

Owyhee County Historical Society, Museum and Library
Oral History Interviews
2022

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Forward

Appreciation

For this oral history collection, Boise State University student researchers conducted interviews with community members living and working in Idaho's sagebrush steppe in Spring 2022. The goal of this collection for students was learning: learning how to listen to the stories of others, learning how to ask questions, learning how to use equipment, and learning how to collaborate with community stakeholders. The process of collecting oral histories provided student researchers hands-on experience through the interview process, and we are thankful the students were willing to share the oral histories they collected, even when they were still learning to interview.

We extend deep appreciation to the community members who took the time to talk with our students. In addition to those whose stories are included here, we also acknowledge contributions from John Cossel and Charles Kiester, whose interview could, unfortunately, not be included in this collection due to an error with the audio recording. The following transcriptions are based on audio files, and some of the spellings are therefore approximate.

We want to give special thanks to the Owyhee Historical Society, Museum and Library for providing space for interviewing. We are also very grateful to Mary Huff, Brenda Richards, and Scott Jensen for their help in recruiting interviewees.

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Jackie McKee Benson

Kacey: There we go. So I'm just letting you know that after about 50 minutes, our audio quality will start to go down. So I'll give you a little bit of closing cues. But those are for the audio quality solely, not because I'm trying to speed up or anything like that. But we do have to watch out for that audio quality because it will go down. So today I'm interviewing Jackie Benson for Shared Stories Lab. It's an oral history project with Boise State. It is April 22nd? Yes, 22nd. We are at the Idaho Murphy Museum. I'm Kacey Bates, an interviewer with Shared Stories Lab. So to get started with the interview, what can you tell me about your background in the Owyhee area just in general?

[00:00:40]

Jackie: Well, first of all, my maiden name is McKee. So it would be Jackie McKee Benson.

[00:00:51]

Kacey:

I'll add that on there.

[00:00:52]

Jackie:

Okay. Well, I grew up here from the... My folks bought the ranch in 1947. So I've been up here since then. I was two years old when they bought the ranch. Lived up here until high school years. We ranched, and I was the only child so I had to find things to do to entertain myself. So I had a horse and a dog and I roamed the hills. I was the only redhead Indian princess there was in Owyhee County at that time because I played up in the rocks and everything where the Indians all roamed years before that. Went to school in the schoolhouse here in Murphy. And then, of course, we have the little schoolhouse up at Reynolds Creek which is falling down right now, unfortunately.

[00:01:46]

Kacey:

Yeah. So you talk about being the only child from your family. Because from the other people I've talked to, there has been such a close-knit community. What was that like being an only child from your family, but also in such a close community like that?

[00:02:00]

Jackie:

Well, school-wise, there was only, like, seven kids. And I was the oldest one of those. So I had a lot of little itty bitty brothers and sisters. But we lived far enough away from the regular community that it was pretty just isolated. There was a ladies club and my mom belonged to that. And we went to that once a month. But as far as intermingling with other kids, it was mostly just during school time. And then I had cousins in the valley that would come up in the summertime and hang out. That kind of thing.

[00:02:40]

Kacey: Yeah. So you also mentioned going out into these areas with your dog and your horse. What was that like? Do you have any memories or stories...?

[Crosstalk 00:02:47]

[00:02:47]

Jackie: Oh, lots and lots of memories and lots of... Well, I don't know about stories, but lots of memories. I remember my dad would never let me have a saddle. He said, "If you're going to fall off, you're going to fall off, and I don't want you hung up if you're going to just..." And I was free to just go. There wasn't any BLM fences at that time. You just go out the gate in any direction you wanted, go once you got off the property. And we have a big mountain range of... We call them the granites, but they're big, round boulders laying on top of other boulders, and that's where the bobcats and the cougars laid.

Well, I had no fear of any of that. Of course, having the dog with you, then if there's any kind of a wild animal around, it's going to be scared and leave. And I remember taking a little lunch which consisted of probably crackers and carrots. [Laughs] And just take off and go in the granites to play. And there's little rocks laying over top of other rocks, made a little cave, and there was flat rocks that you can lay out for a table. Oh, yeah. And I had spent a lot of time up in the granites playing.

[00:04:00]

Kacey: Yeah. And I'm sure that's a beautiful place to let your imagination just go wild.

[00:04:04]

Jackie: Yeah. We had lots of willows in the creek at that time. And our house is right on the creek. So there's a creek bank. And when we was up there, there was lots and lots of the willows, and burrowing down and through them, I would have playhouses and forts and I had great imagination as far as being the only child. And that's what I... I still, when I go down in the willows now, when I go irrigate, I think, "Oh, this is a neat place for a fort."

[Crosstalk 00:04:35]

[00:04:35]

Kacey: Yeah. It never leaves you. So you also mentioned in there that when you were out there doing these things, the fences weren't out there and the land was a little bit different. Can you speak to how the land has changed since then? Or kind of what it's been like to watch it change?

[00:04:51]

Jackie: Oh, I hate the change and don't have nice things to say about BLM because they're the ones that put up all the fence. They're trying to manage that, but they can't manage it. The ranchers manage it. And it's their livelihood, so they're going to do a better job managing it than any bureaucracy department. There's a lot of good improvements. The

ranchers have put in water traps and water tanks and so on, so forth. But I don't like the change. I don't like the change, and I don't like what they were doing and all the people that are coming in. That really upsets me. And the lack of respect that the Flatlanders bring up into the mountains. It's public land and so they're public, and they think they can do whatever. And there's been times I've chased them off with my 30-30.

[00:05:56]

Kacey: Understandably.

[Crosstalk 00:05:57]

[00:06:01]

Jackie: I'm kind of known as Jackie Oakley. And that comes from a longtime story of people coming in, my husband taking off and going to the valley on Sunday, and left me home. I'd had a tooth pulled. Left me home and it was snow on the ground. And these two guys just appeared on my front doorstep. And they were young guys, and they had hoods on. They were hoodies. Just hoods, sweatshirt hoods. Knocked on my door, and at that time, we didn't have a landline. All we had was the cell phone. And so I just had this real weird feeling. You get a feeling when something's not quite right, like a red flag.

And so I snuck around and got the cell phone out of the window. And luckily—thank you, Lord—I had service when I went into the bedroom to call the sheriff's office. And she said, "Well, Jackie, we're 45 minutes away. Why don't you get a hold of one of the neighbors?" She says, "I'll call somebody, have them come your way." Well, we're in a community of 12 families. And so it was feeding time and it was winter so there was snow on the ground, like I said. So the ranchers were all out feeding. So she got a hold of one of the neighbors and he headed up that way.

Well, in the meantime, they were trying doorknobs. And then they were sitting on the deck. And so I went around to the bedroom; we have a double door out—French doors that goes outside—and so I get the pistol out of the headboard and I just... He was over there at that side of the thing, and so I just leaned on the bed and I pointed it to the door handle. I thought, "You little SOB. You touch that handle and that's going to be it." So nothing happened. And so I went ahead and got dressed and went through the bathroom door and went around the back of the house and come stepped upon the steps.

I had my 30-30 and I had it right here. I didn't have it pointed, I just held it in my hand like this. And I said, "Can I help you?" "Uh-uh-uh-uh." They're shocked that somebody's there, and a woman for one thing, and then a woman with a gun. [Laughs] Anyway, they said, "Well, well, well, well, we just wanted to know, we're stranded up here, if we give you \$50 if you would help us?" And I said, "You see that pickup coming across the hill? That's the sheriff's office. You walk that way, same way you come into my lane, you walk

up to them. Give them your \$50 and see if they'll help you." They turned around and left. So it's kind of a funny story. But it's more than just a story. I mean, I have...

[Crosstalk 00:08:52]

[00:08:52]

Kacey: Well, it's a true testament of just standing up for yourself. It's your place. I mean, your place to stand up for yourself. It's not their business. So I mean, if that's what you're known for, go for it.

[00:09:03]

Jackie: For a lot of that. I'm known for that and a lot of other stuff too, other than the fact that... Kind of famous for pies and pickles.

[00:09:12]

Kacey: [Laughs] Yeah. I think that goes back to the community thing also. There's all these different connections that I've just learned about since talking to the people involved in this community out here, which has been super interesting. But going back to how the land has changed and this not wanting it to change. What would you want people to know who haven't experienced this land and the beauty out here before it's changed too far? Or what would you have liked them to know before it started to change? What types of things come to mind that you wish people would have seen before it's too late?

[00:09:47]

Jackie: Well, I'm pretty possessive. So I don't care if they've seen it at all.

[Crosstalk 00:09:51]

[00:09:51]

Kacey: Yeah. [Laughs]

[00:09:51]

Jackie: ...that they would just stay away is what I would like. Obviously, that's not the case and you have to deal with all kinds of folks. Well, they talk about the sage-grouse and they talk about endangered species. And if they could have seen it before BLM manages it, all that stuff took care of itself. The sage-grouse eats manure, they eat bugs. They follow the cattle. Lots of birds and whatever, follow the cattle. And the cattle eats the grass and it makes everything thrive. Before it was, the grazing was perfect. We never had a fire, ever had a fire. And now we have fires all the time because of BLM's management.

[00:10:54]

Kacey: Yeah. That's one thing that I spoke to one of the fire chiefs about of this lack of understanding of how grazing actually benefits the land. It seems like there's always this negative connotation to cattling, when in reality, there's all these positives that come

out of it that people choose to kind of ignore. And just going back to without people stepping in, we had all these systems but now we decide we have to change them and fix them. But they were...

[00:11:21]

Jackie:

But those people that want to fix them, they sit in Washington, DC, and don't have a clue. I mean, a clue. If they could get out here and put boots on the ground and see what's out there. Like the Soda Fire. Oh, my gosh. I had an interview with somebody from Moscow, I believe, on the Soda Fire. And it's just stupidity is what it is. And some people will say, "Well, it's lack of knowledge." Well, okay. If you want to get into a position and you wanted that job, you research and you find everything you can about that job before you apply for that job. Right? So that you can do a good job.

Now, so much of this is just political to me. And running the ranchers through hoops and it's caused... Well, years ago, you didn't even dare come on my ranch. BLM guy would never step foot on my ranch. My dad woulda run him off for one thing. Well, when I was a kid, we moved the cows out, way out, wherever. And there was no fences, so sometimes they'd get picked up and get hauled off as far as the river. And one of the farmers or ranchers down there and say, "Oh, by the way, Russ, I got one of your cows down here."

Well, he'd go down with the truck and pick it up and bring it home. That's just how that all worked then. Well, now everybody is against everybody. Everybody is for each person. I mean, this community, our community up at Reynolds Creek is pretty good. But there's a lot of communities that's not. But ranchers are a different breed of people, for sure. They're out for the industry. They're out for successfulness of the neighbor. Anyway, that's just Owyhee County.

[00:13:23]

Kacey:

Yeah. Well, then, I obviously don't know a lot about cattle ranching or what that means. But one thing that I've learned is it seems like the success of one neighbor helps the success of the other neighbor. If everyone else is doing okay...

[00:13:35]

Jackie:

Well, when we're branding, the neighbors all get together. Not everybody brands on the same day. Everybody gets together and they just make sure it worked. They have a big dinner, everybody gets along, the kids all run and play. And I mean, yeah, it's not like it used to be. There are some places where if a neighbor is sick or something, they will go in and do up his crops and stuff for him if it's harvest time.

That was back in the day. There's not so much of that anymore, although we have had some of that experience here two years ago. Well, the Soda Fire. But two years ago, we had a breakdown. And of course, I panicked because my husband had been diagnosed with a disease and I thought, "Oh, how am I going to do this all by myself?"

Well, they found out about it and they came up and they baled our hay. Did not charge us. I mean, it wasn't like it was 160 acres worth of hay. I mean, we're on 160 acres, but a lot of that's pastured. But anyway, it was just kindness. And those were folks that were in the valley and they were the same folks that brought us up a truckload of hay when the Soda Fire hit and took all of our hay and all of our fall pasture. They came up and just unloaded it. I mean big bales. There was thousands of dollars worth of hay. And never was ever mentioned after that, other than just...

[00:15:12]

Kacey: Yeah. Just for sake of kindness and helpfulness. So you talked about how things have changed in terms of the community. What can you say about other times where you've seen that type of kindness or caringness from the community that you've been a part of? Either in the past or just recently. But you mentioned it changed, so I'm just trying to find other ways of where this has happened and maybe how we could get back there as a community. [Laughs] Or hopefully get back there.

[00:15:40]

Jackie: I'm the oldest one up here. Been up in the Reynolds Creek area the longest other than Jaca, Inez. She's a couple years older than I am, but she never went to school. They were Catholic. So their folks all went to the kids in the valley, so they could go to the Catholic schools. I've been trying really hard to see if there's some way that we can get the schoolhouse put together again. It's got good bones, it's going to take a lot. Because that was our kind of our community center.

And it would be nice if we could have card parties or just to get together for like a big Easter dinner or Christmas time or Thanksgiving time and bring the community together that way. But everybody is just like everywhere else. Everybody's got kids scattered here and grandkids scattered there in the valley or out of state or something. And so it's really hard, unless it's a working project, to get the community together. But I still, if there's a neighbor sick or there's been surgery in the family or something, I always try to still take meals. And I try to coordinate other people to say, "Okay, I'll do it today. You do it tomorrow. And we'll do it for a couple three days for these guys." I still do that.

[00:17:13]

Kacey: Yeah. Well, that's reassuring to hear. So going back to kind of more of the land itself and growing up in this area, we've talked a lot about how BLM has stepped in and kind of changed how the land is managed. But you mentioned all these stories of the bobcats and the sage-grouse. Do you have any stories of just interacting with the wildlife or just being on the land itself?

[00:17:37]

Jackie: Well, it's my playground. Never seen any bobcats. My dad trapped them. I know there was bobcats because we used to have... When the folks first moved up there, we lived in

a one-room—I call it—shingle shack. And the folks brought up chickens and guineas. And it wasn't too long that the chickens were all gone because coyotes and bobcats would come in at night and take them. And we only had one building, the old barn, and then of course the house.

And then the guinea hens, they would get up on the house at night. We had lots of trees but they would get up on the house. Bobcats would crawl up on top of the house and get them. Because you'd hear them at night stomping on the roof. Didn't see a lot of that, just heard that. My folks probably kept a lot of that stuff from me or something. Later on years, I heard about it and I thought, "Oh, well, I didn't know that." But of course, they didn't tell me.

Coyotes. Lot of coyotes. Rabbits. I know in order to feed the dogs, we would go out maybe twice a week and shoot a bunch of rabbits for food for the dogs. And we had a couple of cats too, I think I remember. Tame cats. Of course, they didn't last very long either with the bobcats and coyotes. But no, I don't really have any experience with the wild animals out there.

[00:19:23]

Kacey: Yeah. What about just being in the sagebrush or the plants or the landscape? When you look out there, what do you think of or what are you reminded of, of all those memories? Or just what do you hold close when you think about the land out there?

[00:19:39]

Jackie: Well, it's God's creation for sure. And it's God's country. I always call it God's country and the rest of it down there's God-forsaken. [Laughter] I suppose if I grew up in the pines, I would love the pines. But I just love the sagebrush. The smell of the sagebrush. You run over it with a rig or you walk on it or the horses go through it, and you smell that smell, and it's a wonderful smell. I mean, it's just home to me. I'm very possessive. When I cross that bridge down there, there at Dan's Ferry Service, my bits switch, flips, and I become a different personality. I mean, I'm very possessive of Owyhee County. And especially my area up there—Reynolds Creek area.

[00:20:32]

Kacey: Yeah. I mean, I understand that on a different realm of being from a place that completely changes in front of your eyes.

[00:20:38]

Jackie: No, it doesn't. This doesn't. No. In fact, a lot of the stuff that's going on in the world right now doesn't affect us. It doesn't touch us like it does the folks. And me being raised up there and pretty poor... I guess we were pretty poor. I didn't know that. I thought we had everything that there was. I mean, only child, I didn't want much for anything.

[00:21:08]

Kacey: That was what you knew.

[00:21:09]

Jackie: Yeah. I wasn't around a lot of people that had a lot of things, so I didn't have that desire to have things. I had everything I needed. And all the attention of my mom and dad. So I had a wonderful childhood. I was adopted by my oldest sister and her husband. So I don't know what my life would have been like if I had been raised... Because I have nine siblings on one side—my mother's side—and then 10 siblings on the other side. So I have 19 siblings. Okay. My birth mother had 10. I was the tenth. And then the woman that raised me was the first.

So I don't know how they could have all went together so that I had all 19 together. But anyway. I had a wonderful childhood, a wonderful childhood. But as far as things changing, the Reynolds Creek area has not changed. I guess it's changed some. They've put in some ponds, and there's been a new house or two built in – would have been 75 years because I'm 77. Not many.

There's been some mobile homes brought in, and then a few reservoirs put in there in the valley. But the roads all look the same. The mountains are all still the same. There's less sagebrush on my side now because of the Soda Fire. Of course the terrain's all the same. Build the corrals and different things up in the area for convenience for doing cattle up in the hills instead of bringing them all down here and doing them.

[00:23:13]

Kacey: Yeah. So we've spoken a lot about things that have changed, but now we're kind of transitioning to things that have stayed the same. What things do you find yourself doing in this area that you've done your whole life? Or do you ever catch yourself in a moment thinking like, "Wow, this is exactly how it was 50 years ago"?

[00:23:28]

Jackie: Mm-hmm. Most everything except when I get in the car and go to town.

[00:23:33]

Kacey: [Laughs] That's when it all changes?

[00:23:35]

Jackie: Yeah. No. We have animals, so you get up in the morning and you take care of the animals before you have breakfast. You might swig down a cup of coffee if you've got one heated or you got the microwave handy and you can throw it in there. Do hay, irrigate every day. Just build fence, just maintain the ranch. And it's an everyday thing. And so I garden and I can, and of course then I do all the bazaars in the area. So I'm constantly baking or canning for bazaars and stuff. And I cook on an old wood cook stove like what's here in the museum.

[Crosstalk 00:24:13]

[00:24:13]

Kacey: Wow.

[00:24:13]

Jackie: In fact, every day. Especially until it gets really, really hot, I get a fire going in the morning first thing, put a pan of water on for oatmeal or make homemade bread toasts – you seen the homemade bread I brought in to Betsy – and get the sourdough started and just add more to the sourdough every day. So yeah, it's kind of pretty much like it was before. And it's my comfort zone. That makes me happy. When my water bucket is full, my wood boxes are full, my pantry is full, I'm happy. That's all I need.

[00:24:46]

Kacey: Yeah. And those are the things that matter. The things that you look and you go, "That's a good day." I just had another thought but then, right out there. That's going to bug me. So going back to kind of just living in this routine and going back to things that have stayed the same, do you find that your imagination and being out in the land and having those things, inspire you to think of just crazy scenarios? Or do you find that you find moments of that as well? Or not so much?

[00:25:18]

Jackie: No, I'm pretty realist. I'm pretty much of a realist. I'm too real for a lot of folks. So common sense is my thing. Stand for what you believe. As my dad used to say, "If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything." So you have to have a passion. [Someone enters room] You don't have to be quiet. [Laughter] And my passion is protecting Owyhees a lot, as much as I can do.

Can't do a lot. And I'm a lot of talk. I would like to think that I could do something physical, but I've kind of gived that up. We've stopped chasing people down at two, three o'clock in the morning with a gun and a cell phone saying, "What the hell are you doing on this land? You're up to no good at two o'clock in the morning. You roam in the mountains, so you're up to no good. You got to be up to no good."

[00:26:34]

Kacey: Well, I don't blame you. And that is something physical to do and...

[00:26:36]

Jackie: But we don't do that anymore. Everybody says, "Mom, what would happen if...?"

[00:26:44]

Kacey: So what kinds of things do you find yourself doing to kind of hold your ground or feed that passion you have for protecting?

[00:26:51]

Jackie: What do I do?

[00:26:52]

Kacey: Yeah.

[00:26:52]

Jackie: I talk a lot. Prime example, we was in Albertsons picking up my husband's prescription. There was an elderly man who had a Vietnam hat on and he was in a wheelchair and he was trying to find some pop, pop, fizz, fizz—Alka-Seltzer, basically. And we was at the pharmacy. So up and down on that side of the pharmacy, there's all the over-the-counter stuff. And somebody was trying to help him and it wasn't what he was wanting. And so he was coming up towards us and I leaned down to him, and I said, "Sir, can I help you?" And he said, "I'm sight-impaired. I can't hear." So I understood.

And so I heard what he said he wanted and I said, "Do you want original? Or do you want mint?" And he said, "Original." And he was so thankful that somebody would listen to him. And the gal that was starting to help him, she just walked past and said, "Oh, he's being so rude." So that made my blood start to boil. And so when I got up to the... Because the gal that was helping him was the one that was the pharmacist helper, and she was helping me then at that time. And so the other gal... There was another gal there, and I said to her, I said, "I'm not going to say anything to her, but you tell her the reason that she can stand back there and have the freedom she has is because of this man."

Oh, I was mad. Well, the two pharmacists heard me and said, "We totally agree with you, ma'am, but he didn't need to be rude." And I said, "No, he probably didn't need to be rude. But he had indigestion because he needed the Alka-Seltzer. He can't see, he can't hear, he can't walk, and nobody's going to help him. What kind of attitude would you have?" And so it's the underdog, I'm constantly...

[00:28:58]

Kacey: Looking for how to help the underdog.

[00:29:00]

Jackie: To help the underdog. Yeah. And want to. That's my passion. The giving is my passion. And I don't know how much of this junk you're going to put on there. But I don't want to be bragging about that.

[00:29:16]

Kacey: Well, it's not bragging at all, but those are the things that do matter. The actions every day that you make an effort to kind of engage with or the values that you try to live by every day.

[00:29:26]

Jackie: Well, I've been known—and I know this is going to be edited, but—I've been known to be the Upper Reynolds Creek bitch. And I have that reputation to maintain. And I try really hard every day to maintain that reputation. So it sometimes spills out into Canyon County, but everybody knows who Jackie Benson is. Not everybody, but I mean, a lot of folks.

[00:29:47]

Kacey: People that matter. [Laughs]

[00:29:48]

Jackie: Well, that matter to me. Yeah. [Laughter] But I have a soft spot and I have a big heart and I can get real emotional, really easy. But I hate to see people being taken advantage of and I hate to see people being abused. And it makes my blood boil and I want to just jump up and kick them in the throat. I mean, that's how I feel. Instead of talking with my mouth. I'm not good at that. I can think it really good, but just to come out and say it? It just comes out as gibberish a lot of the times. [Laughter] And then if I get really pissed off, then I bawl and I can't say nothing.

[00:30:36]

Kacey: That's how I am too. It seems like the emotions can get the best before the words get out. But having a reputation for standing up for people is something to aspire to have and to be protected over that is more than understandable. I mean, that's kind of the hope I would have to be known for, is not to be walked over and to have the power to say, "No, this is what's right. And this is what's wrong. And this is what I want."

[00:31:02]

Jackie: One time we had a neighbor—and the neighbor's still there—but he has mellowed a whole bunch. Not because of me, but he's just gotten older and there's been other people in his life that has changed his thinking. He was a water attorney out of Boise. He thought his sh-- didn't stink. I'm sorry.

[00:31:21]

Kacey: [Laughs] No, it's true.

[00:31:22]

Jackie: I'm real. And he tried to take advantage. My dad passed away and my mom and I were running the ranch. And he tried to take advantage of my mom. And I stood up to him, toe to toe, and I cussed him out like a sailor would cuss out somebody. And from then on, he probably just thought, "Oh, gosh, crazy redhead up here. Stay away from her." But from then on, he left us alone. He was trying to steal our water.

And I come off on him like... I don't know. But I try to think back on what the conversation was and I can't remember. The only thing I can remember was I... And I

never, ever do the F-bomb. But it got done that day because he was taking advantage of my mom who'd lost her husband and was trying to make the ranch go. And he was trying to steal her water.

That's the lifeline of property up here. If you don't have water coming down that creek, you don't irrigate, and you don't have hay. And it's just different things that I stand up still, and voice my opinion, strong opinion. Always been opinionated. But just like the museum. I'm on the board of the museum and went to one of the county commissioner meetings one day. And before the meeting, they stood up and pledged allegiance to the flag and had a prayer. Impressed the hell out of me.

And I thought, "You know what? There's no reason we can't do that." So I got that implemented. And I feel really good about that because we're all supposed to be patriots. We're all supposed to love the flag and what it stands for. If you don't, get the hell out of our county. That's my thinking. And so I guess it's little things, but it makes me proud to know that...

[00:33:40]

Kacey: You did what you could.

[00:33:41]

Jackie: ...so many people just kind of take all that stuff for... Take it for granted or don't even think about it maybe. Anyway. Probably getting off of the subject here. Sorry.

[00:33:54]

Kacey: Well, changing gears. So I have in my notes here that the museum was a little bit interested in kind of what it was like to go to school out here. Do you have anything to say on what that was like or that experience? Or even just being the oldest out of your group?

[00:34:08]

Jackie: Well, oldest up at Reynolds Creek. And then we couldn't get a teacher up there. And so there was a lady up there—a family up there—that she had a station wagon. I don't know how it all came about because I was just third grade, other than the fact that my mom would take me to her house and we would get into the station wagon. I don't remember if she went door to door and picked up the kids or if they all met somewhere.

I think they all met at the mailboxes. And then she'd drive us to Murphy every day and then pick us up. And she did that. And remember that and remember water across the road sometimes and it was a little scary when we'd have a flash flood or something. Because there's a couple little washes out there that you have to cross. They've put culverts in since. Are you needing to...

[Crosstalk 00:35:12]

[00:35:12]

Kacey: Oh, no. It was just dying on me. I was making sure it was kept going.

[00:35:16]

Jackie: Anyway, so there was a lot of kids in the school for me.

[00:35:21]

Kacey: At Murphy?

[00:35:22]

Jackie: Yeah. Well, there's probably 18 or something like that. And it was all classes from first to seventh, I believe. And remember, at recess, we'd run out and find horny toads out in the sagebrush and stuff. School was scary for me, only because I was away from my folks. And my comfort zone was the ranch and being home. I didn't want to have to comb my hair and I didn't want to wash, and my mom made me wash my hands and comb my hair.

And of course, my hair was really, really long. And of course, blowing in the wind and tangled and all that and heavy as a horse's tail. [Laughs] So wasn't something... But anyway, I guess the most thing I remember is the superintendent come into school, and she was a mean lady and scared me to death. And I was scared to death of her. And I didn't want to come down off the hill. I kind of wanted to stay at home where I felt safe. I didn't feel safe at school ever. Never felt safe at school.

[00:36:37]

Kacey: Did that feeling alleviate once going to the Reynolds Creek School? Or were you always at the Murphy school? Or are those the same thing?

[00:36:46]

Jackie: No. Reynolds Creek is 17 miles up in the mountains. Murphy was a big town, big school. And then after the third grade, they got school teachers again. And I went till the seventh grade up there at Reynolds Creek. So I think the most that it was ever there was 11. And that was the summertime when somebody would hire somebody to work and they'd stay the winter and they had a family with kids. And those kids would go there. So I think we got up to 11 one year. And I remember one big boy that had dark hair and I can't even remember his name. But I remember he was older than me.

[00:37:32]

Kacey: So there was one that was a little bit older.

[Crosstalk 00:37:34]

[00:37:34]

Jackie: At one time. Yeah. At one time. Just one time. One year. But I went from fourth grade, I guess. Fifth, sixth, and seventh. No. Second. Third here. Fourth, fifth, and sixth. And the seventh year they had... That was as far as we could go. And so the folks had to move off the hill to get me to school. And so daddy bought an acreage in Kuna. But we kept the ranch and we'd come up every weekend and was up there all summer. And so it was like having two homes and kinda, so, anyway.

[00:38:15]

Kacey: How did the experiences differ from going to school in Reynolds Creek to going here in Murphy? Did you feel kind of more in your comfort zone out in the smaller school?

[00:38:29]

Jackie: Yeah. I was in my element up there. Down here, I was in somebody else's element and didn't much care for it. Well, it's like any kid going to a school for the first time, being the new kid. I mean, everybody knows you, but you don't know everybody. And it took a while. I had some friends, one or two girls mostly, that I remember. And a couple of them, we still... In fact, once they moved from here, they went to Melba and went to school with my husband. And so when there's class reunions, I get to see them and we're friends on Facebook and stuff.

But a lot of difference. I know the most people I was around was during 4-H time when we'd go to the valley for fair. Because we did have a 4-H club up there and I did go to that and belonged to that, and worked all summer to get projects done and get to the fair. So I wasn't isolated a lot. But there was usually nothing during the summertime other than just the 4-H thing and that wasn't a lot.

[00:39:56]

Kacey: Yeah. What kind of projects were you doing for 4-H?

[00:39:59]

Jackie: I did entomology and I did weeds and bugs [Laughs] and cooking and sewing. We were poor enough that I couldn't do pigs or cattle. Those were our livelihood and there wasn't an extra one for you to play with kind of thing. But I remember baking a cake in the wood stove because that's what we had to heat and cook with. And oh, it wasn't a disaster. It turned out okay. And I think I probably got a blue or red ribbon. I don't even remember. I used to have the ribbons but I don't have them anymore. But I remember those things in the competition. I didn't like that competition. It was one of the things that... I was too much of a perfectionist.

[00:41:01]

Kacey: [Laughs] The cake baking wasn't for you?

[00:41:04]

Jackie: No. I do that now and I'm okay with it, but...

[00:41:07]

Kacey: Not for the competition.

[00:41:08]

Jackie: ...I have electric stove too. [Laughter]

[00:41:12]

Kacey: Yeah. Well, we're nearing our end of the time here. So is there anything else that you wanted to share? Anything else that comes to mind before we sign off today?

[00:41:22]

Jackie: Well, yes. Because I remember going to school at Reynolds Creek and the weather would be bad. And the folks would get me to school Monday morning, and then I would stay with the teacher in the little black house next to the Reynolds Creek school. And then, as the weather got better, they would come get me. And sometimes I would stay three or four days with the teacher and stay in her little cabin at night and that kind of thing. I remember that. And then if they had to, they'd come over horseback and pick me up on the other side because we'd be on the right side of the creek.

I remember a couple years' winters when we'd have a big flash flood and it'd wash the bridge out, so there'd be no school until they got... And they would put planks across that thing and you'd had to get this tire on this one and this tire on this one and then somebody out front would make sure your tires are straight so you'd get across the roaring creek. I remember doing that. Lots of times we had to walk in if the roads were bad. And we're five miles in. And over clay. And of course, you'd walk on clay. And you know what that does. It's like walking on high heels and all of a sudden, this other high heel falls off. And so then you... Trying to get home. But just those kinds of memories.

[00:42:54]

Kacey: What was it like staying with the teacher? Did you find yourself building...

[00:42:57]

Jackie: Oh, it was wonderful because it seems like she always had really neat food for one thing. And it was just her and me. And there was no TV, so she'd read stories to me, which I loved. And I would do my homework. I mean, it was like my own private tutor. So that was wonderful. And then I know, when it was at the end of the school year, we always had a big picnic. All the ladies would get together and all the kids, last day of school. Lots of times we'd clean the cemetery. We'd go and cut all the weeds and rake and make the cemetery look nice. And then we'd go up on Whiskey Hill and have a picnic. And that was kind of a traditional thing to do.

[00:43:51]

Kacey: Yeah. Other than the few that you've mentioned, are there other people that you went to school with that you still get the opportunity to connect with or share those memories with?

[00:44:02]

Jackie: Once in a great while at a bazaar there'll be one of the gals that used to live just up the road. Well, our closest neighbor was two and a half miles as the crow flies. So probably eight miles from us. We were in the same grade. And whenever I see her, we want to get together, but I'm usually busy selling pickles and pies and stuff and she's just coming through looking at stuff. But reminiscing when we get a chance to, with her. Yeah. She remembers a lot more than I do, actually, because she was down in the valley and we're up in the mountain more.

[00:44:43]

Kacey: Okay. Do you find yourself just talking about old stories?

[00:44:47]

Jackie: Lots of times. That's why Mary O'Malley said, "Jackie, you got to get your story out there."

[00:44:52]

Kacey: Yeah. We got her interview, too. So at least she did it as well. She's not just making you go for it. She did her story, too.

[00:44:59]

Jackie: Oh, hers is probably really interesting. She's interesting people.

[00:45:04]

Kacey: Yeah. She is super fun to talk to, that's for sure. So other than that, is there anything else that you want to talk about or share or get on here before we turn it off for the day?

[00:45:15]

Jackie: I'm sure there will be when we say goodbye.

[00:45:17]

Kacey: [Laughs] That's how it always goes.

[00:45:20]

Jackie: Yeah. I didn't take notes. I should have taken some notes. But I was right in the middle of everything at home and... "Oh, I can wing this."

[00:45:29]

Kacey: [Laughs] Well, we appreciate you even taking the time to even sit down for 50 minutes and really just talk and have the conversation. These have been super fun for us as students to do and learn from.

[00:45:42]

Jackie: So what is your... Well, when you [Inaudible 00:45:44] turn that off, I'll...

[Crosstalk 00:45:45]

[00:45:45]

Kacey: [Laughs] Well, I will turn it off now. So I just want to thank you one more time.

[00:45:49]

Jackie: Okay.

Chris Black

Haley: So to start off—actually have a little spiel, but—today I'm interviewing Chris Black for Shared Stories Lab oral history project. It's April 27th, 2022 and we are in the Idaho State Department of Agriculture conference room. I am Haley Netherton-Morrison, an interviewer with the Shared Stories Lab. And to get started, would you mind telling us a bit about your background in the area?

[00:00:28]

Chris: Sure. My background: born and raised in Owyhee County in the Bruneau area. My family's been there since 18—what?—65? '75. Anyway, '75, yeah. And we've raised cattle and horses and things ever since. And I'm just, I guess, carrying on the tradition.

[00:01:05]

Haley: Great. So were there any specific stories that you wanted to share about your experiences with ranching with the Owyhee County landscape that you'd want other people who aren't familiar with the area to know?

[00:01:19]

Chris: I probably have a lot. What particular kind of stories? Because there's different kinds of stories. There's landscape stories. There's stories about horses and cattle. There are stories about family, about history. What specifically are you....

[00:01:39]

Haley: Yeah. Maybe start off with some stories about the landscape. That'd be good. I know part of the motivation of this project is, of course, the ties to the sagebrush landscape for Owyhee County. But, yeah, if you have anything in particular, like memories out in the sage, or anything that you wanted to share.

[00:01:58]

Chris: Okay. Well, of course, sagebrush landscape is integral to what we exist on and what we've thrived on and used for our livelihood all these years, all of my lifetime, and all of my parents and grandparents and great-grandparents' lifetime, and great-great-grandparents' lifetime. So it's been integral. It's changed some, even in my lifetime. Good or bad, it's changed. And I think better in the last 10, 15 years. I think things look better than they had looked in the '70s and '80s type thing, as far as landscape goes, for my particular interest and my particular interest in range management.

And I have a history in economics and business because my dad told me that you have to be able to keep the ranch before you can affect any landscape or do anything like that. So I have a background in that. But I also have a lot of self-teaching because education

really goes beyond... Education, all you really do is learn how to learn. So after you go through your education, if you can keep learning through your lifetime, that's ideal, in my opinion. So I've gone on back in the '90s—I think '92, '93—I went on to look at the sagebrush landscape and see what I can do to improve or to take some pressure off or whatever.

And that's when I got into holistic management, which is taking a view of management where you take everything into account, whether it's livestock or wildlife or plants or kind of everything into account. And that is the premise that I've been using to manage on since that time, since the '90s. And it's been a learning curve and a little bit different than what tradition was. But we've seen a difference in the landscape. And that is a good thing. We've had to work a lot with laws and regulations because that affects all of us.

So sometimes we can't do exactly what we need to do. But we are working through that, and that's an ongoing thing. When we live in a county – Owyhee county is 93% public land – and so we rely, for the most part, on public land for our livelihood because it's such a big part of the landscape and we only have a small amount of private land to go with it. But the private land is in critical areas where water is and all of that. So we have to work well with the government and with the other people, users of this multiple-use landscape, what we call a sagebrush steppe. Yeah.

[00:05:58]

Haley:

Yeah. Great. There are a couple of things I wanted to follow up on from there. That was really wonderful. So you mentioned having to learn throughout your lifetime as the land changes and things. And I was just curious, what do you think are some of the things that have been.... I guess, what are the things that you've learned that you would most want to share with somebody else, or that have been the most helpful for you in managing the landscape?

[00:06:31]

Chris:

Well, the thing that I've learned is when you go out on the landscape, first of all, you need to be on the landscape if you want to manage it or you want to affect it. In this day and age, we are pretty centric on our phones or on being in an office and thinking of ideals and ideal landscapes. But when it comes down to the practical use of things and the practically working on landscapes, you have to be there. You have to be on the landscape and you have to observe. And that's the main thing.

After all, what is science? Science is the art of observation and making correct observations, or at least observations and going back to correct them if they're not quite right. So that's the thing that I've learned: to observe the landscape for what it is and to work with it in that way. And it's funny because when I was growing up, we didn't write things down, we didn't take pictures, we didn't do a lot of that. But what I've learned to do is monitor. By [Inaudible 00:08:04] take pictures or write some things down. I'm not really good at writing anything down, but I'm just not built that way.

But I do write critical things down. And I do take pictures and I use technology for that. I'll use my phone for a lot of that with cameras and with apps that write all the GPS coordinates, all that stuff on the photos themselves. We can do all that. And so we can use technology and we can do that, but it doesn't replace being on the ground. So that's one of the main lessons I've learned. That's just one of them. One of the other ones is to work with animals and work with the landscape.

Try to not impose my belief systems on a landscape or on a cow or on a horse. If I can work with them, we can always come to some compromise and work better together. Whether it be with cattle or dogs or horses, which I work with all of those and they're an integral part of raising livestock on the sagebrush steppe and making my living, providing food and fiber for the nation. And that's really the way I see it as what we do.

[00:09:46]

Haley:

Great. I was curious. You mentioned the monitoring, but you were mentioning the changes from the '80s to now and the improvements. And I was curious if you could just speak a little bit more to what things looked like in the '80s versus how you feel that that's changed now?

[00:10:04]

Chris:

Yeah. Well, where I am in the allotment I'm thinking of up in Owyhee is... Well, we're probably the most isolated area in the lower 48. And we have, just to mark that point, we have two wilderness areas within my allotment out there. So we're quite way out, and we're way out down. And even then, before in the '70s and before '83—I built a fence in '83—cattle could've roamed all over out there. It wasn't tame like most areas are, and even more then. If I wasn't there to keep my animals from going back, they could have went clear to Bruneau, which is 80 miles away. So things have changed.

And during that time, when I learned about management and the things we could do to enhance grazing and enhance grass, enhance basically the whole – when you talk about holistic for wildlife and everything else. The things that I learned had to do with timing and had to do with keeping cattle together. And it became easier with some fences, but we're still way out there and there's a lot to do. But the changes that I've seen when I took care of timing and the grazing and stuff through whatever means.... We did it by herding because we didn't have a lot of fences. And that's something that we were used to but we had a different focus on it.

So I don't know if I'm making sense or not. But anyway, what I saw and what I proved through monitoring is that immediately, the sagebrush steppe responded to that. When we took the pressure off, when we started moving, pay attention [Inaudible 00:12:28] immediately, that sagebrush steppe responded to it. And within four or five years, we saw plant spacings that came together so that less bare ground (and all of this stuff),

which is all good. So I don't know if I answered your question but that's what I saw, is immediately we saw that. And we were able to prove that through monitoring.

But there's always a struggle with people that aren't on the landscape and have different ideas on how the landscape should be operated and may or may not be out on it. But we still, in this.... I shouldn't say political. I should say, in the environment we're in, in Owyhee County, where we have largely public lands, we have to deal with that. And that's a real thing we have to deal with. So I've dealt with the landscape and the landscape has responded. Now, we have to figure out how to deal with people and see how they respond. And that's ongoing.

[00:14:02]

Haley: Totally makes sense.

[00:14:03]

Chris: I don't know if I answered your question or not.

[00:14:05]

Haley: No, that was great. And also really neat to hear the role that monitoring was playing in that. And I think the other thing that I wanted to follow up on from some of the things you were talking about was you mentioned your shift to holistic management in the '90s and how that was kind of such a turn away from the kind of traditional methods. And I guess I was just curious if you could speak a little bit about what sparked your interest in the holistic management and how that maybe changed how the.... I guess you had to kind of think through all the different things that you'd already been doing and things. If you could speak to that.

[00:14:48]

Chris: Well, what sparked my interest was first economic because at the time I was just starting into the... Just got out of college and was starting into the business. And at the time, BLM had done monitoring out there and things weren't as good as they would've liked them to be. But we had a lot of challenges like I talked to earlier, where we didn't have fences, we couldn't control as much, and didn't have the concept of how to control timing and whatnot. What I was doing, I was looking for a better way to manage and a better way to do things on the sage [Inaudible 00:15:30] and while still doing what we've always done, which is raise food and fiber and raise livestock and horses, and enjoy what I enjoy out there. And that's part of it.

In my mind, I always wanted to be a cowboy. And that was always my goal. I wanted to be out there. I'd been out there since I was 10 years old and riding horses and doing stuff. That's what I wanted to do. Whether I went to college or whatever, that's what I wanted to do. In order to keep that lifestyle, I had to manage better and I had to do things better. So I went searching for that answer. And it so happens that one of my best friends from high school was putting on a holistic management seminar in Glenns Ferry

and I went to that. It was a four or five-day short course on it, which sparked a lot of those ideas and a lot of the theories there and a lot of the—well, I shouldn't say theories—proven things there.

And a lot of the stuff I could relate to because I'd seen it, and it's just putting it together and clicking with it. So that's where that came in. And they stressed the importance of monitoring, which I found is vital. I was just talking here at the Department Ag. They have the monitoring program. And I was just talking to Thadd about that—integrating my monitoring into that. But that was the real spark at that time. And the ongoing thing is to be able to keep doing what I'm doing. And that's what I like. And if my kids want to do it, they will have the option. Or if I have nieces or nephews that want to do it or whatever, I want somebody to have the option to be able to do what I'm doing and provide food.

[00:17:46]

Haley: Great. I was curious. You mentioned kind of first going out when you were 10 and I was curious if you had any stories around that you wanted to share that...

[Crosstalk 00:17:56]

[00:17:56]

Chris: Oh, yeah. [Laughter] I have lots of stories. I don't know what you're looking for, but I have lots of stories. Because at that time, it wasn't unheard of for.... People seem shocked to send a fourth or fifth grader out and expect them to do a day's work. But in my community, it wasn't a big deal. So I went out basically not knowing how to.... Other than riding around the house. Just out. And they sent me out with my brother and myself. Went out. I think I was in fourth grade and he was fifth grade, whatever age that is. And we went out and we'd stay part of the summer with a hired man and learned a lot.

And learned a lot about life, learned a lot about how to be tough, and how to endure hunger and thirst, and that sort of thing, and endure hard work. So that's where we're coming from. So by the time I was in the seventh grade, I think I was staying by myself out there with nobody. And that seems to shock people now, but it was nothing. And even some of my kids, I would take them out and do the same thing. But at that point, you're considered a man and you should be acting like that in my community, according to old school.

[00:19:57]

Haley: Has that been something that's changed? I know you said that you brought your kids out when they were young, too. But have you noticed in the community that that's something that's changing? Are kids getting out there later or having...

[00:20:10]

Chris: Depends on who's doing it and where. I used to bring my kids out when I could on horses or on four-wheelers or whatever, and bring them out since they were tiny, very tiny and be with.... So they're used to going out all the time. A lot of people are doing it. One of my nephews that works with me out there, he brings his small kids out and does the same thing. Takes them on horses or on stuff. So they grow up doing that. So yeah, that's in some instances, not in all. Some people don't do that. But I think that was true back in the '70s and '80s, too. I mean, there was more use of child labor, so to speak. But really, it's just an opportunity for a child to learn and grow in a different environment and challenging environment that basically gives you good feet on the ground for life in my opinion.

[00:21:33]

Haley: Yeah. Was there something from kind of those early times out there.... Was there any particular lessons or things that you just really felt like stuck with you, and you were really glad you had that experience at a young age to really...?

[00:21:54]

Chris: Oh, gosh. Yeah. Just lessons on how to handle horses and how to handle cattle. And I learned from people—older—but I also learned on my own. Once I was told something, when you're sent out on your own to do something, which, even when you're young, even if there's somebody over you, you're sent out on your own and you may go do a whole job, a whole day without ever seeing anyone. We have to make decisions and you have to go through that kind of process and evaluate your environment and evaluate your capabilities and evaluate your horses' capabilities or your dogs' capabilities and the cows' capabilities to get the job done.

So that was vital lessons that I learned. Some lessons we learned. Just for instance, at that time, we were camped way over at Long Tom which was a five-mile trot. We rode horses every place. Five-mile trot to Camas Creek, which we didn't have a camp there at the time. But our allotment runs from there clear to the Owyhee River which is 30 miles basically. So we would go on some hellacious circles and big rides and you learned a lot on that. Learned how to be tough—at that young age even, learned how to be tough—and how to navigate somewhat—I shouldn't say hostile, but—difficult environment.

And what comes to mind, in particular, is we would go clear from Long Tom clear down past Battle Creek Crossing which is.... That doesn't mean much to you, but it's a long ways. It's better than 25 miles. So you'd get up before daylight and trot down. We trotted most every place we went. Trot down and then we'd ride through the Battle Creek Canyon.

And Perk [Gene Perkins] was the guy that was over us. He sent us, Doug and I—my brother and myself—down the canyon, which is challenging. And then he sent us. We met at the fork of Battle Creek and Big Springs Creek. And he went up Big Springs Creek

which was easy and he sent us up Battle Creek, which extended our ride quite a ways further. And then that's really tough. We don't hardly ever ride it.

I think he did it to teach us that lesson on how to persevere and how to navigate a, not hostile, but very challenging environment. And we did that. And he didn't believe in a lot of.... In packing lunches for instance, or packing water. So we would drink out of.... When we found a fresh spring or whatever we'd drink, we learned to be tough. And that may be extreme, and probably is to most people. But yeah, we learned some lessons there. And we'd go on a few of those circles. Or if we went over to Jack's Creek, we had to ride that country too because there was no fences.

Anyway, I can remember sometimes when we'd be trotting back home, get together, and it'd be after dark, and I just couldn't stay awake. But I would go at a full trot and never miss a post, but I'd be asleep. And then I wouldn't wake up until I got to a gate because Perk could be a little bit upset if we were asleep on our horse. So I'd wake up when the other horses stopped. But I could keep rhythm and still.... Anyway, that's a little different than most and probably different than even a lot of ranchers out there.

[00:26:41]

Haley:

Thanks so much for sharing that. That was great. You mentioned the just challenge of the landscape. And I'm just curious. It is a kind of harsh environment, a challenging environment. What keeps you still ranching in Owyhee County and staying there and wanting your family to stay on land? If that makes sense.

[00:27:07]

Chris:

Well, yeah, it does make a lot of sense. Because basically, that's where my ancestors stopped. And we've ranched kind of all over southern Idaho and northern Nevada through time. But we've had that particular allotment that I was talking about—the Big Springs allotment—we've had that since '42. So it's just been a part of my life. And it's very challenging. I live in a rock pile, basically, and it's a very challenging environment. But I don't really think of it that way. I look at it as a very lush landscape. And other people don't see it. They just see the rocks. What I see is – I see the parsleys and the large-headed clovers and the onions that are out this year. They're just beautiful.

I mean, you have a purple landscape with onions this time of year. The parsley's coming in and it's yellow. So you have all these forbs and stuff and it's just breathtaking, to me. It may not be to other people, but to me, it is because you have all of these colors and they come in this time of year. And it'll be white with the white onions a little bit later. And it's breathtaking. In fact, I don't take lunches because I only eat the parsleys and things that nature provides and it's good.

And the onions and those type of things, I don't bother to dig up the bulbs because then they're there for next year. I just eat them like cows do and take the tops and they're good. But that's some of the things I enjoy. Even though it is a harsh environment. I

mean, there's rocks, and rocks are difficult to overcome. You don't overcome them; you work with them. But that takes a physical toll on you. So that's why I'm 62 and I'm in pretty good shape. [Laughs]

[00:29:24]

Haley: Is that just because of just navigating over the rocks and everything?

[00:29:29]

Chris: Yes. Yeah. And getting places because there's enormous distances. There's over 100,000 acres in that allotment, which is big. That's big by anyone's measure. And you have to navigate the whole thing and most of it is rocky or a lava flow. Well, it becomes quite difficult. I mean, challenging, I should say. Everything's difficult in life, but I'd say challenging.

[00:30:04]

Haley: Do you find that the cattle have adapted really well to the....

[Crosstalk 00:30:10]

[00:30:10]

Chris: Oh, yeah.

[00:30:10]

Haley: ...rockiness? Yeah.

[00:30:11]

Chris: Yeah, they have. As long as your attitude is good with the cattle, and you understand cattle and understand their needs and meet their needs, they can meet their own needs in that environment quite well. The only time that you run into problems is if some people that come to that type environment don't understand the cattle's needs and only see the rocks, but don't see all of this great feed that's there. And the cattle don't because of the way they're handling them. So they're not successful in that type of situation. But if you are observant and look and listen and see what nature tries to tell you and tries to inform you, well then you can work through even a harsh environment like that.

[00:31:31]

Haley: I was curious if you could share a little bit more about kind of the family history of coming to Owyhee County?

[00:31:42]

Chris: Well, we were related to some of the first settlers in Bruneau Valley, the Turners. My family was. They came from Ohio. They originally came from Ireland and were through the West. Came from Ireland in about 1800, something like that. But they came from

Ohio after the Civil War. They came west and they actually rode the train to Utah, and then went from there up here. And when they got here, they didn't have much, but at that time, this was a country where you could, by your own labor and by your own initiative, could build something.

And that's where some of the women were really good. And my family at the time, they started a business. When they first got here, they started a business of providing milk to miners. So they'd go from Bruneau clear down into Nevada and bring their milk cows, provide milk to miners. And that's kind of what.... The women and a lot of the men would work with horses and work with cattle. But they moved as a family down and then would always come back to Bruneau and built stuff up to where they could afford to buy land and get cattle and horses. But that's really what gave them their start.

In fact, when the Bannock Uprising came through, the Blacks weren't in the Bruneau Valley. They were in Nevada because that's what they were doing. So for most of the time, my great-great-great-grandfather built up several farms and ranches. We had cattle and horses, but more emphasis was on horses. We provided remount horses to the military and to anyone. Because at the turn of the 1900s, horsepower was what drove the nation. That was everything. Steam was.... All farm ground and everything was with horsepower and most armies and whatnot.

So they provided remounts for military and horses for the plow in the Midwest and around Idaho, and remounts for say the Boer War. They sold a lot of horses that way in Africa. Anyway, but they would come out and when trains come in, they would take them to Mountain Home or to Boise or to Murphy and trail them—horses and cattle. They had both, but mainly horses until the horse market kind of petered out, which was in the mid to late '40s. And then we got more and more into cattle and eliminated a lot of the horses because there wasn't the need anymore.

[00:35:48]

Haley: I was curious. It's always so cool to hear the history of the ranches, but in your lifetime, what do you feel has had the greatest impact on ranching?

[00:36:04]

Chris: Greatest impact on ranching? Well, basically, people stepping back in the '80s and '90s and looking.... It's the same thing. A lot of people had the same epiphany—I don't know whether that's the right word or not—that we needed to work with the landscape and we needed to do things that.... When I talked earlier about searching out and looking at holistic management, a lot of people were doing that at that time because they knew that they wanted to be in the business and wanted to provide it in an environmentally friendly way, so to speak. I mean, that's a new term, but at that time, it was a term that was sustainable. A sustainable approach. And some of the practices before that weren't as sustainable.

So that's one of the big changes, and the big shifts in my community is looking toward that sustainability and looking at the long run. When the first settlers came, they were looking year to year because life was tough. And if you got raided by Indians or somebody came and stole your stuff, you didn't have it. So they didn't look that far into the future. And at that point, people started looking further into that future. And I being one, and many other ranchers too. And there was a backlash in the '90s of some of the practices we did in the '60s. But most of that backlash was from the university side and from the environmental side. But most of that backlash was a response to stuff that we'd already worked to fix. So I think we're coming back more into balance now.

[00:38:37]

Haley: I'm curious. What were some of those practices that were sparking that backlash?

[00:38:42]

Chris: Well, part of it was overgrazing. But we didn't have a concept of what overgrazing was. And my definition of what overgrazing might not be what most people's is, but people are coming around to looking at my concept of it as being more correct. And that's the holistic-type thing. Overgrazing because ranchers didn't know the importance. See, because we're in a very dry environment and there isn't much humidity. So on a sagebrush steppe landscape, you can't continually graze. If you graze once, you need to move on because when that plant regrows.... And it only has a certain opportunity to regrow. If it regrows, and they come back and graze that again, it takes the root system and cannibalizes it.

Each time a plant sticks up leaves to regrow, it cannibalizes the root system. Each time it seeds out, it reinvigorates and expands that root system. With just that basic concept and realizing that basic concept... And people didn't necessarily know that until holistic management came along and some of the science came along, that basic biology came along. People didn't really know that, and then they're starting to realize that and starting to bend their management systems to reflect a better approach to accomplishing those in the sagebrush steppe.

But them coming from back east or from Europe, which is a very humid environment, it's totally different. You can have cattle out there all the time and you'll never overgraze because you have humidity and you have water all the time. And that's the two things we don't have out west, so you have to approach things differently.

[00:41:15]

Haley: And I was curious. With the... Oh, shoot. [Laughs] I had a follow-up. Oh, you mentioned having a look into the future. And I'm curious. When you are managing for a future, how far into the future are you kind of, I guess, looking or managing...?

[Crosstalk 00:41:47]

[00:41:47]

Chris: Yeah. Well, I'm managing because my family's been here a long time. That fact tells me that I need to look way far into the future. I can only see and I can only affect what I'm doing year to year, but I can see what I've done in the past has affected some things clear in years out. So I can see that. So how far? Well, I'm looking 50 years out. But realistically, I'm looking four to five years out, that I can really do a lot to affect what's happening depending on precipitation, all of that stuff, and working with what you have. People talk about climate change, but in Owyhee County, we don't see it.

I mean, we do, but we don't because the climate changes every year. There's supposed to be a drought here and I couldn't turn my cattle out the other day because we had seven inches of snow up there. So I couldn't turn them out. This is one of the latest times I've been getting cattle out because of conditions. And it may be dry the rest of the summer. So we have challenging stuff every year. And that's been that way since my lifetime. So we have different challenges every year which makes it exciting and not.... There's no.... Monotonous. It's challenging and keeps me going basically.

[00:43:55]

Haley: Never boring.

[00:43:56]

Chris: Yeah. Not boring.

[00:43:58]

Haley: Great. I was curious. Thinking about that. Similarly, along those lines, how has technology kind of changed ranching in your lifetime or even before....

[Crosstalk 00:44:15]

[00:44:15]

Chris: Yeah. It has and it hasn't. We still use horses, we still use dogs, and we still use us to go out and gather and do all that. Some of the methods have changed a bit. I use dirt bikes and I use four-wheelers because it's more efficient. I'll give you an example. Back in the.... Well, it would have been in the early '50s. Late '40s or early '50s. Early '50s. My mom has a story from the early '50s where she was just married—married my dad—and came out and they were down in this allotment. And we had our Dickshooter allotment and we had the next allotment over—which is Del Rio's now—and we had both.

So they went down. And they had seven cowboys that she was feeding. And it was her job to feed them and everything. So they went to Indian Crossing. Then they had milk cows, of course, because you needed milk. And so the milk cows had just had calves and couldn't be moved. And they had moved from Indian Crossing to Dickshooter, which was 15 miles away.

But she was still cooking for all these guys on a little tiny.... It wasn't out of the ordinary back then, but even to me seems.... That's difficult. Difficult job cooking for six or seven guys. But she was riding from Dickshooter camp clear back to Indian Crossing, which was about 15 miles every day to milk the cows because you had milk cows. And then hauling the milk back and then cooking two meals because that's what cowboys eat is two meals a day—breakfast and when they get in late afternoon—and doing all that.

And she loved it because she had freedom. She could go and she could look at everything on the way back. And talked about getting lost but not really being.... And went and found—she went way out of her way, but—went and found her way because she knew the terrain landscape and followed the canyon. But it wasn't upsetting. It was exciting to her. Anyway, to get back to the deal, they had a lot of help then, and we don't have that luxury anymore because it costs a lot of money. And there isn't a lot of people that want to do the type of work that I want to do.

There's a lot of people that want to be cowboys, but they want to get in their horse trailer and drive someplace and then get out and go and move the cattle and then be back and have cell phone service and have internet and all of these luxuries which.... None of that out there and never have. So we have to do with less help and that's where technology comes in, is where we use dirt bikes and ATVs and drones. I got a drone that I use, that I gather cattle with and I use to look over the hill because I don't have to take a four-wheeler or a dirt bike out through those rocks to do it. And I can gather a whole area.

To me, it isn't any different concept than using my border collie dogs to gather cattle. But, in one instance, I can sit on the rim of an area and gather a whole big pasture which is about 3000 acres. Gather them into a spring and then go down and get them and take them out which makes life easier for me. So technology does that. And I can get more done in a day because on a horse.... And I love horses. That's the reason that I'm a rancher. I love horses. My family does. And I use them extensively when I have close-in work that's close in.

But anytime you get three, four miles away from camp, you're limited in your ability to work with cattle and stuff. You can only get a certain amount of work done. And I need to get more work done within the parameters of what cattle can handle. So I can go and I can move these cattle until they're ready to quit. And then I can go and gather another bunch and move them. And it's more time for me but it's enjoyable time. I'm not on a horse, what I like to do, but I'm out there and I get to see and I get to do it and it's long—some people would say long, hard work, but it's enjoyable. So I enjoy what I do.

[00:50:03]

Haley:

Great. I'm just going to take a second to pause this one and restart.

[00:00:00]

Chris:

Sorry. I'm taking so much time.

[00:00:01]

Haley: Oh, no. No, it's perfect. We have about a half-hour before the next meeting, so we can keep going. But I was curious, you mentioned your mom getting lost but finding her way back.

[00:00:24]

Chris: All while carrying a couple of gallons of milk and.... She just talked about it. She wouldn't ever tell me the story until the last few years because she didn't think it was anything. And there's a lot of stories like that my family has, but that one just came to mind when you talked about how many people because she was feeding – seven cowboys. And then when she got to Camas Creek, they had hay crews at Camas Creek because that's when they were proving up on the Taylor Grazing Act on the rides, so they would hay that, and there's nine people in the hay crew because they were doing that with horses a lot and stuff. So, she was feeding 9, 12, 15 people, 16, 17 people all on a little tiny wood camp stove.

[00:01:23]

Haley: That's just really impressive. [Laughs]

[00:01:27]

Chris: And she loved it because she got to do...she grew up on a ranch in Jordan Valley and she wasn't an inside girl, she was an outside girl, and she was.... There was two daughters, her and Sissy, and she was the cowboy for the ranch. That's what gave her freedom to be able to do what she wanted to do and wouldn't be, looked down on or anything by... you know most people didn't, some people did at that time. It's just a fact, with women cowboying and stuff. Most people didn't, but some people did, but she enjoyed that.

[00:02:13]

Haley: Has that been something that has changed, women in cowboying?

[00:02:17]

Chris: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Well, it has and it hasn't. It's just certain instances. And most of the time, the way we look at it, as far as women, women are equal if they prove to be equal. We don't evaluate women and men; we evaluate people and what they do and how they act. And for the most part.... There's exceptions, but for the most part.... Yeah. And women's role has changed somewhat because there's a lot more women in ranching and interested in doing that and interested in doing the same things that men do or had done traditionally.

But that's not to say that there wasn't people then. Even back, Kittie Wilkins, if you look it up, the Horse Queen of Idaho, on PBS, they have this story; it's right out of Bruneau. And people had great respect, all of my family and everything. We worked with them all the time and had great respect for her and her empire basically. They were doing the

same thing we were doing, providing remount horses and doing all that. They had great respect for her abilities and what she could do. So, that's one example.

[00:04:04]

Haley: Yeah, that's great. I appreciate you explaining that a little bit more. I was curious about something I had written down earlier that I wanted to ask was, were...? Your family has been in this landscape for so, so long. What do you see as kind of your role of your land and of your livestock of maintaining both family traditions but also kind of this greater Western culture if that makes sense?

[00:04:42]

Chris: Well, yeah, both. I mean, I never really looked at it that way until the last 10 years or so. Really, it's just been a struggle to keep doing what I'm doing and keep my family fed and keep the roof and do the finance, all of that. But I really look at it as tradition, and we've always looked at it that way, but it's a tradition and a way to.... Yeah. I would like to pass it on to my kids if they choose, but it has to be their choice, just like my daughter would like to do a lot of the stuff I do but, at this point, she isn't capable, I mean just realistically. But if you have the desire, you can.

My sons aren't interested. They're doing other things. That doesn't mean there isn't a cousin out there or my daughter or my daughter can have a.... And that's really my goal, is to have something to move on, something to give to my kids. Because family, that's the big thing, family. That's really what motivates a lot of ranchers, it's being able to give the livelihood they have.

[00:06:29]

Haley: What are, I guess, the...? On that note of family, what are the things that you treasure most about the ranching way of life that you do want to be able to pass on?

[00:06:41]

Chris: Freedom. I mean, that's the ultimate thing, freedom to do as I choose and be my own boss. But there's obviously restrictions. You have the bank; you have all of this other stuff. Freedom isn't easy and you have to work at it, but that's the one thing that I've always cherished all through my life is the freedom. And that feels free when I'm out there on the horse, riding and working cows and working with animals. And that's my outlook on working with animals too. They have freedom too, and cows have freedom too. You have to keep it. You have to work with them, not against them. You have to work with them to get the outcome you need to happen. Yeah. I don't know how to explain it, but that would be the freedom of it. The freedom with responsibility.

[00:08:01]

Haley: I'm just curious, is there a particular.... I'm sure you have many, many, many stories, but is there a particular story that maybe comes to mind about a time that you felt like you and the horse and the dogs and the....

[00:08:21]

Female: This isn't the IRCP room. [Laughs]

[00:08:23]

Chris: No, it's the next one over.

[00:08:23]

Female: Okay.

[00:08:24]

Chris: I'll be there in a while.

[00:08:28]

Haley: ...that you and you and your horse and maybe the dogs and the cattle were all working really well together. I was just curious if you had maybe an example or a story.

[00:08:43]

Chris: Well, gosh. Many because that's my goal any time I go out. My goal is to make everything feel easy. I mean, you might have a difficult one or you might have a difficult whatever, but to be comfortable and make things feel easy, that's my goal. And actually, compared to... I've helped other people and to a certain extent, sometimes they look at it as a job or a chore or a challenge. I look at it as I just try to make things flow as easily as possible because that makes me the most money, for one thing. It all comes down to economics. It makes me the most money because then everything goes better. And I'm more settled, you know, more settled, more calm and all of that.

So, stories, just many. I used to... I do a lot of things myself because we have trouble getting labor out there and whatnot. So, there's been times when I've gathered – you know when we work yearlings or something, and I'd have to work them into the smaller fields, come off big. Well, you have to work them. A lot of times, I'd have to work two, three hundred, four hundred head by myself, just my horse and my dogs. And that's kind of challenging to cut pairs out or something and still hold herd by yourself. Normally you'd have two or three people holding herd just to hold the whole group together so you can cut the animals you want out, which is part of cowboy work. And I'm happy every time that goes good, and it seems to go good most of the time.

Just the other day, we worked out... I have some Hispanic guys that have been raised on my farm and are great and working, but they just started on horses here a couple of years ago because they're interested. That was fun just the other day, just a week ago to work the two truckloads out. I needed to get out and teach them to put them and work with animals and stuff and be able to cut pairs out and that sort of thing. I don't know if I'm explaining it good, but that's what I feel. I feel accomplished when I do those jobs well and without stress and without drama.

[00:12:05]

Haley I appreciate you elaborating a little bit on that. I'm so curious, working with the dogs, how many dogs are you usually working with?

[00:12:15]

Chris: It depends on what I have at the time. I'll always have at least one dog and up to three, and they'll go depending on what I have to do and depending on their abilities. But I always have at least one dog because it's hard to move cattle without that extra push. And that's all.... Dogs are amazing. They're herders so you can send them out. I can send them out a quarter-mile away and bring cattle back to me, or send them to the back and bring them in. Of course, the cows don't like dogs because of wolves or whatever, coyotes, that sort of thing. But as long as everyone does their job and the cows respect them and the dogs respect the cows too — which some dogs are too aggressive, and I don't like that, I like there to be that mutual respect — then everything can flow.

