

**Oral History Interview of
Felix and Monica Macha**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
January 29, 2015
Lubbock, Texas**

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Felix and Monica Macha, who discuss their upbringing, education, innovations in cotton breeding, and experience farming and living on the South Plains.

Length of Interview: 01:05:47

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Keywords

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Felix Macha (FM):

—we abandon, too.

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

Well, I just hate to hear that. I grew up on a farm north of Slaton, and then my father was with Anderson Clayton, the oil mill for years and years, so we've all been—

FM:

Ag-related, huh?

AW:

Yeah, growing up, interested in that.

FM:

Yeah, I grew up south of here, about twenty miles.

AW:

Let me preface our tape by saying this is Andy Wilkinson with Felix Macha, and it's January 29th, 2015 and we're at his home in Woodrow. What's your birthdate, date of birth?

FM:

Eighth, twenty-fifth, twenty [August 25, 1920].

AW:

Eighth month, twenty-fifth day of 1920, and you said you were born twenty miles south of here. Would that be—

FM:

It'd be close to New Home.

AW:

To New Home? Were your folks farmers?

FM:

Yes.

AW:

How long is—are they the first generation to be farming out here?

FM:
Yeah.

AW:
Where did they come from?

FM:
Originally, they grew up in Seymour, a little place called Bomarton.

AW:
Wolmerton?

FM:
Bomarton. B-o—Bomarton.

AW:
I don't think I know that. Is it gone now?

FM:
Practically gone now. I think there's still a little Catholic church there, and that's about it. I haven't been there in a long while, but yeah, it used to be a community center. They've got that little church and the cemetery there and few houses, you know, but the community is not functional, I don't think, any more. It used to have a store and a filling station, and they had—oh, I don't even remember. Had a cotton gin there I think at one time too.

AW:
What direction from Seymour?

FM:
That's west of Seymour.

AW:
West of Seymour.

FM:
Yeah.

AW:
I travelled around this country a lot, and that's not one I remembered.

FM:

Yes, it would be between Seymour and Munday. You know where Munday is?

AW:

Yeah, I do, and I also—there's not much cotton out there now, but I know there used to be a lot.

FM:

Yeah, used to be a lot of cotton. Yep. In fact, when this—I still have a few kinfolks out there and my wife's folks, they came from Munday—I mean, not Munday, Rhineland. Do you know where Rhineland is?

AW:

No.

FM:

Okay, it's north of Seymour—no, north of—well, anyway, it's northwest of Seymour.

AW:

Yeah. How do you spell that?

FM:

M-u-n-d-a-y.

AW:

No—not Munday—where your wife's from.

FM:

Rhineland?

AW:

Oh, Rhineland. Oh yeah, I know Rhineland quite well. They have a big Catholic church there.

FM:

Yeah, they've got a big Catholic church there.

AW:

Yeah. Beautiful church. Well, for some reason, I misheard you, and I've actually seen, that, it's just a beautiful building.

Monica Macha (MM):

Well, I found it.

AW:

Terrific. Yes, I bet we can get this transferred and get you a copy of it, if you'd like.¹

MM:

It'd probably tell you a lot of stuff that you wanted to know.

AW:

Spell your first name for me, would you?

MM:

M-o-n-i-c-a.

AW:

Just like I would've spelled it. What was your maiden name?

MM:

Albus. A-l-b-u-s.

AW:

Are you any kin to Tommy, up around Littlefield?

MM:

Yeah. His, my daddy, and his grandpa, were half-brothers, and so those younger kids, I don't really know them, but I know who Tommy is whenever I—he used to deliver gas to us, but I don't know if I'd know if I saw him now.

AW:

Well, he's passed away.

MM:

Oh, has he?

AW:

Yeah, he married—this is even more confusing—he married my father's step-niece's niece after her husband died, but I got to know him through some of his cow punch friends like J.B. Allen and—

¹ Referring to a VHS tape that was donated to the Southwest Collection at the time of the interview.

MM:

He died a few years ago and he was buried from Littlefield Baptist Church.

AW:

Yes.

MM:

Yeah. I remember now.

AW:

Yeah. He's just a really—I really liked him a lot. I hated—sad to see him go, and Macha. That's the name I know from Littlefield. Are those—?

FM:

Yeah, I don't think we're kin to those. It'd be some distant cousin probably or something.

AW:

Right.

MM:

But I grew up in Pep.

AW:

Oh, in Pep. Yeah, so you're—

MM:

Yeah.

AW:

But your folks were from Rhineland. Is that right?

MM:

My daddy and mama grew up in Rhineland, and they moved to Pep when they got married.

AW:

I love Pep. I'm a musician, and I used to play dances there.

MM:

Oh, really?

FM:

Oh, I used to dance there.

AW:

I tell people, especially people from back east and who aren't quite acquainted with our custom out here that the contract for playing the dance required that you played the "Bunny Hop" at least twice a night, the "Cotton-eyed Joe" twice a night, and you had to have at least one shot of Jim Reed every hour. (laughs) It was really good. It was a great.

MM:

Yeah, we had a wedding dance, and Tommy Hancock played at our wedding dance.

AW:

Did he? Yeah, and the Roadside Playboys? Yeah. When did you marry?

MM:

Well, we'll be married fifty-eight years in February 5th.

AW:

Wow.

FM:

Yep. Been a while.

