



John Bliss Oral History Interview, August 21, 2015

Title

“Researching the Intersection Between Communities and Forests”

Date

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Location

Peavy Hall, Oregon State University.

Summary

In the interview, Bliss provides an overview of his family background and upbringing in Madison, Wisconsin, commenting in particular on his memories of growing up during the Vietnam War era and of his participation in the counterculture. He then recounts his undergraduate studies in Cultural Anthropology and the path that he took to entering the Peace Corps. From there, Bliss details the two years that he spent as a Peace Corps volunteer in Afghanistan and the ways in which his experience of deforestation in Afghanistan led to his pursuing further academic study in Forestry.

Bliss next describes his master's degree work at Wisconsin and, in particular, his thesis research on the use of early computers to classify forest cover types. The six years that he spent as a forester and silviculturist with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources are the next topic of discussion, followed by a review of his Ph.D. research and his first attempts to marry his training in Anthropology and Forestry. Bliss closes out this section of the interview by touching upon his first faculty position at Auburn University and noting the research that he conducted there on the socioeconomic impact of the forestry industry in Alabama.

The session then turns its attention to Bliss' move to Oregon State University and his work as the first Starker Chair in Private and Family Forestry. In commenting on this period of his life, Bliss reflects on the creation of the chair by the Starker family; his observations on the social and political differences that define community engagement with forests in the Northwest versus the Deep South; his involvement in creating unique experiential learning opportunities for OSU Forestry students interested in social problems and community dynamics; and his move into an administrative role as Associate Dean for Graduate and International Programs within the College of Forestry. Bliss likewise comments on his association with the University of Queensland; the increasing internationalization of OSU's College of Forestry; the college's standing with respect to other Forestry programs world-wide; and the potential importance of cross-laminated timber in building the skyscrapers of tomorrow.

The interview concludes with notes on family and the importance that Bliss places on striving for balance in life.

Interviewee

John Bliss

Interviewer

Mike Dicianna

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/bliss/>

Transcript

Mike Dicianna: Well today is Thursday August 27th, 2015, and we are going to learn about Doctor John C. Bliss, associate dean here at the School of Forestry at OSU. My name is Mike Dicianna, I'm an oral historian for the OSU Sesquicentennial Oral History Project. We're in the dean's office of Peavy Hall here on the OSU campus, and we're talking of better than a hundred years of OSU forestry, and we're going to learn where John fits in. We always like to start with a kind of a short biographical sketch of our narrators, like where were you born, early childhood life, that type of thing.

John Bliss: Sure. Born and raised in Madison, Wisconsin by parents who were born and raised in Madison, Wisconsin. My father was, as he called it, a ribbon peddler. He managed a men's clothing store the whole time I was growing up. He came back from the war and had hoped to go into medicine, had a one-year—I think it must have been a two-year-old baby daughter that was born just before he went overseas, and so when he came back he felt he needed to support his family. He went back to the clothing store where he had been a stockroom boy when he did his undergraduate degree in Business, and got that job back and retired from it something like forty or forty-five years later. He's now ninety-eight and healthy and sharp, and he's got a sense of humor that just is as biting as it was thirty years ago. Still lives in Madison.

And my mother, when I was in high school she went back and got a master's degree in Music Education and taught elementary school music for many, many years, and taught piano in our home. So I went through K through 12 in Madison city schools, grew up in a family that didn't have much money, and my mother gave piano lessons so that she could take us on vacations in the summer, and we would pack into the family used car and spend two weeks. And her goal was, "let's get to every national park in the country." So kind of an early love of camping and of wide-open spaces and mountains. So that figured in later on.

I did my first degree in Cultural Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin. I never thought about going anywhere else; I mean, why would I go anywhere else? I could live for free at home, I think tuition was a hundred and twenty-five bucks a term, and if I paid the tuition my dad would buy my books as long as I resold them at the end of the term and used the proceeds for my tuition.

So anyway, and I dropped out at least once. I think I dropped out twice. And in one of those dropping outs I ended up on a commune in eastern Washington. Actually, the area that's on fire right now, just outside of Tonasket - Mt. Bonaparte. A family friend had a ranch and invited me to come up and I was picturing "oh hey, great, I'm going to be a cowboy," and I get out here and it's loaded with hippies and pseudo-Buddhists and Taoists, and—

MD: So '68, '69?

JB: You got it; you got the picture, yeah. This would have been a little later. I graduated from high school in '69; this would have been maybe '71.

MD: Oh wow, yeah.

JB: And you know, the Vietnam War was going on, the world was going to hell, so I got out there and actually had quite a learning experience, for less than a year. I think I was up there six or eight months and decided "you know, maybe I should finish my degree." So I came back, finished my degree, met my wife, who was to become my wife, bought a truck—you know, this could go on forever. Bought a used plumber truck and traveled up and down the Rockies all the way down into Mexico and back up the Rockies, and decided "by golly, we're going to get married." And called home—and there's stories all around this—but called home to learn "hey, the Peace Corps called, they've got a placement for you, but you've got to be married." We had applied before we took off in the truck. And so we got home, we were married, and ten days later we landed in Kabul, Afghanistan and did two years Peace Corps.

[0:05:25]

MD: Well let's catch up a little bit. One of the things I always ask, because every generation has the significant memory that imprints on them, whether it be the Pearl Harbor attack, or later generations maybe the Challenger; your generation is like mine, do you remember when JFK was assassinated?

JB: Oh yeah, I was, I remember Kathy Troy—I think I was in seventh grade—Kathy Troy broke into tears. She was a classmate and we were in class when we learned about that. You know, those were turbulent times. I mean it was Kennedy and another Kennedy and Martin Luther King and the Watts riots and Earth Day and the beginning of Women's liberation movement. Gay pride was still off into the future, so there was—and music has always played a huge part in my life and I was playing in bands back then and paying my college tuition playing in bands, and music was just, I mean there was this culture renaissance. Everybody could be a musician; everybody I knew was in a band.

MD: They were all in a garage band, yeah.

JB: Oh yeah, and that's what we cared about. And of course there was tons of drugs going on all over the place, and some friends were succumbing in ultimately a pretty destructive way. But there was this sense of experimentation and you can do anything and, you know, "we're going to remake the world, because the world as it is sucks; let's do something different." So that was all just boiling. Then we came back from Peace Corps two years later, and that would have been—or almost three years later—it would have been '76, and the world had changed. We decided to go back to school and suddenly campus was quiet. I remember I had to go back into remedial math, I didn't have any math, and so I was in a calculus class with these kids that were several years younger. I remember one of them asking "well I don't know why you guys did that marching and protesting; what good did it do?" And I thought "wow, times have changed."

MD: In five years, yeah.

JB: Yeah. I mean we were out of Vietnam, Nixon had been humiliated, Jimmy Carter had come on the scene. But it was just a different, different time.