[00:13:36]

Haley: Great, yeah. I appreciate that. Working dogs are so cool. [Laughs]

[00:13:42]

Chris: That's where I talked about the drone. That's how I learned to.... Just working dogs, that's how I learned to use a drone because it's the same concept. You don't want to get in their face all the time. You want to be back enough. Or if they need to be got in their face, you get into them. And I can do a lot of things with a drone just like I do with a dog because, let's face it, a lot of times, the dogs get tired just like horses get tired. And I get tired, but I sleep at night. I don't have any trouble sleeping at night [Laughs] or taking a nap in the day.

[00:14:26]

Haley For sure not. [Laughs] Very hard work. So, we have about 15 minutes before I know that we need to wrap up, and maybe a little bit sooner too so you have a bit of a break before you go into another meeting.

[00:14:39]

Chris: No problem.

[00:14:40]

Haley: I wasn't sure...

[00:14:42]

Chris: It's been fun. I just don't talk well about this stuff. But it's been fun.

[00:14:49]

Haley: I wasn't sure if you had anything that you specifically wanted to talk about in these last kind of few minutes or wanted to share.

[00:15:01]

Chris: Well, I don't know. [Laughs] Like I said, I'm not very good at talking about myself much without making a point or something like that. It's just like there's just.... In my community, storytelling is a way that we learn. The way we teach and learn is through stories, is telling stories and working out what happened in this situation, in that situation, and you tell it through stories. But they have to be context-related for me anyways. A lot of people can just tell those stories and they come right off; it just doesn't happen for me unless there's the context to it. But that's a big part of the community, and that's what really made me happy with you guys doing this because there's so many great stories out there. And you guys are so good at pulling it out of us that it's just great.

[00:16:15]

Haley: I appreciate that. I guess on that note of the stories to learn and to teach, I was curious, maybe it's still too big and not enough context, but do you have one or two stories that are particularly favorite points for you to make when you are teaching, say, the folks that you were working with recently, training them to work with animals? What's your particular favorite story to help teach them to have that better relationship with?

[00:16:59]

Chris: Well, when I'm working with people and trying to teach them it's usually on the ground. That's one difference too, most of that is on the ground. And then I can relate. Once you're with somebody on.... And that's why even in monitoring or with BLM or whatnot, I love to go out on the ground and talk to them on the ground. Whether you're doing anything there or not, talk to them on the land and in the sagebrush steppe because there's something about being there and something about the vastness and something about the reality of it that makes a difference in learning.

So, if I'm teaching a new person to handle cattle or something, I want to be there. But I want them to make a mistake or what I perceive as a mistake, and then I want to hash it out with them so that they can see my point of view and then try it that way and see if it works better for them. So, that's the way I teach and that's the way I learn or try to teach, and that's the way I try to deal with people. In this day and age, a lot of people have different concepts, and they make up stuff in their head and think that's ideal. We see it in YouTube all the time and all of that. But there are practical people that do stuff and show it. That's a thing with YouTube, too. They do show it and it's not just ideal. I don't know if that answered your question or not.

[00:18:55]

Haley: No, that was great. I'm curious, you mentioned YouTube; do you find that with things like drones or training dogs or other things, is that a source of learning and information for you?

[00:19:09]

Chris: Yeah, yeah. For most of my mechanical stuff. I have to do a lot of mechanicing too to keep my pick-up. I can go on YouTube and find a video that somebody has had the same problem, and it eliminates a learning curve. There's a lot of people that don't do things right, so you have to sort through that stuff, but yeah. It's the same way I learned. In our society, we learn by telling story, and that's what YouTube is, is you tell your own story, and you provide facts or you provide actual...you can actually see what they do. So, it's an easy place for me to learn and it's a good place for me to learn because it's the same way that I grew up learning, only visual. And I'm a visual person, and I grew up....

That's the good thing about doing stuff on the land and doing stuff with people, is it's visual and it's sensory. Smell or taste, everything is there. YouTube, you don't quite have that, but you have people doing the same things and I can feel it in my mind. Does that make sense?

[00:20:42]

Haley: Yeah. That makes a lot of sense. That's great. I guess what my final question — unless you have any other things you have to share — is, I know you and I have talked before about sagebrush quite a bit, and you just mentioned the smell of the land and things, and something I always like to ask people is, do you have a particularly fond memory or anything associated with the smell of sagebrush or the smell of the landscape?

[00:21:17]

Chris: I can go back to when I was small, when I first started smelling sagebrush. What comes to mind is Christmas back when I was young. What we'd do is we'd go up and we'd cut a juniper tree so we'd have that smell, that fresh juniper in the house, and that was Christmas to me when I was growing up young. I don't really do it anymore. I should but I don't do it. But I can look back on that memory and associate that smell every time I ride through junipers even though we've worked on them, they are a part of the environment and they have their place, but their place isn't every place, so we work through SGI and that sort of thing to trim them back to where they should be. Even that, I love the smell, and it makes me think of Christmas all the time. Does that make sense?

[00:22:21]

Haley: Yeah, that's great. I love that. Thanks for sharing that. So, we're coming close on time. Are there any other, I guess, closing thoughts or stories or just parting words that you'd want to have captured?

[00:22:42]

Chris: Just my advice to people is to never quit learning with an open mind.

[00:22:49]

Haley

Would you be able to elaborate a little bit on that?

[00:22:52]

Chris:

Well, that's what I've tried to do in my own life, is to keep learning. I mean, that's why I got drones and why I got dogs and do other things, is to keep learning, keep searching for answers, and have an open mind when I do it so that I don't miss opportunities and so I can see someone else's perspective without clouding it, interpreting it with my own. So, yeah.

[00:23:36]

Haley:

Well, thank you so much.

Richard and Connie Brandau

[00:00:03]

Amy: Hi. My name is Amy, and I'm an interviewer with Shared Stories Lab. I'm sitting here with Richard and Connie Brandau. It's April 9th 2022. We are at the Owyhee [County] Museum in Murphy, Idaho. Richard and Connie, thank you so much for joining me here today. Can you tell me a little bit about your background in the area?

[00:00:28]

Richard: I was born and raised on Reynolds Creek. I've been there all my life. Well, when Connie and I got married, we moved three miles up the creek to the mouth of the Reynolds Creek Canyon and we've been there ever since.

[00:00:48]

Amy: Oh, wow. I think Connie was saying that you've been here in the area for 74 years, born and raised in the same place?

[00:00:54]

Richard: Yes. My grandfather come here from Germany in 1903 and settled there. My dad bought the place from him, and we bought the place from my dad and had added on, too. So, it's been in the.... We've been in the family for a long time right in the same place.

[00:01:23]

Amy: Wow. What are some of the changes that you've seen over the span of your lifetime?

[00:01:31]

Richard: Oh, man.

[00:01:33]

Amy: Probably so much to pick from.

[00:01:34]

Richard: Oh, whoops. Excuse me. Oh, man, lots and lots of changes, I guess. From where we run cows and stuff out there, you used to turn cows out the gate and now it's all blotted off and you got different fields and stuff to go in with. We're on a BLM allotment and stuff and then we also have private ground up on top, too – there where we go in later on in the summer.

[00:02:10]

Amy: Okay. What does that mean to like run the cattle off? If you could just explain a little more.

[00:02:19]
Richard: Run the cattle off?

[00:02:21]
Amy: Yes.

[00:02:21]
Connie: No, okay, go ahead.

[00:02:23]
Richard: Go ahead.

[00:02:25]
Connie: Just basically it used to be you turned out the gate and they grazed around, and you let them graze free range until fall and then you put them back in on private ground on top.

[00:02:37]
Amy: Okay. Yeah, thank you.

[00:02:40]
Connie: Now, the BLM's got everything sectioned off in pastures. You wind up moving your cattle. It's just a controlled, more controlled grazing. And the roads. I mean, you said the roads when you were young.

[00:02:54]
Richard: Oh, yeah. Yeah, there wasn't near the roads and stuff out there. There was pretty limited in roads. You pretty much.... When we salted the cows, we pretty much went up about two, three miles up the country and loaded salt on a packhorse and hauled salt out with a horse back.

[00:03:15]
Amy: Yeah. It sounds like you were just like really in the elements.

[00:03:19]
Richard: Mm hmm. Now, there's roads everywhere. You take your side-by-side and go about anywhere you want to go out there.

[00:03:26]
Connie: How many miles did you pack the salt?

[00:03:29]
Richard: Oh, probably four or five miles, probably.

[00:03:32]

Amy: Oh, my goodness.

[00:03:33]

Richard: Up the country.

[00:03:34]

Amy: Wow.

[00:03:36]

Richard: Because it's just about 18 miles from our house to our top ground up there where we wind up in the summertime with the cows.

[00:03:51]

Connie: Your cow camp cabin.

[00:03:52]

Richard: Yeah. Our cow camp cabin. Yep. It's all burnt up there from the Soda Fire a few years ago.

[00:03:59]

Amy: Oh, dang.

[00:04:00]

Richard: But we've since rebuilt up there. So, we'll still be able to get away and go up there whenever we can.

[00:04:08]

Amy: Oh, yeah. That's absolutely important. Is that just for like leisure and rest and relaxation?

[00:04:17]

Richard: Well, no.

[00:04:17]

Connie: No. It's a business.

[00:04:18]

Richard: It's business.

[00:04:19]

Amy: Oh, okay.

[00:04:19]

Connie: Because when you get up there, it's a full day to come back. Well, about half a day to go up and half a day to come back, so you need a place up on top of Squaw Butte. That's

where his ground is. To be able to go up and stay, and then you ride out from there a day to gather cattle or fence or something like that. Do your work that's associated with the ranch.

[00:04:44]

Amy: Okay. So, it's lodging for a hard day's work.

[00:04:48]

Connie: That's right. Yeah.

[00:04:48]

Richard: Yeah. It is.

[00:04:50]

Connie: We've still got a wood cook stove in it. There's a spring box that you go out and dip water. It's living like the pioneers did when you're up there. Sure makes you appreciate what you've got when you get home.

[00:05:02]

Richard: Yep. It makes you appreciate good old electricity.

[00:05:06]

Amy: Right. This is a luxury.

[00:05:14]

Connie: He still rides. He still ropes. A lot of our friends that are still active in the business still brand their calves the old way and stuff. It's just a good way to keep neighbors being neighbors and make sure everybody's got their cattle branded. Some people don't realize that a brand is a registered trademark.

[00:05:37]

Amy: Oh, right. It's personalized, like a signature almost.

[00:05:42]

Connie: Yeah. Or like your license plate on your car, your registration on your car. Proves ownership.

[00:05:49]

Amy: What were your experiences branding?

[00:05:55]

Richard: [Laughs] Oh, there's lots of experiences.

[00:05:58]

Amy: It sounds like some adventure.

[00:05:59]

Richard: Oh, yeah, yeah. Some of them there, if somebody isn't paying attention, they could be kind of...somebody can get bucked off or get you tangled up in the rope or if you're not paying attention. Most of them generally, the crew that I'm around there, they got some real good branders there. Everybody watches out for each other and handles cattle real easy.

[00:06:25]

Connie: It's kind of neat because when we first got married in '67, he was still helping some of the ones that are now the old-time buckaroos, Dick Jayo. You put up hay loose with, your dad and you did, when you were in high school, which is a lost art now, stacking loose hay and stuff. Everything's mechanized.

[00:06:47]

Amy: Yeah, mechanical.

[00:06:49]

Connie: You even said your grandpa when you were little, did.... Well, he didn't know how to drive very well and did everything with a team.

[00:06:56]

Richard: No, did not – never did learn how to drive. So, when I was about five, six years old, I did all the hay cutting there at my dad's place, there with the tractor and a mowing machine. And then my grandfather, he, like I said, never learned how to drive. So, he still had his team of horses and an old dump rake, and he did all the raking of the hay. And then my dad, he had an old farmhand and put it in buckloads and stacked hay loose; where now, everything's in bale.

[00:07:33]

Amy: Right. So, it's just completely...

[00:07:36]

Richard: All completely different. Where we still use the small bale on the creek place there and stuff there; now, a lot of the outfits are all to the... Well, big bales that'll weigh probably 12 to 1,500 pounds. We're still small bales, which is handy for a small bunch of cows.

[00:08:04]

Amy: Right, right. So, it fits the situation. Do you have any memories with sagebrush that you'd like to share?

[00:08:12]

Connie: Sagebrush?

[00:08:15]

Richard: I guess. We used to do... I've been on some controlled burns, I guess, where you tried to burn it off so your grass could grow a little more and stuff like that.

[00:08:38]

Amy: Was it more like pesky or it was overrun?

[00:08:41]

Richard: Oh, yeah. It would grow everywhere, yeah. Overgrown everywhere, really. When it was... Well, like down there at Hardtrigger where we run cows there, there was some of that sagebrush there. It would get that big around.

[00:08:58]

Connie: About a foot around the trunk and be higher than your head horseback.

[00:09:03]

Connie: Head with horseback, yeah.

[00:09:04]

Amy: Oh, my goodness.

[00:09:05]

Connie: Which...

[00:09:07]

Richard: Nothing grew underneath of it.

[00:09:09]

Amy: Right.

[00:09:10]

Connie: He was one of the original members of the Owyhee County Local Sage-Grouse Working Group and finally, I think in my opinion, just got disgusted with the way the agencies were trying to tell you how things were 100 years ago or what it was like and not take into consideration all the human activities that have basically destroyed some of the habitat. They try to blame it all on the rancher and the cattle, and just coming up here today, the recreation is the one that the BLM is now terribly worried about that it's affecting the agricultural industry in the county.

[00:09:59]

Richard: I remember one BLM official there asked my dad there, it was right there at the forks of Hardtrigger there and he asked my dad, "Well, Henry, you've been here all your life. What did it look like when you was a kid?" He says, "Better than it does right now

because there wasn't any fences. There wasn't any fences to hold these cows here to stop them right here." No, they spread out. They spread out all over and there was no concentration.

[00:10:32]

Amy: Right, right. How did your dad cope with trying to give the cattle their best life but also adhering to policies that he didn't agree with?

[00:10:47]

Richard: He didn't handle change real well, like me, I guess, too. I don't handle change real well, either too. No, Dad, he...

[00:11:00]

Amy: Persevered.

[00:11:00]

Richard: Yeah, he did. He did on the farming and stuff there. He modernized there and he was pretty much a do-it-yourselfer. He pretty much did all his own mechanicing and all that kind of stuff. Well, now, with the modern-day stuff now, you can't hardly work on a lot of the stuff.

[00:11:25]

Connie: Tell them about your dad's '39 A tractor still sitting down there in the yard.

[00:11:28]

Richard: Oh, yeah. Dad, he bought a brand new 1939 John Deere A tractor, brand-new and had a pair of single bottom plows on it. Him and his brother, they did custom plowing around the valley, plowed a lot of acres with that all there. But they would run it in shifts. Run it in shifts and run 'er day and night.

[00:12:00]

Amy: Wow. Sounds like literally a full-time job.

[00:12:02]

Richard: Yeah.

[00:12:03]

Connie: And the tractor is still sitting on the farm down there. You can still go...

[00:12:08]

Richard: You give it a crank and it will run.

[00:12:10]

Connie: But it's down to the point that you can hardly find pieces, parts for it.

[00:12:15]

Richard: Yeah.

[00:12:16]

Amy: Yeah. That's a really, really good point; just when the parts to keep the thing running or just become outdated or obsolete even though it's still a perfectly functional machine.

[00:12:29]

Richard: But some of this newer machinery and stuff that they use now, oh, I don't.... Some of that stuff, I don't think I can even start. I mean, and then you need.... It's all computerized and all that. It's above my head.

[00:12:45]

Amy: Right. Which, you know.

[00:12:46]

Richard: Computers are above my head.

[00:12:49]

Amy: Some of the technology, it's very, you know. They have such funny strange names as well like a Bluetooth for your phone like that little thing that attaches to your ear.

[00:13:00]

Richard: Yeah.

[00:13:00]

Amy: It looks like you're talking to yourself.

[00:13:06]

Connie: He does enough talking to himself when he's out horseback.

[00:13:09]

Richard: Yeah.

[00:13:12]

Connie: We live up the creek and the place has been.... Well, our water right on our creek is what, 1876 water right, which means it was a well-established place at that time. But originally, it was the truck gardens for the Chinese raising vegetables to take to Silver City. Our place was a freight stop on the way to Silver City, kind of the house in the same place. Our house was built in 1914 when the other, the original house burned down. Our water comes out of a hand-dug well which is dug over a spring. It's about 20 feet deep. Just these old places in Owyhee County were settled around where there's permanent water.

[00:14:04]

Richard: Where there's water.

[00:14:05]

Connie: Yeah. Matter of fact, there's a rock outcropping at the upper end of our place by Reynolds Creek Canyon that's got petroglyphs on it that a professor from College of Idaho came out and said looks like a map. If this was a map of this area, what would you think it would be? Well, with him having lived here his whole life and run cows here and stuff, you could map out that it was a – or you could tell them that it was a map chipped in the rock. It was pretty interesting.

[00:14:40]

Amy: Yeah, that really is, just to create that landmark of like the physical surrounding area. Wow.

[00:14:48]

Connie: Yeah. They said that that was probably 3- or 4,000-years old, sort of like the petroglyphs down by, what is it, Celebration Park, Map Rock, stuff like that. But pretty cool.

[00:15:04]

Richard: Then you get just above our place, end of the canyon, there's two ditches. There's one on each side and they're hiking trails pretty much now, right now up in there but everybody calls them the old Chinese ditches and they were not the Chinese ditches. They were.... A guy named Doc Beck built one, had hired a bunch of Swedes and stuff. There was a lot of Chinese, I think, worked on it too, but it's all hand laid rock up alongside the canyon. It's quite a sight to see really. On the other side was a guide, we call it the Caldwell ditch there. It'd come clear right around there and it wound up a ditch that went into a little reservoir behind our place and the water – tried to get water clear around here where the Hemingway Butte recreation area is right now. Yeah.

[00:16:04]

Connie: The other one, the Beck ditch went all the way down where Givens Hot Springs is.

[00:16:08]

Richard: Yeah.

[00:16:09]

Connie: But your dad said that he went up there with his dad, Grandpa George, and met the Swedes and stuff and that was during the Depression. Doc Beck must have been kind of a bit of a philanthropist to hire somebody because the water rights were already all taken up out of the creek. What, your dad said they got water through that three different times was all. Didn't have a very good water...

[Crosstalk 00:16:35]

[00:16:35]

Richard: Well, it leaked like a sieve.

[00:16:36]

Connie: Yeah. Anyway, but it came out of the canyon about, what, a mile and a half above our place. High ditch through a tunnel across some wooden flumes across a couple of big sand draws. You can still see where the ditch ran out across the flat, the level place it was.

[00:16:58]

Amy: It just sounds like the water was just a source of livelihood and source of grave importance, too, you know.

[00:17:07]

Connie: Yeah. Without water, you have nothing in a desert.

[00:17:10]

Richard: Yeah.

[00:17:11]

Connie: The water rights are very, very important. That's why they're all....

[00:17:16]

Richard: Well, the three places we own right now from the canyon to the highway there, that's the only water we got is out of Reynolds Creek.

[00:17:27]

Connie: And it's live water and usually, the creek's dry by about the 1st of July. So, you're very limited in the crops and in the stuff you can raise. Grain, deep rooted hay.

[00:17:41]

Amy: So, the water source dictates what gets planted and what thrives?

[00:17:47]

Connie: Correct. I think everybody's going to figure that out this year, as droughty as it's looking. [Sigh]

[00:17:57]

Richard: Yeah. My grandfather, he used to raise a lot of barley. He hauled it with a team and a wagon up to Silver City to the brewery.

[00:18:09]

Amy: How far away was that?

[00:18:13]

Connie: How many days? Do it in days not miles.

[00:18:15]

Amy: Oh, how many days? Very good point.

[00:18:15]

Richard: Days. Yeah. The first day, he would make from the place, they're probably up to the Democrats.

[00:18:21]

Connie: Up at Reynolds.

[00:18:22]

Richard: Up to Reynold Creek there.

[00:18:23]

Connie: Which is about 20 miles.

[00:18:25]

Richard: And then from the Democrats, he'd make it on into Silver and dump his load. He had an uncle that lived in Silver there, and he'd spend the night with him and the next day, make it back to the Democrats and spend the night and then the next day, back home again and reload.

[00:18:43]

Amy: Free time to reload. That's the key word. Do it all again.

[00:18:47]

Connie: The interesting part that I thought was that he could take 1,000 pounds of barley which sounds like a lot but that's only half-ton up at a time in that little, the wagon box. That's all you could haul. It was steep enough. They went up through Reynolds Creek because that was the freight route because it wasn't as steep all at once like it is on the Silver City Road down here on Sinker, the mine runs.

[00:19:16]

Amy: Yeah, that makes sense that you want to take the route that's a little bit more, is it like level or not as steep.

[00:19:22]

Connie: Yeah. And then Reynolds back then in 1905 was a town. I mean, it had, I can remember reading one of my dad's book, Current Idaho History, and it was written in 1900 and it

had pictures of the town of Reynolds on it. The town of Reynolds which it's now, it's just a farming community. But then ours, our place, the saddle shop down on his dad's original place was the post office for the Wilson community. As you go along, you realize that wagons can make about 15 miles a day. If you look any place here in Idaho when the original settlers are, the towns are about 15 miles apart. Yeah.

[00:20:13]

Amy: Yeah. That sounds very kind of intuitive of trying to accommodate the routes in which people traveled.

[00:20:20]

Connie: Yeah.

[00:20:21]

Amy: Knowing that they really couldn't go much more, need to stop over for the night or something.

[00:20:27]

Connie: One of the interesting things, too, on his dad's place is the cemetery. The cemetery that everybody got planted in was up at Reynolds Creek. It was more of a central deal. And then the one there, the Wilson Cemetery, it says was established in 1905. That's when they had a lot of cholera, diphtheria and stuff come through. Whole families are buried in the Wilson Cemetery. His dad used to say that was a really bad winter that year. That's where the original road went through that place there and that's as far as they could go. So, they just started burying people right there as far as they could go. His dad's place used to have the big livery barn on it.

[00:21:17]

Richard: Yeah.

[00:21:18]

Connie: How many teams did he say could be in there?

[00:21:19]

Richard: Oh, there would be at least a dozen teams probably, I think, that barn could hold.

[00:21:27]

Connie: That that barn could hold. A team is two horses so it's pretty big.

[00:21:30]

Amy: Okay. That's pretty sizeable, yeah.

[00:21:32]

Richard: Yeah. But there again, you were about 15 miles from Marsing, about another 15 miles to Murphy which was the railway at that time.

[00:21:40]

Richard: The highway didn't go through there then. It was down about a half a mile down the country and down, weaved around through different places.

[00:21:51]

Connie: You remember when they were building the highway through?

[00:21:54]

Richard: Oh, yeah.

[00:21:55]

Connie: But it was a gravel road. It was called the County Road then.

[00:21:57]

Richard: Yep.

[00:21:57]

Connie: How old were you when that was?

[00:22:00]

Richard: Oh, I'd have to be probably five, six years old.

[00:22:03]

Connie: So, that'd be about 1953 or '54.

[00:22:08]

Richard: At that time, when they wanted to build the highway through there, people wanted the highway through there and stuff. So, they'd give right-of-ways. They'd give the right-of-ways. They didn't have to buy any.... I think there was maybe a holdout or two there that they wound up having to buy some right-of-ways but most people just donated the ground to them for the road because they wanted the road.

[00:22:38]

Amy: Well, then yeah, everyone's objectives are being met and very good.

[00:22:40]

Richard: My dad talks about when he was kid, when he was a little kid, if you see somebody going down the road, that was a rare thing. All the kids, there was eight in his family there. They'd all go out there and they said the Brandaus, all them kids would be out there and they'd peek around the tree and be watching somebody go by. They hadn't seen very many there.

[00:23:03]

Amy: That's so rare. You just wonder, well, who's that and what are they up to?

[00:23:08]

Richard: Yeah.

[00:23:08]

Amy: Kind of get the binoculars out.

[00:23:10]

Connie: We've got pictures on the wall at home that when his parents passed away, you're going through albums that were little tiny – like two inch by three-inch pictures that his dad, he must have gotten a camera for like a 12th birthday or something. Pictures of an Oil Pull Rumely and the stationary combine there at his dad's place that the guys were running with the belt, and pictures of turkeys and sheep.

[00:23:42]

Richard: Oh, yeah.

[00:23:42]

Connie: But his grandmother was known as a real good cook. I guess they'd get their hand crews out there. They had all the small meats that they could go out, cook because there was no refrigeration. There was no electricity in this area until 1934. It's just really interesting that....

[00:24:04]

Richard: Telephones. When Mom and Dad died there and was cleaning out the attic, in there in the old house and stuff there, we found an old crank telephone and it was brand-new.

[00:24:19]

Connie: Never been used.

[00:24:19]

Amy: And never been used.

[00:24:19]

Richard: It was never been used. Well, they had an idea that they could run the telephone line on the top of the fence posts. Well, that didn't work very well.

[00:24:33]

Connie: We were over at our son's last night, Casey Brandau. He's in Meridian now and we gave the phone to him. We've got a very small old, it's over a 100-year-old house and what do

you do with the stuff, the antique stuff? Anyway, gave it to him and he's got it hanging on his wall over there in Meridian.

[00:24:50]

Amy: Very cool conversation piece.

[00:24:51]

Connie: There you go. That's what it is. Yeah, yeah. All the other things we found in the attic, the piano rolls for the old player piano that his granddad George Brandau had. And then we found something, I didn't know what it was. It looked like a fuse box. Well, back in under, we pulled it out and it was a player harmonica. You blew in the harmonica and turned the handle as the little roll went.

[00:25:18]

Amy: For the notes, yeah.

[00:25:20]

Connie: And Casey's got that.

[00:25:20]

Richard: We still got on the shelf there, there's a mousetrap. It's a mousetrap about this, about a foot long. It's all copper wire around like that.

[00:25:31]

Connie: Copper wire woven together.

[00:25:34]

Richard: Your mouse crawled in the thing, then couldn't get back out.

[00:25:38]

Amy: Oh. So, it was just in the tunnel. One way in, no way out.

[00:25:42]

Connie: That's right. That was kind of back under the floorboards of the floor upstairs. It was kind of....

[00:25:48]

Richard: Yeah, yeah.

[00:25:49]

Connie: There was some interesting stuff. [Amy: That's just so fascinating.]

[00:25:51]

Connie: But his grandpa George's house, they lived in the, what do I want to say, the homestead house. When you homesteaded a place, you had to build a house that was a certain size and live in it for three years. But anyway, they tore that house down in 1914 and his granddad's family lived in Charlie Johnson's sheep sheds while they were building the big house that's still standing there. It was kind of interesting. It was built in 1914.

[00:26:26]

Richard: Yeah.

[00:26:27]

Connie: My brother remodeled it for us a few years ago. He said that it's kind of unique because the studs in the house go clear from the floor to the second story. All one piece of wood with not a knot or anything in it like it now. Yeah.

[00:26:44]

Amy: Wow. And I think that that's true, that craftsmanship and the intricate – and wanting it to stand the test of time. Things were constructed so much better.

[00:26:54]

Connie: Well, down on his dad's place, too. His granddad, like we should tell the story about how he wound up here, but his granddad.... Where was I going with this, was fairly well-to-do. There was.... Yeah.

[00:27:12]

Amy: How did he wind up here?

[00:27:15]

Richard: He had an uncle.

[00:27:18]

Connie: John Wagner.

[00:27:18]

Richard: John Wagner. And he had a farm right next to the place where we are here.

[00:27:27]

Connie: He also owned the....

[00:27:28]

Richard: Owned a whole bunch up there in Silver City.

[00:27:31]

Connie: The Trooks and Jennings mine up there. There's a restaurant, about three or four of the buildings.

[00:27:36]

Richard: Anyway, Grandpa figured he was going to inherit that there. Evidently, John Wagner's partner or whatever in the place, wound up, screwed him out of it, you might say. So, Grandpa, he was headed back to Germany, and then when he was at the train station or something, if I got this right, there....

[00:28:05]

Connie: In Caldwell.

[00:28:06]

Richard: Caldwell. Somebody says, "Well, I know that such and such is wanting to sell that place."

[00:28:13]

Connie: John Arvidsson.

[00:28:14]

Richard: Arvidsson. He wound up buying it, and that's when... My grandmother, Minnie, she worked for Keith's which was a big sheep outfit up there, and had this up there. They wound up getting married and that's....

[00:28:32]

Amy: The rest is history.

[00:28:34]

Richard: The rest.... Yep.

[00:28:34]

Connie: They got married the same day that he renounced his citizenship and bought the place here in Wilson. They got married over in Dixie at a preacher's house.

[Crosstalk 00:28:44]

[00:28:44]

Amy: That timeline is just down to the....

[00:28:46]

Connie: Yeah. I did find this out researching the water rights on our places. The really interesting thing is how did his.... After all of this happened, his granddad was going to go up to Silver City, the county seat, and register a GB brand, George Brandau. When he got up there, the clerk said, "Why do you want another brand?" He found out that his uncle, John Wagner had registered a V, just the plain V brand in George's name. Well, this Henry Ward that had claimed all of John Wagner's estate had 125 head of cattle. It's here in the book someplace in the courthouse because I've looked it up and I've got the

certified copies at home. But anyway, he had claimed everything on grandpa George's estate or grand.... No, John Wagner's estate.

[00:29:45]

Amy: Oh, my goodness.

[00:29:45]

Richard: Wagner's.

[00:29:47]

Connie: But the cattle, the 125 head of cattle were branded one iron with the V and that iron is registered to George Brandau. So, when they found that out, the sheriff went down and got 125 head of cattle and moved them across the road to George Brandau.

[00:30:04]

Richard: What a start.

[00:30:05]

Amy: Yeah.

[00:30:06]

Connie: What a start. That's what I said. His grandad was really good about always helping other people. Matter of fact, in 1914, the year your dad was born was when they started the Wilson Ditch Company, which was the forerunner of the Reynolds Irrigation District Pumping Station and he was on that board. I was lucky enough to be secretary of that for a while and have all of the handwritten books that show his Grandpa George's signatures and how they got that ditch company going. And then the Depression hit and nobody paid their water bill and it wasn't a district, it was just a ditch company and it went defunct, but....

[00:30:49]

Richard: Well, the one right up there right next to, what I always got me, right up there that's where our, from deeded ground is up on top up there. He had loaned...

[00:31:02]

Connie: Jack Keith.

[00:31:02]

Richard: ...Jack Keith a whole \$500, loaned him \$500. When it come back to paying it back, Jack Keith didn't have the money. So, he wanted to give Grandpa that whole section, the ground up grazing section, the ground there for the \$500 that he owed him.

[00:31:23]

Connie: At the head of Squaw Creek.

[00:31:24]

Richard: And grandpa says, "No, I don't have any use for it. I'll just wait for my money."

[00:31:30]

Amy: Right, right.

[00:31:31]

Connie: Now, that section of ground is probably worth...

[00:31:35]

Richard: 100,000 probably.

[00:31:37]

Connie: 100,000, yeah.

[00:31:37]

Amy: Easily. Wow. Wow.

[00:31:40]

Connie: Yeah. But over the years, his dad and him have both added to the ranches. His Grandpa George and Minnie, they homesteaded another so many acres on the place down there and bought the Beuz property at a sheriff's sale, the one that the cemetery is on. And then your dad bought our place in 1967 from a neighbor that was about ready to lose it. We moved in there into a little story-and-a-half house with no indoor plumbing. I guess it had water in the kitchen sink but that was it, and lived there. And then we bought it from his dad in 1976 when our daughter Jody was born. And then in 2000, we started leasing your dad's place in 1996, and in 2000, his health got bad and his mom convinced his dad that you need to make some decisions of what's going to happen.

[00:32:41]

Amy: Right. It's coming time.

[00:32:42]

Connie: I think he was 90 then. Anyway, and we had the opportunity of buying the home place from his dad then. And then in 2005, he wound up buying his grandmother's place, Minnie Brandau's that sat in between our place in his dad's place. He's put together a pretty good little cattle operation.

[00:33:10]

Amy: Yeah, absolutely. All just acquired and kept within the family.

[00:33:15]

Connie: Sure, yeah. It's kind of unique in that we don't have to tru.... Or we didn't. We've leased it out since then to Daniel Richards but we didn't have to truck cattle anyplace. Everything was done horseback, turnkey. Turn them out the gate, move them up to the private ground and then in the fall, wean your calves. You could drive them home, drive the cows home and a one-day drive home into the back gate and....

[00:33:45]

Amy: Done and done.

[00:33:45]

Connie: Yeah. The old way.

[00:33:47]

Amy: Right.

[00:33:47]

Richard: Yeah. There's not very many outfits there that trucking isn't involved with anymore.

[00:33:56]

Amy: Yes. Well, I want to be respectful of your time. To close, just to get your opinion of what would you like people to know about this area and what it means to you?

[00:34:15]

Richard: Oh, it'd be nice if people respected the private property and that there's been a lot of hard work and stuff to make this private property what it is. Far as the cattle grazing and stuff out there, we need it. We need it. It's just not a big play area.

[00:34:44]

Amy: Right. So, be respectful. Yes.

[00:34:46]

Richard: Yep.

[00:34:47]

Connie: That would be my opinion, too, that with the way the valley's growing and the recreation coming out here, recreation is basically kind of ruining it because.... I'm not going to say all of them but most of the recreationists have no respect for mother nature. They're out there for their own pleasure and enjoyment.

[00:35:10]

Richard: They're not interested in the sights. They're interested to see how fast they can go.

[00:35:16]

Connie: The Hemingway Butte area used to be a real curlew nesting area. Now, we very seldom see curlews.

[00:35:23]

Richard: Bare ground. Bare as this floor.

[00:35:24]

Connie: It's bare ground. Well, and a foot of dust.

[00:35:28]

Richard: Yep.

[00:35:29]

Connie: But as they come out and destroy the aesthetic value of where they are, they keep moving out because "I don't like the way Hemingway Butte is. It's destroyed." But the use that you're doing is the one that's destroying it. I don't know if there's a solution. We were talking to our son about it last night. He said you need to make the recreationists pay some way, whether it's through licensing or something, and then have the government agencies that's in charge of it police it and make sure you don't have the trash and all of that. I don't have a....

[00:36:12]

Richard: Well, there's a lot of things they can do, too, there that when it's rainy and muddy out there and stuff like that, they need to shut her down just until she dries up enough there where they can use it.

[00:36:28]

Connie: Be on it without any....

[00:36:30]

Richard: But I mean, that seems like when a lot of the recreationists from town anymore want to go out there to see how muddy they can get their outfit.

[00:36:38]

Amy: Oh, my goodness.

[00:36:40]

Richard: Then you know when it's muddy like that, they're tearing up the country.

[00:36:45]

Connie: And it doesn't recover out here very fast. I mean, that's....

[00:36:50]

Richard: Bureau of Land Management's the only ones they really got a thumb hole on is those ranchers because we've got a grazing permit.

[00:36:57]

Connie: That we have to pay for.

[00:36:59]

Richard: That we have to pay for.

[00:36:59]

Connie: That we have to abide by the rules and the regulations.

[00:37:02]

Amy: Right, right. So, it'd be nice to see not only some, sounds like personal responsibility and respect for the area, but then also a little bit of enforcing or having them pay in some ways that they understand the value of it.

[00:37:16]

Connie: It's like anything else. If you don't have the responsibility and the personal respect, then somebody has to police it. Do we need more government? I don't want it, but with the more people, you do. And the other thing, out here in Owyhee County, everything pretty much is volunteer on the EMTs and the fire departments and stuff like that. You get people come out and then it's the taxpayer and the ranchers and the people that live here in Owyhee County that wind up paying for their stupid mistakes recreating. I don't know, I think we all get a little resentful of that, that live out here. I'm not going to say all; I do personally. And I'm an import, I've only been here for 55 years.

[00:38:04]

Amy: Oh, only 55 years, Connie. I think you're well-entitled to have your opinions and you're of value, yeah. Absolutely.

[00:38:12]

Connie: Oh, like anybody else. Yeah.

[00:38:14]

Amy: Yeah. I think that's such a, again, just letting people know that there's consequences and we want to preserve this beauty and this historical site.

[00:38:30]

Connie: The only thing is that people think preservation means no use and they like it the way it was. Well, the way it was kind of the old west way. If you don't let there be some sort of use, the grazing that's been here for a million years with the buffalo and the dinosaurs. I mean, Sinker Creek has dinosaur bones every place on it down there.

[00:38:59]

Amy: Good to know.

[00:39:01]

Connie: Yeah, on private property. But our whole ecosystem here was based on grazing animals and grazing stuff. Well, the kind of animals change but the motorcycles don't take the place of a cow.

[00:39:19]

Richard: And we haven't even got into the wild horses.

[00:39:21]

Connie: I just was going to say that. We haven't got into the wild horses yet. Yeah. Oh, my. That's a whole other issue.

[00:39:29]

Richard: Ain't that that a whole issue too.

[00:39:30]

Connie: And a conflict with recreation. There's a wild horse herd management area right with all of the recreation right in the middle of it. Yeah, conflicts. Anyway, back to the grazing part. If you don't graze it, you're going to burn it off, blaze it. Graze it, log it, or blaze it. Well, we don't have sagebrush big enough to log. And then we get into the water quality issues, and we don't even want to do that. Anyway, yeah. We've been on a lot of different boards and committees and stuff. I commend our Owyhee County officials for doing what they do.

[00:40:15]

Richard: We do have some good Owyhee County officials.

[00:40:17]

Amy: Yeah, absolutely. Being on the board and just having that community support and knowing that your voices are being heard.

[00:40:23]

Richard: Yeah. And that they're doing something about it. You can listen all you want but if you don't do anything to support the local culture and economy, it goes away. And then you have the city mentality that everybody wants to move out in the country and be part of this great country camaraderie and then go, "No, I'm not volunteering for 4-H or the fire or the running for office or being on the museum board." They want everybody else to supply it.

[00:40:59]

Richard: My hat's off to them for the museum.

[00:41:01]

Connie: Oh, yeah.

[00:41:02]

Amy: Yes, this is a fantastic space.

[00:41:02]

Richard: They've got a lot of neat stuff here.

[00:41:04]

Connie: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

[00:41:06]

Amy: Yeah. All right. Well, I thank you both so much for your time today. I think that is all.

[00:41:13]

Connie: Okay. Thank you for doing this.

[00:41:15]

Richard: Yeah.

[00:41:16]

Amy: Thank you so much.

[00:41:17]

Connie: Okay.

Sid Erwin

[00:00:11]

Anika: Sounds good. Okay. I'm here with Sid. Can you tell me your last name too?

[00:00:15]

Sid Erwin: Erwin.

[00:00:16]

Anika: Sid Erwin.

[00:00:16]

Sid Erwin: E-R-W-I-N.

[00:00:19]

Anika: Great. Thank you, Sid. And yeah, feel free to tell me a little bit about your background, like you said.

[00:00:29]

Sid Erwin: To give you some idea about who I am, I graduated from college as an electrical engineer and then went on to take a business degree. I have a business degree in finance and electrical engineer. I carried the professional license for over 40 years. You have to forgive me; I have to think a minute...

[00:01:03]

Anika: No, you're all good. No rush.

[00:01:04]

Sid Erwin: ...so I don't get this confused.

[00:01:06]

Anika: You're all good.

[00:01:10]

Sid Erwin: My first job out of college was electrical inspector for embedded items on Hells Canyon Dam. I spent two years there. My wife taught school in Halfway. From there, I went to the general office in Boise and joined the long-range planning crew. That only lasted about four years before I had all of the boss I could handle. I left there and went to Hagerman to work with my folks in farming. In 1974, we moved to Bruneau. I've been in the same place, not in the same house, but in the same place since 1974.

[00:02:08]

Anika: Wow.

[00:02:12]

Sid Erwin: My dad died in 1979 leaving me with a tremendous debt to pay off, so I was kind of stuck there to take care of that. Beyond that, currently I have a whole bunch of responsibilities. I'm vice president of the Idaho Irrigation Pumpers Association, I sit on the Farm Services Agency Central County Committee, I sit on advisory committees with Idaho Power in the integrated resource planning advisory area, also in the energy efficiency area. I am the owner and operator of Erwin Farms Incorporated and the managing partner of Erwin & Mink Farms LLC.

[00:03:25]

Anika: Man, that's a lot of wonderful things, it sounds like.

[00:03:28]

Sid Erwin: The latter consists of 3,000 acres, half of which is irrigated, the other half is dry ground. I'm telling you all this good stuff; I'm not going to write that down.

[00:03:43]

Anika: Sounds good. That's all right.

[00:03:48]

Sid Erwin: I am active in many different community activities. I support the community. I'm currently working with the Idaho Department of Water Resources to put together a groundwater district in the Bruneau/Grand View/Oreana area to help preserve the aquifer, which is where all of my irrigation water and much of the irrigation water and the date comes from.

[00:04:25]

Anika: Man, that sounds really important.

[00:04:30]

Sid Erwin: Yes.

[00:04:30]

Anika: Water is necessary.

[00:04:31]

Sid Erwin: Today happens to be 22, I think.

[00:04:35]

Anika: Yes, it is the 22nd. It happens to be.

[00:04:40]

Sid Erwin: Yes.

[00:04:42]

Anika: Is something on the 22nd? Oh, it is the 22nd year as well, yeah.

[00:04:47]

Sid Erwin: Yes.

[00:04:48]

Anika: Yeah. [Laughter] Well, I'm interested to hear more about the... To be honest, I don't know much about... That's kind of why we're doing these interviews, because I'm from Boise, but I don't really know much about farming in rural areas in Idaho and ranching in Idaho, and so I'm really interested to hear about other people's experiences and learn more about the communities and experiences of people that I don't really know much about. And so yeah, I'm interested to hear more about – I heard the word aquifer and I'm kind of hearing from what you just said a moment ago about your work that part of it has to do with water and making sure that there's access to water.

[00:05:28]

Sid Erwin: Yes, yes.

[00:05:30]

Anika: Can you tell me more about that?

[00:05:33]

Sid Erwin: My interests are heavy into water, all kinds of water situations. Of course, I'm interested in electric power. That's the reason I participate with Idaho Power on their, and I've been a participant for over 20 years on these committees.

[00:05:48]

Anika: Wow.

[00:05:53]

Sid Erwin: The thing that happens, very truthfully, is the average citizen in Owyhee County, and for the most part, in the country, does not understand the innuendos and the things that happen that makes the world turn. So, it takes an individual who wants to spend a little time and put a little effort to it to understand city government, county government, state government. Not very many people understand those.

[00:06:24]

Anika: Sure.

[00:06:25]

Sid Erwin: I've spent a lot of time working at that. So, as a result, my activities, even though I am a farmer/rancher, my activities are more concentrated on the quasi-political activities that are involved in proper operation of the governments and their association with the community and the citizens. Some of the things that we have to do in the state of Idaho, we have a shortage of water, particularly in the current drought, and therefore, there are efforts all the time to preserve what we have through both recharge and proper and efficient management of the resource. In most cases, these are voluntary actions, but sometimes the state becomes involved through the Department of Water Resources and asks us to do certain things. So, those are a lot of the things that I do. Along with that, I run a cow herd. I run them in the wintertime at Bruneau and the summertime at Fairfield.

[00:07:40]

Anika: Oh, nice.

[00:07:42]

Sid Erwin: I have the responsibility of them in the wintertime. We have another fellow that takes responsibility in the summertime at Fairfield, even though I still have to look at them occasionally and see what's going on. The farming end of my operation is so large that I've rented most of the ground. The fellow that's farming the ground is predominantly a forage producer. By that, I mean he grows hay and corn silage for the local feedlots and dairies. He also raises a certain amount of wheat and triticale and those types of things for forage or for sale. Those activities I delegate to him because I've got my hands full with the things I choose to do in the political arena. [Laughter]

[00:08:38]

Anika: Yeah, yeah.

[00:08:39]

Sid Erwin: And take care of things that are influential in the county and to some degree in the state, although I don't put that much effort to that. I put a lot of effort to county government and trying to help them achieve the goals that the citizenry looks like they want to have done. So, as far as what I do, the things I enumerated at the start are important because my input helps the various entities to make decisions that are constructive and positive for what's going on in the state and the communities. So, those are the type of things. I will tell you that even though I've been in the same location for almost 50 years, as far as what I do is not always readily accepted by the [Laughter] folks around me because sometimes they don't view the problems and the opportunities in the same fashion that I view them. I get into feuds occasionally with people because I think that we ought to do things certain ways. Sometimes we have to negotiate to a mutually agreement position, but that's all part of life. [Laughter]

[00:10:18]

Anika: Yep. Certainly, yeah.

[00:10:22]

Sid Erwin: It's an interesting thing. That's one of the things that brings me to you. I drove for an hour this morning and I'll drive for another hour...

[00:10:31]

Anika: Oh, we appreciate it.

[00:10:33]

Sid Erwin: ...to go home. [Laughter]

[00:10:35]

Anika: We did here too so we're happy to have met here. Yeah, thanks for coming out, we appreciate it.

[00:10:38]

Sid Erwin: Yes. And I'm doing this because I was asked by an individual in the community to help you folks kind of struggle through this portion of your life. So, that's part of who I am and part of what I am. I have a lot of years and a lot of experience under my belt in various arenas, so I can be somewhat successful at doing some of these things. And I'm always interested in what the people on the other side of the counter are doing. In particular, you folks because I've been there and done that, it's been a lot of years ago, but sometimes I feel that the goals and opportunities that are available to college graduates today are a little bit different and sometimes distorted from what real life is. [Laughter]

[00:11:46]

Anika: I agree. I absolutely agree. Yeah. It's definitely a strange experience and I think part of what I'm excited about doing is, like I said, being here and kind of just practicing hearing other people's stories and practicing listening to people, and helping people... Or not helping people but just listening attentively and caring about somebody else's story. These are for the museum, and we don't want anybody to feel exploited, or we don't want people to feel like put on a pedestal by those college folks.

[00:12:22]

Sid Erwin: I'm not concerned about that because, as I say, my education and background puts me in a position. And I'm no different than the person on the street or the person that's chasing the cows down the road. Actually, to compare it, I know Lisa Grow, the president of the Idaho Power Company, and I'm no different than she is. And if I want to get after her, I do, I have no objection. So, my position is pretty much just there. It's interesting because I have a lot of people say, "Well, why do you do these things?" Well, I do these things for the better of the community and society. That's the reason I drive for an hour and talk to students.

[00:13:15]

Anika: I'm interested to hear what changes have been made, or do you have any stories or memories of a time that you felt rewarded from your work or a time when you saw a change that felt really good to see in the community?

[00:13:32]

Sid Erwin: Well, there are things that happen over time, and I'm reluctant to take credit for some of these things. For instance, probably one of the best achievements that I've seen over the years, and this happened in about 2015, 2014, somewhere in there, the General Store in Bruneau, the owners died, and they needed the ground to – if my memory's correct – the church or the EMTs or somebody. Anyway, they decided to take the store down and build a community EMT center.

And in the course of events, it became obvious that they were able to find grants to build the building, but one of the caveats that was kind of giving them a little bit of trouble was maintaining the building on a monthly basis. So, I was a member of the Bruneau River Soil Conservation District at the time, and we were kind of looking for an office space. So, I suggested to the EMT crew that if they would build us a dedicated office in the building for the Soil Conservation District, I would agree to, or get the district to agree to pay the monthly expenses of maintaining the building so that they

wouldn't have to worry about that. And I did that, and I was successful at talking the District into following through with that.

And so now the Bruneau River Soil Conservation District has an office within that building, and we put a person in there five days a week, so the building is not necessarily vacant all the time, it's there. And this individual that we hired with the district also goes above and beyond her calling because if she has to go back – she works 8:00 to noon – and if she has to go back in the evening and open the building for a meeting for a community group or something like that, she does it so that the EMTs don't have to come and open the building. And that's probably the most important thing that I've seen that I'm proud of.

I also am – I don't know as I would say proud – but impressed by the fact that I am continually invited back by the power company to participate in their activities. I'm almost the oldest guy in time on the various committees because they get to choose who sits on their committees, it's not my choice, and they have continued to ask me to serve year and year and year to the point where...

[00:16:44]

Anika: You're valuable, yeah.

[00:16:44]

Sid Erwin: ...my longevity is more than anybody else there.

[00:16:48]

Anika: Excellent, that must feel good, yeah.

[00:16:50]

Sid Erwin: Well, it's...

[00:16:51]

Anika: And well deserved, certainly.

[00:16:53]

Sid Erwin: Yes. It is important to me that they view my contribution, even though it may be adversarial...

[00:17:03]

Anika: No! It's important. Yeah.

[00:17:04]

Sid Erwin: ...as being important to what's going on.

[00:17:07]

Anika: Absolutely.

[00:17:11]

Sid Erwin: Those things are important to me. I don't know that they're necessarily the highlight. For instance, I don't think a lot of people know Lisa Grow, the president of the Idaho Power Company. I know a lot of people in the power company. They have been very generous with me over the time. I have an essential tremor, that's why I'm so slow, and I told them years ago, I said, "You know, guys. I'm shaky. I'll have trouble." They said, "Don't worry. We'll just give you a tracker. Just come. We want you here." That makes you feel good.

I tried to step off the Farm Service Agency Committee because I'd achieved what I wanted to get done, and the staff said, "No, you can't do that." I said, "Well, watch. I will." And the next meeting they showed up with some grower testimonials that said the local community wanted me to stay on. So, I agreed to sign the nomination papers and go on. In the election, there was only one vote cast against me, and it was a write-in by the fellow I rent my ground to.

[00:18:34]

Anika: [Laughter] Nice. That's good, yeah.

[00:18:36]

Sid Erwin: That was just for spite in general, and you don't know the gentleman, so you couldn't understand that. But he was just poking at me a little bit, which is all right, I don't object.

[00:18:50]

Anika: Just play it off, yeah.

[00:18:52]

Sid Erwin: I been renting ground to these guys; this'll be the seventh season. They came to me about two or three years ago and said, "Sid, you're a whole different landlord," and I said, "Oh, why?" And he said, "Well, you expect me to succeed," and I said, "You're darn right. I can't make payments if you don't succeed." "Well," he said, "Most landlords don't care whether we succeed or not. They just want their rent." I said, "No, I want the place improved, and I want you to succeed, and I want everything to keep going. And if it's not mutually beneficial, then I'm not interested in doing the activity." He said, "Well, I really appreciate it, because," he said, "You're a whole different deal than I expected."

Well, my deal is is I want you, I want the community, I want everybody to be successful in the operation. I don't want anybody to be a failure, and I don't want anybody to feel that they're on the wrong side of the fence, even though sometimes I aggressively get after people when I think they're out of line. But most people know me well enough to know that I'm not going to be mean or derogatory. I'm just going to dress them up, get them up to speed where I think they ought to be, and most people accept it and go along. Sometimes I get people mad at me and won't speak to me, but that's all right. It doesn't bother me. [Laughter]

[00:20:26]

Anika: Yeah. Conflict is part of cooperation, yeah.

[00:20:30]

Sid Erwin: Well, it is. It's an interesting activity. And here again, to me, in the first place, my goal in life is to enjoy it. Have a good time. I want you to have a good time. I don't want to sit here and make life miserable for you. So, as a result, why, I look for the positives and the good things that are going on and try to do things that are positive for everyone, even though I may not get recognition or even credit for it. That's not that important to me. The thing is is to achieve the goal of getting the things done that are right, in my mind are right, and for the most part, I'm successful at getting them done, and I make the community feel good.

Personally, I will tell you that probably the biggest thing in my mind that was an achievement was the day – and I can't tell you what that day was – when I was debt-free. You're not old enough to make real sense out of this, but in 1979 when my dad died, we had only been on this place for five years. My dad died of melanoma at 65, which was I guess at that time normal. But anyway, the last couple years of his life, he enjoyed them immensely and the pocketbook showed it. So, when he died, he left me with over a half million dollars in debt. And it took me the better part of 25 years to pay that off. I was indebted for an operating loan, I was indebted for payments on the place we bought and moved on, I had some other indebtedness that I had to pick up, but the bulk of it was an operating loan. We just worked at it and worked at it until we finally got the thing cleaned up.

And of course, my only mortgage at this time are irrigation systems that they're the collateral for. So, my indebtedness is easily managed today, but it's a major relief when you get to the stage where you don't have to worry about where that annual payment's coming from to make it on those things. The creditors were moderately reasonable, although I did have some troubles with them. Not with my loan manager so much but with the loan committee because the loan committees rarely know you personally, they just know what's on the page. They took a dim view of what I was doing in the latter years, so I just gathered up some money and paid them off and sent them on their way and went on. But personally, that's probably the biggest.

On the other side, I will give you a downside. I had a son – I have three sons – the youngest one decided at about age 24 or 25 that there wasn't beer enough made in the county that he couldn't drink it all. And so one night on the way home, he rolled his pickup, ended up a quadriplegic, total quad. He had no use of his right arm, only a little use his left arm, he could not work his hand, but he could move his arm. So, he lived with us for 19 years as a quadriplegic, and we had some extra help come in and take care of it but most of it was up to Judy and myself. In August of this past year, his body finally decided it was tired of laying in the bed, so his kidneys quit, his liver quit, all of those internal organs begin to quit, and he died sometime mid-August. My oldest son who had been working with us but had chosen to go another route got COVID, ended up in the hospital, and two weeks later, he died of COVID.

[00:25:27]

Anika: No. I am so sorry.

[00:25:31]

Sid Erwin: Well, in the case of the youngest one, Ken, we knew it would happen. He lived three times longer than he was supposed to. He was given 6 years as a quad, he lived 19. In the case of Russell, he has a young family. Well, relative, they're in high school. But he had chosen to step away from my wife and myself because he decided we didn't know siccum about what was going on. So, to me personally, it was not a big jolt. I was disappointed, but by the same token, I realized, and I will tell you in hindsight that it was a blessing that he went because he eliminated some family feud problems that we didn't need to go through. [Laughter] But that's probably the lowest point.

My mother lived to 104. She had a wonderful life, a lot of fun. She chose her death date. She lived in assisted living in Mountain Home, she called my sister and said, "Mary, come and get me." And Mary went and got her and brought her home, and Mary said, "What's the deal?" Mom says, "I'm going to die." She laid in bed and quit eating and drinking till she died. That was it. [Laughter]

[00:27:01]

Anika: I know some of my relatives that got very, very old, they eventually that got to that point where it was like...

[00:27:07]

Sid Erwin: Yeah. They made their own decision. Nobody else had anything to do with it. That's just the way it was...

[00:27:13]

Anika: Yeah. It's autonomy, yeah.

[00:27:15]

Sid Erwin: ...in that case. And then my dad's case, I knew Dad was in trouble, so that's just part of life. Mom, I knew she was ready to go, it was not upsetting for me, no problem. Those are the kind of things that we all face, and all go through. It was a little bit of a shocker, it really put my wife in a deep hole when both kids died, but part of that was because she watched them die. I chose not to do that. I wasn't [Laughter] about to do that. I want to remember people as I see them, not in a semi-coma-induced state in the hospital trying to figure out what to do. Those are the things that happen.

Locally, I will tell you that I have a lot of people who come to me. For instance, in my life I've been through four divorces, none of them my own. They'll come and say, "Sid, will you help me work through this?" and ordinarily what it is is they want help in determining values of assets, they want help in determining how to split them up. In almost every situation, it's the lady part that they're talking to me. They always want to know what should they expect to be their best position, what should they do. I will tell you that I'm impressed that people think I'm smart enough to help them do that. [Laughter]

[00:29:14]

Anika: You seem like a good person to help out with that, yeah.

[00:29:17]

Sid Erwin: And in most cases that I've been with, my advice has been pretty accurate and pretty much straightforward, and the outcomes have reflected what I told them I thought would happen.

[00:29:33]

Anika: That's pretty wonderful.

[00:29:35]

Sid Erwin: Those are activities... And here again, I didn't solicit it, they just came and said, "Hey, I'm going to kick this guy out. Help me." [Laughter]

[00:29:45]

Anika: Yeah. [Laughter] Oh, man.

[00:29:48]

Sid Erwin: Don't you get in that pickle.

[Laughter]

[00:29:52]

Anika: Oh my gosh. Yeah. What was my other question I was going to ask you? Especially with everything going on in your personal life, how do you still find the energy and the drive to be involved in these community things?

[00:30:09]

Sid Erwin: Part of me, that's the way I am. I'll give you a little recent history that's rather interesting. Two years ago on March 31, I had a heart attack. Very mild, didn't amount to much. I have a couple of stents in my heart that...

[00:30:29]

Anika: I'm glad you're alright.

[00:30:30]

Sid Erwin: ...took care of that problem. But in the course of events, I've been on blood pressure medicine for, I don't know, four or five years, and in the course of events about 60 days ago, something like that, I was at an auction sale with my brother-in-law in Twin Falls, and I fainted.

[00:30:50]

Anika: Oh, no.

[00:30:52]

Sid Erwin: So, there was an EMT on the staff, and when I woke up, the fire department was there and the EMTs and everybody, so I agreed to go to the emergency room. And when I went to the emergency room, why, the first thing they did was they drew blood to see what was going on. I sat there for a couple three hours and pretty quick, the emergency room doctor came back, and he said, "Your problem is potassium, you're short," he said, "You're at 2.5. If you were 2.4, I wouldn't let you out of here." And I said, "Well, where

should I be?" and he said, "3.6." I said, "Okay." So, they gave me some horse pills, and they gave me an IV of potassium, and I felt pretty good. And so I went home and made an appointment with my personal physician and visited with her and so on and so forth.

But come to find out, the Losartan I take for blood pressure is a cannibal when it comes to potassium in your blood. By that, I mean it takes it out. And since that time, I've talked to quite a few people who are on blood pressure medicine, and they all take potassium. So, I am a little confused with the medical community that we didn't keep track of that along with everything else. So, anyway, personally, they've put me on potassium, and I feel better now than I have for almost two years.

[00:32:41]

Anika: Nice, that's great, yeah.

[00:32:42]

Sid Erwin: Which is interesting because I've had some memory issues, my wife has gotten very concerned about memory issues and stuff. But with going on the potassium, now I don't have those.

[00:32:57]

Anika: Nice. That's great.

[00:32:58]

Sid Erwin: Everything looks better.

[00:32:59]

Anika: Do you feel like you're better able to engage in these... Do you have to travel to engage in these different responsibilities that you have a lot?

[00:33:07]

Sid Erwin: Yes, I do.

[00:33:08]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:33:09]

Sid Erwin: I even drive a big truck. [Laughter]

[00:33:10]

Anika: Oh, nice. Yeah. It sounds like that can be definitely, for anybody, can be very taxing.

[00:33:15]

Sid Erwin: Right.

[00:33:16]

Anika: Hopefully, that's gotten easier.

[00:33:17]

Sid Erwin: Yeah. In answer to your question, I feel really good. I told Judy this morning, I said, "You know, I wonder why this didn't..." And if it hadn't been that emergency room doctor in Twin Falls that recognized that potential, I would've been in big trouble. Because I've been to specialists, I've been all around. Nobody seems to be concerned about it except for that gentleman, and I compliment him that he [Laughter] found that. No. In response to your question about how I feel, I feel good. Have you figured out how old I am?

[00:34:01]

Anika: [Laughter] At least 21. I have not.

[00:34:05]

Sid Erwin: I was born in 1941.

[00:34:08]

Anika: Oh, man. Okay. Let's see, I'm trying to think. So, my grandfather was born in 1951, and he passed away in 2014 and he was 63. About 73, is that... No?

[00:34:21]

Sid Erwin: No. If you take 41, that's 59 years.

[00:34:24]

Anika: See, that's why I'm in creative writing because math is not my strong suit.

[00:34:27]

Sid Erwin: 59 years to the turn of the century and we're 22.

[00:34:32]

Anika: Turn of the century, 59 plus 22 would about 71, 72?

[00:34:36]

Sid Erwin: No, 80.

[00:34:37]

Anika: Oh, 80. Oh, my goodness. Well, you do not look 80.

[00:34:40]

Sid Erwin: [Laughter] Barbra Streisand is 80 today.

[00:34:43]

Anika: Really?

[00:34:43]

Sid Erwin: Yes.

[00:34:43]

Anika: Wow, man, you and Barbra Streisand do not look 80. Today, she's 80? Did you say today?

[00:34:49]

Sid Erwin: I believe it's...

[00:34:49]

Anika: Or just in general?

[00:34:50]

Sid Erwin: No, I believe today is her birthday.

[00:34:52]

Anika: Oh, really? That's a funny fact.

[00:34:53]

Sid Erwin: On the Today Show, I think they were talking about her birthday.

[00:34:55]

Anika: Oh, that's funny. Wonderful.

[00:34:58]

Sid Erwin: And I will tell you I expect to live 20 more years.

[00:35:02]

Anika: Oh, you better. Was it your mother or your grandmother lived to 104?

[00:35:05]

Sid Erwin: My mother.

[00:35:06]

Anika: Your mother. Wonderful, yeah.

[00:35:07]

Sid Erwin: Yes, uh-huh.

[00:35:07]

Anika: Oh, man. That's so wonderful.

[00:35:09]

Sid Erwin: Yeah.

[00:35:10]

Anika: A question that I was thinking about earlier that I'm still interested in knowing is kind of like when or how did you... It seems like you have a really big focus on, like you've been saying, the kind of like government or county level.

[00:35:23]

Sid Erwin: Right, right.

[00:35:24]

Anika: How or when did you realize that that was kind of the way that you wanted to navigate issues like water management?

[00:35:30]

Sid Erwin: You know what? If you want to have any control of your destiny, you better be involved.

[00:35:36]

Anika: Absolutely, yeah, yeah.

[00:35:37]

Sid Erwin: Pure and simple, that's all it is. I was involved from the get-go. By that, I mean back in the early '70s or mid '70s. I was involved with the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation, and I was very active, I had a lot of influence in that organization. I did a lot of things to secure particularly solutions to water issues while I was there. But what happened is that that organization chose lobbying people who were not very effective. We still have that issue in that organization. Russ Hendricks is not much better than that bottle right there, and he's the head lobbyist. Idaho Farm Bureau's influence, even though they tell you it's great, is very small. They have a fellow by the name of Braden Jensen that's come aboard the last three years who is a much better guy, he's much more ambitious, he's interested. He's the guy I work with. Even though I'm not influential in the Farm Bureau, he's still a guy I work with when I want to get things accomplished and get things to go.

So, when I left Farm Bureau because they were not very good, I went over to the Irrigation Pumpers. I'm vice president, but I have a tremendous responsibility because I negotiate programs with Idaho Power, I negotiate rates with Idaho Power, I work with the Public Utilities Commission on rates and programs. Right now, we're trying to do something because the power company and DEQ came to a million-dollar settlement for water quality issues at all of the Snake River dams except for those in Hells Canyon, and my position is... The power company self-reported that they thought they were in violation of the rules and so the DEQ generously fined them a million dollars.

So, that's up for public comment, so the Irrigation Pumpers will submit testimony or comments to DEQ about the fact that we think that probably DEQ can find money in a better place than take it out of Idaho Power rate payers. So, those are the things. And I've been involved in rates for a long time, and I understand how rates are put together, I understand cost of service, I understand the cost of the various resources – solar, wind, hydro, gas, coal, all of those things. I don't quote them off the top of my head, but I understand their relationships. And so as a result, if I want to have any impact on my destiny, specifically power rates, I have to be involved. That's all there is to it.

[00:39:06]

Anika: Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah. Man, it sounds like you're someone who is very well-versed in kind of all different sides of both the actual... Because you have the hands-on experience to be able to say what is going to work for people here, but you also have the literacy and the kind of more bureaucratic side of things to be able to join those two realms and kind of advocate for others.

[00:39:29]

Sid Erwin: I was amused. I was talking to a county official here about a month ago, and I said to her, I said, "You know, 95% of the county citizens don't understand county government," and she said, "Me included till I got in."

[00:39:47]

Anika: Probably me too. I would say I probably don't understand my county's government.

[00:39:52]

Sid Erwin: But in order to be effective to control, and I assume you're a resident of Boise, so you get all of the good stuff that's going on with the Interfaith Sanctuary and all that other crap that's going on. I will tell you point blank that even though it's supposedly nonpartisan and nonpolitical, it is very political. And it's who you know and what your credibility is as to how much influence you have over what's going on. And you have to be involved. You have to go to Planning and Zoning meetings, you have to go to commission meetings, you have to go to budget hearings, you have to go to all of those in order to do the things that are necessary to influence public policy.

