



Bryan Wolfe Oral History Interview, October 31, 2014

Title

“A Fifth-Generation Farmer and Rancher”

Date

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Location

Valley Library, Oregon State University.

Summary

In the interview, Wolfe describes his family background as a fifth-generation farmer and rancher growing up near Wallowa, Oregon. In this, he discusses his parents and grandparents, his contacts with 4-H and FFA as a boy, and his wife's background as a native of Joseph, Oregon. He likewise reflects on community life in the Wallowa area, his memories of high school, and his decision to attend Oregon State University.

Recalling his OSU experience, Wolfe speaks of his transition to a larger community and a different climate, the 1962 Columbus Day Storm, his academic progression in Agricultural Economics, and his social life, with particular attention paid to his activities as a member of Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity. He also notes his participation in agricultural clubs and the OSU Flying Club, a trip that he took to the 1965 Rose Bowl football game, and jobs that he held while an undergraduate.

The session then shifts focus to Wolfe's activities as a farmer and rancher following college. Wolfe begins by sharing his memories of returning to the family ranch and setting up a household. He then outlines the specifics of the family's expansion of its operations, including their purchase of large tracts of land near Pendleton and Hermiston, the growth of their cattle herd, and their implementation of center-pivot irrigation circles. He also touches on the risk that farmers assume, particularly with respect to inclement weather, and the personal impact that weather disasters have made on his own crops over the years.

As it nears its conclusion, the interview concentrates primarily on Wolfe's civic engagement. He speaks of his work on the state Board of Forestry, comments on the proliferation of windmills in eastern Oregon, and notes his continued connection to Extension and Experiment Stations. The session ends with Wolfe's thoughts on the future of agriculture in Oregon and some remarks on the paths that his children have followed into adulthood.

Interviewee

Bryan Wolfe

Interviewer

Chris Petersen

Website

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

Transcript

Chris Petersen: Okay Bryan, if you could please introduce yourself with your name and today's date, and our location?

Bryan Wolfe: I was born William Bryan Wolfe, and I go by my middle name, Bryan. And this is Friday, November—

CP: October; it's Halloween.

BW: Oh, October 31st, Halloween, and 2014. And we are in the Valley Library Center on campus at Oregon State University.

CP: Terrific. Well, we'll talk a lot about your upbringing and your OSU years, and your life in agriculture. We'll start in the beginning. You were born in Enterprise; is that correct?

BW: I was born in Enterprise. The Wolfe family came out of northeastern Tennessee in 1899, out of the mountains of northeastern Tennessee, and came to the mountains of northeastern Oregon, and settled there. And we were agriculturists, and started owning ground since 1891 up there. My brother and nephew were on the farm that's been in the family since 1896, so a long, long time in Oregon. And we expanded our operations. My dad was Bill Wolfe, and we expanded our operations in the '60s, and we were grain operators and a large cattle operation of purebred polled Herefords. And we were showing all over the United States and in Canada in purebred stock, and selling bulls and heifers, replacements and seed stock.

And so we expanded our operation over into Umatilla County to take advantage of lower altitude and warmer winters for our livestock operation. And 1969 we bought some property in Hermiston, and in 1970 we bought some dryland operation in the Pendleton area. And so 1972, why, we started developing the center-pivot irrigation circles in Hermiston. And being the farmer of the family, my brother Steve was more the cattleman, and brother Dwight wasn't back on the farm yet from his schooling, and so I started spending quite a bit of my time at the Pendleton and Hermiston places, and developing that, the water sources and center-pivot circles on that property, to be developed to some of the most intensively farmed, fertile ground in the world. We can raise crops there unequal to anywhere.

But then I was spending so much time over there; I had a wife and two little sons, and a third one on the way, and so it just became time to—we needed to move to Hermiston. So rather than commuting back and forth, and being a weekend dad and whatever we could do, so I moved the family to the Hermiston area in 1975, and have been part of that community ever since. The irrigation circles require constant attention. And so personally, I wouldn't have cared whether I lived in Pendleton or Hermiston at that point in time in my life, but the demands of daily and sometimes almost hourly vigilance on those circles required us to be there at that time. And so that's actually how come I came to live in Hermiston. And we were a family corporation and a partnership, with my father and two brothers and myself. And you know, you work at getting along together and good things do happen.

And so we worked hard at it, and were successful at a lot of things through those years. [0:05:03] And then as we go down through the years, why, in the early '90s, wanted to kind of break up into our own units, my brother and I going our separate ways, and the youngest brother moved off the farm a little bit before that. And so, we broke things up a little bit so that we each had our separate units, and he is a very good operator and made a success out of his, and we like to think that we were doing the same in ours over there in Umatilla County, and specifically the Hermiston area. And so, we just grew that, and Dad passed away in '92. And then we lost Mom in '02. So that's what divided things up to basically where we are today, Chris.

CP: Hm. Tell me about growing up. You grew up—you said you were a fifth generation rancher on a family homestead. Now, you were near Wallowa, is that correct?

BW: Absolutely, we were four miles out of Wallowa, Fort Lostine, and Enterprise, and I can remember it was a great, great time growing up in those years. One of my first memories is having an old white dog, a white dog named Snowball. And I can remember getting paddled by my father, because that dog, if I would point to something and say, "Sic 'em," he would chase whatever I pointed to. And as a little three or four year old, five year old, why, that was great fun. If you'd

get in the pig pen and sic that doc on the pigs, why, they'd squeal and that was so much fun! And Granddad would come around and say, "Billy, you've got to keep that kid and that dog out of the hogs. He's running all the fat off of them."

CP: [Laughs]

BW: The fat pigs. And then Granddad never spanked me, but Dad would. And it seems like whenever he'd turn his back or something, why, Snowball and I would get back in there, and that was so much fun. And so anyway, that was one of my first recollections of being around, a kid on the farm. I don't know when I started driving, because we had a lot of cows and in Wallowa it takes two to two and a half ton of hay per cow, per winter, to get through that winter. And so hand-feeding those cows was a big chore, a time-consuming chore. And we helped out a very young age.