MD: It was just—now how much was the University of Wisconsin involved with the anti-war movement from this—was it huge there?

JB: Oh, it was huge.

MD: Because it wasn't so much here; it was more a conservative school here.

JB: Oh no, I mean they used to call Madison the Berkeley of the Midwest. There was kind of Berkeley, Madison, Ann Arbor, and I'm not sure what place on the East Coast would fit in that, but oh, it was, there were whole terms where either classes were closed because the teaching assistants would be on strike, or you couldn't get into buildings because the tear gas was so thick, and the university would be closed. Yeah, it was—

MD: So they had campus unrest.

JB: You know, when you talk about a social revolution now, you kind of think "oh right, yeah, like that's going to ever happen," but at that time there was so—oh, and there was the Kent State killings; you talk about significant.

MD: Yeah, did they close school there?

JB: Oh yeah.

MD: Yeah, because they closed OSU.

JB: And we had midnight vigils and candlelight vigils. I mean and you're thinking "my God, they're bringing in the Army National Guard and shooting students on campus with them." So anyway, it's very hard for young people today to imagine the turbulence, and there's a lot of nostalgia for tie-dye and for Jimi Hendrix, and you know, and that's all a part of it, but I think sometimes it's lost how gut-wrenching it was. I mean, for example, my father was a decorated veteran of World War II with a bronze star and very proud of his military history, and I was a conscientious objector. And so you think about, how do you reconcile your respect for your father and his respect for me with that? Well as it turns out, he was amazing about that, he was wonderful about that. But there were these huge generational rifts.

[0:10:39]

MD: Yeah, never trust anybody over thirty.

JB: Exactly. My wife reminds me that when her mother, who's very conservative, from a conservative rural town in Wisconsin, when I was first introduced to the in-laws I had hair down to the middle of my back. And my mother-in-law asked me "so, what are you going to—what are your career plans?" or some question like that. I said "well, I plan to retire early," and Kerry is like "ohh, John." But that was a little bit indicative of the sense that "there's a lot wrong, we need to fix everything, everything's broken, let's find a different way of doing things."

MD: Now your undergraduate Anthropology; what specialty within that discipline did you look to study and look to go into?

JB: That's a great question, because it brings up kind of a philosophy of education. My feeling then and my feeling now is that a university, your time in the university, this is not job training. If I wanted job training I would go to a technical school or I would join a trade union. I felt then, and I feel now, that a liberal education is the basis of citizenship. I was in Cultural Anthropology not because I had any dream that I would ever use it - I was pretty sure I wouldn't - but it fascinated me. I was curious about it; I wanted to learn about it. And again, going back to my father, the amazing thing was that he didn't say—well actually he did say, "at least get a teaching certificate." You know, he was pretty pragmatic, you know, and "now you're married, what are you going to do, and"—

MD: Well at least maybe you can do something with it.

JB: Exactly, and so I did that. But this rush to get in the race and get your credentials and get a high GPA and come out with a marketable degree, I didn't think that was the reason then for going to college, and I don't think it is now, which I know puts me very much in the minority.

MD: Yeah, but it's a philosophy that, you know, do what you love.

JB: Well it leads to great graduate students, I'll tell you that. And they're all employed. I don't have graduate students in employment lines.

MD: So obviously you were part of this culture, counter culture; was your sphere of friends and everything all hippies? I mean, was that your crowd that you ran with, or?

JB: So when I came back from that commune, it was with the intention of—I got to get my timeline straight, I forget whether it was before or after that. It was probably before that, actually, that my friends—about five of us, and we'd been chums since grade school—decided to rent one of these slum landlord houses that, it was two hundred and fifty bucks for the whole house, right on the edge of campus. And I remember my father saying "well, you're going to do what you want to do, but I just fear that hanging out with those guys, you're going to drop out." I said "Dad, drop out? I'm a good student." I was getting good grades. I lasted a term. So that was just before I dropped out. But hey, I did eventually filter back. So yeah, you know, my buddies were musicians and artists and ne'er-do-wells. Good guys to grow up with.

MD: Well, it's interesting that you went into the Peace Corps and taught English, because you have a teaching—came out of school with a teacher's certificate, and you were there between '74 and '76, so that was just before the Afghani war.

JB: Yeah.

MD: There's, like I say, there's bound to be some stories about your time in Afghanistan.

JB: You're just going to have to cut me off, yeah.

MD: Oh, well, I've got plenty of tape here.

[0:15:01]

JB: Yeah, we arrived in '74 and we left in '76, and that was this window of time between the ouster of King Zahir Shah. So there had been, it had been a kingdom, he was ousted by a cousin, Daoud Khan, who instigated some democratic

reforms. It became the Republic of Afghanistan, and Daoud was in power maybe a year or two before we arrived and a year or two after. So there was relative calm in the country. There was quite a progressive movement, you had women going to college in the capital city, college-aged women would not be underneath the chadory. They would wear—either they'd be dressed very conservatively and with a head scarf, but they weren't enshrouded. We were up in a small town in the north, and there, as a man outside of an Afghan family, of course I never saw a woman, there were never women unshrouded in public.

We left in '76 in the, it must have been the spring, late winter, early spring of '76. We were right on the highway that led from Kabul up and over the Salang Pass and Hindu Kush, and then you go and you get onto the Asian steppes, the—eventually you lead to the Oxus River, which was at that time the demarcation with the Soviet Union. And the Soviets had built this highway, basically one of only two highways, and in the spring, I think of '76 it was, we would start to hear these rumblings in the middle of the night, coming down the highway. And they were armored personnel carriers and big flatbed trucks carrying anti-aircraft equipment and so forth.

And so the Soviets were setting up for the invasion. And in '79, Christmas of '79 is when the lid blew off. But between '76 and '79, there were these series of puppet governments. Daoud was assassinated, and I don't even remember their names but there were two or three puppet regimes before the Soviets finally just invaded.

MD: That's incredible, I mean to be part of this history and then to see it today. Now do you still have ties at all with Afghanistan?

JB: Not with anyone in Afghanistan. It became really difficult. We did for a while, and there were some families that became refugees and got out into Pakistan, and some that made it to Germany and some that made it to the US. And so for some number of years we had some communication, but communication within Afghanistan; not at all.

MD: Not much forestry going on in there for you to travel to.

JB: Well actually, you know, another guy here in the college - he's now retired - Robin Rose was on a USAID mission to reestablish a tree nursery in Kabul. So there have been some efforts, yeah.

MD: Oh wow. I just don't picture Afghanistan as forested, but –

JB: Well, it's been heavily, heavily deforested, over the eons. I mean, it started with Genghis Khan.

MD: Yeah.