I'm not always as successful as I would like to be because I don't have time enough. Like a county budget, for instance, I don't have time enough to dig around in all of it and make sense. Some of it I understand better than others, but the thing is is that – and this is one of the important things from my perspective that you need to take away – is that if you want control of your destiny, get involved.

[00:41:20]

Anika: Yeah. I like that.

[00:41:21]

Sid Erwin: And it takes time. It takes energy. Sometimes it takes a sleepless night. This is the second time this week I've been in Murphy, because I was here Tuesday for a Republican Forum. I'm precinct committeeman for precinct 10, which is Bruneau. And as a result, I have an involvement and a responsibility to the Republican Party to do some things. That doesn't mean that I endorse a lot of the activities that some of the stupes that are part of the party are doing right now.

[00:41:59]

Anika: Well, that's the funny thing about two parties is that it's hard... I think a lot of people in this country feel the same way, yeah. It's hard to group yourself.

[00:42:06]

Sid Erwin: Well, but...

[00:42:08]

Sid Erwin: Actually we have three parties in this state. We have the Democrats, we have the old line – I'm going to call them the old-line Republican Party that's the center of the crew – and then we have those ultra-conservative zealots, which we have a lieutenant governor and some people like that. Irregardless of where you stand with them, if you really analyze what they're doing, it's not mainstream. It's not good for the state as a whole. The

central part of the Republican Party is the part of the party that's looking at the state as a whole and for looking out for the welfare. And even then, I sympathize with Brad Little because he feels a lot of political pressure from advisors and from outsiders to do certain things. And sometimes he does things that he would rather not do in order to either, one, pacify a group, or number two, to do something to bring the situation to a head. After a time, you will understand there's lots of ways to do all these things. It's part of life, and if you would rather watch Netflix as to go to a public forum, that's your choosing.

[00:43:47]

Anika: No, actually, I lived last year in an apartment in Boise that ended up getting bought by an outside developer, and it's happening a lot in Boise and a lot of parts of Idaho I understand, and I didn't live there at the time that they were having Planning and Zoning meetings, but most of the people that lived there were either students or elderly and it was very... It wasn't a low-income apartment, but it was very affordable. And so they spent about two years fighting it and they successfully fought it off, because they wanted to tear it down and build more expensive units there.

[00:44:16]

Sid Erwin: Right, right.

[00:44:18]

Anika: That was something I was proud of was that the people that I... And I wish that I had been there when we still had the opportunity to do that. And there's still more opportunities to continue, yeah.

[00:44:24]

Sid Erwin: Right. But the thing is is those decisions that you're talking about were financial compared to community oriented.

[00:44:35]

Anika: Absolutely.

[00:44:36]

Sid Erwin: My problem with it is is that when you get somebody from New York City from an investment fund involved, they don't care about the community, all they care about is the dollars. One of the things that grates on me something terrible is – I don't how you drove down here, but if you came through either Melba or Kuna or any of those small communities, I haven't been to one of them for a long time because I don't come over here that much – but we have a lot of trouble because right now, you can order stuff from Amazon and get it delivered to your door cheaper and with less effort than you can go down to the local hardware store. But what does Amazon do for the community? Nothing.

[00:45:24]

Anika: Nothing, yeah.

[00:45:25]

Sid Erwin: So, in my opinion, we need to have your generation and the next generations stop and analyze what do they want in their society. Do they want all the Amazons, or do they want local communities with productive businesses? It worries me probably as much as any one thing because my wife patronizes Amazon. If I had control, we wouldn't buy anything from Amazon. Anyway, that's an issue in my book, that your generation, the generation older than you, and the generation younger than you are going have to figure out where you want to be, what do you want to do. Do you want to have all of your television on Hulu or somebody else like that or do you want it on free over the waves?

[00:46:30]

Anika: Yeah. That's kind of how I feel too. That was my concern when we had to move out of those apartments was that there was already a community space there and opportunity for community with that neighborhood and the units there. And prioritizing, yeah, like you're saying, this financial interest over community is very frustrating. And to worry about what does it mean if we're prioritizing money over places and community space. Yeah. One thing I'm interested in hearing on that topic is what's kind of been the past of some of the issues that you're working on and what's the future of some of these issues or where do you see things going from here?

[00:47:09]

Sid Erwin: Oh, in Owyhee County, we're in, from Murphy east clear to Hammett, we're in – I won't say a transition state – we're in a discussion state over the Comprehensive Plan. One of the things I did in my past life is I chaired Planning and Zoning, so I'm familiar with what goes on in Planning and Zoning. But the county commissioners who are in charge of Planning and Zoning appoint a Planning and Zoning Commission who they delegate to the responsibility of kind of keeping things in order and advising the commissioners on what. So, we are going through right now meetings. The first ones were held in Indian Cove, Bruneau, and now they're working at Grand View because COVID kind of upset the apple cart.

But I went to a meeting Wednesday night in Grand View just to observe what was going on. And the group that was there, there was probably 30 people give or take, and they were all opposed to – how do I want to call it – unorganized development brought on by subdivisions, those types of things, in agricultural land. They basically want the ag land left alone, and the development made in the city of Grand View. Now, I'll give you an example of what happened clear down at Hammett on that end of the county. There was a section of ground along the river between Highway 78 and the river that was available for sale. So, this couple from Boise came out and bought that, and then they approached Planning and Zoning to rezone that for a hundred houses.

[00:49:25]

Anika: What?

[00:49:28]

Sid Erwin: So, needless to say, the community was up in arms, and they come to Planning and Zoning and got all excited and everything, and Planning and Zoning turned the conditional use permit down. But as we have gone through these meetings, that couple

has shown up to almost every one to state that they believe there should be development in Owyhee County, but they live in Boise.

[00:49:54]

Anika: Oh, man. We don't claim them!

[Laughter]

[00:49:56]

Anika: Oh, that's awful. Yeah.

[00:49:57]

Sid Erwin: So, those are the kind of things.

[00:50:01]

Anika: That's too bad, yeah.

[00:50:03]

Sid Erwin: I put together an expansion of the Bruneau Fire District into Indian Cove, because Bruneau Fire's been going over there all the time anyway. And so we put it together, and I wrote a petition for those people to sign to join the fire district, and then I gave it to one of the guys down there to circulate. And out of 23 people, no, 22 people, there were 19 that signed it, they wanted to join. There was one person that didn't, refuses to sign anything, and there were two people that were absentee landowners he couldn't find. So, we basically got good support. The petition had to be submitted to the county commissioners and then goes on to state tax commission. But the feeling of the people in rural Owyhee County for the most part is, "Don't bother us. Leave us alone." And that's the way it is. Now you get down to Homedale and Marsing, it's there but it's not as strong as it is east of Murphy. So, I would expect a certain amount of development to go on down there.

[00:51:22]

Anika: Yeah, interesting.

[00:51:25]

Sid Erwin: But in answer to your question, the bulk of Owyhee County will be the Wild West for the foreseeable future.

[00:51:34]

Anika: We sure hope so, yeah, yeah.

[00:51:35]

Sid Erwin: Yes, yes.

[00:51:36]

Anika: Yeah. I hope that people from Boise could sympathize or empathize with that, because I think a lot of the sentiment in Boise seems to be that people from Boise are upset by

out-of-state people coming and taking part of our space in Boise, and so maybe perhaps people in Boise could apply that logic to other places and think...

[00:51:56]

Sid Erwin: They don't think that far.

[00:51:57]

Anika: ...maybe they would also like to be left alone.

[00:51:58]

Sid Erwin: They don't think that far. [Laughter]

[00:52:00]

Anika: Yeah, I hear you on that, yeah.

[00:52:03]

Sid Erwin: And it's an issue. The other thing I find interesting, even though I don't have kids in school, I go to school board meetings all the time. And part of that is because occasionally they ask my opinion on something. But here's the interesting point for you. We have a large Mennonite community in the Grand View area. To some degree over at Bruneau, but not so much. More in the Grand View, some in Oreana. The Mennonite community, when they come in, they build a church, and they build a school. So, our school system has approximately 300 students at Rimrock right now. There's 60 over in the Mennonite school. The Mennonite school gets no state support, but because of the way state support is passed out, we don't get any credit for them either because state support is based upon enrollment. So, our school of 300, which is down just about 50 students from where it used to be, could sure use those extra 50 students in the system.

[00:53:22]

Anika: Yeah, right. Yeah. Because it's per seat, yeah.

[00:53:25]

Sid Erwin: Yeah. There was some fussing going on the other day about, "Well, our school is going south." Well, when you take 60 students and put them in another school, and then of all things, we have school board members that homeschool their students, so they're not counted. [Laughter] So, in reality, people by and large don't view the whole thing, they're selfish. They want only their issues taken care of; they don't worry about the rest of us. I've gotten on to this one school board member kind of unmercifully at times, [Laughter] because she does things that are unethical. And you've not had the privilege of serving on boards, but when you serve on a board with a person like that, the other board members can't really chastise her, but I as a patron can. There's no comeback to me, so I don't mind standing up and making my point. I did it one night and as the crew walked out for an executive session, why, three of them said, "Thank you, Sid." [Laughter]

[00:54:50]

Anika: I'm going to pause this really quick.

[00:54:53]

Sid Erwin: Whenever you get tired, I'm going on.

[00:54:55]

Anika: It usually wraps us up. I try to wrap up at 55 minutes, but I'm enjoying. I mean, I always enjoy interviews, but I feel like we're not at the end of the interview.

[00:55:04]

Sid Erwin: Well...

[00:55:07]

Anika: Or the conversation, yeah.

[00:55:08]

Sid Erwin: I met a potential husband for a niece the other day and he is an ex-Micron employee, electrical engineer, ex-Micron employee. I told his future father-in-law, my brother-in-law, I said, "You know, I'll bet he didn't expect to find somebody like me in Owyhee County." And I'll be honest with you. Of course, a lot of people in Owyhee County know who I am now. I mean, you can ask people around who Sid Erwin is, and even though they may not know me personally, they'll have some reputation that they'll attach to me.

It's unusual to find people with my background, my experiences, and my education in rural agricultural areas. Although I will tell you that in the Bruneau area, we have more than one engineer, we have more than one accountant, we have people who have been to college and come back to run the farm or do things like that. We have ag teachers, we have all kinds of people like that who have educations, who are positive influences in the community, which is a little strange to me. I was born and raised in Magic Valley, spent the early part of my life in Wendell and Hagerman, and to find people with an education was rather rare. My mother was a schoolteacher, but my father just grew up as a farmer. And to find people even today in that area who have been to college is I wouldn't say a rarity, but it's not real common.

[00:57:10]

Anika: Sure, yeah. I got to do an interview at the university a few weeks ago, he's an assistant professor at Boise State and I think he has a PhD in I think land management services or something to that degree, title, effect. He was talking about how part of what he does is work in the governor's office. I can't remember his title, but he works on a project where they essentially try to find students from rural areas to go to college. But their purpose is to get them back in their original communities and to teach them. One thing that I hadn't thought about that he brought to light, a perspective that I hadn't considered, was that he was saying a lot of the STEM jobs that they teach for people that live in urban areas like computer engineering and things like that, just more kind of the city-based STEM, I'm not sure how else to explain it. He was just talking about how there's STEM jobs but different types of STEM roles that are needed in rural communities, and that was something I had not thought about before, yeah.

[00:58:12]

Sid Erwin: Well, for instance, today is the last day for a banker in Mountain Home. He's not leaving the bank, he is moving to another job where he's going to home-work, and his new job is troubleshooting for bank employees, and it's all remote. What happens is now, because of the ability to remote work, you can have all kinds of people living in all kinds of situations, wherever they want to live, and so on and so forth. The thing that I find that's an issue with that that I wish that Boise State and other schools would address is that sure, you may have an engineering education that suits well for the job you're doing, but how does it fit in the community? How do you contribute to the community? Are you willing to contribute to the community, are you willing to bring your education and experiences to the community and make a positive effect? And that's where I have concerns. And part of this, I fault professors for. And I'll be honest with you, it's a good thing I wasn't on the interview committee for Tromp, because I'd never hired her.

[Laughter]

[00:59:47]

Anika: Sometimes in academia, there can be too much academia and not enough of the actually doing things.

[00:59:56]

Sid Erwin: There is, always.

[00:59:56]

Anika: That's kind of what I appreciate about this project is that what really kind of what we're trying to do is there's a scientific aspect to the project that GEM3, who gave us the grant to do the project, is working on. But we're really about the stories and the importance of what is happening in these communities and what do people want to remember and what do we want to have on the record so that it goes forward.

[01:00:21]

Sid Erwin: But the more important thing of what you're doing is you need to go back and say, "Look," and I'm not trying to put words in your mouth but...

[01:00:33]

Anika: Oh, no. You're good. I'm open, yeah.

[01:00:34]

Sid Erwin: ...I'm trying to give you an example.

[01:00:35]

Anika: Yeah, absolutely.

[01:00:37]

Sid Erwin: Is you're sitting here talking to me as what would appear to be a farmer/rancher and yet look at my experiences and my education. And so from my perspective, part of your job should be go back to these folks and say, "Hey, one of the issues that we're seeing is that academia needs to emphasize more the fact that, sure, you got an education, but what are you going to do with it? What are you going to do with it for society, what are you

going to do with it for your community? Not just what you're doing with it for yourself or your employer, but what are you doing beyond that?"

[01:01:23]

Anika: Yeah, I agree.

[01:01:25]

Sid Erwin: To me, that's part of what happens. Here again, I'm philosophizing with you.

[01:01:31]

Anika: I like it, yeah. I appreciate it.

[01:01:33]

Sid Erwin: But those are the things, and if I was involved in your situation, in my report, I would emphasize the fact that it appeared to you that maybe academia ought to look and see where their hole card is and figure it out.

[01:01:52]

Anika: Yeah.

[01:01:53]

Sid Erwin: It's just like the legislature whacking a million-and-a-half dollars out of BSU over something they were teaching. Well, the legislature didn't speak to you about what you were not teaching. They fussed about what you were teaching. And to me, that's wrong. And those guys aren't stupid, but what happens is they get on a roll, and they can't figure out how to get off of it. But those are the kind of things that I see that I would want to very much promote, and I hate to say it, but academia is getting far removed from reality, a long ways.

[01:02:37]

Anika: Mm-hmm, yeah. I think that's a lot of kind of what the tension is, about academia is, yeah, that it can definitely feel disrespectful to other people and exclusionary and also, again, not focused on the most beneficial aspects.

[01:02:59]

Sid Erwin: And I need to defend them just a little...

[01:03:02]

Anika: Okay.

[01:03:02]

Sid Erwin: ...because you stop and think of the effort that is required to become a PhD.

[01:03:09]

Anika: Yeah, absolutely.

[01:03:11]

Sid Erwin: It's a focused effort concentrated in what, eight years, nine years, something like that? So their whole life has been centered on a specific goal. So, they are not exposed to the things that go on outside of them that they need to step back and look at. Because I know of people who have PhDs who couldn't care less about what happens in the rest of the world, their focus is so narrow. And that's what gets us in trouble is that their focus is so narrow that they don't realize what's going to happen to them if they don't participate otherwise.

And people in general view people with education as somewhat more intelligent and somewhat more worldly than the average citizen, even though you can be a uptown welder or do things like that, electricians, those types of people, they still tend to view... And part of this comes because what they do is based upon something an engineer did. So, they by nature look at it and say, "Well, he's smarter than we are." Not necessarily in reality, but on paper he is. I have to defend them to some degree.

But by the same token, I would like them to broaden their scopes a little bit to see what's happening because I can tell you for sure. I can show you a retired professional engineer's license. And the only reason I have it in my pocket is if I have to testify in court, that's credentials. See. So, that gives me credentials, that gives me authenticity, that gives me a feeling within the jury, within the lawyers, within the judge, everybody, "Oh, here's a guy that gets up." Let's say you're a PhD in English, it doesn't make you any different. You need to state where your credentials come from so it gives you credibility. And people don't understand that at all. Because I have people say, "Well, why do you pay the 10 bucks a year for a retired license?" I said, "It's for credentials. It's to show who I am, what I am, what I can do."

[01:06:11]

Anika: Yeah. My father's done the same thing with Sheet Metal Workers because he used to be a sheet metal worker and he still pays his fees and stays in. Yeah. I just appreciate that we have that, these lessons that you've kind of been talking about. That I get to take them away with me and continue to think about them in my life and also that we get to have them on the record. I think that's a really wonderful thing.

[01:06:32]

Sid Erwin: You will probably always remember this, young lady.

[01:06:35]

Anika: Oh, I will, yeah. That's been the best part of this experience is I was just excited to talk to people who just know more than me. I love hearing people's stories. I grew up sitting around campfires with my grandparents and talking to them. And so I always appreciate just getting to talk to people who have some wisdom for me, yeah.

[01:06:53]

Sid Erwin: Well, I assure you I'm not a campfire person, I'm not a hunter or a fisherman, either one.

[01:06:59]

Anika: Well, some good stories are all it takes, and we definitely got some good stuff out there, yeah.

[01:07:05]

Sid Erwin: A lot of what I'm throwing at you is philosophy rather than...

[01:07:08]

Anika: It's all good, yeah, it's all great. Is there anything else, whether it's things that you want people to know about your community or things, like you said, you were kind of addressing one thing that you would like the university to do better, or just anything that you want to have on the record or anything that you came with in mind that you want to make sure you get to say?

[01:07:32]

Sid Erwin: I've pretty much covered it.

[01:07:33]

Anika: That's great.

[01:07:33]

Sid Erwin: I can talk to you from now till four o'clock if you want, but I ought to go do something else.

[01:07:38]

Anika: I think I could too, yeah.

[Laughter]

[01:07:41]

Anika: Well, I really appreciate your time, I've so enjoyed talking to you. And yeah, I think I will remember this for a long time and think about it. So, thank you for your time, I appreciate it.

[01:07:48]

Sid Erwin: Well, as I say, when I started this, I wanted you to have a pleasant experience, I didn't want it to be one-sided. I'm as much interested in what you're doing and where you're going as you are in what I'm doing and where I'm going. When Brenda called me, she said, "I want you to go talk to these folks." I said, "Why?" She said, "Just because I want you to." [Laughter] Of course, she knows me well, she knows what my background is and how I think, which is probably a little bit unique in your travels because I tend to look at all sides of the problem. Part of this is my engineering background because I'm an analytical type of guy, so I end up looking at all sides and that's the reason that I give you both sides.

[01:08:45]

Anika: Yeah, I like it, yeah.

[01:08:47]

Sid Erwin: So that you have my perspective – be it good, bad, or indifferent – why, you have it, and it takes care of it.

[01:08:56]

Anika: Yeah, we appreciate it, yeah. One thing that I'm working on in some of what you've been saying about community, it made me think of this. I was telling our professor on the way up here that I'm working on starting... I think it will be hosted on a website, but I would like to create a map using both the archives from Boise, whether it's the City of Boise or the museums that we have there, one map of kind of like places in Boise and what they used to look like. And then I'm doing some interviews with people around different places about their memories and experiences of those places. And then there'll be another layer of map that is kind of what's currently going on. And then I would like to use the zoning and planning ideas from the city of Boise to make another layer of the map that's what it's going to be in the future.

[01:09:40]

Sid Erwin: Yeah. I'm going to make a comment, not necessarily a caution, but a comment.

[01:09:47]

Anika: I'm happy with anything, yeah.

[01:09:49]

Sid Erwin: In December, the Idaho Department of Water Resources wrote a management plan for an advisory group at Bruneau that was putting together this groundwater thing. Okay. Okay, he come to Bruneau once a month for a meeting, and in March, he was at the meeting and he said, "Nobody's said anything about the management plan." And my brother-in-law looked at him and says, "Where is it?" "Oh," he said, "It's on the website." My brother-in-law said, "Who is your audience?" he said, "You're not speaking to a bunch of teenagers. You're speaking to people who are busy, that have a lot on their plate, have not got time to go to the stupid website and try to figure out what you did."

[01:10:39]

Anika: Absolutely.

[01:10:39]

Sid Erwin: I just make that point.

[01:10:41]

Anika: No, I think that's absolutely a very valuable piece of feedback, yeah.

[01:10:43]

Sid Erwin: When you're thinking about these types of things, you think about the audience you want to go to, and you think. Because personally, computers are foreign. Even though I have education in computers, they move so fast, I can't keep up with the stinking updates.

[01:11:02]

Anika: I understand, yeah.

[01:11:02]

Sid Erwin: I have 15 pivots on my plate, they're all Valley pivots, they're all made by Valley Irrigation, but as time has gone on, the panel, the control panel, has gone from a very self-explanatory 15 years ago, to a panel today, I can't even navigate the damn thing because it's all on the screen. I'm lucky to get it turned on, let alone anything else. So, the Mexican crew that works for my tenant, they won't move them because they don't know how. The old ones they move because it says forward, backward, on, off. You know. But on this, you have a screen, and it's blank until you poke something and bring it up.

[01:11:53]

Anika: It's not very accessible.

[01:11:54]

Sid Erwin: No, it's not.

[01:11:55]

Anika: Yeah, accessibility's important, yeah. That's something to consider, thank you, appreciate that.

[01:11:58]

Sid Erwin: And the only reason I tell you that is because you folks think about the internet as a solution to all ills, and it's a creator of a lot of problems too.

[01:12:11]

Anika: I completely agree with that, yeah. Yeah, there are some other aspects of that project that we were talking about how to move it away from the internet, so what you just said makes me interested in, yeah, exploring some other avenues and seeing what makes it accessible for people to engage with. That's why I'm excited that we get... I don't know if we're having one space in the museum that will be an exhibit or just small areas where we're adding things to exhibits, but...

[01:12:35]

Sid Erwin: All I can tell you is that by and large, the patrons of the museum will be the older clientele, and they, by the nature of the beast, read books, and pamphlets, and that stuff. They don't go to the internet. Although I see a lot of use of the internet, like on YouTube and things like that, by older people, but when they really want to study something about history, they go to a book.

[01:13:11]

Anika: Yeah, this project is just for... The map project is kind of my own community project that I'm interested...

[01:13:17]

Sid Erwin: And that's all right.

[01:13:18]

Anika: Yeah, and then this...

[01:13:18]

Sid Erwin: I'm just...

[01:13:19]

Anika: Oh, yeah, no. But I really appreciate that piece of feedback because I think that that's something I hadn't considered, and I think it's important to consider, yeah.

[01:13:25]

Sid Erwin: Yes.

[01:13:27]

Anika: And then this, yeah, for this we're working on putting together an exhibit for the museum. And it will also be preserved in the library at the university in the archive there. So, I'm just excited that we have this conversation.

[01:13:43]

Sid Erwin: And the other thing I want to caution you about is that if you put this stuff on the computer and it goes to cloud someplace, what guarantee do you have that it'll be there in 10 years.

[01:14:00]

Anika: Oh, yeah. This is something we've thought about, yeah. I think we're also making CD copies, and we talked to – oh, geez, the museum director or the planner – some of the folks from the museum that set up the exhibits came down to the university a month or so ago. We kind of talked about some of these issues and how our exhibit probably doesn't need to have an interactive, it could just have an iPad that plays a video. But for the most part, it doesn't need to be screens, it should be some text and pictures.

[01:14:29]

Sid Erwin: Right, right.

[01:14:30]

Anika: So, they kind of helped us figure out, yeah, who is our audience and what will they find engaging and meaningful for the community.

[01:14:36]

Sid Erwin: I'm going to sidetrack just a minute.

[01:14:39]

Anika: Yeah, that's all right.

[01:14:40]

Sid Erwin: For your information.

[01:14:41]

Anika: Sure, sure, yeah.

[01:14:43]

Sid Erwin: I'm a scrounger in the dump all the time, and I'll explain to you why I'm so dedicated. One day I looked in the dumpster and there was a toolbox in there and I thought, "I can use that." So, I got in and dug the toolbox out, and in my digging around, I found five commemorative coin sets, complete.

[01:15:04]

Anika: Oh, my gosh.

[01:15:06]

Sid Erwin: The board, the picture, and all the coins.

[01:15:09]

Anika: Why did somebody throw that away?

[01:15:11]

Sid Erwin: Somebody got mad. But what I'm telling you is that's what addicted me to it is because there was probably \$200 worth of coin sets there. But right now, I'm addicted to 78, 33s, and 45 RPM records. I have a humongous collection of those.

[01:15:35]

Anika: Oh, man.

[01:15:36]

Sid Erwin: I probably have no less than 500 DVDs, and I probably have no less than 100 CDs.

[01:15:47]

Anika: That's what stays, yeah.

[01:15:48]

Sid Erwin: And I have a whole slew of 8-tracks.

[01:15:51]

Anika: Oh, my gosh. That's incredible, yeah.

[01:15:53]

Sid Erwin: Plus the associated players and all of that stuff.

[01:15:56]

Anika: A lot of people don't have, yeah.

[01:15:58]

Sid Erwin: And they almost all of them came out of the dump for free.

[01:16:01]

Anika: Wonderful, yeah. That's great.

[01:16:03]

Sid Erwin: No fooling. One day, I looked in the dump and here was a cardboard box, almost so heavy I couldn't lift it. It was all 78 record albums in the folder. You remember the old folders that came with the records in the envelopes?

[01:16:22]

Anika: Vinyl has kind of come back.

[01:16:25]

Sid Erwin: Yes, yes.

[01:16:25]

Anika: I own not that much vinyl, but I do like vinyl records, yeah.

[01:16:28]

Sid Erwin: A whole box of them, old ones, I'm talking '50s, that they'd set in the dumpster.

[01:16:35]

Anika: That's wild, yeah. That's very cool. Neat. Man. Well, I should probably wrap it up, although it's hard to. Yeah, I appreciate your time.

[01:16:46]

Sid Erwin: Well, I hope that I've made your life interesting.

[01:16:50]

Anika: Oh, absolutely.

Tim Freeman

[00:00:00]

Kelly: You ready?

[00:00:01]

Tim: Fire away.

[00:00:02]

Anika: Excellent. Okay. I've started the recording, and I'm here with Kelly and with Tim Freeman. My name is Anika. We're going to do another interview about Tim's experiences out here in Owyhee County and elsewhere.

Actually, it was interesting that you mentioned the part about how...you've talked about how cattle, or that you guys would bring your cattle to the same places in the sagebrush. Because that was one of the stories at the beginning of this project that we were like, "What kind of stories...?" We were kind of having a hard time imagining what stories about sagebrush might be told. Especially as people that come from a place where...I mean there's sagebrush in Boise, but not like there is in many places in Idaho. That was one thing that really piqued my interest about it because that really highlights maybe that observation wouldn't be made if somebody didn't ask the right question, and a scientist just looking might not make that observation. And that kind of brought up how the story part of it can be really important. But, I don't know. Do you want to talk about that or tell me about that? Because I don't really know much about it.

[00:01:08]

Tim: Well, on that note about the sagebrush, there's a lot of places, my place in Jordan, sagebrush is chest high when you're horseback. So, in the wintertime, if you let your cows into there, they not only have a windbreak, and they'll duck in there out of the weather. But when they calve, you don't have the diseases. It seems like in the summer when it's really dry, the sun will be bearing down and cook out any bugs that was there. Because when your cows calve, you don't have the scours. You don't have the pneumonia. It's like an open-roofed barn that stops all the weather but still lets the sun in and lets the cows soak it up. It's like an open-roof sauna. A nice little sunroom. After a few days, they're fast enough to keep up with their moms and go everywhere else but they'll still come back to that deep sagebrush for protection.

People have talked about clearing this sagebrush and that brush for letting more grass grow. Well, some of that might be okay but you still want to keep your deep sage to protect your cows' calving ground. The only downfall to that in your deep sagebrush is you will have bird's nests up in that sagebrush and ground squirrels that go up there so the rattlesnakes go up there. You can be riding by and straight across from your belly

there's a rattlesnake in the sagebrush with you. You might want to watch when you're riding through the deep stuff. But yeah, the tall sagebrush is good for cattle.

[00:02:52]

Anika: That was what came up yesterday. I did a practice interview with one of Kelly's... She was your student? Yeah, a student named Callie. She's a graduate student. She was saying that rattlesnakes primarily are what she's... Not necessarily what she's come into contact with, but she was like, "If you're going to hear sagebrush stories, there's a lot of snake stories." She was saying.

[00:03:10]

Tim: Yup. When they hit a horse in the nose, his whole face will swell up, and it cuts off his oxygen. He can die. I've seen some of my cows that's been hit, and they fevered up so much when they're struck in the face. They fever up so much that the face hair, the skin will actually peel like a large blister. Some of them it looks like they go blind. But luckily, the ones that I've had, when the fever hits and they get really hot and thirsty, so they'll come to the water hole. So you'll find them by the water hole trying to suck in the moisture and regenerate themselves, naturally on their own trying to break their fever. But boy, are they ugly when that hide's peeling off.

The ones that are struck in the legs, the leg will swell up. There's some rotting going on. The one bull I had, I couldn't get him to the water hole fast enough. Because it's hurting him, so now he's on the fight. So you kind of bait him to chase you, and you're riding in the direction of the water. When he gets to the water, okay, now you can leave him alone. But yeah, they're a force to reckon with. My wife got bit on the leg.

[00:04:33]

Anika: Oh, really?

[00:04:34]

Tim: Mm-hmm.

[00:04:34]

Anika: I was about to ask if people have been bitten.

[00:04:36]

Tim: Yes.

[00:04:37]

Anika: What do you do?

[00:04:40]

Tim: Besides laughing at her? I tried that.

[Laughter]

No, I didn't. I did try to make light of it, so she didn't get too excited.

[00:04:48]

Anika: Freak out.

[00:04:50]

Tim: She got bit on the front of the ankle. I told her, "Hon, you're in tough trouble because I'm not sucking that venom out of that dirty sock." Well, it turns out that both fang bites were vertical. That snake had flung his head sideways instead of being coiled up. She had stepped on him as we were walking through the meadow looking at a place to cross the swather. It was still a little wet by the ditch. She had stepped him. He just whipped his head and bit her that way. So she didn't receive a full charge of venom. But at the same time, the leg was discoloring. There was a metallic taste in her mouth. One side of her head was going numb.

I get her to the house. We're on the phone to 1-800-ASK-A-NURSE. They couldn't find any antivenom, but they said bring her to a hospital. There was no cellphones back then, so we finally make it down to town and call from the payphone. They still hadn't found any antivenom. She says, "Why would I check into a hospital if there's no antivenom?" I said, "Well, what do you want to do? You relax. What do you want to do?" She goes, "Let's go to the grocery store and get some ice cream for the kids." So we did. I called again after we got out of the store. She had picked up some crackers, and bread, or something while we were in there. She goes, "Nope, let's go home." So, we drove all the way home and kept the leg down. I don't remember if we iced it or not, and never went to the doctor.

The next day, some of the swelling had gone down but the color had intensified. She wasn't slurring her words anymore. The bad part of her head was good again. The nurse called us back, "Which hospital is she in?" "Well, she's not in one." The nurse was all POed, we hadn't checked her in. Well, the swelling had gone down and so she never did go. What the proper thing to do is? I don't know. But that's the experiences I had with cattle.

[00:07:11]

Anika: Well, because yeah, if there's no antivenom.

[00:07:12]

Tim: Right.

[00:07:13]

Anika: Yeah, then might as well just go and enjoy. Were you nervous about what would happen?

[00:07:19]

Tim: Very nervous. Very nervous. I felt sorry for them kids going to have to eat my cooking, you know?

[00:07:22]

Anika: Dude, what a tough gal.

[00:07:26]

Tim: That was going to be really bad.

[Laughter]

[00:07:30]

Anika: No, that's tough.

[00:07:29]

Tim: Yeah, we had no idea what was going to happen. I just tried to do everything, let her relax. Then the next day, she was better. She just, "Okay, we're good to go." They said if the snake would have been coiled and POed, you got a whole lot harder charge. So that's one your friends need to watch out for when you're in the sagebrush in the meadows.

[00:07:58]

Anika: Yeah. Growing up, in Boise, we had a house. Then behind it, no one was allowed to build houses on this certain area. It was filled with sagebrush. Growing up, we were always told, "You're not going in the field because there's rattlesnakes out there." There's stories about rattlesnakes appearing on our porch and my dad shooting it with a bb gun. It didn't die so he had to chop its head off with a shovel. Lots of rattlesnakes.

[00:08:26]

Tim: We've had them on our porch. We've had them in the yard. The scariest one was a little maybe seven-incher, baby. That was between the house and the chicken house where Michelle and the kids always went to gather eggs. So somewhere, there's a nest. That was the scary part because I didn't know where he came from. Otherwise, I would have fixed the nest. That was the scariest one.

[00:08:52]

Anika: Especially, you're mentioning growing up and how growing up in a place like this is obviously very different than growing up in Boise. When you're a kid, it seems like there could be rattlesnakes. There's all these dangers. Do you have stories? Do you remember instances of becoming aware of some of these dangers?

[00:09:13]

Tim: As a kid?

[00:09:14]

Anika: Yeah. You were talking about feeling invincible. When you're a kid, you're not really aware. You are of some of the dangers, especially the ones your parents tell you about.

[00:09:22]

Tim: As a kid, one of the first dangers I learned the hard way was my dad had told me, "Don't rope that calf." Well, I just had me a brand-new rope from some guy at the sale yard that twisted them up out of bailing twine. That's like saying, "Don't look in that window. You're going to see the wrong thing." Well, you've got to look in the window. So I roped the calf. And he drug me through the corral. So I tried to catch the calf several times to get my rope off. No, that didn't happen. When Dad come home, he sees the rope on him. "Hey, what happened there, Tim?" I said, "Well, I just had it hanging on the feed bunk while I was pushing hay and the calf stuck his head in it." And he goes, "Yeah, right."

[Laughter]

You were always cautious with your saddle horses because you didn't know what he had been exposed to. What was going to scare him or what wasn't. So, I was very fortunate. My dad trading cattle everywhere. He would be at, say, a remote Nevada ranch, and there'd be an old wore-out saddle horse there that had been there, done that his whole life. Dad would say, "What are you going to do with that horse?" "Well, we'll probably just coyote bait him or something. Might not make it through the winter." Dad said, "If there's room on this truck, I'll give you \$30 for him." Well, yeah. So then he'd bring the horse home to me, and that old horse would teach me everything that he'd been through. He was pretty much bombproof.

Then as you got older, you got younger horses, and then you were teaching them. But that was before the markets crashed. When the markets crashed, we hit the racetrack with thoroughbred horses. Had a few quarterhorses. The money was in the thoroughbreds.

Then we started traveling. You talk about dangers as a kid. I pretty much was shedding my childhood then. On the racetrack, you either grew up fast or not at all. That's just the facts. You would go to, say, Nebraska. You never been in a tornado, before but there's tornadoes all over back there. Those kids knew about them. I didn't know about them. Idaho boy. They didn't have any venomous snakes. Had spiders for sure. Let's see. Sioux City, they had snapping turtles. Cleveland the only dangers was the two-legged guys walking around. There was some bad guys there. Some good people but some bad ones. When we shipped down to Florida, you had cottonmouth, water moccasins, pygmy rattlers, and every spider you can dream of. That was sixth grade. So, you were exposed to a lot of different things growing up like that. Either dangers that crawled or dangers that walked around saying, "Hey, buddy."

You learned real quick not to trust people. Real quick. But at the same time, you saw that in the card rooms behind the saleyard too. You don't trust those guys either even though they're your buddy. "Hey, did your dad go buy any cattle today? What'd he get for them?" You don't say that because then they're going to outbid you.

Dangers as a kid. Guns, for sure. But you always carried a pocketknife and matches. As a kid, when I was first taught to carry matches, I didn't understand what a backfire was. My granddad had told me you get out on the range and there's a range fire, if your horse can't outrun it, you might need a backfire to save yourself. Well, okay. So I always carried a pocketknife and matches. I've got a lighter today, but I haven't smoked since I was seven, you know, so what the heck. [Laughs]

[00:13:25]

Anika: Maybe you could tell me more about what "backfire" means.

[00:13:31]

Tim: A backfire. If you're horseback out there, say, 60 miles away from a building, or 20 miles from your pickup. Suddenly, there's lightning and it's starting a fire that's coming to you and you're not going to outrun it. You read your wind because you don't want your wind going the wrong way. If you light a little fire and let it burn off say 50 yards, now you and your horse can go on that 50 yards that's been burnt. Now the range fire that's sweeping over everything is not going to burn you and your horse up.

[00:14:05]

Anika: Oh, I see, yeah.

[00:14:06]

Tim: It's going to be smoky and burn your eyes and all of that, but you're going to live through it.

[00:14:10]

Anika: You're going to get out of there.

[00:14:13]

Tim: I don't know what age kids start carrying matches and lighters today, but back then, you carried them in your pocket when you were six or eight.

[00:14:22]

Kelly: Did you ever have to do that?

[00:14:24]

Tim: Nope, never had to do that. I've sat through some lightning that was, oh man, it was hot. Guy and me were pushing cows up on top of this rim. It had been a cloudless morning.

And all of the sudden... I'm riding a bronc-y mule, and he's riding his old pet mare. He's hollering at me. I can't hear him over all the cow bawling. But I noticed my mule's ears are cranking and twisting—I thought just because she was a bronc mule. The lightning had already been hitting behind me. Well, I'm focused on the cows.

Well, there had been one black cloud come up out of a, say, McDermitt area. We hadn't seen it. All of a sudden, it's on us and here come these hot daggers. So I tied my mule to his saddle horn and tied his mare to my saddle horn. Then I took one more piggin' string and tied his mare to a big sagebrush. Then we dove off down this steep canyon maybe, I don't know, 80 yards. We could hear it popping and striking all over us. But here come the rain and hail with it too.

He's scared to death, and I'm not much better. He's maybe 10 years old. He starts saying prayers. Oh, yeah. So I'm sitting close to him to comfort him. He was this innocent kid, but at the same time, I know my track record. So if somebody is going to get struck, it should be me. But at the same time, I don't want to desert him. So about 30 minutes of this went by before the storm blew over. And we crawled up out of the canyon, got to our horses and mules, and Guy had heard a motor. I hadn't heard it.

So we get horseback again. Go to find our cows. I'm sure there's been some of them struck, but luckily, none. But here come Michelle and Temi in the pickup. They had seen that cloud come over us and start throwing daggers down. And they couldn't find us. So they was pretty sure we were fried and laid flat out. When we met up, "Are you guys okay?" "Yeah, we're okay." "What the hell are you doing riding in a lightning storm?" "We didn't want to be riding in a lightning storm. It snuck up on us." Guy had said when he first spotted it, he goes, "Dad, we better make it to the trailer." I said, "Buddy, we ain't going to make it to that trailer because the storm is coming between us and there." That was our only resort was to dive down low to get out of the danger of the strikes. But yeah. It wasn't good. It was not good.

[00:17:17]

Anika: You said with your son, right?

[00:17:19]

Tim: Yup.

[00:17:19]

Anika: Especially, yeah, with your own kid.

[00:17:23]

Tim: Yeah. He was, I think, first or second grade when we moved to Jordan. I taught him about horses, for sure. Matches and knife like when I was a kid. Then his sister is 17 months older, so she'd come home from grade school in Challis, where we'd moved from. Wanted to teach him to learn to make a letter A. No, he didn't want to do that.

How about a letter B? Nope. He just wanted to sign his name for a team roping check. That's all he wanted to know.

Then when it come time for him to go to school, I opened up my gun cabinet and pulled out a gun. I immediately had his full attention. I say, "Do you know what this is?" He says, "Yeah, that's a 12-gauge shotgun." "How did you know?" "Well, you told me." I said, "Come here." I teach him the letters off of the gun barrel because that's where his interest was. He was all about the guns, the horses, the cattle, the hunting, the fishing. Side by side all the way growing up. When we were moving cows and it was good, he was there. Bad, he was there. So was Michelle and Temi. It was a family deal that you stuck together and did it.

It was kinda remote where we were at, and no school buses. So we started homeschooling. And that was priceless. You had a few choices in your curriculum in a public school. But homeschooling, you could really concentrate on this one. Skip a little of that one. Concentrate more on another one. At the same time, the great benefit was you were side by side all day. I hope I did alright with them two. They haven't disappointed me yet.

[Laughter]

[00:19:22]

Anika: Yeah, that was what I was going to ask. I was interested in hearing you about and you talked about it. Things that you've gotten to do that you did when you were a kid that you get to do with your kids now or memories that you've shared with them.

[00:19:35]

Tim: I shared with them a lot of memories. Good and bad. The only time they've ever been cheated in cards, I cheated them.

[Laughter]

But then I showed them how I cheated them. It was okay for me to cheat them even though their mother was POed. It was okay for me to cheat them because it was a learning deal. Don't let somebody else cheat you and take your money.

I told them stories of the good side of town, the bad side of town, of different cities, of different peoples. What else did I try and teach them? Reading, writing for sure, and always know your money. Always know your money. I taught them like my dad taught me. The whole sky is your chalkboard. You should be able to do your numbers in your head.

[Phone ringing]

[00:20:32]

Anika: It's alright if you got to take it. I can pause this, I think.

[00:20:36]

Tim: Pardon.

[00:20:37]

Anika: Okay, now I'm recording again. You were just talking about your kids and things that you've tried to teach them. If you want to say more on that, you can, or we can ask a different question.

[00:20:49]

Tim: Let's see. We raised them the best we could. Taught them the good and the bad. Always tried to teach them, if you're going to bed with a full belly and a decent place to sleep, you're richer than half the world. Because they can change the color of money tomorrow. Richness is in what your values are. Some people might have a whole lot of money and not a very good cook at home. They're eating crackers or peanut butter. If you got a belly full of good food and a decent place to sleep, you're rich. There's a lot of people that don't have that. If you don't have to walk, whether it's a horse, or a bicycle, or a \$300 car, you're really rich. So many people are deprived of that. I tried to set those kind of values for them. I'm pretty proud of them. I'm a little biased but that's okay. Or very biased.

[00:21:53]

Anika: They are your kids.

[Laughter]

One thing that I didn't quite get in the last interview was, and maybe you guys said it but I missed it, was how you and John met. I asked you guys how you found out or figured out that he had saved the little girl who ended up being your wife. I think I missed how did you two meet?

[00:22:15]

Tim: We lived in the end of the road on Hardtrigger Creek, Owyhee County, just west of Givens Hot Springs. Had a horse outfit. Then we also did some logging. We had got into that when we needed more corrals, and that old guy gave me the workhorse. That's where I learned to drive horses. That old mare taught me a whole lot.

We had some poles, and posts, and some bigger logs. John had just bought a piece of property about a mile from us and was going to build his house. He came up and was looking at logs. He actually said, "We could put a sawmill in here and square some timbers." I'm thinking, "What the hell?" And he goes, "No, I know where there's a sawmill." And it was a pile of metal in a corner.

Him and Dad had known a lot of people, mutual acquaintances. They become quick buddies. Now, I'm watching and I'm learning from John. He knew about how to put the sawmill together, so we started squaring timbers. Now he's building, I think, a garage with some of the logs, and then splitting the shakes with the old hay baler for the roof. That had to have been in the, maybe the early '80s. Then in '84, I left this country. Was in Nevada. In '85, I moved to Challis and met Michelle. Our first year together, John and Sue had the chance to go back and stay around her folks and her family that she had been away from for so long. There was also a construction job back there. He said, "Why don't you guys move into our house?" So we stayed there for 8, 10 months, something like that. How I met him, I guess is when he was interested in the logs and the timber.

[00:24:33]

Anika: I'm remembering you did. You guys talked about that at the very beginning.

[00:24:36]

Tim: He is a master craftsman. Okay, here's a perfect example of today. Housing is outrageous anymore. I can't even guess what it costs to build a brand-new house today. John can take one or two loads of logs. Of course, he'll need younger muscle today. But build a log house in no time. The cost of two loads of logs is a drop in the bucket to a new house.

We built a log building at our place with his instruction. It was just maybe 8- or 10-inch logs. He showed us how to chink it. We put a roof on it and just a little bit of fiberglass insulation in the ceiling. In the winter of '82, right out here, the Snake River was froze over. It was 20 below with hard winds. The building that we built was a pumphouse and a storage area for my mom's canned goods. We had one 100-watt light bulb next to the pressure switch. Nothing froze. It was that tight. We did that in maybe less than 10 days.

He is a master builder. He can look at a set of logs or blocks. What's great about him is he's willing to teach you so then you can learn from him. He's a great guy. That's how I first met him. And then we've been friends ever since.

[00:26:20]

Anika: I know that you're mentioning that there were some stories that you wanted to get to or things that you wanted to hear that he wasn't able to remember or couldn't quite recall. If there's any stories that you want to tell either on his behalf or memories that you have or stories that you have about John, you're welcome to share those too.

[00:26:39]

Tim: Let's see. Nope, I better not tell that one. Better not tell that one. I don't know. Some of these stories about down in the mines because he worked the mines in South Mountain when he was growing up. He didn't know till later that there was certain elements down that tunnel that would affect him. I remember one of them was the pneumonia. He would get pneumonia because it was so dark, and wet, and nothing dried out. He's stuck

in there for so many hours inhaling all that wet air. He said they weren't pumping a whole lot of air in the tunnels back then. I can't remember some of his other stories.

Oh, I remember one time he told me he seen Owyhee Reservoir fill in three days even though it was in drought conditions. He said the storms came so fast and hard that they were basically flash floods. That whole reservoir filled.

He remembered one evening, he could feel just kind of the temperature change. He told his brother, "We better throw these extra tools closer to the shop." "Why?" John said, "I think it's going to snow." Just after dark, I think he had to go milk the cow or something. He said, "Here come big snowflakes." He said, by morning, they were just finishing breakfast. They went out with shovels and shoveled a two and a half foot track out to their pickup and their tractors because it had dumped so much snow that night. He said, "You can't predict the weather." You know what the weather is going to do in June. That's how you predict the winter.

[Laughter]

I wished I could remember, or I wished I could have pulled a few more of the stories out of him. His grandfather was a doctor. He had told me stories about delivering babies. Heading out in a Model T or an older pickup, and then having to jump across rocks from the creek, and then get in a wagon or a buggy on the other side to make it to, say, the mom that's delivering. He had quite a few stories like that.

[00:29:07]

Anika: What a neat dude. I appreciate you being a representative for him too and trying to get some more of the stories out of him. It's sometimes tough going in and not knowing a whole lot about who we're interviewing. I appreciated your questions as well. I'm getting stuck here. What do you think, Kelly?

[00:29:25]

Kelly: Well, I was curious thinking about how you're talking about how he knows how to build those log buildings. Thinking about all this knowledge and skill for how to live out in this part of the country. What are some of the things that you feel like you know how to do or maybe your dad or grandfather knew how to do that are being lost or that you're worried about that knowledge getting lost?

[00:29:55]

Tim: One of the things today, the way the times are, the situations happening, is producing and preserving your own food. It's a big worry. Not so much for me because I'm a little flexible and don't eat that much anyway, all right. To produce your own food instead of relying. To me, reliance is a weakness. Independence is strong. That's in my book. If you can raise your own food and preserve it.

My grandfather and dad would cure their own hams and bacons. My granddad's philosophy was always keep a couple three sows around, running around eating extra produce or whatever. He says, "Because they'll have a litter of pigs, and that will pay the mortgage." With pigs around, he learned to cure hams, and bacons, and canning meat. A lot of people don't know how to can meat anymore. Lucky for me, my wife grew up and her grandmother canned a lot. Then her mother canned a lot. So she's good at the canning.

One of the things with whatever our political world is today, she was mad last fall because she couldn't find canning lids. I remember her stomping out of one of the stores and she goes, "They're still selling cigarettes and beer, but they won't sell me canning lids." I said, "Well, there's important things in this life I guess." Some of those things are being lost. It's kind of a worry. A lot of people don't have the opportunity to raise a big garden or do a lot of their own home preserving. Those that do have the opportunity, I wish that they could share with those that didn't.

Another thing is growing your own livestock for your own freezers or your canning. There's a couple little families that we've been teaching to grow their own beef or their own lambs. My wife's cousin was a professional butcher. Then he taught my son, who was pretty good before. The time that he spent with the cousin was priceless. So, he taught this little family that raised some lambs just a few weeks ago how to butcher their lambs and cut them up for all the proper cuts, which is good he was there. Because if it was me, it would be finger steaks or burger. I don't know anything about that. He's very good. He tries to help teach them. That's some of my worries.

What did they call them in the '20s or '30s? They called them Hoover Wagons. The Hoover Wagons was made out of automobile parts because nobody could afford the parts or the gasoline. Everybody was broke-broke. So they would butcher a car, and make it into a wagon, and put the horse to work pulling the wagon. They called it a Hoover Wagon because I guess that was the President at the time. People could get around if they have the knowledge and flexibility to do that.

You mentioned living in Boise. When I was a little kid, I remember standing in the backseat of the car. Nobody had to be belted back then. We drove from Middleton to Meridian on a gravel road, got gasoline, and still drove east. Then you look down in the whole of Boise. In between there, it was still all farm ground. There was a lot of hot artesian water wells between Middleton and Eagle at the time. Because you'd see green strips running to the river, but with the influx of people and development, it's depleted a lot of those artesian. Now, we're stuck with relying on electric pumps to bring us our drinking water. Back then, we had artesian everywhere, and you could just go fill your jug and take it to the house. But times are changing.

Yeah, I would say one of my worries is producing your food and procuring it, or preserving it. I wish there were more of a down-home set of values being pushed today.

I might be backwards in a lot of ways, but some of the ways are pretty high-value. It's not the glitz and glory of anything, but it's the sustainability. I guess that's the word for it. To help your neighbor in their garden or something like that. Because we don't know what tomorrow's going to bring. If you got a full tummy and a bunch of wool around, you can put it on your garden or make your bed.

[Laughter]

For sure. We've got a few sheep, and I'm the first Freeman to have many sheep. Because it was just a trading item. They were all cattlemen and horses. I didn't know a damn thing about sheep until we started trading workhorses and mules. A lot of the cow men, they'd picked the fanciest team and a brand-new harness and write a check. Hold that check for a week, and I'll make it good. The sheep man, he would chit a little bit on the price, and he'd pick a medium-sized horse, and a mule, and a used set of harness. But a lot of times, he'd pull cash out of his pocket. I thought, "There's got to be money in the sheep."

Then you look into it a little farther. A lamb will fatten in six or eight months. Six or seven months on grass. You don't need a combine to harvest grain to put into him to carry him through the winter to get through. You can still fill your freezer and eat quite well. Everybody can handle them. You don't have to have a very fast horse, or a squeeze chute, or a long rope. You can get by with them.

When my kids grew up...when they first started toddling, I had some cows. They'd get out there, and I was afraid they were going to get hit with the cows. So I sold the cows and bought some sheep. My dad about croaked. "What the hell are you doing?" "Well, they're going to hit the kids, so I sold the cows and bought some sheep." [Growling sound; laughter]

[00:37:08]

Tim: To me, they're the poor man's gold. They really are because they feed you. They clothe you. They'll get by on some grass.

I ran into my old babysitter a few years ago. I don't know what church she goes to.

[00:37:34]

Anika: Your old babysitter. The person that babysat you when you were a kid?

[00:37:38]

Tim: Yes. Believe it or not, after she passed through babysitting me and my brothers, she went on to be a grade school teacher. She said, "If I lived through those three, I can handle grade school."

[Laughter]

Her and her husband are very strong in this church. She said that she was going to go to church. She said, "How long since you've been to church, Tim?" I said, "Well, you know what? They tell me God was a good shepherd, but some of the best lambs are on the outside of the flock." "Oh! That's, that's okay, yeah. I'm going to tell my husband that. He might spit that out over the pulpit." I said, "Good luck, Mary Jo."

[Laughter]

I don't know if he did or not. But good people is good people.

[00:38:22]

Anika: Of course.

[00:38:25]

Tim: Some of the best lambs are on the outside where the grass is better, for sure.

[00:38:33]

Kelly: How did you learn to raise sheep if that wasn't something you'd done before?

[00:38:37]

Tim: I watched a lot of the oldtimers. I asked a lot of questions of the oldtimers. When I had a real tough situation and couldn't talk to them, I called the Dubois Sheep Station. They would talk to you over the phone about what your problem was. Especially the old Basque men. They'd come to this country, and they'd started with nothing. So they learned to do with nothing. They would teach me about shearing before lambing, or wiggling your wool-blind ewes, or spreading them out to eat the grass. Those are the guys that taught me about the sheep. Trial and error, but a lot of listening to the oldtimers, for sure.

I know an old Basque man in the Pahsimeroi Valley. Last summer, he told me he came over here 70 years ago. To this day, by nine o'clock in the morning, he's already walked his six or eight miles. To do that at his age, summer and winter, that's something.

One year I bought a truckload of wild ewes out of Wyoming. When the last one was done and gone, I promised my kids the next truckload I bought would be a pickup stock rack full. I was never going back and buying wild Wyoming ewes. Because they ran over everybody. They had never been lambed in a barn. They had just been range lambed. Behind every bush was a coyote, or a cougar, or something to scare them. So the poor devils never settled down.

[00:40:36]

Anika: It's all those little things that someone like me would never think of.

[00:40:40]

Tim: They add up.

[00:40:41]

Anika: It's just fun to learn about them and to hear about a different set of knowledge.

[00:40:50]

Tim: I tie a lot of my world to horses. Like I was telling you about with the blinders on a horse, they only hear what they think they hear, or feel on the lines, or see. It's a lot like an animal. He don't speak English. If you move quick, are you coming to him, or did you jump from something that's going to get you both, you know? Because that animal don't know what you're thinking. So a lot of it is body language. You approach them slow. You get close to their protected circle and then you got by. Now you're not pressing him anymore. A lot of times curiosity will bring them back to you. If you can meet on a mutual deal.

It's like colts. A lot of times people say, "How do you get along with that colt?" I say a lot of it's body language. It's like two people on a blind date that don't speak the same language. You have to figure each other out. Oh, you don't like your coffee that hot, or you don't like pepper on that... It's just a quiet, slow approach to everything. Like starting a colt. There's a right way, and then there's the fast way. I mean, the fast way, he don't have a chance to learn. That's all Hollywood. If you go slow and easy just like with an animal or the blind date. You go slow, and easy, and figure things out. Don't get chargey and arrogant, for sure. Patience, understanding, and consideration. Good for horses, people, and business. Consider where you were raised and understand that you've never seen a badger with a ground squirrel under your porch. Right? Or have you? Have you seen that?

[00:42:55]

Anika: [Laughs] Can't say.

[00:42:57]

Tim: Okay, so you're a different neighborhood than I was. Or maybe you weren't cleaning a stall in Florida, and there was a cottonmouth in the corner. Everybody's got a little different experience. So you try and be patient and consider. It works better. It works better.

[00:43:20]

Anika: I agree. I think we can all find common ground on that one. The patience and understanding works better.

[00:43:26]

Tim: Don't go off halfcocked. When you go off, go off magnum.

[Laughter]

[00:43:31]

Anika: We're getting close to the time. We're at 43 minutes. We're getting a little close to the time that the microphone starts to go wonky. You just mentioned it, and Kelly mentioned it to me earlier, I've heard there's a badger story. If you would be so willing. If you're willing to, I would love to hear your badger story.

[00:43:49]

Tim: Which one?

[00:43:50]

Kelly: Well, I guess it could be your choice. I know there's one where you're getting chased.

[00:43:56]

Tim: Oh, I been... The one where I had him on a twine or the one where I got stabbed?

[00:44:00]

Kelly: I only know the stabbing one. You're welcome to tell either.

[00:44:06]

Tim: I was helping my uncle put up hay. We broke at noon, a buddy and me. There's a motorcycle there. So we hop on this motorcycle. I think I'm about 13 or 14. We take off down this gravel road because my uncle didn't fix some lunch. We got a half hour to play around. I see this badger run across the road into the alfalfa field. I said to my buddy Steve, I said, "Stop this bike. I'll go get that badger and we'll skin him out." "Okay, yeah." Like I said, 13, 14. When you're young, you're invincible.

I chase him down through the alfalfa field. It's a real pretty alfalfa field, and not many rocks to kill a badger with. So I find a rock. I threw it and hit him right in the head. It just drops him. Tim thinks he killed him. I got my knife out and I walk up there to cut his throat and start skinning. And he snatches up and bites my blade. I jerked my blade back and take off running, and he is right on my boots. As I'm running, every now and then, I can feel him slap my boot heel. I'm running for all I'm worth. I could run back then. I'm running for all I'm worth. There's a concrete ditch between me and the fence, and then the road. So I have to jump the concrete ditch. I'm sliding on my knees under the wire as I see the badger come over the ditch right by my head. I flip up on my feet, run for the bike. I'm hollering, "Steve, start the bike! Put it in second gear! Get it ready! Get it ready!" Because the badger's still on my boots.

I jump onto the bike. I said, "Go, go, go, go!" He takes off. I go to scoot back, and I can't scoot back. Because Steve has a folding lock-blade knife, and he had it open to help skin the badger. He stuck it in his back pocket with the blade up. And so as I jumped on the bike, I run that blade from the bottom of that side up through the top of it, and I can't

scoot back. I looked back, and okay, we've outran the badger. I said, "Stop the bike real slow, Steve." So he's stopping. I go get off, and I can't move my leg off. I stick my fingers in his back pocket. Make room so the knife will come out. Then I get off on the ground. Pull the knife out. Give it back to him. And in all of my early teenage knowledge, I take this cotton bandana off my neck, dip it in that ditch full of water, wash off my fresh wound, squeeze the blood out so there's no infection, and tie that nice wet bandana on the wound. Put my pants back on and go back to stacking hay. I didn't monkey with another badger for probably six months.

[00:46:53]

Anika: Kept you away for a whole six months?

[00:46:54]

Tim: Yeah. That one I got on a twine. He just dug a fresh hole and he's ducking in and out of the hole. It wasn't very deep yet. I had the bailing twine in the back of my pickup. I didn't have anything else with me. I put the twine around the hole, and I hide behind the sagebrush. As he comes out, I wait for that second leg to get through the loop, because they're very loose sided, and I jerk it tight. And now I got him in the air on the twine swinging around and round. I don't want him close to me. He got tired of that about the fourth time and shuffled his hide and dropped out at my feet. There I stand with this string and a very POed badger. When I headed for the pickup, I made Jesse Owens look slow that day. I was running for all I was worth. I dove into the back of the pickup. He circled around it a few times and then went back to his hole. Never touched him again.

[00:47:50]

Anika: Those are some good badger stories. [Laughs]

[00:47:52]

Tim: I love them. I love playing with them because they're not just your gentle little bunny. I mean you're going to get a little spark out of it. You're going to get a little feedback when you get close to them, which makes it sporting.

[Laughter]

[00:48:08]

Anika: Messing with badgers.

[00:48:09]

Kelly: What would you do with the hides?

[00:48:12]

Tim: You can actually sell them. If you tan them, they make a real pretty hide. But to this day, I've never got one tanned. They kill a lot of squirrels at home. At the same time, they make a huge hole. I've actually lost baby calves in the badger holes. Not lost that you

can't find them, but they've died because they get stuck in the holes. Hurt some horses. Damn near killed Guy. He was galloping and there was a badger hole under a clump of a bunchgrass. As his horse came over the bunchgrass, he dropped both front feet down that hole and somersaulted with Guy underneath him. So yeah, I shoot badgers.

This year, there's not a whole lot of squirrels out. It might be a low population. So it's hard telling what it'll be like for the badgers. Maybe there won't be very many or maybe they'll come closer to the chickens looking for something to eat. I don't know. Time will tell there. They're a fun animal, but they are detrimental in some ways. But they are sporting. They are sporting.

[Laughter]

[00:49:35]

Anika:

Well, let's see. We've just got a couple minutes left here. Is there anything else that you want to add, or have on the record for stories, or something you'd like to say? One of the questions that we have for the end is if there's anything that you in particular want people to know or the people who are unfamiliar with sagebrush steppe or maybe just with this area of landscape, if there's anything that you'd like people who aren't familiar with it to know about it?

[00:50:05]

Tim:

It's a beautiful environment. It can be unforgiving. But if you learn to live with it, it's not bad at all. They say that big range fires are good for things. I say that you should have firebreaks because like today, we have a major concern over the sage hen. Well, you can tell a man how many cows to run and where to run them. The same with his sheep. But when Mother Nature starts a massive range fire, you don't tell her nothing. So if we want to protect it for what it is, we ought to have some kind of firebreaks to protect the good sagebrush, protect the grass, protect our beloved sage hen. Because when a range fire starts, how much fried chicken we got out there? It kills a lot of them. And no way of recouping.

So like the deep sage that's good for a calving ground, try and protect it. If some of it needs cleaned up a little, okay, then we can clean up with either controlled burns or brush clearing. Have some kind of a set of brakes on your wagon so you don't have a runaway. If we will have some firebreaks that are grazed down as bald as my head, great. Make it a mile wide. Next year, switch to a different area. That way you can protect your environment and the creatures that live there.

If I really want to get on my soapbox, that could go to our timber too. Because it's such a pity the state we're in now. Losing our timber to these massive fires, when it could have been corrected. At the same time, we could harvest timber. We could graze it. There's already massive fires taking off that, it's too late.

People should learn from their mistakes. I would hope some of our agencies would do the same thing. Yep. And I'll take that story to the White House. You might not want me... Well, here's one. I would not be your president for \$1 million a week. I would not. But I'd be dictator free for two weeks.

[Laughter]

[00:52:48]

Anika: I hear you on that one.

[00:52:51]

Tim: No, I think if we protect it, it's better for everybody. It's better for everybody. Some of it needs cleaned up, for sure. Yeah, it's a good environment. We should take care of it.

[00:53:12]

Anika: Excellent. I think I'll go ahead and stop my recording now.

Craig Gehrke

John: Today I'm interviewing Craig Gehrke for the Shared Stories Lab oral history project. It is April 11th, 2022, and we are in the audio room of the Boise State Library in Boise, Idaho. I'm John Behrens, an interviewer with Shared Stories Lab. So just to start off, what's your background with the Owyhee Initiative? How'd you get started? What did you do there?

[00:00:25]

Craig Gehrke: We had started...well, work in the Owyhee started clear back in the early, actually, the late 1980s, early 1990s, with the whole controversy about the Air Force's plans to create some additional training facilities out there. And so that was a big conservation effort. That was one of the first efforts that really, I think, made familiar to a lot of people in Idaho, the Owyhees, in particular the Canyonlands, because down there is a kind of forgotten corner of Idaho. And they were only known to a few, what we call desert rats and river runners. And that went on for almost 10 years. And we rolled that into then, by that time, President Clinton had been elected president.

So we took a run at having a national monument designated down there, which was not a popular idea with the local folks. And that, we didn't make it, that was unsuccessful. But we did end up, again, creating a much larger constituency for the Owyhee Canyonlands, for the protection, for their...people got to know them more and were interested in seeing some kind of something happen to them. Because they realized they're a pretty special place. Shortly after the monument thing died away, we were approached – I was approached – by the representative for the Owyhee County Commissioners, asking if I'd participate in the Initiative, because they had seen me doing some of the Owyhee stuff. And I'd actually gone down early on and had coffee with one of the county commissioners in the Marsing bowling alley; just kind of introduced myself. And I'd been recommended to him, or he'd been recommended to me by one of the BLM employees here saying, "You should go talk to this guy. He was a pretty reasonable person." Because the county commissioners were pretty, you know, in that very conservative area, they're kind of leery of conservation interests and particularly those in the Treasure Valley.

So we'd had a good conversation, positive. And then like I said, this representative named Fred Grant, met with some of us here in Boise and asked if we'd participate in something the Commission put together to try to bring some people together to see if we couldn't figure out a way forward with the Owyhees. Because I think the local folks knew, you know, environmentalists weren't going away. I think we recognized, finally, that whatever we wanted to do down there really had to incorporate the interests of the local residents. And it looked like the Initiative was the forum to do that. And so this was about...I think this was 2001, if I remember correctly. And so I was one of the original members of the Initiative.

[00:02:42]

John: Oh, sweet. Yeah. So how, with that initial monument kind of thing, how did you get into that?

[00:02:51]

Craig Gehrke: Well, The Wilderness Society pushed for monuments around the country. And we were, you know, instrumental in getting some of the ones designated in the Southwest and in other places around the country. And so there were places where, because the Owyhees have been considered for lots of different designations over the last 40 or 50 years. I mean, there was talk of a National Conservation Area, there was talk of a National Park. There's always been talk about wilderness down there. So it's kind of like, there was lots of different ways to try to recognize the landscape. And because the Clinton administration kind of found and dusted off the Antiquities Act, we thought we would take a run at seeing if we could convince Bruce Babbitt, who was the Interior Secretary in President Clinton's shop, to take a look at the Owyhees. As you remember, you might remember, they were very interested and actually did expand the Craters of the Moon National Monument at the time. So we thought that was kind of a good indication that they were willing to wade into a pretty conservative state and look at a monument designation. Granted, Craters were a lot less controversial than the Owyhees would be, an easier lift, if you will, if anything's easy in this state. But yeah, we thought that that might be an avenue, given the constituency and the support we built to have something out in the Owyhees, that would make sense to take a run at a monument designation, I think.