I can remember standing in the seat, hanging on to the steering wheel. If we had a truckload of loose hay, or if we had a pickup with some bales on it, why, Dad would say, "Go left." And I'd turn. "No, no, the other way!" And I would just kind of hold the steering wheel; it was just kind of creeping along. And the snow wasn't too deep to do that. But anyway, that's my earliest recollection of growing up there. I had a first cousin, my mother's sister and her family; they were just up the road a little bit. And Mom used to say that what I didn't think up, why, Raymond did. So we were both double-trouble. But a great life, and an awesome experience growing up in rural Oregon.

CP: Did you have horses?

BW: We had horses, and I can remember being gone all day with a horse. And we were in the flat of the valley, and then I would ride up to Raymond's place. It was at the foot of the hill, and then we'd drive up on the—we'd ride up on the mountains up there. And finally, Mom made a ruling that I had to come home for lunch. Then I'd head right back out on the horse after lunch, and head back up there, go back up and play around. But I had to be home by dark. So, but yeah, I just spent lots and lot of hours in exploring things, and it was a wonderful opportunity in those days. [0:10:01]

CP: Do you remember having much contact with Extension, or with some of the outgrowths of Extension, like 4-H?

BW: Absolutely, because first I could get into 4-H, I was in it. And I noticed out when I walked in today, Andy Landforce, and Andy was a big part of those of us out at Wallowa County up there. And so I can remember him. When I was in FFA, one of our chapter banquets at the Wallowa FFA, Andy came back and gave the keynote speech at the FFA. But yes, I can remember that, and I was in the 4-H Livestock Club, 4-H Tractor Club, and I was in Empire Builders, 4-H Empire Builders. And so that was a real interesting time.

As an aside to that, Chris, my wife of—we're going on 49 years in a month or two—why, I first met her in the Empire Builders 4-H club. She was a couple of years younger, and she had a stepbrother that was my ages, so she kind of hung around a little bit. And just hanging around, you know, and as things goes on, why, sometimes things like that grow on you a little bit. And so the rest is kind of history, I guess. After we get to college, we were engaged—married in my senior year in college, and I think engaged in my sophomore or junior year. I can't remember when, but yeah.

CP: So she's from Wallowa?

BW: She's from Joseph.

CP: Okay.

BW: And there's one thing that we have never settled in all of the years of our marriage. Now, we do agree that I lived on one side of the railroad tracks at Wallowa, and she lived in Joseph out by Hurricane Creek, and it is on the other side of the tracks. Now, the thing that has never been settled in all of these years of marriage, and I am smart enough not to push it, is who was on the right side of the tracks, and who was on the wrong side of the tracks? We do agree that we were on differing sides of the tracks, and s that's good enough for me. And it's been wonderful. Hasn't always been easy, but it's been a wonderful life together, and when you have a partner that is working together with you, and me with her, why, it's been a wonderful life; it really has.

CP: So the area you grew up in was very much a rural area, and Wallowa's still a small town, but I would presume there were times when people congregated into a community. Do you remember much about community affairs and community life around Wallowa?

BW: Absolutely. The folks were part of the Grange, and we would go to a Grange get-together, and everyone around there, stock growers coming around to those a little bit. I suppose one of my—and sports with the high school, because everything in a small community revolves around the schools, and that is your community identity. And so voting day, we would go in with Mom and Dad on voting day, and it was a community. You just saw everyone there in the evening, voting, to get in there. And also on Friday nights, all the stores stayed open till 9 o'clock so that we could come in and shop on Friday night. And I can remember that; it was just a great time to meet and see all of your neighbors that, in those days we didn't have the social media and everything we have today, and the instant communications.

I can remember that we did have a telephone. My wife didn't have a telephone up in the rural area of Joseph, where she was at. But we had a telephone, and our ring was three longs and a short. And so you picked it up to talk, and if anyone wanted to listen to your conversation [0:15:01], all they had to do was pick up the line, because it was a party line. But you know, it was great. And so, those get-togethers—there were several families in Middle Valley that we would get together on a Sunday during the summers, and go on a picnic, and take our four-wheel-drives and go out to somebody's summer range or something, and have picnics out there, or go down to Idanha, Cloverdale, and pick huckleberries or something like that. We don't do too much of that today.

CP: Yeah.

BW: Mm-hm.

CP: What was school like for you?

BW: School was good. It was something I had to attend. I was fortunate, I guess, because I didn't have to study a lot. But I enjoyed it. Played sports some, and I was one of the youngest boys in my—I was the youngest boy in my class. There was one girl younger than me, and I think in those days the cutoff was November 5th for a five-year-old to be six. And my birthday was October 28th, so I just had a birthday. In some respects, in retrospect, I may have been a little bit better in the sports had I been a little older to have competed in the class. But I'm sure my Mom wanted to get rid of that kid and get him into class, or get him out of the home and get him into class. And so, I'm one of five kids, and I have two brothers and two sisters.

And you talk about school—one of the things I can remember, just like you and I are sitting here today—forgive me, mother. But anyway, we're going down to the junior- senior prom. I'm driving the car, and Mom is one of the junior mothers. And this junior-senior prom is held at the high school, in the lunchroom area, or whatever. And the junior mothers are helping the cooks and everything, and they're helping serve for the event. And we had to drive down a lane to get to the main highway; then it was four miles downhill watergrade to Wallowa. And I can remember, this was in May of my junior year, just before starting senior year, and I can remember Mother saying, "Honey, I've got something to tell you." And I says, and I'm driving; driving down the road, "Yeah, Mother, what have you got?" "I'm pregnant." "Mother! You're kidding!" And I can remember just as we're sitting here today, "I wish I was, honey, but I'm not." And so in October, three days before my birthday, my youngest sister was born, 17 years younger than me.

CP: Wow!

BW: But she's been a joy to the family most of the time, you know.

CP: [Laughs]

BW: A little sibling rivalry, but anyway, that's an experience I can remember. Somewhere it just sits in there. I had my corsage and boutonniere, and I was going to go pick up my date and drop her off at the school, and then I was going to go pick up my date. She kind of popped my bubble for the whole evening, I guess: "I can't believe my mother's pregnant!"

CP: [Laughs]

BW: But you know, it's just something you remember. I had a graduating class of 22 students, and we had our 50th reunion not too long ago. And most of them came, and it was great to see some of them [0:20:01], but you know, there were some old people in that room, and I don't think I was one of them!