JB: But yeah, it's a, you know, it's tragic. There are a couple of generations now that have grown up knowing nothing but war and hardship. Of course Afghanistan, back then, was not an easy place to be. But you learn a lot when you're kind of under adverse conditions, and you really see the beauty of people, the strength of people. For me, one of the lasting impressions that no doubt led to my work in the last couple decades was a real love for folks who come from just a completely different mindset. I mean, we were in a very traditional, conservative, Islamic society. And so we kind of started to understand Islam from the inside, and that has come in pretty handy in recent decades and has led to—I mean, the most enriching part of my career has been my graduate students, and they've been from all over the planet, and from several different major world religions. And that has enriched my life.

[0:20:25]

MD: Yeah. So coming back to the United States, you began your actual graduate studies, again at Wisconsin-Madison. I see that early on you were a research assistant with the Department of Forestry. Now what kind of thing were you working on and why the shift to Forestry?

JB: So that's a real easy one. Forestry was on my radar in part because of kind of the usual naïve, oh, you know, "I want a job where I camp out and eat trout fresh from the," right? We still get a lot of that. But also in part because of just the experience of living in a country that had been so heavily deforested, and sort of having a visceral understanding of what it means to be in a situation where fuel of any kind is hard to come by and seeing some of the environmental destruction, but also the possibilities that reforestation, so I had a real strong interest.

But then there was a real pragmatic part of it; we came back and I knew I wanted to go on for a master's. And I had done a little bit of research and I had three fields that I was interested in: Forestry, Wildlife Management, and Communications. And so I made appointments with each of those departments on campus. I went to Communications and they basically handed me a sheet of paper and said "there are no jobs in Communications, but if you want a degree, sign here." No, that doesn't sound so good. I went to Wildlife and kind of got the same thing: "we'd love to have you but, you know, it's a life of internships and volunteer work before you can actually get a career."

And then I went into Forestry and my first sign that this was promising was that the executive assistant said "the department head would like to speak with you." So I hadn't even met anybody at the other places. And so Ron Giese invited me into his office, and after a bit of negotiating I ended up with an assistantship and a possibility to come on as a master's student.

MD: Wow.

JB: So I thought "well, Forestry. That's it."

MD: Well your master's thesis is really interesting to me because it's titled "Computer-aided classification of forest cover types from small scale aerial photographs." Now computer technology in 1979 was advancing, but nothing like today. So what were they able to do in the computer Stone Age for this application?

JB: Well, the major professor that agreed to take me on was a guy by the name of Tom Bonnicksen, forest ecologist, and he had a small grant; it was twelve thousand dollars, as a matter of fact, from the National Park Service. They needed a way to gather forest health, forest ecology, and just basic "how much forest do we have?" that kind of data, forest data, over large expanses of National Park Service land, cheaply. This was pre-Landsat, pre-satellite imagery. You know, we were still working with old black and white photos and stereo viewing and all that kind of stuff, and that's what we were trained in.

So this was cutting-edge at the time. We hired a small plane with a hole in its belly and mounted a 35-millimeter camera, like your Canon, on a little mount facing straight down, loaded it with color infrared film, and chose, as our experimental area, the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore up in Lake Superior, which is a series of beautiful wooded islands with white pine and hemlock and yellow birch and white birch and aspen and maple. And so we flew these transects over these islands and would take that film and put it in what was called a scanning microdensitometer. Basically what it did is it shot light through the film and measured the qualities of the emulsion - basically the thickness of the emulsion, I guess. And I was teamed up with a computer scientist, and his job was to produce these really primitive maps on the old computer paper that comes out in reams.

[0:25:44]

MD: Tractor paper, yeah.

JB: And so we would start off with the first algorithm, would just, "can we separate land from water?" and it would produce a map. And my job was to interpret "what is the computer seeing in this emulsion?" So my wife and I spent a summer—it was really tough, having to spend a whole summer on Bear Island in the middle of Lake Superior. It was awesome. So I had gone out and done the ground truthing. So I'd done an extensive hand survey, mapping the vegetation by forest type. We centered in on one island, this Bear Island, for our first testing. And then we would—so I would say "well, no, they got that wrong. This is a sand spit, that-" and so forth. And then we would refine; "well the computer is finding something different about this part of the Island, what is that?" And I would go to my map and say "well, that's a tiny little patch of hemlock."

"Oh, okay."

So now we could zero in on that and we're finding out what those were.

And in the end, what we published from that, we were pretty delighted to be able to tell the difference between the little freshwater lake and a stand of yellow birch. So I mean, it was crude. But you know, we got to our hardwood and softwood; "yeah, we can—you know, eighty percent of the time or whatever, we can distinguish."

MD: And so this is early, early on. The stuff that we do now with GPS and satellites and now the technology is-

JB: You have twenty-four/seven coverage. It's cheap, it's on the internet, the capability of crunching huge volumes of data in order to make these kind of determinations is amazing. I mean, our scientists now in the college, they're looking at determining growth, forest health, drought status, insect infestation, it's amazing, yeah.

MD: Well, and by 1988 you were completing your PhD in Forestry. Now, your focus has changed to something that's kind of related to today: "Motivations of nonindustrial private forest owners: a qualitative approach."

JB: So I finished my master's degree and was offered a job with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and it was as a—it was in firefighting. It was as a forest—I guess it was called a forest ranger trainee. And I went through field training and then was assigned. The decision was in the states, where they would put you, and my first assignment—well, as an aside, my wife and I were expecting our first baby, so we said to the DNR, "you know, we'll go anywhere, just make sure there's a baby doctor in the county."

So of course we were assigned to the little town of Webster in Burnett County, where there was no hospital, no clinic, no baby doctor. But I was assigned as the ranger, which meant I had a ranger station and a staff of firefighters. And so my first year with the DNR was in fire control, and literally my first day on the job was on what's called a project fire. It was a thirteen-thousand-acre fire that brought in the National Guard, brought in the Forest Service, brought in all the neighboring—I mean, it was huge. By the time I - I was in southwestern Wisconsin - they called, they said "we've assigned you to the Webster Ranger Station, and by the way, you need to get there within the next six hours; there's a project fire underway." [Laughs] And I'm this punk kid that didn't know anything, I'd never been, you know, I'd been on a couple of control fires as a trainee.

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So, but I did that for a year and then had an opportunity to move into southwestern Wisconsin in a hardwood silviculture job where I would be the forester for the county. Beautiful part of the state, gorgeous black walnut, high-quality, export-quality, red oak and white oak, and all working with farmers. With few exceptions it was all non-industrial, small-scale, private forest ownership. And so I spent the next five years working mostly with dairy farmers but also others that had small parcels, and I loved it. And that's what got me into the whole "well, what makes these people tick? What are the mechanisms by which you can influence a private land manager's behavior so that you can have some impact on the condition of the forest?" And so it started from a very, very practical sort of "how do I get these, basically Norwegian and German dairy farmers, to not graze their woods down to bare soil? And how can we get them to consider maybe expanding the area that maybe their fathers or grandfathers had cleared on steep slopes, that really wasn't suitable for pasture? Or as cropping patterns change, how might we encourage folks to consider reforestation in ways that they haven't before?" and that sort of thing.