[00:04:08]

John: Back where I grew up, it was this Niobrara River with the same kind of time zone. They were trying to get in that scenic...

[00:04:17]

Craig Gehrke: Wild and Scenic.

[00:04:18]

John: ...Wild and Scenic Act down there.

[00:04:19]

Craig Gehrke: Yeah.

[00:04:19]

John: And I actually grew up on the, if you know the nature preserve that's also...

[00:04:24]

Craig Gehrke: I know where the river at, I'm not that familiar with the country there, though.

[00:04:27]

John: It's just like the...a Nature Conservancy is a little preserve up higher up on the river.

[00:04:31]

Craig Gehrke: Oh, okay. Yeah.

[00:04:33]

John: A scenic place. And that's where I grew up.

[00:04:35]

Craig Gehrke: Oh, okay.

[00:04:35]

John: And a lot of...there was a lot of conflict between landowners there and people that...I mean, obviously the landowners care for the river and the land there, but...

[00:04:35]

Craig Gehrke: Sure, sure.

[00:04:45]

John: How did you and the people you're working with get past that with the landowners saying, we want to protect this land, but also allow you to do what you do.

[00:04:54]

Craig Gehrke: It took months, if not years. It was...you think back and it's a very gradual process of, you know, sitting down around a table there, not here in Boise, and just kind of starting to identify why you're interested in a place, why you think it needs protection, without trying to, you know, denigrate the work that'd been done down there or that, you know, imply that the people living there had done a poor job of it. So he's not coming from my standpoint, you know. We always thought that, you know, some...the Owyhee country in the canyonlands down there are some of the wildest places in Idaho. And we thought that, well, they had been recommended, some of them, by the BLM for wilderness designation for 20-some years, since the late 1970s. And so we had started with that. Just saying, well, you've got, you know, several thousand acres down here, the agency has recommended they're managed and protected. We'd like to start the discussion with that.

And they wanted to talk about lots of different things. They wanted to talk about some of the processes the BLM used to evaluate grazing practices. They wanted to talk about access. They wanted to talk about some of their water developments that they had in there. So we spent a lot of time just kind of laying things on the table and then sorting through what we thought we could make some progress on or what we thought we weren't making progress on. We weren't going to talk about the Endangered Species Act. We weren't going to talk about sage-grouse. Because that was going to play out no matter what we were doing. It seemed like our best chance for success was to

concentrate on land with affected landowners, with affected ranchers and the County Commissioners and the Tribe. And recreationists, and try to have some critical mass, if you will, that would come up to say, "Okay, here's what we've kind of agreed upon."

So it took lots of field trips out there. And it took lots of sitting down. We kind of did...we did different workgroups. I was on the, obviously, the wilderness one. Sit down, talk about what does wilderness mean. So I'd prepare all kinds of fact sheets on the Wilderness Act and how it had been implemented in Idaho and answered their questions about, you know, predator control, about fencing and management, about grazing rights and all that kind of stuff that would be involved. And then, you know, talk to other people who were, you know, managing livestock grazing and wilderness, like in Hells Canyon or up in the Frank Church to say, you know, the Gospel Hump, like, how's it going here? What are the problems? What do you think we ought to recommend that we do or don't do?

And all the while, trying to, you know, you never quite knew where...if you were going to step on a landmine or not, how somebody's particular interests were going to, you know, upset them. And they were the same way with me, probably, to some degree. But it just took...it was easier on a couple of things. A couple things would happen, I think. One was the field trips, where if you spent hours in a truck bouncing over really bad roads, you'd talk about a lot of different things. And you see stuff. And suddenly, kind of things become real to people, and a little less abstract. The other thing that a colleague of mine, John McCarthy, who worked for the Idaho Conservation at the time, he was the state group on this initiative, the Idaho Conservation League, he was the rep and I was the national conservation group rep.

He and I went down early on, and we kind of did this by accident—people always think we were brilliant for this, but it wasn't really thought through. We went down after work one evening to the school in, what's the...not the Grand View, making my...I'm losing my train of thought now...in Oregon. Anyway, one of the smaller towns just on the edge of the Owyhees on the west side there, to the high school, in the gymnasium. And they had a bunch of ranchers come in. And we all kind of sat around in a circle and talked about stuff. And John and I going to their home turf to talk to them just impressed the hell out of them.

[00:08:46]

John: Yeah, I bet.

[00:08:46]

Craig Gehrke: And they thought, wow, these two guys would actually care. And so it was kind of a no holds barred kind of meeting. Tense, sure, you know. But just the fact that we went down and sat down and, you know, answered questions, kind of showed them some maps, talked about stuff. And then John, particularly, went ahead and, I did a little bit of this, but John did more of it than I did, went and met with every single rancher that

would be affected by a wilderness designation. And went out on the land with them to their grazing allotment to see what would be wilderness, what would be out, what might be a conflict with wilderness that they were doing now, what wouldn't be.

And I kind of worked on the policy end of things for them, because there would be some policy things they wanted to see done differently in the management of some BLM stuff with the implementation of the Wilderness Bill. So I was kind of helping, you know, figure out this thing of what would actually make a difference to them, the ranchers, and what would actually get through Congress in DC. Which it turned out, wasn't much. For their end, Congress was not known for its innovation at that time. But anyway, so we kind of divided up the landscape. John went on the ground, and I stayed and worked with folks with policy stuff. Some of the leaders in the National, or the Owyhee Cattle Association, and the Owyhee Borderlands Trust, and the conservation districts out there. So we kind of divided that up. And we continued to work with these meetings that we had to just discuss and narrow down the range of things we thought we could actually get done.

[00:10:10]

John: That's pretty cool. It's quite a long-term commitment.

[00:10:17]

Craig Gehrke: It was a long time. You know what, there was lots of stuff. We spent...I'm the first to admit, we spent a lot of time spinning our wheels and not getting anywhere. One of the things that was completely frustrating, turned out to be more frustrating, is that the conservationists wanted to have some places where the wilderness designation to set up a process where the permittee would be bought out and then that grazing...that permit would be retired permanently. The BLM can't permanently retire an allotment on their own. They have to reissue it. So then Congress had to mandate that if a willing seller, if the guy who currently owns it retires it, the BLM is directed to close it, period. So we wanted some cattle-free wilderness, because that had happened with the Steens over in Oregon. And it was interesting to us to think, well, then it ought to be, given all the land is grazed in Idaho, to have some pockets of places that wouldn't have cattle in it.

And the ranchers were up to it, as long as...they kind of said, well, okay, we could get behind that, as long as it's, you know, a willing seller kind of thing and then the price is right. And you know, all kinds of things. But well, as it turns out, you know, they were, and I didn't realize this at the time, you know, there were cattle authorized to graze, and then there are cattle that used to be authorized that were reduced because of some environmental concerns. But those other cattle never went off the books. And so the ranchers wanted to talk about the bigger number, rather than the number they actually had, because they'd always kind of thought they were eventually going to get those cows back. And then there was temporary use that they wanted to see somehow accommodated. So we talked about all these paper cows that were out there.

There were real cows that we thought we would be dealing with and then there were all the extra animal unit months that the ranchers wanted to talk about. So it got pretty complicated on how to figure all that out in the end. In the end...and plus, we had hoped there'd be federal funding for this. And there wasn't. That was quickly put to rest by Congress. "No, we're not going to be funded at all for this." So then the environmentalists ended up finding private donors to the tune of over \$4 million, I think, to eventually, I think there's some [Inaudible 00:12:21], there's a hundred and some thousand acres of livestock free grazing out there where folks had just come forth and said, "Oh, we've had about as much fun out here as we can stand. We want to be bought out." And so we've retired some out there.

But that was one thing. It just took us months to figure out, you know, how much are these AUMs really worth? Are we going to pay for the ones that are actually on the land versus the ones that are on the books? How long ago were the ones, you know, reduced? Why were they reduced? Was there any realistic expectation they were to come back again? So it all got very complicated. Far more than what I thought it was going to be when we first brought the idea up of saying, "Hey, let's have some of the wilderness areas not have cattle."

[00:13:00]

John: Yeah. Sounds like a very complicated...

[00:13:03]

Craig Gehrke: Yeah, yeah. The other thing that was a tough thing, too, was...and this is where...one of the bigger threats I saw to the country out there apart from the Wilderness designation, was just the explosion of off-road vehicle use. And we see more and more. I was seeing more and more. Two tracks going off the roads and just kind of pioneering routes along the edge of the canyons on both sides. And each one of those, you know, dig down into the soil of those ruts and then you get weeds in there, and you see somebody else coming along, he sees a track, then he goes on it. And pretty soon, you've got motorized use, both sides of the canyon. Bighorn sheep habitat, sage grouse habitat, you know, mountain lion, bobcat, all kinds of things that we thought were going to suffer from motorized use. And it was just exploding out there.

So we've kind of started to put our heads together about how are we going to, you know, given all these routes that we see on the ground, which ones are legit, which have actually been constructed versus which ones are just people, but traffic going back and forth. So we kind of decided, what we'd use as a guide was to dig out the old USGS maps. Because a lot of those date back to the 1940s, 1950s. And if a two-track was on that map as a two-track, the environmentalists were more inclined to leave it open and to say, okay, that's been there for decades, it's getting used, let's leave it alone. If it wasn't on there, our first inclination was to close it down if it had been created by recreational use and it wasn't, you know, legitimate.

And it was funny, the ranchers totally got behind that. Because they saw the logic behind that, saying, okay, you're at least trying to be fair. You're not trying to close off a road that's been out here since our grandfathers were here or whatever. And they can kind of understand that. I remember, they, too, were very alarmed about the explosion of off-road vehicles out there, too. Because they were spooking their cattle, the noise. They saw that cheatgrass coming in the tracks, coming up after they had been traveled a few times. So they kind of got what we were after, what we thought that...yeah, that the sound of motors out there is not what we're trying to fall...trying to allow here. So...

[00:15:06]

John: Yeah.

[00:15:06]

Craig Gehrke: So anyway, that was one place where we kind of hit some, you know, they understood where we were coming from and what we were trying to accomplish.

[00:15:13]

John: That would be kind of...when you have these very common sense things, it's easier to get...bridge the gap.

[00:15:17]

Craig Gehrke: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:15:19]

John: So you said you had pressure from the conservationists on the other side. Did they have similar trouble?

[00:15:23]

Craig Gehrke: Oh, yeah. Well, a lot of the conservationists were very mad at the whole Owyhee Initiative, because they thought we were way too accommodating. I mean, there was definitely a lot of...there were folks who, for years, who had dealt with, you know, livestock grazing on BLM lands, conservationists, and just saw livestock grazing as being incredibly detrimental to the land, period. And I hadn't seen that. It was kind of like, you know, years ago, you know, the Sierra Club, for example, had taken a position on the National Forests and not to support any commercial logging anymore. And The Wilderness Society was supposed to do that. And those of us out in the West, could not honestly say that every time we'd seen a timber sale, it had been a bad thing. We'd seen some conducted pretty well. And it's the same thing with grazing.

I mean, I've seen a lot of bad grazing practices, but I've also seen some good grazing practices, too. So we couldn't just say flat out that grazing was bad for the land or was being conducted shabbily. But there were some conservation groups in the state who just adamantly didn't want to give any aid or comfort to the ranchers, who simply wanted to see them go. And that wasn't part of our plan at all. And in fact, some of

those groups were mad because they didn't get invited to the Initiative. Well, you know, you kind of have to live with what you've said in the past, you know. And if you're...well I used to say, if you're kind of stuck on the sound of your own rhetoric, you're going to have to live by it.

So there were several conservation groups who opposed the Initiative, who rallied some people against that, thinking we were being...we were selling out or were giving too much power to the ranchers, all kinds of different stuff. The calculation we made was, did any of these groups have the horsepower to derail us back in Congress? And none of them did. And so we were kind of hard-assed about it, just saying.... It was interesting, when we first tried to work with them, John and I would meet with them on a regular basis after work, kind of saying, here's where we're at, the way things are going. And it quickly became apparent to us that nothing we were ever going to do was going to please them. You know, there was nothing we could do other than coming out against livestock grazing. And they were kind of there to just throw a wrench in the works. So we basically just said, well, you know, we're going to move on from this and we'll keep you informed. But, you know, we're not going to stop.

So there were several groups that kind of toward the end of it, a couple of groups kind of came on board saying, yeah, this isn't as bad as what we thought we were going to be. But I've got a whole file of, you know, screeds written to The Wilderness Society back in DC and written to other groups here at how we were, you know, undermining the National Environmental Policy Act in defining wilderness. This won't be real wilderness and all this kind of bullshit that they were making up, trying to get us to back off or try to get our board of directors to pull us off the Initiative. And none of it was successful.

[00:18:07]

John: You take what you can get there.

[00:18:10]

Craig Gehrke: Well, you do. And I mean, and that's the other thing, too, we had a fundamental difference. I saw ORVs as the largest threat out there, ATVs. They saw cows. And I just...and cattle grazing has been allowed in wilderness since the Wilderness Act was passed in 1964. So again, it's got to be managed, you've got to do it well. But ATVs are not compatible with wilderness. And I just saw that as being a...the cattle thing, cattle grazing has been out there now for over 100 years. ATVs have been there the last 40, 50 years, perhaps, now. And they were growing exponentially. So I just saw that being, you know, if we don't do something now with this, it ain't going to happen.

[00:18:47]

John: You're combatting the greater evil, especially when cattle grazing is...

[00:18:49]

Craig Gehrke: Yeah.

[00:18:51]

John: Especially since it can be done in ways that are less impactful for the land.

[00:18:56]

Craig Gehrke: So it also kind of helped...and I'm sure...and the cattle folks and the County Commissioners were getting beat up from the other side, who thought they crawled in...telling them that they crawled in bed with the devil. You know, you've crawled in bed with environmentalists, for God's sakes. "They'll stab you in the back in the last minute" or "They don't care about us." And you know, "We've got to fight, we've got to go down with the ship here." So they were certainly also, and to this day, it was much tougher, I believe, for the Owyhee County residents who worked on the Initiative to run into their neighbors in the grocery store or the post office than it was for me here in Boise running into the odd anti-grazing person. Because they had to live...and their kids were going to school with other kids out there. They'd see them far more regularly.

It's much...I still think it's harder...was harder for the Owyhee County folks who participated in the Initiative to be upfront, to be outspoken when we needed them, than it was for John and I to stick with it. Because we had other groups on our side. I mean, the Sierra Club was with us, Idaho Rivers United, the Nature Conservancy. Who else was... On and off, the National Wildlife Federation. And so we had, you know, like I said, we had figured out, who do we need that won't be able to derail us. And we had pretty much tried to bring those folks along since the...once we realized, after the first year or so, that it actually had the potential to work, we thought, well, we better pay attention to the politics of this.

[00:20:17]

John: Yeah, yeah. So, yeah, you mentioned this before, that you were...and it's on the paper, that you were the Idaho State Director for the Wilderness Society.

[00:20:26]

Craig Gehrke: Yep.

[00:20:28]

John: So was there...were there projects after this that you worked on that you learned from?

[00:20:35]

Craig Gehrke: Yeah, well, the one thing, the environmentalists had always been kind of accused, and rightly so I think, that after a wilderness area was designated, we kind of took our toys and went home, went and did something else. And this one, we said we weren't going to do that. So after the bill passed, we were going to be part of the Initiative. The Initiative was going to keep going. And through the writing of the Wilderness Management Plan and all the kind of follow up stuff that we knew we wanted to do that wasn't in the

legislation, that Congress didn't want to deal with. But then we said, okay, we'll deal with this just as a group of individuals making recommendation to BLM.

So we stuck together up until the time, I mean, it was still going at the time I retired last year, of the Initiative meeting on...well, COVID kind of slowed it, obviously stopped it meeting for a while. But we continued to meet and work through the implementation of the Act. And so that got to a lot of places on, you know, getting the Wilderness Plan Development, the development of the fire component for the Wilderness Plan Development. We stayed away from stuff, again, like sage-grouse. But just kind of dealt with things that were loosely tied to the Initiative like the construction of firebreaks near the wilderness areas kind of stuff and made comments on those projects. A lot of them I wrote for the Initiative to sign, or John Robison, who replaced John McCarthy on the Idaho Conservation League, would write comments written by the board. We'd make changes and stuff and then send them in as a group to the BLM.

[00:21:56]

John: That's really cool that you're still in that area.

[00:21:59]

Craig Gehrke: Yeah. So yeah, we were still there up until the day I...up until like, last year when I retired. And it's still going. I'm not sure what will happen now, because obviously, I've left, a couple of other folks have retired, one of the board members died. I think they'll probably...I think the Initiative will have to figure out kind of what they want to do. I kind of wrote for...last summer, I wrote a final summary of everything we accomplished for them to just...for the remaining board members to look at and say, okay, is there anything beyond this list or on this document that we should go after or do we consider ourselves done and then go look for other groups to support.

[00:22:32]

John: That's really cool. So the selling of lands that no longer have cattle on that, is that still a thing that's ongoing or is that just...

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Craig Gehrke: Well, it's out there. And the Idaho Conservation League pretty much took over the lead on that. And they've dug up the private money of, you know, either organizations or individuals who are willing to enter into a contract or to buy the AUMs out. So it wasn't the land, it was the cattle permit that was sold. Yeah. So it's still an option. It hasn't been done for a while, to my knowledge, anyway. But again, like I said, I haven't tracked it that closely. Similar or actually, the same provision was included in the White Cloud legislation that Congressman Simpson passed. And that, too, has had, oh, several thousand acres of livestock grazing area retired permanently up there. So it's kind of like a thing that's out there that we've tried to put into most of the land. We've always talked about if we have another one, to always include that provision, just in case somebody wants to sell their cattle and close the permit permanently, then.

[00:23:34]

John: That's really cool. So in that same capacity of like, within The Wilderness Society, how did you start out in that?

[00:23:45]

Craig Gehrke: It was...well, it was kind of interesting. I grew up in a very...I grew up on a cattle ranch in northern Idaho, very rural, very isolated. So I always very much appreciated and enjoyed nature as a kid. There was no neighbors around, lots of forests for us to ride horses on and stuff like that. So when I went to college, I thought I wanted to be a forest ranger. And I'd never seen a forest ranger before. I didn't know what they did, but it sounded cool.

[00:24:11]

John: Good name.

[00:24:12]

Craig Gehrke: So, you know, I went to the University of Idaho and went to the College of Forestry Wildlife and Range Sciences. And kind of saw that forestry was really about tree cutting and stuff. And I thought, well, that's not really very interesting. I was really more interested in wildlife and wildlife protection. And at the time, the advisor said, well, yeah, great idea, but you're not going to get a job in that, because it's overblown, so I went to range. My degree is actually in Range Resources, because I thought, well, okay, that's kind of what...it'll be something do with nature then and protection. So I got a degree there, started with the Forest Service. And this is the Forest Service in the 1970s. So I don't want to, you know, denigrate them now or whatever now.

But the Forest Service back in those days was completely lock, stock, and barrel, development-oriented. And I would see, I was in Montana at the time, and this was the time with, you know, James Watt was Interior Secretary, and I saw, you know, these conservation groups, these private nonprofits, trying to protect wilderness from seismic testing in the Bob Marshall and trying to designate wilderness in the Madison Range. And I thought, that's what I thought I'd be doing over here at this agency. They're doing what I thought I'd be doing. What's going on here? So I worked for the Forest Service for a while, and it just seemed to me to be so dead-end. It really wasn't what I wanted to do. So I took a...I quit, went back, took a couple years to school and took writing and speaking courses with kind of an eye on, well, maybe I'll be an environmental journalist or something.

And then got a job with the Idaho Conservation League as their Wilderness Organizer up in Lewiston. This would have been 1983. And I worked for them for a year and then a position came open here with The Wilderness Society. They had a Boise office. They have offices in most of the western states. They had one here in Boise. And so they had a position open up. And I got it.

[00:25:59]

John: That's very nice. That's cool.

[00:26:02]

Craig Gehrke: Well, I had gotten married by that time. I always say my wife had the adult job. So I could afford to look for something and, you know, volunteer and do all this kind of stuff while trying to worm my way into the conservation profession.

[00:26:13]

John: I know, I'm doing Bio, and I want to do stuff like that. My girlfriend, she's in hotel management. Well, you know, if it works out, I got support.

[00:26:26]

Craig Gehrke: You got support. There you go. Yep. There you go.

[00:26:28]

John: But yeah, no, that's really cool. Is there...are there any other projects in Idaho besides the...

[00:26:36]

Craig Gehrke: Oh, yeah, we did a lot of different stuff. Another big issue was the White Cloud Wilderness Designation. And that actually started when I was still, hell, I was still probably in junior high when that started. It took 45 years to get the Boulder White.... From the first time they were talked about for a wilderness designation to when the bill finally passed in 2015. And that was really...I was really proud to be part of the last pulling it across the finish line. Because a lot of the old guard I'd met first starting out down here in Boise, were the warriors, if you will, who promoted the White Cloud protection and got included in the...White Clouds were then part of the Sawtooth National Recreation Area, but they weren't wilderness. And the folks here, they pushed for that, but they couldn't quite get it that far. But they'd always hoped they would get the White Clouds in wilderness. And then the politics changed, got a lot more conservative, so it went totally off.

It was not only on the backburner, it wasn't even on the stove for many years. And in the meantime, The Wilderness Society worked on...mostly on National Forest lands. And that was including all the National Forests in Idaho had to develop long-term management plans. So I wrote the comments for The Wilderness Society on all those plans, you know, arguing for the wildlife to be protected, that the fish, you know, Wild Rivers, be recognized for native fish populations. Did that across the National Forests. We challenged individual timber sales that were going into areas that were undeveloped in the National Forest. Eventually all the wilderness areas in Idaho, and actually all the wilderness areas in the National Forest in the nation were protected, say we're not going

to develop these except under some extraordinary circumstances, which is a pretty high bar. And so I was involved in that, as was The Wilderness Society nationwide.

And then the other things we've worked on, I worked for a number of years on trying to secure some disease-free bighorn sheep habitat, because domestic sheep who were grazed transmitted disease to bighorns, to which they don't have any immunity. It's kind of like the old story of the Europeans who came here and gave smallpox to the Native Americans. So many of them died. It's kind of the same thing. The domestic sheep aren't sick from it, but the bighorns had no immunity. It took several years to ratchet back, several years of litigation in Hells Canyon and the Salmon River Canyon to close domestic sheep allotments in bighorn sheep habitats so that the bighorn sheep would quit dying of pneumonia every year and slowly start to build their population back. And that was successful. I mean, they're slowly...the bighorn sheep are slowly building their populations back up again now because we...the several hundred thousand acres of land that had domestic sheep grazing on them that don't anymore, that the bighorns can go in and occupy without worrying about getting sick.

[00:29:24]

John: Wow, man, that's really cool. So you mentioned a couple of times, kind of just like, how the movement of the politics and how it's like the country and the state have made, you know, wilderness areas and just protecting these things in general a lot harder or easier and gave hope. Have you, in your years of working in Idaho and even through this project, have you felt that...has it gotten easier or harder with...because I guess Idaho has been pretty...

[00:29:59]

Craig Gehrke: I think...I have thought about that question a lot for the last four or five years. And I am very conflicted on whether or not the Owyhee Initiative would have worked now or not. just because I see this hardening, not just on the conservative side, but also on the environmental side, a hardening of positions and the demonization of your foes.

[00:30:20]

John: Yeah.

[00:30:20]

Craig Gehrke: And you don't have to do that in order to make a point. I mean, there were 10,000 topics I never talked about with the Owyhee ranchers, because I didn't want to know what they knew about it. And it didn't matter. It didn't matter to what we were trying to do. What they felt about, well, ESA, the Endangered Species Act, for example; don't think they were big fans of it. But that didn't matter to what we were trying to do here. So I, you know, it's funny, because of all those ranchers I met, I wouldn't hesitate to go meet with any of them now, talk about almost anything. I just don't know if the politics now would give any of us the space to do what we needed to do, because we are so hardened and so angry.

So I don't, you know, maybe because what we found out, I mean, you know, it was a big lift to start with, because, you know, wilderness was unpopular at that time. Idaho was conservative at that time, too. I don't think it was, this is just my own personal opinion, I don't think it was as crazy conservative as it is now, back then.

[00:31:27]

John: Yeah.

[00:31:29]

Craig Gehrke: And that maybe sounds kind of, I don't know, like I'm being...dissing them a little bit. But I think that when you...I'm always more discouraged after the legislature is in town, the politics in Idaho, than I am at any other time. And by June, I'll feel better. But I don't know. Because so many people now, everything is a fight, everything is, we can't give an inch, we have to go down with the ship. And everybody in the Initiative took a leap of faith with somebody they hadn't worked with before, to see if we could...see if their position, what they were trying to achieve, could get a little closer to being realized. I couldn't get wilderness without the locals on board. They couldn't get...we had some wilderness, we also had, by the way, I should have mentioned this earlier, so we had like a half a million acres designated.

We had another couple hundred thousand acres released from consideration from wilderness that had been kind of being managed in wilderness by the BLM administratively. And that just...those restrictions went away. So the ranchers got loosened up, if you will, a couple hundred thousand acres where they can now burn juniper. They can now go put the livestock developments in if they wanted to, if they needed them. But basically, they saw that as a win, that the wilderness question at least finally got settled in Owyhee County. And it's always hard to prove a negative. But you know, in the last several...you know, all during the Obama administration, you know, he did a lot of National Monuments. And nobody mentioned a thing about the Owyhees. And for the last, you know, ever since the Initiative passed, the wilderness land protection issue has not burst into flame down there or come back again.

So we always point to say, wow, we'd have been knee-deep in a monument fight had we not won. I can say, I used to kid the ranchers that, you know, I'd have bankrupted The Wilderness Society in a monument had the wilderness initiative failed out there with the Owyhee Initiative, and we'd have went home mad again. And then Obama had come in, we'd have run right back with a monument fight again. And it was interesting because the monuments don't necessarily...they're all a little bit different, managed differently. And that scares a lot of local people, because you leave it to the agency to kind of make up the plan. Wilderness at least was a known quantity. They knew what it was, and it had been around since '64. So that was, it was safer in their mind to think, okay, well, we can live with that, because we've seen this work in other places. This monument thing is scary. Maybe they were a little paranoid. But again, maybe not. Who knows?

But I like to point out, and this is hard to prove, that the land controversies, and this assumes Grand Staircase, Bears Ears, nowhere near the Owyhees. No, nothing came up again, because we had settled it.

[00:34:09]

John: Yeah. That's a really good point. It's cool that there's people that live on the land that are all parts of the Initiative.

[00:34:20]

Craig Gehrke: Yeah, yeah.

[00:34:21]

John: It's not some...administrated by people that don't live there.

[00:34:27]

Craig Gehrke: Right, right. Yeah.

[00:34:28]

John: It's a...

[00:34:29]

Craig Gehrke: There's always going to be issues down there. I mean, we have...you know, we're working now on...it was interesting, because we wanted to do, for example, the wilderness plan, you know, generally, as part of wilderness plan, on the issue of fire, you want fire to have its natural role in an ecosystem. Well, down there, you really don't have that luxury because a lot of the wilderness areas down there have some of the very best remaining sagebrush communities. If those burn up, they're gone. So we actually had...and have actually used...this is another thing that has been done that we just have to kind of grit our teeth in this and understand the bigger picture here. They've suppressed fire in the wilderness areas down there.

They've actually taken bulldozers and built fire lines in the wilderness areas to get ahead of a fire because they wanted to protect some of those last remaining sagebrush stands that are so important. Because once the...because like I said, some of the best sagebrush habitat are within the wilderness areas down there. And if that would be burned up, then Owyhee County would lose some of the best stands of sagebrush they have left. And so we kind of want to see those, you know, they have to get all kinds of different approval, but they have fought fire to protect the wilderness area from fire, to a bigger extent than what they would, say, in the Frank Church or the Gospel Hump, for example, where they'd say, "Okay, it's a forest fire, we're going to let it go."

[00:35:44]

John: Yeah.

[00:35:46]

Craig Gehrke: So we kind of had to...and that's kind of, I think, just one of the realities of the world, is that we don't have the luxury. One thing I'm not sure we're ever going to know again, what a natural fire regime is going to be for many more years. We don't have the luxury of letting it burn now, because I don't want to lose those sagebrush stands, the ranchers don't want to lose them, the wildlife people don't want to lose them. So that means putting a bulldozer line of wilderness and then going to, going back and trying to reclaim it. And the BLM does go back to try to reclaim them. Then, like I said, you've got to think about the bigger picture of, that's the world we're in now, where we have intense, crazy fire seasons.

[00:36:24]

John: Yeah. So that's what my dad does. He works for fire up in the Panhandle.

[00:36:28]

Craig Gehrke: Oh, yeah? Yeah.

[00:36:29]

John: And it's just every year, them trying to find the balance in there. Do you think there will ever be a time where like, you know, those sagebrush stands are expanded enough that they could deal with a fire? Or that's just not the reality?

[00:36:45]

Craig Gehrke: Nope. I think the climate's...I'm very discouraged on where the climate situation is now for Idaho, for southern Idaho, or for the whole state, actually. I think we're spiraling downward.

[00:36:59]

John: Yeah. We're seeing even just less water in the area every year.

[00:37:05]

Craig Gehrke: Yeah. Yeah, I just...and I think the other thing, too, I mean, there are so many more, you know, the vegetation community is under so much more stress now from drought, from fire, from invasive species. You know, things that we never dreamed of...the Wilderness Act, frankly, we just never dreamed up back in the '50s and '60s when they were putting the Wilderness Act together. I just see like...and particularly in the lands that are stressed anyway, like the high desert country, and obviously a lot, you know, harsher climate than say, well, the Panhandle, for example. I can see them being a lot more vulnerable to climate change than perhaps in the mountain forests or....

[00:37:41]

John: Yeah, oh, definitely. And especially the...I feel like there's a lot of...you talked about the sage-grouse and the pygmy rabbits that rely on the sagebrush so much. They're already stressed species.

[00:37:57]

Craig Gehrke: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:37:59]

John: It kind of just cascades down.

[00:38:00]

Craig Gehrke: Yeah.

[00:38:02]

John: Is there any like, as far as you know, and you might...places in kind of the sage steppe that could be expanded to, say, to have stronger sagebrush stands and more effective land for that?

[00:38:19]

Craig Gehrke: Well, I don't know, because it's so...I mean, the BLM does an almost heroic job of trying to reseed sagebrush after a fire. I guess I'm not that familiar with how...what kind of success they've had in the different elevation gradients and stuff like that. I know it's so much harder to get, you know, the low sagebrush...higher elevation, low sagebrush established than it is the lower, big sagebrush established. You'd almost have to talk with the BLM folks and say, you know, how... From the outside, it feels like...it seems like they're holding their finger in a dike that's about ready to burst. They're doing the best they can. But ultimately, we're going to lose a huge chunk of sage-grouse land. But that's also...I'm...I can't say that for sure, because I've not tracked where they've tried to rehab places that have burned or places that have lost some sagebrush before or reclaimed.

Somebody...that's interesting you said that, there was an NPR story just last week I was listening to, where they're doing some rehab after a fire down near Pocatello, I thought. It had been apparently a fire that went from sagebrush into the forest. And the forest stuff was going to be back, you know, rehabbed, if you will, in like 10 years or so. And they said it would take 100 years for the sagebrush down below to come back to what it was beforehand. And as a society, we don't have the attention span for 100 years. So whatever they're going to do to try to get that back, if it means, you know, care and tending for 100 years, I'm extremely discouraged that they're going to do that. They'll run out of money, they'll run out of attention span, they'll have something else go somewhere else that needs their attention.

If that's an indication of what happens after a bad sagebrush burn, that it takes 100 years to come back to what it was, then no, I don't think we're going to have it come

back again. Because I don't know what the climate is going to be. A lot of the forests, you know, like in the Lost River Range and in the Lemhis, you know, have those big Douglas fir forests and those north facing slopes. Those were all remnants of the last Ice Age. Once those are cut, once those die, once those burn up, they ain't coming back again, because it's just too hot and too dry for those big old...they came, they got established under a much cooler weather climate than we're ever going to have again.

[00:40:32]

John: There was...I was listening to a talk when I was up in Coeur d'Alene, they did like this gem symposium. And they were talking about, like even up there, you know, there's still pretty strong water flow. And they've got...like they've got the aquifers refilling every year. But a lot of fish are going to be stranded in these upper mountain streams, because that's the only place that they can remain cool enough to live.

[00:40:57]

Craig Gehrke: Yeah. Yes. Yeah. Well, you've seen the...you've probably heard about the temperature gradient marching up the Salmon River, getting warmer all the time. I think two years ago, it was up to, up to White Bird. It had never been...the temperatures at one point at White Bird, they were that warmer. So a lot of the upper watersheds, which is a point we made in the White Clouds of the Upper East Fork in Herd Creek, in Jerry Creek, a lot of those...you need those. That's the only place that bull trout will survive anymore, or those...if we ever get salmon back, they need to have these cold water habitats to live. And everything downstream, if you will, will be too hot for them.

[00:41:31]

John: It's a pretty intense issue.

[00:41:35]

Craig Gehrke: It's pretty intense, all right. I mean, there's a lot of, you know, the appearance of a lot of things unraveling right now. Very discouraging.

[00:41:42]

John: Yeah, I would agree. And I haven't been working in it for any amount of time. But do you...I mean, you were kind of talking about like, you know, that land, it's going to take, like, hundreds of years for the sagebrush. Do you think that in places with...with the Owyhee Initiative and the people living around there, where they're kind of like, directly affected by it, do you think areas like that, since it's a local issue, might have a higher attention span for that with the community involved?

[00:42:18]

Craig Gehrke: Yeah, I think they would. Because one thing we did well was to go in and bug the BLM to pay attention to stuff. And the BLM loves and needs local constituencies for what they...but they know what they need to do. They know what they ought to be doing. A lot of times, they also have people yelling at them not to do things. So when they have a

group of people, particularly leaders in the county, like that were involved in the Owyhee Initiative, come and say, you know, you really need to pay attention to X, or we really want you to do Y, it carries some weight.

So one of the things I know we've struggled with, there's...the Andrus Center is having a Zoom conference next month, talking about that it's the 50th anniversary of the Sawtooth National Recreation Area. And so they're talking about like, how's it doing; how's it looking like. And one of the most depressing things was, again, for the legislature this year, they wanted to pass a memorial, some folks to recognize it, and it got voted down by the Republican Parties saying, no, because that's public land, the state should be managing it. If we don't even have a constituency for the Sawtooth area, then that tells me that every place we give a damn about needs to develop a really strong, vocal, somewhat obnoxious, local constituency to stand up for it and say, no, this land deserves better and this land deserves our best attention.

Now, whether it's celebrating it or paying attention to it like in the Owyhees, or doing something like in the Panhandle, where, you know, the the folks in Sandpoint or wherever, coming together, say, you know, you really need to be dealing with, you know, snowmobile and grizzly conflicts, or snowmobile and skier conflicts. That's the way I believe things get done, is developing a constituency. And you can't cover the entire state. You pick and choose, you know, we'll...that was one thing the Wilderness Society did on a regular basis, is you have to pick and choose places where you can make a difference, where you can come in and help organize people or help guide the policy development for an area to protect a certain place. Because that kind of tension almost always gets results.

[00:44:20]

John: Well, you can kind of have people there...people that care...

[00:44:23]

Craig Gehrke: Yeah, yeah. So I do think, to answer your question, I do think with a local constituency like the Initiative, the Owyhees will fend far better than it was if they all went back to their individual little corners, if you will, and just advocated for their own interests. When we were doing the Initiative, one thing we had talked about that...we found we spent far more time, conservationists did anyway, trying to figure out how to help the ranchers with their issues than we really did on our own. Because...and that really, to me, made it a collaborative, because I wasn't going to succeed unless they succeeded. They weren't going to succeed unless I considered to be succeeding also. And so we all wanted to see our own interests helped.

And that's why it took so long to sort through, I think, what we actually realistically do. Because, you know, they weren't buying, you know, I'm sure they didn't buy everything the environmentalists said. We weren't buying everything they said that was a problem. But we sorted through things and decided, yeah, there's a legitimate concern here,

whether it was ATVs, or whether it was, you know, access to a grazing, to a water development that was going to be a wilderness kind of stuff. We could see that some of that was a grain of truth and some facts we needed to address and try to solve some problems with versus some other, you know, global things. We thought, we're not going to wade into that, because we can't really solve that.

[00:45:39]

John: That's fair. The audio quality goes down, apparently, in about like 50, 55. Is there any....

[00:45:49]

Craig Gehrke: I'm sorry. What's that?

[00:45:49]

John: The audio recording quality goes down at like 55ish, 50, 55. Is there any stories or things you want to say or talk about?

[00:46:04]

Craig Gehrke: Well, not really. I mean, just we've covered it. Other than, I think the Owyhee Initiative was, I think, one of the best things I undertook under The Wilderness...for The Wilderness Society, because it really got out and tried to...I did my job better after learning and working with local people than I did beforehand. And really digging down and spending what almost fulltime on a single issue for a number of years, really, I think, made me a better advocate for stuff in Idaho. Because I had some view of where other folks were coming from and understood like, okay, they're not all bad guys. Just because we don't agree on some stuff, that doesn't mean that they should be dismissed.

[00:46:43]

John: That's pretty cool. Yeah. I think that's a perspective more people need to have. We can learn from each other.

[00:46:49]

Craig Gehrke: Yeah, yeah.

[00:46:51]

John: Yeah. Thank you a lot for doing this.

[00:46:52]

Craig Gehrke: Sure, no problem.

Jerry Hoagland

[00:00:01]

Amy: Hi. My name is Amy and I'm an interviewer with Shared Stories Lab. It is April 9th, 2022, and we are at the Murphy [Owyhee] County Museum in Murphy, Idaho. I have Jerry Hoagland here with me, a rancher who's lived in the area. Jerry, can you tell me about your experience and what brought you to Idaho?

[00:00:23]

Jerry: I was born here. [Laughs] My dad and mom had a farm south of Melba for about two years, and then my dad had opportunity to buy out one of his brothers at Reynolds Creek, and then they moved to Reynolds Creek, and I've lived there till about 1980. And then we had our river place, across the river from Melba, and then I lived down there till just this last fall; then I moved back to Reynolds.

[00:00:55]

Amy: What is the population of Reynolds?

[00:00:58]

Jerry: Okay, give me a minute: [Laughs] 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16. Probably about, with all the employees and their children and stuff, could be about 20.

[00:01:18]

Amy: Okay. Wow. And it's grown since you were originally from there?

[00:01:24]

Jerry: No, it's actually probably less.

[00:01:26]

Amy: Oh.

[00:01:27]

Jerry: Yes. Neighbors have bought out neighbors and they're all other places and combined their operations, so there's fewer now than what there was.

[00:01:37]

Amy: And just to clarify, I don't think I fully got...20 people total?

[00:01:42]

Jerry: Yes.

[00:01:43]

Amy: Oh. Wow. Oh, my goodness.

[00:01:45]

Jerry: In that valley, Reynolds Creek valley.

[00:01:47]

Amy: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Wow. Would you like...want to speak about your experience with the Owyhee Initiative?

[00:02:00]

Jerry: Okay. I've been kind of involved in it, in the background, from the very beginning. The lead person, Fred Grant, was their consultant, and he was...kind of the idea of making it work. After the meetings, I guess he would be frustrated or something, but he would give me a call and unload on me. So, I knew pretty much what was going on, and how it was progressing and then all the little details. I was really fortunate in that – to be able to have a good rapport with Fred to make sure that...and then to help wherever I could to get it moving forward.

[00:02:46]

Amy: Yeah, absolutely. I think when you can be a, sort of, like the sounding board for somebody...

[00:02:52]

Jerry: That's exactly what I was for Fred, I think, because he would tell me things and then run it by me. And then, like I said, some of the days were really frustrating, trying to get all the people organized together in their original beginnings, and so he could at least vent it out from himself to...and then get refocused....

[00:03:18]

Amy: Recalibrated... [Laughs]

[00:03:19]

Jerry: Recalibrated. [Laughs] Yes, so he could be refocused and then move on to the next meetings and be prepared. I was really fortunate to have him as a good friend, to be able to do that.

[00:03:33]

Amy: What were some of the topics that he would unpack and say, "Jerry, what is your take on this?"

[00:03:41]

Jerry: The idea was to get people from different organizations—environmentalists, landowners, recreationists, and others—to be able to work together, to compromise, to create this Initiative. The main focus was to protect the ranching industry and keep it

viable out on the lands, and to try to convince the recreation and environmentalists that...they were all kind of part of this, too, but they needed to understand how we operate. We need to understand how they operate and then understand how they were recreating and enjoying things.

[00:04:34]

Amy: How it's all interconnected.

[00:04:35]

Jerry: It's all interconnected, and so with that, that early on, trying to get them to...

[00:04:46]

Amy: Talk to each other.

[00:04:46]

Jerry: Talk to each other, and it was quite an ordeal. They'd take them out on the ground, and that was probably the best thing that they could do. Actually, we had a range consultant that was...his name was Chad Gibson, and he...could point to them, the plants, and how grazing affects them and different things like that and how it's either...how it works. Those people learned a lot right away. "Oh, okay. [Laughs] I understand now why...what this is. The cow don't just eat one blade of grass and it's gone forever and ever, the plant. No, it reproduces."

[00:05:31]

Amy: Right, right. Mm-hmm.

[00:05:33]

Jerry: So, that was probably the hardest part to educate them all at the first, and then the recreation at the same time, to understand their impacts. And just cross country and that stuff, and so it really worked. [Laughs]

[00:05:54]

Amy: I think that's really valuable when people who want it and have policies or regulations to actually go to the environment and see the viewpoint of the farmlands.

[00:06:05]

Jerry: On the site.

[00:06:06]

Amy: Yeah.

[00:06:05]

Jerry: On the site, yeah. It wasn't just one site. There's a whole lot of sites. Owyhee County is huge, and we have such a diverse...we have a little bit of everything. [Laughs]

[00:06:17]

Amy: Wow. [Laughs]

[00:06:18]

Jerry: [Laughs] We have high mountain timber, we have low country desert, we have high deserts, we have canyons, we have creeks, we have.... It's a variety of different things, and I think that's what attracts everybody to it. They all want to protect it, but the ranchers are there, and they've probably been protecting it longer than everybody, to get it to what it is, where everybody wants to protect it to that point. You can't always say, you can't hold it in one stage all the time, because nature moves.

[00:06:54]

Amy: Absolutely.

[00:06:55]

Jerry: Yes.

[00:06:56]

Amy: You know, it's always progressing. I also think that's really important that you point out that the ranchers have always had the land's interests, the best interests at heart.

[00:07:04]

Jerry: Yeah, because if they didn't, they wouldn't be in business. [Laughs]

[00:07:06]

Amy: Yeah, it's their livelihood.

[00:07:08]

Jerry: Yeah. [Laughs]

[00:07:08]

Amy: Yeah. Wow. What do you think were some of the issues that the stakeholders and the other people were so surprised to encounter or hear more about, like at the on-site level?

[00:07:24]

Jerry: [Laughs] Since I wasn't on the tour... I don't know. They learned a lot, and it gave them a different perspective than what they had always understood. We were fortunate to have very vocal people that could explain it to them in a way that they could understand. I think that was the key. You'd have, like Brenda Richards, you'd have Chad Gibson, and Inez Jaca was certainly on the... They're very common-sense and know how to explain those terms.

[00:08:01]

Amy: Like in layman's terms. Yeah.

[00:08:02]

Jerry: In layman's terms or into that type of a deal. I think that was the huge success of having that quality of people to make it work.

[00:08:15]

Amy: Wow, that really does make sense because even if you have the message, you have to be able to translate it to who...

[00:08:20]

Jerry: Yes.

[00:08:20]

Amy: Yeah.

[00:08:21]

Jerry: Because I can go out there...and one of the side things we do is with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. They have this deal called Sage-Grouse in the Schools, and they'll load up a bunch of kids from different schools early in the morning like about 4:00...

[00:08:39]

Amy: Oh, that's early. [Laughs]

[00:08:40]

Jerry: Yes. [Laughs] Drive out to where the sage-grouse are at, where they're strutting, and then watch them strut. Then they come back and do another tour and show how the ranchers are operating out there, which usually ends up on my place. So, I start visiting with them, and I don't know how to talk to them, but yet I'll just point out some things, and all of a sudden you can see them click. "I got it. Now I know." I think that's what a lot of people... You gotta figure out where that click is to understand, and where those people on the Initiative knew how to approach that. I guess they could watch and see the reactions to the people, the environmentalists or the recreationists, and kind of, "Okay, this isn't working. I gotta address it a different way."

[00:09:35]

Amy: They have to speak a little bit of their language so that they'll listen to mine.

[00:09:39]

Jerry: Yes. Yeah. That's where Fred kind of knew that, too, from a lot of experience, and he could help guide them on how to start approaching that.

[00:09:51]

Amy: Mm-hmm. I just think that's one of the most... I mean, I just love hearing this because the communication aspect, when each person has their values or their interests, but it overlaps, or there are areas of overlap that maybe aren't being acknowledged or talked about. So, I really think that that really makes a big, big difference of just trying to get people to work together.

[00:10:15]

Jerry: Yes. We're all environmentalists. We're all ranchers, we're all recreationists. [Laughs]

[00:10:22]

Amy: Right. We embody these same roles.

[00:10:25]

Jerry: Same roles.

[00:10:25]

Amy: Yeah.

[00:10:25]

Jerry: [Laughs] Yeah. But to go out and talk to people from a city on recreation, how this works, you have to talk a different language. The same with the recreation talking to the environmentalists. [Laughs] It's two really opposing groups to bring them together like that. That was really amazing, but it's all conversation.

[00:10:50]

Amy: Right. Absolutely. I think that's so important because...not to go into it with preconceived ideas of, "They're going to shut me down," or, "They're not going to listen."

[00:10:58]

Jerry: Right, right, right.

[00:10:59]

Amy: You know, because everyone... I mean, everyone has different viewpoints that should be respected and taken into consideration.

[00:11:06]

Jerry: Yes, yeah. Yeah. [Laughs]

[00:11:08]

Amy: Hmm. Wow. Wow. I'm sure Fred heard so many stories and facilitated those conversations.

[00:11:14]

Jerry: [Laughs] Yes. Yes.

[00:11:14]

Amy: Wow.

[00:11:15]

Jerry: Yeah. Like I said, he'd get high and then he'd get low. [Laughs] You know, depressed and it [Laughs] was kind of... But at least he...

[00:11:25]

Amy: It sounds like you were just such a good, faithful friend to kind of help keep him sane.

[00:11:32]

Jerry: [Laughs] Exactly. But I don't know why me. [Laughs] I'm a nobody. [Laughs] But it was...

[00:11:38]

Amy: Yeah, he must have really thought just... One, he just trusted you and could vent to you.

[00:11:43]

Jerry: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:11:44]

Amy: And then also, you must have had some nuggets of wisdom he kept, being like, "Okay, I see. I didn't connect those two things together."

[00:11:51]

Jerry: Yeah. Right.

[00:11:52]

Amy: Yeah. Because I think sometimes, especially with really complex problems, you have to have that outside perspective, you know?

[00:12:00]

Jerry: Yes. Yeah.

[00:12:01]

Amy: So that was you.

[00:12:02]

Jerry: Yep.

[00:12:02]

Amy: Very cool.

[00:12:02]

Jerry: Yep. Yeah. [Laughs] Yeah.

[00:12:05]

Amy: Hmm. What do you think Fred would... I don't know, what would be his vision for his utopia of everyone being happy? What would make everyone happy?

[00:12:20]

Jerry: Oh, I have no idea. [Laughs] He was a planner, so I think he had an idea what the outcome should be and how to get there to plan. I think that was...

[00:12:40]

Amy: Sounds like he's a big-picture thinker.

[00:12:42]

Jerry: Yes, he's a big-picture thinker, and how to get there, and that was his...

[00:12:48]

Amy: More complex and harder.

[00:12:50]

Jerry: Right. And that was... It was really a challenge to bring that group together and move that forward to what it ended up. That was really remarkable.

[00:13:02]

Amy: What were some of the things that eventually were accomplished with the Owyhee Initiative?

[00:13:08]

Jerry: [Laughs] The wilderness designation. There's some issues with BLM not adhering to what the intent of the law was. We have issues with that, because that was a guaranteed thing, that when we were working... What was unfortunate was that the BLM were there and gave us advice. "Oh yeah, this'll work, but no, you can't do that," different things like that. But when it was all over and done, and we thought we had it all straight, well, then, afterwards, then there's...the bureaucracy got involved and so...

[00:13:52]

Amy: The red tape overruled.

[00:13:52]

Jerry: The red tape.

[00:13:53]

Amy: Yeah.

[00:13:54]

Jerry: I guess one of the positive outcomes is that the ranchers are still here and they're still working together with the environmental groups. We have our...working on travel management plans for the recreation. I think those are the real positive things.

[00:14:10]

Amy: Right. So, out of that came some structure, some building blocks to keep going towards. Okay.

[00:14:16]

Jerry: Right. Right. Like the travel plans. Again, BLM's a little slow on getting those established. It's a process that takes time to develop. It's a lot of public input. One of the other things was to have more law enforcement out there, and Congress has never appropriated funding for that extra law enforcement.

[00:14:42]

Amy: Just to make sure people are following policies, or...?

[00:14:45]

Jerry: Yeah, following policy, following mostly recreation, or even protecting the wilderness so that there's not motorized vehicles willy-nilly running around in there. That's probably one of the... Another thing that did not happen that should have happened was Congress actually fund for the Initiative.

[00:15:09]

Amy: That came up in one of the other interviews. There was a desire for the people of Owyhee County to see some actual enforcement to preserve these lands, and without it being enforced or the police involvement, then it just...the recreational use was getting out of hand and being destructive.

[00:15:28]

Jerry: Right now, we have discussions with BLM pretty regular about it. They promote it. They should have to help...

[00:15:35]

Amy: Absolutely.

[00:15:36]

Jerry: ...defend and make sure that... I mean, people want to go. That's all right, but it's the willy-nilly and the creating new things just for their own [Laughs] mark on the earth, it's not desirable. [Laughs]

[00:15:56]

Amy: Yeah, because there's consequences, and people need to have personal responsibility for respecting the area.

[00:16:02]

Jerry: Yeah.

[00:16:05]

Amy: Would you want to speak about your time as the county commissioner?

[00:16:10]

Jerry: Okay, that's been a long one. [Laughs] I was with Fred way back. This goes back before county commissioner quite a ways. I got involved in the Owyhee Cattlemen's Association as a director, and then moved to president and then that. Then after that, and that was with working with Fred and then Chad Gibson, too. He was our secretary for the Cattlemen's.

[00:16:40]

Amy: Oh, and I'm sorry. Just one question. When you say, "way back," was this like...

[00:16:44]

Jerry: 1990s, early 1990s.

[00:16:47]

Amy: All right. Thank you.

[00:16:48]

Jerry: Yes. One of the big issues at that time was the Owyhee Resource Management Plan, and the way they were going to do that, there was going to be an automatic... I think it said 33% cut of livestock grazing across the board, whether it was good or bad or whatever. Some of them were going to even be 60%, so it angered everybody. And then there was going to be some recreational management and stuff involved in all that, too. So, you had recreationists and cattlemen working together to try to straighten out this resource management plan, to make it viable and workable.

In the end, it... Well, it wasn't really a compromise, it was more to... But anyway, it is what it is. That was signed in 1999, so then... I can't remember what year it was. The county commissioners at that time asked me to be on the Planning and Zoning Commission. So I was on Planning and Zoning for about five years, and then, yeah, that'd

be about right. Then in 2006, then I ran for commissioner and was elected, and I've been commissioner ever since.

[00:18:22]

Amy: Wow, yeah. The journey of getting to that point. Wow.

[00:18:27]

Jerry: So, you've some basic background plus working within these two...even while I was on Planning and Zoning and then even in the earlier years when I first started. So I was pretty well informed on those kind of issues, and so then I can keep bringing that up when we have meetings with the public or with BLM and other agencies and stuff like that. And it's also been an interesting budgeting process, because that's what the commissioners do. [Laughs]

[00:19:02]

Amy: How are the numbers?

[00:19:04]

Jerry: Well, right now we're good, but the state legislature sees all this money out there. "We don't think the county should be carrying this much carryover money," but they don't understand how counties work. We have our high years and low years. The biggest share of our funds don't come from property taxes, it comes from sales tax. We get a huge percent of the sales tax, comes directly to the counties, and so that funds a lot of our operations. That's outside of what the...the highway user's tax for gas tax and stuff. That's a separate one. It's more specifically just for road and bridge. And then our property taxes actually consume about between 28 to 33% of our revenues.

[00:19:57]

Amy: Oh, my goodness. There's a little bit of a discrepancy with the numbers, then yeah.

[00:20:00]

Jerry: Yes. Yeah. And then we get PILT funds for the BLM lands as a sort of a property tax sort of a deal. They're gradually increasing, so we've had...that's helped our revenues a lot. With those revenues from the PILT, we've invested in our buildings, we've invested in our communities. The new building in Homedale is probably our most major purchase we built, and then different things like that.

We'll take the PILT funds and actually use them more for that rather than actually for wages or equipment or anything like that. That has helped. But like I said, the legislature... When counties get their property taxes twice a year... They collect in December and then they collect in June. We have to operate even though our budget starts October 1st. We have to have enough funds for those to carry over for those funds to come in until the next revenues start showing up.

[00:21:22]

Amy: That's quite a lengthy amount of time to...

[00:20:24]

Jerry: Yeah. So we have to build up enough funds to carry all those different departments and wages and other projects we've got going on, and the state sees that throughout the state. All the counties operate this way. And they see this big pot of money. "You're just holding all this money for, what for? We want you to cut you back to only like... have a 30-day..." Then we're broke for two months... [Laughs]

[00:21:50]

Amy: [Laughs]

[00:21:50]

Jerry: ...before our taxes come in. [Laughs]

[00:21:52]

Amy: What am I supposed to do?

[00:21:53]

Jerry: What are we supposed to do?

[00:21:54]

Amy: Yeah.

[00:21:54]

Jerry: Lay off everybody? [Laughs] Yeah.

[00:21:58]

Amy: It's interesting how they look and only see that, without considering all the outside factors and the timeframe as well.

[00:22:04]

Jerry: Exactly. Exactly. It's really frustrating. [Laughs]

[00:22:07]

Amy: Hmm. Wow.

[00:22:09]

Jerry: So far, we've beat them back, but there are some... Last year they passed a property tax deal. It was really scary, but actually the way the law was written it actually increased

the property taxes in Owyhee County [Laughs] a little bit, which was not the intent of the law. They're not taking input from the people that...

[00:22:37]

Amy: It most impacts.

[00:22:38]

Jerry: ...are most impacted.

[00:22:41]

Amy: Which I think is just a really intriguing point of making decisions in which you don't have to have anything to do with a trickle-down effect of those consequences.

[00:22:52]

Jerry: We have to provide those services. We have to, by law. But a lot of people, when they get their property tax bills, they don't realize a portion of that goes for schools, fire, library, go for a cemetery, they go right down the list. There's a whole bunch of those little taxing districts that are, when you all add it up, is a whole lot more than what the country is collecting.

[00:23:17]

Amy: Right.

[00:23:18]

Jerry: Yeah.

[00:23:19]

Amy: So many different aspects.

[00:23:21]

Jerry: Yeah. [Laughs] But we were targeted, so... [Laughs]

[00:23:25]

Amy: [Laughs] Sometimes it feels like that, like just wearing a target.

[00:23:30]

Jerry: Uh-huh.

[00:23:30]

Amy: [Laughs]

[00:23:31]

Jerry: But over the years since I've been commissioner...in 2007, when I started, we were in really good shape. We had good funds for carryover and stuff. Well, then, 2008 that's when things kind of turned...

[00:23:46]

Amy: Recession.

[00:23:47]

Jerry: Recession. And so we cut our budgets just as much as we possibly could and tried to maintain our staff. We still had to lay off some staff, but then once things turned around, then we could start rehiring those and bring them back in. So we're at a stage now where we're really worried about, with the legislature's... We got all this money, but things could turn around, and if we got stuck on... They're going to support us, take away our property taxes and support us with sales tax. That means if this recession comes, people aren't going to buy as much. There's not going to be as much sales tax, so we're... [Laughs] Then what do we do? Start laying off employees because we can't provide all of them, and the people just have to stand in line waiting for their business. [Laughs]

[00:24:42]

Amy: Yeah. I mean, it just sounds like a real Catch-22.

[00:24:44]

Jerry: It is.

[00:24:45]

Amy: And so you're kind of... You don't want to put all your eggs in this basket because that basket could be obsolete or...

[00:24:52]

Jerry: I know it.

[00:24:53]

Amy: ...or get stolen. [Laughs]

[00:24:54]

Jerry: I have to admit, the property taxes are probably the most unfair taxes there are. Really.

[00:24:59]

Amy: Hands down.

[00:25:00]

Jerry: Hand downs. But it's there, it's what we use. The sales tax is a good tax, but if you're going to depend on that and ups and downs, then there's...

[00:25:12]

Amy: It's volatile.

[00:25:12]

Jerry: It's volatile. Yeah. [Laughs]

[00:25:17]

Amy: Nobody likes that. We want things to be at least a little bit of security and certainty.

[00:25:23]

Jerry: Yes. Other than that, what have I accomplished? Roads were a big issue when I ran, and I've done quite a bit. There's still a lot, but road building is expensive. With the state's extra monies now they're going to put towards road and bridge, we're going to try to do a couple bridges, and hopefully we can do some more roads. Yeah, it's expensive. [Laughs]

[00:26:00]

Amy: What are some of the most pricey things that people would be surprised to hear cost so much, that goes into road building?

[00:26:09]

Jerry: Actually, it's the distance, and then the lack of materials, finding materials that qualify for a road base and all of that stuff is pretty difficult to find. To me, the standard for some of the roads...

[00:26:30]

Amy: Yeah, you can't skimp for safety.

[00:26:31]

Jerry: You can't really skimp, and then you want the road to last for 50 years plus, so you have to build a good base.

[00:26:39]

Amy: Absolutely, because without that foundation, what's the point of doing something just halfway? [Laughs]

[00:26:45]

Jerry: I know it. I know it. [Laughs] So anyway, that's kind of one of the issues. Equipment and labor has increased in cost, and then we're stretched so thin between all the miles we have for each district here in the county. We have two different country road districts, and there's a lot of miles of dirt roads that have to be maintained and yet we're... Increased traffic is probably four times what it was five years ago, that we're getting an awful lot of traffic on that backcountry roads and stuff like that. We can't hardly keep up with those, let alone...

[00:27:32]

Amy: Like a new...longer distances.

[00:27:35]

Jerry: Yes. When the price of fuel right now is pretty expensive, but what it does, more people will recreate locally rather than travel, like the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, or the ocean, or places like that. So I anticipate we're going to see an awful lot more traffic locally here on our roads, so it's going to be a bear to keep up.

[00:28:05]

Amy: Yeah, absolutely. What would you want recreationists to know about this area in terms of respecting the land or...what would the people of Owyhee County want people to know?

[00:28:17]

Jerry: Respect their private property. Don't do the cookies and stuff in the middle of the road. [Laughs] That's an insult.

[00:28:26]

Amy: Stop. [Laughs]

[00:28:26]

Jerry: Absolute total insult. If you want to leave your mark, go do it on your driveway. [Laughs] Then you can look at it every day. [Laughs]

[00:28:33]

Amy: [Laughs] I mean, we have greater significance and value.

[00:28:38]

Jerry: Yeah. But I think the number one thing is respect the land, respect our private property. Yeah.

[00:28:47]

Amy: All right. Is there anything else you would like to include at all about your experiences living here, how you've seen it change through the years?

[00:28:55]

Jerry: The biggest is the recreational impact, more and more recreation there is, this really...since the COVID thing started. Recreation has been a big, big issue in Owyhee County. It's just overwhelming. Silver City used to be a nice, quiet little town in the summertime. Every day of the week it's just.. We're even having traffic jams in Silver City.

[00:29:24]

Amy: And it's just...the roads aren't built for that congestion.

[00:29:26]

Jerry: They weren't built for that congestion. It's a safety issue, too. If somebody gets up there with a serious heart issue or a medical issue or something, broken leg or whatever, and it depends on the weather conditions whether Life Flight can fly in and get them out, but if they're...have to transport them out, with the congestion of the traffic, it alarmed a lot of people here [Laughs] who were on holidays.

[00:29:53]

Amy: Yeah, but sirens might be going, but you're not moving an inch. [Laughs]

[00:29:56]

Jerry: Yeah, you're not moving an inch. [Laughs]

[00:29:57]

Amy: That's really, really scary when you put it that way.

[00:30:00]

Jerry: There was the Memorial Day two years ago. It was actually a traffic jam. They couldn't get in and they couldn't get out at Silver City. It [Laughs] was that bad. So many people, you know? We gotta go. It's close, and... That was a scary situation for those people there. Since then, we've worked to create a little bypass so they can actually make a loop through town and get back out, so that would help relieve some of the pressure, but there's still some other issues. We're trying to keep it...with the amount of cars, traffic, and the UTVs and stuff that go into the town, it's difficult to actually enjoy the uniqueness of that historic town.

[00:30:47]

Amy: Right. Some of the charm and features... People want to enjoy the outdoors, but then you go there, and it's filled with people. You can't get any of that peace and quiet or soak up the beauty and the scenery, you know?

[00:31:00]

Jerry: Exactly. Usually if you want to stay till about 6:00, 7:00 in the evening, then things quiet down.

[00:31:07]

Amy: Quiet down.

[00:31:08]

Jerry: And that's about the only time you can really, actually enjoy the uniqueness of the town.
[Laughs]

[00:31:14]

Amy: Which is nuts because it's evening by then.

[00:31:17]

Jerry: [Laughs] I know it. You've only got a couple hours.

[00:31:19]

Amy: Yeah.

[00:31:20]

Jerry: But it's... [Laughs] That's the way it is.

[00:31:23]

Amy: Yeah, very true.

[00:31:27]

Jerry: That's about it, I guess, on commissioner-ing that I know of. Got involved in a lot of issues over the years with county commission.

[00:31:38]

Amy: You saw lots of adventures and been the sounding board and tried to advocate for the people.

[00:31:44]

Jerry: Yes. Yeah. We're re-zoning in our county through Planning and Zoning, and so we've been holding meetings. We start at Homedale, then through the Marsing, Wilson area, and then the Murphy area, and then Oreana, and then Grand View, and then Bruneau, and then over by this side of Hammett on the Owyhee County side. It's quite interesting what people think, of how they want to see their lands develop. The first ones was...87% said, "Keep it in ag, protect that ag." The next ones, they weren't so much on that. It was more like a 72 to 75%, and then you get over to Grand View, then they want

a lot. I think it was like 50% want it opened up for development. But they have not seen the development like we see here in the Treasure Valley.

[00:32:42]

Amy: Right. The perspective is just so different.

[00:32:45]

Jerry: So different. So once we get one section done, then the commissioners approve it and then we move on to the next one. And I can't believe people that participated in the zoning, and we did what they wanted, come back, "Nope, that's not what we wanted." I [Laughs] can't believe it.

[00:33:06]

Amy: That wasted our time, our funds, our energy. [Laughs]

[00:33:08]

Jerry: Yes, yes. [Laughs] We just...

[00:33:11]

Amy: Why did they change their minds?

[00:33:12]

Jerry: I don't know what happened. Something changed and so... Anyway, we're getting a lot of complaints from that end of the county that's... [Laughs] Okay. You had your opportunity. We're stuck... We'll try to accommodate you as best we can, but...

[00:33:28]

Amy: It's a little too late.

[00:33:29]

Jerry: You had your voice several times. In fact, I think on the Homedale one we had...how many different meetings just for public input? Four or five different public meetings, let alone prior to the commissioners approving a public meeting. [Laughs]

[00:33:47]

Amy: I guess it just goes to the saying that you can't please everyone.

[00:33:50]

Jerry: Exactly. [Laughs] Exactly. You can't please...

[00:33:51]

Amy: [Laughs]

[00:33:53]

Jerry: They're all like Lincoln. [Laughs] You can only please some of...

[00:33:54]

Amy: There's no pleasing everyone.

[00:33:55]

Jerry: ...the people part of the time and some of the people not at all. [Laughs]

[00:34:00]

Amy: Yeah. There's not much more you can do. I'm a one person. From your perspective, one person.