CP: [Laughs]

BW: But anyway, that's the way it goes.

CP: Yeah. Well, I'm sure that you could have stayed on the farm after graduating from high school, and just lived there and continued to work, but you decided to go to college at OSU. What made you make that decision?

BW: My dad had attended Oregon State, one term. I think he graduated from Wallowa in 1939. And he'd attended down there one year, and good friends that he'd made there, and then he was needed back on the farm. He was the youngest son. The other two sons were off in—they were actually in the war. Uncle Wayne and Uncle Alvin were both in the service, in the war. And so he was needed back on the farm to help Granddad, and so he left school and came back there. My mother was a young girl out of Enterprise, a member of a big family up there. And so, he came back and went to work on the farm.

And I don't know; there was a lot of students that came out of Wallowa, and some of my friends that were going to Oregon State, so as an agricultural school I never had any want to go, any inclination to go anyplace else. And my grades were such that I was able to be accepted as a junior in high school, based on my grades at that time—member of the National Honors Society at Wallowa High School. So you furnished a transcript of your grades to the university, or the college at that time, Oregon State College, and I was accepted as a student, and I knew that my senior year in high school. I knew I was going to Oregon State. And then there were some neighbor boys around there that had pledged Alpha Gamma Rho, and so they came after me to get me to pledge the fraternity. And I was going to be an ag student, majoring in Agricultural Economics with a Business minor at that time. I never veered off of that course, so it seemed to be a natural fit for us. And I never veered off of that, too, the support of wanting to go to Oregon State.

CP: Had you visited before you went?

BW: No.

CP: What did you think? What was the transition like for you?

BW: Big world.

CP: Yeah.

BW: It was a big world. I remember my dad coming down freshman year, to Dads' Weekend. And then we were at Gill Coliseum, and we were playing basketball, and that was the years of Mel Counts, and Baker, and those, that we were doing pretty good. And I can remember Dad and I walking into Gill Coliseum to find a seat to watch the ball game, and he just stopped, "Man, this place would hold a lot of hay."

CP: [Laughs]

BW: And so, but no, I hadn't. I just had some friends here; I had contacts here, and I was not afraid to leave home. I was ready for a new experience, and college was that. And so I was looking forward to it, probably always in my mind to never do anything else but to go back to the ranch, and the farm. And so, that has proven true. I have never been anywhere other than to Oregon State, and then I would go home on weekends, and all vacations and everything else, to work on the farm.

CP: How was the adjustment to Willamette Valley for you, a very different climate than what you were used to?

BW: Yes, sir. I came down fall of '62, and of course, Dad didn't want me to bring my car, so I had to—in the first term I had to be without a car, so I rode down with neighbor boys [0:25:00], and came down, and I see these sissies packing these umbrellas around, and I'm not going to be one of them. Boy, did I eat those words pretty quick!

CP: [Laughs]

BW: Didn't take long to have an umbrella. And really, Chris, I didn't find the adjustment to the rainy weather that much. I enjoyed the climate, the students, and everything here at the university, to where I really didn't pay that much attention to it, also viewing it as just an opportunity at that time, knowing full well that it wasn't going to be permanent. And so, it was a means to an end. And so, yeah, didn't bother me. Didn't care for it that much, but growing up in Wallowa County, and especially since I've lived in Hermiston, the only rain that ever hurt us is the one we didn't get.

CP: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

BW: And so, they're pretty precious to us up there. So, just be careful what you wish for.

CP: Yeah. Do you have memories of the Columbus Day storm that happened not long after you arrived?

BW: Yes, I do. Yes, I do. The Columbus Day storm coincided with the Pacific International Livestock Exposition in Portland. It was a livestock event showcasing purebred cattle, and our family were showing cattle at the PI in Portland, out at the old grounds. And so, myself, and I think I had two or three other students, we headed up there right after that storm hit. And so, we started out of town, and trees were down, and it took us a lot of hours, but we—back roads and everything. You know college students; we're not going to take a downed tree, or power lines, or anything. So we were back roads, and turn around and backtrack, and everything else.

We finally made it up there to the exposition hall, and I can remember my mom and dad being so irritated, and almost mad that we would venture out in a storm like that, and how bad it was, and all of that stuff, electricity out and all of that stuff. But we were actually in it, and traveling, and as young college students, we were oblivious to the danger. We're invincible, and we're going to make it to the PI, and up to the show cattle and everything, and so we did. So yes, I remember that. I was out in the middle of the storm, out in it, driving in it.

CP: [Laughs]

BW: And the aftermath of it, it was fairly late when we got there that evening. Mom was worried to death.

CP: Well, tell me a little bit about your academic progression here at OSU? Were there any influential teachers that you had, or classes that made an impact on you?

BW: Yes, I really appreciated several individuals down here. And the one that I probably appreciated the most, probably, was Curtis Mumford. He was my advisor, and he was an older gentleman. What a gracious man, and a wealth of knowledge, and so willing to help and guide me through the college experience! And I really, really liked him, and counted on him to help me out quite a bit. I started out saying I wasn't the best student, and my first term I got a 2-point. And so my brothers, as a pledge at the fraternity house, brothers at the house set me down and says, "That's very unacceptable." And so, that's the only 2-point I ever got in my life. [0:30:00] Now, there was some that weren't too far above that, but. So, I needed to concentrate a little more, and we're here for a reason.

But Curtis Mumford was probably my greatest advocate, and the gentleman that really helped me the most. Another one was Emery Castle. Dr. Castle taught Economics, and I enjoyed his teaching, enjoyed his classes, and they weren't easy, but what a knowledgeable man, that presented in a way that I really enjoyed! You know, Murray Dawson taught a five-hour soils course that was just like drinking out of a fire hose, but that was a good one. And the labs that went to it, so, those are the ones that I probably remember as much as anything, is Curtis Mumford, Dr. Mumford.

CP: Why did you decide on Economics, versus a different area of Agriculture?

