night.

AW:

Did you? What time of the year was it that you got out of the service?

EW:

It was in I think March, April, sometime in there.

AW:

It was already warm down there, wasn't it?

EW:

It was warm down there.

AW:

So driving at night would've been pretty good.

EW:

Old truck didn't have no heater in it, I don't remember, but we got here about ten or eleven o'clock next morning.

AW:

That's quite an adventure. Alright, well let me get you if I can—if I could get you to sign right next to your grandson's name. And what this is—I'll give you a copy of this, so you know what it is that you've signed and that you haven't promised away anything.

EW:

What did you do through your life? Did you cotton farm?

AW:

Well, I grew up on a cotton farm, but we moved to town when I was pretty small, and my dad stayed in the agriculture business. He worked for Anderson Clayton, a cotton oil mill. So I grew up around a cotton oil mill and all that. I spent twelve years, went to college, and I spent twelve years in police work, and then I spent ten years in finance, and then the last twenty-five years I've been in music and the arts. And that's how I got to this job is because I do a lot of interviews with people in my music and art—writing plays and such, I spent a lot of time doing interviews with people for research.

EW:

You're good at it.

AW:

Well thanks, but really, you're the one that's good at it. All I do is listen. You did a great job. It's a great story. I hate for people to find out how much—that I actually have a job where I get paid to listen to people tell their story. It's a pretty good one.

EW:

A lot more stories out there I could have told you.

AW:

Well, I got time.

EW:

I ought to tell you a story about my dad.

AW:

Yeah, I'd like to hear one.

EW:

They farmed cotton at Crosbyton in 1912 or '13.

AW:

Wow, that's early. Your dad was kind of a pioneer. Your dad was a pioneer?

EW:

Oh my, yeah.

AW:

Yeah, first irrigation well and then—

EW:

Some of the first cotton up here.

AW:

Yeah, well cotton in Crosbyton in 1912, that's pretty early.

EW:

He moved here on a migrant train.

AW:

Really?

EW:

You know, they take their tills and plows and stuff on this migrant train, and they had a little half section out ten miles west of where I was born. Anyway, before that they had farmed cotton in Charleston. And him and his cousin, they got through plowing and everything, and they had nothing to do, so they made them a covered wagon, and my mother and dad and his cousin's wife, they took covered wagons, and they went from there to New Mexico, to the Rocky Mountains in covered wagons.

AW:

Really?

EW:

Covered wagons, yeah.

AW:

Just for the fun of it?

EW:

Yeah, they never had been to the mountains, so like we travel now in a mobile home or something.

AW:

Wow, that's really interesting.

EW:

They had those teams and stuff. My mother's hunting rabbits, and she had that .22 hanging down, she's on a horse and shot her little toe.

AW:

That wasn't so funny then, though.

EW:

The cure they had was kerosene. Remember they would put kerosene on everything. Anyway, they went over in New Mexico, and went to see where Billy the Kid had been, and camped a tent all over in there. Of course, they put saddles on one horse, so they could catch and turn the rest of them loose. They had to keep that one where they could catch him.

AW:

Yeah, and get the others.

EW:

So one morning they didn't find no horses. They went over where the Indians was, and the horses over there where them Indians was. Dad said, "I don't know whether they stole them, or they just went over there," but we gathered them up and took them back. We had to have them to pull our wagon, or we couldn't go nowhere. Anyway, they got those horses back, and I think they can put that stuff on a train and sent it back to Charleston.

AW:

Is there any write-up or anything about that experience other than just your stories? That's really interesting. I've never heard anything like that. That's great.

EW:

Yeah, he and Mom come up here in I think '18 or '20 on that migrant train.

AW:

Did he ever say why they left Crosbyton?

EW:

Never did say why. It wouldn't have been very good living over there. I guess they had a chance to buy this farm out west of town here, and I don't know what they paid for it. Anyway we farmed it, Daddy stayed here, and I bought some of it in 1950, but he moved to South Dakota in '49 or '50, ranch up there. They're all buried up there, too.



AW:

He was pretty adventurous.

EW:

Yeah, Mother said she'd done all the pioneering she wanted to do. They went up there, and the ranch didn't have running water, and they didn't have indoor toilets. That was in 1950. They didn't have, you know, still had to burn coal. No propane or nothing.

AW:

And that country gets cold in the wintertime.

EW:

Oh man. You've got to put on several layers of clothes, overshoes every time you go outside.

AW:

Yeah, especially if you had to do that to go to the outhouse.

EW:

Yeah, you work outside all the time. Biggest job was keeping those stock watered. Water would freeze up. The ice would get that thick.

AW:

Yeah.

EW:

Someone took a chainsaw and sawed it; I always had to chunk it out with a bar.

AW:

Nobody had those warmers in those days to keep it from freezing.

EW:

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. My dad lived—he was born in 1892, he died in 1992.