MM:

Yeah, we know them and knew the Machas that lived in Littlefield because they used to come to the dances in Pep, and that's where we shopped, was Littlefield, when I was a kid.

AW:

Yeah, the other thing I like about Pep besides the dances is when they have a community feed at that church.

FM:

Sausage Fest.

AW:

Oh, my goodness. It's great.

MM:

Thanksgiving.

AW:

Yeah, I was born in Slaton in the Catholic hospital. We grew up Methodist, but we—all of our friends were Catholic — so we got to go to the sausage fest.

MM:

Yeah, we used to go to a lot of dances in Slaton.

AW:

How did the two of you meet?

FM:

I reckon at a dance.

AW:

Perfect. (laughs)

FM:

Yep.

MM:

It was rodeo dance in Littlefield.

AW:

To be exact?

MM:

Yeah. (laughs)

AW:

Were your parents—Monica—farmers as well?

MM:

Yes.

AW:

And cotton, I would guess?

MM:

Yep, and they had sorghum too, and cattle, and pigs, and chickens.

AW:

Yeah. I know when I was growing up in the fifties that you didn't just have one thing. You had—especially like to keep some livestock.

FM:

Yeah. Well, people used to make their living at home kind of, you know. Yep. That was then, and this is now.

AW:

You're right about that. Well, what we were interested in was what this is about. The stormproof cotton, and—tell me about what year that was that it got going?

FM:

Well, I think dad started that, really somewhere in the 1920s. 1928 or—and, fact of it is that he got started, they had a bad storm, and they didn't have their cotton out yet, you know. It ruined it. They were walking around in the field, looking at it, and he found a stalk or two that wasn't blown out, you know, it's still in there, and he kept the bolls, you know, on the cotton and planted it, and from then on he just—process of elimination, you know; keeping what he wanted and discarding the rest, and he came up with a stormproof cotton, a cotton that wouldn't blow out if it come a storm, and it—when he got it developed, good enough for—he thought was good enough to put on the market—well, he couldn't sell the stuff hardly because it wouldn't open very much you know, and it wasn't pretty to look at in the fields, you know. It was tough, and he had trouble getting cotton pickers in there to pick it and pull it, you know, but once they started pulling it, man, they loved it because it would get a lot of cotton in the sack.

AW:

Yeah. Now, were they—was that a time when they were picking cotton as in the southern style of pulling it out of the boll on the plant or were they pulling the boll off?

FM:

No, they were pulling the boll off pretty much.

AW:

Yeah. That's what we did when I was a kid. I was just—but I know in the south that for— those bolls would open up because they would actually pick it.

FM:

Yeah. I remember one time though—I guess we didn't make much of a crop, and Dad got a job for the family to go out and pick a field of cotton, and that's picking it, you know, like you said,

and ooh, man, I thought we never were going to get our bail picked, you know. Get our fingers so worn, it was—

AW:

Yeah. I hated that. The only thing worse was that was, my grandad had moved up here from Denton County and they—he was used—he grew up, and they would have two rows of peanuts or so. They'd move across the field every year, and so he had us—grandkids us—digging those peanuts. That's the worst job, I think. Cotton—I never thought I'd ever say choppin' cotton looked good, but after the peanuts, it looked great. (laughs) Well, how long did your dad work on that after the late 1920s to kind of get something out to market?

FM:

That was more or less his life. That's what he loved to do. Breed his cotton and he had—at one time, he bred up some cotton that he thought was going to be real good for strippers, you know. It was a straight up stalk and it'd put the bolls right next to the stalk, you know. It was—but he couldn't get it to yield good enough so they had to give that up, and they—it was a long, tedious thing. And he had bred up a stalk that the stems weren't too big and hard, you know, so it would strip easy with a cotton stripper, and so forth. So, he and his brother, they built a cotton stripper, and I remember 'em using that thing. That was way back.

AW:

Yeah. About when did they build that?

FM:

That had to been in the late 1920s.

AW:

Really?

FM:

Yeah.

AW:

That sounds very early for a cotton stripper.

FM:

It was a sled. That's what it was, and there was two kinds of 'em built.

MM:

I remember us having a sled.

FM:

Yeah. The sled had—it was just a sled with—and the front had fingers on it, and cotton would strip off. You stood back there with the fork and scraped it back, you know, and when you get to the end, you scooped it out and put it on the turnrow.

AW:

So you walk along behind it?

FM and MM:

No, you rode on it.

AW:

Oh, you rode on it?

MM:

It was like a trailer.

AW:

Was it pulled by a tractor or a team?

FM:

No. It was pulled by horses.

AW:

Yeah, back then, yeah.

FM:

And the other one was—had like they are now, the long coming-up strippers you know. This was just two-by-fours coming close together, and that cotton would go between and strip it off, and then they'd get to the end, they'd fork it off and that. Both of them left a mess in the field, but it—

AW:

Yeah, and you got a lot of trash in there probably, too.

FM:

Well, it wasn't too bad as far as trash, but it just didn't do a good job of getting the cotton off the stalk. It just left a lot of it on there.

AW:

What was your uncle's name?

FM:

Victor.

AW:

And your father was H-a—?

FM:

Hynek. H-y-n-e-k.

AW:

H-y-n-e-k.

FM:

Yeah.

AW:

Oh, when did your father pass away?

FM:

Nineteen fifty-seven.