BW: Well, I grew up with livestock, around livestock, and you know, maybe—I didn't know what they could teach me about livestock, and so I thought, well, things live and die on business, and being able to have that business acumen and everything. And being around the livestock, and you've got Extension; you've got other people that I could turn to if I need help a little bit, but I wanted to kind of focus on the economics and the business side of it a little bit, so that I could have that background to fall back on, and to help me with the future experience. Because the college is full of specialists

in Animal Science, and they're full of Ag Economics and Business people, too, but you need that basics in business acumen to be able to survive. And so I just thought that I would take that.

And the Animal Science, I took several Animal Science courses. One course I took was from Professor Wahlberg, and he had a real knack. He had quite an arm on him. And he was down at Withycombe in that lecture hall there, and he had quite an arm on him. And you could be sitting anywhere in that lecture hall, up in the back row, or down toward the middle, wherever, and pretty soon that arm would come flying out, and an eraser would hit somebody, and there would be a puff of white chalk and everything. You couldn't sleep in his class. He did not want you sleeping in his class. And everyone in the class knew if he saw somebody sleeping, because he very seldom erred to miss.

CP: [Laughs]

BW: And I didn't get chalked, but there are some students that did. That was an interesting byproduct of his lecture. But that was interesting.

CP: Were you in ROTC?

BW: I was not. I had an opportunity, and it didn't hold interest to me. There were several members in the fraternity house that were, and went on to successful careers. My youngest son was a member of ROTC, greatly enjoyed it at the university, went through and went into Army aviation, and has been [0:35:01]—we're very proud of him as parents. Served two tours across the pond as a Blackhawk pilot in Iraq and in Afghanistan. And so he now lives at Fort River, Alabama. He's a Department of Army civilian. He's in the reserves, and he's an advanced flight instructor for the Army on helicopters, so that through this start at Oregon State and ROTC, why, he is very well—he just loves that life. He was a double-major, Ag Engineering—or, Civil Engineering and Forestry Engineering, with a minor in Military Science, and a couple of other minors. So yeah, he got his mother's genes, and he's a good student.

CP: Tell me a little about social life in school for you. I'm sure that AGR was a big part of it?

BW: Yes, it was. We would have—once a term you'd have a house dance, and fall, winter, and spring were different themes. And sometimes, why, there were events coming along; you needed a date to go out, why your contacts there could help get you a date somewhere. And it was—it was really neat. Maybe somebody's sister was coming in, or somebody needed a date to accompany them. So the social life was really awesome. We spent a lot of time—yeah, there's keg parties; there's beer parties. That's part of college. It was different then than it is now, but it was still somewhat the same. You'd get away from home, why, you've got to spread your wings and fly a little bit, and some people don't know when to pull their wings back a little, and whatever. So some of us have to learn the hard way and some of us don't, but I was fortunate that it was not much trial and error for me, and really fortunate with that.

But the social aspects, and the interaction—that's what made the college experience so great, is some of the friends that I had in classes are friends today. They don't necessarily need to be fraternity or anything else, just, I can count on—probably take both hands to count individuals that I have kept up with through those 48 years since I've graduated, that I just met and associated with in classes. And I was fortunate enough to go on the Livestock Judging Team for some trips with, Hallsclap, who was our judging coach. And so, we formed some good bonds, and the students that are still alive today, why, when we see each other, or once in a while call up one another, it's awesome.

The life experiences that you make here! You've left home of your circle of friends, and everything right around you that you grew up with that you were isolated in your own little world. And you come here, and it broadens your horizons, and you create friendships that can last a lifetime, and do. One of the things that—this will bring the story pretty close to home—is that I was in Nebraska a couple of weeks ago, to a meeting [0:40:00], and I get the phone call from a fraternity brother. And his wife is having open—having heart surgery. His wife is having heart surgery in Portland on Friday, and we're coming home, flying into Portland Thursday night, was going to drive home Thursday afternoon, but no. We stayed there. We stayed at Providence Hospital with him for six hours, while his wife's in heart surgery.

You know, that's 48 years ago Tim and I were in the fraternity house together. And we parted ways then, but we've kept up. Their two boys and our two boys are about the same age, so the four of us, both wives and husbands, we have been friends, and maintained a friendship throughout all of these years. Maybe we won't talk for five years, or six or

seven years, but then we'll see each other; it's just like we left it yesterday. And that's what college does to you. It's the friendships that you make, and the interactions with others, because it's not necessarily the book education that you get here. It's the life lessons that you create out of this. And it's your responsibility. It's up to you to create what you want out of it. And it's the whole person that grows out of this college. I would not be near the person today that I like to think that I am without that college experience to set me up and to put me out.

CP: Well, you referenced that you were in a few Ag clubs while you were here. You also were in the Flying Club?

BW: I was. I was in Oregon State's Flying Club, and I really hated that, and regretted all of these years, that I didn't get into it earlier in my college career, because it was just the last several terms of my tenure here. See, I was one of those stone stupid kids that thought he should come to college and graduate in four years, and then get out and go into the real world, and get a job, where I could have milked that for maybe five, or six, or seven years, been a professional student a little bit. But no, I couldn't wait to get out and make a mark on the world. But anyway, that gave me a love of flying, and I never did get my license, never did finish it up. I have passed the test, and am ready to solo, and I was ready to cross country when I graduated, and I always had a love of flying. Flown some small airplanes, owned one, but I never finished up and got my pilot's license, and that's one of my regrets. Yes, sir.

CP: So, did the school own a plane that the club used, or how did this work?

BW: I honestly don't know. I think it was—I think the club owned it. And so, you bought into it and you joined the club, but I honestly don't know how it really worked, Chris, but it was great! It didn't cost much. I do remember we were based at the Albany Airport, and it was a little tricky. I can remember the first day that I was by myself, went up with my instructor, and we'd come around, and he says, "I want you to do some touch-and-go's." And so I come around and touch down, and then up, and around, and touch down. Then he says, "I want you to taxi over here." And so, I did, and he says, "Now, I'm going to get out, and I want you to do your touch-and-goes." Gulp!

CP: [Laughs]

BW: Just me in that plane, but oh, it was a great feeling! But you know, on warm spring days [0:45:00], almost hot, you come over plowed fields or roads, and then as that water pond that was out by the paper plant, or whatever, and there were some updrafts and downdrafts a little bit, and it could buffet you a little bit on some of those. So it was a lot of times a little interesting, coming in and out of the Albany Airport.