AW:

Wow.

EW:

He worked hard all his life, and Mother always said it seemed like he has to do everything the hard way. He did work hard. He wasn't a very big guy. He weighed maybe 140 or 150 pounds.

AW:  
Really?

EW:  
Yeah. I wasn't either until—I was 155 pounds for many, many years. Now and then I can't walk I keep gaining weight.

AW:  
Yeah, it's hard to get rid of it if you can't walk.

EW:  
Yeah, I can't walk. That's another story.

AW:  
Injury or—?

EW:  
I had about twenty years ago both knees replaced. That irrigation in them tubes, and tromping through that mud, and snow skiing didn't help it much.

AW:  
Oh, so you were a snow skier?

EW:  
Yeah. I used to go snow skiing up toward—no skiing, and it still tore up. Anyway, December 5, 1911, I went in there, and they was going to put another knee in. They did, and it didn't work. It wasn't staying in joint—come out of joint. So finally they took it out and put another one in; it was worse. They said if they operated anymore, they had to operate on it, and I'd have to lay in bed for six weeks with it open. It had infection in it. I still got a deal on the side of my leg here that drains. They said the best thing for me to do is have it cut off up here. I ain't been back to them doctors. I didn't want to do that. Sometimes I wake up hurting so bad, and I think about having that darn thing cut off, ain't doing me much good. I still don't want to have it cut off.

AW:  
Yeah, who knows if that'll fix it.

EW:  
Sir?

AW:

Who knows if that'll fix it.

EW:

Yeah, I don't know. It's something.

AW:

Well I hate to hear that.

EW:

That's one of those things. I've been in here since Christmas, and up until then I had to get up and walk a little and take care of myself. But it started giving way on me and falling, and they put me in here, so I can get taken care of. I can't walk at all now.

AW:

Well if you're falling you sure can't be by yourself.

EW:

No, there's a sign: "Do not get up by yourself. Call for help." I did that, I said, "I can get up," but I fell right over there. Went down. So I haven't tried it anymore. I look at that sign, and I think I'd better—I'm so heavy; they'd have to get a giant to come and pick me up. (laughter) Anyway, that's kind of my life.

AW:

Well it sounds to me like you've had a very interesting life.

EW:

I have, yeah. I've enjoyed it. Of course, my wife and I were baptized in 1947 in the Church of Christ, and we've been faithful members there all these years, so we think we know where we're going—so if we keep on doing right.

AW:

That's a big job in itself.

EW:

Yeah, it's something else. After she passed away—that's been eight years ago—I was lonesome, but I couldn't find anybody could even near take her place. I won't now. There was nobody in church that I would like to marry, any other partner. And I said I'm not going to one of them honky tonks to find one. You know, a bar fly or something. So I didn't look. Anyway, I guess what bothers me about it bad as anything than getting older, I think of people that I've known,

friends, a lot of the, think about somebody I knew, a lot of them die from fifty-years-old to up to now.

AW:

I know, we were just talking on the way up here, talking about subscribing to the local paper, how it gets smaller and smaller every year, but yet those of us of a certain age still have to subscribe to it because we've got to check the obituaries to see which one of our friends—

EW:

I listen to KPAN, the local radio, every morning to see who passed away. I still got a lot of friends, but I've lost a lot of good friends, too. Young people, they're fine, but they're not like having old timers come in to see you. I had three young girls come in yesterday—that's Jared's daughter and two girls—we visit awhile. My son comes in quite often to visit.

AW:

Yeah, but there is something about visiting with somebody who's experienced the same things that you have, you know, a shared experience that you can talk about, and that's something different.

EW:

True.

AW:

But it's really nice that you've got your grandson here in town, too.

EW:

Oh yeah, that's quite a boy. He worked himself up—I think he got forty-eight of them trucks running, a hundred loads a day to the feed yard and dairies and stuff. He used to go to Dalhart all the time, and then they build one of them plants in Bovina and bring that corn in and then make sweet bread out of it. It's really a good feed, and everybody's getting on it. He was working at the feed yard out in the cattle town and heard about this deal. The guy come in there and told him about it. The president of the feed yard over there, they get along real well, but he sold out and then he told Jared, "Just go ahead, I'll finance you. We'll finance you." So he bought some trucks and started hauling and then bought some more trucks. He bought six or eight to start with. Then Matt Collier had probably around twenty trucks. They run some business together out there. Matt wanted to sell and Jared bought them, and so the banker found out Jared do what he said he would, you know? So the bank finally—he gets about whatever he wants now. He takes care of it, works hard at it. He's quite a boy. He went to Texas Tech, too.

AW:

Yeah, we were just talking a few minutes ago about his son and daughter being there.