MD: Yeah, it seems fascinating to me because of the whole idea that the GPs and the Boise Cascades and the Weyerhaeusers, and then you have people that have twenty acres of forest, and they're two different worlds.

JB: And the surprising thing is it's those little guys who own most of the forest land in the United States. Collectively it's bigger than the Weyerhaeusers and it's bigger than the Forest Service and so forth. We don't see that out here on the West Coast so much. The story is not the same.

MD: Oh, okay. Yeah, that's what I was curious about.

JB: We're heavily federally owned in this area, but as you move into the Midwest and then particularly in the East and the South, if you want to have influence over the condition of the forest, you've got to be dealing with tens of thousands of Ma and Pa's, with tens of thousands of objectives.

MD: Yeah, that's one of the things that I've noticed is, forestry, this is a big nation and we've got different needs and different philosophies here in the Pacific Northwest versus the softwoods down in the South, of which we're going to go down South. One of your first positions in academia was with Auburn University in Montgomery, Alabama, and—

JB: Well, in Auburn, Alabama.

MD: Oh, it's actually Auburn?

JB: Yeah, it's the town of Auburn, little town at that time, fifty thousand, like Corvallis. About roughly an hour to the east of Montgomery.

MD: Oh that's why they used—yeah, because Auburn's a Land Grant institution just like OSU. Your position was as a Forestry Specialist with their Extension.

JB: That's right.

MD: They call it a Cooperative Extension System, which is basically what we have. So what were your initial duties when you moved to the Deep South?

JB: Let me back up just a tad from that to—because the critical thing for my career was the realization that the mindset, the curiosity about people and about culture, the emphasis on qualitative understanding that I got from Anthropology; it was an "ah-ha" moment in a landscape architecture class when I was starting my PhD when I realized "oh my God, that degree in cultural anthropology wasn't worthless!" So it was the wedding of realizing I had a methodology and an approach to learning that could be wedded with this whole area of nonindustrial private forestry. Nobody was doing that. I thought "now there, maybe that could be something that could—maybe I could make a living at that," right?

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So that's what led to the dissertation; that's what led to the job at Auburn. Auburn had—well, I was a post-doc for one year following my PhD. You know, you finish your PhD and you think "world, I am ready, come get me," and the world wasn't ready. There were no jobs. So luckily I was able to have a PhD, or a post-doc. I had, by that time, three babies, two of them in diapers, no money. I finished a PhD; well what are you going to do with that if you don't have any jobs? Kerry had said "I'll go anywhere except the South." You know, we're both Midwesterners, we had the usual prejudice against the South, but I said "well, I'm going to apply for this job, because we need a job."

So I applied, went down there; the people were wonderful, campus was gorgeous. The job was for a forest economist, and in my letter I had said "you know, if you really need a forest economist, I am not your man, but you don't need a forest economist." They had three or four, as did most forestry departments around the country, including OSU. So I made the somewhat risky argument, because the search committee was made up of largely forest economists, I said "you don't need another forest economist. You need somebody that understands the non-economic motivations." And they bought it and offered me the job, so we moved the family there.

So that's what I was hired to do, was to help figure out why is it that sometimes the nonindustrial private forest owners don't act like rational economic actors? And so that's what I brought there, and it was like going to an area where "oh man, the world is my oyster," because there'd been tons of economic studies; there was no sociology or anthropology on these tens of thousands of folks who own most of the forest land and were making most of the decisions about what was happening with their forest land.

And worse than that, the forestry profession's view was - and stubbornly persists, though I think we've made some progress - it was referred to as the small woodland owner problem, or the small forest owner problem. And these folks were considered "you're the problem," the problem being, "why don't you act like we want you to act? We're foresters, we know best."

MD: Yeah.

JB: You know, "love us, we're a religion, follow us," you know. And so much of my career has been about trying to change the forestry profession by helping folks to understand why do we own forests? And what do we want out of our forests? And it isn't exclusively that we want to generate a little cash. That's really important, it's a huge driver, I would never minimize it, but it's not the whole story.

MD: This is great. Now, did your position there at Auburn involve any teaching or mentoring grad students at all, or were you totally a hundred percent at the station?

JB: No, it was actually a position that I was warned you would fail at. It was a—I had all three functions: research, teaching and Extension. And you know, the common knowledge was that that was a recipe for disaster. But actually there were, I think there were four of us hired at the same time, all with those split positions. We all loved those positions, and I can't imagine doing any of the functions without the other. The idea of having an Extension appointment without research struck me, and still strikes me, as a bit strange. For me, it was a wonderful wedding. You would have the opportunity to follow your own curiosity, generate new knowledge, share it with students, share it with the public. So I never felt overstressed or having one of those functions competing with the others. So, and early on I learned "wow, I really like this research stuff and I love working with graduate students."

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MD: What kinds of classes did you end up teaching? Were they related to the—

JB: So, my teaching was relatively light, so I mean that is in full disclosure; that was the other side of it. But oh, I taught in fire, I taught about fire management. I ended up teaching some communications for students. But most of my teaching was with graduate students, and has been through my whole career. And that has been my joy in this whole thing, is working with graduate students. I'm not so big on administrators. Faculty egos get in my way. Graduate students are where I get my nourishment. And it's always been that way, since my first graduate student.

MD: So what do you consider your major accomplishments, or your memories while you were there at Auburn?

JB: You know, it's interesting; I mentioned that Peavy Hall is being torn down, so we're all having to clean out our offices, and so just this week I've been going through files, and I came across a letter from a forest industry leader, who's since passed away, and I'd forgotten all about this letter. He wrote it to me—we always sent Christmas cards, and so he'd gotten a Christmas card and he was responding to that, and he—I had since moved here and he was saying "you know, you did make a difference." And what he was referring to was a study that my graduate students and my colleagues and I did. It was a big, for us, it was a big multi-year, multi-student - it ended up being maybe a quarter of a million dollars - long-term study on basically asking the question "has forest industry resulted in a socioeconomic improvement in rural Alabama? What has been the impact of many tens of millions of dollars of tax breaks, free land, building infrastructure, in order to attract forest industry—mainly the pulp and paper industry—as an engine of economic growth?"

So the theory was, if we could get a big paper company in Wilcox County, we'd generate employment, generate salaries, generate tax revenue, improve schools, raise the general socioeconomic status of some of the country's poorest counties. And so for the better part of a decade, that was a real focus. And to the credit of our team—I mean this was controversial stuff, as you might imagine, because it was taken as a given that, well, of course forest industry is good for rural America. And in many, many ways it has been, and it was. But because of the very generous tax provisions provided to all kinds of industries, from pulp and paper to more recently the automotive industry, much of the benefit was given away. And so we had—MacMillan Bloedel is a great example; they were working in British Columbia where they were heavily taxed, where there was a certain level of corporate citizenship that was required of them. And Alabama could have enjoyed some of those same benefits, but because Alabama is a very poor state and very tax-hungry, there were these extremely favorable terms negotiated that were, as I recall, basically thirty-year tax holidays that could be extended for another thirty years.