CP: Yeah.

BW: But I loved it.

CP: You mentioned you went to the Rose Bowl game?

BW: Yes. I was a student here. I started in the fall of '62 and graduated in '66. So in the Rose Bowl game of January 1st, 1965, a group of us AGRs went down to the Rose Bowl. A fraternity brother was Bill Kenta, and his folks lived in Fontana, California. And so, I had to take my brother, which that throws a damper a little bit, the younger brother, but he was okay. But we went down to the Rose Bowl, and kind of hung out at the Kenta house in Fontana, sleeping bags all over and everything. Then we took in the festivities of the Rose Bowl, and we were down there for about three or four days.

And I do remember we spent the night out on the street, because Bill says that you needed to do that. And so you had the curb, and then in front of the curb three or four feet was a painted line on the pavement. And we needed to stay on the curb during the night, and then when the parade would come down we could come out to that line. And so we staked our place where we were going to watch the parade, and I can remember looking across, to the left of us, up, was the CBS cameras, and I remember seeing the NBC cameras looking another direction. But we were right on the parade route; we spent all night there.

And it was just a big drag with cars, hot cars and loud pipes, and people. It was just a big parking lot, just moved a little bit. And I can remember the exhaust, smelling the exhaust of the evening, and I don't think we slept at all that night. And then we had our chairs there. We were right on the front row of the parade route, watched every bit of that, and then went

to the stadium with another 100-plus thousand people to watch the ball game, and got our heads handed to us in the basket with the score. But we had the awesome experience of the Rose Bowl that I've never forgotten. So, it was really neat, and until a few years ago, why, that was the last bowl game. We went through a lot of years of drought in that football team.

CP: We did. I know that you went back home when you were in school to help out from time to time on the farm. Did you have a job when you were a student here?

BW: I did have a job here. It was an enjoyable job. It was before the advent of the land use laws that we have in Oregon, and so I needed a job, wanted a job, and to give me something to do a little bit, so I applied and got part of—I don't know if it was the County or the City of Corvallis, but they were doing a survey of all of the streets, and the housing, and all of the development that they had. We had to go street by street and lot by lot, and mark down where there's multiple-family dwellings, or single-family dwellings, or whatever. We physically mapped out a whole lot of this, the streets of this town, around the college, while I was here. And it was an enjoyable time to do that, and it was interesting. It was a precursor to our land use laws in 1975. [0:50:01] At that time, I had no inkling of what was coming, because I was doing it in '65, in '64, '65, '66, but that's what the city was doing to get to where they are today.

CP: Is this the urban growth boundary?

BW: Well, I think it was just to identify what all was here, and to get an accurate assessment of what was actually physically there, so that they could go out, and I don't know; did they have urban growth boundaries in those days? I don't know. You just started growing a little bit, and I don't know what regulations that they did have. And until 1975, why, I'm not sure.

CP: Well, you finished up school, and then you went back to the ranch. Is that correct?

BW: Absolutely. I never wanted to do anything else but go back to the farm.

CP: Did you feel like you were pretty well prepared from the business side, because it sounds like that's what you were shooting for from OSU, to learn more about that? Is that a loaded question? [Laughs]

BW: I don't know if I was or not, just, I was prepared to go back and work hard. You know, get up zero-dark-thirty, and I enjoyed the work. And Dad and I would have meetings once in a while, and I would—we'd talk things over, and then when Steve would come back to the farm, why, he was in on the conversation some. And so, yeah, it helped me, and I had that knowledge there. But in those years it was mostly just real physical hard work, and if you needed to make something happen, you just worked harder to make it happen, and enjoyable.

CP: Yeah.

BW: I was married in December of my senior year of college, and so took on responsibilities real early in life. And so, I figured I had to get back and make a living for a family, and so that's what we did.

CP: Now, what was the living arrangement back at the farm? Were there multiple dwellings, or were you all in one big house?

BW: No, there were multiple homes. We moved to, actually—actually, the little house we moved into right next to the folks' big house was built by my mother and father. When they were first married, they lived with my grandparents, his parents. And probably about 150, 200 feet away, they built a little two-bedroom house, and small kitchen, small living room, and it might have only been a one-bedroom, but it was small. And it's still there today. And so anyway, we lived there, so that my wife's mother-in-law was real close to her. So that's where we were, and it wasn't a lot of privacy away from the folks, but that's all right.

And I can remember, came back to the farm; didn't have anything. The stove had one burner that was out of it, the electric stove, and the other one worked. The oven didn't work. But as a wedding gift we had gotten a Sunbeam fry pan, so we could cook things in that, and then we also had a relish dish that we used—a Melmac dish that we used to use for silverware, and that was about—it was pretty sparse there for a while, when we started putting things together. And the first boy comes along, and we had two more sons after that. We're blessed today with four sons. We took in another son,

and we're blessed today with four sons, thirteen grandchildren [0:55:00], and nine great-grandchildren, with number ten on the way in January.

CP: Wow!

BW: So, we're really blessed. We really are.

CP: Yeah. Well, it sounds like—at the beginning of our interview you gave kind of an overview of your career, I suppose, in agriculture, and it sounds like, if I'm gathering this correctly, that the homestead existed for quite a while and was sort of what the family did, and then there was a pretty broad expansion and diversification of your family's operations over maybe the next ten to twenty years. Is that fair to say?

BW: That is fair to say, because that expansion started in the late '60s, and we branched out into Umatilla County from Wallowa County. We were thinking that there's got to be a cheaper way to winter cows. And two and a half ton of hay per cow, per winter—that's fairly expensive. And so we could have went over into the Snake River area, but that's pretty isolated down in those canyons and everything, and you get in there a month at a time; the only way you have in and out is through the river. So we chose to come over to lower altitude at Pendleton and Hermiston. So in 1969 we bought 500 acres in Hermiston and were going to winter some cows over there. So we brought the cows over there on that sand and sagebrush, and it wasn't much different feeding hay in Hermiston than it was in Wallowa, because once the cows ate all of the feed up on that sagebrush we couldn't grow anymore in that sand.