[00:34:07]

Jerry: Yeah, so anyway. That's probably been the most difficult. Another really difficult... is employees, employee situations and stuff. That's a hard...difficult.

[00:34:19]

Amy: Like keeping people employed?

[00:34:21]

Jerry: Keeping people in place, or they got issues, and bringing them forward or they're complaining about somebody else. That's the hardest job.

[00:34:31]

Amy: You know, you're trying to keep up morale, but then also you can't be... You don't want to just let the gossip fester and...

[00:34:39]

Jerry: Right. Right.

[00:34:40]

Amy: Brings people down.

[00:34:40]

Jerry: That's probably the biggest issue as a commissioner, yeah, keeping your employees happy. [Laughs]

[00:34:50]

Amy: Mm-hmm. Wow. Well, thank you so much for sharing your perspectives and your thoughts. There anything else before we go?

[00:35:01]

Jerry: You talked about sagebrush?

[00:35:03]

Amy: Oh, yes. Excuse me there. What were your experiences with sagebrush, if you'd like to share those?

[00:35:09]

Jerry: Okay. [Laughs] On our home at Reynolds when I was little, across the road from the house were these sagebrush, which was below a ditch, so they got kind of naturally wild. They were as high as the door here.

[00:35:21]

Amy: Oh, my goodness.

[00:35:22]

Jerry: The big, tall ones. It was kind of neat to work through that little forest of sagebrush just across the road from my house. I never thought much about it, you know, until later years, and so in ag, in high school, we had to go to the University of Idaho for a state competition. I got up there and I got sick, and I could not figure out why. It was more of a homesick type of thing, but as soon as I got home, I could smell the sagebrush, and I was home. That was... I had no idea how much sagebrush meant to me at that time. Just the smell of it. Because people are allergic to it. Yeah, I've got a letter from...a neighbor that ranches that when sagebrush is in certain states, they just can't hardly breathe or see, their eyes run, and everything.

[00:36:10]

Amy: Mm-hmm. But for you it's just that homey...

[00:36:14]

Jerry: It's that homey...

[00:36:14]

Amy: ...nostalgia.

[00:36:15]

Jerry: Yes.

[00:36:16]

Amy: Yeah. How would you describe the smell, as just fresh?

[00:36:20]

Jerry: It's got two different smells. It's got the bitter smell, but then after a rainstorm it has a totally different, really pungent odor. It is so sweet. I just love it. But a lot of people... "Oh, I can't breathe. I can't tolerate it," [Laughs] but it's neat. I like it.

[00:36:39]

Amy: Yeah. For the people who have just that positive association, especially with the home and being home and knowing you're home after you've traveled somewhere else, it's really, really special.

[00:36:51]

Jerry: Yes.

[00:36:51]

Amy: Very cool.

[00:36:52]

Jerry: I've noticed that other times when we'd travel away and then come back, yes, I like that sagebrush. It's got a life cycle, sagebrush does. All plants do, and we're at that late... and then that's where the fires come in and wipe out... It's also the invasive annual grasses that are taking out an awful lot of the sagebrush. We're working on a project now to try to stop some of those invasives from coming in. It'll take out the sagebrush and everything else, and then we're losing that habitat and that benefit for this area.

[00:37:34]

Amy: Yeah, like the ecosystem's just disrupted.

[00:37:36]

Jerry: Right. But sometimes it can get so thick in a pasture that then you have to go back and kind of set it back a little bit and allow some other plants to get back into it, too.

[00:37:49]

Amy: Right, so it can't hog up everything.

[00:37:51]

Jerry: Yeah, so you gotta balance... You gotta have it, but yet there's places where it kind of needs to be rejuvenated. That's the way I look at it.

[00:38:02]

Amy: Is it referred to as a watering plant or gives water?

[00:38:07]

Jerry: How do you mean?

[00:38:09]

Amy: Affiliated with water, like absorption?

[00:38:12]

Jerry: It takes a lot of water away from the grasses and stuff. Yeah, it does.

[00:38:15]

Amy: The other grasses that need it.

[00:38:17]

Jerry: It takes quite a bit away from them. When it gets too dominant, then you do a treatment on it whether it's a prescribed fire or mechanical or whatever, then that opens it up for the other grasses to come. But it's like a life cycle. Eventually it'll come back in, and the grasses, it's...

[00:38:38]

Amy: It's very resilient.

[00:38:39]

Jerry: It's very resilient. Yeah. Unless, like the Soda Fire...was so intense, so hot, it took out all the seed source for distances. So, it's going to take a long time before the sagebrush ever gets back into those.

[00:38:54]

Amy: When was the Soda Fire? When was the Soda Fire?

[00:38:58]

Jerry: 2015, I believe it was.

[00:39:02]

Amy: Wow, and we're...

[00:39:02]

Jerry: 2015, 2016, I can't remember which year.

[00:39:05]

Amy: And still seeing the effects of how much it wiped out. Wow.

[00:39:08]

Jerry: Yes. Yeah. Yeah, it was pretty massive. And then it allowed a lot of the invasive grasses to further expand. Then, without treatments on those, there will never be sagebrush come back, because...

[00:39:23]

Amy: Quite like it was.

[00:39:24]

Jerry: Yeah. Quite like it was. Unless we can get a control on it. Those controls are expensive, but to keep it from spreading throughout the farther distances, we need to kind of hold it in check. Try to see if we can move it back a little bit.

[00:39:42]

Amy: How does one get a control on the sagebrush?

[00:39:49]

Jerry: Prescribed fire.

[00:39:50]

Amy: Okay. Sorry about that.

[00:39:52]

Jerry: Or a...and actually there's an experimental watershed in Reynolds, and they were going to do a controlled burn on some of their experiments, a larger-scale burn. It was supposed to be done in the fall of the same time of the year that the Soda Fire, so everything stopped. [Laughs] So they couldn't do the controlled burn. But that spring, the BLM—because they're the ones that know how to burn—come in and did what they call a blackline, and put a blackline down around where the perimeter of...where the fire was going to be. That was so neat to watch. In the spring is when they did it, so it was a cool season burn. The grass has come back thicker than ever...

[00:40:41]

Amy: Oh, my goodness.

[00:40:42]

Jerry: ...and the sagebrush started coming back again. Now we've got sagebrush up about like this. So the plan is now to burn it next year in the fall, so they'll have to go back and re-burn all this sagebrush. But it was so resilient, it come back in a cool season burn, so if you wanted to set it back, that's what I would do, but to get enough fuel to carry that is kind of probably the issue because everything's kind of green, and unless there's forage left over from last year that would carry a fire.

[00:41:16]

Amy: Yeah. It just seems like there's so many different factors to take into consideration, no matter what your intention is, nature can intervene or have a mind of her own.

[00:41:26]

Jerry: Right. And fire is the least expensive and probably the most effective because all plants need fire, really, to survive. Quaking aspen, they thrive. We haven't had a fire for so long now, the quakies are in trouble. It's quite interesting how... I'm kind of a fire promoter. [Laughs]

[00:41:49]

Amy: Yeah, absolutely. I heard another story promoting the fire to keep the sagebrush kind of at bay because it's just so abundant and gets so dominant in the area.

[00:42:01]

Jerry: Right. Right. Like I say, the plants that can absorb the more water, the more the aggressive ones outperform the others. Juniper is the same way. We do a lot of juniper treatments to kind of set them back. A fire is really what naturally kept them back, and I think the same with the sagebrush. We fought to keep the fires from...all these years [Laughs] and now we're getting big, big, major fires because everything is old growth, and so combustible at this stage. That's why we're having all these huge, massive fires like we do.

[00:42:42]

Amy: Wow. It just seems like there's so much kind of... What I hear is just kind of irony, and if you've maintained the fires, then you won't be ravaged by the fire. So that's just such a...

[00:42:52]

Jerry: Yes.

[00:42:52]

Amy: ...interesting viewpoint that I had not considered before.

[00:42:55]

Jerry: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:42:56]

Amy: Thank you. Wow.

[00:42:57]

Jerry: Yeah. No, that's... Yeah, I promote fire. [Laughs] Not that I'm lighting fires, but I promote...

[00:43:02]

Amy: No, no, no. [Laughs]

[00:43:03]

Jerry: Whenever they can do it, do it, because it's...

[00:43:06]

Amy: Safe and controlled.

[00:43:07]

Jerry: It's safely controlled, and I've watched BLM do it. They're an amazing group. They understand how it works and they know how to keep it from getting hot. They can do a prescribed fire like... It is fun to watch, because sometimes they say the scarier the fire the better the burn. [Laughs]

[00:43:26]

Amy: Wow. [Laughs]

[00:43:28]

Jerry: But they're just on that edge of that scary.

[00:43:31]

Amy: Right. They're the experts.

[00:43:33]

Jerry: They're the experts.

[00:43:33]

Amy: Leave it to the experts.

[00:43:34]

Jerry: You leave it to the experts.

[00:43:35]

Amy: Yeah. [Laughs]

[00:43:35]

Jerry: But no, it's fun to watch them. [Laughs]

[00:43:38]

Amy: Wow. Okay, awesome. All right. Well, anything else at all?

[00:43:45]

Jerry: No, not that I know of. Other than, like I said, I think I've talked about the invasives, what they need. It's a serious...probably one of the most serious things in the rangeland that we're facing here, at least on this side of the county. The others haven't got that yet, with the medusahead and the Ventenata, but, yeah.

[00:44:07]

Amy: All right.

[00:44:08]

Jerry: I don't know anything else, I guess.

[00:44:09]

Amy: [Laughs] Well, I thank you so much for your time and interest in our project. Thank you so much, Jerry, for joining me today.

[00:44:15]

Jerry: Yes. To talk about the Initiative, that was fun.

[00:44:17]

Amy: Awesome. Thank you.

[00:44:18]

Jerry: Yeah. Yep. Okay, Amy.

[short addition]

[00:00:00]

Jerry: ...very obvious.

[00:00:02]

Amy: And so, the first year when they did the blackline...

[00:00:05]

Jerry: Okay, the blackline. They did it with a flamethrower on the back of a pickup, and they would go along there and get it started. They had a dozer there in case it got away, but the humidity and all this was high enough that they could control it and keep it just local right along the edge. After that burn in the spring, and as things greened up later that year, then I knew there was sage-grouse in there, but we seen a lot of sage-grouse working on that new growth, on the new grass that had got burned, and it was down. They were thriving on that. It was really neat to watch right after the fire...or that little blackline fire that brought those birds back out.

[00:00:51]

Amy: Yeah, brought back new life.

[00:00:52]

Jerry: The new life, and it was just so delicious to them that they were really doing good on that. Then, like the other, as the sagebrush started coming back in there a little bit, too, but just that little strip of...it couldn't have been like 40 feet wide. Some places it'd go up the hill a little ways, but that was all right. Most of it was just to get a 40-foot barrier right down along the road so that they could control when they did do the prescribed fire.

[00:01:22]

Amy: Wow, I just love thinking of the sage-grouse just recognizing that they can now feed here and that it's new and rejuvenated.

[00:01:31]

Jerry: And they still had cover. They could escape across the road into the higher brush and the grasses, and yet they could go back out there and feed. Yeah, it was pretty neat [Laughs] to watch.

[00:01:41]

Amy: Absolutely. [Laughs]

[00:01:42]

Jerry: Yeah. [Laughs]

John and Sue Jones and Tim Freeman

[00:00:01]

Anika: So I'm here with Tim Freeman and John Jones.

[00:00:05]

John Jones: Uh-huh.

[00:00:05]

Anika: Nice to meet you, folks. My name is Anika.

[00:00:07]

Tim Freeman: Nice meeting you.

[00:00:08]

Anika: And yeah, our project is...we're called...we do the Shared Stories Lab. And we just came out here to kind of hear some people's stories. I'm from Idaho, but I was raised in Boise. And so I'm not too familiar...

[00:00:18]

John Jones: What? I was...

[00:00:18]

Anika: ...with a lot of the experiences. And I'm just interested to hear.

[00:00:23]

John Jones: I was born in Boise, so I guess...

[00:00:24]

Anika: Oh, wonderful.

[00:00:24]

John Jones: ...that's okay.

[00:00:26]

Anika: Yeah. Yeah. So I'm just kind of interested in hearing about your folks' background. And yeah, just tell me about yourselves and your families and where you're from.

[00:00:35]

Tim Freeman: Fire away, Mr. John.

[00:00:37]

John Jones: Well, I grew up in Jordan Valley. My grandfather was a doctor there. He went there in 1903. No, no, he went there like, 1910. He graduated from Iowa University as MD in 1903. Third in his class.

[00:00:56]

Anika: Wow.

[00:00:56]

John Jones: And he had not finished high school when he went to college.

[00:01:01]

Anika: Nice.

[00:01:02]

Tim Freeman: Wow.

[00:01:02]

John Jones: And he had a teacher's certificate, but he hadn't finished high school. And he, I think, bought property in Owyhee County in 1938, maybe. And that was on South Mountain. It was the old Three Forks Fort grazing ground on top of the mountain, on South Mountain. And yeah, it's been an interesting and eventful life.

[00:01:39]

Anika: So have you lived here your whole life then?

[00:01:41]

John Jones: No, I lived all over...kind of all over the nation.

[00:01:46]

Anika: Yeah?

[00:01:46]

John Jones: I spent a winter in California and a summer in and a part of a winter in Delaware. And I lived in Everett, Washington for a little while. I worked in Sun Valley for a year and a half or two years.

[00:02:01]

Anika: Lovely.

[00:02:02]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:02:02]

Anika: And how'd you land in Owyhee County?

[00:02:05]

John Jones: Well, I knew I was coming home to Idaho. And I found a piece of ground on a corner down there that I could afford to buy. And I bought that and eventually built a house there, which I never had a building permit for.

[Laughter]

[00:02:25]

Anika: Did you ever get caught?

[00:02:27]

John Jones: I guess, but they didn't say much. They took...

[00:02:30]

Anika: That's good.

[00:02:31]

John Jones: They looked it all over and said, "Oh." Then the electrical inspector was almost the same way. He said, "Well, you need this grounded better." And that's all. But then I...

[Laughter]

[00:02:48]

Anika: That's all he cares about.

[00:02:48]

John Jones: ...I knew how to do that stuff. See?

[00:02:50]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:02:52]

John Jones: Yeah. And I'm a carpenter. But then I was a cowboy and a miner, too. So...

[00:02:56]

Anika: Oh, yeah.

[00:02:57]

John Jones: All kinds of things. Help, you know. You learn stuff. As I'm working in the mine, I worked with an old miner that we hand sharpened all of our tools, picks and bars and stuff. So I learned how to temper metal as I went along. Yeah, it's pretty interesting.

[00:03:19]

Anika: Did you work in mining here in Idaho or somewhere else?

[00:03:21]

John Jones: In South Mountain.

[00:03:23]

Anika: Oh, okay.

[00:03:25]

John Jones: The Sunshine Mining Company leased it, then we cleaned out a tunnel, and they got it all so they could prospect it. They drilled holes and got the samples. And out of 120 holes, they only had like seven that didn't have metal in them.

[00:03:47]

Anika: Oh.

[00:03:47]

John Jones: But it wasn't, any of it, really rich, you know. Yep. And then part of South Mountain is pretty heavy in gold. And Silver City was mostly gold, but they found all kinds of other stuff, too, antimony, copper, lead, some zinc, silver, a lot of silver. That's why it's called Silver City. Yep. Curious world.

[00:04:14]

Anika: Yes.

[00:04:14]

John Jones: And when I was 16, there was a US Geological Survey. People...my folks had a store in Jordan Valley that my granddad, his office was in the back of. And the US Geological Survey had a team in Owyhee County and Malheur County, and I said, oh, well...I was a smart kid. I said, "Oh, well, this country is all mined out years ago." And that head geologist for the US Geological team said, "Son, there was 7% of the minerals and metals taken out of this country. All the rest of it, 93% is still here." And they've had silver...DeLamar working for years. But other than that, they really haven't done a whole lot. And I don't think they even knew about that, US Geological Survey team. I don't think they knew. But there was a...right there at DeLamar, there was a well driller, decided he wanted to prospect. He had a rotary well drill rig in right there above DeLamar. He drilled into what he said was the biggest quicksilver mine in America.

[00:05:37]

Tim Freeman: Well.

[00:05:39]

John Jones: But it was froze when he had his well rig there. So it was holding it up. And the oldtimers told him, get your rig off of that meadow, because it's going down if you don't.

[00:05:53]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:05:54]

John Jones: And he didn't pay any attention. And he spent two weeks and two D9s getting it out of there, too.

[00:06:02]

Anika: Oh, man.

[00:06:05]

John Jones: He went from Jordan Valley to Grand View, Idaho, Nelson, and he worked there for years. He's the guy that drilled a whole bunch of those artesian wells in South Falls over there. He made a living there for years.

[00:06:17]

Tim Freeman: Oh, really?

[00:06:18]

Anika: Huh.

[00:06:19]

John Jones: Artesian...Grand View has got a whole bunch of artesian wells. And some of them around Oreana are hot. There's a lot of hot water in Owyhee County, too. But then, the...I've got a book on it, too, the volcanic action under Yellowstone Park came right across the United States right here. This is part of it, right here.

[00:06:50]

Anika: Uh-huh.

[00:06:52]

John Jones: And still is.

[00:06:53]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:06:54]

John Jones: And that's a super volcano if it ever blows. But it's actually cooling off right now.

[00:06:58]

Anika: Yeah?

[00:06:59]

John Jones: Yeah.

[00:07:00]

Anika: I didn't know that.

[00:07:02]

John Jones: Good, yeah? Well, I heard that...they'd studied it, you know.

[00:07:05]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:07:06]

John Jones: And they're studying it all the time.

[00:07:07]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:07:07]

John Jones: There's a bunch of panicked people that want to tell you it's about to blow.

[00:07:11]

Anika: It's about to, yeah.

[00:07:11]

John Jones: But it's cooling off.

[00:07:13]

Anika: Huh. Well, that's good to know.

[00:07:15]

John Jones: Yeah, it is.

[00:07:16]

Anika: It's comforting to me.

[00:07:17]

John Jones: Yeah. Well, we're not...

[00:07:19]

Tim Freeman: Glad it kept moving.

[00:07:20]

John Jones: ...we're not downwind of it anyway.

[Laughter]

[00:07:24]

John Jones: And actually, you don't know it until you get past 60. We're not here very long. Our time, our life, is just about that quick. It's kind of like the old guy said, you know, it's just about like a sparrow flying through a room with the windows open. You know where it came from and you...but you don't know where he went or what he did while he was there. That's the way life is. It's not much.

[00:07:54]

Anika: Yeah. I like that little saying.

[00:07:58]

John Jones: Exactly. Oh, I have one other thing you'd really like.

[00:08:02]

Anika: Yeah, sure.

[00:08:03]

John Jones: You can't make me look bad.

[00:08:06]

Anika: Why would we...well, we don't want to make you look bad.

[00:08:09]

John Jones: Nobody can make me look bad. I can't make you look bad.

[00:08:12]

Anika: Oh, yeah.

[00:08:14]

John Jones: No, I can't make you look bad. Nobody can make somebody else look bad.

[00:08:18]

Anika: Uh-huh.

[00:08:18]

John Jones: That's all on us.

[00:08:20]

Anika: This is true. You got to own it.

[00:08:22]

John Jones: Yeah. Well, and then you can just figure it out any way you want to, but you...nobody can make you look bad.

[00:08:30]

Anika: This is true.

[00:08:32]

Anika: This is good wisdom.

[00:08:32]

John Jones: So the better manners and the nicer you are to people and the better you get along, the better off you are. Because you're not making yourself look bad.

[00:08:41]

Anika: Yeah. Well, I like that. Because that's what my motto is, too, is just be kind.

[00:08:45]

John Jones: Yeah.

[00:08:45]

Anika: Yeah. I like "be kind." And that's what...

[00:08:47]

John Jones: Oh.

[00:08:47]

Anika: ...that's why we're excited, because we just heard that everybody out here is so nice and easy to talk to.

[00:08:51]

John Jones: Don't look back, they're gaining on us, too.

[Laughter]

[00:08:57]

Anika: Well, what about you? Do you want to tell me a little bit about yourself?

[00:09:01]

Tim Freeman: Well, I met this guy right here.

[00:09:02]

Anika: Yeah. How do you folks know each other?

[00:09:05]

Tim Freeman: I think I was a teenager, and he was buying logs, when you started building your house.

[00:09:13]

Anika: Huh.

[00:09:13]

Tim Freeman: And then...

[00:09:13]

John Jones: Well, I was built a garage.

[00:09:15]

Tim Freeman: And then he wanted to put wood shingles on. This is a very interesting man you're talking to. He goes, "We can make these shingles with a hay baler." And I said, "What the heck." And so him and my dad, they pull this baler in, and he puts a shaving blade off of a...what was that, off a snowplow or something, wasn't it? A cutting edge.

[00:09:38]

John Jones: A grader blade, yep.

[00:09:40]

Tim Freeman: Put a cutting edge at the end of the plunger on the baler, and you gear it down...you idle your tractor down real slowly, it's running the baler, and as your chunk of wood goes through, it shaves off the shingle at the bottom.

[00:09:51]

Anika: Okay. Yeah.

[00:09:53]

Tim Freeman: And he made all his shingles that way. But then I think John was cowboying in Challis, and he met my wife first when she was just a, like a three-year-old, maybe.

[00:10:06]

John Jones: Yep, yep. Yep, yep.

[00:10:08]

Tim Freeman: You'd been...you was riding for cows or something and seen them.

[00:10:11]

John Jones: Yep, yep. Yep, yep. And she was all alone. I don't know, they left her. And I was riding this horse that you couldn't be in the crowd with him, he was so nutty. And I just picked her up and got right on and he thought that was okay. Who knows?

[00:10:31]

Tim Freeman: You took her back to her folks, right?

[00:10:32]

John Jones: Yep.

[00:10:33]

Anika: And so she was lost out there?

[00:10:34]

John Jones: Yep.

[00:10:34]

Anika: Oh, man.

[00:10:36]

John Jones: She was...her grandmother was, oh, I don't know, maybe half a mile away, a mile.

[00:10:42]

Anika: How'd you...did you figure out how she got lost?

[00:10:44]

John Jones: Yeah. She...

[00:10:46]

Anika: She just...

[00:10:46]

John Jones: She told me she was going to find her folks and they'd gone someplace and left her with her grandmother, and she wanted to go be with her folks. And she started down the road and...

[00:10:58]

Anika: She said, "I'm going."

[00:10:59]

John Jones: Yeah. She's still like that.

[00:11:02]

Tim Freeman: Yep. That she is.

[00:11:23]

John Jones: She went...

[00:11:24]

Anika: How did you...how did you come upon the coincidence that that ended up being your wife? Or how did you figure this out?

[00:11:30]

Tim Freeman: I went to Challis, and we married up and then introduced her to John and Sue. And John remembered her family picnicking up..and that was at Slate Creek?

[00:11:44]

John Jones: Yeah.

[00:11:46]

Tim Freeman: And he said, "Well, I picked up that little girl. Yep, and that was you." And so this is right at almost 20 years later.

[00:11:55]

John Jones: Yeah. More than that.

[00:11:57]

Anika: Wow.

[00:12:00]

Tim Freeman: How long did you cowboy in Challis?

[00:12:02]

John Jones: Oh, three years, I think. Three years. One of the buckaroo bosses that I worked for had appendicitis and he didn't want to go spend money on the doctors. So he operated on himself and sewed himself up. And everything was a success, except he didn't have sense enough to take some antibiotics that he would have given a cow. And he got an infection that killed him. Yep.

[00:12:42]

Anika: Man, to think you could sew up your own appendix, and then the only thing that would get you after that is the infection. That's just...

[00:12:51]

John Jones: Horrible.

[00:12:51'

Anika: That's horrible. Yeah. That's so tough.

[00:12:55]

John Jones: I got a neighbor that was working for somebody buckarooing down...and he's a good friend, too. And he sewed up his leg and stitched it all up and put it back together. And

he was talking to a doctor, and the doctor said, "Oh, well, you did that yourself. You're a cowboy! "

[Laughter]

[00:13:22]

Anika: Oh, my gosh. And so you were mentioning that your father was a doctor.

[00:13:26]

John Jones: My grandfather.

[00:13:27]

Anika: Your grandfather was a doctor. Was he a doctor for this area? Or where was he?

[00:13:30]

John Jones: He was in Jordan Valley.

[00:13:31]

Anika: In Jordan Valley?

[00:13:32]

John Jones: Yeah, yeah.

[00:13:33]

Anika: Okay. Yeah. And what was it like growing up with... were you growing up here while he was a doctor in Jordan Valley?

[00:13:40]

John Jones: No, we lived in Jordan Valley.

[00:13:42]

Anika: Okay.

[00:13:42]

John Jones: My folks had a little ranch. And that's kind of interesting. When I tell you that we had a ranch, you think to yourself, well, you know, they run cows and this and that. But we learned to operate tractors and trucks and Caterpillars and shoe horses and train horses and doctor cows. And all of that had to be a success or you didn't make it. When a guy says he's... it's like, I've got, and I've still got it, a girl said, "Well, all I ever did was a 4-H project or a lamb or something." And that county extension agent said, that's probably the best recommendation you could have. You fed this animal and took care of it. And you know, there's a whole bunch of knowledge there...

[00:14:42]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:14:42]

John Jones: ...that most people don't even...well, if they live in town now, they don't have a clue what the hell you're even talking about, you know. It's like, how do you treat your dog? Well, they treat their dog pretty well. What about all the time you got in in training him?

[00:15:01]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:15:02]

John Jones: You have some self-respect, there it is. You can only make yourself look bad.

[00:15:07]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:15:08]

Tim Freeman: Yep, you're right.

[00:15:09]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:15:10]

John Jones: It's a, you know, cowboy's best horse keeps getting better. Do you know why?

[00:15:17]

Anika: Why?

[00:15:18]

John Jones: Because he rides him in a pinch.

[00:15:21]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:15:23]

John Jones: It's just that thing that happens.

[00:15:22]

Anika: Yeah. Maybe this is...I think this is a question that I have, as someone from...who doesn't have a lot of experience with kind of...yeah, we have very different...like, I was not raised in, like you said, kind of like when you say the word ranching, mostly what I think of is raising cows. So the like, kind of verb "to cowboy" or like, to go out and cowboy, what does that...I'm not really sure what that means. You want to tell me about what it means to cowboy?

[00:15:50]

John Jones: Well, mostly nowadays, they're ranch hands. But a cowboy is the guy who takes care of the cows and horses, feeds them, vaccinate them, doctors them, gets up in the middle of the night and pulls calves if necessary. And then he's a guy that puts up hay and rakes hay or puts up hay and...it's just, it's a real huge subject in the end.

[00:16:25]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:16:25]

John Jones: It's like, do you know what a carpenter is?

[00:16:27]

Anika: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Just a lot of...yeah.

[00:16:29]

John Jones: I'll bet you don't.

[00:16:31]

Anika: Well, maybe to some extent. Yeah, I think maybe you're right there. Probably not fully.

[00:16:34]

John Jones: Yeah. A carpenter is a guy who works with wood. And most people think, oh, yeah, he builds stuff with wood. A carpenter is the guy that does everything no other occupation does.

[00:16:51]

Anika: Specialty, yeah.

[00:16:51]

John Jones: Specialty.

[00:16:52]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:16:52]

John Jones: Electricians and plumbers don't do carpenter work.

[00:16:55]

Anika: Right.

[00:16:56]

John Jones: Carpenters take up all the slack.

[00:16:58]

Anika: Hello.

[00:16:59]

Sue Jones: Hi. I want to sit down.

[00:17:01]

Anika: Feel free to sit down. We're happy to have you. We are recording if you're all right. Just so you know.

[00:17:06]

John Jones: It'll be \$10.00 for you.

[00:17:07]

Sue Jones: Huh?

[00:17:07]

John Jones: That'll be \$10.00.

[Laughter]

[00:17:16]

Anika: How are you today?

[00:17:17]

Sue Jones: Good. How about you?

[00:17:19]

Anika: Doing well. And what was your name?

[00:17:21]

Sue Jones: Huh?

[00:17:21]

Anika: What was your name?

[00:17:23]

Sue Jones: Sue.

[00:17:23]

John Jones: Sue.

[00:17:24]

Anika: Sue, nice to meet you, Sue. I'm Anika. We're just doing..we're just having...they're telling me some cool stories about their experiences and cowboying and growing up here in the area and in the Jordan Valley.

[00:17:37]

John Jones: She...I met Sue in Sun Valley when she was skiing and I was working, delivering firewood.

[00:17:43]

Anika: Yeah?

[00:17:45]

John Jones: Sue and I went out three times before we got married.

[00:17:50]

Anika: Oh, that's awesome. That's wonderful.

[00:17:54]

Sue Jones: Seemed like more.

[00:17:55]

John Jones: Yeah, she's got the...I don't know if it's going to hold though. It's been 50 years.

[Laughter]

[00:18:04]

Tim Freeman: Has it really? Wow.

[00:18:05]

Anika: I was just about to ask how long. Man, well, that is wonderful.

[00:18:09]

John Jones: It's all her fault.

[00:18:09]

Sue Jones: Yeah. I'm...

[00:18:10]

John Jones: It's her.

[00:18:11]

Sue Jones: I'm going to win the quilt.

[00:18:13]

Anika: Oh, that quilt is so beautiful.

[00:18:18]

Sue Jones: Well, they're having the drawing on our anniversary.

[00:18:21]

John Jones: Oh, really?

[00:18:22]

Anika: Oh.

[00:18:22]

Sue Jones: So it's meant.

[00:18:24]

Anika: So it's going to be your quilt.

[00:18:25]

Sue Jones: Yes.

[00:18:26]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:18:27]

Sue Jones: Yes, we deserve it, don't we?

[00:18:29]

John Jones: Well, I don't know. Maybe.

[Laughter]

[00:18:34]

Tim Freeman: When's your anniversary?

[00:18:35]

Sue Jones: Well, don't let me interrupt here.

[00:18:37]

Anika: Oh, no, you're not interrupting. You're all good.

[00:18:41]

Tim Freeman: When's your anniversary, Sue?

[00:18:50]

Sue Jones: [Coughs] Excuse me. June 5th.

[00:18:50]

Tim Freeman: June 5th?

[00:18:52]

Sue Jones: 51 years, it'll be.

[00:18:54]

Anika: Oh, my goodness. Congratulations.

[00:18:56]

John Jones: It's all her fault.

[00:18:58]

Anika: How did you folks meet?

[00:19:01]

Sue Jones: He...I let him pick me up in Sun Valley.

[00:19:05]

Anika: Oh, yeah, in Sun Valley. You just told me. Yeah.

[00:19:06]

Sue Jones: Yeah.

[00:19:07]

John Jones: Delivering fire wood.

[00:19:11]

Sue Jones: And I had split my ski pants, and I had my hair in rollers. And he brought us firewood, huh? Yeah. So...

[00:19:30]

Tim Freeman: How much was firewood back then?

[00:19:33]

Sue Jones: Well, 51 years.

[00:19:36]

John Jones: I think it was \$5.00 for one. And I don't remember. I don't...never...they didn't pay me anyway. They just put it on their bill.

[00:19:47]

Sue Jones: No.

[00:19:48]

Tim Freeman: Oh, gotcha.

[00:19:50]

John Jones: Yeah, I run a, I think it was the next year, I run a Sno-Cat on Bald Mountain. And I don't know it was...I got to thinking about it, if the Sno-Cat, the ones they had then, if they broke a drive line or something happened, you just went as fast as it'd go right into the trees down there. Then you'd...and I got to thinking about it, and I quit.

[00:20:18]

Anika: Yeah.

[Laughter]

[00:20:20]

John Jones: Damn coward.

[00:20:24]

Anika: What did you do after that?

[00:20:25]

John Jones: We starved for a while.

[Laughter]

[00:20:30]

Sue Jones: That's not about Jordan Valley.

[00:20:33]

John Jones: No, no, no.

[00:20:36]

Anika: So you got married after three dates or you asked her to marry you after three dates?

[00:20:42]

John Jones: After...we got married after three dates.

[00:20:44]

Anika: Yeah? Where did you get married?

[00:20:47]

John Jones: In Everett, Washington.

[00:20:48]

Anika: Yeah? Nice. And when did you...so when did you folks move here, then? How long have you been here for?

[00:20:57]

John Jones: Well, we lived south of Marsing there for 27 years. And then we moved here 23 years ago. We've almost lived in Owyhee County 50 years, too.

[00:21:08]

Anika: Man. Wonderful. Yeah.

[00:21:12]

John Jones: Yeah. It's hard to remember all the things that happened in Owyhee County and Jordan Valley there. The history books are full of stuff, but now it's really hard to remember.

[00:21:29]

Anika: Well, one thing that I thought was funny was when the other folks were leaving, the people...I feel bad that I didn't grab their names. My other...one of my other peers interviewed them. But they made a joke about how they're not going to let you just sit around the campfire and drink whiskey. Which I thought was really funny, because when we were driving up here, we were talking about how we were excited to hear some like, campfire stories.

[00:21:49]

Sue Jones: Yeah. Little bit of whiskey.

[00:21:51]

Anika: So if you guys have any campfire stories about sagebrush or even...not even sagebrush, but just...yeah.

[00:21:55]

Sue Jones: Take your gun so somebody thinks you have a purpose.

[Laughter]

[00:22:05]

John Jones: It's a nutty world.

[00:22:08]

Anika: One thing I was going to ask you earlier, when you were talking about growing up and learning how to drive tractors and/or use tractors and things was, my grandparents were also in ranching communities growing up, and I...or my great-grandparents, and I didn't get to hear much from them because I was very young when they passed away. But I

have heard other stories from my grandparents. I've heard tractor stories and other kind of ranching stories. Are there any stories that you remember from growing up about driving the tractors or...

[00:22:35]

John Jones: Yeah, I tipped one over twice.

[00:22:37]

Anika: You tipped one over twice?

[00:22:38]

John Jones: Yeah, it's a wonder it didn't kill me.

[00:22:39]

Anika: Oh, my goodness.

[00:22:40]

John Jones: It's...my dad had a loader on a little tiny tractor. And instead of having hydraulics, it had a lift on a kind of a winch. And when you got to the top or something happened, it'd trip, and...so you didn't know. And then if you got...it was a tricycle Deere tracker, meaning it just had one front wheel or two front wheels close together. If you got a little sideways, it'd just flop over. And you were lucky if it didn't kill you.

[00:23:10]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:23:12]

John Jones: And I tipped it over twice.

[00:23:13]

Anika: Oh, man. How'd you get out?

[00:23:16]

John Jones: I just jumped clear while it was going down.

[00:23:19]

Anika: Just jumped, yeah? No, that is the tractor story that my great-grandfather, that I've heard from my great-grandfather, it was that somehow, it went to rolling over him, and he pushed it. It must have not been a very big tractor. But he still pushed it, and when you're...you've just got so much adrenaline.

[00:23:33]

John Jones: But there's a point of balance when any kind of force would do it.

[00:23:37]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:23:40]

John Jones: I knew that down toward...well, I can't remember. Anyway, Roy Shannon had a tractor with a real high loader and he had it up in the air, and he had a shock of hay on it. And he was going down through the field, wind blew him over.

[00:24:09]

Anika: Oh, my gosh.

[00:24:09]

John Jones: Blew him over backwards, too. Yeah.

[00:24:13]

Anika: No kidding.

[00:24:14]

John Jones: Yeah. I bet he didn't do that again. That's the one thing you learn with them old tractors and loaders and stuff, is you run around, and if you're going anyplace, you kept that bucket close to the ground.

[00:24:24]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:24:25]

John Jones: Because it didn't fall over from there.

[00:24:27]

Anika: Yeah. Oh, man.

[00:24:28]

Sue Jones: Oh, no, you're fine. I'm just...

[00:24:30]

John Jones: Tim, his father had racehorses and trained racehorses. And Tim Freeman there is a guy that trained a lot of racehorse colts.

[00:24:45]

Anika: Yeah?

[00:24:46]

Tim Freeman: Lots of horses.

[00:24:47]

Anika: Lots of horses?

[00:24:47]

John Jones: Yeah. He described it to me as a controlled runaway.

[00:24:52]

Anika: Yeah? Do you want to tell me more about that?

[00:24:56]

Tim Freeman: Well, sometimes you don't know where you're going, but you're just going to go real fast.

[00:25:00]

Anika: Yeah?

[00:25:01]

Tim Freeman: Just sit the...

[00:25:02]

Anika: Do you have any stories about runaway horses or anything like that?

[00:25:06]

Tim Freeman: Ohhh yeah. I've been on a few runaways. He traded a lot of horses, workhorses. And he trained lots of racehorses. And we were in the east, and they were charging \$500 a month to winter a colt. And my dad says, that's a lot of money. And then we came back home to Idaho, and he still had his eastern contacts. He says, "Hell, I'll just bring them colts out here for \$300 and winter them and break them for you." Well, they said, "Okay," so here come these semi loads of colts, and I was the horse breaker. And so we would break them out western style. But then some of the owners would say, well, keep them another month and put them in a flat saddle. And holy Toledo, there was no guardrail or nothing. You got on and you sat there until they run out of air and then you banked him back home. And when he was trading workhorses, when gas first hit a dollar a gallon, he started trading workhorses, because he had met a lot of Amish people in Ohio. And he would go back there and buy those workhorses that were broke to death, most of them, and bring them out here and sell for feed teams. So you could feed cows in the winter and save that dollar a gallon. But some of those horses had been worked with plows and disks and heavy equipment, some wagons. Well, their wagons had brakes on them.

[00:26:40]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:26:42]

Tim Freeman: We had a New Holland Running Gear for a wagon and no brakes. And so when they took off, you just crossed your fingers, said your prayers real fast, and tried to bank that runaway horse into something that was uphill or something to slow him down. But if the horse didn't have brakes on the wagon, they sold for more money, because then everybody knew that they were bombproof. The first year doing it, I think I tore up a one-ton truckload of leather, of harness. But I was pretty green, and I learned real fast about the runners. And we never chained a single tree back or anything. You just got on and started driving.

[00:27:25]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:27:27]

Tim Freeman: One of John's friends from South Mountain, this was one of my hairiest ones, Kenny McKenzie sent me a colt to break, a saddle horse colt. And I had the colt about three weeks. And I always spent four weeks on them, four to five weeks and then sent them home. And I got him pretty well in the handling, I mean, get a good mouth on him. Well, now, Kenny would like him roping a little bit. So you rope a sagebrush and teach him to pull. And sometimes that sagebrush bouncing along behind them, you catch another gear and go faster, because it's spooks them. So I'd done a few little sagebrush with him and I'm up on this rim, and I rope a pretty good-sized sagebrush. And the colt won't pull it out. So I don't know if he's tired or if he's just cheating me or what. So I give a little slack and we take a little harder run at it. We hit the rope and it doesn't come out. So we go the other way. And I'm concentrating on the colt, especially his ears and the rope, and we take a really hard run at it. We hit the end of the rope, and he bogs his head and goes bucking. Somewhere there, I lost my right stirrup, and when I come back down and get it, the rope is under my right thigh. And it's getting pretty hot in a hurry. So I'm still riding this bucking colt, scooted up out of the seat so I don't rope burn my thigh anymore. And pretty quick, the tail on my rope goes through. Whew. So I was glad to see that. And I sat back down in the seat just as he bucks over the edge of the rim. And it felt like it was two miles off the...it was probably, I don't know, 30 feet. But it felt like two miles with the air blowing through your ears. We hit the ground, and my feet are in the stirrup standing on the ground.

[00:29:20]

Sue Jones: Oh, God.

[00:29:20]

Tim Freeman: Yeah, because he just folded up.

[00:29:22]

Sue Jones: Oh, God.

[00:29:23]

Tim Freeman: And I thought...I was...felt terrible for the colt.

[00:29:26]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:29:26]

John Jones: He's dead.

[00:29:27]

Tim Freeman: And I got off and walked around him and, nope, his legs look good. So I stood him up, walked him around a few circles. He was walking fine. We just hit real hard. So I got back on that colt and I rode right back around and climbed up on top to that sagebrush and I said, I'm going to fix this. I took my rope off, coiled it up and rode home. I never...

[Laughter]

[00:29:47]

Tim Freeman: I didn't rope another sagebrush that day.

[00:29:51]

Anika: I've got to fix this. Yeah. Oh my gosh. That is...those are some great...yeah.

[00:29:57]

Tim Freeman: That was kind of a hairy ride.

[00:29:59]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:30:00]

John Jones: Bill Loveland told me, he was a little rancher that I knew, he said he and Ira Schaeffer were riding down Brown Ridge. And he said there was...we were both riding colts, he said. He said there was a cougar, a young cougar running from them. Ira Schaeffer said, I never roped one of them.

[00:30:24]

Tim Freeman: Uh-oh.

[00:30:25]

John Jones: And the race was on. And he roped him. He said, the only problem with cougars is, when you rope them, they come back up the rope.

[Laughter]

[00:30:36]

Anika: Oh, no. Oh, man, that is a problem.

[00:30:37]

John Jones: He said that was really interesting for a little while.

[00:30:40]

Anika: I bet. Yeah.

[00:30:41]

Tim Freeman: Get itchy in a hurry.

[00:30:42]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:30:43]

John Jones: That's what a rancher from up in north Idaho that raised yaks told me about yaks, too. He said, they'll come right back up the rope.

[00:30:51]

Tim Freeman: If you rope a yak?

[00:30:52]

John Jones: Yep. He had some... he had a couple of yaks and his wife butchered one of them, because he was going to try to ride it.

[Laughter]

[00:31:01]

Anika: So she got to it before he could. That's great. Oh, my gosh.

[00:31:05]

Tim Freeman: Yes. And the backbone on a yak, you got a little hump. I was so mad. I had my... because the yak was ready, and I thought I was ready. And then I'm pulling my boots on and I heard the gunshot. They'd shot the yak.

[00:31:24]

Sue Jones: Get out.

[00:31:25]

Anika: While you were on it?

[00:31:27]

Tim Freeman: No, before...

[00:31:27]

Anika: Oh, I was like...

[00:31:28]

Tim Freeman: No, I was headed out to...

[00:31:29]

Sue Jones: Lucky for you.

[00:31:30]

John Jones: He was getting dressed to go out and...

[00:31:30]

Tim Freeman: It was lucky.

[00:31:31]

Anika: He was getting dressed, yeah. Okay. I see that.

[00:31:33]

Tim Freeman: I was headed for my saddle when I heard that .22 go off.

[00:31:35]

Anika: Oh, yeah.

[00:31:36]

Tim Freeman: And I just [growling noise], because I'd never rode a yak.

[00:31:39]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:31:39]

Tim Freeman: What I've always wanted to ride, though, is a giraffe. But anyway. When they butchered the yak out, the hump is actually rib bones that go straight up. And I'd never seen that in my life.

[00:31:52]

Sue Jones: Really?

[00:31:53]

Tim Freeman: Yep.

[00:31:53]

Anika: Wild.

[00:31:54]

Sue Jones: Now I didn't know that.

[00:31:55]

Tim Freeman: Yeah. So like on a beef or a deer or elk. you got your smooth backbone coming back.

[00:32:00]

Sue Jones: Right.

[00:32:02]

Tim Freeman: But on a yak, the rib bones are...

[00:32:04]

Sue Jones: I didn't know that. I thought that was all tissue.

[00:32:07]

Tim Freeman: So did I. Yep. I didn't know that.

[00:32:10]

John Jones: Be good for a saddle.

[00:32:12]

Tim Freeman: Yeah, it would be. It'd be like a set of withers in...

[00:32:14]

John Jones: Yeah.

[00:32:15]

Anika: He's like, I know.

[00:32:16]

Tim Freeman: But I never got to ride him.

[Laughter]

[00:32:19]

Sue Jones: Wow.

[00:32:22]

John Jones: No, most of sitting around the campfire is, oh, you just go in and wash your hands and face and maybe take a shower and go out and do something...still some daylight left.

[00:32:35]

Anika: Yeah?

[00:32:36]

John Jones: Daylight.

[00:32:37]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:32:38]

John Jones: And the guys told me, don't put no lights on your tractor. Because you'll work 24 hours a day then.

[00:32:47]

Anika: Yeah. Yeah. I've heard a lot of good...it seems like there's a lot of good animal stories, too, that everybody's got. Any good animal stories?

[00:32:53]

John Jones: Oh, yeah.

[00:32:54]

John Jones: My neighbor is a guy that was running pretty hard about 10 years ago. And somebody said something about him, "When are you going to sleep?" And he was asleep right then standing up.

[00:33:10]

Tim Freeman: Wow.

[00:33:11]

Anika: Oh, man.

[00:33:11]

John Jones: Yeah. He was tired, you know.

[00:33:13]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:33:14]

John Jones: Animal stories, I don't know.

[00:33:16]

Sue Jones: Tell her about Flip.

[00:33:19]

John Jones: Oh, Flip was a wonderful old...Flip was a little Morgan mare that, when I was, I must have been five. Eddie...Eddie Turner...

[00:33:32]

Sue Jones: Okay. Going.

[00:33:33]

Anika: Thanks for coming in.

[00:33:35]

Sue Jones: Yeah, I'll probably be back.

[00:33:36]

Anika: Sounds good.

[00:33:37]

John Jones: Eddie Turner was a neighbor on Cow Creek, and our ranch was just down the Jordan. And he'd come to visit. I'm sure he come to visit us kids. And he, when he was getting ready to leave, and he always said, "You know, it's a nice day, don't you think so, eh?" And he looked at us and he said, "Would you boys like a colt, eh?" "Well, sure." What would you say? "Okay. I'll bring you one tomorrow. "

[Laughter]

[00:34:11]

John Jones: And he brought us a little filly named...he couldn't...he didn't...there wasn't any market for mare colts, you know. And she was the nicest horse you was ever around. My dad went to break her to lead and she just got the angle on him and flipped him. So he just called her Flip.

[00:34:32]

Anika: Oh! That's great.

[00:34:33]

John Jones: She was really a nice little horse.

[00:34:34]

Anika: That's a good one.

[00:34:35]

John Jones: Yeah.

[00:34:35]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:34:37]

John Jones: Yeah.

[00:34:37]

Anika: Do you have any memories or experiences that you remember with that horse in particular?

[00:34:43]

John Jones: Uh-uh.

[00:34:43]

Anika: Not necessarily?

[00:34:44]

John Jones: No, you could be walking home from the school and whistle and they'd all come down and you'd get on the horse and ride the rest of the way.

[00:34:50]

Anika: Oh, I see. Yeah. Yeah. That's awesome.

[00:34:55]

Tim Freeman: Beats walking.

[00:34:56]

John Jones: It takes some effort to teach a horse to...

[00:34:57]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:34:57]

John Jones: ...come when you whistle.

[00:34:59]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:34:59]

Tim Freeman: Yep. Yep.

[00:35:02]

John Jones: It was really funny. That recorder you got, what's that, three-hour recorder? Five-hour?

[00:35:11]

Anika: Oh, it goes up...once we get to about 50 minutes, the audio starts to get pretty rough. So we keep them to about 40. But we can...if you want to, we can go longer. I just have to start a new recording.

[00:35:18]

John Jones: Oh, no, no, no.

[00:35:19]

Anika: But yeah, that's what we keep them to, about like 40 minutes, 35. So yeah, probably here in the next like five or 10 minutes, we can start wrapping up. But if you guys have any other stories in particular that you want to share, or I can keep asking you questions. So I've just got more...I've got plenty of questions, things I'm interested in hearing about. What about...yeah, tell me more about...so yeah, growing up, raising...your dad raised horses.

[00:35:46]

Tim Freeman: With horses?

[00:35:47]

Anika: Yeah. What was that like growing up?

[00:35:50]

Tim Freeman: Let's see. My great-grandfather, my grandfather, and my dad all had a couple, at least, racehorses. And they come out of the Dakotas, South Dakota, during the dirty '30s and Dustbowl time. They landed in Caldwell, Idaho in '36. They still had horses in their blood, bad. So they contracted and traded mule colts at the time for like the Forest Service or the military. Then Dad was in the...my granddad and dad was into cattle. But they still had them a fast horse or two. And then in the '60s, the cattle market went bust. And everybody in cattle had a tough time. And so the fastest money was in racehorses. So instead of just a couple of horses, we wound up with, the most I ever counted was 52 running horses...

[00:36:53]

Anika: Dang.

[00:36:54]

Tim Freeman: ...and thoroughbred horses, and the biggest money was east. So Nebraska through Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Florida.

[00:37:05]

John Jones: Baltimore.

[00:37:06]

Tim Freeman: Yep. So I left Idaho in fourth grade, and I got to come home in the eighth grade. In the meantime, it was tack room to tack room across the U.S. So like I told you before, they had the high cost of wintering a horse in the East. And so he said, well, we can winter them out here cheaper and send them back broke. Well, my granddad had taught me

the old vaquero way when I was about 13 or 14, with just, I don't know, six or eight colts. So somewhere in there, I'm sure it was a misunderstanding, my father was chewing on me for something and he says, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" And I puffed out my little 130-pound chest and I says, "I'm going to be a bronc rider." He goes, "What?" I says, "I'm going to break horses." And he smoked at the time, and he just kind of bit the end of his cigarette and grinned and said, "Okay." And here come a truckload of...and they weren't just colts, it was runaways and flip-overs and spoiled horses.

[00:38:13]

John Jones: Junk horses.

[00:38:13]

Tim Freeman: Yeah. Something that was...they either needed cured or they was going to kill somebody. And I says, "Oh, so are you going to snub me up, Dad?" And he goes, "You're the one that wanted to ride these SOBs. You get on." So when you're a teenager, you never think about getting hurt. You think you're pretty much invincible and tough and so you never say die or defeat. You never give up, right? So you'd get through with one set of horses and he would sell them or trade them off. But well then here come the race colts. And at one time, there was five snubbing horses and seven saddles going. Twenty-stall barn, one or two round corrals was wore out. And that's what you did from daylight to dark was ride colts. And then that market tightened up a little bit, so he started trading the workhorses. And truckloads of workhorses. So at one point in there, when he started in the workhorses, we needed more corral poles to build corrals. And somebody gave me a work mare, a big Percheron work mare. She was from Jordan Valley. I don't know, maybe one of Skinner's old Percherons. Did they have Percherons?

[00:39:36]

John Jones: No, probably Jaca's.

[00:39:38]

Tim Freeman: Maybe Jaca's?

[00:39:39]

John Jones: Yeah.

[00:39:39]

Tim Freeman: So here come this big work mare out of Jordan, and I packed up my bedroll and chainsaw and moved to the timber, and that's where I learned to drive a horse. She taught me a lot, that old mare.

[00:39:52]

John Jones: I should tell you the story about him and his dad and horses.

[00:39:55]

Anika: Yeah?

[00:39:55]

John Jones: They went to the, I think the sale in Shoshone, where they was selling workhorses. A work mare came in that was long feet, and long mane, and long tail, and a horrible, ugly thing. And his dad bought her pretty cheap. And Tim went out and cleaned her mane and tail and trimmed her feet and got her all combed out, and they put her back through the sale and doubled the money.

[00:40:24]

Anika: Oh, wow.

[00:40:25]

Tim Freeman: And the original owner bought her, didn't even know her.

[00:40:27]

Anika: What?

[00:40:27]

John Jones: Yeah, that's who bought...

[Laughter]

[00:40:29]

John Jones: And he said, "The guy told me later, he said, 'You know,' he said, that guy called me and said, 'That's really strange, that mare got to our place and just acted like she was at home.'"

[00:40:43]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:40:44]

Tim Freeman: Didn't even know her.

[00:40:46]

Anika: Oh, my gosh.

[00:40:47]

John Jones: Didn't know his own horse.

[00:40:49]

Anika: That's really great. Oh, my gosh.

[00:40:51]

John Jones: And that's a real true story.

[00:40:53]

Tim Freeman: Yep.

[00:40:54]

John Jones: I sold him...I had a Shetland mule.

[00:40:56]

Anika: Yeah?

[00:40:57]

John Jones: I had a white mule and a little mare that Sue rode parts...a couple times. And then I had a little Shetland mule. I got...I had done some construction work and a guy paid me, part of it, with this mule.

[00:41:16]

Anika: Nice.

[00:41:17]

John Jones: This mule would, she was...one of them baby calves, she was meaner than hell. Anyway, she...I had trade them, and Tim came, got them, it's about a mile, and rode that mare home, and his father traded...put that mule on a truck to Wyoming with some workhorses. And that little mule, you couldn't break her.

[00:41:48]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:41:49]

John Jones: I put a pack saddle on her and with a bunch of gravel on her, heavy load, and she bucked it off.

[00:41:54]

Anika: Man.

[00:41:55]

John Jones: You couldn't do nothing with that mule. And so the guy that bought her had a ranch next to the governor of Wyoming's ranch. And the governor of Wyoming saw that mule and said, I got to have her, I'm going to drive her in a parade. And I wanted to see that more than anything I missed in my life. Because I know what had happened.

[00:42:19]

Anika: That is funny.

[Laughter]

[00:42:21]

Anika: Yeah, that's great.

[00:42:21]

John Jones: Yeah, it is funny. She was an ornery little...

[00:42:24]

Tim Freeman: There would have been pieces of leather and wagon all over the country.

[Laughter]

[00:42:31]

John Jones: And hide, and yeah, that would... And then I got one other story. That guy that operated on himself.

[00:42:36]

Anika: Oh, yeah.

[00:42:37]

John Jones: When I was young, I grew up, my dad had Angus cows. And I...and he was the only one in the country. And I grew up with Angus cows. And everybody thinks Angus cows, you know, at that time, they had a little bit of a temper and they were kind of strange to be around. You got used to them, though, and everything was fine. Well, I went to work on that ranch, I was buckarooing and one of...kind of a hot day in the fall, we were come down there and they had big willow thickets. And then there'd be just a round spot, and there'd be a spring in there. And that...Angus bulls and stuff, what was the other half of the ranch. The guy that owned the ranch owned about 1,500 head of Angus, 1,449 is how many he had. And the guy I worked for had...

[00:43:24]

Sue Jones: It's me.

[00:43:26]

John Jones: The guy I worked for had Herefords. And the buckaroo boss said to me, he said, "What would you do with that bull?" And I said, "I'd open that gate, he's sore footed, and he'll go in there by himself. Just leave him alone." And he had two dogs, and he was riding a kind of a weird little horse that'd buck every chance he got, any kind of excuse. And he said, "I'll show you what I'd do." And he opened the gate and he bailed right into that brush pile with him. And he commenced to cussing. And the dog is barking and those...and pretty quick, he comes squirting out of there with that horse trying to buck and them dogs, and that bull with his head right behind the horse's hind legs, and the dog is right on the back of the bull.

[Laughter]

[00:44:16]

Anika: That's like out of a cartoon!

[00:44:17]

John Jones: It was...yeah, talk about a cartoon. It was the funniest thing I ever saw, and I think I'll ever see again. There was this guy with a big floppy hat, his horse trying to buck. And that bull was just driving him right through the...

[Laughter]

[00:44:36]

John Jones: Hard as you could go.

[00:44:38]

Anika: Oh, gosh.

[00:44:39]

John Jones: Yeah. That was a good time.

[00:44:40]

Anika: Yeah, that's a great story.

[00:44:44]

John Jones: That was a good time.

[00:44:45]

Anika: Oh, man.

[00:44:46]

Sue Jones: Tell her about the guy that had the horse that would jump in the back of his pickup and...

[00:44:53]

John Jones: Oh, yeah. We had a neighbor that had a Pinto horse and a ton truck and he just back around there and that horse would get right on that ton truck flatbed. And I'd see him going down the road lots of times. He was going to gather some cows someplace.

[00:45:10]

Tim Freeman: No rack or anything, eh?

[00:45:11]

John Jones: Nothing. The horse would be standing there.

[00:45:14]

Tim Freeman: Wow.

[00:45:14]

Anika: That's a great deal of trust.

[00:45:15]

John Jones: Yeah. Yep, yep. Curious world.

[00:45:19]

Anika: Yeah. Well, I think we're getting to the end of our little time here. But if you have any other...

[00:45:22]

John Jones: And then I gave...I raised some puppies...

[00:45:27]

Anika: Oh, yeah.

[00:45:28]

John Jones: ...and I had a Australian Shepherd and they were Old English Shepherds. So anyway, they were crossed puppy. And he was a good, really good breed of dog. And I gave one to Bill Lowry in Jordan Valley. And he said, "I never had no dog. How do you train these dogs to work cows?" And I said, "You don't. This dog, you teach him to mind. He knows how to work cows." And he made him jump in the back of the truck and ride with the horses all the time. And then one day, he was ready to go and he backed around there. He had...he didn't have the horses loaded when he made the dog get in. He backed around to the chutes...the bank, so we could load his horses. And after that, he had to backup to the bank for the dog.

[Laughter]

[00:46:23]

Anika: Oh, goodness.

[00:46:25]

John Jones: The dog trained him, didn't he?

[00:46:26]

Anika: Yeah. No kidding. Sadly, it does happen that way sometimes.

[00:46:30]

John Jones: Yeah. I thought it was great. Then he told me, he said, I wouldn't hire two cowboys to replace that dog. Yeah, he was a good dog. Yep.

[00:46:45]

Anika: Well, thank you, folks. I think unless, like I said, if there's any other stories that you want to get in. But otherwise, I'll go ahead and turn this recording off. Is there anything else you wanted to add?

[00:46:54]

Sue Jones: Yeah, I wanted to ask what you're going to do with these stories.

[00:46:58]

Anika: Yeah. So they'll go...they'll...first...well, they're going in a couple of places. They're going in our Albertsons Library archive at the university so that they'll be preserved. They're not really...we're not really publishing them. We're just kind of keeping them so that we have them for future generations to listen to. And then we're also having...we're contributing, I don't know if we'll have our own exhibit, I think we're kind of working with some of the folks at the Murphy Museum about putting some of our interview stuff. We're all going to...though it'll be in the Murphy Museum and then we're also going to have transcripts of all these interviews printed. And that was...here, I'll go ahead and turn this off.

Rose King

[00:00:00]

Kacey: I'm going to let you know that our audio quality starts to drop after about 50 minutes. So, I will give you some closing cues or start kind of going towards the end of the interview, just because of that audio quality. So, today I'm interviewing... Can I get your name one more time? It was Rose...

[00:00:14]

Rose: Rose King.

[00:00:15]

Kacey: Rose King. So, today I'm interviewing Rose King for Shared Stories Lab. It's an oral history project. It's April 9th, 2022, and we're at the Murphy, Idaho museum. And I'm Kacey Bates, an interviewer with Shared Stories Lab. So, starting off, can you just tell me a little bit about your background in the area? You mentioned you came here when your husband was 37 or really established here and your husband was 37.

[00:00:39]

Rose: Yes. My husband was born and raised at Kuna, Idaho, which is not too far from here. I was raised at Marsing, Idaho. And my parents moved to the Nampa area from Marsing and then to Kuna area, my high school years. And in 1937 or '73, excuse me.

[00:01:04]

Kacey: No worries [Laughter].

[00:01:06]

Rose: In 1973, we bought the ranch at Oreana, Idaho. And it was on my husband's 37th birthday that we signed the papers.

[00:01:17]

Kacey: That's really exciting. So, I'm a little bit unfamiliar with the smaller towns in this area. Where is Oreana, Idaho, in relation to either Nampa or Kuna?

[00:01:26]

Rose: Well, we're 30 miles from the river bridge to Oreana. And then, from Oreana, you go on to Grand View and Bruneau from there.

[00:01:45]

Kacey: Okay. That's good to know. So, a lot of the stories that we've been collecting here today, it seems like the histories are really tied to kind of the geographical locations. Is that something that you've noticed in your experience living in this area opposed to maybe

some bigger, larger cities? Or is there anything you can speak on, about just how people relate to the geographical areas or towns in this area of the sagebrush?

[00:02:10]

Rose: Well, people like to travel to go to Silver City, which was old, is very old. And beings as how my husband and I graduated from Kuna, on the last day of school, we were all supposed to go to Nampa to a movie.

But a friend that was driving the car decided we would go to Silver City, Idaho. We got about one-third of the way. We got stuck in the snow. We ended up all having to walk in to Silver City. There was a telephone. And there was a gentleman that stayed there. And he got a hold of his brother, who came from Kuna to get us out of the snow bank.

[00:02:57]

Kacey: To rescue you. Yeah. So, there was snow all the way up there. And you said you were...

[00:03:02]

Rose: This is in May.

[00:03:03]

Kacey: Wow. So, I guess that's pretty not too crazy for Idaho. But still, you never imagined getting stuck in a snowstorm in May. But I guess that's just how it is in Idaho. Are there any specific stories or memories that you want to share for your experience about people who might be unfamiliar with this area or with sagebrush or just what it's like to live out here?

[00:03:28]

Rose: Well, we have lived in a number of various places. And most all of them have been out in the desert areas, in Oregon, and Nevada, and here in Idaho. But they are all livestock orientated. And that was what we did was to run livestock. And the winters are rather severe in most all of those places that we've lived in. When we lived at Donnelly, those winters were very severe back in the early '60s. And not so much now, but yes.

And on those particular things, our water was, of course, snow water. And every now and again, it went through a new vein. And the one time when it went through the new vein, I said to my husband, I said, "This looks like cow pee coming out of the faucet." And it did have an aroma to it. And we had to quit using our spring water. And we went to the neighbors that had a well until everything got through going different veins.

[00:04:53]

Kacey: Yeah. So, I'm unfamiliar with the term vein. Can you explain what that is or how that works? I haven't heard that before.

[00:04:59]

Rose: Well, they call it a vein because it's underground. It is whatever water travels in.

[00:05:08]

Kacey: Okay. So, like little mini streams or some sort.

[00:05:10]

Rose: Yes. They're underground.

[00:05:12]

Kacey: Okay. So, it sounds like there was all these... From an outsider's perspective, there's all these minute challenges you face during your daily life that people just seem to overlook or not understand. Does that represent your experience of living out in these areas?

[00:05:31]

Rose: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. But you have to take them in stride because you have a goal in life. And without a goal in life, you'll never know if you get there.

[00:05:42]

Kacey: Yeah. And without a goal, we might all seem like, "What's the point?"

[00:05:46]

Rose: That's right.

[00:05:47]

Kacey: So, you talked about these goals in life and you guys were cattle ranchers. Is that your main goal was always for the cattle? Or was there something else that was motivating you?

[00:05:58]

Rose: That was my husband's desire when we were in school. And we dated our last two years of school. He told me if I wanted a rancher's life, we'd continue to see each other. If not, let's not waste time.

[00:06:16]

Kacey: Oh, so he had it all figured out.

[00:06:18]

Rose: He had it figured out. And I couldn't see any difference. My father was a farmer. And I had to help him at the barn with the cows and the calves like any children do that's raised up on farms. And so, I couldn't see any difference in that. But we had several routes that we took to get there. He was working when we got married as a finish carpenter at the Mountain Home Air Force Base, putting in the new homes. And they were selling the barrack-type homes that they'd had.

There are several of those homes that have been put into nice homes in the valleys. So at the Marsing and the Grand View area got quite a few of them. So, that was how... And from there, I worked at a bank. And when he got laid off at the airbase from the job he was at, he went to work at Brownlee Dam when they were putting the dam in. And as soon as they could put in housing, which was trailers, I stayed and kept care of our home in Nampa. And then I went up. And he drove the trucks, a Yuke, dumped the first load of rock into the dam. And I went to work in the office.

[00:07:46]

Kacey: Oh, at Brownlee Dam?

[00:07:47]

Rose: At Brownlee Dam.

[00:07:48]

Kacey: Okay, that's super interesting.

[00:07:50]

Rose: So, we both worked there for two and a half years. And he said—they were laying off some people—and he told me, he says, "I'm ready to start farming." But we saved all of his checks and spent mine.

[00:08:05]

Kacey: Oh. So, you guys were ready, ready.

[00:08:07]

Rose: We were ready for it. And so, the neighbor man was going to get laid off, and he had four children. And my husband says, "Give me his pink slip and let him stay because I'm ready to leave."

[00:08:24]

Kacey: Wow, that's a noble thing.

[00:08:26]

Rose: And so, we went to Melba and farmed at Melba. And from there, this gentleman had a ranch at Donnelly and asked if we would go there. So, we went to Donnelly. And when we were at the dam, we had one son. And we had two children born while we lived at Donnelly.

[00:08:45]

Kacey: Okay. So, a total of three or total of two?

[00:08:47]

Rose: Well, that was a total of three, then.

[00:08:51]

Kacey: Okay. Yeah.

[00:08:53]

Rose: And we sold our house in Nampa in the meantime. And we bought 20 acres on Highway 44. And we remodeled the house, fixed up the land. And we sold that. And then, we started ranching on our own.