AW:

And do you remember when he was born?

MM:

No. He died in 1956. We got married in 1957.

FM:

Okay. Right close together anyway.

MM:

It was in, I think January, February something. I don't know. It was cold.

FM:

And my uncle died; I don't remember when. We were married already and—

AW:

Was he your father's younger brother?

FM:

My older brother. He was older than—

AW:

Oh, no—

MM:

Oh, was Victor older than—

FM:

Yeah. He wasn't much. I guess not over a year or two, but they lived within a half a mile of one another out there, and—

AW:

Near New Home where you grew up?

FM:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah. It sounds like they were pioneers, that there wasn't anyone—I don't know of folks that were spending that much time on their breeding.

FM:

Well, I think it was kind of a pioneer deal, and then, at that time, there was a fellow by the name of—

AW:

Excuse me. Can we have a moment just to pause this so I can put new batteries in?

FM:

Yeah.

AW:

Sorry.

(break in recording)

AW:

Okay. We got the batteries back going and I interrupted you. You were saying they had gotten—

FM:

Yeah. I forgot where we were, but that's alright.

AW:

We were talking about how they were pioneers in—

FM:

Yeah. Dad kind of worked with Don Jones, I think was his name. He worked at the experiment station here², and they kind of worked together on that stormproof cotton, but Don worked on Acala cotton³. He was—he had always liked that tall picker cotton, you know, but he also wanted to get that stormproof quality into that Acala, and I don't know if they ever did. I guess they did somewhat. And so that's how he wound up working with the experiment station, so—anyway, Dad loved that—messing with that cotton. He had a hard time getting it started because, like I said, it wasn't appealing to look at in the field, and then—later years, there's a fellow by the name of—damn it, I can't remember his name. Anyway, he came up with a cotton that had that stormproof quality in it, and it fluffed out a whole lot and it was pretty in the field, so that kind of took a little big bite out of Dad's business, but—then—

AW:

Was that fellow over at Ropes, Ropesville?

FM:

No. He was east of here somewhere. Lankert. Yeah, "Lankert cotton" had that name—

AW:

Do you know how that's spelled just—?

FM:

No. L-a-n-k-e-r-t I think.

AW:

That's not a name I know either.

² Texas A&M AgriLife Research & Extension Center at Lubbock.

³ *Gossypium hirsutum*, the most-produced variety of cotton in the U.S., is classified according to its production region: Delta, Plains, Eastern and Acala.

FM:

That cotton got real popular for a while.

AW:

Was your dad's—marketed under his name, Macha?

FM:

Yeah.

MM:

It was H.A. Macha.

FM:

"Macha cotton."

MM:

Stormproof.

AW:

Did he ever stop selling?

FM:

Yeah, whenever he had developed cancer. Prostate cancer, and that kind of took him out of the business, and he had a big stock of cotton seed and told me to just close it out, and that's what I did. I sold all the cotton seed, and he died shortly after that.

AW:

But it wasn't that he got out of business 'cause people didn't buy the seeds?

FM:

No, no. Anyway, that was about the size of it, and my end of the deal was through the fork.
(laughs) The scoopin' and— (laughs)

AW:

He got the glamorous part.

FM:

Yeah. My brother and I. We delivered cotton seed. We had a little truck, Chevrolet truck and—

AW:

Is that the one that you've got out in your carport?

FM:

No, no, that belongs to one of my boys.

AW:

Oh, that was a handsome truck, when I drove—when I drove up I saw that.

FM:

Yeah, but anyway—

AW:

Did you delint?

FM:

Yeah. To start with that cotton, we didn't have to delint it. It didn't have a lot of lint on it.

AW:

It was slick coming right out of the—wow.

FM:

Yeah. Right out of there. We didn't have to do any delinting, but then in the later years, I guess it was in the late forties, they had a pink bollworm infection in south Texas and everywhere and they passed a law that you couldn't sell your seed unless it was delinted and heat-delinted.

AW:

To—with the idea that would kill the—

FM:

Yeah, the worms when they were—their larva, and that acid delinted—well, not acid, fire delinted.

AW:

So that was before people were doing acid delinting.

FM:

Yeah. Right.

AW:

That's great.

MM:

We didn't have very many of these. Just one or two.

AW:

Does the Ag Museum [Bayer Museum of Agriculture in Lubbock] have one, I wonder?

MM:

No. I don't guess.

AW:

Would you be opposed to me talking to them in to come out and get one?

MM:

No. I don't think we have any to give away.

AW:

Okay, I just wanted to check.

MM:

Just a couple. Felicia has one that's framed and put on the wall.

AW:

Oh, okay. That'd be good. We could get them to copy it. You know, photograph it. That's really great.

FM:

That's the number one, okay. That was the kind of original. It was more stormproof and tighter in the boll and everything. People in sandy ground, Lake Brownfield and all up in there. They always wanted to, number one—

(Phone rings)

It wouldn't load up with sand.

AW:

Oh, because it was tighter.

FM:

Yes.

AW:

Yeah.

(MM talks in background)

FM:

But—

AW:

That's interesting. Did—at that time, were—when you first started, most of this was dry land, wasn't it?

FM:

Yeah, it was all dry land pretty much.

AW:

Because we didn't have that much irrigation until after the war. Did your father think about in his breeding how efficient it was with water?