So then we looked around and found 13,000 acres in Pendleton that was dry land, wheat and pasture ground, and we had what we called foster chaff dumps that would fit on the back of a combine. And so we gathered the chaff and the straw out of the back of our combines and make loaves out of them, and pulled them to create those loaves, so that during the winter months, we could winter 800 cows without feeding a bite of hay, on that development there. And it's a wheat summer-fall rotation, so one year we'd pasture one half, and one year we pastured the other half, so in that low-rainfall area in the bunchgrass, why, we were able to not overgraze it and not overpasture it. And that worked fairly well for us, as a matter of fact, real well.

That was an expansion there, and then we got to thinking. There was a little spot of cattails on that place. And anyone knows about agriculture, or farming, or ranch life, knows that cattails will only grow in year-round water. And in that Hermiston area, that's pretty rare. So, must be water right there. We got a big dragline in there and scooped it out, and lo and behold, there's—we could pump 2,500 gallons a minute out of that thing for a couple of center-pivot circles. So that was the start of the development of the operation in Hermiston, where we had several center-pivot circles, and we had feedlots set up there so that we brought cattle down out of the Wallowas and I would winter them there on corn stocks, or I'd raise a lot of turnips, too, pasture the calves or pasture cows. And then I would take the purebred bulls and heifers and bring them down there and feed them as replacements, or feed them up for production sales. And so, yeah, it allowed us a lot of versatility that we had in maintaining both the Pendleton place, and Wallowa and Hermiston.

CP: So there was at least a period of time where you were moving 800 cows from Wallowa to Hermiston and back?

BW: No, they were moving them to Pendleton.

CP: Okay.

BW: And then we were moving several hundred or a thousand down into my feedlot there in Hermiston, to graze calves. [1:00:01] We would—we had around 250, 300 bulls a year that we would sell for breeding stock. So I would get those ready for the production sales. And then replacement heifers, we would bring them down to Hermiston. And you don't want them to get too fat; you want them to grow good. But if a replacement heifer could gain 1.6 to 1.7 pounds per head, per day, why, she's just right, and she'll breed good. And so that's what we did for quite a few years there during the '80s.

CP: Yeah.

BW: It worked real well in the '70s and '80s, yeah.

CP: The logistics of being a rancher—people don't think about these sorts of things, moving 300 bulls [laughs] for 175 miles.

BW: Yeah, and I used to drive my share of the truck from Wallowa to Hermiston, but it was terrible! You had to go over two mountains to get there, and as soon as you get over them, why, you unloaded and turned around and went back over them. You know, it was just monotonous as the dickens, and especially if you had to put on a set of chains in cold weather and everything, why.

CP: Yeah.

BW: But that's what we hired out to do, and that's what we did.

CP: You mentioned the center-pivot irrigation circles. Were you pretty early on in Hermiston, the Hermiston area, doing that?

BW: We were not real early. I think they got started in the early '60s. But we were still one of the earlier ones in there. And we bought our first pivots in I think in '73, maybe in the winter of '72, to put on. There were quite a few circles in big farms there that had already been around there, so it was somewhat established. But we were one of the first ones. Ron Baker at C & B was also; he might have been the first in the area to combine the cattle feeding and center-pivot circles, so that I was doing a lot of the farming to facilitate wintering cattle. So crops I was growing would be corn silage, to feed the cattle during the winter, or a crop of wheat. Get the crop of wheat off and plant turnips, to graze cattle in the winter. So that was a lot of the things I was doing to be able to run those cattle out, let them feed themselves during the winters as much as you could.

And with the feedlot setup there, if a storm would come in, or inclement weather, real bad weather—you can get ten, fifteen below there. You can get a foot or a foot and a half of snow. It probably won't last long or anything, but with that we had the hay, we had the feed, so that we were set up so that we could feed. A lot of the people that went down into those desert circles and rented places down there would get caught. And if it got really cold, they were hauling water to their animals, and doing everything. And twenty-below weather, or ten-below weather, hauling water in a water truck can be problematic. So we had piped water all around the circles, and water troughs, and yeah, we would have to chop ice at the trough.

But you didn't want to break a float, because the golden rule around the place was—and it went for me as well as anybody else—if your job was chopping ice and you broke the float, you stripped down to the waist and you fixed it. And that was just as good for me as it was for any of my men, or my sons, as they got older. Because you inadvertently chop a little too close to the float and poke a hole in it, well, it isn't going to work anymore. So that sub-zero water in that water trough, you've got to get your arms wet to fix it, and that's a real shock.

CP: Yeah. We talked a lot about hard work. I think about larger agricultural enterprises, especially independent ones, there's so much risk involved with cattle investment that you have to make to build up your enterprise [1:05:01], and reward can come, or it can not come, depending often times on the weather. I mean, how have you sort of mitigated that for yourself, and how does that play out for you? There's been so many farmers who have lost so much because things didn't work out, and they had invested so much.

BW: We—funny you would ask that question, Chris, because we went through an event in 1995 on the farm that in the history of keeping records in the Hermiston area, or the little area north of Hermiston between Hermiston and Umatilla. McNary Dam is only about three miles from my house. And so we had a hail storm, and I lost all crops in fifteen minutes, no insurance. And some of the hail stones were as big as softballs. It's quite a shock. A potato crop, a sweet corn crop that was scheduled to be harvested by Smith Frozen Foods within five days—just, nothing.

A potato field that was scheduled to be dug within about ten—I think it was 7th of July or something like that, and we were going to be digging potatoes. And yeah, they're underground, but every potato that's within an inch of the ground got bruised. You know as well as I do that a lot of potatoes are ripe right at, poke up to the ground a little bit. There wasn't—that ground was as bare as this table that I've got my hands on here, right now. It just pulverized those potato vines. There was absolutely nothing. And so, we had that catastrophic event, and it was life-changing. I went from operating a farm of

—being able to take some risk in maximizing income and profits, to minimizing the risk. So after that, I didn't raise any more potatoes, myself. I would cash-lease the ground. And some of those other high-expensive crops that you can, if you get it you can do pretty good, and if you don't, why, there's always next year, but I didn't feel like I had next year.