[00:09:17]

Kacey: And where did you start your ranch on your own?

[00:09:20]

Rose: Well, actually, like I say, we rented so many of them. But we bought the one over here at Oreana.

[00:09:33]

Kacey: Oh, okay. So, that all ties back to ending up back here. Cool. So, a lot of our research is looking specifically at the sagebrush. And you've spent so much time in it. Do you have any experiences or memories relating to the sagebrush? Or is that something that you're ever drawn to living in this area? Or is it just something that's just familiar because it's always been here?

[00:09:56]

Rose: Well, that's familiar that's been here. But we took a lot of BLM fence jobs, which were in the desert, in the sagebrush. We did quite a few fences. They would probably take us at least three or four weeks to accomplish. There were a lot of springs that we had fenced for BLM.

[00:10:21]

Kacey: So, what was the purpose of these fencing?

[00:10:24]

Rose: Well, it's to manage the livestock because you have grazing. Each person has their own allotment. And so, you keep your fences up and things. But the government starts it first.

[00:10:38]

Kacey: Oh, so they're the ones that decide where the fences go. Okay. But it's all for the benefit of cattle ranching, not some outside initiative. It's for the cattle ranching.

[00:10:47]

Rose: Yes.

[00:10:49]

Kacey: Interesting. So, with cattle ranching, I just don't know much about it. What has that experience been like of being such a monumental piece of your life? Or if you could sum up just what cattle ranching means to you, is there a way that you can put it?

[00:11:08]

Rose: It's a hard life, but it's a good life. It's a good place to raise children. They learn responsibility. It gives you satisfaction of creating something. The upkeep, how you keep it up, the buildings. And you clean off different areas, and that increases your ground for production.

[00:11:44]

Kacey: Yeah. So, the organizing.

[00:11:48]

Rose: So, I guess for everybody, it's a different idea.

[00:11:54]

Kacey: Yeah. What would you want someone who has no experience or has no knowledge about that lifestyle, what's something that you would pass on to them, or something that you would hope that they can recognize from this industry or from this place?

[00:12:12]

Rose: I would tell them that they have to be very dedicated, very determined. And they'd find it very rewarding.

[00:12:25]

Kacey: Yeah. So, you keep mentioning kind of these values behind cattle ranching. Would you say these values of dedication and responsibility and pride in what you do, has that played a part in these communities developing? Because even just spending a day here, I feel like everyone here knows each other. And there's all this friendliness. Do you think that understanding of those shared values plays into that? Or how do you see those values?

[00:12:54]

Rose: Well, the ranching people as a general whole, if you see your neighbor in trouble, or if he needs help, you all go and you help. They've been doing some branding just recently. And you might have 10 neighbors that come to you to help brand. So, the women do all the cooking and see that everybody's fed and have drinks and things.

So, that's why I say it's a family in a community. The whole family gets together. If somebody gets hurt, everybody tries to help out for a while until they can get over the problem that they have. And well, it's not like living in town because sometimes you don't even know your neighbors in town.

[00:13:54]

Kacey: Yeah. But you know everyone. You see them. They're at your house. They're helping you. You're helping them. It just seems like it's such a unique industry in the sense of how connected everyone is with both each other and just the overall goal of what you're all doing. Would you agree with that?

[00:14:11]

Rose: Oh, yes.

[00:14:12]

Kacey: It just feels like there's a certain level of connectedness that you can't understand unless you're really engaged with those values and this shared lifestyle.

[00:14:21]

Rose: And see, in the Bruneau area, they have a rodeo every year. And everybody goes to the rodeo. They all help get it all prepped and ready for people to come. And all of the communities, if there's somebody that's been hurt, they all go together and help them see that they can get well and food, funerals, all of the things.

[00:14:56]

Kacey: Yeah, just looking out for each other.

[00:14:58]

Rose: Yes. Like I say, we've lived in town and we lived in the country. We lived in a trailer court. And of course, the people that we worked with at the dam, they were neighbors. They all just sort of... Like I say with my husband, the neighbor fellow had three children. And he knew he was ready to go ranching, so he asked to take his pink slip. And that man needed the job more than he did. But they were all real nice people. And we've found that most of the people in the area here are quite good.

[00:15:50]

Kacey: Yeah. Being from Idaho, I like to believe that everyone from here has something special in their heart. But you can't say that about everyone. But really, when you go into these smaller communities and especially out of some of these bigger cities, I feel like being from Idaho, that's something I really see in our state. Maybe I'm just biased but...

[00:16:08]

Rose: No, I think that's very true. And see, now our children were in 4-H. They were in high school rodeo. And all of the parents, they saw that if some kid didn't have a horse, that got hurt, or something, the neighbors, they all help each other.

[00:16:29]

Kacey: Yeah. Looking out for each other. So, spending so much time being from this area and then settling down in this area, what can you say about your own experience of growing

up in this area and now watching your children grow up in the same place? Is there anything special that sticks out to you about that or anything that you reflect on and think, "Wow, we're lucky to be here," or anything of that sort? Or even, maybe it's not always a positive memory, but...

[00:16:56]

Rose: Well, they're all positive in their way. And you can't expect all of your children to want the same. We have a daughter that's a beautician. She's very good. She's in Nampa. She has a home and four children. We have a son at Homedale. His oldest, which is a boy, has a construction business plus rodeo stock. So, he puts on some rodeos. And he has some stock that he has sold at the NFR. And to get to do something like that means you had pretty good stock.

[00:17:43]

Kacey: Okay. I'm unfamiliar. What is the NFR?

[00:17:46]

Rose: The National Finals Rodeo.

[00:17:48]

Kacey: Oh, okay. So, that's a big deal then.

[00:17:50]

Rose: Yes.

[00:17:51]

Kacey: That is really cool. So, as someone who's grown up in this industry, is it really cool to just watch your grandson just kind of rise those ranks in that industry?

[00:18:00]

Rose: Oh, yes. Yes.

[00:18:03]

Kacey: Yeah. How would you say that their experience in this area or growing up on a ranch compares to your experience? Do you think that they share the same appreciation for it or is it different?

[00:18:15]

Rose: Well, it's totally different because we didn't have all the equipment and stuff that there is today. But at the same token of time, they still have their little hardships that come along. But no, they do the high school rodeos. And the girls compete at the barrel racing and the calf roping. Well, they have the goat tying. So, the girls compete just as well as the boys.

[00:18:49]

Kacey: That must be exciting to watch.

[00:18:51]

Rose: And so, we have watched and have gone because some of the grandkids have gone to the nationals. And so, we have traveled and gone to some of those events, too.

[00:19:02]

Kacey: That is really cool. Do you find that in the rodeo community there's a similar kind of connectiveness that there is with the cattle ranching?

[00:19:12]

Rose: Yes. And there is a sportsmanship in them. If somebody's horses get damaged or something, others step in and help. So, yes. And I'm not saying the people in town aren't good because there's a lot of good people in town. But they just do more things separately than what ranching and farmers do.

[00:19:42]

Kacey: Okay. I forgot what I was just about to say. I was just going to keep asking: Do you have any just shared experience with your community with the sagebrush or any shared connective...?

[00:19:56]

Rose: No, because all of the properties were pretty much taken out of the sagebrush for what we do. Like I say, we have two cow camps in the area. And we put new corrals on them and keep improving them.

[00:20:20]

Kacey: Yeah. So, just managing the land.

[00:20:23]

Rose: Yes. And then, that way your work is a lot easier if you've got good corrals and such. And usually at least once or twice a year, they have a party. I say a party, they get together and all sit down and enjoy what they did.

[00:20:39]

Kacey: Yeah, celebrate the season. So, I really enjoyed your story about going up to Silver City in high school. How does that even go from... You're meant to go to the movies, but young high school kids are all doing their own thing anyway. Was it just some silly night where you guys went?

[00:20:56]

Rose: Well, it was a silly, stupid.... Our driver just turned the wrong direction.

[00:21:04]

Kacey: Yeah. He's like, "I'm taking us somewhere new." Yeah.

[00:21:09]

Rose: But no, that was not normal for us. But that was the last day of school, so we were definitely not normal.

[00:21:19]

Kacey: How could you be? Riding high on the last day. So, you talked about you were with your husband during that time. Do you find that you're still connected to other people from high school or from the school days who are... All have similar lives or...?

[00:21:33]

Rose: Yes, of course. Like I say, at my age 86, there's really not a whole lot of people that are really left in my era. But those of us that are, we keep in touch.

[00:21:50]

Kacey: Yeah. And I can totally sense that being here. I mean just being here for two weekends, everyone knows each other and everyone has some story about someone. And they're like, "You need to talk to this person. They know that person." And is that just reflective of spending your life here and growing up here, knowing these people and just having the shared experience of being here or...?

[00:22:13]

Rose: Well, I think it is. Marsing is a small community. And Jordan Valley is a small, connected community. And like I say, where we have lived at these various spots, there's not too many places we can't go that we don't know somebody.

[00:22:40]

Kacey: Oh, yeah. I mean, I like to think that I'm from not too big of a town and I feel that way. I can't even go to the store sometimes and not know someone. So, I can't imagine just even a more concentrated pool of... You have some story with every person you run into.

[00:22:57]

Rose: Well, when we lived at Donnelly — you were speaking of a store — we had a little grocery store. And my husband absolutely loved peanut butter. We bought peanut butter in the five-gallon containers.

[00:23:12]

Kacey: Oh my gosh, I didn't even know they made them that big.

[00:23:13]

Rose: Well, they did back then. And you would make sure you stood it up to get the oil, keep it mixed up. But if you wanted sauerkraut, he had sauerkraut in a big barrel. People took

their pans. He weighed their pan. He put sauerkraut in. And then, he charged them for the sauerkraut. He had pickles that way in the containers. He also had powdered sugar and brown sugar that way.

And I had chickens. And we had some pigs that we raised. And so, when we butchered the pigs, I rendered the lard. And the store in Cascade, he would tell you what day that the people from Boise would be there to bring the hams and the bacons down. And they would send them off and they would cure them. And with the chickens, you took the eggs to the grocery store and he traded you out in groceries. So, our life was so much different than what most people see today.

[00:24:27]

Kacey: Yeah. It was a true bartering. He did this-for-that-type of situation.

[00:24:32]

Rose: It was.

[00:24:33]

Kacey: Even later on, do you see that those types of connections and cultures have still lived on just...?

[00:24:42]

Rose: No, I don't believe they're nearly as helpful as they used to be.

[00:24:51]

Kacey: Yeah. I mean, if somebody has the pigs and someone has the chickens, I mean, you're all switching around so everyone has a little bit of everything. But I guess that's really not the case anymore. Everyone's far more individualistic.

[00:25:05]

Rose: Yes, yes. And like I say, the lady at the feed store, she was also a beautician. And I traded her dressed chickens for haircuts.

[00:25:21]

Kacey: I mean, not a bad trade.

[00:25:22]

Rose: No, it wasn't a bad trade at all. And when the huckleberries were in, I bundled up my little kids. And we went out and we picked huckleberries. And at the golf course, I sold berries to the grocery store. And he would call me and say, "They're coming for the tournament. If you've got any extra berries, bring them up, and we could sure sell them." Well, that way, we would have money that we could buy our children's shoes.

[00:25:54]

Kacey: Yeah, it was always some other side going on.

[00:25:58]

Rose: Yes, there was always... And you don't think of people doing those things today.

[00:26:04]

Kacey: Yeah. I mean, it's definitely not the assumed path that everyone's on. It's far different. But just the story of going out and getting huckleberries, I mean, people still go and do that but it's never for... Most of the time, it's just for individual enjoyment, not for the betterment of either these communities or these connections. So, it's really great to hear that there was always someone looking out, or someone...

[00:26:30]

Rose: Yeah, it was... But the communities were real good, and the community that we're in. Like I say, I don't have anything to do with the ranch now. I have my home there, but I'm not involved in it. But I sell western wear and such, so I'm still very busy.

[00:26:55]

Kacey: Oh, yeah, I imagine.

[00:26:57]

Rose: And I go to markets, and I buy this stuff. But my health was going downhill. And the doctor told my husband, said, "She can't work on the ranch anymore like she has." And he asked me what I was going to do. He says, "Are you going to go play bridge with the neighbor man?" Well, the neighbor man was 25 miles away. And I said, "I don't know. But when he comes next time for eggs, I'll ask him if he plays bridge."

And so, he needed a pair of boots. And I called the company that we bought his boots from. And they sent me a pair. So, the next time they needed some boots, I called and he says, "Do you have a dealership?" And I said, "No, but you sent me the boots." "Well, you'll have to buy five pair." Well, he sent me two postcards. There was six pair on each post card. So, I got an order for these boots. I sent them to him. So, now if I need one pair, two pair, I can get them. I did that with the hats, that brand of hat that my husband liked. I did that with that. So, I had to get six hats, at \$250 I had, so it wasn't too hard to do that.

[00:28:14]

Kacey: Yeah. Well, it seems like your husband is your sole customer here. Do you find that... Outside of cattle ranching, it seems like you found another avenue to really connect with the need of the community. Do you find that doing this new side business keeps that connection going?

[00:28:33]

Rose: Well, I think so. I think I left my phone at home. I did. Because I was going to show you. But it's been enjoyable. And I think it helps quite a few people. The rodeo always has a little mutton busting. Now, that's when they're little kids up to about six. They ride the sheep. So, I said, "Well, I'll give some prizes." Well, we have two little kids each day, that's only four prizes. I've been doing this for quite a number of years now. We are now up to 30 mutton busters each day, so now that's...

[00:29:23]

Kacey: Oh, my god. That's a lot of prizes to organize. What do you choose for your prizes?

[00:29:28]

Rose: Well, I buy caps, boys' caps, girls' caps. Belts, I buy assorted sizes. But if I do that, I make the parents come down and help pick. Backpacks. Suckers that are long that are...

[00:29:45]

Kacey: Oh, the swirly, big, movie-type ones.

[00:29:47]

Rose: Yes. With the animal on the end. It'll be a horse or something. Well, there's just a lot of different things that I come up with for them.

[00:29:59]

Kacey: Oh, yeah. So, now that you've gone into the seller business of these western goods, do you find that you're just known as the Western store?

[00:30:09]

Rose: No, I don't know. I just hope I'm helpful to the people. That's what I want to be.

[00:30:17]

Kacey: Yeah. I mean, I think that's what we're all hoping for. But it really sounds like there's always this... You specifically are always searching for this place to fill the need for someone or some part of the community. And that's also just a larger vision of the community of everyone's always doing all these different things to help out each other. So, that's really cool to just...

[00:30:39]

Rose: But see, my husband liked horses. So, we went to a lot of horse sales. And so, my trailer is all set up. And I would sell outside, and he would be inside buying. This one particular night, I had locked up and I told him, I says, "Just a minute, Gordon, Kelly's coming." And Kelly came out. And she looked at me and she looked at my husband. And she says, "I talked to you inside. I talked to Rose outside. I didn't know you two belong to each other." [Laughter]

And so, my husband says, "Well, you can be our daughter while we're here." She was a Canadian. And I says, "Well, my husband's name is Gordon King," and her eyes got big. "That's my father's name. He's dual citizenship. He came from the States. But when he met my mother, he got citizenship for Canada." And so, when we went to Calgary one year for the rodeo, we called, and we went out. And her dad was there. And they were a spitting image of each other, those men were.

[00:31:52]

Kacey: Oh, my gosh. What are the odds of that? Just how did those things work out?

[00:31:57]

Rose: I don't know.

[00:31:58]

Kacey: That is so funny. And you hear about those just odd moments all the time, but makes you question how odd they are.

[00:32:05]

Rose: But you never think you will experience it.

[00:32:07]

Kacey: Yeah, but there's always something where it's like some weird coincidence. But that really, I think, just speaks to the level of personability and friendliness of the community. There's always going to be some distant relative of this person is also the distant relative. That seems like no matter what, there's always going to be those connections...

[00:32:28]

Rose: There will be.

[00:32:28]

Kacey: ...especially in a community like this.

[00:32:33]

Rose: And my goal in life, I wanted to be a tailor.

[00:32:38]

Kacey: A tailor? Well, now you sell clothes.

[00:32:38]

Rose: Well, I made clothes, too.

[00:32:40]

Kacey: Oh, really? So, did you get to fulfill your tailor goal?

[00:32:43]

Rose: Oh, I did. I made all my husband's shirts, my children's clothes. And I sewed for other people.

[00:32:51]

Kacey: That is really cool.

[00:32:52]

Rose: So, yes.

[00:32:53]

Kacey: Was that something that you were doing at all of these different places that you found yourself? And was this like a lifetime...

[00:33:01]

Rose: Well, it was just something that you did. And for this one particular customer, her husband had this one beautiful jacket. And he loved it, but his elbows wore out the lining. So, she would bring it over, so I could reline...

[00:33:17]

Kacey: His elbows.

[00:33:19]

Rose: ...the sleeves quite frequently. And there's just a lot of different things. But no, when our oldest son got married, his wife, well, his bride-to-be, she and her mother went shopping for wedding gowns. And she picked one out that she liked. And so, several days later, she and I went back, and she tried on the gown. And I had a Polaroid camera. And I took pictures this way, that way, and another way. When I came home, I put these pictures all up on my little shelf. And we made her wedding gown.

[00:33:58]

Kacey: That is amazing. That is so cool. It seems like all of your different avenues and paths have just brought so much fulfillment in all these different areas.

[00:34:09]

Rose: It does, but you know, one, one has to create. And so, you can't... Nobody makes anybody happy.

[00:34:19]

Kacey: Yeah, it's all innate. It's all personal. It's not about anyone else.

[00:34:23]

Rose: It is. And so, it can be, "Poor, woe little me," or, "Well, it's a better day today."

[00:34:28]

Kacey: I'm gonna do something about it. Yeah. And I think that attitude is becoming more and more few and far between. It's less and less common to really have that. It's my responsibility to create my happiness. So, it's great to hear that that's something that other people recognize as well of, it is your responsibility. It is your journey to advocate for. And it really sounds like you made a point to find all of these different things that you could do for yourself even.

That's just really amazing to hear, especially about the wedding dress. That is such a cool, cool story to talk about how something that you chose to do for yourself really helped someone that you love very much. Do you have any other stories about just tailoring or anything that that has done for you or for the community?

[00:35:18]

Rose: Oh, I've sewn for a lot of people in the community.

[00:35:21]

Kacey: Yeah, I imagine.

[00:35:23]

Rose: This one lady, she would go to Boise and she would find the kind of a dress she wanted. But it would probably cost her \$100 or more there. And we would go to town and we would pick out the fabric. And I had one lady that came to the house one day. She was a friend. And her husband was in the Senate here for Idaho. And I had an afghan. And she said to me, "I want one of those afghans." I said, "Okay."

And our little grocery store, it had yarn. It used to have everything that you could get. So, we went and she picked out her yarn. And unbeknownst to me after she had passed, her husband told me, he said, "She was bundled up in that afghan the day she died." And I thought, "Well, Lucy wanted that afghan really bad. I made it for her. At least she enjoyed it."

[00:36:28]

Kacey: Yeah, that is so beautiful. And I mean, just that tangible connection of just a physical reminder of this was a real moment. It's just such a beautiful thing to reflect on, of, there's actually something physical to look back on and think that is what that meant to that person. So, that's really cool to hear about.

[00:36:48]

Rose: But that's probably not what you were wanting, but...

[00:36:51]

Kacey: No, this is exactly what we're looking for. It's more about connecting with the personal side of this area and land to really showcase what it means to live out here. And that's

really what we're looking for, is what does it mean to be a part of this community? And what does that look like? Who does that affect? Who does that include?

[00:37:10]

Rose: Well, I think the Lions Club in town, the Mennonites do an awful lot. Everything that they do, these are not paid jobs. But if there is a wreck, the ambulance needs to go, these people quit doing what they're doing and they go.

[00:37:33]

Kacey: Yeah, I spoke with the deputy fire chief earlier today. And he was telling me how that is all volunteer raised. And one of the questions I had for him is, as a volunteer, you don't really get the privilege to ever turn it off. And he made a really good point about if we're not going to do it, who will?

[00:37:51]

Rose: That's right.

[00:37:53]

Kacey: Yeah. And it was really eye-opening to me. In these small communities, people really do step up to say, "Well, I'll just take care of this. I'll take one for the team on this one. You did this, I'll do that." And it was really cool to really be a part of that, to really recognize and see how important that shared value is as a community.

[00:38:13]

Rose: Yeah, that's it. And it was just like with 4-H. I taught 4-H cooking and sewing. And this one little girl, she lived out quite a ways. And so, she stayed at our place, the nights that we had our 4-H. And I see her to this day. And she tells me that was the best years of her life. And she says, "I wanted to model after what you and Gordon had." And she has a wonderful husband now.

Her first husband was a wonderful young fellow. But they were putting in grain in the granary. And when he moved something, it hit the electrical wires and electrocuted him. They had two little children. But I saw her just the other day. And she reminded me, she says, "You don't know how much you taught me." But she's a wonderful person. And she's got, like I say, a really nice husband now. Not that her first husband wasn't, it was just...

[00:39:18]

Kacey: Yeah. A tragic...

[00:39:19]

Rose: ...a tragic accident that took him.

[00:39:21]

Kacey: Yeah. Well, as a young person, I definitely have those people in my life where you can just recognize. "I am a different person after meeting you and seeing how you choose to live your life." And it's reassuring that those moments aren't lost on the people that we're learning those from. Because I know that people that I... I have people like you in my life where I look up to and think "I chose to be like you." I have those role models. And to hear that recognition means something and isn't lost is really great to hear about.

[00:39:55]

Rose: But I have friends that I don't see very often, but we're still friends. You don't have to smother each other.

[00:40:05]

Kacey: And I think that's the best type of friendship. You do your thing. I'll do my thing. We'll meet in the middle sometime when we can. Yeah.

[00:40:13]

Rose: But no, I had brought the book. I didn't know if you have some of the pictures that we had. But I see what your...

[00:40:22]

Kacey: Yeah. And sometimes the pictures help with the memories anyway. Sometimes it's great to look forward or look back at, and sparks up a conversation. Well, we're nearing the time limit here. Is there anything else that you were hoping to get out here or anything else that you want to talk about before we turn it off for the day?

[00:40:40]

Rose: No, I just think that the ranching areas and a lot of the farmers too, they used to have to work together because they couldn't all have the same equipment. And it was harder when they were all new on it. But I do think that the areas from the Marsing through the Bruneau area towards Mountain Home, I think, they're a good group of people.

[00:41:11]

Kacey: A good bunch.

[00:41:12]

Rose: They are.

[00:41:13]

Kacey: It's the gem state for a reason. Maybe it's not the real gems, it's the people.

[00:41:18]

Rose: But it is. It is very true. And I feel very honored to have lived where I've lived and met the people I've met. And like I say, you don't have to see your neighbor all the time. But you know if you ever need anything, they're still there.

[00:41:35]

Kacey: Yeah. Well, I am so glad that we were able to capture your perspective of this community and really shine light to all the beautiful parts of it that people don't normally get to see unless they're out here doing these things. So, I want to thank you for your time and just coming out here and spending your Saturdays with 40 minutes of talking to me. So, I appreciate that.

[00:41:58]

Rose: Well, thank you very much. It was an honor.

Mary O'Malley

[00:00:01]

Interviewer: All right. So, today I'm interviewing Mary O'Malley for the Shared Stories Lab Oral History Project. It is April 9th, 2022, and we are at the Owyhee County Museum in Murphy, Idaho. I am Nichole Crandall, and I am the interviewer for the Shared Stories Lab. How would you like to tell us a little bit about your background in the area?

[00:00:25]

Mary: Well, I've lived here in Murphy since I was a few days old and left the hospital until three years ago and moved to town. I'm 75 and it's just easier to live in town, closer to facilities. But when I lived here, two miles out of Murphy, I lived within 15 or 20 miles of where my dad was born in 1897 in Black Jack which is a mining camp, never really had a post office, up above Silver City. And his mother was born in the head of Reynolds Creek in 1867. Her family came on the Oregon Trail headed for California, got as far as Nevada, heard about the strike in Silver City in 1864, and came up here with milk cows, pigs, and then four kids, and had six more kids, and stayed here. And my brother still has the ranch. It's the oldest ranch in the same family in the state of Idaho, 1865. So, I've been here, this area, a long time.

[00:01:32]

Nicole: So, you grew up on the ranch here.

[00:01:35]

Mary: Yeah. Grew up on ranch. Could ride before I could walk. That was how you got anywhere; you took a horse because you needed... Not that you couldn't walk, it's that the horse needed breaking. And so, you took him and went about your business.

[00:01:51]

Nicole: So, you say breaking. What is that?

[00:01:54]

Mary: Well, gentling would be the city thing. You'd take a colt, two years old, wind up roping with him to catch up with him, and then you start explaining to him how it's going to be from now on. He's going to wear this bridle, saddle. And after he has resolved to that, then you educate him that you're going to get on him and ride him and we're going to go herd cattle together. Sometimes that's almost that fast. And I think of the 9 or 10 horses I broke from the time I was 9 till the time I was 18, I never rode a gentle horse. I kept break-... I'd get a new one every year. I had one that was nearly that obvious. Once he realized he was stuck, he said, "Okay. Whatever you want." A lot of them are not nearly so easy to talk to.

[00:02:45]

Nicole: So, that one was probably your favorite horse?

[00:02:48]

Mary: No, he was a sneaky knothead. But it just goes to show you horses are just as individual as people. He just realized he was stuck and said, "Oh, whatever."

[00:03:00]

Nicole: So, where is this ranch located?

[00:03:02]

Mary: It's five miles down the road. It's Sinker Creek. It's one of the... There's just a couple of creeks that are year-round in the front range of the Owyhee mountains, and it's one of them. Reynolds Creek, for example, is almost year-round. Sinker Creek is year-round. I'm trying to think. That may be the only one that's really year-round most of the time, so it was an obvious place for the first settlers to get because it had better water.

[00:03:27]

Nicole: Yeah. Wow, that's super neat.

[00:03:29]

Mary: And there was one meadow that the Indians used, they came spring and fall on their way from where they spent the winter to where they spent the summer, and so the Joyces, which was the early family name, didn't settle that because they knew the Indians would use it. And then, the Bannock War just about finished off the Indians in this area for a lot of different reasons, and that was 1878. So, then they went ahead and filed on that meadow. Just one meadow. It isn't huge, but they called it the Indian Meadow. They knew they would be back with their horses because Indians through here were migratory. Nobody can make a living staying put without irrigation.

[00:04:15]

Nicole: Yeah. So, you live right beside this creek.

[00:04:20]

Mary: Yeah. It's miles of pastureland. It isn't row cropland. It's quite gravelly. But it's probably five miles intermittent irrigated fields. Pretty strung out by modern standards. Not the pretty fields you see in the farms.

[00:04:37]

Nicole: I don't know. I like the sagebrush area. This is gorgeous, driving up here.

[00:04:40]

Mary: Well, this is sagebrush on both sides. But right down in the creek, they've taken all the land that they can get level enough and run water across it and pick up that water and

run it across again. And it's basically pastureland. Sometimes, they hay it. We tried corn one time. It was too much work. It's not very good soil, so it didn't grow very well. It was too much work.

[00:05:06]

Nicole: So, it mostly was pastureland for what type of animal did you guys have, raise?

[00:05:10]

Mary: Well, they were beef cattle, Herefords. My brother does all kinds of exotics now like Charolais and they've even tried Santa Gertrudis. Whatever the new breed is, they try them. Now the big one is Angus, but he has a mixture of cattle. I look at them and say, "I wonder what your ancestors were." [Laughs] Like people. They mix. "Okay. Black with a white face, but you're built more like a Charolais. Okay. Something."

[00:05:40]

Nicole: Yeah. So, is there any specific stories that you want to talk about?

[00:05:46]

Mary: I can't think of any. My mother came here from Philadelphia, grew up at a rowhouse, so she was first-generation American. Her mother was born in England, came as a child. Her father was born in Germany, came as a child. And he actually fought in the Spanish-American War, so he was here in time to be Americanized enough to go to the army. So, that was 1898.

But she was working in Philadelphia and had bad sinuses, and they said, "You need a dryer climate for your health. So, we can transfer you." She was working for Burpee Seed Company, which was a big company back east and still is. "We can transfer you to Denver or Boise." But her boss knew somebody at Northrup-King in Boise and so she transferred there.

Was working at the seed company, and one of the other employees said, "My best friend's brother has a horse running in the 100-mile horse race out in Owyhee County. A city girl like you needs to go see it." So, they took her out. And my dad had entered this horse, stallion off the range in there, and the horse won. And three months later, they got married and everybody said, "Huh?" [Laughs] Because my dad was 48 and she was 34 and neither one had ever really dated seriously, and they get married in three months?

And she thought that was really something, to actually talk to somebody who talked to Indian fighters. My dad didn't really remember them, born in '97, but he certainly was raised by people who had actually fought Indians, and now we were all friends and getting along. And she just thought that was fascinating that you knew that kind of second-person. And there were still Indians here that would sell their moccasins or sell gloves, especially at the Oreana store, and other things that were immediate like that.

So she, among other things, got a 16mm camera and went out and took pictures of branding, teaching horses to drive. And the museum has that here, 16mm big reels, and then they would put on DVD and VHS and people call me and say, "Your family ranch is on PBS." Fundraising is when they run it, and they run it again. I say, "Yeah, I know. Okay. Thank you." But there's a snippet of a J-3 plane, very early crop-duster flying maybe two minutes. There's a picture of a really early combine from the 1940s, maybe five minutes. And then teaching the team to drive. Running horses. They come off the ridge and it's all very impressive, just like the movies. Of course, my mom from Philadelphia's going, "Wow," and taking all these pictures.

So, that's kind of neat to have because the people that lived here said, "They're just running a combine. They're just branding. This isn't special." But to her it was, and so she... And she was a real active Girl Scout. And that tied in well because she knew all about camping and the stars and the birds and things that on a ranch are just kind of taken for granted. And she says, "I know what that is," and everybody else says, "Yeah. It's a pink bird." [Laughs] She actually knew it.

And my dad, his idea of what he did in life was take care of his cows. My mom always said her competition all weighed 1,200 pounds. "The girls," he called them. We had about 1,000 head, cows and calves, and he knew them all. They didn't have a name, but "You know that one with the red eye and last year she had the steer calf and we sold him to so-an-so." And then I learned them all. It was a cow I was supposed to go fetch because they're range cattle. They went on the open range and tend to spend the summer in the same place if they like it. They'll be on the same meadow up high, on the mountain year after year if they want to.

[00:09:48]

Nicole: So, your job growing up was to fetch the cattle when....

[00:09:52]

Mary: Well, yeah. They don't need a lot of fetching, but sometimes you want a specific one for some reason or the calf didn't look right when you saw it last and you have to find it a week later and see if the calf looks like it's better. The ones that tended to be the ones you didn't see were just like children, it isn't the kids in the grade school that the teacher never notices that are the problem, it's the ones that stick up and cause trouble. And those tend to not be hard to find. Those are the cows.

And the calves, of course, get sold. Most of the steer calves get sold every fall. Compared to other cattle operations, they need very little maintenance. When my son went to the University of Idaho and got an Ag Science degree, one of his professors said, "How often do you vaccinate?" And Robbie said, "Once." And the professor said, "Once a year? Once a month?" "No. Once in the lifetime," because, if they're in a much moister climate, they get many more diseases. I mean, that's true in humans. If they live in New Orleans, they

get diseases that we don't get up here. Malaria, TB tends to be where people live together and where climate is no better. Same way with cows. This climate, they get very little because it's dry and it's cold. They get vaccines just like humans do, but not as many as if they lived in a climate where malaria was a problem, say.

What else could you ask? We had horses. We had range horses because you have to have horses, pretty much, to work cattle. And they still do. But my brother, just within the last five years, I forget exactly which year, he finally converted his last horse range right to cattle. And that was the last horse range right in Owyhee County. And there's a huge history if you read about Owyhee County going back with thousands and thousands of horses were raised. And the Horse Queen of Idaho was here. Horses were huge, and they became much less valuable after World War I.

That's where these so-called wild horses are from, is after World War I especially and after the early pioneer days, people couldn't afford to feed horses. And so, they would turn them loose. And my uncle Charlie told about seeing a guy come out with a bunch of workhorses from Ada County, say, Kuna area I think, and brought this herd of 30 or 40 horses out, swam them across the river and said, "Have a good life, guys. Bye," because he couldn't afford to feed them. And that sort of... I mean, they came much less valuable.

And after World War II, you practically couldn't give them away. And so, horses became just kind of a... Now, they're a hobby. It used to be they weren't living with horses, and now they're a hobby. And so, horses have become much, much less. My family were never huge into horses, but they had hundreds because that's what you had to have.

[00:12:57]

Nicole:

So, you talked before, you said something about horse range rights and your brother just passed up the last one in Owyhee County. Do you mind explaining what a horse range right is?

[00:13:09]

Mary:

Well, on the public range, which is most of Owyhee County... I think it's owned about 85% by the federal government, administered by the BLM. And from times way back, just like water rights, you know, when somebody files on a water right in Boise, they have a right because they are using it for beneficial use on a truck garden, say. They have a right somewhere in the statehouse. Well, the same way only this is federal ground.

It was unregulated before the Taylor Grazing Act of 1939 which created the BLM which was put together from the grazing service and the government land office. So, federal ownership. They regulated how many... They would ask me how many cattle I ran, and I say 100, and how many do you run, and I'd say she runs maybe 50. So, then they go to you and they say, "Okay. How many do you run?" And you say, "I run 150." "And how many does Mary run?" "Well, she runs, I don't know, 75." And when they got all that

figured out, then they said, "Okay. You have a right to however many." And this was early '40s.

And they came up with X amount which you pay every year, called an animal unit month. You pay just a few dollars every month on every cow, which really adds up over years. And it's been adjusted several times. But the basic right goes back to about '40s when that was put in. And so, you had a right for so many cattle and so many horses and so many sheep if that's what you ran.

But then, say sheep have totally died out. Well, the guy that owned sheep says, "I don't think I can grow sheep anymore. There's no market for them. Plus, the coyotes are eating them right and left. I want to convert." And they convert. I think it was 5:1, sheep to cattle, and I think cattle are 2:1 horses. So, if my brother, say, still had a right for 50 horses, and I think that's about what he had, then he would be able to get 100 cattle right trade. And you'd go into the BLM and fill out some forms. I've never actually done it, but I know my dad did it once in a while because he did less and less horses. He never had sheep, but less and less horses and more and more cattle.

And it's kind of on the idea of how much the critter will eat of the federal range, how much value, how much damage is the critter going to do on the grass or the range. And of course, as you know from looking out here in the sagebrush, there's no grass, per se. A cow that is from the Wallowa Valley of Oregon would starve to death here. She wouldn't know what to eat. And the same way with a horse. Whereas, if you've ever seen the cattle up here, they're fat and sassy compared to what they should be.

My dad went to Wallowa. He said, "If my ancestors were coming out on the Oregon Trail and were going to leave me a ranch, why didn't they get here instead?" Because you look at the cows and the grass is up to their bellies. Just huge. But the cattle don't look any better than the ones here, so it's kind of what they get used to and what they're able to make... If you're used to driving a Ferrari, that's one thing. But if you're used to driving a Chevy, you might do better with a Chevy. And these cattle are much more Chevy people. Does that answer what range right is?

[00:16:48]

Nicole: Yeah. So, your brother gave up his horse range right.

[00:16:51]

Mary: Yeah. He converted it to cattle.

[00:16:54]

Nicole: He converted it all to cattle.

[00:16:57]

Mary: Yeah. Nobody else has any.... No more legal horses.

[00:16:59]

Nicole: No horses?

[00:17:00]

Mary: Yeah. No more legal ones. Supposedly, people turn them out. The BLM says they really don't find branded horses that often. I have a feeling they just die. It's like turning out stray cats. They don't do well.

[00:17:12]

Nicole: So, you actually brand your horses along with....

[00:17:15]

Mary: Have to be. On the range, have to be.

[00:17:16]

Nicole: Have to be.

[00:17:17]

Mary: Yeah. How would anybody know what they were? I mean, how would the BLM enforce? You could turn out 1,000 cows when you had a right for 100, except by brand, and they say, "Uh-uh-uh. Tut-tut-tut. One, two, three, four, five, six..." Because the BLM, they tend to be young people like you that come out of college and say, "Okay. Where do I start?" And they have to be able to identify the cattle and identify what it is we're trying to do here.

They have earmarks. The MJ, which is the ranch brand, is supposedly one of the earliest brands in Owyhee County, but has always had... It has a split in the right ear and an overslope in the left ear, and it has a wattle, they cut the skin, loose skin, and they cut it, in a calf, about as wide as my little finger is the perfect way, and it's right in here. So, I can see a cow driving past on the road 60 miles an hour and tell you if it's Paul's cow or not. I can tell it fastest from the wattle. If she's standing right, I can tell it from her brand. Other people, of course have a....

My mom always swore that my dad could see the brand before she could see the hill that the cow was on. But she was raised in Philadelphia. So, it's a matter of identifying them. And each brand is registered in the state, and there's a brand book and brand inspectors. If a bunch of cattle are taken into a sale ring, the brand inspectors make sure that the brand matches the paperwork so that you can't take my cows to town and sell them and I can't take your cows to town. Like a car registration, and this is a very primitive VIN number.

[00:19:03]

Nicole: So, you do it with the horses too, I'm assuming.

[00:19:05]

Mary: Horses, yeah.

[00:19:05]

Nicole: I thought you would take the horses closer to where you need going. Rather than just out.

[00:19:09]

Mary: No, horses, that's what they do now. Now they're raised in a pasture. But my dad's theory was that horses who were raised in pastures didn't do well out there trying to climb up and down the hills to go get where the cattle were, and they'd break their neck. And to some extent, that's true. They don't do quite as well. But it just isn't worth it. The horses have no basic use. It's a major pain to have somebody break them. They've run out of dumb kids like me to do the work.

[Laughter]

[00:19:44]

Nicole: It looks like you got the tough work for it.

[00:19:47]

Mary: Yeah. It's easier said. . . . My dad spent an awful lot of time working with a nine-year-old kid to break horses. And he thought that was important. That's what should happen.

[00:19:58]

Nicole: And so, your brother also had the job too?

[00:20:01]

Mary: Not much. He was sickly, and so he kept getting pneumonia and trying to die every winter, so my mom kind of kept him in the house. And by time he got well enough to just go out and do what kids do, he was probably about a third-grader. And by then, you don't ride as naturally. He may have a different version. But he never got where he could ride as naturally as I could just because, well, it's like learning a language, I think, to some extent. Most of the time, if you're going to learn a language, if you don't learn before about 9 or 10, you're going to have a lot of trouble getting good, getting to sound like a native speaker. And I think same way with riding horses. So, I rode from the time I was. . . .

Well, that's kind of how I got started here, writing. I showed up in a meeting and they said, "You need to write your story." I said, "I'm just a kid." This is 20 years ago. And Julie Hyslop was in charge here and she said, "And how many people grew up like you did?" And I said, "You've got a point." [Laughs] Partly because my dad was so much older. I

grew up thinking breaking horses was normal. Now, nobody does that. So, what other good questions do you have?

[00:21:20]

Nicole: What is something you want to... You kind of talked about this before, but is there anything else you want to tell about your experience that would help people who are unfamiliar with this land? Land or community.

[00:21:32]

Mary: Well, it becomes less possible all the time to make a living off the land. We're getting more and more — and every place is — more and more people who have portable incomes. They work remotely. They are writers or truck drivers or airline pilots. We have a group of 60 pilots that work around a runway down here, Sky Park, across from Givens Hot Springs, right along the river. They share a runway. And many, many of them are airline pilots. Some are retired, some do other things, but a lot of them are airline pilots. Well, they have a run from San Francisco to Japan. So, they drive to Boise and catch an airplane, go to San Francisco, get the route, do the route, and come back. That sort of job. They're not making a living in Owyhee County.

And more and more and more people are doing that type of thing. Owyhee County — and the county officials would know this better than I would — but people aren't making a living off the... I'll say my brother now owns 10,000 acres. I don't know if that's accurate, but that's the idea. He and my nephew and one hired man run that with seven to eight hundred cattle, and that's a living. But very few people can do that. And that's a lot of acres that you pay taxes on and everything. And most people in Owyhee County now are making a living some other way than off the land. It's just pretty sparse ground.

The Indians were that way too. I mean, there was... I forget. I've read an estimate of how many Indians the very earliest white men that came in and thought about these things back in missionary times thought of, and it's like one Indian per 10 square miles. It's not a whole lot better now, people who can make a living from the land. They make it some other way. And even then, most farm families everywhere in the United States have a family member that has a job off the farm. They work in the courthouse, so they get retirement and health insurance. And that's true here too. Many, many, many families, yeah, we're ranchers, but the wife works at the courthouse or she's the county treasurer, or she's the county whatever. And that is more and more true here.

And it's more and more true everywhere, but Owyhee County didn't have much anyhow. It was really sparse from everywhere. When you look at the density, say, of people, Indians, on the Columbia River up toward the coast, many, many, many more people. Lewis and Clark, when they went through Montana which has the same problem, they went 90 days and never saw an Indian. Lewis and Clark were out where there should've been people. They were seen because they saw signal fires. But they get down toward the Columbia and they have people every day. The Indians make pests of themselves

because they start stealing things and harassing them. Who knows? But it's like going into a city, whereas all across Montana, just like all across through here would've been, there were no people. They can't make a living off it.

And the Indians couldn't work remotely. [Laughs] They had to make a living off the land. So, that's one thing that I think is not often appreciated here, is you can't make a living off the land very easily. A few people can but not many.

[00:25:21]

Nicole:

Do you have any experience you want to talk about with the community around here? You kind of touched base with that with the scarcity. Do you have anything else you would like to say about that?

[00:25:32]

Mary:

Well, again, sparse people. I lived five miles that way, and I raised my kids two miles out here. It's 13 miles to school. When I was a kid, there was no bus. So, the first year, I was in the first grade, they boarded me with my aunt, dad's sister, in Nampa. The second year, there was a kid from Murphy who was finishing his senior year. His dad had taken a job out here, but he drove back in to finish his senior year at high school every day. They paid him to take me to school. The third year, they gave up and let me go to the one-room school in Murphy where there were 11 kids in five grades.

And I may as well stayed home because that standard school was so far behind. Even two years of the Catholic school in Nampa was nice and all. I learned to sing, and I learned some poetry. But I went back to fourth grade and they were multiplying and dividing and started history, and I said, "Huh? How'd all this happen?" And then, when my brother went to school, there were two of us. So, then they bought a place in town that we called "in town," but it was 40 acres, eight miles out, and everybody else called it a farm. We thought it was town. But that sort of thing.

And then, when we went to high school, you don't go to high school around here because there were no buses then. And it's too far to drive really, 13 miles each way. That would be 26 miles morning and night to take kids to school. Not feasible on gravel roads. Well, my folks didn't think so. So, I was boarding. I went to boarding school at Cottonwood, the convent, the convent school. And before that, every girl out here, girls were sent to the convent schools because they could board them, and that's how it was. The boys tended to not go to high school. Solved that problem.

My dad didn't graduate high school. His younger brothers did, but they were sent to boarding schools. My kids went to Melba on a bus. There's one bus a day. But when you go to a boarding school, you don't have any social life. I realize now, listening to my grandkids talk about track, running track. And I knew this in high school. We didn't pay much attention. You can't do debate, you can't do band, you can't do anything because

it's all weekends, and you're on the ranch. So, that is a problem that every family out here has to figure out somehow.

And more than a few have places in town, which may be Bruneau, which isn't much, but the people from down at Riddle and Three Creek and...I'm trying too think where else, anyhow, worse places than that, you have to have a place in town or send the kid to boarding school. There's just nothing else to do. Or they don't go to high school. And now, high school's assumed. I wouldn't have been able to go to high school except for boarding. But now, they have buses. It's just unheard of for middle-class kids to not go to high school. And just ahead of me, at even my age, it didn't always happen. And that is still true. You still have to figure out a way to get kids to school.

[00:28:59]

Nicole: I don't have any more questions. We're hitting the 30-minute mark. If you want to say any last few words or not, we could just wrap it up.

[00:29:08]

Mary: I can't think of anything. I mean, I can go on babbling along forever, but...

[00:29:13]

Nicole: I mean. [Laughs] It's been great hearing all of your stories.

[00:29:16]

Mary: Yeah. I've got to say that's something that you won't hear everywhere from the same people, different people. But you have, in these interviews, gotten a few people that will have that same story, like Jerry Hoagland, who was raised on Reynolds Creek which had the same problem. And he went to the one-room school all the time, and then it kept closing on him. He'd go a while in Reynolds — this will all come out in his — and then they close it. And then he went to Murphy for a few years, and then he got bused into Melba for a few years. And this is just younger than I am. So, it's changing in my lifetime even. How do we get kids to school? How do we make a living here? Yeah, I don't have anything. Like I said, I can go on forever about...

[00:29:55]

Nicole: I mean, I love hearing all of your stories.

[00:29:57]

Mary: ...how things are changing.

[00:29:58]

Nicole: It's been really great to hear from you. Thank you again for coming in and talking to us about it. And then, I'm just going to hit this button here.

Lou Monson

[00:00:00]

Kacey: I've already asked if you have any questions, but I'm just going to let you know that after about 40 minutes, our audio quality gets a little rough. So I will let you know when we're nearing that timeline, that it's time to give some closing cues.

[00:00:11]

Lou: I probably don't have 40 minutes' worth of stuff.

[00:00:13]

Kacey: [Laughs] That is perfect. I know some people are more talkers so we like to prep them before we get started that we're only looking for about 40 minutes here. So today, I'm interviewing Lou. And then can you remind me of your last name? Monson?

[00:00:26]

Lou: Mm-hmm.

[00:00:27]

Kacey: Lou Monson. I'm with Shared Stories Lab and today is April 9th. And we are at the Murphy Idaho Museum. And I'm interviewing for Shared Stories Lab. So first off, could you tell me a little bit about your background in this area or just your background in general?

[00:00:45]

Lou: Well, I lived in the Nampa/Caldwell area from about 1969, '70. And then I did 30 years in the military. And we moved back to this area and moved out here into the Owyhee desert in 2010 and joined the local fire brigade. And I'm now the deputy chief of Murphy-Reynolds-Wilson Fire District and the head EMT—emergency medical technician—for the fire district. Retired. Other than chasing fires and whiffs of smoke, we just enjoy our retirement.

[00:01:48]

Kacey: Yeah. So with that job, are you spending a lot of time out on the landscape walking around?

[00:01:53]

Lou: All of it. A lot of it.

[00:01:54]

Kacey: All of it?

[00:01:54]

Lou: Yeah. Yeah, I do. Starting in about 2010, early 2011, I have been out. It's almost a daily thing. We do about 100... This year, it looks like it's going to be about 150 emergency medical calls a year. And we're all volunteers. Uncompensated, 100% volunteers. And we'll probably do 20 fires. Out of that 20, five of them will be structure fires and 15 of them will be wildland, which puts us out in the sagebrush. The fire district is 350 square miles. It's the second-largest fire district in the state of Idaho.

[00:02:45]

Kacey: And that's completely volunteer-run?

[00:02:47]

Lou: 100% volunteer. Nobody is compensated for anything.

[00:02:51]

Kacey: Wow, that's crazy. So is that land area bigger than Owyhee County?

[00:02:55]

Lou: No.

[00:02:56]

Kacey: I guess I'm just unfamiliar...

[00:02:56]

Lou: It's actually just a part of Owyhee County. If you come up Highway 78, about eight miles this side of Marsing, our fire district starts and goes to Fossil Creek towards Oreana, which is just three or four miles from the Oreana Loop turn-off. And then from the river all the way to Silver City.

[00:03:19]

Kacey: Oh, wow. So I know just a little bit about the area and how, I guess, environmentally, there's a lot of different industries going on with, I guess, the fire and then mining. Do you, as a firefighter or just as this volunteer position, are you engaged with all those industries? Do you find yourself getting...

[00:03:39]

Lou: Yeah.

[00:03:39]

Kacey: ...a case of all of those, because you're...?

[00:03:40]

Lou: We wind up being engaged with everything that happens out here. Whether it's just retirees like myself or cattle ranchers or farmers or miners or just whatever, we do a lot

of interface with the Bureau of Land Management because a lot of our fire district is Bureau of Land Management area. The BLM.

[00:04:04]

Kacey: So that seems like you're connected in just about everything that's going on in this area.

[00:04:08]

Lou: We stick our finger in a lot of pies. Yeah.

[00:04:10]

Kacey: Yeah. So moving on a little bit closer to the sagebrush. Do you have any experiences or just memories about sagebrush that people unfamiliar with this area might find interesting or educational? Or just things that they might want to know or don't know about what this area entails or looks like? Or what it's like to be out there every day?

[00:04:32]

Lou: It blooms in September.

[00:04:33]

Kacey: Blooms in September.

[00:04:34]

Lou: Most people don't know that sagebrush blooms in September.

[00:04:38]

Kacey: I've lived in Idaho my whole life and I did not know it bloomed at all. So can you tell me about that? What does that look like?

[00:04:44]

Lou: Well, the pollen gets in the air like cottonwood trees or whatever other plants are out there. But in early fall, in September, the sagebrush blooms. So if you have allergies and you think it's spring that your allergies kick in, out here it could be September when your allergies kick in because the sagebrush is in bloom.

[00:05:06]

Kacey: Wow. That's super interesting because I guess I always assumed September's like a dry season.

[00:05:11]

Lou: It is dry, but it's dry out here all the time. That's why they call it a desert. We don't get a lot of water. And I don't know if there's anything else that blooms in September. And we have two or three different kinds of sagebrush all growing in the same area. I don't think we have very much silver sage. There's a huge bunch of silver sage out south of Gowen Field, out in that part of the desert. Over towards Cinder Cone Mountain and down that

way, there's a giant—and I think it's protected now—of the silver sage. Common sagebrush out here. It was five years ago, the Soda Fire. The Soda Fire burned 350,000 acres.

[00:06:17]

Kacey: Wow. Was this all through Owyhee County, or...?

[00:06:21]

Lou: Yeah. It started, I think, down around Cow Creek down around Jordan Valley, ran up Highway 95, stopped it short of Marsing, Homedale, it didn't get over there. Came through here, got it stopped before it got to Murphy. But it burned—I live down in an area called Wilson—it burned within a quarter of a mile of my house on three sides. Fortunately, we had some green down the bottom at Reynolds Creek.

Stopped it there and it went around. It burned around the substation at Hemingway Butte. We fought it and kept it out of the cattle yards down on Wilson Creek at the feedlot down there. And it was a week. It was a week's worth of burning sagebrush. It was an infiltration. They had people from other side of the river calling because they thought the fire was at their front door, and it was 40 miles away.

[00:07:36]

Kacey: Yeah. And you're like, "You don't even know what that looks like." [Laughs]

[00:07:39]

Lou: That's how big the fire was. It was enormous. I have photos of all of them. We were out there the day before it came over the hill into our fire district, it was burning from the south working its way up north. And I went out with my fire truck and went to all of the ranches and did a survey with the ranchers and said, "Okay, you need to run a plow here or a ditch there. You're okay here. Put some water on that, you'll be fine. Move your cattle because they're going to get toasty." And for the most part, we did really well. We did not lose any residents. And part of it is because of our pre-planning. We lost some cattle.

The ranchers just didn't believe us or didn't act fast enough to get them up out of the hills. Because they were on range. And you know, they can... Environmentally, it was a disaster. The sagebrush takes forever to grow back. It's very slow-growing, and because we don't get a terrible lot of moisture, it's still recovering. The sagebrush hasn't recovered in a lot of the areas. A lot of it has, a lot of it hasn't and won't recover for years. I can take you out now to that part of the desert and say, "Look here at this line, where you can see where the fire burned and where it didn't burn."

[00:09:14]

Kacey: So it's like a physical...

[00:09:15]

Lou: It's a physical line there if you know what to look for. Five years later, you can still see where the fire burned everything up.

[00:09:25]

Kacey: Yeah, that's super interesting. So in situations like that, are you guys working with outside fire districts or is it solely your team and your volunteers that are managing that?

[00:09:37]

Lou: Well, we were the first there. Then the BLM comes because it's almost, it was on their ground. Our primary purpose is the life and safety of the public, followed by life and safety of the livestock, followed by crops. And then priority's the desert. But sometimes you have to go out into the desert to keep it from getting to those other things. We normally work with the BLM. The first couple of days on that fire was BLM. And the fire grew to a point where the BLM was overwhelmed and they brought in what's called a FEMA Type 2 team and a bunch of contractors. And then they brought in a FEMA Type 1 team. And we went from actually directly fighting the fire to what's called structure protection division.

[00:10:34]

Kacey: Yeah. So, like, prevention and stuff.

[00:10:35]

Lou: So we kind of stood around the residences, out from the residences, and prevented the fires from getting to the residence while the contractors and the helicopters and the airplanes and all that fought the fire. But the first three or four days, we were the only, us and the BLM—the Boise BLM—were the only thing out there. And that's not unusual. We had a fire across the road from here in Con Shea Basin, which is that basin that goes out that way. Burned around Guffey Butte, 10-12,000 acres.

And it was us and the BLM. It burned up some crops. It didn't destroy any houses. We kept it from that, but it burned up a couple of irrigation pivots and destroyed some crops. It's just the big fires are really tough. The little ones, hopefully, we get out there a lot of times, we'll catch them at 10 acres and get them put out before the BLM ever gets here. And they go, "Well, you guys ruined all the fun."

[00:11:49]

Kacey: [Laughs] You're like, "We're just doing our job."

[00:11:50]

Lou: But that's what we're here for. And for a bunch of volunteers. Of course, most people do not know that 90% of the firefighters in the state of Idaho are volunteers.

[00:12:04]

Kacey: Yeah, I didn't. I was not aware of that.

[00:12:05]

Lou: But everybody lives in the big cities and they have a Caldwell, Boise, Idaho Falls, Pocatello, or whatever. They have paid departments. The rest of this great land is all volunteers. Some of them are partially compensated when they make a fire call. Some of them like us are totally uncompensated. We don't have enough of a tax base and enough people to live out here to... The tax base pretty much buys diesel fuel and pays the power bill. [Laughter] That's about it. That's all they get.

But the sagebrush. There's places where I don't think it's ever going to come back once you have a fire. There's a place out on Rye Patch, which is east of here. There was a fire out there. We went out and worked with Grand View Fire and got it out. The thing that happens is a year following a fire that's burned everything to the ground is tumbleweeds. The tumbleweeds just come on. And they'll pop up and you'll have enormous quantities of tumbleweeds.

[00:13:19]

Kacey: Is that even more of a fire hazard?

[00:13:21]

Lou: Well, yeah. They're terrible.

[00:13:22]

Kacey: So it's just a cycle.

[00:13:22]

Lou: They're a horrible fire hazard. You don't even need gasoline with a tumbleweed. And the tumbleweeds will grow for a couple, three or four years until the grass starts to take hold and starts in there. But the sagebrush just doesn't come back. I can take you over to Rye Patch again. I know where the fire was, but I don't know what to look for. I can show you where it burned all the sagebrush and the sagebrush just did not come back. If it comes back, it's maybe an inch high in a couple of years. It just does not come back.

[00:14:06]

Kacey: And sagebrush itself, it is such a large covering area, but the plants themselves aren't super big or extravagant in size. So that's just super interesting. I never thought that it would be a plant that would take so long to mature or get to that size.

[00:14:22]

Lou: It takes a long time to grow. Takes a long time to grow back. You can't even cultivate it. Once it's down, once it's burned off, it's going to be years and years and years. Which tells you that some of these, when you run into these huge sagebrush pastures where

the sagebrush is eight feet tall, and you're down amongst the sagebrush and it's eight feet tall, that's hundreds of years ago. It has never been burned. Because it does not come back. It does not grow fast.

[00:15:01]

Kacey: Yeah. It just sounds like the sagebrush holds such a physical reminder of all of these big ecological events that...

[00:15:08]

Lou: Every ecological event out here, you can go look at the sagebrush and know, "Okay, this burned 10 years ago. This burned 100 years ago," just by the size of the sagebrush.

[00:15:21]

Kacey: Wow, that's just super interesting. I've never even thought of looking at plants in that respect, or even specifically a plant that I've commonly just overlooked. So that's just really cool to think about the physical reminders that sagebrush, and the physical history, that it can hold in itself. So I know that you mentioned that your top priorities are typically people safety and then livestock safety and then crop safety. But it seems like those all just relate to the community safety in general.

[00:15:52]

Lou: Yeah. It's pretty much. BLM federal agencies are not allowed to fight structure fires. They can't fight a structure fire. So that's left to us. If you've got a house in the middle of a sagebrush patch, it's up to us to convince you to run the bulldozer around there and make a fire zone. We spend a lot of our time—and we get some help with advertising from the BLM and handouts and paper, but—we spend a lot of our time talking to the people that live out here in the middle of nowhere about fire-safe zones around their homes. If they'd have done more of that in California, they'd have more houses left.

[00:16:43]

Kacey: [Laughs] Oh, yeah. But there's nowhere to put fire zones if it's all houses.

[00:16:47]

Lou: Yeah. Well, that's the problem is that you can't put a home right in the middle of a sagebrush patch without doing some kind of mitigation. Some kind of fire mitigation to keep your house from burning down. Because we're not going to get there fast enough to save it if that sagebrush is on fire.

[00:17:07]

Kacey: Yeah. So how receptive are people in this area to these types of warnings and trainings of, "Hey, this is what you should do to keep your home safe"? Are they pretty receptive?

[00:17:18]

Lou: Yeah. The ranchers are very, very good about it. When we go out Reynolds Creek and I stop and try to annually make a trip to all the ranches in there and talk to the people about fire safety and what they can do. After the Soda Fire almost burned them all out...

[00:17:41]

Kacey: Yeah, they've been more inclined.

[00:17:43]

Lou: ...they've been really, really receptive. Now, lately, it's waned a little. People forget, you know, and so we'll have a big fire and everybody will remember. But they're really good about it. Once in a while, you run into some old curmudgeon that...

[00:18:02]

Kacey: He hasn't done it before...

[Crosstalk 00:18:04]

[00:18:04]

Lou: Hasn't done it before, has never been burned out. "I don't care. Go away. Get off my land. Close the gate when you leave." And those kind of people you just have to deal with like anybody else. "Have a nice day," and go on about your business and know that if the fire hits that valley, or it gets down in his property, you're not going to save anything. You might rush down there and get him and his dogs and leave. But you're not going to save anything with six or seven-foot sagebrush right up against the edge of the barn. Poof.

[00:18:42]

Kacey: Just instant.

[00:18:43]

Lou: That's it. Yeah.

[00:18:44]

Kacey: So at that point, it's just their choice.

[00:18:46]

Lou: Yeah. They've made that choice. "Okay. You need to cut back 20 feet or 30 feet here, and mow this down." And no, they're not going to do it.

[00:18:59]

Kacey: I mean, that's on them at that point, I guess.

[00:19:02]

Lou: Once we give them our best advice, I write a thing and put it in the files that this guy didn't want to play.

[00:19:08]

Kacey: Yeah. So it just seems like your role is doing your best to kind of prepare the people what can happen and kind of managing between the BLM and the community. Do you see... How does the BLM connect with the community? Or because they're not interested in the structures, do you find that they're just solely focused on their land and their sagebrush? Or kind of what's their role in...?

[00:19:32]

Lou: They help us. They help us with fire mitigation. They'll help us with brochures to hand out on how to protect your home. They publish a lot of that. We don't have the funds to do that publication and the BLM helps us with a lot of that. They help us with public awareness. Besides helping us fight the fires, they come and work with us a couple of times a year with our people and our training and help us stay current. And we get a fuels briefing on what the weather forecast looks like for the summer and whether we're going to have a big buildup of fuel, which is the grass and the sagebrush and tumbleweeds. Fire fuel.

So we work really closely with them. I have probably five of them in my cell phone, besides the dispatch and all of that. And they're on all our radios. We can talk to them on the radio. We don't have that communication problem that at one time, small fire districts had that problem. Couldn't talk to the BLM because they were all on different frequencies. We have all of their frequencies in our radios. They don't have ours, but we have theirs. And so when they come in to take over a fire on their ground, we'll brief them on what we've done, where we're at, what's going on. They take over the fire and become the incident commander. We just switch over to their frequencies and become part of their protection.

[00:21:01]

Kacey: Yeah. So it seems like a very beneficial collaboration on...

[00:21:05]

Lou: Right.

[00:21:05]

Kacey: ...both ends then. It's not one-sided.

[00:21:07]

Lou: And let us not confuse the fire part of the Bureau of Land Management with the enviro-fascist part of the Bureau of Land Management.

[00:21:18]

Kacey: Oh, yeah. Well, that's kind of what I was kind of trying to understand is...

[00:21:21]

Lou: That's two completely different entities.

[00:21:23]

Kacey: Yeah. I know you could say “the Bureau of Land Management” and that can bring a certain type of meaning or connotation.

[00:21:29]

Lou: Connotation. Yes. Right.

[00:21:31]

Kacey: So I was just wondering how their fire team just connects with the community or...

[00:21:35]

Lou: They don't even like each other.

[00:21:36]

Kacey: Well, that's good to know.

[00:21:37]

Lou: The BLM environmentalists and the BLM fire people don't even like each other. [Laughs]

[00:21:40]

Kacey: Well, that seems to be a common problem in the topic of fire anyway. So I know that wildfires have become a more and more apparent discussion just all over, especially the west coast and Idaho and Oregon and California. Have you noticed a big change in wildfires? Or from your experience, has it been pretty steady and it's just more conversation than normal?

[00:22:07]

Lou: For us, grazing has a huge effect on wildfires. The more you graze, the less wildfires you get, the less spread you get. Because the cattle or sheep eat the grass down—and the grass is fuel—and so you have less fuel for the fire to burn. The grass isn't going to do anybody any good. It's going to be gone in the mid-summer. It's going to be brown and be...

[00:22:38]

Kacey: Might as well let the cows eat it.

[00:22:38]

Lou: ...fire fuel. Might as well let the cows eat it. Those lands that are grazed, and grazed regularly, and then grazed responsibly, we don't have as much fire problem as we do

with the land that's not grazed. This is part of the thing that we're trying to convince the people that want to save the sage-grouse, was that the sage-grouse are not going to survive if you continue to burn up their habitat. And there's no way to prevent burning their habitat without grazing. What we've discovered in the Idaho Plan—from what I've read—is that grazing and sage-grouse are compatible. They go really well together.

[00:23:32]

Kacey: Yeah. I think, oftentimes, people overlook our systems as just innately bad without considering the benefits that they bring as well.

[00:23:40]

Lou: That's true. And grazing really helps the fire. If you get a really bad fire, you'll get it in areas that weren't grazed. You'll also get fire depending on the weather. You have a real wet spring, you get a lot of grass. By mid-June, that grass is no longer green. It's brown, and it's fuel.

[00:24:02]

Kacey: That's so interesting. I never thought of more rain and water leading to more fires. But logically, that makes sense. I've just never made that connection before.

[00:24:11]

Lou: Well, once you've got that undergrowth of grasses that have turned brown, that becomes the fire ladder. Fire starts on the ground with a lightning strike or something else or man-caused, and that grass is the first step of the ladder. If the grass is really short, the fire just runs along the ground and doesn't cause any great conflagration. But if the grass...

[00:24:38]

Kacey: The taller the grass, the taller the fire.

[00:24:38]

Lou: ...is tall, then it catches the sagebrush and the buckbrush and the other brush on fire, which works its way up. And if you've got any kind of trees in the process, it works right up to the trees. That's the fire ladder. It's from the ground up. Well, if you've cut out that first round, first rung on the fire ladder, all the fire does is run along the ground and doesn't work its way up the trees, up the bushes. And so it keeps the fire down. And yeah, water gives you a wet spring, gives you a lot of grass, gives you a bad fire season.

[00:25:15]

Kacey: Yeah. I've never made that connection before. That's interesting. I just had a question, but I lost it. Let me take a second to think about what it was. Well, from what I'm understanding, there's so many values to cattle ranching and just having cattle in general. But I think they're often just overlooked in terms of, I guess, the cow industry just has a bad rap in general, but from what I'm understanding that doesn't exist here.

[00:25:47]

Lou: The bad rap a lot around here was the dairy farms. And these cattle out here are not dairy cattle. You're not going to get any milk out here. You're going to get beef. And a lot of people don't understand until they move out here that this is open range. When I moved out here, I had a fence around my property but I didn't have any gates. And my wife asked me, she said, "Where's the gates in your priority list?" Because we had a lot of things to do with this new place. And I said, "Well, they're on the list." She said, "You want to move that up?"