FM:

No. We didn't—he didn't go into that. We did, like on this place here, we did a lot of irrigating all right, but we never worried about the water, you know. We had a lot of water then—

AW:

Yeah, right. Well, I was just saying, during the dry land, it's—

FM:

It was real efficient as far as dry land. It was good dry land cotton.

AW:

Yeah, so it was efficient.

FM:

Yeah. Oh, yeah.

AW:

When did you move from New Home area up to here? Because I see this says "Tahoka."

FM:

Yeah. Yeah. In 1942, I went to the Air Force, went to the Army and I spent four-and-a-half years in the Air Force. And in the meantime, Dad bought this place because it did have irrigation on it and the Lynn County stuff was dry, and didn't have irrigation. So when I got back from England, we moved up here and we worked this and the dry land over there at New Home too, so—we didn't know about much about irrigation, but we sure used a lot of water.

AW:

We did too. We had great wells there outside of Slaton, and we ditch-watered it and moved those pipes, tubes.

FM:

I remember the first pipes we got—Dad bought us some pipes. Oh, I think it was about eighty of 'em, and man, I laid them all out and used them a day or two and came back one morning and there wasn't any.

AW:

Did they blow off?

FM:

No, somebody stole 'em.

AW:

Somebody stole them.

FM:

Water was running everywhere.

AW:

Oh, gosh.

FM:

Yep.

AW:

But we had a time or two in the 1950s that the wind—they didn't disappear, but they would blow them enough that they would bend them and they were almost useless after that. That aluminum.

FM:

Yeah. Well, these were little plastic ones.

AW:

Oh, the plastic ones.

FM:

Yeah, they were plastic. Clear plastic.

AW:

Did you happen to save any of that seed?

FM:

Nope. We had some around for several years and there was—guys come by and want some and I'd give them some, you know, and after a while, I didn't have anymore.

AW:

That's what happens.

FM:

Yeah (laughs)

AW:

When you give it away.

MM:

That was the Mooneys (?), and I talked to Alice again.

FM:

The stormproof stuff that was in that seed are in the cotton. All of the cotton that's out now that has that stormproof quality in them came from that.

AW:

Really?

FM:

As far as I understand, yeah.

AW:

Yeah. So, that's the original set of genetics that anybody that has that same trait came from your father's seed. That's great. That's a great story.

FM:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah. Now, was that something your father—did he try to protect that so he could sell his number one—it sounds like he didn't care. He was happy for people.

FM:

Yeah, he was happy. I think he told me he tried to get a—something about a name brand—

AW:

Trademark.

FM:

Yeah, trademark.

AW:

Did he try to patent the—of course, there wasn't much genetic patenting going on then, I don't think.

FM:

No, I don't think so. Anyway, this cousin of mine or so-called cousin at Littlefield, he tried after that—after Dad died, a good while, he tried growing Macha cotton seed.

AW:

Ah.

MM:

Emil.

FM:

Yeah, but he didn't make a go of it. He gave that up, but anyway—

MM:

He was talking to Felix at a dance, and he got all this information, and then he transferred it like it was theirs, and everybody's going like—

AW:

Well, you got to be able to deliver. (laughs) He might know the story, but—

MM:

But he did sell some cotton seed, and he had a cotton seed sack too. Emil did.

AW:

Did it look like this one?

MM:

That was green. It had green printing on it, and it was—I don't think it lasted but a couple of years.

AW:

My dad's been gone for too long for me to, so I couldn't ask him, but I know Paymaster, they had their own seed, and I wonder how they worked with the folks like your dad. They're bound to have been interested in it.

FM:

I don't really—

MM:

Don't you think it went through that—what do you call it—extension outfit?

AW:

Oh, yeah, the extension service?

MM:

Yeah, and then—I think that guy took a lot of credit for what he did.

AW:

Oh, Don Jones?

FM:

Yeah.

AW:

Yeah.

MM:

But like Felix said, the whole genetic thing—that's what it all stemmed from was the original.

FM:

My dad's breeding, but this cotton breeding goes on and on, you know. It never stops. Newer varieties and improved varieties and all that.

AW:

They're doing some interesting work over at the A&M station out on the north side of town to breed it back to what it looked like when it came over from Egypt. With the idea that you would leave it in the field five to eight years.

FM:

Yeah, that would be alright, but it freezes down here.

AW:

Well, it also produces less and less cotton for the stalk. Yeah, I don't know how they're going to get it to, but I thought it was kind of interesting that they were—

FM:

Yeah, well, that's part of their breeding business, you know. They've come a long ways. Just like about the time Dad started this stuff—well, old Martin Mays over here, he developed his maize that grain sorghum, you know? That used to be only grain sorghum we had, was what the old crookneck—it would make a head and it would—pull down, you know, instead of up? And he bred it up somehow, I don't know—

AW:

So that the head would stand up?

FM:

Yeah. Stand up.

AW:

Which made it a lot easier to—

FM:

Combine.

AW:

Yeah. And also, didn't it—when it crooked, it was real susceptible to weather, then, too.

FM:

Yeah, and insects I believe too.

AW:

Oh, really?

FM:

Yeah. You know. Things move along.

AW:

Now, did you have—you mentioned one brother. Did you have other siblings?

FM:

Yeah, I had two brothers.

AW:

Two brothers?

FM:

Yeah, an older brother and my younger brother. They both passed away already.

AW:

And what are their names?