So I went into a risk management mode, and it changed the way I operated 'til up to today's times. So yes, it was quite humbling; it really was. And really, my boys and I, and Lou Ann, we made a lot of soul-searching on our parts, and dig down, and there's a reason for it, and we needed to not necessarily find the reason to understand it or anything, but to accept it, and to make the best of it, and that's what we've done.

CP: Yeah. I want to ask you about a couple of things you've been involved in a little bit outside of agriculture ranching. The first is the Board of Forestry. How did that come about, and what was your involvement with the Board of Forestry?

BW: Well, I was just going along, and running a few cows and things there at Hermiston, and there was an opening on the Board of Forestry. And someone from—I was involved in the Cattlemen's Association. My dad was an officer in that, and president of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, and I was a committee chairman for them. So said, "Well, there's an opening on the Board of Forestry. Are you interested?" And what do I know about forestry? [1:10:00] Being in the forest, in the mountains, to gather the cows, in the Forest Service or coastal Cascade lands, so yeah. So I applied for it, put my name in there, and Governor Atiyeh appointed me to the Board of Forestry. That was my first experience at something like that, and I really, really enjoyed it. And it was a little bit short-lived, because when Governor Atiyeh was retired, why, Governor Goldschmidt came on, and he wanted to reappoint members of the board, his own Board of Forestry members. And there was most of us says, "Well, we're on there for specific terms, and when the terms end, why, then you can appoint your own board, and so we'll just let it go like that." Well, that wasn't good enough for him, and so he pushed a revamp through the Oregon Legislature to reconfigure the Board of Forestry, so I was out of a job after two years.

But I really enjoyed it. I enjoyed working with the people, and that was a really awesome experience. I've had the opportunity to be on another state council or board, and I'm coming to the—I'm term-limited on that, and I'll have my final meeting in November. That's on the Oregon State's Energy Facility Citing Council. You're limited to two four-year terms on that, and so I will have served my eight years now, and I've been privileged to be chairman of it in recent years. So all these windmills that you see throughout Oregon, and some of the natural gas plants, and some of the transmission lines, are through the Department of Energy Citing Council. And we permit those, issue site certificates, and we're regulation-based. The counties are permitted, are involved in the process, because there's land use issues, and the counties regulate land use within the counties, their jurisdictions. And so it's a quite involved process, with the federals on some of the federal transmission lines, and LNG, or whatever else that the projects are coming.

It's been a neat experience, and I'm ready to hand my responsibilities off to somebody else to serve their apprenticeship, and to be a part of that necessary process. Oregon has a different process than a lot of other states. We met one time with Washington's Energy Facility Citing Council, and they're made up of agency heads and agency people, whereas Oregon's is a volunteer layman's group. We have seven members of the council, and we're a diverse group that bring different expertise to the table, so that hopefully we can look at all aspects of this thing in light of the rules and regulations that we operate under. And so, I'm going to go off of it. My scheduled replacement is a gentleman who is a retired circuit court judge out of Eugene. He's going to be a great addition to the council. And so Oregon has this citizen involvement on our boards and on our councils, and things throughout our state, that a lot of other states don't have. That can be good, or that can be bad, but I'm an Oregonian, and I'm proud of it. [1:15:00]

CP: Yeah. Well, if you've been involved with this for the last eight years, you've been involved with a lot of windmills. Anybody who has driven out to the east side has seen more and more cropping up over time, and they are controversial for some folks. I'm sure you've been in the midst of some interesting conversations over those eight years about windmills?

BW: Yes, you're right. And it's a shame that we had to use the windmills for some rural economic development, but that's the facts of what they were. And I guess if the windmills are on my place and I am receiving the royalties or the payments from them, why, I am going to be a lot more for them than if I'm a neighbor to one, and they're benefiting but I'm not, but I get to look at them. And I can certainly see both sides of the issue. I understand it, but majority rules in our state, and the majority of the people, and our elected officials, have decreed that the renewable energy, as they see it, is what should be

a priority of the state. And so I recognize that, and I will do my best under the constraints that I operate under to fulfill that obligation.

But I would probably rather not see them in the areas that we're seeing them now, and the quantity that we're seeing them. But that is today, and so I'm going to get used to them, just like everybody else is going to get used to them. The part that bothers me a little bit is it's putting upward pressure on your and my electricity rates, because the renewables are a little more expensive, plus they're intermittent. And so the renewable power has to be backed up by something, because you want that light switch to go on.

So one of my other jobs that I have, I'm real proud of, is I'm serving on the board of directors of our local electric cooperative, Umatilla Electric Cooperative, in Hermiston. And so, we're charged with bringing safe, reliable, affordable electricity to our members, who are our owners, too, as a member of a cooperative. So it's putting a little upward pressure on that because of having to integrate renewables in. We're under mandates that we have to have so much of this energy, so we've got cheaper energy that we could buy, but we can't because we have to replace it with the more expensive energy. But we work within those constraints to minimize the impacts we can to our members. But that's the rules of the game that we are involved in, and we have to do it that way, and we do it the best we can.

CP: What kind of continued connections have you had with Extension and the Experiment Stations out your way, OSU?

BW: Quite a bit, actually. I've been fortunate to be involved with Hermiston Agricultural Extension and Research Center there, and have been on the advisory board for quite a few years, and chairman of it for a number of years. The Extension and Research is really near and dear to me, because as many people know, Hermiston is a new area, really, and the farming methods and techniques that we employ there are relatively new since the '60s and '70s. And when we're talking about growing the crops, the wheat and the alfalfa and everything [1:20:01], those have been around for centuries. But the intense, intensive degree with which we raise crops in the Hermiston area, and that we can put on these inputs into the soil, put the water on.

We get yields that are envied throughout the world, whether it's corn, potatoes, carrots, onions, alfalfa, whatever it is, and the rotations to the land and everything. And so, it's a real challenge to do that, and when you intensively farm and cultivate the ground as we do here, you have the opportunity for pests and other diseases to come into you. And the Extension Service and Research Station has been invaluable to us in that area, to lead the way in some research on whether it's a nematode, or it's another insect, or a fungicide that we're getting some early wilt or late blight in some of our crops, or whatever it is, they're at the forefront of doing the research on that that is directly beneficial to us as growers. They have been on the leading edge of that.