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And then - not the fault of the industry at all; the fault of state government - there was a lack of state responsibility for public education. So you had a billion-dollar pulp and paper facility in a community that couldn't afford to put glass windowpanes in the elementary school windows. And you had a frustrated industry not able to hire locally because the local labor force couldn't read the timeclock. And so there's some structural issues that are generally thought of as a state government responsibility, but the state government was not functioning.

So at any rate, to get back to the question, what was the impact? I hope one impact was raising the bar of expectation, that if we're going to use public monies to attract an industry, we're going to do it in a way that, at a minimum, doesn't have negative influences on our citizenry, and that we have some expectations for rural development. So my work there really had a strong rural development focus, alongside the private non-industrial forest management. But both of those

threads; the interest in how do we improve forest management on nonindustrial lands? And how do we improve the social outcomes of forest industry? Those drove me in and have been central to what I've done for the last fifteen years.

MD: Well you became the holder of the Starker Chair here at OSU in 1998. Now what brought you out West to the Beaver Nation? I mean, was it fate? Or a job search?

JB: [Laughs] You know, when we moved to Alabama I told my wife, I said, "well, you know, three years and then we'll go." And it isn't easy to move—well it wasn't in that period of time—to move to the Deep South, to a very conservative state, from what was at that time quite a little bastion of liberal politics in Madison, Wisconsin. But we loved it, and I didn't even look for a job for eight years. And there's a lot about the South I miss. I was having, I guess, what you could say a fair bit of success. I attracted fabulous students, we were publishing a lot, being invited to speak around the world, you know, real heady stuff, and "oh man, am I a smart guy!" Of course, you soon realize it's not about that; it's surrounding yourself with people who are a lot smarter and asking good questions.

And so I got a call from Scott Reed who was the, at that time, was the associate dean for Extension forestry here in the College of Forestry. And because I was in Extension, it's a small world, we all know each other. He called me and said "we'd like you to come and give a lecture in our sustainable forestry series. I said "oh, that's great." So I came out and he said "oh, I'll pick you up, come a day early and we'll go skiing." And I said "that's great," so I brought my—or I guess he must have had cross-country skis for me here. So anyway, I came in here early, we're heading up to Hoodoo, we stopped for a coffee and donuts; he says, "now you don't really think I brought you all the way out here just to get a lecture?"

And I mean, I was totally naïve about that. He said "I want you to think about—we're really interested in growing the college's focus. It's been pretty heavily on public forestry and industrial forestry, but we have no emphasis on the non-industrial private, and I want to pick your brain about how we might grow that area of expertise, and we may have a position that opens up, may have a position within the next year or so." And so we had a conversation and one thing led to another, I was invited to compete for the position, which was created by the Starker family. They donated to the college a parcel of land, about two-hundred and sixty acres, right on the edge of the McDonald Forest, over in the Soap Creek Valley.

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And it was actually Betty Starker Cameron who wrote the page and a half letter which is the only formal language about this, from Betty to George Brown, who was the dean, very personal letter. "Dear George," you know, "here's what we want to do; we want to give this piece of land, and our objective is that it be used for a demonstration forest focused on best management for small forest owners, and we'd like it to be actively managed, we'd like timber to be harvested and we'd like reforestation and we'd like experimentation and a lot of demonstration for landowners, and we want the revenue, any revenue that comes from timber harvest, to go into eventually building an endowment that would be large enough to create a position" in what they were calling family forestry, private and family forestry. And that was the first time I had seen that term, "family forestry."

MD: Right.

JB: I really—it came from here. Now it's all over the place. Well, George Brown was a very savvy horse trader, and he negotiated with the state; they had some kind of a matching program in place at the time, and he negotiated with Betty and the Starkers, and came up with something that was even better, which was "okay, we're going to do that, but we're also going to use some other revenue from other sources and we're going to combine this with the current program from the state, and we can create an endowment that can hire somebody within the next couple of years." So they created the Starker Chair in Private and Family Forestry, and that was the position that was advertised. And so I came out for an interview and—

MD: It was written for you.

JB: Well, I did recognize a lot of my interests in the job announcement. My kids were like "Dad, we don't want to move." In fact, it took forever for my daughter to adjust to the idea. She's not angry at me anymore.

MD: Yeah.

JB: She just moved to Corvallis with her husband, who's a new assistant professor in integrative biology, and my three-month-old grandson, who's my third grandson. So yeah, she moved back to Corvallis, but that's what brought us here. And what a remarkable opportunity.

MD: I also read that you spent some time with the brothers, Barte and Bond Starker - they're the owners of Starker Forests now - learning about trees here in the Northwest. Did you learn a lot about the Pacific Northwest and the practices from them?

JB: Oh yeah.

MD: Because that legacy of the Starkers goes back to the beginnings of the forestry program here, with T.J. Starker.

JB: Well I'll tell you; with my history of doing research on the pulp and paper industry in the South, when offered this opportunity to apply for a position that had in its very name a forest company - you know, if I got this job I was going to be the Starker Chair - I had some questions. Do I want to have my name, my professional name, forever connected with a forest products company? If that's going to be the case, I need to know that that's a company that I'm going to be proud to have my name associated with. I did my homework. I mean, frankly, I tried to dig dirt: "I want to know the skinny on the Starker family." And as anybody who has worked in the Pacific Northwest knows, there's no dirt to dig.

MD: No.

JB: This is a family that has been a model of how you can operate a business in forestry that is cutting-edge in terms of forest management, that cares about its employees, that cares about the communities in which it works. I mean, everything I read, everybody I interviewed—I made a lot of calls—was just "oh yeah, they're the gold standard." So I satisfied my curiosity about the Starker family and I have just the utmost respect for them. I did as soon as I got to know them, and I still do now, whatever it is, seventeen or eighteen years later.

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MD: So compare your forests between the South, the pines and hardwoods, and walking through some Doug fir.

JB: Well, you know, there are few things more majestic than the forests of the Pacific Northwest. It's such an interesting - politically and socially - it's such an interesting environment here. The South is politically very conservative, and in terms of its forest management it's very conservative. During the time that I was there, there was no Forest Practices Act. There was a reforestation law, which every state in the United States has some version of: if you harvest, you've got to replant.

There was no—at that time—there was just the beginning of an awareness of the need to pay attention to the impacts of forest management on streams. And so, I was there at a time when we were in pretty heated negotiations between the forestry profession, the industrial forestry community, a little bit of impact starting to come in from citizens' groups, but it was in its infancy. We were looking at best management practices, all voluntary. Come out here; there's this Forest Practices Act and comprehensive state-wide zoning, neither of which existed in Alabama, and which was quite sophisticated here. The nation's most sophisticated forest practices laws. So an entirely different atmosphere.