And I said, "Well, why do I need to move the gate priority up?" And she said, "Because there's a cow pooping on my patio, and I would like that to stop." So we still live in open range. There's cattle run up, down the road where I live, but I have gates to keep them off my... Because my lawn grass, or grass that grows on my place, looks a lot better than that scrub out there in the sagebrush. They'll come mow your lawn for you if you leave the gate open. But this is all open range all the way out from here, all the way to Grand View, that direction. It's all open range. So cattle just can wander freely across the highway.

[00:27:07]

Kacey: So do you find yourself just having instances with cattle as you're out doing either these search and rescue or fire things? Is that a pretty common occurrence that you're just...

[00:27:16]

Lou: Yeah. There's cattle everywhere. This area here is lower grazing. They will move the cattle, they'll graze them here starting, I think, usually around the 1st of April. And they'll do about a month here. Then it'll start to get hot and this grass will dry up. And they'll move the cattle to higher elevations, to where the grass is still green. And so they do that all through the summer, moving the cattle to where there's green grass.

Eventually, they'll be all the way up towards Silver City because the grass is green up there and it's brown down here. So you just got cattle everywhere, all the time, everywhere. And we do vehicle accidents. We respond, of course, like any fire department would to crashes and vehicle accidents. And there's a lot of, "Somebody hit a cow."

[00:28:22]

Kacey: Yeah. That was going to be my next question. Is that a common thing, especially with people from...

[00:28:26]

Lou: I hit one with our quick response truck, middle of the night coming back from a medical call. Going down Highway 78, and a deer come up from the river through a field and popped out onto the highway and I nicked him with the corner of the truck. It happens.

It happens all the time. One of our firefighters works in Grand View. So we're talking about 40, 50 miles that way. So every morning he's going that way. And sure enough, he popped over a hill and there was a Black Angus in the middle of a black road in the middle of the black morning. And he totaled a GMC pickup truck. It's pretty common, hitting a...

[00:29:13]

Kacey: A cow.

[00:29:14]

Lou: ...a cow or a deer. It's livestock or wildlife. You're going to hit something.

[00:29:21]

Kacey: Yeah. So kind of going off of that. So you talked about deer and then... Was it sage-grouse? Did I get that correct?

[00:29:28]

Lou: Sage-grouse. Yeah.

[00:29:29]

Kacey: Yeah. How do those types of wildlife or the native wildlife in this area interact with the cattle or the ranchers or just these more developed areas of the sagebrush steppe? Or how are they tolerated?

[00:29:43]

Lou: They've been working together for so long that there's really not a lot of problem.

[00:29:48]

Kacey: Yeah. Have you ever just looked out and seen cows and deer?

[00:29:51]

Lou: Oh, yeah. And the antelope. A lot of antelope out here. You see them all. The deer are more reclusive, so you don't see them as much as you would cattle out grazing in the desert. But if you know where to look and you know what time of day or night, you can always see deer moving around. They don't inhabit the same fields. They kind of eat different things.

[00:30:24]

Kacey: Yeah. So they're just naturally in different spots.

[00:30:26]

Lou: Just naturally in different areas. They'll all go to drink. But the cattle are usually provided water where they're grazing and the deer are usually in the streams or along the river or someplace where they're going to naturally have water. And because there's so few

fences, the deer come and go like they want to. And in the areas where there's lots of motorcycles and motorbike riders and four-wheelers and that kind of stuff, the deer will not go there. They don't want to interact with the people. And in fact, the cattle don't even particularly like it.

[00:30:59]

Kacey: Yeah. So you mentioned... I forget the name of that area where all those dirt bikers and...

[00:31:05]

Lou: This morning? Was the Rabbit Creek Trailhead.

[00:31:07]

Kacey: Okay. So in areas like that, do you find that just in general, it's just more recreational activity instead of like the...

[00:31:16]

Lou: Our population, figure have about 2,500 to 3,000, 4,000 people live out here in our district, in our 350 square miles. On the weekend, I can have 10-15,000 people—in what we refer to as my desert—recreating, riding their motorcycles, riding their side-by-sides, their dirt bikes, rock crawlers, four-wheel drives. That's recreational area. So yeah, we keep an emergency medical staff on all the time. Volunteers waiting for a call to go rescue somebody that decided to run into a rock in the middle of nowhere.

[00:32:04]

Kacey: So how do you see that surge of people interacting with this area other than with their big toys and all of that? Do you see the same value towards the area? Or is it just fleeting because they're only here for a short time and then leave?

[00:32:20]

Lou: The people that recreate here on a regular basis concern themselves with the conditions of the trails and the “bring it in, pack it out” kind of attitude...

[00:32:32]

Kacey: So they're generally pretty...

[00:32:34]

Lou: ...and they're generally pretty good about it. Occasionally, you will get some interlopers who have a side-by-side or rent a side-by-side that don't really know what they're doing. And you will find a pristine pasture up on the side of the mountain someplace that's been tore up because they don't care. They just don't care.

[00:33:01]

Kacey: They see it as not their problem.

[00:33:01]

Lou: And it's not their dirt. They don't care. The people that recreate out here a lot, they care about the environment, they care about the area, they care about helping us do our job. But you occasionally get the folks that just plain old don't care. And I'm not going to point any fingers but they're usually from the People's Republic of Ada.

[00:33:32]

Kacey: Yeah. No, I believe it.

[00:33:35]

Lou: They're rude and insensitive. And fortunately, that's not the majority. That's the minority of people.

[00:33:44]

Kacey: Yeah. That's reassuring to hear. But I would honestly expect it to be the majority of people like that.

[00:33:50]

Lou: Most of the time, people are really good. And, of course, you've got to understand that when we see them, they're laying in the dirt with a broken leg or a broken arm. We're the guys they want to see. And a lot of our medical calls are so far out in the brush that we have to use a helicopter to get them out. Because you don't want to ride on the back of my rescue truck...

[00:34:16]

Kacey: With a broken arm.

[00:34:16]

Lou: ...10 miles down the road with a broken leg. It's not going to happen. That's what helicopters are for.

[00:34:24]

Kacey: So with the volunteer structure, how does kind of calling for backup or calling for these other resources like airplanes or helicopters, how does that work?

[00:34:32]

Lou: Just get them on the radio and call for one.

[00:34:35]

Kacey: So are those also volunteer-based?

[00:34:37]

Lou: No. Life Flight, Air St Luke's. Those kind of... And now Marsing Ambulance and Grand View Ambulance both are volunteer organizations. They're compensated a little bit but

they're all volunteers. Part of our district is in Grand View's purview and part of our district's in Marsing's. So if we're doing a ground transport...

[00:34:59]

Kacey: They can come help you out.

[00:35:01]

Lou: ...they're going to come meet us on a road someplace and we're going to bring the patient to them. If it's a residence, they're right there with us. But if it's in the backcountry, we generally will go get them. And if we can get them to a road, it's not too terribly serious, and we can haul them out to a road and get them in an ambulance, that's what we'll do. If that's not going to be possible, we'll just get on a radio and order up a helicopter. And then, most people don't know that there's an outfit... organization run by the State of Idaho. It's run by the Emergency Medical Bureau—EMS Bureau—which is a division of Health and Welfare. Runs an organization called StateComm.

[00:35:45]

Kacey: I've never heard of that.

[00:35:45]

Lou: And StateComm has repeaters all over the state of Idaho.

[00:35:50]

Kacey: I'm not familiar with repeaters. What is that?

[00:35:53]

Lou: That's where you talk on one frequency, it goes to the tower, and is rebroadcast on another frequency to increase your range. This is a repeater. It repeats...

[00:36:04]

Kacey: Yeah. Your message?

[00:36:05]

Lou: ...your message. Goes to the tower and then is repeated on a different frequency to whoever you want to talk to. We do the same thing with the sheriff. That's how you—because our radios are pretty much the line of sight. While you're in hilly country, you need to be able to talk to the top of the mountain. So StateComm has repeaters all over. And I can call a StateComm from almost any place out here and get them on the radio and have them relay messages.

Have them relay messages to the hospital if I don't have cell phone service, which is a lot of places out here that a cell phone don't work. I can have StateComm relay a message to the hospital, I can have them order up a helicopter, I can ask them to do almost

anything for us. And a lot of times I can talk to the sheriff's office on my radio. Just kind of depends on where we are. Sometimes you can't get the sheriff.

[00:37:00]

Kacey: But there's a huge interconnected network of all these different resources.

[00:37:02]

Lou: Yeah. And the helicopters talk to StateComm when they're coming and going. They talked to, what's called, F2. They can talk to the hospitals on another frequency, which is called F1. And that's all run by StateComm. And StateComm is a division of the Emergency Medical Services Bureau in Idaho.

[00:37:20]

Kacey: Okay. So one of my last questions here is, as a volunteer in the fire industry, how do you ever get the chance to kind of turn it off? Or do you ever get that chance to not worry about it?

[00:37:33]

Lou: Get out of the district. Take your truck, hook it to your fifth wheel, and go to Hells Canyon or go to Gettysburg. We went last year, flew to Gettysburg. Just take that vacation. It's kind of like working. You have to take...

[00:37:51]

Kacey: It's like retired, but not.

[00:37:51]

Lou: ...vacation from work. It's retired, but it's not. It just means you're doing as much work but not getting paid for it. So that's what we do. We just load up, go somewhere out of the district. The fire chief and myself always text each other if one of us is going to be out of the district.

[00:38:12]

Kacey: Okay. Even for day trips?

[00:38:15]

Lou: Day trips, whatever. He has some real estate. He's a licensed agent, real estate agent. So he's in town a couple of days a week. I have other things that I have to do. So we'll always text each other and say, "I'm out of the district." So the number one guy knows where his number two guy is. And the number two guy knows the boss ain't here. Somebody's got to be here to cover that kind of stuff. And then motorcycle races, dirt bike races, all that stuff, we put a crew right at the race.

[00:38:45]

Kacey: Okay. You're ready to go?

[00:38:47]

Lou: Yeah.

[00:38:48]

Kacey: Yeah. It takes a special type of commitment to really never be able to turn it off fully.

[00:38:53]

Lou: A guy asked me the other day, he said, "Why?"

[00:38:57]

Kacey: That's a good question.

[00:38:57]

Lou: A radio announcer. And he said, "Why do you do that?" And I said, "If not us, who? If we don't do it, who's going to do it?"

[00:39:09]

Kacey: Who's going to go get the kid with the broken arm?

[00:39:10]

Lou: Somebody's got to go get that kid with the broken arm. And if not us, who? You? No.

[00:39:15]

Kacey: Nope. I don't have the shoes for that. [Laughs]

[00:39:18]

Lou: Not the radio announcer. He doesn't have the shoes for it. That kind of a thing. So that's where that comes from. It's just people, a commitment. Some of our people are retired sheriff's deputies. Some of them are retired military. Some of them are retired airline pilots. I got retired people from all walks of life and...

[00:39:38]

Kacey: Well, not retired anymore. [Laughs]

[00:39:40]

Lou: ...some of them that are not retired. They have real jobs They go to work every day. But when they're available, they help. So that's where we get them. That's what we do.

[00:39:53]

Kacey: Just good people doing good things.

[00:39:54]

Lou: Just good people doing good things. And there's a lot more good people out there than you think. Our problem right now is that there are no young people. As soon as they grow up, they go away to college. And there are no jobs out here unless you want to be a cowboy or you work on a ranch or your parents own a ranch or something like that. And they're gone. And so most of our help are old guys.

[00:40:20]

Kacey: Yeah. I believe it. I mean, I think my generation specifically would really value from hearing the information that we're trying to get today, of just the importance and what it's really like. There's all these misconceptions. And just hearing from someone that's in the sagebrush every day, how beneficial and just all the different meanings it brings to the community is really great to hear.

[00:40:42]

Lou: If you want to know what the after-effects of the Soda Fire were, there is a video. Somebody did a program. And I do not remember what it was called, but I think it was on Public—PBS. And it was specifically about the Soda Fire. And in that video, they interviewed a lot of people. And one of the people they interview is a former member of MRW, fellow named Jack Young. And he was a captain of the fire at that time. He's since passed away. But he explained a lot of it very well in that video about the Soda Fire. And it would be interesting for the people that weren't here then or weren't old enough to be involved in it to go back and look at that and say, "Oh, my."

[00:41:42]

Kacey: Yeah. I will go check that out. So my last question I have for you then, why is it called the Soda Fire? Where'd the name come from?

[00:41:48]

Lou: The BLM at this... There's a mountain down south, down towards Cow Creek that's called the Soda Mountain. There's a repeater on there. We talked about...

[00:42:01]

Kacey: Yeah.

[00:42:01]

Lou: ...radio repeaters? BLM has a repeater called a Soda repeater which is on that mountain down there. And so they got to name it. The first guy to the fire gets to name it.

[00:42:10]

Kacey: Have you gotten to name one yet?

[00:42:11]

Lou: Oh, sure. Yeah.

[00:42:12]

Kacey: What's your favorite that you've named?

[00:42:14]

Lou: The Dead Crow Fire.

[00:42:15]

Kacey: Dead Crow?

[00:42:16]

Lou: Yeah.

[00:42:16]

Kacey: I'm going to write that one down.

[00:42:18]

Lou: Yeah. We had a fire up on Murphy Flat, which is to the southeast of here. Murphy Flat. We had a call for a fire that was burning. We got up there and the fire, obviously, had started at the base of a power pole. And the fire had run across into the desert and started the sagebrush on fire. So in our investigation, we went to the source, which was underneath the power pole, and looked. And here was a dead crow that had gotten in the transformer.

[00:42:51]

Kacey: He started it all.

[00:42:53]

Lou: Caught himself on fire, fell into the grass, caught the grass on fire, and started the fire. So I named that fire the Dead Crow Fire.

[00:43:00]

Kacey: That's a good name. [Laughs]

[00:43:01]

Lou: And then when you call the BLM and say, "Hey, we have a fire, yada, yada," the incident commander will be the Dead Crow—IC—because your incident commander's referred to as the IC. And then you get to name the fire. The fire that happened in Con Shea Basin, the BLM named it. We wanted to call it the Con Shea Fire because that's where it was. But there had been a Con Shea Fire years previously, so they looked at the map and they called it the Celebration Fire because it started right across the river from Celebration Park over in Canyon County. So they called that the Celebration Fire.

[00:43:43]

Kacey: Interesting name. Who's celebrating that? [Laughs]

[00:43:44]

Lou: Yeah. Who's celebrating that fire? But Celebration Park was right straight across from where the fire started on our side of the river. So that's how they get their names. That's how these fires get their names, is the first guy on there gets to name the fire.

[00:43:59]

Kacey: And it sounds like a lot of them are connected, just to location. And just from my experiences of talking, the last few weekends that I was here, so many of the memories and stories and just the things are connected to these names of the creeks or the crossroads, which is just so interesting to me.

[00:44:16]

Lou: If you want to take a trip, just a little day trip, you can do it in a car—better if you have a pickup, but you can do it in a car—go to the end of this street, turn left. That's Rabbit Creek Road. You take Rabbit Creek Road and it will eventually come out in Reynolds. I have a fire station in Reynolds.

[00:44:41]

Kacey: And that's where one of the schoolhouses is, correct?

[00:44:43]

Lou: There's an old schoolhouse across the road from my fire station. There's a cemetery that goes way back into the 1800s across the other road from my fire station. It doesn't look like a fire station. It looks like two big garages. That's Reynolds. That's the intersection of Rabbit Creek Road, Upper Reynolds Creek Road, and Democrat Road. If you turn to the right there and go back out Reynolds Creek or Upper Reynolds Creek Road, it will bring you out on Highway 78, right back out here about 13 miles that direction. But it's 18 miles to Reynolds this way and 18 miles to Reynolds that way.

[00:45:23]

Kacey: Yeah. So it's a big square almost?

[00:45:24]

Lou: So it's a big square. You can go around. But you could see the signs with all the—Tiddie Creek is this way. The old stage trail is this direction. Something is this way. And everybody is geographic. There are no towns, so we refer to everything in its geographical location.

[00:45:43]

Kacey: That's super interesting.

[00:45:44]

Lou: Murphy, Reynolds, Wilson.

[Crosstalk 00:45:46]

[00:45:47]

Kacey: You got all three of them on there.

[00:45:49]

Lou: None of them were towns. This is not a town. This is not an incorporated town. This is the village of Murphy. And the only thing that's here is the courthouse and the museum. But it's not a town. It has no mayor. It has no city council. It has none of that. It's just an area, geographical area. Well, Reynolds up that road 18 miles to that dirt corner, where there was an old schoolhouse. And Wilson, back down the other way to where there's an old schoolhouse.

The fire department owns the old schoolhouse in Wilson. That's our fire hall. And then after Givens Hot Springs is my other station. I have one here in Murphy. So I have four stations. Because you don't want to have to drive that far to find a piece of equipment. And hopefully, we have somebody that lives in each one of those areas that can go get that piece of equipment. Doesn't always happen. Yes, geographical locations are very important. And usually, in the old days, there was a post office there.

[00:46:54]

Kacey: Okay. In all of these different...

[00:46:55]

Lou: In all these different areas. In the museum, you'll find a book called Sagebrush Post Offices.

[00:47:02]

Kacey: That is super interesting.

[00:47:06]

Lou: And it will show you where and when all of these post offices were out here in the sagebrush. There was one in Wilson. There was one in Reynolds. They got their names different. They're named after people.

[00:47:22]

Kacey: It's based on these geographical places.

[00:47:23]

Lou: It's based on those geographical locations. There's a lot of history here that people don't know. Even the people that live here don't know. Hemingway Butte, which is a motorcycle park off of Upper Reynolds Creek Road. Hemingway Butte was named after a stagecoach driver that was attacked and killed by the Indians in that location. The

stagecoach driver managed to get his stagecoach down to the river at what is now Walters Ferry. Then it was somebody else's ferry. And some soldiers there returned fire to the Indians and drove them off. But before the driver could get his team and stagecoach up onto the ferry to take it across the river, he passed away. And they named that Butte Hemingway Butte after the stagecoach driver whose name was Hemingway.

[00:48:22]

Kacey: So there's just a reason for every name whether geographically or...

[00:48:24]

Lou: Every name, every geographical name, every mountain, every valley, everything that happens...

[00:48:32]

Kacey: Tie back to something.

[00:48:33]

Lou: Tie back to something. Mount Wilson is where one of my radio repeaters is, is that way. The backside of Mount Wilson there's a little knob called Soldier's Cap. The reason it's called Soldier's Cap is if you come around at it from a different angle, it looks like an 1890s cavalry soldier's cap. They had a little peak in the brim. That's the way that knob got named, was soldier's cap.

[00:49:04]

Kacey: Well, and it's identifiable too.

[00:49:05]

Lou: It's identifiable. So every place like that out here, there's something. Con Shea Basin was named after a guy named Con Shea. C-O-N S-H-E... And they named that basin after him and that road that runs down there. The Oregon Trail is right over there.

[00:49:30]

Kacey: Yeah. That's just crazy.

[00:49:32]

Lou: I can take you right now down Con Shea road and show you where the Oregon Trail crossed what is now known as Con Shea Road. Right over here within two miles.

[00:49:43]

Kacey: Yeah. And do you think that part of the reason why... Not that there's no towns here but there's a little settlement here and then a little settlement a few miles this way. Do you think that ties back to the Oregon Trail of just where they were stopping or any connection there? Or not so much?

[00:49:59]

Lou: No. There's not a lot here. You can look around and see there's not much here. Murphy was, at one time, the largest cattle shipping point in the entire Pacific Northwest. They shipped more cattle by rail and drove out of Murphy than anyplace else in Idaho. The old railroad tracks run underneath that bridge across where you came in here. It ran up there to the stockyards and they shipped cattle out of here. That's why Murphy was a cattle place. Silver City was the original...

[00:50:40]

Kacey: Mining, or?

[00:50:40]

Lou: ...county seat.

[00:50:43]

Kacey: What was that?

[00:50:44]

Lou: The county seat. Silver City was the county seat. At one time, Silver City, Idaho, and Idaho City were the two biggest towns in Idaho.

[00:50:52]

Kacey: That's just so interesting.

[00:50:52]

Lou: And now, one of them's a ghost town and the other one's...

[00:50:55]

Kacey: Heading that way. [Laughs]

[00:50:56]

Lou: ...heading that way. Yeah. Those were the two biggest towns in Idaho because of mining. So mining played a big part out here.

[00:51:04]

Kacey: Well, and it also seems like we talked about kind of these physical reminders. It's like these towns are almost physical reminders of the history. You have Silver City, which is a reminder of the mining industry.

[00:51:14]

Lou: The geographical locations—because they're not cities—the geographical locations, each one of them has a meaning, has a place. It's like Givens Hot Springs. That area was settled by a family named Givens that moved through there. And the wife of the—and they're in a covered wagon—and the wife found the hot water at Givens, it's a natural

artesian hot water, and she said, "I'm not leaving. You can take your wagon and go on towards Oregon if you want to, but I'm staying right here because the water's hot and I can take a bath." And that became Givens Hot Springs.

[00:51:55]

Kacey: Yeah. That is just so cool to look back and now be able to see all of these places as reminders of those stories and those memories. So we're getting close to time here. Is there anything else that you want to end off here or anything else that we haven't mentioned that you were hoping to get to?

[00:52:11]

Lou: No, no. We're good.

[00:52:13]

Kacey: Awesome. Well, I just want to thank you so much for your time. This was so cool. And I'm so glad that we had a chance to sit down and do this and capture this for the museum and for generations to come. It was really cool. So I want to thank you.

[00:52:25]

Lou: You're more than welcome.

[00:52:26]

Kacey: Well, I'm going to stop at that. Thank you.

Paul Nettleton, Dennis Stanford, Donna Bennett, and Vern Kershner

[00:00:02]

Haley:

Today, I'm interviewing Paul Nettleton, Dennis Stanford, Vern Kirshner. Donna Bennett may join later on. My name is Haley Netherton-Morrison. I'm here with Kelly Hopping from BSU as part of the Shared Stories Lab Oral History Project. It's April 25th, 2022, and we're in the Owyhee County Museum in Murphy. Like I said, I'm Haley Netherton-Morrison, and I'm an interviewer with the Shared Stories Lab. To kick us off, it'd really be great if each of you could speak a little bit about your background in the area. You can either define that as Owyhee County or closer to maybe the particular valley that you're in. Yeah, just whoever wants to get started.

[00:00:48]

Dennis:

My name's Dennis Stanford. I was born and raised close to Jordan Valley, which is in Oregon, but the main valley is Pleasant Valley, that I live in, Cow Creek Valley. And, have been in ranching all of my life. I went through 12 years of school, and then I went to ranching. Basically that's, yeah, what I do. I'm Hereford cows and then black cows.

[00:01:28]

Vern:

I'm Vern Kirshner. I live in Jordan Valley right now, retired rancher. Otherwise, I lived in Owyhee County on Flint Creek. I was born and raised down in Homedale until I was 18. Then, I went into service for a while. Went one year to school, and then I just come back here, and been working in around Jordan Valley. My uncle had a ranch on Flint Creek. He was getting up in age and his vascular, and it was only about 30 of us nieces and nephews, nobody else wanted to stay there and work. I stayed and worked for him. Then, I bought his place when he was about ready to retire. That's my background.

[00:02:25]

Paul:

I'm Paul Nettleton. I'm in the Murphy area, here. I've been owner-operator of the Joyce Ranch since the early '70s. When I got out of school, and even before, I was always raised on the ranch. We just naturally went to it. The ranches were considered the oldest family-owned ranch in Idaho. We haven't been able to find another one older. It was established by my great-grandfather in 1865. I'm fourth generation. My son is basically running it now, or I let him think so. That's my background.

[00:03:22]

Haley:

Are there any stories that you all want to get started with, that could either be about the landscape here, or the community, or people that maybe didn't grow up in Owyhee County, what they might want to know, or what you'd want to share with them?

[00:03:44]

Vern: Well, this is Vern Kirshner. My grandfather come to Silver City on my mother's side, Townsends, in about 1868 or something like that. They was miners. My mother and her six-seven siblings was born and raised in Silver City, in what we call Wagon Town, down the river. All of them was miners until the mine started petering out in Silver City. Then they started spreading out. Great uncle bought the ranch on Flint Creek. My grandfather bought the ranch from him, then my uncle bought it from my grandfather, and I bought it from him, on Flint Creek. It's now been over 100 years that ranch has been in the same family.

[00:04:48]

Dennis: Dennis Stanford. My ancestors came to Owyhee County in 1865, someplace around there. My great-great-granddad was the first sheriff in Owyhee County appointed by the governor. Then, his oldest son was the third white child born in Owyhee County. When they moved to Owyhee County, they ended up in Reynolds Creek. The mines is what brought them here. They were freighters. That's what they did, was hauled the mine supplies in. They raised, had a dairy, and had fruit trees and stuff on Reynold's Creek, and gardens, and they hauled hay, and fruit, and whatever in, and whatever they needed to back out. I don't know what, whether it was ore or something. That's what they were, freighters, for years. When the mine dried up, they went to Canada for seven years, and then came back to Reynolds Creek, and then finally ended up it was Jackson Creek, Cow Creek on the other side of the mountain, on the west side of the mountain from Reynolds Creek. Then, as the families got bigger and branched out, then they finally ended up in Jordan Creek in Jordan Valley, and they bought that ranch in '60-'59, so they could send me to school in Jordan Valley without homeschooling me. Anyway, that's the bulk of that, and then we bought the ranch from my dad, and so it's been, yeah, we've been Stanfords around Owyhee County for a long time.

[00:06:39]

Vern: Long time. Yeah. A lot of them, yeah.

[00:06:44]

[Laughter]

[00:06:46]

Paul: My family first started in the head of Reynold's Creek, too. They had a, they called it a milk ranch, a dairy. Had some dairy cows when they first come into the country. Stayed one winter up there, the head of Reynolds Creek. Decided he needed to to lower elevation someplace, and came down, and found our place on Sinker Creek in the spring 1865. Kind of been there ever since. One of the interesting stories that my ancestors talked about was when Matt Joyce, my great-grandfather, when he first came to Sinker Creek he was going to settle in a nice meadow area down right across from where I live right now. He was going to settle there, and establish his homestead, and couldn't figure out why somebody else hadn't. It's a beautiful area. Talked to one of the homesteaders just up the creek, and he said, "You don't want to homestead there," he said, "You'd have some trouble." And they did have some trouble with Indians coming across the plains. He says, "You don't want to have any more trouble with Indians. That's the Indian Council grounds. They come and spend the summer there, and that's where they hold their council," or whatever. Anyway, the guy talked him into partnering up with him.

Those days, there was no surveys. You took up a homestead. You weren't really sure where you were taking it up. It was mostly squatter's rights. If somebody, if you made some improvements over there, and you left to go get supplies or something, somebody else moved in, it was theirs. They took over everything you had. This guy was Scotch-Bob Anderson, was his name. Anderson? Anyway, I may be wrong on the last name. Anyway, he talked Matt Joyce into partnering up with him. He says, "You want to go back up to your family in Reynolds Creek in the summertime," he said, "I want to get away once in a while myself." He said, "We can just trade off." There'd always be somebody here squatting on the grounds. That lasted about three years, and Scotch-Bob decided he wanted to move on to other things, and sold, or gave, or whatever, we never did know, his portion of the improvements to Matt, and Matt built a cabin, and we've been there ever since. As the interesting things about these things is, the ranch expanded. Matt Joyce had seven girls, five boys. Every one of them took up, well most every one of them, took up a homestead as soon as they got to be 21 years old. Boy, you can expand your land holdings there pretty quick with that type of a thing. That's the way, build it into a ranch that was viable with a business, and of course when the mines dried up, and the milk dairy business folded, because they mostly were selling into the mines in Silver City, they went to beef cattle in the mid-'70s. That's where we've been, our bread and butter ever since.

[00:10:53]

Haley:

The squatter's rights, do you know much about how it was enforced at all, trying to keep the entirety of the parcel of land that you were squatting on?

[00:11:05]

Paul:

I'm not sure. They did fence areas. In fact the fences were, they fenced what they thought was maybe 160 acres or in that neighborhood. Most of the fences weren't on line. They used rimrock in our area for a fence. Rimrock goes [Laughs] look like a snake going up through there. Even today, we're farming, and running ditches across a little bit of federal ground, because the canyon doesn't go straight, and there was corners that came down into the field, and there was corners that were part of the homestead that went way up above the rimrock. Yeah, even today we've got that situation.

[00:12:04]

Dennis:

Ancestors, the way they took up the land haunts us today, because federal government calls it fenced federal range, FFR. They charge you for it. You can only run on it at certain times. When they took those up, it only made sense for them to fence it in the cheapest, shortest direction, to get their land under fence. A lot of times they went, instead of going east and west for a quarter, north and south for a quarter, they just cut from one corner to the other one straight across. Instead of going, they'd go a quarter of a mile with the fence instead of going a half a mile, is what basically it was. Today, that is very problematic to us, because the government claims their ground, and you can only do certain things on government ground. It, yeah, makes a deal. The survey came way after all the homesteads were in, so there's a lot of them, they thought they knew what they took up. They came to Murphy, and give the description of the land they were on. Well, it might be off a half. They might've taken up a big chunk of rimrock and thought they took up where the water was.

[00:13:17]

Vern: Exactly.

[00:13:20]

Dennis: We still fight that today. Just because they won't let you go back and say, "No, this is what was taken out, was this land that is in the canyon, that had water, and was meadows." They didn't take that rimrock up. They didn't want that. That is just part of being in this country first, is because you got what was the best, and that's what kept everybody going. As the mines started to dry up, then everybody had horses, and lots of them, because that's what they freighted, or run horses, the cavalry mounts. Paul's ancestors were great for sending lots of cavalry horses to the cavalry. That was the deal, and then they needed beef. That's what made sense to run on this, because that's how the wild horses got here, was everybody no longer needed those horses. They were all turned out on federal land, so they just left them. The horses didn't come from walking across the Isthmus of Panama or what. The horses were turned loose here. They were domesticated horses, and they all got turned loose. So, they're actually feral horses. They're not wild horses. They're not mustangs, but anyway.

[00:14:44]

Paul: After a couple generations, they get kind of wild.

[00:14:47]

Dennis : Well, yeah, they're wild, but they're not.

[00:14:49]

Paul: But, yeah. The interesting story on the fenced federal land, I've got a little piece of government ground comes down off the rimrock, corner's in the middle of my horse pasture, goes back over the rimrock. It's got about probably close to 100 yards of creek goes through it. It's one of their precious riparian areas, the creek areas. They come in one day, and told me, and this is, "We'd like to look at this." I'm like, sure, be glad to show you. It was that gal that was the BLM director area manager, that gal that was down our throats all the time.

[00:15:38]

Dennis: You don't have to say her name.

[00:15:41]

Paul: I don't remember her name, actually. Loretta something, I think.

[00:15:45]

Dennis: [Laughs] I remember her name.

[00:15:47]

Paul: Anyway. They come in there. "Your riparian area's in bad shape. You've got to manage this better." I said, "What do you mean?" I said, "It's a horse pasture. We use it year-round. We feed hay on it, I mean, it's just that area." Well, "We're going to have to write some permit, whatever, rules on this dang thing." I said, "To tell you what, I've probably got, you know, your land comes down off the rimrock, and goes back up the

rimrock." I said, "As far as I'm concerned, you know, if I deny you permission to come in here, and on my private ground to get to that, you've got two choices. You can sell that area to me, or you can rappel on down off the rimrock and fence it out." I said, "I don't care which you do." A couple of those got in. I was talking right to Loretta. It was a couple of those guys behind, like that.

[00:16:53]

[Laughter]

[00:16:54]

Paul: She says, "Well, that'd make it a little hard to manage it." I said, "Yep, you're right." [Laughs] They can be sometimes what they think they're doing right, but they can be unreasonable from our standpoint. Most of the time, they see the light if you show it to them. [Laughs] Yeah, as far as the wild horses are concerned, we had a lot of wild horses in this country. All the ranchers had turned out. Most of them, my dad called them rimrock Perchs, because it was the old one, at the advent of the automobile, there was no use to having these work horses around anymore. Most of them were bigfooted, big draft type horses, and tractors came. They didn't need to pull the plow anymore. Basically, they were turned out. It was mainly because horses were practically worthless then. Nobody wanted horses. You didn't use them anymore. My dad, when he took over the ranch in 1935, all of the sudden the, I think it was actually into the late '30s sometime there, horses came up to where it was profitable to gather them. He paid off the ranch debt almost completely with selling horses that he gathered off the range that nobody else wanted.

[00:18:37]

Dennis: At that time, everything was shipped. There was a railroad station here, [Inaudible 00:18:41] canyon. Everything from north of Winnemucca came to Murphy, Idaho, to get on the train.

[Crosstalk 00:18:53]

[00:18:54]

Dennis: Sheep, cattle, horses, they were all shipped from here. There were sheep outfits 70 miles to the south, and they would wean their lambs out there, and then drive them to Murphy. Basically there was cattle staged around here for 30 miles in a circle, and everybody wonders how come this country got beat up pretty bad. That was the deal, is that there were so many cattle coming here to be shipped, that they ate everything bare around here for miles.

[00:19:26]

Paul: Murphy, I'd heard tell, and they'd probably tell you here at the museum, that Murphy was the largest livestock shipping area in the late '20s. Maybe even in the early '30s, but once Taylor Grazing Act come in, they couldn't just, itinerant herders couldn't just run anywhere out here. Then it got dried up, and within 20 years they pulled the railroad out completely, and Murphy could, nobody used it.

[00:19:55]

Vern: The government had to finally put in trail right of ways, stock trails, because everybody coming across, it just widened out. Even everybody down here, because they brought them in, stock driveways from south to north. They're still in use today, in a way. You had to stay on that driveway, driving your cattle, or tried to keep your sheep there. Like I said, they've got it spreading out. Then, the ranchers got the right to not allow sheep within a mile.

[00:20:35]

Paul: Two miles. I got a sign over in our museum says two-mile limit. You put the sign out so to keep them away.

[00:20:45]

Vern: Back then what we called them was tramp sheep herders. They came from everywhere. Eating, the grass was free. They'd lamb out in the springtime, and they just kept coming, and spreading out, and eating everybody out. So they put a limit on them, and had the stock driveways for them. The cattle, they more or less, they could keep them on the road or something pretty good.

[00:21:17]

Paul: For seven miles, only out of Murphy, and they were holding herds all around us. They waiting to get trains to haul them out in the fall. They were just grubbing every blade of grass right down to the dirt.

[00:21:38]

Dennis: My ancestors, my great-granddad, that's when they lived on Jackson Creek, before they even got back into the cow business, after they got rid of all the horses, that's what they did was feed all the cattle coming through. They put up the hay that they fed the cattle coming through and crews, and in the fall they would have somebody. I mean, they were booked up all the time. There was somebody coming through day, after day, after day.

[00:22:02]

Paul: Made the living doing that.

[00:22:03]

Dennis: Yeah.

[00:22:06]

Paul: It's kind of funny, because my dad would tell about the buyers. The cattle buyers that would come out, and the cattle buyers that would all come out, and when they did, they brought a bottle of whiskey. They'd catch the ranchers out there someplace. Of course, the ranchers, some of them been on a trail, and all the cowboys for several days. They was ready for a drink of whiskey. The old cattle buyers would pass around this bottle, and of course they'd blow a bubble or two themselves, make everybody think they're drinking. They'd get a good deal out of the ranchers of buying cattle. [Laughs]

[00:22:52]

Vern: I'd like to speak a little bit about, my mother was born and raised, like I said, over at Silver City. Grandfather was a miner, and his dad was a miner, but it was unbelievable.

She had I guess seven-eight kids. Just a little Irish woman. How they lived in those old houses in Silver City, that's how wide the boards was on those. They had no insulation. They put newspapers up on the walls for, and then maybe put wallpaper up.

[00:23:29]

Dennis: Oil cloth.

[00:23:31]

Paul: Oil cloth, yeah.

[00:23:32]

Vern: But, they lived in, that's all the insulation they had, those old houses. Then their house burnt down on them, too, right in Silver. They had a pretty tough time for a while, but everybody worked with each other. My grandfather, some of those mines, they'd come down. They'd stay up at those mines, in boarding houses they had up there. Then, they'd come to town on weekends or whenever they had the time. Then, they'd pack up backpacks and pack supplies back up to those mines when the snow was deep. I had one aunt who, my grandfather, he liked to drink, too. By the time he had to go back up on the mountain, he had to have a pack on his back, and he had a box, they come in boxes, of crackers on top of that. Every time he took a step, it'd hit him. I think he was probably hungover anyway. She says, "Burt liked to drink." But, got up on the mountain, and back that, and it hit him on the back of the head. Got up there on the windiest point, and just kicked that thing apart. Crackers blowing.

[00:24:52]

Paul: My dad was born up at one of those mines, the Blackjack, on the back side of Florida Mountain. My mother, grandmother, was a Joyce of course. But none of the boys married, out of the five Joyce boys none of them married. That's why the name ran out. My grandmother married my grandfather Villo Nettleton, and he was a carpenter in the mines. He was up working at the Blackjack Mine when two of the kids, my dad and my aunt, were born. They had five children. They ended up back on the ranch. The only one of the girls' families ended up back at the ranch. That's how it happened, getting to the Nettleton name.

[00:25:52]

Dennis: Yeah. I've got a picture in here that is Frank Monahan, Matt Joyce, John Joyce, Lee Stanford, Bill Gardner.

[00:26:01]

Paul: The Silver City cowboys.

[00:26:03]

Dennis: Yeah.

[00:26:03]

[Laughter]

[00:26:09]

Dennis: They all, at that time, all of our ancestors were here. Basically together, and so for me it's amazing that all of us stayed in this country. Because Owyhee County's not an easy place to live. It's desert, high desert country. There's been years when there's nothing, you know? But always forgiving. We usually always get a timely rain. Not a lot of us, Paul has to haul water, but mostly just in his winter range country. Most of our water is all live water, and we have some reservoirs. We run down our furthest south point, where we run our cows, is 12 air miles from the Owyhee Indian Reservation. We're way south in Owyhee County. Next to the Nevada, what they call three points or whatever, where Nevada, Idaho, and Oregon all come together. Yeah, we're just about five miles from that, is our south.

[00:27:30]

Paul: I didn't know you went that far south. Yeah. Wow.

[00:27:36]

Dennis: Yeah. The Owyhee is our boundary, what comes out of it.

[00:27:41]

Paul: Actually, and I've thought of that too, Dennis, is why so many of our families hung on in this country. Owyhee County has more century farms and ranches than any other place in the state.

[00:27:57]

Dennis: I don't know. It might not be real good for our ancestors, if they're no smarter than we are.

[00:28:07]

[Laughter]

[00:28:11]

Haley: There are two different things I wanted to follow up on, and I think the first is the Silver City Cowboys. Would you all be able to talk about that a little bit more? I'm not familiar with the Silver City Cowboys.

[00:28:22]

Vern: Could you repeat that?

[00:28:23]

Haley: Sorry. Yeah, I wasn't speaking very loudly. What I was saying, you mentioned the Silver City Cowboys. I was wondering if you all could speak to that a little bit more.

[00:28:36]

Paul: I'm not sure where that... I know that picture came in the Silver City area. That was some of the ranchers, some of the cowboys and the ranchers that rode in that country. I'm not sure they all spent a lot of time in Silver City. I know the Joyces did, because that's the country they ran cattle in. I would assume in those days with no fences that, you ended up with your cattle all over the county. They probably didn't run cattle particularly in

very close to the Silver City area, but close enough that they'd get cattle there. That's where the picture came from.

[00:29:27]

Dennis:

In my way of thinking, they probably since Silver City was the happening place at that time, I'm thinking when they were done with round up, or done branding, or something, that's where they ended up getting together. It was probably for a good time, and in those days all the cattle started in the lowest elevation and went to the highest elevation, and it made no difference where you were at. The mountains around Silver City, whether you're in Jordan Valley or whether you're on the other end, Oreana, Bruneau, Grand View, you ended up going high. Basically, all the cattle around ended up where there was live water and shade in the fall. That's how come you would end up with everybody from all different parts of the county at some place working cattle, is because all the cattle, and there was no fences, so all the cattle converged, the one to the highest, coolest place in the heat of the summer. Then, when it was time to gather cows in the fall, and go back to the deserts again, then we had to split them and go your 35 different directions was what it was.

[00:30:43]

Paul:

Interesting thing about that, you talk about shade and water. There probably wasn't a heck of a lot of shade. They had completely clear-cut all the timber in that area for the mines. Either mine timbers, or fuel for the steam engines, or something. Everything was clear-cut. The sawmills only even had two or three sawmills up there. They only lasted five or six years. All the timber was gone. The time the cattle were running, there probably was probably some scrub willows along the creek, but that was about it.

[00:31:19]

Vern:

When you had the Italians moved in. They packed wood into Silver City for people to cook on, on burros. What wasn't taken out of the trees, they was cutting mahogany and whatever, and packed them. So it got pretty well cleaned up.

[00:31:40]

Dennis:

My brother ranches on the south side of South Mountain. There is charcoal pits there that the Chinese cut the wood, juniper, and then they burnt it until it made charcoal, and then they brought it back to the mines to run the smelters, these charcoal pits. There's big charcoal pits. You can find them all over in that country. Every ridge has got charcoal pits on it. You'll go along, and all the sudden the ground's solid black. You go, why? real gravelly, porous, pretty rocky ground. Well they just built these pits, and that's what they did, was burnt these junipers until they were in charcoal form, and that made them lighter, and so they loaded them on burros, and hauled it back to the mines. That got rid of it, at that time they even, and that's probably 30-some miles from Silver City. So they were going that far out to get fuel to run the mines.

[00:32:41]

Paul:

Yeah. I know they were going a long ways. You don't see any of the old stand trees. There's a few down low on Picket Creek. I know where there's maybe half a dozen trees that were probably kinda isolated in on the hillside, and they didn't want to go up, because it was maybe just one tree. Getting in the lower elevations, there probably

wasn't a whole lot of stand there. I know where there's about four-five trees, and shoot, they got stumps on them like you wouldn't believe, I mean trunks, not stump, trunk.

[00:33:22]

Vern: My grandfather, he cut a lot of lumber. They would put sawmills down in those creeks going to the south, and then they sawed the timber up there, and then brought them up out of there in wagons with oxen, and taking them to the mills. Then those guys there would saw them up for what they needed in the mills, either build a new mill, or build them up in the tunnels. Like he said, they all had to be hauled in there. I thought it was kind of ironic, 100 years later, I had timber coming out of there, but it was with trucks and stuff. My grandfather was back in then, 100 years later I'm taking the regrown trees.

[00:34:15]

Paul: Yeah. I'm the same way.

[00:34:20]

Vern: Yep.

[00:34:22]

Haley: Something I wanted to, before we, sorry, get too far away, something I wanted to circle back to was mentioning that Silver City as a common meeting space, and a place where people get together. I'm curious, do you still feel that there are those, maybe, common spaces today, or has that been something that's changed through time, just because everything else that's changed in the county?

[00:34:52]

Paul: Silver City, even though it's... We hate the term 'ghost town.' I live there all summer. It is a remnant of what it was, but it's still, to the old timers, and a lot of us, it's the place where Owyhee Cattlemen's Association still holds their annual meetings there. It's still a place that everybody kinda looks to, and that was the center of the development of this county, even though the larger towns now are Homedale and Marsing and Grand View. Silver City's kinda the, I think, is something, a place that everybody seems to want to gravitate to, if you're talking about Owyhee County. I don't know what you think, Dennis.

[00:35:56]

Dennis: It's the mother. That was the first county seat, and it was the mother of the county. Everybody went to that. The only reason that people don't go that way anymore is because everybody else in the country wants to go there.

[00:36:14]

Paul: Well, it's the winters.

[00:36:17]

Dennis: The winters, it doesn't... With good highways and vehicles, it was way easier to go someplace else that had more accommodations. Silver City is a place you go back to, because you like to remember. The Owyhee Cattlemen's has their annual meeting there every year, and it's because that's part of our heritage, part of our, I don't know, we went there as little kids with our parents and our grandparents. It was a big time. When we

were kids, we'd have a meeting during the day, and then there was a big barbecue at night, and the dance started at eight o'clock and went all night long. It was a midnight supper, and then there was a breakfast after. I can remember my granddad dancing in the Masonic Hall there at six o'clock in the morning, last dance. He'd dance all night long, and it was just a big cattlemen's get-together and party. It was usually after haying. You were done haying, and just before you started gathering the beef, and it was, yeah, a time. And so Silver City has always meant something to every one of us that's been in the livestock industry and the mining industry, because it's what brought everybody that's in Owyhee County, that's been here for a long time, it's what brought everybody to Owyhee again.

[00:37:51]

Paul: Exactly, exactly. That's the thing. All of our ancestors came because of Silver City. My ancestors, the Joyces, were headed to California on the California Trail. Stopped along the Humboldt so my great-grandmother could have a baby. Heard about the strike in Silver City, decided that was closer, and then came to the mines in Silver City in spring of 1864. Like I said, they only spent one winter up there, and then decided they're going to raise cattle at lower elevation.

[00:38:30]

Dennis: Mine all actually went to California, with Leland Stanford, who started the Stanford University. They all actually went there, and then came back from Cal. Part of the cousins split in California, and they went to Red Bluff. From Red Bluff came back to Owyhee County from Cal. So I guess I'm a Californian.

[00:38:53]

[Laughter]

[00:38:55]

Paul: I knew you had some of your relatives that started Stanford University. That's quite a...

[00:39:06]

Dennis: Even when my dad graduated from high school, he could have went to Stanford University free ride. Instead of that, he went in the service, because it was World War II.

[00:39:17]

Paul: Yeah. Hm.

[00:39:22]

Haley: Just as a note on timing, we're around 40 minutes. So at some point soon, we'll probably take a pause, and we can either do lunch or just restart the recording with a second file. Something I was curious about, related to some of what we've been talking about with particularly the changes that have happened. From mining to now cattle ranching here in Owyhee County. You mentioned earlier the harshness of the environment out here, and I believe it was Paul, you in particular mentioned that you've mused on what makes people stay out here when it is so hard. I'm just curious if you all had thoughts on that, or why you choose to stay here and ranch, or why maybe your families continue to choose Owyhee County.

[00:40:18]

Vern: We all went through wondering why we's out there. I lived up 18 miles out of Jordan Valley. Didn't have electricity. We finally got a phone in in the '70s.

[00:40:32]

Dennis: Yeah, but you had to put that in yourself.

[00:40:34]

Vern: Damn near.

[00:40:36]

[Laughter]

[00:40:36]

Dennis: He worked for the phone company, wanted to put it in.

[00:40:41]

Vern: Anyway, my son lives eight miles further than where I live, and that really get deep snow on Big Boulder Creek. He got married to a wonderful gal that loved the country, and fit right in, and they was pulling a calf one night, and the heifer hit her, and broke her leg right there. No telephone at that time. We had it in Flint Creek, but not up there. They had a little boy, about yag big. My son got her in the feed manger in the barn, and she says, "I'm okay. You get that calf pulled." So he got it pulled, and you've got the car over there, and the kids loaded up, and drove to my place, and he pulled in there tooting the horn. He was cussing me why I wasn't out there to help him. Well, I didn't know what had happened!

[00:41:41]

Dennis: Three o'clock in the morning.

[00:41:43]

Vern: Yeah. Anyway, then he hauled her out, put a pin in her leg, and come back stayed a week with us, went back home with her kids. That's the harshness. And they're living over there yet.

[00:41:57]

Dennis: They still don't have power.

[00:42:00]

Paul: Well, they have solar now. They've changed.

[00:42:04]

Vern: We had generators, but just regular power now. They've started wondering why they're sticking around. Nobody else stays up there in the winter anymore. They're the only ones over there. It can get pretty harsh, and then you look back at it and laugh.

[00:42:28]

Dennis: The winters for me are not the tough part. It turns dry, we've had crickets for I don't know how many years now. It used to be crickets come once ever' 25 years. They kind of go through. Now, we've had Mormon crickets for, I don't know, the last 15 years.

[00:42:46]

Paul: Brace yourselves. They're coming again.

[00:42:49]

Dennis: They're hatching everyplace again this year. Yeah. It can be dry. Last year was, in our country, was the driest we've ever seen. It can go from calves that weigh 600 when you wean them to calves that weigh four and a half. You know things have got a little tough. You go from a 88 percent preg rate to a 60-something percent preg rate. It's tough, yeah.

[00:43:20]

Donna: [Inaudible 00:43:20].

[00:00:00]

Interviewer: Good.

[00:00:02]

Donna: I'm Donna Bennett. My grandfather came from Scotland and settled at, I think he kind of herded sheep, but he settled in several different places on the way out here. I had it written down. I couldn't find my stuff. In the early 1900s, and he settled at Mary's Creek, which is a mile towards the Sheep Creek Canyon, from Tindalls' settlement there. He built a house. Well, no, he didn't. They had a dugout type thing. Then, he married Francis Tindall. My dad was born in 1910. He had two brothers, one an older brother and then one younger one. When he was nine, my dad was nine, my grandmother Frances Tindall passed away with tuberculosis. They had built a brand-new house that had incidentally come on rail. It was a Sears & Roebuck house that came in pieces. It came to Mountain Home on the train, and then they put it on what they called a stage, and took it out to Mary's Creek, where they built the house the same time the Tindalls built their house. Did you know that?

[00:01:42]

Dennis: I'll be danged.

[00:01:44]

Paul: I did, because I got the privilege staying at that house one night.

[00:01:49]

Donna: Bob, my dad's, or the Tindall house?

[00:01:51]

Paul: Tindalls. They was living in it.

[00:01:57]

Donna: I've got Dave's family, and then Grandpa. After Grandma died, Grandpa went back to Scotland, and the three boys stayed with Liotta Tindall and Chester Tindall until they

were quite a bit older, and then they went back to Scotland and stayed until they were in their young 20s, I think. Then, they came back, bought the place back from a cousin that had bought the place, and then dad took care of it, had it until 1946, and then he sold it to Bob Tindall and moved to Gooding.

[00:02:40]

Dennis: What was your maiden name?

[00:02:41]

Donna: Smith.

[00:02:42]

Dennis: Smith.

[00:02:43]

Donna: Mm-hmm.

[00:02:45]

Dennis: You were part of where Dave lives now, down on Mary's?

[00:02:52]

Donna: No, Dave's in the main Tindall house.

[00:02:54]

Dennis: Oh, he is? Oh.

[00:02:56]

Donna: Dad or Grandpa built the house on Mary's Creek, and that's a mile down.

[00:03:00]

Vern: That's on down the creek.

[00:03:03]

Dennis: Okay.

[00:03:04]

Donna: I've got some pictures. This is the Tindall house.

[00:03:08]

Dennis: This is almost down to the Nevada line.

[00:03:11]

Donna: Yeah, but this is the Tindall house.

[00:03:15]

Dennis: A little east of Owyhee.

[00:03:18]

Donna: They made a calendar for their 100th year.

[00:03:26]

Paul: Oh I remember that. I think I've seen that.

[00:03:28]

Donna: Then, it's got some, this is the house that my, that's my grandma and grandpa, in the house that they built. But those houses came, and they're very well-built houses.

[00:03:44]

Paul: They were Sears & Roebuck houses, came on the train.

[00:03:48]

Donna: On the train, pieces and parts. The original.

[00:03:52]

Paul: We just met a whole bunch of them just like that going down highway 95 this morning, only they're modules. They're big, quite, deals. Those are nice, yeah.

[00:04:03]

Donna: They're probably better built than the ones now, because lumber was probably more true.

[00:04:09]

Paul: They're probably actually 2x4s instead of 3x.

[00:04:20]

Haley: Before we jump back into talking about the harshness of the environment and what keeps people staying here in Owyhee County, I just, part of what we're really interested in with these interviews, beyond just all the amazing history that you all have to share with us, is the sagebrush landscapes as well as the other landscapes that are here in Owyhee County, and seeing the house against the sagebrush hills, and yeah, I was wondering if you had any kind of memories associated with that area.

[00:04:57]

Donna: A lot. One of the Tindalls, Chester Tindall, wrote a book, and it's probably here somewhere, about his experiences there. He was a cousin. One year they had a milk cow that produced enough milk and cream that Grandma Tindall decided to make ice cream. And so she sent the boys out to gather up sage-grouse eggs.

[00:05:32]

[Laughter]

[00:05:34]

Donna: Because she needed eggs for the ice cream.

[00:05:36]

Dennis: Yeah, sure.

[00:05:37]

[Laughter]

[00:05:39]

Donna: That was pretty good.

[00:05:41]

[Laughter]

[00:05:43]

Donna: But, you were talking about the Indians walking. Dad, I was always horse crazy as a kid, and dad didn't ever- I don't ever remember seeing him ride a horse. I know he had to a lot, because the saddle that he rode was pretty well worn. But he said he walked, because he has a series of ranches all the way from Mary's Creek up past Token Bambi and up toward Mountain City on Yankee Bill. I asked him. Then, they moved from one ranch to the other with the haying seasons. They put the hay up, and then they'd go up a little higher, put that hay up, and go a little higher. I asked him something about walking or riding, and he says, "I didn't ride, I walked." He would rather have walked than he would ride.

[00:06:39]

Dennis: We had Dennis Swisher was, we owned one of the places that he owned on Juniper Mountain. We own it now. That was the way he was. He had, when he left there, he went and mined for a while, and we rented, leased his place then, and then we leased it after we came back. That's the way he would. He'd ride his horse when he was driving cows, [Donna: Mm hmm, so would Dad] but he'd leave his horse and then walk back and get his pickup. Instead of, I'd have rode my horse back and tied him to the pickup. When we was kids, it was nothing. He wouldn't even think about it. He'd take off, 20-25 miles, you know, and he'd just walk back, and do whatever, you know, that was the way he did it. And you know, but yes, there was a lot of those guys that did that.

[00:07:30]

Donna: Then, the Tindall place, the main house that Tindall, was on a hill. Have you ever been there?

[00:07:39]

Dennis: I don't think so.

[00:07:40]

Donna: It was built on a hill, and Grandpa Tindall, he had sheep at that time I think, and he decided that because of the winters and stuff, he wanted them to come in, into shelters. And so he dug out underneath in that hill a huge room. Did you ever see it?

[00:08:01]

Vern: Well I knew about it. He pointed it out for us once.

[00:08:05]

Donna: He dug out this huge room thinking we could get the sheep in there for the winter and feed them whatever. They'd never clean it.

[00:08:12]

[Laughter]

[00:08:14]

Donna: I don't blame them. But now it's kind of falling in, in different places. Mom always told us kids when we were down there, "You don't go over here. You don't go over here because it might fall in on you." [Dennis: I'll be danged.] How long would it have taken to do that, with a shovel, and a pick, and wheelbarrow?

[00:08:42]

Dennis: Right, and there's probably some pictures in here someplace of corrals over at Jackson Creek and they were all willow corrals. I mean, people used what was there, and whether it was they dug a hole, or they built rock corrals or what they did. There was no money floating around. You could hire a guy to work for you for a dollar a day, and you fed him, and a place to stay. They would have lots of guys working, and that could, everything was you dug a hole in rock by the pick and the shovel. Those corrals were all, because they were at that time, they ran all horses. They were all six-foot willow corrals.

[00:09:36]

Paul: It used to be labor was the cheap. Guys wanting work all the time. My dad used to tell about coming down here to the local employment office here in Murphy, which was just a saloon.

[00:09:53]

[Laughter]

[00:09:55]

Paul: And hiring 10-12 guys to go do the haying.

[00:09:59]

Dennis: The deal was, you could hire them any time of the year, and if they decided to go on another drunk, you just come back and get the one that was about ready to sober up and take them. When we were kids, there was all kinds of them guys. They were old bachelor guys, and you could get them, and they'd come and do anything. They could all mechanic a little bit. They all had horse savvy, and they weren't afraid to work until two weeks into their deal, and they figured they had enough money to go on another runner, and they'd be gone again.

[00:10:30]

Donna: My folks, because they were adjacent to the Indian reservation, they got a lot of Indians that did the same thing.

[00:10:38]

Paul: My dad had Wayne Aman and his wife hired, then. She just passed away here just last year, Joe and Gary's mother. They cooked for the crew back in the '50s, early '50s. She

was hired to cook for the crew, and she'd do it. Shoot, when I grew up, there was always six or eight guys around. God, I don't know how you'd get them for \$50 a month, and room and board, even then.

[00:11:18]

Dennis: Now three guys can do all the haying. Used to take 25 guys, you know.

[00:11:22]

Donna: If you could find them.

[00:11:23]

Dennis: All the people you could get to hay, but now, it doesn't take very, it's... Everybody's got... we're all spoiled. Spoiled rotten. You've got nice equipment. You're in an air conditioner. It's a whole different story now than what it was. Before, you'd start haying, and you'd hay for a month. Now you can put up the same amount of hay in less than a week, easy.

[00:11:54]

Vern: That's what I was wanting to say about the ranches over there. A lot of them were small, a little bigger. Where there used to be three or four guys on the place running it. One person, because of equipment.

[00:12:14]

Paul: Yeah, there's a whole lot different than... The funny thing, in those days, you'd hire the guys, and it's like you were talking about, they might be around for a few days, but they work like hell when they were around. But they went on a drunk, they'd be gone for a week. Nowadays you can't get good people to work like that period.

[00:12:44]

Haley: Is that because of just other opportunities that people are seeking out, or?

[00:12:51]

Paul: I think just like Dennis says, we're kind of all spoiled. It's not just that you can't hire people. Today you want to, if you want to hire somebody, all they want to do is be a horseback or, you know...

[00:13:10]

Dennis: If they're coming to a ranch, they think they're going to be...

[00:13:14]

Paul: Yeah, they think they're gonna be cowboys.

[00:13:14]

Dennis: They think they're going to be a cowboy.

[00:13:17]

Donna: They have this idealized version.

[00:13:19]

Dennis: Ninety-nine percent of what we do is building fence, and taking care of water lines, very mundane things. It's not all glamor, I'll guarantee. And that's fine. We don't care anymore. We try to keep everything in the family. The reason there used to be so much help at that time, it was World War I was a lot of it, and then World War II. There was a lot of people. They talk about the homeless people now, that are in there. They didn't stay in the cities and be homeless. They came and was looking for a job. They was looking for a place to get something to eat. So that was a big part of it, was to get a meal. If they could get a job and get paid for it. They would stay as long as they could, but then. It really isn't any different than what is going on right now, only what is going on right now is, they get fed and taken care of, and they're homeless people, instead of coming and being part of a community someplace else out in the... and that is part of the...

[00:14:37]

Paul: Different mindset, you know. Completely different mindset than they've got nowadays.

[00:14:42]

Dennis: They were all cool guys. They always had stories. Today, in the way everybody thinks, has this deal of if somebody doesn't fit in a mold someplace, they're kind of different. These guys, my parents trusted them, us kids, with every one of them. But yes, they might go off on a running drunk for two weeks, but they'd come back and sober up, and they were just like part of the family. We all had them around and working. They were just cool guys, that had cool stories, but they didn't have, most of them didn't have families. Most of them loved to be around kids, and help kids do things.

[00:15:34]

Paul: They had skills.

[00:15:36]

Dennis: Oh, yeah.

[00:15:39]

Paul: Not just uneducated deadbeats, they had skills. They just had a drinking problem, most of them.

[00:15:48]

Donna: A lot of the young guys that came, they were CCC boys. They come, the government, they didn't have any, they didn't have any money. They didn't have anything back there, where they were from, back east. They were brought out here to work. They worked for the government, I think.

[00:16:09]

Vern: Yeah, it was the government. It was an army. You find -what to you call them- army.

[00:16:17]

[Crosstalk]

[00:16:20]

Dennis: Civilian Conservation Corps, is what it was, CCC. Three Cs.

[00:16:23]

Donna: A lot of these old dams and stuff were built by them.

[00:16:28]

Dennis: Water improvements. We've got water improvements all over our country, yet the wooden troughs are still there. They put in pipes and wooden troughs, and piped water.

[00:16:37]

Donna: That was how they, and to be honest they really need another CCC corps to get some of these guys off the street doing something.

[00:16:50]

Vern: They've got too many rights now.

[00:16:53]

Donna: I blame the drugs a lot too. They're into the drugs, and they don't care.

[00:17:01]

Vern: It was the Depression put these guys into these corps. Like she said, they come from all over. There was a captain, there was a regular army, and if you didn't do right, you went to jail. But most of them was there to work, and they did.

[00:17:19]

Donna: And they stayed here, I mean most of them.

[00:17:24]

Vern: When World War II come, they shipped them all just right into the service, most of them.

[00:17:37]

Haley: Something that I saw has come up several times now are these different changes that have occurred and changed the way you've all been ranching, and things, and I was just curious what your thoughts are on what's the biggest change, I guess, that's happened in ranching through the years, maybe even from back when your great-great-grandfathers and things were ranching to now.

[00:18:04]

Donna: Government. Government.

[00:18:08]

Paul: Without a doubt.

[00:18:10]

Vern: The environmentalists trying to run the country. The way I put it is, probably be a lot better way, but the environmentalists want control.

[00:18:23]

Donna: They have no idea what it looks like, but they have this ideal vision of what it should look like, pre-Columbian.

[00:18:36]

Vern: Another big change, like Dennis said, the machinery that we work with and stuff made a big change.

[00:18:46]

Paul: I think they look at this desert like you look at a mud hen, and think you're going to make a peacock out of it. You can't do it.

[00:18:58]

Dennis: I guess it all starts with the environmental groups, community, however you want to put it. I shouldn't even use that "environmental," because I think the Cattlemen's probably the best environmentalists there ever is, or the people that work with the land, on the land, knows what it takes to make a living and a profit off of that land without hurting the land. Because you can't make a living or profit off of land if you take everything away from it every year.

[00:19:29]

Vern: Overuse it, yeah.

[00:19:31]

Dennis: It has to be there for the next year. Now that the radical side of this equation has the same capability and supposed interest as we do as public land users, they can sue the federal government and get paid their attorney fees and their professional time if they win the suit, by the federal government, and so that lets them file these suits on every decision we have on public land. There's a lot of them. Most of them, they're successful at. So that's what drives what goes on, and that's what drives the wildfire situation that goes on now. You never used to – I can remember my uncle trying to set fires in August on Juniper Mountain to burn the trees up, and you'd get an acre and a half patch that would burn up.

[00:20:36]

Donna: If you were lucky.

[00:20:36]

Dennis: Now, there is so much understory of fuel that is driven by environmental groups that, that's what's – Same thing happened in the logging industry and all that. All that is driven, all this fuel is built up, but they won't let the public land users use what needs to be used out of it. I don't want to get on that soap. We're in history, and this is part of our history, is what it's coming to. I don't know why my nephews actually want to be in the business, to be truthful with you. [Laughs] Because it's going to get tougher. It's been tough. We've been fighting this fight for I don't know. Paul and I didn't have gray hair, or Uncle Vern, either, when we started these fights. We've all been in this fight forever. And we're still on the land. I remember my granddad, in one of his diaries, he wrote a deal

that when the Taylor Grazing Act came in, in 1937, it would never be the same as it was before. Because they were managing the cattle. Well, it wasn't the same. It took years for it to get, but now we've actually, you don't raise 350-pound weaners. You're raising 600-pound weaners. There is a lot of good things that have happened with what's went on since the Taylor Grazing Act, but it's made it a lot harder to make a living. At that time, you could make more money on a 350-pound calf than you can on a 600-pound calf today, because of all the regulations.

[00:22:24]

Paul: No kidding, and because of all the inflation.

[00:22:28]

Dennis: We don't get to count that, do we?

[00:22:30]

Paul: My dad used to talk about, "I can sell 10 cows and buy a new pickup truck."

[00:22:35]

Donna: Sure.

[00:22:36]

Paul: How many do you have to buy now, or sell now, to buy a new pickup truck?

[00:22:42]

Dennis: Probably close to 100.

[00:22:44]

[Laughter]

[00:22:48]

Haley: Great. That was a perfect segue back to the challenges and what keeps people still in Owyhee County, and even keeping on with ranching. I know, Dennis, you were speaking about before we took our break, and I wasn't sure if you still had some more thoughts on that, or if somebody else did.

[00:23:11]

[Crosstalk]

[00:23:11]

Dennis: You hit on that a while ago, and you said we're just stupid.

[00:23:14]

[Laughter]

[00:23:16]

Dennis: While I was eating lunch, I had a little bit different angle to it. In Owyhee County, we're all interrelated, is what the deal is. And so you don't want to move away from your family.

[00:23:32]

Paul: There's a lot of that.