EW:

Yeah, my son and his wife—oh what year was it? '66 or '67 he graduated from Texas Tech and come home and started farming. I told him at that time we already didn't have very good credit. I say you get ahold of something else, you know, we got this farm, and we going to have to do it the way we know how to do it. So whatever you learn down there probably won't work here anyway. He wasn't interested in nothing, but farming. He really liked cattle better, and that's what he's doing mostly now. I started him out when he was about eight years old driving a little Ford tractor with hay up on it.

AW:

Speaking of cattle, I saw a whole lot of cattle out on the wheat on the way up today, more cattle than I've seen from the road in a long time. So I guess people are starting to build their numbers back up.

EW:

Yeah, that's why they keep them. My brother up there, he keeps a bunch of heifers. I don't know, eighty, ninety, every year replacement, sells the old cows off and keeps them pretty well up. Boy they've got good cattle, and they keep them in good shape. The year before last they had that storm that killed so many up there. He lost thirty cows in that storm. Some of them lost two, three, four hundred, lost them all.

AW:

Yeah, it was rough.

EW:

Yeah, it's several thousand head of cattle lost in that country, cows. They'd already shipped the calves off of them, just had the cows.

AW:

Plus that was about the same time that the price of replacements was really going up, wasn't it?

EW:

Yeah.

AW:

Hard to get back in.

EW:

It was. Replacements cost us a bunch of money.

AW:

I've got a friend down in southeast Texas that they couldn't afford to replace the cows they had to sell during the drought, so he's leasing his pastures to a government wild burro program. He said it's the best job he's ever had. He said the first big trucks, they unloaded those burros, he thought they'd scatter like butterflies, but as soon as they got off that truck their noses went right down in the grass and they never looked up. I think they probably rescued them from the desert somewhere. So all that green grass was pretty good.

EW:

What were they thinking about doing with them?

AW:

Well, because there are a lot of interests that think they shouldn't kill them, but you know, in those big national parks, there's no grass left for them to eat, and so they're literally—they round them up, and they take them and they pay them a little something for someone like my friend to pasture them. I think they eventually sell them. A lot of people are buying those to put out with their sheep in particular because they keep the cows and the wolves off. But he said he'd never thought in his life he'd be a burro rancher.

EW:

No.

AW:

But you do what you have to do.

EW:

You take what you can take. It's something else.

AW:

Alright, well I'm going to need to go check on my colleagues and see how they're doing with Gerald. I might have to rescue them from Gerald.

EW:

I bet he'd do all right, Gerald. Gerald and I have been good friends.

AW:

He's a good guy.



EW:

Yep. He moved out—I don't know, he lived at Westway, could've been there all my life. He moved out there in—I don't know, '50, '51, something like that. He'd been to college and come out. We was good friends and his brother. We'd fish together and hunt together and play cards and bowl and whatever together. But we've been doing that for years. He's a close friend.

AW:

Yeah, he's a good guy. He's really interesting to talk to.

EW:

He knows a lot of stuff. He's getting a little slower I noticed the other day when he was here, and he'll tell you he's not, but he was pretty sharp. That tractor drive wouldn't have went very far without him.

AW:

Nope, he was one of the most important people. He and the Campo bunch were, they were the brains of the outfit.

EW:

And they gathered tractors as they went. It was quite a deal. I have one story up there that woman run into one of them tractors. She said, "I know which one it is." He said, "How do you know?" She said, "Well, it's an international, it had a 1206 on there. That's the number of it." (laughter) The license plate was 1206. I don't know—people. It's like my brother one time went up there to Washington. On the ship deal, they wouldn't let him toy with them colts, and then he went up there, and this one senator or woman asked, "Well why don't you castrate them?" (laughter) He said, "Woman, they ain't breeding them sheep; they're eating them." That's how much she knew about it, you know? It solved her problem, castrate that cattle.

AW:

Oh my goodness. That was your brother?

EW:

Yeah.

AW:

Alright, I better let you get to your lunch. Thank you so much, I'm going to stop this.

EW:

It's been running all that time?

AW:

Oh yeah, those are good stories. We don't want to miss anything. Again, thank you so much for taking the time.

EW:

And I'm glad to meet you.

AW:

Yeah, it's my pleasure.

EW:

Thank you for what you're doing.

AW:

Well I appreciate that.

EW:

In the future years of farming—of course I tell them I farm every night in my sleep, but I always have trouble. The other night that old [unintelligible] combine (1:41:19) come by, I got some blue weeds. I tilled it full of blue weeds, turned and everything was all stopped up.

AW:

And that's what you're dreaming about? Oh my goodness.

EW:

Yeah, belt's off of it and everything else. I woke up and said, "Oh man." I don't know why. I guess I dream those dreams.

AW:

Yeah, well I think that's true with all of us. Even when I was a kid working the grocery store I used to wake up in the middle of the night thinking I was sacking groceries. Alright, well thanks.

EW:

Thank you very much.

***End of Recording***