I can remember, as a part of my homework in my first few months, I asked – I did what you do. I said, "ok, who do I need to talk to?" and I got names of professors, legislators, forest owners, activists. And I spent a lot of time, the first six months, going around interviewing folks, informally. And one of the people I interviewed was a state legislator who was also a tree farmer. And I went to his tree farm and had a meal with him, and we're in the interview, and he's just raging against regulation. "Oh, we've got regulation on this, that and the other thing!" and I thought, "wow, this sounds like the South. This is what I heard all the time." And so I said, "well, so I take it you feel you would be better off if the state Forest Practices Act were thrown out the window." And he looked at me like, "oh my God, they didn't hire you, did they? Are you kidding?" And he said, "are you kidding? That's the one thing that makes it all work. I wrote part of that state Forest Practices Act."

His point was that there's this continuous negotiation where we're trying to find this balance between what is environmentally sound – what's the best science – and what is economically feasible. How much can we practically ask a private owner to do before they just say, "ok, the hell with this. I'm going to sell my land." Because that's an outcome

nobody wants. And so he was just very sensitive to the need to – to finding that balance. And of course he's going to be, "no, that's too much. That buffer is too wide!" But knowing that it's a negotiation. So I learned a ton and I have continued to learn a ton.

MD: Yeah, prior to your time here we had the spotted owl controversy and we've had numerous, numerous issues with environmentalists, and there's got to be a way to tie everybody together, or at least bridge some gaps. And that's part of your study here, I think; that's so important here in the Northwest.

JB: Well, and since I came, and particularly in the last five years, the College of Forestry has become a diverse, really diverse, community of scholars. Diverse in terms of perspective. Diverse in terms of nationality and ethnicity. Diverse in terms of gender. Diverse in terms of where they got their training and in what kind of discipline they got their training. Not that it was homogeneous, back in the '90s when I came, but relative to where it is today, it was pretty homogeneous. A high percentage of the faculty at that time got their degrees at Oregon State. Now, Oregon State is a great place and in terms of Douglas fir silviculture, there's no better place. But if you want a vibrant intellectual environment that remains responsive to issues of the day, you have got to have people from multiple perspectives. And particularly in the last several years, with the hiring that has been done, this ain't your father's College of Forestry anymore. And that, for me personally, that has been a very welcome and wonderful evolution that's happened.

MD: You're so well-represented in the literature, one of the things that I read, you talked about your graduate classes, of one of the graduate classes in community natural resources, we would take students to rural communities across the state where they could learn directly from forest owners, community leaders, and citizens of all persuasions. This seems to me to be innovative and so important. It's real world.

JB: And it's also really fun.

MD: I bet.

JB: It's also really fun. That has been a great joy for a number of reasons. One reason being, it's been a real collaboration between myself and Dr. Kate MacTavish, who is in what is now the School of Public Health on campus. For ten years, we've taken a maximum of fifteen graduate students from all over campus – from Public Health, from Public Policy, from Anthropology, Economics, Agriculture and, of course, Forestry, Natural Resources, Wood Science. Fifteen students. And Kate and I have considered ourselves – well, there are two models of higher education, right? There's "the sage on the stage," and I love that too. I love being the know-it-all and telling stories and performing for the students. And then there's "the guide by the side." And that class is all about taking the responsibility for learning away from the professor and putting it on the shoulders of the student.

And so in an experiential learning class like Communities and Natural Resources, my job as a teacher is to create a learning environment and facilitate the learning that a student does in direct contact with the subject matter. So I align resource people in kind of, let's say, idea-rich environments. And then I facilitate those students, I take them out and I dump them into a pool full of sharks and deep water. Deep enough so that they can have the fear of drowning, but I'm there in case the drowning happens, I've got a life raft. So they very quickly get away from the question, you know, "do we need to know this for the test?" or "what's the answer here?" Because my answer is always going to be, "I have no idea, you tell me." And that's what we do and we do it over a period of about ten days, and it's not quite as unstructured as I'm making it sound.

But for example, one year, two years, we focused on resource management on the Warm Springs reservation. Now Warm Springs, like many reservations across the country, has a whole lot of challenges. Low employment, high rates of addiction, high rates of various kinds of abuse, low rates of high school completion and college education. It has all that on one hand. It also has unbelievable family, spiritual, tribal histories and connections that our typical college students have no experience with. And so we've got a lot to learn from them, and it is one of these environments where you can take a student at a formative point in their education and toss them into an environment. Here, you ask, "what's the right thing to do with a wild horse herd? Or with the ponderosa pine or with the salmon resource here on the reservation?" Now, that's not a question that I can answer, but that's a question that will lead a student, inevitably, into all the complexity. Because there's going to be an ecological dimension to that, there's going to be a historical dimension to

that, there's going to be an economic and a religious and an ethnic and a political dimension. It's messy, it's complicated, just like the real world.

So you take them out there and what we've done is we've arranged, ahead of time, to have a really good tribal educator, and the leader of the natural resource department for the tribe, and a spiritual leader and so forth. We've gotten these resource people, cultivated them over a period of time, to help our students with the idea that maybe we can also help. So as a part of this, we're going to have at least one day in service where we ask, "now, if you had fifteen pretty smart – maybe not strong, but maybe strong – but highly motivated college students at your disposal, what would you have them do?" Well, one year that would be, "we'd like them to do the hard back-breaking labor of digging out weeds along – exotic invasive weeds – along a stream." We can do that. Another year it would be, "we've got fifteen canvas teepees that we use for our summer camp for our youth. They need to be cleaned and handled in the way that our forefathers told us how to handle them. Washed and folded and prayed over, and put away." That changes lives.

MD: Oh yeah. That's education. That is what OSU is all about.

Well, let's bring it up to sort of today. You were appointed as the Associate Dean for Graduate and International Programs within the School of Forestry.

JB: Right.

MD: So you've commented on how graduate students are your passion, I'm interested in the international programs. That's kind of up your ally as world traveler. What's that end of your position all about?

JB: Well, they're entirely separate. My graduate students have come from all over the world and I haven't given up on that. In fact, right at the moment I have one graduate student who is in Senegal and I have another graduate student who is writing her Ph.D. on work done in west Africa. But as associate dean, you get your pleasures in different ways. And while I had less opportunity to work directly with graduate students, I have the responsibility and the opportunity to try and expand opportunities for graduate students, and undergraduate students in the international realm. So my job there is to create the experiential and other kinds of learning opportunities so that our students, whether they're undergraduate or graduate, by the time they have graduated and finished, they know that their careers are inevitably going to be about more than just Douglas fir in the state of Oregon. And so with my wonderful staff, we have worked hard to identify opportunities for global internships, for long-term study abroad, for exchange student opportunities with institutions all over the world.