FM:

Edmond was my older brother and Robert was my younger brother.

MM:

And he had two sisters.

AW:

And what were their names, just—?

MM:

Georgie.

AW:

Georgie?

FM:

Oh, sister's name? Georgia.

MM:

With an 'a'.

FM:

And Evelyn.

MM:

And they were older and younger. Felix is the middle kid.

AW:

The middle. That's why you got stuck with that fork. (laughs) And Monica, what about your siblings?

MM:

I have two older sisters and an older brother that died.

AW:

And what are their names?

MM:

Alice and Louise and Rhienart died.

AW:

Rhienart?

MM:

Uh-huh. R-h-i-e-n-a-r-t, and he died in, I don't know, 1997, and then I was the youngest.

AW:

And you have children, right? Because you said they had run you off the path—

FM:

Yep.

AW:

What are their names? Are they all in cotton as well?

FM:

No. Tim, the oldest, he's working for—

MM:

DSI [Diversified Subsurface Irrigation], that drip irrigation.

FM:

And—

MM:

Mark.

FM:

He's in Denver. He's working for an electric company.

MM:

He's in the credit department.

AW:

I lived in Colorado for a number of years. I really liked it.

MM:

In where?

AW:

In the Denver area. I lived in—

MM:

They loved Denver. They've been there, I guess this is going on to be five years pretty soon, and Mark was there five years before. He was there a year before his wife moved there because they had a senior in Frenship, and so she had to stay in town until he graduated. He graduated second or third in his class.

AW:

Oh, that's a good deal.

MM:

Frenship, and he's at Tech.

AW:

What's he doing at Tech?

MM:

Engineer. They've got two kids that are engineers, and he's in engineering.

AW:

Oh, that's good. That's good. Yeah, my wife and I like to—we were there a long time ago. We were there in the 1970s, but we still have tons of friends from there and go back all the time.

MM:

Denver.

AW:

Mmm-hmm.

MM:

Yeah, they like Denver. Mark was working for an oil company. I guess oil; I don't know. Anyway, TransMontaigne, and when the gas prices dropped—actually, their company sold and they rehired him for their new company, but then the gas prices dropped and he got laid off, because he was the last one hired.

AW:

Yeah, and then gas is still cheap.

MM:

And so he got a new job with an electric company. That sells electricity to three or four states, I think. He just started in January.

AW:

Well, good for him. Electricity is a good place to be right now. Everybody needs that.

MM:

Anyway, he said he was very pleased with his job.

FM:

And then there's Mary Ann.

MM:

That was Cindy.

FM:

Oh, yeah, I forgot Cindy.

MM:

She was a teacher and her husband's an engineer. He goes out on rigs to tell them how to set the things.

AW:

Land rigs, or—

FM:

Yeah.

MM:

And the coast actually—his job's not threatened now by the gas thing, because he's out on the coastal areas. Supposedly, that's what we hear.

FM:

Cindy used to be a school teacher, but she retired.

AW:

And then you mentioned one named Mary Ann?

MM:

No. Then Jim Ed and Steven are the next two kids, and they farmed.

AW:

They farmed here?

MM:

Yeah.

AW:

Is it S-t-e-v-e-n?

MM:

Uh-huh, and Jim Ed lives next door on that side of us.

AW:

That's a nice house.

MM:

Yeah, it is, and then Mary Ann. Mary Ann is our youngest daughter. She lives about six miles on Slide.

AW:

How does she spell that?

MM:

Mary. Ann. A-n-n.

AW:

Good. That's how my wife spells her—she's Mary Ann, and she gets really angry when people put e's on it, and put it all together in one word. She's very insistent about that.

MM:

Cindy's last name is White.

AW:

W-h-i-t-e?

MM:

Yeah.

AW:

And Mary Ann's?

MM:

Is Marnell.

AW:

How do you spell that?

MM:

M-a-r-n-e-l-l.

AW:

The reason I'm asking all of these things other than it's interesting to me is that we have lots of people who use the collection and will for the next hundred years on genealogical issues, so yeah. We try to get as much of that as we can.

MM:

She's married to Doug. Douglas.

AW:

And they're at Slide, or near—?

MM:

Well, they live in Highland Oaks.

AW:

Oh, okay, yeah.

MM:

They decided on about building a house and grow their kids up in that house, and so them and the bank own the house.

AW:

Yeah. Well, not very many Americans—that happens to anymore. They grow up in that one house.

MM:

Mary Ann said, "We grew up in this house, and that's what I want for my kids," and that's what Doug wants—that's where they grew up. He grew up in Hereford.

AW:

Yeah, we've tried that a couple of times, but we wound up at jobs or whatever taking us off.

MM:

Mary Ann's a dietician and she works—one day she works at Denver City and one day in Lubbock. That's where she gets—and Doug works from home. He works for DTN [Data Transmission Network]; that's Data Tele Networking or something, I don't know.

AW:

Oh, well, if he works out of his house then part of that house is at least deductible.

MM:

Well, yeah, one room. I don't know.

AW:

Yeah, they're pretty strange about that. I used to work out of my house, and—

MM:

Anyway, he works at home, and that a way, he's home whenever the kids come home from school.

AW:

Yeah. That's good. So but out of the whole litter, you still have two farmers at least.

MM:

Yeah, two farmers.

FM:

Yep, and they've got their hands full.