And early on they developed—they're part of a potato breeding tri-state with Washington and Idaho and Oregon, and they develop potato lines there and cultivars of new varieties of potatoes. Because the russet potato's been around for a lot of years, just the plain old russet, but it's been quite a staple. But anyway, we keep trying to get some disease resistance into them, and try to build a better mousetrap, for lack of a better word there. But anyway, we developed some potato lines there that they were under hand lines, or wheel-lined irrigation. It was solid set—maybe it was. And when they went out into the growers fields, that canopy under a center-pivot circle that goes around, puts water on it every revolution? That's a different microclimate, and there's an experience that a cultivar kind of failed under that microclimate.

And so, it led us to believe, hey, if we're going to be relevant to our growers there, we need to have the same climate that the growers have. And so, "Hey, growers! We need to have center-pivots and everything on that station." And now the Hermiston Experiment Station has I think it's seven or eight center-pivots on it. We have several micro, mini-pivots that allow small research to be done in small plots, and so we're the leading public research facility in the world with center-pivots, with the modern technology that we can use. We've got several pivots out there that every sprinkler, from that pivot to the tip of the glass tower, can be controlled with each sprinkler. And some of those, there's a sprinkler dropped down every ten feet. So it's tremendous abilities to effect research. And the Experiment Station has shown us that we can grow some pretty good crops [1:25:01], and don't need to put on the water that we were putting on. I converted to low pressure many years ago, and saved 45 percent on my electric bill, right off the bat.

CP: Wow.

BW: And raised the same crops. And it's such a science, whether you're growing carrots or potatoes or whatever it is, that you know at certain stages what it's going to need, and weekly you monitor the soil for moisture, petiole analysis, and soil analysis of critical ingredients. And we're using infra-red—the last couple of years we've been able to use some drone technology there that has the ability to spot one infected potato plant in any field. And that's logged, so that you or I could walk right to that plant and we can see what's coming, because if there's one, there probably will be more. With the onions and potatoes, and carrots, how high-valuable and intensive those things are, and there are some other crops, too. So, yes, it's challenging; it's fun. It's in the future and it's here today!

CP: Yeah.

BW: I can remember—I remember Dick Tracy when I was a kid, you know, and he had this watch that had a TV on it and everything. Who would have ever thought that what we have today? And I'm just, I'm amazed.

CP: Yeah.

BW: And I'm enthused, because what's around the corner? What's the next five, ten, 30 years hold?

CP: Yeah. Well, that leads into one of my last questions. You've seen a lot of change in your time in northeast Oregon. I'm wondering, as you kind of look into the future a little bit, what are some of the issues that agriculturalists are going to be really grappling with in the next five, ten, 30 years?

BW: I probably expect the political pressures to be as great on our lifestyle as about anything. And in Oregon we have a citizen form of government, and we have our ballot initiatives and everything. But a lot of those are run by emotion rather than facts. I worry a little bit about the future, the future that we can keep producing food for a lot of people. Sustainable agriculture, a lot of home-grown food, that's great. I'm all in favor of it. I agree with it. But when we're talking about feeding the world and feeding our own hungry, why, you've got to be able to produce this food on a tremendous economic scale to be efficient at it, to be safe at it.

And we're operating under—I've got some people that are leasing parts of my farm now, that they mentioned there are 34 different reports that they fill out for GAAP rules, and other aspects of growing this food and produce, from farm to table. And a lot of it was good, that we can get this food to yours and my table in a safe [1:30:01], efficient manner, but some of it is a little redundant and can be over-excessive. But I think that technology is going to be here. Our plant breeders and geneticists are working on new varieties, and breakthroughs, and things. How about a potato or a carrot, or some other vegetable that has some other healthy items put in its makeup, such that it'll be a better food, or more nutritious food, for other peoples of the world that are living on sustenance, and so maybe that'll make it a little better for them. I don't know; it's just, whatever your mind can dream, it can be possible.

But it's been a tremendous experience for me to have grown up and to have—I can remember, just barely remember, the horse and team that my dad and granddad had. And I never—I wasn't old enough to put the harness on the horse, but they had it there, and I can remember using it a little bit. Then they got a tractor, and started going from there, but what an opportunity to witness where we are today! I am so blessed! And to have had the friends and family, and the partner in my wife, to share that with me, and our children! I am a blessed, blessed man, much more than I deserve. And so I just, I thank the good Lord every day, and he and I have conversations every day, and sometimes I don't listen as well as I should, and he lets me know that, but that's okay.

And we go about our way in this world of trying to do what we should do, and being an example to those that follow. I've taught my children—we have taught our children—that you never get a second chance to make a first impression on somebody. And you have one mouth and two ears, and so if you can use them in that proportion, and maybe listen twice as much as you visit or talk, why, you'd probably be better off.

CP: [Laughs] Good advice for all of us, I think. Well, Bryan, I want to thank you very much for this. This has been a real treat for me, and I appreciate you lending us a perspective that we don't have, so many people couldn't give us, so I really appreciate that. Thank you.

BW: Well, I just appreciate the opportunity, because when you first got in touch with me, what have I got to offer, you know? And you have been so easy to visit with, and I hope my ramblings have meant something. But I don't know as—I

had one son—I have two sons that came here to school and graduated from Oregon State. The one son lived off campus, and he didn't have—well, both sons lived off campus, but one didn't make quite as many relationships through the college as I did, and the other one probably did. And so their experience is a little different, in different times. But I'll tell you, they wouldn't have given up those years, and where they are today, without that. [1:35:00]

The middle son graduated and came back into the area. He was a certified crop consultant for many, many years to several dealers around in the area. And then, just has come in with Mom and Dad on the farm, and we're slowly working him in. And we're going through our estate analysis and a lot of our planning, really, to fine-tune it now, and our goal is to—Oregon State has been such a part of us throughout all of these years. And it is Oregon. Oregon State is just, it's the core of where we are. And I just owe so much to the experience that we've had here, and so we are planning to remember Oregon State in our estate plan. You know, our daily lives are influenced every day by the Hermiston Ag Experiment Station there at Hermiston. The way we farm, the way we do things, the crops we raise, they're influencing everything every day. And so, yes, we're supporting the university.

CP: Terrific. That's great to hear. Thanks.

[1:36:37]