And the thing that has been most fun has been to give our faculty within the college, give them the resources they need to lead our students on short-term international experiences. And it's been terrific; great success. We've been at this three years, we've already tripled the number of students in the college with some significant international experience. We have faculty-led programs in Japan, Australia, Spain, eastern Europe, northern Europe, Peru, Chile. So these are not just sort of general interest study abroad, these are OSU College of Forestry faculty with a focus on, for example, wood in architectural design in Scandinavia. Or the fungus of tropical trees and how that fungus can be used in wood sculpture, and how pigments can be derived from that fungus for aesthetic purposes. I mean, just this outrageous stuff. And the rural community stuff that I was just talking about, on the Warm Springs, I take students to rural Japan, where we study the very same kinds of issues that we see in rural Oregon. Many, many comparable or parallel issues in rural Japan.

MD: Is this why you were in Japan this last summer?

JB: That's exactly right.

MD: What prefecture were you in?

JB: We were up in Akita Prefecture in the north of Honshu, and I had five students from OSU, Oregon Institute of Technology, Eastern Oregon University. Here at OSU, we had Veterinary Medicine, Natural Resources, Forest Engineering, and Wood Science. And then five students from Akita International University. And these students form teams that are bilingual, multicultural, multidisciplinary, and they study natural resource-based rural development in rural Oregon, and then they do it together, same thing, in rural Japan. Fabulous class.

MD: Wow, that's interesting. I find that you're an honorary professor with the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia. Now, does this involve the same type of travel and teaching and research Down Under?

JB: It does. That was an outgrowth of my participation in IUFRO – the International Union of Forestry Research Organizations – which is a very large science-based body that has many, many different working groups. There are working groups on forest ecology, on forest soils, on hydrology, forest engineering and so forth. One of the working groups is Small-Scale Forestry, and that has been just a wonderful group of people. When you realize that you're studying this stuff about non-industrial private forest owners in the States, and you realize, "wow, Serbia is now trying to figure out what their private forestry might look like?" All of these countries of the former Yugoslavia now are writing new forest policy laws, they're repatriating land that had been taken from private owners who had had it in their families for centuries, and now they're figuring out, "how do we give it back? How do we determine who owns what? And what kind of forest practices make sense?" So all of eastern Europe has gone through that. Australia has a huge non-industrial private forest base as does New Zealand. These issues pop up in Japan, they pop up in Africa, and so what my students and I learn is that, wow, the skillset that we've developed is applicable elsewhere.

So through that small-scale forestry group, I've been able to take my students all over. I take them to these conferences, they give papers, they make connections. And I've given these workshops on the research methods of, basically, of anthropology applied to forestry. And that led to an invitation in Australia to get involved with that University of Queensland. Yeah, it's just been wonderful opportunities. It's been a great career, I'll tell ya.

MD: So how many countries has this taken you to? You're a world traveler, I understand that you do that for enjoyment, but this is making a difference globally.

JB: Who woulda thunk that there would be this kind of application? My students and I – oh my gosh – so, we've done work in rural China, in the Philippines, in Australia, in Lithuania, in Serbia, Bosnia, in Ethiopia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Ireland. I mean, there are others I'm sure, but those are ones that I've been really engaged with. We've done workshops and trainings and been on dissertation committees. And then my students – oh, Brazil, Guatemala, I know I'm forgetting some. There's a bunch.

MD: Yeah, you've made it around the world.

JB: There's a bunch; it's been phenomenal.

MD: The world-wide global issues of deforestation of the Amazon and things like that, you're within that.

JB: And here's an interesting, my thinking about where this college is going. Our students, particularly our graduate students but many of our undergraduate students, they are realizing, in some cases before our faculty and our administrators, that their lives – first of all, statistically, we know that they're going to have more than a half a dozen career changes. And they know or sense that it isn't all going to be in Oregon, it isn't all going to be in the Pacific Northwest, it isn't all going to be in the United States. And it's no big deal to this generation of students to take a job somewhere across the world.

That is also true of our new faculty. We have hired really well. Our recent hires are from South America, eastern Africa, eastern Europe, Australia, China. And we're not exceptional that way. And we didn't say, "ok, we're going to go out and hire a bunch of international people." We want to get, "so who's the reforestation expert?" Happens to be from Chile. Who's the best hydrologists in the world? Well, one's from Canada, one's from South America. And they totally get it. Their education has been from all around the world, their graduate students are going to be from all around the world, their interests are from all around the world. And so, without any policy change, without any Associate Dean for International Programs, this college, in five years, is going to be so much more international in its breadth and understanding than it's ever been in the past. And it's led by students, it's led by assistant professors. That is a beautiful thing.

MD: It makes me proud of the long history of where Forestry started in 1910 to where it's going today.

JB: There's been a huge demographic change, as I've mentioned, and that drives – it's students and its faculty that drive, you know, "what do we study?" And it drives, "well, what does it mean to be a natural resource professional?"

MD: You're working in the community of colleges with Forestry departments, how do you think we rank or stack up – without being too Beaver-centric – stack up against other programs nationally? This seems so innovative and so special to me.

JB: You know, we boast about being the Forestry leader. And you can quibble and you can slice and dice it many ways, but by many measures, we are. And we will be more so – we're more so now than we were five years ago, to my way of thinking. So when I came, I would say, in terms of industrial forestry and in terms of Douglas fir silviculture, we're a world leader. Having visited a lot of universities around the world, we have a huge global reputation. I just got back from a week in Korea and I visited four different universities, and at every university, the first thing would be, "oh, I got my master's degree at OSU" or "my major professor did." Or at the minimum it would be, "oh yes, I went to a conference in Corvallis." They would say, "oh, I've been to Corvallis." And the same is true pretty much anywhere that you go where there is a forestry or a natural resources institution, somebody there has passed through here.

We are the only remaining College of Forestry in North America. Now that's not to say that there aren't other colleges of natural resources, environmental studies, but that is one – it's a name. Well, how important is that? It's probably pretty important. We did not go, have not gone, the route of many of the other – well, all the other programs in the United States – that were kind of bread and butter forestry institutions twenty years ago. Now they've been folded into a college of agriculture or they've merged with others and become a college of the environment. Many in very, very good schools. Ours is the only one that has stayed with the idea that forestry is still a concept that is broader than just growing trees and cutting them down. And so we are unique that way.

If you look at our research productivity, it's unmatched. So you can say, "are we the best college of forestry in the world?" Well, when it comes to producing cutting-edge knowledge, we've got a pretty good right to brag right there.

We've got work to do. This demographic change of bringing in a much more diverse faculty – again, along all the dimensions that I mentioned – that was essential and will be essential. Because you can't remain a global leader without having global insights, and we are making fantastic insights in that direction.

MD: Makes me proud to be a Beaver, to just even think about it.