AW:

Yeah.

FM:

It's kind of—they're always short on help. They're pretty particular anyway.

MM:

They're very.

AW:

Well, you've got to be particular about help, you know.

MM:

You don't want to put a nobody on a hundred thousand-dollar machine.

AW:

No, and then you've got a crop that if you mess it up, you've got to wait a year for another one. I mean, that is pretty important work. Is the oil patch hiring—does that have any impact or is it they were just running out of people who want to work on farms?

FM:

I don't think the oil patch has had much effect on us now. I mean, the city does more impact than anything else. It's nice to go to work at eight and get off at five or whatever and so forth and don't have to get out in the weather and you know, so it's—out here on the farm, you know, you've got to—you don't have any really set hours. You've got to work when the work is there, and you know, and stuff. They haven't—they don't much want to work on the farm anymore.

AW:

Yeah, and there's always work to be done, too.

FM:

Yeah, and our old foremans, they got too old. They retired, kind of like me. My old farm hand, that old Frank McCoby. He worked for me for thirty-five years, and he finally died.

AW:

That's a kind of a record of itself right there. Thirty-five years.

FM:

Oh, yeah. Yeah, he was a good man. Sometimes I thought he was the boss rather than me. (laughs) We got along, but now—

AW:

What do you see as the future of farming out here? Especially we just—we kind of danced around the issue, but the aquifer going down and—

FM:

Oh, we're here to stay—you know, the country's got to have farmers. There ain't no way around it. Somebody's got to produce; so they'll keep us in business, I guess.

AW:

I think you're right, but we might be growing some different things out here, won't we if we—

FM:

Yeah, might do that.

AW:

If we can't irrigate like we used to—

FM:

One of my neighbors—I told them all, they can't do without farmers. He says, "I know it, but they can damn sure do without some of us!" (laughs)

AW:

I hadn't thought of it like that. "Yeah, we're going to have you, but not all of you."

FM:

Like my boys now, they shoot—they got about four-thousand acres to work. It takes some help to do that and—

AW:

Takes a good banker, and takes a—

FM:

They get some of their work or help from Tech boys.

AW:

Do they?

FM:

Yeah. But the one's that they get from Tech comes from the other side from Houston. I mean Fort Worth and Dallas, east of there. They're country boys that need a little help, and they come out here, and we recruit a little bit.

MM:

Teach 'em.

AW:

The problem with that then is in three or four years, they're gone.

FM:

Yeah, they're gone, but we always tell them that education is first. We appreciate your help out here and all that, but—

MM:

When you leave, you have to give 'em another guy and they go, "Oh, there's not any."

AW:

You can't leave without a replacement. Well, did Jim Ed and Steven—did they study ag?

MM:

All of our kids graduated from Texas Tech.

AW:

I wonder, was agriculture their—

FM:

Jim Ed was. Now Steven, he went into business. He worked for Furr's Cafeteria for several years. They transferred him to Austin, and he got his belly full of it over there and he came back over here. I told him, "Come on back. We'll put you to work here."

AW:

I wish he had helped us keep my favorite cafeteria there on 50th.

MM:

Yeah, that's where he—

AW:

Because that was my favorite cafeteria and when they closed out, I felt like it was a personal insult.

MM:

Yeah. (laughs)

AW:

We grew up—my wife and I both lived not too far from that and, we didn't know each other when we were in high school, I was—that was a fancy night out, was to go to Furr's.

MM:

Yeah, exactly.

FM:

Yeah. At one time you know, they were pretty nice. They had a piano there and music, and it was real nice, and it just kind of gradually just went down, down, down.

AW:

Well, even at the end we—our kids, just before it closed, one Christmas, our kids were all out of town, and we thought, "Well, let's go to Furr's and have Christmas dinner," and it was fun, you know. Everybody was dressed up like it was kind of back in the 1960s. Well, that's really interesting about them being back in farming and staying with it. I know they're busy, but if they're ever interested in sitting down and talking a little bit about what they think about the future of farming, I'd like to get the voices of some people like them who'd grown up with this several generations of farming on both sides and have, at least one of them, has come back to it. That's a really important thing because—

FM:

Yeah. I think they're out there in the shop now.

MM:

Yeah, they are.

FM:

They were working on the tractor out there, but anyway—

AW:

What should I have asked you about that I hadn't?

MM:

I don't know.

FM:

I don't either. That was then and this is now, and I—

MM:

But you know that guys farmed across the road? Avenue P runs behind their farm, and they farmed that, and now there's housing going there. They bought—I mean, that sold for housing.

AW:

I was over at Ropes over the weekend doing some work. A friend of mine and a fellow whose papers we collect, Max Evans, a novelist, grew up there and he was hoping that I'd go take a picture of his house that he lived in as a child. So I drove over there, and it hasn't been that long since I've been down that highway, and there were about a dozen brand new houses north and west of Ropes that I had no idea that had gone up there, and when you see that, you know that's not just however much the house sits on, but there's a lot of ground now that's not being cultivated.

MM:

It's kind of like [Farm to Market Road] 1585, and it's grown up the last, I'd say three years for sure, but the last two years, it's really popped up with housing and lots of stuff, and they're even going to put a Domino's Pizza over there by Quaker and 1585, and we've got a Dollar General up here, 1585, just right up the road.

AW:

It's not quite like being in the country anymore.