One of the things that I read recently is there's this talk about using wood to make wooden skyscrapers. And I realize that it's part of the studies here; is this something that we're going to see here on campus to replace Peavy Hall? A wood skyscraper? It's an interesting concept.

JB: So what you will see if you come back in about, let's say, three years, just to be safe, Peavy will be much more of a wood structure than it is now. It won't be a skyscraper. I believe the plan is a three-story building that features some of the engineered wood products that are very innovative and are being used in seven- to fifteen-story buildings that are being built in Canada and Europe. Our building codes don't allow that right now, but there's work being done to change those building codes. At the core of that is, if you want a healthy forest and you want a healthy forest community, there have got to be ways to satisfy the human needs of that community from the forest without destroying the forest. So you've got to have forest products that can be extracted and can be used for the basis of economic opportunity, while at the same time sustaining ecological services that the planet requires from the forest.

So some of the innovations don't happen out in the forest, they happen in the lab. And among those innovations are new ways of combining technology with the natural qualities of wood to create new building products in a way that leaves as small of an environmental footprint as possible. So many of these cross-laminated timbers, for example, our argument is that those are products – unlike steel and concrete – that can be grown in a sustainable fashion, that can be the basis of economic activity, and that can be used in buildings that will last essentially forever. So that is one major thrust for the Peavy new building. But also, so there's a second building that will be built on the campus, just within a quarter mile from here, that will center on those kinds of products; innovating wood products.

MD: So it's the future of forestry. Of the industry, anyway.

JB: Well, it's going to be a big part of forestry, and particularly of Northwest forests, because of the extraordinary qualities of Douglas fir. It's pretty exciting and it'll have its challenges for sure, but the idea is, as a Land Grant institution,

to combine science and technology with outreach to communities and to industry, with new knowledge that can be put to use.

MD: That's the way it's been for 150 years.

JB: Yeah.

MD: Well, none of our Beaver stories are complete without learning a little bit about your family. We've learned a little bit, but tell us about your family and how much they're a part of your life and a part of your success.

JB: [laughs] No family, no success.

MD: Mama's not happy, nobody's happy.

JB: Yeah. Well, you ask that at an interesting time because we're in a very interesting and exciting time in our family's history. So my wife Kerry and I have been married for, I think, forty-eight years. We have three grown children who [laughs] at one point, Benjamin was teaching English in Japan, Christopher was studying Mandarin at Beijing University, and Jessica was a Peace Corps volunteer in Niger, in the Sahel of Africa. So we were scattered all over the planet.

And now we're at this point where Benjamin and his wife Crystal have moved back to Oregon, to Portland, with their two sons Rowen and Elliot, aged three and one. And our daughter Jessica and her husband Ben and their three-month-old son have moved from Princeton, New Jersey, where they were in post-docs, to Corvallis, where Ben will be an assistant professor of integrative biology. And so we're pretty much in seventh heaven. Now, we've got to work on son Christopher. He is a science writer for the Union of Concerned Scientists in Boston. So we would love to get he and his partner Lisa to think about moving out here, but that hasn't happened quite yet. But we are relatively new grandparents and now we have got three grandsons close by.

MD: And it suits you well?

JB: It suits me very, very well, yeah. I am really thriving on having Lyle, my three-month-old. I wake up and the first thing – they're living with us until they find a home – first thing in the morning, I've got this beautiful smiling baby looking at me, and two out of the last three nights, I've put him to sleep, listening to crickets in the backyard out on a porch swing.

But it ties in to my educational philosophy too, because I know you're going to ask about that. And this is not necessarily *de rigueur* among many of my faculty, but my mission with many of my graduate students has been to emphasize how, if they don't have some kind of work/life balance, they're not going to be successful. I have felt that, over my career – and I have felt this personally, I needed to learn from my wife and from others, the importance of this – I plunged into being an assistant professor with all the energy and enthusiasm that we expect. And the model was the superstar who's publishing like crazy and bringing in millions of dollars in grants, jet-setting around the world to give conferences. And it's an ego trip and it's wonderful and I loved it until about three years in when my wife, after I came in on a late flight into Atlanta and then drove the two hours to Auburn, I tried to get into bed without waking my wife and she was awake. And she asked me three questions, and I couldn't answer any of them. And they had to do with the kindergarten teacher of my oldest and my daughter's best friend and my little kid's nursery teacher's name. And I failed the test. And she said, "well, you've got some choices to make. Good night." And that stuck with me.

So my mission with my graduate students is that superstardom is for some folks, a tiny percent. It's a bad thing for us to be looking for in our graduates, where most of us are not going to be superstars. We're going to be good scientists, we're going to be good teachers, we're going to make a great contribution to society. But if we're going to thrive, we're also going to have families that stay together, we're going to know our kids' teachers' names. And so I try to practice what I preach. I try to model that. Sure I'd love to have a Nobel Peace Prize or a Pulitzer, but I'd rather have a happy family and a healthy body, and I'd like my students, rather than being in the lab on Sunday nights, I'd like them to be on the soccer team or going to their kid's recital or whatever it is. As I say, that puts me at odds with some of my faculty, but I think that is a huge challenge, especially for Land Grant universities. That's my pitch and I'm sticking to it.

MD: Well, one of the things I always like to do is to give our narrators, our interviewees, a chance to impart some final nuggets of wisdom, which you've been so generous with so far. But are there any final thoughts for the Beaver Nation that will be watching this oral history?

JB: Well maybe I'll just recap, because I've tried to slip some of those in. But one is definitely along the lines of what makes a successful graduate student. And what makes a successful graduate student is one who has learned how to do excellent work and, at the same time, be a great citizen of the community and a good mother or father or partner, and has a sense balance between their professional aspirations, their career aspirations, and their physical health, and their spiritual health, and the health of their family and community. And we can teach that, and we can model that.

And as I mentioned, in a Land Grant in particular, we are not a technical school, or shouldn't be. A university and a college, it is such a privilege, we are so privileged – we're the tiny whatever the percentage is of the world's citizens how have this unbelievable opportunity to focus on what interests us for a few years before being tossed out to make a living and to make a contribution. It's a huge privilege. And sometimes I think that many of our faculty are pushed into a situation of feeling it's a grind and they have got to get that nth paper out, and they've got to bring in that next \$10,000 of grant money. And I understand that that has become more and more real, it's become tougher and tougher, and I don't want to minimize that. But if we lose that sense of a privilege, and if we don't take advantage of the opportunity to develop collegial relations with colleagues outside of our discipline and outside of our department and impart that kind of joy of learning to our students, then we're really missing the boat. So there you have it. I don't know if that counts as a nugget of wisdom but that's heartfelt.

MD: No, that is just absolutely fantastic. On behalf of the oral history project for our 150th anniversary as a Land Grant institution, your contribution is going to be a major portion of our collection, and for that we thank you so very much for participating.

JB: It's been a great pleasure, thank you.