MM:

No, and we're not, and, you know, whenever we first lived here, you could see Slaton's lights at night over here and you could see something way over there, maybe a light or two, and then Lubbock. You could see Lubbock a little bit, and back here, it was dark, and now it's just lights all the way around, but I think, frankly, I—my daughter and I went over there when they first started building houses. We just drove in there to see what was going on. They had dirt roads and stuff there, and all the way up, they was watering and making grass and stuff, and I think water is going to be our main thing that's—

AW:

I think you're right.

MM:

It's going to be the—it's going to be bad. I mean, I think that you can't water grass like you're watering alfalfa and—

AW:

Yeah, because you cut that grass, you don't do anything with it except putting a dumpster.

MM:

Yes, and see, and then, you know whenever they farmed that, they irrigate it, and then it got too much—I mean, it got dry until where it wasn't enough to irrigate. But now, as much water they're putting there, it's not going to be but a few years, and there's not going to be any water.

AW:

I think you're right, and we don't have to do that—not, at our house, no. My grandparents moved off the farm in Slaton and to the house that I'm in now. When they died, we, my wife and I, moved into it after our kids got big, but we don't water our grass. We have an old kind of grass that does pretty well just on dry land. We water our—we have a couple pecan trees that we water, but most everything else we just let it go on. It's just fine.

MM:

But you can't use water wasteful like that, and that's kind of like where Mary Ann and Doug live. Steven was looking for—he's thinking he'd like to move out closer this way, and he went there and he was asking about water and stuff whenever, and there in that Highland Oaks area, there's a lot of places, and there's a friend of mine that—she moved to Florida now — but she lived in that Indiana south, and they had a big backyard, and swimming pool, and awesome stuff, and she said—they sold their house when it rained this spring and everything was green and beautiful, but she said that they ran out of water to sprinkle their lawn, lot of times, the sprinklers

wouldn't—would just barely run, and water, I mean, people need to really take it serious because water's going to be the—

AW:

Yeah, you can't—it's one thing if you have to go to dry land, but it's another thing if you can't turn on the tap at your house.

MM:

Exactly, and—

FM:

You don't miss water until it's gone.

AW:

Yeah.

MM:

But I think water is going to be our number one problem someday.

AW:

I think that day is—

MM:

But it's coming faster and we—

AW:

Yeah, I think it's awfully close.

FM:

Well, take the school over here. They're running out of water, so they pipe the water from Lubbock here, you know, and, well, so be it.

AW:

Well, we're pretty close in Lubbock to running out of water. I mean, we had no water from Lake Meredith which was not good water to start with. You—all of us have had a purifier of some kind on our household because you couldn't drink the stuff, and now you got Lake Alan Henry, but it's in an oil field, so what's it going to be like, and it's going to cost a lot of money to pump that water up here if it stays full.

MM:

But I know whenever Felix and I was first married, he had big old water irrigation, you know, pipes and stuff, and then gradually all of a sudden over the years, there was no water. It's all dry land now, and give it another fifty years, what's going to happen? There's not going to be. It's not going to replenish if you just keep sucking it out.

AW:

Well, the place that we live, the aquifer is beneath that layer of clay and caliche, and it—the recharge from rainfall is almost nothing, so what does it take to recharge it well? I don't know. We'll never see it recharge. We got to figure out something else to do with it.

MM:

But I think that people need to wake up the ones and that have something to do with it and say, “Uh-uh, you can't have that kind of grass and that kind of watering.”

AW:

Yeah. Well, and there are cities—have you ever been to Tucson? You know, it's very interesting. Tucson, a long time ago, faced the issue of water usage in landscaping and they just made it illegal to use landscaping that wasn't native, and you can go from—and now in Phoenix, they still, they have canal water off a couple rivers, and there is a whole lot more basic kind of ordinary grass and shrubs, and the funny thing is in the summer time, you'd much rather be in Tucson than in Phoenix because they're both hot, but in Phoenix, it's humid because of that ditch watering and all that—those water intensive plants — and Tucson is much more comfortable, and I still remember growing up here in the 1950s when it was dry and a little old swamp cooler would freeze you out of your house, and the more trees we got and the more lawns we got, the less those things worked, and, you know, it has an impact not just on us using it up, but a lot of other kinds of things. Do your sons talk to you about this? About—?

MM:

I don't talk to them about it. (laughs)

AW:

Too depressing?

MM:

We might just mention stuff or something, but really get down to the nitty gritty of it, the nuts and bolts of it. I don't think we do talk very much.

FM:

They know work's coming, and they don't have—just—

MM:

Yeah, they understand, but—

AW:

Yeah, I don't think anybody in agriculture doesn't understand it. I think they understand it a lot better than the people in town.

MM:

It's kind of like I used to hear, "Oh, these farmers are poisoning everything. They poison—they use poison," and then you listen to how much poison they put on their lawns and their whatever and whatever and per square foot, they use ten times more than a farmer does on his whole crop. I mean, it's not equal.

AW:

No, and not only that, they're poisoning things to make them look pretty, not to make them produce. There's a big difference in those.

MM:

So how did your pecan trees do?

AW:

They did well.

MM:

This year?

AW:

Mmm-hmm. We got—both our trees are Burkett, so it's a native—

MM:

Is Burkett the round one?

AW:

It's the big, round ones which I like because they're pretty soft, thin shells, so you can actually crack 'em and—but they have a lot of flavor like the long, skinny ones, but they also seemed—we had a crop this year, this first year and about—

MM:

And last year you didn't?

AW:

No. We did not.

MM:

We didn't either. We had five pecans and three of them had—it was bad. We got two trees.

AW:

We have one large tree and one smaller tree, and then we have two big bur oaks which are—turn out to be native to the Plains in America because they have that big, thick bark, so they wouldn't burn up with prairie fire and things, but they seem to persevere pretty well, and we only water them, any of our trees, oh, a couple of times a year. We just want to make sure the root stock is good, but we—and they've plugged along just fine. My wife and I are thinking about how we would—because we live in town and we don't have a lot of space. It's not a big house, but we don't have a big lot either. It's an old part of town, but we would like to do a water catchment system. We have—I have some friends down state toward Menard, where it's pretty dry like it is here, but hotter in the summer, and they're putting in water catchment systems that are remarkable.

MM:

In the ground?

AW:

No. They store it above ground. Some of them do it in tanks below ground, but most of them are building them above ground and they collect it off the roof, and it's not that expensive. I think the biggest problem is filtration and if you're going to try to drink it, you have to have some way to purify it, but it was a house of this size I would guess you're, what, two thousand square feet?

FM:

Yeah, something like that.

AW:

Two-thousand square foot house you don't need but about ten inches a year, rainfall, to supply your domestic needs so—it's amazing how much water comes down out of the sky even in a dry year, so we're thinking that we might want to do something like that because I can see a time in Lubbock especially, not so much running out of it, but we are undercharging right now for what water's really worth in town. I mean, way undercharging, and some moment, somebody's going to wake up and say, "Wait a minute. We can't sell water for a tenth of it costs us to acquire. We're going to have to get back to pricing it fairly."

FM:

Well, I'll tell you. My boys are good. I don't know how many tanks out there that—you can beg or borrow it from 'em for fertilizer tanks and bring the fertilizer out and they'd—

AW:

Oh, those white, plastic—?

FM:

Yeah. They don't want them back.

AW:

Well, we may have to do that. That's what a lot of people are converting.

MM:

I know. That's what I told Felix. We need to get the water off the shop when it rains. It'll water the grass all year.

AW:

Well, the other thing people are doing with those tanks—of course, I think one problem is if you're going to consume it, you have a long term process cleaning it. But another friend in town that had built an aqua culture system using those tanks where you had fish and aquatic plants that worked in symbiosis, and they would—he'd actually sell the fish or eat the fish, and it was very interesting and he used those very same tanks. Well, we may have to give 'em a call.

Alright, well that's—let me explain a little bit of the process of what happens here. I'm going to ask you to sign a release form in a moment and what it is for is for you to say it's okay for scholars—researchers to use the interview and listen to it, and that's basically what it's about so that we can let people hear what you have to say. I will get—make sure that we can make you a copy of this, and then we'll get it back to you.

MM:

Okay. There will probably be some stuff on there that Felix didn't tell you today. I don't know.

AW:

Well, we'll, if there is, then that will even be better if it's the same thing you told us today, but you never know. In terms of collecting history, we're like, if you as a farmer, if you were growing a crop you didn't know what it was going to be used for and used by people you don't know who they are in the future, that's what we do in the collection history business. We don't know necessarily who is going to be coming to listen to all this or when they're going to listen to it or what they're going to be interested in, so if we knew that, we could do a perfect job, but so

we try to get as much as we can. Now one thing I didn't ask, I didn't ask, when you got married, did you move to the farm, and you farmed it together. Is that correct?

MM:

We lived in town for a year while they built this house.

FM:

I lived with grandma and my sister and—

AW:

In the next house. Yeah.

FM:

They kicked me out when I got married. (laughs)

MM:

And then we moved in this house, and it was—it had that grey shingles stuff on it.

AW:

Yeah, asbestos shingles?

FM:

Yeah.

MM:

In 1998, we bricked our house, and we built the garage on to the—I mean, made a bedroom out of the garage when the kids were—I think Mary Ann was probably about—she was probably about two or three, and I changed that into the bedroom. I did most of the building in there.

(laughs)

AW:

Did you? Really?

FM:

Yeah, she put the floor in and everything.

MM:

Felix bought me a circular saw. Took the garage doors off and—

AW:

I can't wait to tell my wife. She loves to—she's helped a time or two in these women-built Habitat for Humanity homes, and she said that she had missed her calling. She had wanted to be a carpenter.

MM:

When Felix said, "Well, I don't have time, and we've got some guys out here," and it was like, whoa, that's way out of—that's just too much money. Well, if you want to go get you some stuff and get to work. It took about nine months.

AW:

Well, that's—who knows? A contractor might have taken nine months to get it done, too.

FM:

Well, we've always lived simply, you know. We never spent money unwisely, I don't think, and everything too much—

MM:

We had kids to send to college too.

FM:

Yeah.

AW:

Sure glad you sent them to Tech.

MM:

Yeah. They all went to Tech and all of them married kids from—that went to Tech or they ended up going after they got married to Tech, so it was good. It's been a good ride. God has blessed us greatly.

AW:

Yeah. Most of anything I've gotten accomplished in that regard, I certainly don't try to take credit for myself.

MM:

I know.

AW:

Well, thank you both very much.

(end of recording)



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