[00:23:34]

Dennis: But no. It's a good life. There's no two ways about it. In what other life, if I had an 8:00 to 5:00 job, I wouldn't be sitting here on a Monday talking to you in the middle of the afternoon. We do get to choose the times we work, and the times we don't work. We get to...

[00:23:57]

Vern: Times you have to work.

[00:23:59]

Dennis: Yeah, the times we have to work. You're calving in the middle of the night, and an 8:00 to 5:00 job you don't do that. You're whatever there is. But I think what keeps everybody here is, you're basically your own boss. You have lots of people who drive the direction you go, but you are actually your own boss. The banker tells you what you're going to do, but, yeah. I think that's what it is. It's more people stay in this life and stay here because right now, in Owyhee County, we've probably got it the best in any place in Idaho. We've got a good set of commissioners that are trying to drive our population explosion in a way that, I mean, we're staying – Owyhee County is ag, and they're trying to leave it ag. There's some really good things about being in Owyhee County. Go ahead.

[00:25:12]

Vern: One big change I've seen happened is, if I want to sell my ranch, and it's not a big ranch, it's got a lot of acres, maybe run 350-400 head of cows, if I want to sell it, I've got to sell it to him for it'll stay in the business. Otherwise, these guys will come out. The big money people come out. They don't care about the cows, how many you can run on it. They want it for hunting, recreation, and they'll pay you 10 times more than what that ground is using. I can't afford to sell it to him. Where you'll buy it for...

[00:25:54]

Paul: It's just a status thing. The rich guys, "Oh, I've got a ranch in Idaho." We go hunting, and fishing, and yeah, and do all the recreating, and don't really care about doing the ranching. If it loses money, it's just a tax write-off, to them.

[00:26:09]

Vern: Exactly.

[00:26:10]

Haley: Is Owyhee County seeing quite a bit of amenity buyers?

[00:26:16]

Paul: More and more all the time.

[00:26:17]

Dennis: More all the time.

[00:26:23]

Vern: The place I've been leasing over there, where my son lives. He's been leasing it for the last 10 years. Just sold out from under him. It went, there's about 5,000 acres of dry ground and maybe 400 acres of irrigated ground. He lives there year-round. That place just sold the other day for 5.3 million. He didn't even want a chance with this. He can't even start to do that. The guy that bought it told him, he says, "I would have paid twice that much." That's how these places are going.

[00:27:10]

Donna: Are they going to put little ranchettes on it?

[00:27:12]

Vern: Oh, no. I don't think so. Kenny's got it for, he had a three or four year lease. He knows the people, and they're gonna honor his lease. They might keep him on throughout, but like he said. He's getting up there old enough, and they're the only ones over there in the wintertime.

[00:27:36]

Dennis: Which place is that? Murphy?

[00:27:38]

Vern: John Miller's.

[00:27:39]

Paul: Oh, yeah?

[00:27:44]

Vern: We've leased it for 35 years.

[00:27:47]

Dennis: The problem that we can all see coming with that, and Vern attested, Paul attested, and Donna. If you take those people that stayed. My brother lives on a place that's similar to that. All these mountain ranges come down to these places. That's where the meadows are. That's where the hay is. People that run cows around there, if they keep running cows, and all the sudden there's nobody at this ranch, and there might be cows come in there along in December, and nobody would know it. Cows would all die there.

[00:28:28]

Donna: That's what ours do.

[00:28:32]

Dennis: This last fall, for some reason, we got a sudden snow. We hadn't had any moisture. Hadn't had any moisture, then we got three and a half feet of snow in the first part of December. It shut everything down. There's been cattle that's been marooned all winter long. Some of them coming in, the snow was up on their neck. If these people hadn't been at these outlying ranches at the ends of these drainages, nobody would have found the cattle. They would have died. My brother's in a similar deal. He's a year younger

than I am. They're thinking about letting their place go. When they let it go, it's going to be somebody that pays four times what it's worth to be a cow ranch. That's what's going to happen to the industry in our country, is people that have too much money and don't care about the ranching will come in. The fires will get bigger. That's not much history. That's the future.

[00:29:47]

Paul: Seems to be going that way.

[00:29:48]

Donna: They'll turn. They'll buy the meadowlands. They'll buy the whole place, use the meadowlands for ranchettes. Then, they'll go with their four-wheelers and all that kind of stuff out.

[00:30:08]

Dennis: That's not where you were, but that's where that ended up.

[00:30:12]

Haley: That's super helpful, and very interesting, and very relevant to other things that we're thinking about. I wanted to get back to the idea that, just the interrelationships in Owyhee County. I was just really curious if you all could speak to how you all know each other and how you all may be related.

[00:30:32]

Donna: In Owyhee County, the nearest neighbor may be 10 miles away. You're up on the mountain.

[00:30:39]

Paul: We're all neighbors. We might live 40 miles apart, but we're neighbors. That's something you don't get in the city, obviously. I don't know half, well I don't know hardly any people in Homedale and Marsing, and they're living close together.

[00:30:56]

Donna: Vern's place was a fence away from us, around the mountain.

[00:31:01]

Dennis: Yep.

[00:31:01]

Vern: Yep. That's how I got to meet you people.

[00:31:08]

Paul: Regardless of how good the fences are, you'll get a cow, one of your neighbor's. Every fall, you go trade cows around with the neighbors. If you've got a range that's got a neighbor, about four neighbors around you, you get to know all your neighbors pretty well.

[00:31:28]

Donna: Ours ended up in Jordan Valley a few times.

[00:31:32]

Dennis: Fall before last, winter I guess, it was in January. It was cow and calf of Paul's come in at Jackson Creek, my place. It's not that. We've all been on the Cattlemen's boards together. We've all been on every committee that there is in Owyhee County from the Sage-Grouse Working Group to [Laughs], you know? Part of us are related. Probably some of us more related than we know. It's the cool thing about it, is we all have a common interest, and we basically have a common goal. Most of us probably won't share that very well with our neighbor. Everybody likes to be a little bit secretive about what they're doing, not let everything out. But you always feel good when your neighbor's feeling good. My dad always told me one thing. He said, "Good fences make good neighbors." That is basically what it is. If you draw a line and keep your stuff on your side, and keep yours, that gives you a lot of respect for the person that's across the fence from you.

[00:32:57]

Paul: Everybody's got a neighbor that don't do that too well.

[00:32:59]

[Laughter]

[00:33:00]

Dennis: Oh, man. I'd like to have my dad preach on some of them for a little while.

[00:33:05]

Vern: You've got to keep those neighbors within your sight. You've got to work with them. They might not do what they should be doing as good as you think they should, but you've got to stay with them, because you've just got to. Otherwise, you won't be getting cows home. We end up with a lot of people's cows, and we usually trade. I trade with him. Twenty-thirty years ago we got a fence between us finally. Clear up around the top of that mountain. Used to be we'd get cattle mixed, work down there, like you said. Come back, and you'd send people down. It was a good deal.

[00:33:53]

Paul: We got the fence, improved it for a while. Now you've got all the ATVers up there leaving the gates open.

[00:33:59]

Donna: And cutting the fence.

[00:34:00]

Paul: Yeah.

[00:34:02]

Dennis: I had a discussion with John Robison last night from the Idaho Conservation League. John was wanting to go into my country and float the Deep Creek to the Owyhee River, down the Owyhee River, come out in our country. We got to discussing, and he got

talking about the problem we was having with the cows getting in cowless wilderness. I told him, I said, it's Thomas' cows. They have Sierra del Rio leased, are the cows he's talking about at the present time. I said what happens there is, those cows go into Deep Creek to get a drink of water. The boaters or hikers, or whatever there is, they go. They don't hike up Deep Creek. They hike down Deep Creek, and then down the Owyhee River, and come out of the river crossing. It's a two-day hike, two-day float trip, however they want to do it. It's mostly been hiking the last couple years, but this year they're going to float it. Those cows come off in there to water, and the recreation in whatever form they're doing, are coming down the river. Well, they just push the cows down the river, down Deep Creek ahead of them, and then they end up in a cowless wilderness. Then everybody's up in arms, because these cows are in the wrong place. There's no fence to stop them. There's no boundary to stop them. They've got somebody pushing them down the creek. Anyway, I said, "We need a couple of fences. We need a drift fence in that canyon." And I said, "Thomases would put it up." They don't like to go on clear almost to the reservation to get their cows back. Chris Black doesn't like to go there to get his cows back. We don't either, but our cows usually come back out of that deal, because they know a little better. Anyway, he said, "Well, you know, there's fences all over wildernesses. There's no reason you can't." So there's an instance right there, where I would probably tell John, "No, you can't go float the river," but if he's going to help me get a fence to keep my cows from getting into the cowless wilderness area, I'll probably tell him yeah, go ahead and go down through my property and float through. It's one of those things that's part of the history of that deal is, until these wildernesses, and wild rivers, and that stuff came in, it made no difference where the cows were. They were fine. But now, with government regulations, and we did trade for those wilderness through the Owyhee Initiative deal. We traded for it, to stop from getting a monument, and we felt we did well. But there's still some things to be worked out. That's these cows getting in cowless wildernesses. Not that it bothers us, and it probably doesn't bother anyone else. But if they see them in there, they howl about it. There's got to be some mitigation, some way to get that stopped. Hopefully by being a neighbor with John Robison, and from the Idaho Conservation League, that we can figure that deal out.

[00:37:14]

Donna: We've got so many elk up at our place. Elk do absolutely destroy a fence. If they get spooked, they'll just destroy a fence. You can't be up there every day fixing fence. We're going to turn our cows out next week over there. The guys are up there fixing the fence now. You know one or two of them are going to be out in the wilderness. The thing of it is, they're not supposed to go out there. They're not even supposed to fly it to look for them.

[00:37:51]

Vern: Is that right?

[00:37:53]

Dennis: No, you can't.

[00:37:55]

Donna: You can't. Until they put tracking devices on these cows, which I'm sure is coming.

[00:38:09]
Vern: Some of them want that.

[00:38:10]
Donna: I know they do. You can't tell cattle what to do.

[00:38:15]
Paul: With the numbers of cows you have to run these days to make a living, I don't see how the heck a tracking device is going to help you. You can't afford to.

[00:38:26]
Dennis: They won't be used to help us, Paul. Go ahead. You need to guide this a little better.

[00:38:34]
[Laughter]

[00:38:36]
Haley: No.

[00:38:37]
Dennis: We can get off on our problems pretty easy.

[00:38:40]
Haley: That's totally fine, and honestly, it's been really interesting to hear about the wilderness areas, and the Owyhee Initiative, and everything like that. I was curious back to some of the stories. I feel like we got into some before lunch, and does anybody have maybe a favorite story related to driving cattle or whatnot out there that they want to share?

[00:39:13]
Paul: Want to hear the romantic part of it, is what.

[00:39:15]
[Crosstalk]

[00:39:16]
[Laughter]

[00:39:17]
Haley: It can be the romantic part or the not-romantic part.

[00:39:21]
Donna: When I was little, and dad had that country out there, he had little ranches all the way from Mary's Creek to Mountain City. In the fall of the year, they would put what they call a Rodear, and they'd take the yearlings off the range, and then they'd drive them. Took them three days, but they drive them up to these individual ranches, and drive them to Elko, and put them on the train. Then, they'd drive back. That's probably why dad didn't like to ride horses. They didn't have the trucks, and they didn't have all that, that we do now. That was the closest point that they could ship.

[00:40:09]

Vern: That was the closest point for them. Winnemucca was another point, and then Murphy was a point.

[00:40:16]

Paul: Before Murphy was Nampa. They swam the river. Joyces used to, in the fall of the year, when Snake River went really low, they'd trail their cattle across Snake River and go into the stockyards in Nampa before Dewey built the railroad out here in Murphy.

[00:40:35]

Donna: How long did it take?

[00:40:39]

Paul: I don't think it took more than about three or four days, but crossing the river was pretty hazardous. They lost a couple different cowboys.

[00:40:49]

Dennis: Frank Stanford is buried in Reynolds Creek, and he drowned at Walter's Ferry doing that, crossing cattle. A lot of things is changed. We're about 65 miles from my home to our range in the south, and when we were kids we drove the cows and baby calves from home to there. My uncle was, that's basically all he did. He'd come home, and help hay in the summertime, and he'd help feed in the winter. But he was out there from the 15th of March till after New Year's, with the cattle and horses, and he'd bring them home. We'd take off with them cows and baby calves, and we'd drive them for almost two weeks, because them little, tiny guys couldn't go very far. We had Hereford cows at that time. We went through a lot of snow. It was, they would get bad bags, blistered bags, so you had to catch them and grease their udders once a day to keep the calves sucking. It was a lot of tough doing, and one time we picked up an old buckaroo that was working for Jack Morris, name was Bill Pence, and he'd been on one of these running drunks for about most of the winter, and anyway, he got home, and so Jack decided that he was going to sober him up. So he sent him with Uncle Gene and I to drive these cows. I was about eight or nine. We got about two days from Morris's place still going south with these cows, and we'd gotten them all to Bald Mountain Pass. It was just snowing, terrible, absolutely terrible. Old Bill was still really hungover. Not really very coherent about what he was doing, and he didn't have chinks on. His Levis and his underwear had worked up above his knees, and so from his boot top to his knees, about this far, it was bare. It was just snowing, and it was just plastering to the side of his leg. He was just going along driving cows. I'll never forget that. He was quite an old character anyway. He was so numb for this however long a drunk he'd been on. But that's how Jack sobered him up. He sent him with Uncle Gene and I.

[00:43:16]

Paul: Who's the old boy that liked to drink? Worked for Bill Ross, just another one of those old drunks, but a good cowboy. He died about 40 years ago, I remember. He worked in Jordan Valley area.

[00:43:32]

Dennis: Yeah, there were several of them. Bill had a lot of them. Nate was there, Nate Morris, Jack Morris's dad.

[00:43:43]

Paul: This guy was pretty much by himself. I think he was, last time I ever saw the guy, picked him up walking on the Silver City road. He worked for Bill Ross a lot. He was walking up that Silver City road, and I can't remember his name.

[00:43:58]

Vern: Dave Castro.

[00:43:59]

Paul: Castro! Yeah, Dave Castro.

[00:44:01]

[Laughter]

[00:44:02]

Paul: He was walking up the Silver City road, and I'm going, "What the heck? That's Dave," and I stopped. "Dave, what're you doing?" "Oh, I need a ride into Silver City." I said, good grief, of course he smelled like a distillery when he got in. He says, "I've been drunk for 30 days," and he said, "I'm going to try to make it another 30."

[00:44:22]

[Laughter]

[00:44:25]

Vern: He was a character.

[00:44:26]

Paul: He was a character.

[00:44:28]

Dennis: One time, he was working for the Lucky Seven, and he was out on the desert there. He decided he needed some whiskey, so instead of going, and I think he went back to McDermitt horseback. He kept two half-gallons of whatever kind of rotgut he got. He tied one on each side on his saddle, and got on, and started off and his old horse blew up and went to bucking with him, and them two bottles of whiskey come behind his saddle together like that [clap], and they just broke right there. And that was it, doesn't have any more money to go buy another one, so back to the Lucky Seven he went, dry.

[00:45:02]

[Laughs]

[00:45:06]

Vern: My sister and brother-in-law run that. [Coughs] Excuse me. They run the Lucky Seven. They go up on that mountain. She said they'd be there about five days. She had five kids from that size up. Dave Castro would show up, and he knew they's going to be there,

and then he'd stay there, and she says, "I don't give a darn," and she got up at four o'clock in the morning, start the coffee, and Dave had it on. Said, "Sharon, there ain't no use of you trying to beat me up, because I'm always up. I'll beat you up to get the coffee." He treated those kids like they was his own. But the man could get on drunks and very mean. He was herding sheep, I think, when you run into him up there camp tending for Glen Tanner. He'd come into town to go to the Cattlemen's convention in Silver. He was riding a nice horse, silver spurs. He got drunk, and he was in under the dance hall passed out. Gals was riding his horse up, and I don't know why they didn't steal his spurs and bit, and stuff. He was passed out under the dance hall.

[00:46:29]

Paul: One I remember, he'd come riding in here on a snaky colt, into the Cattlemen's, and passed out. I don't know under the dance hall, but I remember passed out on the walkway going into the dance hall the next morning. Somebody went, "Jeez, we need to take care of that poor horse." The horse is, you know, and nobody could get up to that horse. Nobody could get anywhere close to that horse. That horse would snort. He don't- "You don't get anywhere near me!" Oy! Dave, he, about 1:00 or 2:00 in the afternoon, he finally woke up, and got out there, climbed on this horse, and took off. Poor horse had been 24 hours almost sitting on the hitching rail there.

[00:47:19]

Vern: What I'm thinking about, he had a gentle horse. Because I mean ol' Lillian Duncan was riding him around.

[00:47:32]

Paul: Dave, one time, when he was working for Bill Ross, Bill Ross had the old Montini place, Sierra del Rio. He had that leased. He had old Dave working for him down there. Dave had been pretty good for quite a while.

[00:47:52]

Dennis: Dave always was good for a while.

[00:47:54]

Paul: Yeah, and they had a bunch of cattle got out on Murphy Flat. They didn't have no fences on the farms and stuff. I remember a bunch of our cattle got in with them, and my dad, somebody, brought us out a bottle of whiskey for Christmas or something. My dad didn't drink. He says, "Here, go down and take that to Bill Ross." We've had cattle on him all winter long we'd been taking care of. He said, "We owe him at least a bottle of whiskey." I showed up out there, and I'm just probably a 20-year-old kid, barely old enough to drink whiskey, maybe I wasn't even. I don't know. I showed up with that bottle of whiskey, and give it to old Bill Ross, and old Dave Castro seen it. Bill cussed me. He says... Of course, the bottle was gone shortly. He cussed me. He says, "Damn!" He said, "I've been keeping Dave sober here for quite a while. You bring out this damn whiskey. I won't see him for a week or better." And he didn't. He didn't show back. Old Dave, Bill trying to do neighborly favor give him, but they got a bottle of whiskey, and all I did was ruin his hired man. [Laughs] He was not very happy with me, old Bill wasn't.

[00:49:27]

Haley: I don't want to interrupt the flow of the stories, but I am going to really quickly pause and then restart another recording for us.

[00:00:00]

Dennis: But there was a lot of that. Most of our Indians that we get came from McDermitt. The McDermitt Indians and the Owyhee Indians are both Paiute-Shoshone tribe and so they're related also. But they were a big force. Bill Ross used a lot of them. They contributed a lot and still do. And some of us still do, some of us are best friends. I just lost one of my good friends, Robert Crutcher — he had been my friend for years, him and his wife — to cancer. And they basically do the same thing we do. I mean, they're basically in the livestock industry, the older part of the tribes, and they have shares on the reservation and stuff like that. Anyway, I was kind of curious about some of Donna's memories about the Indians that her dad worked.

[00:01:08]

Donna: They came in usually when they were gathering cattle and when they were haying. They'd come in and hay. But of course, my mom, she was a teetotaler. She didn't drink, she didn't smoke, she didn't play cards. I don't know how she got out there. [Laughs] But it really bothered her when they'd go out on a drunk and come back. But yeah, we used them a lot. And I think they still do to a certain extent.

[00:01:44]

Dennis: Well, I think Tindalls you have to. Yeah. Well, they border them, so there's a lot of cattle getting mixed there.

[00:01:53]

Donna: There again, when you gather cows, you gather everybody's cows. You don't leave any out. So, when you gather cows, you gather them all in and then piece and part them out to where they belong. The same with the horses, I guess.

[00:02:13]

Paul: Yeah. It's kind of the thing I was thinking about when you showed the Silver City Cowboys there. They probably all got together and are separating cows, and different guys, different cows. And sometimes you had six or eight different outfits with cattle in them.

[00:02:32]

Donna: They called them rodears.

[00:02:34]

Paul: Yeah, rodears, yeah.

Dennis: And they were big rodears, big ones. And rodears was a big gathering of cattle with no fences around. They were just strictly held by cowboys. And that's the way the calves were all branded.

[00:02:47]

Donna: And then they go in and cut their own out of the herd.

[00:02:50]

Dennis: Get their own cow.

[00:02:51]

Paul: Each one of them take turns.

[00:02:55]

Dennis: Yes. And I remember branding calves with Frank Baltzor and them guys, and they were out in Oregon, and it was all a rodear deal. You would come catch a calf, bring him to the fire, somebody'd heel him. And then when you got done with that calf, then you started on the left-hand side of the herd. And there might be 10 or 15 guys there. And you didn't catch another calf till you were clear around the herd back till you's the next one to the fire. And then you cut a calf and brought a calf to the fire. So somebody was always holding it. There was no... It was very orderly. And if you didn't do it right as a kid, you got your ass chewed. [Laughs]

[00:03:44]

Paul: Yeah. It's not quite like that nowadays.

[00:03:48]

Dennis: No.

[00:03:49]

Haley: So, curious, how young were you all when you started getting involved with the day-to-day operations?

[00:03:56]

Paul: 10. [Laughs]

[00:03:59]

Dennis: Yeah. The first time when I went to Juniper Mountain for my first summer, we'd go spend all summer with my uncle on the mountain, and I was six. You'd spend a month with him there from the end of May till the end of June, just before 4th of July. Then you'd come home and go to McDermitt for the 4th of July for the weekend, and then you'd start haying. You'd hay until the first weekend in August. And then you'd go back until school started. And school never started until after Labor Day, so you'd spend a month there in the spring and a month in the fall.

[00:04:37]

Paul: I remember Silver City. I was up there the one I can first remember. But of course, I was doing some...you know helping along with some things before 10, but first actually went out to do the work and gather the cows myself and help, you know, I was probably 10. I remember bringing a school buddy out one time, and I think we were in fifth grade, that'd be probably 11 or 12. And my dad sent us out on Murphy flat, right about five miles out there and he says there's a steer in with the cows out there and he's big and he's fat, and he said that he needs to be in the steer herd so we can sell him. We went out there and brought the steer home. And wild son of a buck. I'm surprised that we got him, surprised we got him there. Well when we got him there, it was a heifer, and my dad, boy, was he pissed. "You didn't bring the right animal home." [Laughs] We just kids, you know. [Laughs]

[00:05:48]

Haley: And Vern, to catch you up, we were just discussing kind of how old you were when you first got involved with day-to-day operations on the ranch and stories around that if you have anything you'd want to share.

[00:06:03]

Vern: Well, when my sister, Dennis' mother, married in the Stanfords, she took care of, there was three younger kids in our family, my sister and brother and me, and there were three older ones, and they was all sisters. But my dad died in '49 and Virginia just run it because my mother couldn't even get social security for all those kids and her. My dad missed his section on social security, and they wouldn't give her any money. But anyway, so, she had to work all the time. And Virginia married Lee, and so they let me come up there and start driving team, raking hay. And they had about 18 to 20 head of workhorses we gathered every morning, and rodeared them in, and I used to know the name of every one of those workhorses. I just loved it.

Then my uncle lived on over and he was a bachelor. I had to go there and help him finish up haying. I'd ride a horse back from Jackson Creek over to there. And I stayed with my uncle after I graduated and kept working for him. Got married and he says, "You stay here and work for me and I'll sell you this place." So, I did, and he let me have it for a song. He was a bachelor, he didn't need a lot of money, but anyway. We took it on time, bought the place, and I added about 5000 more acres of deeded ground to it. Some deals came up I was able to get into them.

And then, when I sold out to my son and grandson, I could've sold it out to these big bucks, but I knew what my uncle did for me. He sold me the whole place, lock stock and barrel, for \$100,000. I could've sold that place for I don't know how many millions. I just let those kids have it for a song because I wanted to keep it in my family. Is that what you wanted to hear?

[00:08:29]

Haley: Yeah. That's great.

[00:08:31]

Paul: That's the thing about a rancher, you're talking about 5,000,000 or 10,000,000 worth of assets in the ranch. Well, we're all asset-rich but money-poor. You just barely can make enough to keep going, but you've got all these assets. It's like the farmer. He never had any money until he sold out when he got old. And most of us, like us, most of us got family to pass it on to, and we don't need to get these big bucks.

[00:09:12]

Donna: That's kind of the way we are with the place we have now. As I told my kids, there's only one Wickiup. And if you sell it, what have you got besides money?

[00:09:31]

Vern: And we don't know how...

[00:09:31]

Dennis: And that will be gone. The money will be gone.

[00:09:37]

Donna: But the place won't.

[00:09:38]

Dennis: People always just ask me, "You've surely got lots of money in savings," and I say, "No. I got money in dirt. Mine's all in dirt."

[00:09:49]

Paul: I had a reporter ask me one time, he said, "Why don't you just sell out? Look what you could get for this. Why don't you just sell out?" I said, "Well, it's a family heritage."
[Donna: Mm hmm, that's what it is.] It don't belong to me, it belongs to the family. I'm just the guy that happens to be the generation that's on it.

[00:10:14]

Vern: I've been on the ranch up there after I grew up. When I sold out, I moved down to Jordan Valley, and I'm still about to go nuts. If it wasn't for Dennis coming up and helping him, he gives me...helps me put the cows up the chute and whatever, if it wasn't for guys like him, I don't know where I'd be. But I do, I just love to do it yet.

[00:10:51]

Donna: My brother is in Gooding, and he just sold his place, and they had a sale of his... He sold it to a family that we've known all up for years. And then he had an auction of his... And his tools and implements were old. And then he said, "I don't know what I'm going to do." Every day he had something to look forward to, and now he doesn't have anything. And I've always said that, these farmers and ranchers, once they retire and get away

from it, within two years, they die. That's because they don't have any drive, anything to...

[00:11:30]

Dennis: Right. Well, it's not the same... We bitch about having to go out in the snow and stuff, but if we didn't do it, we'd bitch about it. [Laughs] I don't know. We moan and groan about a lot of things, but when you can get up and see the sunshine come up every day and you know that day you're going to do something productive and you're going to make life a little better for yourself or somebody else...

[00:11:58]

Paul: Or at least your cows. [Laughs]

[00:11:58]

Dennis: ...or at least your cows. This time of the year is fantastic. Calves are...

[00:12:05]

Paul: And there's always something...

[00:12:05]

Dennis: ...starting to grow and the grass is starting grow. I mean, hey, life starts over every year.

[00:12:12]

Paul: And there's always something different. There's always some little incident in your daily life.

[00:12:18]

Dennis: I know people that I just, I drive crazy because I don't have a list of what I'm going to do that day. And I said, "I know when I go out the door what I'm going to do," because I'll hear a cow bawl someplace, or there's a calf got through the fence someplace, or one of the horses will be out. There's something different. If you make a list, you never get the list done because you never get to it.

[00:12:42]

Paul: And there's always something that can amuse you during the day. You can always find something. The other day, yesterday, hauling water up to the troughs, and I pulled into the troughs with the water truck and here's this calf and he's dead. I'm sure he was dead. He was just laying back there, his tongue was out a little bit, and his eyes was closed. What the hell happened to him? And he didn't hear the truck or nothing. But I walked up, and I went, "Well, I guess I need to drag him away from the trough." And I grabbed a hind leg and, boy, did he come alive. And I just laughed. It's little things that like that just make your day. [Laughs]

[00:13:29]

Donna: There's nothing boring about...

[00:13:31]

Paul: No, it's not a really boring job. It might be mundane. Sometimes it's just drudgery, and sometimes you can always find something that keeps you satisfied with what you're doing.

[00:13:50]

Dennis: When I was little, we played a lot of marbles, but marbles were also cows and marbles were everything. And my mother always told the story on me, all my marbles were always...the red marbles were the red marbles, and the blue marbles were the blue marbles. And my kids say that's the way my cows are. My cows are that way, and that's the way I want them. The kids call them my marbles. They laugh about it. They'll ask me, "What's going on?" "Oh, I'm going to work this set of cows." "Oh, playing with your marbles again." [Laughs] But that's part of my... The anal part of me is, yes, I want the first heifer, first and their calves in one place, I want the two-year-olds in one place. Everything has got its place. So, yeah, some of us can be just a little bit anal, but I guess that's part of what makes us tick.

[00:14:51]

Haley: Great. So, I was curious, what has been...? Think about the landscape. What's been some of the biggest changes you've seen in your lifetime or if you know stories from your parents' or grandparents' lifetime? How has the landscape here changed?

[00:15:11]

Donna: Junipers.

[00:15:14]

Dennis: In Juniper Mountain, George and Donna run Paul's country. The juniper encroachment has been the biggest deal. When I was a kid, there was juniper trees around and they were big, old juniper trees, mostly on what you would call fire safe places. They were on rim rocks and places like that. And I don't remember exactly what it was, but I was about 10 or 12 and the caterpillar moth had come in, or caterpillar bug had come in, and it killed all the mahoganies and it killed all the chaparral. And when it killed all the chaparral and mahoganies, that opened up the ground for junipers. And there was juniper berries around, but there was enough ground cover of other shrubs and stuff that kept them out.

And when they came, they say juniper trees take a long time, but I know juniper trees that I didn't even see when I was a kid that are 35 feet tall now. I mean, it doesn't take them forever. Once they get above sagebrush, they just take off like wildfire. And juniper trees will go ahead, and they make the ground a little bit salty, but they deplete an already depleted system of water. So, the first thing they kill is the sagebrush and their brush. Whatever brush is there is the first thing. Then the grass goes away.

Then there used to be quite a lot of erosion between the juniper trees because there's no ground cover. And fire has been the biggest help with that, or mastication, which is grinding juniper trees or cutting juniper trees, which the government's finally helping us out on that because of sage-grouse concerns, opening back up the terrain of natural sage-grouse ranges.

But probably the biggest change in landscape was the Soda Fire when it burnt 800 and some thousand acres, and it took a lot of juniper trees, it took everything out. And probably, I'm going to say, four times as much forage there is what there was before, whether it's cheatgrass, medusahead, annuals or biannuals, there's just a lot more forage there. So, as far as a big change in Owyhee county, that's probably the biggest change I've seen at one time, in like a three-day period. I mean, it did take out a pile of country. It went from Jordan Valley to...well, the head of Cow Creek to Homedale in about three and a half hours.

[00:18:11]

Paul: And then, about three days, coming back.

[00:18:12]

Dennis: Yeah. In three days...

[Crosstalk 00:18:14]

[00:18:14]

Dennis: ...and come back up this side.

[00:18:17]

Paul: Yeah. Wind changed.

[00:18:18]

Dennis: The wind changed. But as far as making the resource, I mean, tougher, was juniper encroachment, and still is to this day. It's coming down this way.

[00:18:34]

Paul: My dad used to... We used to own the Josephine Ranch over there. When you're going across to the Josephine Ranch, there was a big flat out there my dad called Lone Tree Flat. And the last time we went back there, he couldn't even find...he couldn't even remember where the lone tree was. There was probably a million trees on that flat. I mean, it was just completely... And it used to be kind of a grassy flat. There's no grass left in it. The junipers had taken it all.

[00:19:10]

Dennis: Everybody had a lone tree. And it was usually a rodear ground, something, you know. But very few lone trees in that country.

[00:19:25]

Kelly: So, you referred to being 10. I'm curious, would you mind saying when you think that was so we can sort of have a peg for about what year that was?

[00:19:33]

Dennis: When I was 10? 1963. I know exactly when it was. [Laughs]

[00:19:42]

Paul: What was that?

[00:19:43]

Dennis: When I was 10 years old. It was 1963 when I was 10 years old.

[00:19:48]

Kelly: For the reference point for when the moths came.

[Crosstalk 00:19:49]

[00:19:48]

Paul: Well, you're just a young buck.

[00:19:50]

Dennis: I'm a little younger but not much.

[00:19:55]

Vern: Keeps pushing me too fast, I know that.

[00:20:02]

Dennis: Yeah. That was... It's been... I mean, I would push any other person that's my age or any other to have the broad spectrum of what we've learned in our life from the life that we lived. I mean, we know how to mechanic, we know how to... animal husbandry is no problem, we know almost everything there is to know about every plant that is in our allotment, we know what a functioning riparian area is [Laughs]. But that's just things that you had to learn to be in our business. We don't raise just livestock. I mean, we take care of the land in a very... I think it's probably the best it's been in our lifetime.

When I was a kid, everybody ran all their adult cows and all their yearlings until August, they gathered them in August, and then shipped them. So, they were actually double-cropping all the range basically. The range has done nothing but get better in the last 40 years.

[00:21:23]

Paul: As my dad used to always say, he said, "We don't raise cattle, we raise grass. We just use the cattle to harvest it."

[00:21:38]

Haley: Great. I just wanted to make sure nobody else had any thoughts on that point. But I had something. I lost it for a second there. I guess I'm curious, kind of touching on that childhood point, for those of you that do have kids or family members in that kind of generation, did they also start that young? Or are kids kind of starting later or has that changed at all?

[00:22:07]

Paul: Probably younger. [Laughter]

[00:22:09]

Vern: My kids, they worked right from the start. They didn't even have television. They could watch television on Saturday morning when my wife had the light plant going and she was washing. Otherwise, they was outside doing something. We had a small place, but they both worked good, and they both ended up being cattlemen. One boy owns trucks. He does a lot of trucking. But him and his wife also run a bunch of cows. They've branched out into this branded beef deal, and she takes orders for that and they get beef. So, she sells beef on the internet or somehow.

[00:23:10]

Dennis: And basically, a lot of people are doing that, fattening their own beef and selling them to private market. You can sell them cheaper. It's probably fed a little different than what it is in a feedlot, doesn't go through big processors. There's not, the packer companies aren't making the big dollars off of it. It's a cheaper way. I mean, you can go on the internet and look up beef and all of these guys' places will come up so you can find them.

Yeah. I have three girls and, to this day, when my voice comes up, they'll say, "Dad, you're hollering at us." And they're all adults. "No, I'm not. I'm just trying to make you better at what you're doing. I'm not hollering at you. And I'm not being mean. It's just I want you to be a little better at what you're doing." But two of them are back in the ranching business, and my youngest daughter just bought a place and she's trying to get back into livestock too. Yeah. And then I have... My brother and I were partners and he passed away from cancer two years ago, so I've got his two boys that are partners with me now. And when you take on early 20-year-olds and a 68-year-old and you try to put their minds together, sometimes that don't work real well. But we get along all right.

[00:24:42]

Vern: They're pretty independent, but they do listen to you. I know that. They won't admit it.

[00:24:50]

Paul: The one time I'd been around them boys I really was impressed. They're good kids.

[00:24:53]

Dennis: Yeah. They're good. But then I remember when I was that age, and then I go, "They're real good kids."

[Laughter]

[00:25:03]

Paul: When we were that age, we weren't taking advice, we were giving it. [Laughs]

[00:25:08]

Dennis: Yes. It's a very cool way to raise a family. The younger generation – And there's getting to be quite a few younger generation people in the ranching business in Jordan Valley now. There's a lot of us old, gray-haired guys going around too, but.

[00:25:27]

Vern: Most of these younger guys is come out within two or three years in college, animal science and stuff. So, they are a little smarter than us, but they've got to learn to run with the...

[00:25:42]

Donna: My grandkids, the granddaughter is a veterinarian and works out of Knight Veterinary in Mountain Home. And then the grandson took agribusiness, but the analytical and the selling points, and when to sell them, and the stock market, and all that kind of stuff. That's where they shine, is going into that type of thing.

[00:26:08]

Dennis: They understand it. I guess it's not that we don't understand how to use futures and all of that. I mean, we can figure it out, but that's not our niche. We don't like to have that money hanging out there. We don't like that risk. And they are a little bit more that way. They know how to...

[00:26:29]

Donna: They know how to... That's what Nick, when we go to sell any commodity, like hay or anything like that, he'll tell you what it's going to be.

[00:26:40]

Paul: You can learn to be frugal.

[00:26:49]

Haley: I guess I'm curious, back to the idea of all the different things you have to learn to be able to do what you do, what are some of the most valuable things you've learned through your time ranching? I'm sure there's a ton, or maybe it's hard to pick out one.

[00:27:08]

Vern: I think the biggest point for me is the medicines that came up better for your calves. I didn't have a whole lot of cattle, but I've had X-amount of first-calf heifers and then the cows. And I lived in a little canyon up there and it don't always get real warm. But anyway. The heifers, calves, good calves and everything, and then they'd come down with the scours. And no matter what you did, you thought you was doing for them, they'd die on you. And finally, I got my vet, give him a sample of the scours, and he told me what I had. And he says, "You give all the rest of those heifers this shot. That will go through them and go into the calf."

And that was one of the biggest improvements I ever had, plus the weight of bulls for first-calf heifers. You come up with calving these bulls. That was one of the next biggest thing. But getting over the scours and stuff on those calves was... If the calf got sick, at least he had a chance to come out of it. Before, they would just dump fluids in them and...

[00:28:30]

Paul: Yeah, you learn how to raise your cattle the way it works out best...

[00:28:38]

Vern: For the area you're in.

[00:28:39]

Paul: ...for the area you're in. And I'm blessed with a lot of low-elevation country here. And we, most of you guys probably if you calf out first-calf heifers, you got them in close where you can pull calves if you need them. You don't have the natural pasture. You've got to feed them all winter. I've got this winter range, and sometimes it catches us. About every 10 years, we wish to hell we hadn't.

[00:29:14]

Vern: I was going to say, 10 years.

[00:29:15]

Paul: Yeah, about every 10 years, you wish to hell you'd never turned a cow out in the winter range because you end up losing a bunch. But I can take my first-calf heifers up there, and they've got to walk two or three miles to water every day. And we never pull a calf. Once in a while, we'll lose a heifer, but very rarely. And geez, it just makes it so easy, and the cattle work better. That's a blessing we've got. But I guess, when you've been around over 150 years, you kind of pick up what you need [Laughs] from the neighboring

ranchers or whatever that didn't make it. You pick up a ranch here and there or a range. So, we're really blessed in our family. I will admit that.

[00:30:17]

Dennis: I think probably the biggest bank of knowledge that I picked up over the years was mostly from my neighbors. Is what they have done, what they haven't done, and what you see. So, yeah, I think it's probably the neighbors is probably where you get the bulk of your knowledge in the business.

[00:30:39]

Paul: I get it. And of course, nowadays, nobody cares because the guys that's buying a ranch, they don't care what it's like. They used to be ranchers who were buying ranches and you were just... You had somebody who's coming in from another area and buying a ranch and wanting to make a ranch out of it. It always amazed me that they didn't go around to the neighbors and say, "Hey. How come so-and-so whose ranch I'm buying, how come he went broke on his ranch? What did he do wrong?" Your neighbors are going to know these things. They've watched what he did wrong. They've watched what he, you know... But a lot of guys, they just buy a ranch just out of the blue and never ask anybody and never take any advice. Sure enough, they go broke too. [Laughs]

[00:31:27]

Vern: Some people, ranchers are hard-headed enough. You can see that guy's doing a good job, whatever he's doing. You think I'm going to do it? No way.

[Laughter]

[00:31:41]

Donna: To go back to what Paul's talking about, when they come in and buy a ranch, they'll usually sell the cattle and bring in some other ones. Well, in our country, we've learned we save our own cattle because they know the country.

[00:31:54]

Paul: Exactly.

[00:31:56]

Dennis: They know how to get home.

[00:31:57]

Donna: They know how to get home. And you get somebody else's cows in there and they're lost.

[00:32:02]

Paul: I had the BLM guy tell me when we were having... They were very concerned about my riparian areas up there, and these old cows of mine in the middle of the day were

bedding down right in the riparian areas right there, and they wanted the cows out of the way of the creek. They said, "You need to sell all these cows and buy a bunch of yearlings. That's the way you...yearlings..." I just scratched my head and I said, "That ain't going to work, guy." [Laughs] You're a nice BLM guy who doesn't know anything about cattle. And I go, "It just doesn't work that way. Yearlings, maybe they'll stay off the creek better, but they will also go, you know, 15 ranges away if they get through a fence." [Laughs]

[00:33:00]

Vern: Usually if I got cattle over here on Nettleton's, it'd be a yearling or something, didn't know which way to go.

[00:33:08]

Paul: Always some young stuff.

[00:33:10]

Vern: Yeah. That's what I'd get, his over there, some young cow and calf.

[00:33:16]

Paul: We had an old cow back in the '70s we called Flint Creek. She went over there three years in a row. The third year, she went to the sale. [Laughs] We got tired of trucking her back from your country. [Laughs]

[00:33:34]

Donna: They'll go to where they were before. We've got one stray cow of Steiner's that keeps coming into our place. And she's a big old black cow with a horn that comes down. You can see her a mile away, but she's always there. [Laughs]

[00:33:50]

Vern: They've got their favorite places.

[00:33:55]

Haley: Well, I guess before people get too tired or anything, I was curious, for anybody that doesn't know Owyhee County well or maybe is visiting the museum for the first time, do you have anything that you would just really want them to know about this place?

[00:34:18]

Donna: Respect it. Respect it. Respect the ground.

[00:34:27]

Dennis: We don't feel any different about our home, which might be 10,000 acres, than you do about your home or your yard. We feel no different about it. And as we've got so we've started locking some gates, and we never used to. And it's not because of the bulk of the population, it's because of that minute percentage that probably don't respect their own

home. So, that's changed things a lot because we used to know everybody that came to visit. And now you don't, and they get mad at you if you ask them who they are. They get mad at you if you inform them they are on private ground, and most of them already know it. I mean, everybody's got an app on their cell phone that shows them exactly where they're at. They know that.

And yeah, we just want the general public to respect what we have like we respect what they have. We absolutely will not go trespassing in their place. I guess that would be ideal. And every time I go across the Snake River, I get mad for what is happening to the farm ground and stuff. And I don't blame anybody for wanting to come to Owyhee County and look around. I mean, if I had to live in that thing, I'd go nuts. But anyway. But when you come, hey, if we're coming up the road with a bunch of cows, just pull right up in there. We're not trying to hinder what you're doing or anything else. It's just, respect what's ours like we would respect what's yours. I guess, that would be my... Just, respect.

[00:36:36]

Paul:

We get these ATVs all the time. And they get... Of course, everybody, I suppose, got some ground, some land out there, some place that's got a road or a trail through it that you haven't thought about because if you tried to lock the gates, they'd just cut them. And I've got... Okay. I can't hire security to sit at a gate. So, I guess, what I have done — and it seems to have worked fairly well — is I just put up a sign in all the places that they come in on private and just say, "Caution. You are now entering private property. Please stay on the main road. Please don't go hill-climbing, mud-bogging. Don't bother the cattle. Keep the gates as you've found them." And I've put my name and telephone number at the bottom.

And I've had a number of ATV groups now that have called my number and said, "Hey, we appreciate you letting us through there. Is there anything we can do?" And I said, "Yes. You can. You can help me keep these signs up," because I can't get around to them all the time and there's always that 1% of knuckleheads that will either tear them down. Not always. Sometimes they weather down.

[00:38:16]

Vern:

Or they can shoot them up.

[00:38:16]

Paul:

Or shoot them. [Laughs] I said, "You can kind of help respect and watch people as you go through. And if you see somebody doing a dumbass trick, talk to them and tell them, 'Hey. You're on private ground and it's a privilege to be here, not a right.'" And that's the thing I see most of all. And boy, there are some really good groups out there, some people that really want to help you and really do appreciate going through and want to...

[00:38:53]

Vern: Want to come back again.

[00:38:56]

Paul: Yeah. Want to come back again. And they know that there's the knuckleheads out there that do these things, and they try to... We've got one group that... You know how they have the Adopt a Highway thing, and they go take a couple of miles and pick up trash. We've got a group that takes the full length of the Silver City Road and picks up trash every spring. And they do a really good job. And there's probably 10 or 15 or 20 of them, Kuna Trail Riders, and they are really good. They're all out of the Kuna area, and they're just really nice people.

I had a, believe it or not, and they were all old boys too, an ATV group... I had a cattle guard that had just filled in with dirt, and the cattle would just walking it to beat hell. And it wasn't one of those big heavy ones either. It was a fairly small cattle guard. And I said, "Geez, I need that cleaned out." "We'll come out and help you." I said, "We need some equipment or something." "I don't know. We'll see what we can do."

They come up there, about six of them, grabbed a hold of that dang cattle guard, they pried it up where they could get a hold of it, and they tipped it up, shoveled out everything underneath it and let it back down. And I said, "You guys are amazing." [Laughs] That's probably close to 1,000 pounds of a cattle guard there, and they just... And they were all fairly old guys, but there was enough of them that they got... And I just, "You guys are great. I appreciate it, you know."

[00:40:47]

Dennis: It's the little things like that that you get some faith in humanity after you see some of that, and then you see some of the other, and you get disgusted. It's human nature.

[00:41:02]

Donna: I don't know about your part of the country, but deer hunting, elk hunting season, we haul our cows in semis, and you'll be going down the road, and it's not a very wide road. And you go around a corner, and here's a pick-up, both doors wide open, nobody around, and you're hauling these, I don't know how many tons of cows you've got on board. And we've had to...

[00:41:29]

Paul: Slam on the breaks.

[00:41:29]

Donna: Or hit the barrow pit. And the checkers, he's not going to hit the barrow pit.

[00:41:36]

Dennis: People are stupid.

[00:41:37]

Donna: They really are.

[00:41:38]

Paul: They do that on the Silver City Road too.

[00:41:41]

Donna: They need to realize that, yeah, you're out in the boonies, but...

[00:41:45]

Vern: They do that over on the Flint Road, and there's some switchbacks. The widest place they want to park is in that switchback. Here comes a truck and he's got to use that corner, all of it, and there's a pick-up sitting there, and they're off up the hill hunting for horns or something.

[00:42:04]

Donna: They need to respect the road because we're on those roads. We don't want to run over them.

[00:42:14]

Paul: I don't know how many times we go up the Silver City Road, and nearly every time we go up there, if it's, especially a weekend, and you'll go around a corner, and here's a rig sitting right in the middle of the road, and there's a deer on the hillside, and they been there taking pictures. "Oh, you want by?" Like they've got all the time in the world.

[00:42:42]

Vern: I was asked by former Governor Otter, he's one of the directors of this DeLamar Silver Mine, and they had a get-together down at Jordan Valley. And him and this other director asked me, they said, "How do you guys feel about this mine up here?" And I said, "Well, I'll tell you, we's had some of our folk come here because of the mines. And we can't really run them down because that's how we got started around our families." But he wanted to know our general idea of that big, open pit mine out there. What do you say?

[00:43:29]

Paul: I didn't know Butch Otter was a...

[00:43:31]

Vern: I didn't either until he was over at that meeting. He told us he was one of the directors.

[00:43:39]

Dennis: Of Integra?

[00:43:40]

Paul: Integra, yeah.

[00:43:42]

Dennis: I'll be danged. But yeah, the same feeling. Natural resources has produced my family a living all for generations. And if that can continue for generations, that would be fantabulous. I mean, natural resources, grass grows every year. I'm not saying that their silver and gold is going to reproduce, but if it's here, let's use it. Natural resources has been the lifeblood of Owyhee County, whether it's water, land, or minerals, grass.

[00:44:25]

Paul: I got kind of a kick out of Integra though. They come up at their Silver City Property Owners' meeting and presented all they're going to do. And if you have any concerns at all, contact this little gal, and I can't think of her name now.

[00:44:42]

Dennis: Yeah, she comes to every function there is.

[00:44:44]

Paul: Yeah, yeah. And she said, "If you have any concerns at all, here's my number, here's my cell phone number." Well, I headed up the mountain and the cows hadn't quite got there yet. I was fixing fence ahead. They tore out about 100 yards of fence out there on top, and I didn't know what the heck was going on. And I called her up and I said, "You guys want to be good neighbors, don't tear a guy's fence out." "Oh, we'll take care of it." Three days, I went back up there, and it was all back up better than ever. And I go, "Okay. You guys, you are kind of good neighbors. That's good."

[00:45:28]

Dennis: They've been really good.

[00:45:33]

Haley: Great. Well, we're at the 45-minute mark on this recording, and so I wasn't sure if y'all are feeling like you have anything else you'd like to share today, or if you're feeling pretty...

[00:45:48]

Dennis: You've probably heard about all you need to hear.

[Laughter]

[00:45:52]

Vern: You got what you want?

[00:45:55]

Haley: I don't know. I mean, yeah. This has been...

[00:45:56]

Paul: Yeah, is there anything else you need?

[00:45:57]

Haley: No.

[00:45:59]

Vern: We can make up some more stories.

[00:46:02]

Haley: Did you have anything else, Kelly?

[00:46:04]

Kelly: I know one thing that I would be interested to hear more about.

[00:46:06]

Haley: Would I be able to switch out just in case, depending on...

[00:46:09]

Kelly: Sure.

[00:00:00]

Kelly: ...the sage-grouse egg ice cream, which is just such a great story, and I was wondering if... I mean, I think that people's relationship to sagebrush has maybe changed over time, and so I was wondering if you had any thoughts about that.

[00:00:17]

Donna: I don't think the cattle ranchers have changed their relationship with the sagebrush.

[00:00:24]

Kelly: How would you describe that relationship?

[00:00:27]

Donna: We need it. I mean, the birds need it. There's a lot of things. And if you look at these ranches, the grass is underneath the sagebrush

[00:00:41]

Dennis: We shipped our cows to Juniper Mountain on Sunday two weeks ago. Monday two weeks ago, we had a foot and a half of snow. Those cows had nothing to eat the first day [Laughs] even though they were in a lot of trees the first night. The next day, we were in a lot of sagebrush, there was fairly high, but there was still a foot of snow, but they could get to some grass or something. And then we had a lot of wind.

[00:01:21]

Donna: Terrible.

[00:01:23]

Dennis: And if you don't have trees, then you find the cows in a patch of sagebrush. We've noticed over the years that the sage-grouse follow the cows. Sage-grouse don't like yellow grass. They like green grass about that tall. [Paul: And all the other wildlife.] It's plum-full of bugs, and the bugs is what make the chicks live. And the nesting deal, the whole deal, the sage-grouse follow the cows. They want something green, they want something lush, something that has protein in it to make the chicks live, whether it's a bug or whether it's green grass, short, green grass. But that is all in...

You can't have a straight meadow because there's no nesting place for a sage-grouse. You can't have a straight meadow because there's no shelter for the livestock, wildlife, birds, whatever you're talking about. So, there's all that deal, and I guess, a lot of times, we take it for granted because our country's all mosaic. It's tree, sagebrush, big sage, low sage. We actually have a lot of... What am I trying to think of? What's the...?

[00:03:00]

Donna: White sage?

[00:03:01]

Dennis: Well, not so much white sage. It's got the yellow flower in the fall.

[00:03:07]

Donna: Oh, rabbitbrush.

[00:03:08]

Dennis: Rabbitbrush. And that's something you've got to be kind of careful about after fire. Rabbitbrush, at a certain elevation, rabbitbrush will come in like crazy. And the BLM's having a big fight with the rabbitbrush thought in their brain. But the way this country evolved, in my brain — you've got to kind of follow the little pebble trail — cows will graze rabbitbrush when it's tender in the spring, when it's coming on and the new shoots are kind of coming up, and then they love it when it's bloomed in the fall when they come back. They eat the blooms off the rabbitbrush. So, that kept it from being so prolific and getting so much rabbitbrush.

Well, now, all of these rotation systems the BLM's got you on, your cows have got to be here, then they've got to be here and got to be here, and all your cows have to be there and they have to be there for these certain number of days, well, they never come back to that rabbitbrush in the fall and eat the blooms off of it. So, that all gets to go to seed. So, if you have a rabbitbrush problem, you're going to get more of a rabbitbrush problem. And the sagebrush deal is exactly the opposite. If you want more sagebrush,

just graze it harder. Sagebrush loves hard grazing. It just gets thicker and thicker and thicker.

[00:04:33]

Donna: And that's something I don't think the environmentalists understand when they keep saying, "You've got to keep the cows off." No, no, they don't understand that.

[00:04:43]

Dennis: No. When they go and plant, after a fire, plant sagebrush, I tell them, "If you just graze it a little bit, the sagebrush will come. It's there. It'll come." All this country is very inter-related with sagebrush just because of our wildlife, the wildlife that's here, the cattle that are raised here. And I mean, the birds are probably more than anything.

[00:05:13]

Paul: But you talked about the sage-grouse following the cows because of that little green regrowth, but also the antelope and the deer. All wildlife. The cows eat the big rough stuff, they'll knock it down, and they can get fairly close, but they can't bite as close as a deer does or an antelope or sage-grouse. And of course, it will grow pretty fast after the cows are moving up, so they've got, you know. I don't what the wildlife would do if there were no cows out here, is what I guess I'm saying because they like the little, short, green stuff. And if the grass has been grazed, the little, short, green stuff is going to be coming up into that big, bushy yellow thing from last year.

[00:06:05]

Donna: And that's what the cattlemen used to do, they followed the green, and they'd turn out down here in the bottom. And then, as it greened up, they'd go up the hill. Well, now we can't do that because we're tied to a certain allotment or tied to a certain area, to a certain range.

[00:06:26]

Dennis: Well, certain timeframe. I mean, everything. And as you look at it and you look at the big picture, it's still about that control.

[00:06:34]

Donna: I know it is.

[00:06:35]

Dennis: They want to rub you between two fingers. [Laughs]

[00:06:42]

Paul: We got a rotation system we still kind of... At least ours still worked their way up one side of the range one year and one side the other. It's not that it's prohibitive yet, but I think they... I don't know. I know there's some guys that have...they want them to run the high country and then come back to the low country, and that's....

[00:07:10]

Paul: Did you ever get that changed?

[00:07:11]

Male: No.

[00:07:11]

Vern: Around Juniper Mountain, up on that top, they want them up there about now on one system.

[00:07:18]

Dennis: Right now. And there's 12-foot drifts yet. Most of that one fence is between two separate pastures in that allotment, you can't see it because it's still covered with snow, and they want us to be there with our cows. But what the problem is, is the people who wrote that decision wrote it off a map and they took those five pastures in that allotment, and they said, "Okay. You go this way one year and you go this way one year." They apparently never even looked at the elevations.

[00:07:55]

Paul: They tried to do that with me, and I got them kind of straightened out to where they understood. "Well, can you do it this way?" "Well, I can do it this way if you do this type of leeway on the dates, and stuff." We worked until we got it where we can live with it.

[00:08:14]

Dennis: Well, that was a problem. When they did the 68, they just did them all at one time. It was a blanket deal. There was no improvements, you didn't go out on the land and look at it.

[00:08:25]

Paul: And I never have figured out why my summer range was later. But they all converged on me because the whole slew of them had 68 to work with. They did them haphazardly. And all those people converged on me, and I go, "Oh, my God. How am I going to convince all these stupid people?"

[00:08:49]

Dennis: But they learned.

[00:08:51]

Paul: But they did learn a little bit.

[00:08:52]

Dennis: They learned a little bit through the lawsuits and stuff on that, and they're still learning. But the 68s, all of those permits that was done in Owyhee County that year, this next year, in '23, they're up for their 10-year renewal.

[00:09:06]

Paul: Again, yeah. Already.

[00:09:07]

Dennis: So, it's already been 10 years. We've been fighting them for 10 years and it's already renewal time. So, some of them are going to get a new decision.

[00:09:15]

Donna: But the bad part about it, once again with the government, is you're not working with the same people.

[00:09:22]

Dennis: That's the trouble.

[00:09:24]

Vern: No, that's the thing.

[00:09:25]

Donna: They don't keep anybody over five years.

[00:09:28]

Paul: That's the most frustrating thing, is to get a new range con and they want to tell you what to do. And they haven't even been out there, and they change them every two, three years, it seems like. We get a different range con, range conservative... They call them range conservationists. They're the ones that are supposed to guide you on here, and they don't know crap.

[00:09:53]

Dennis: They read your decision, and then they go from that decision because they think the decision was based on sound science, which...

[00:10:03]

Paul: You should have this many plants...

[00:10:04]

Dennis: Depends on the administration we're in when they're written, how much, which way it leans.

[00:10:10]

Donna: It's true.

[00:10:14]

Dennis: We've been here a long time; we'll probably be here a long time. And we'll still be...

[00:10:18]

Paul: We'll still be carrying on.

[00:10:19]

Dennis: And we'll still be griping about it most of the time. [Laughs]

[00:10:25]

Paul: I guess we're all survivors. We got here. [Laughs]

[00:10:30]

Haley: Well, if you'll allow it, I did think of one last sagebrush question. Sorry. [Laughs] And it may be nothing, but I've talked to a lot of people about sagebrush in the last couple of years, and something that came up so often was the smell of sagebrush and the memories that can be kind of associated with that, and I was curious if any of you have a particularly fond memory related to that.

[00:10:55]

Dennis: I don't have asthma, so sagebrush is great for me. I don't care. I mean, it's fine. But there's a lot of people, when it comes to be August 1st, from there to the 1st October, can't hardly breathe because of the sagebrush. But sagebrush for me, when it rains on sagebrush, there's always a good smell. I mean, something about green grass growing, sagebrush getting clean, getting a fresh bath, yeah, it's a fond memory. But then buttercups grow under sagebrush too, and buttercups are probably my favorite, so that's a... [Laughs] You know it's springtime when the buttercups get there.

[00:11:40]

Vern: And I've seen buttercups. I do trapping in the wintertime in the rocks and stuff. I've seen buttercups this year in January or February up in those rocks.

[00:11:54]

Dennis: That was when we had spring.

[00:11:57]

Vern: Huh?

[00:11:57]

Dennis: That's when we had spring, was in February. Then, the last month...

[00:12:01]

Paul: And better spring in February.

[00:12:01]

Donna: Okay. I'm going to change the subject a little bit. How's the Mormon crickets going?

[00:12:08]

Paul: They're doing great.

[00:12:09]

Dennis: They're doing fantastic. We're going to have them all over the county.

[00:12:13]

Donna: I thought maybe this cold weather would take some.

[00:12:16]

Paul: You know what, I've noticed in my country...

[00:12:17]

Dennis: Clint said they were coming out of the snow at the Star Ranch the other day and crawling up the side of the house.

[00:12:22]

Donna: Already?

[00:12:22]

Dennis: These crickets were about this long.

[00:12:25]

Paul: Yeah, they're little, look like jumping ants.

[Crosstalk 00:12:26]

[00:12:29]

Vern: They won't eat anything now, like if you poison them.

[00:12:33]

Paul: They won't eat the bait, yeah.

[00:12:33]

Dennis: They won't eat the bait. They've got to be a little bit longer. But they're saying, "You can fly this bait on, you can do this and this." We've all tried the bait. We know what it does. It slows them down on your place for a little while. I just as soon see they kept moving. But I don't know. In Oregon, I think they're going to spray. I think they're going to actually fly and spray because the grasshoppers are so thick also. Idaho won't do it because of sage-grouse, but Oregon are saying, "Okay, do we get rid of the crickets and

the grasshoppers so that there's some grass left for the sage-grouse to have in their habitat, or do we...?"

[00:13:20]

Paul: There's smarter people over there.

[00:13:22]

Dennis: Well, not really. But for some reason Idaho is hung up on this and they're bringing a bunch of bait to the shop in Pleasant Valley, the county shop in Pleasant Valley right away and they can get it. Alls they want is you to take a picture on your phone of the crickets and send it to the ISDA and they'll...

[00:13:46]

Paul: They've got to come out and see them.

[00:13:47]

Dennis: Now they don't.

[00:13:48]

Paul: Oh, yeah, they don't?

[00:13:49]

Dennis: Not in Idaho now. Now, she's saying, if you take a picture of them and send it to her, she'll send you the okay on your phone to pick up bait.

[00:14:01]

Donna: The reason I was asking was that that's what they fed us before, was when we have a really wet, cold, spring, that'll kill them. That's why I asked. [Laughs]

[00:14:11]

Paul: Well, I just started to say, on the spring range of ours, after we...they'd gotten some big colonies, really thick and really in a hurry before that. They're still there, it doesn't seem to me like there's quite as many. It might have knocked them down a little bit.

[00:14:28]

Dennis: Oh, really, well, you would think it would have got some of them, but what they say about the wet and cold is, they have an exoskeleton or whatever. I mean, their skeleton is on the outside. And if it's wet and cold, they get that moisture under there, and it starts to mold, and it won't let that skeleton shed right. And that's what gets them. But we've had a lot of different weather in the last 10 years, and it just seems to me like they just keep getting... [Donna: Getting worse.] I mean, now, down in Owyhee Reservation, I mean, they kind of started in the northern part of Owyhee County and they just kind of going south and going south and going south, and now they're... But the ones that are in this part of the county are still here.

[00:15:19]

Vern: That's what we found out instead of baiting them. We baited them along the road, till the gutters was that full of dead.

[00:15:28]

Paul: Yeah. We did that on the Silver City Road.

[00:15:29]

Vern: We found out, just let them keep it going to your neighbors.

[00:15:34]

Paul: It didn't work for us. They went up the neighbors and then they come back.

[00:15:40]

Dennis: I called all over the United States to hear if they were so bad in our hay fields, and nobody could tell you what they would do to a cow if you bailed them. And finally, I talked to a kid in Winnemucca, and they'd had them for quite a while. And he said, "I tell you what, we bailed them, and the cows ate them and thought they were fine." He said they were just protein. So, we just started now. And if they're in the hayfield when it's time to hay, hey.

Paul: Added protein.

[00:16:06]

Vern: The gutter's that full of dead crickets, and cows, later in the year, are going right down that gutter licking them up.

[00:16:15]

Paul: Really?

[00:16:15]

Vern: Yep.

[00:16:18]

Dennis: They are very, very, very high in protein.

[00:16:20]

Paul: I've never seen my cows eat none of that.

[00:16:21]

Vern: And they were poisoned too. Well, those cows were kind of forced to it too.

[00:16:27]

Dennis: They've been around in our country enough now that you'll see crickets crawling over the cows and they're just laying there.

[00:16:32]

Paul: Oh, yeah. I've seen cows laying and chewing their cuds and the crickets are climbing over the top of them.

[00:16:40]

Dennis: They are... I don't know whether you guys been around crickets very close or not, but they're a little bit gross.

[00:16:44]

Donna: They're creepy. I said...

[00:16:48]

Dennis: But I figured out they don't... I mean, they're absolutely nothing. I mean, other than they come down your irrigation ditches and plug all of that out.

[00:16:55]

Donna: And stink.

[00:16:57]

Dennis: Oh, and stink. Oh, man. They get a foot and a half deep on the fields before they come out. They'll get to cut out and pile up, pile up. And then they'll come out this cut out, down the field they'll go. They'll get about this deep in the field. I had to take drags in the loader and try get them.

[00:17:14]

Paul: I was going to say, because they stink. Geez.

[00:17:16]

Dennis: But talk about hay grow the next year.

[00:17:19]

Paul: Oh, yeah? Good. So thick.

[00:17:21]

Dennis: Good fertilizer. Yeah.

[00:17:24]

Paul: I've never actually had them on my hay fields.

[00:17:26]

Dennis: But I don't know. I mean, as far as being good for sage-grouse and crickets, I think after they get this long, I don't think a sage-grouse ever looks at one of them.

[00:17:35]

Donna: They won't.

[00:17:36]

Dennis: Because they've got that hard external shell. It's no longer a delicacy.

[00:17:43]

Paul: I noticed things like the...

[00:17:45]

Dennis: Catfish.

[00:17:45]

Paul: ...doves and the quail and chukars eat them. But you're right, it's the smaller ones.

[00:17:52]

Dennis: Yeah, yeah. They eat them when they're small. Right now, the ravens and the crows are just going nuts on them. They're really eating. I mean, you look out on the rim, you think, "Man, there's something dead up there," and then you go, "Oh, no. That's where they were hatched."

[00:18:09]

Haley: Great. I want to say...

[00:18:10]

Dennis: Is that what you wanted to know? You didn't...

[Crosstalk 00:18:11]

[00:18:13]

Dennis: ...one thing you wanted to know about sagebrush.

[00:18:16]

Haley: No, that was great. But unless anybody else has any other thoughts or anything like that, I really, really appreciate your time and talking to us and sharing your stories and all your knowledge. Yeah. This has been really, really great.

[00:18:29]

Dennis: Well, we hope we helped you with what you were doing. And you let us unload so the rest of our family won't be so miserable for the next four or five days because I won't have to unload on them.

[Laughter]

[00:18:41]

Haley: Happy to help.

John Robison

John: Today, I'm interviewing John Robison for Shared Stories Lab Oral History project. It is April 25th, 2022, and we are in the audio room of the Boise State Library in Boise, Idaho. I'm John Behrens, an interviewer with the Shared Stories Lab. So, John, can we just get started with your background with the Owyhee Initiative, how you got started there?

[00:00:24]

John Robison: Sure. I have a kind of a... Everyone has their own interesting entryway into the Owyhees, whether they were Native American, been there since time immemorial or fourth generation ranchers or whatever. My own story comes through rivers. I grew up in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, and went to school up in Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, where I got really interested in white-water kayaking and canoeing and then later on went to work as a river guide. I was actually, during the winters, I was teaching high school biology and algebra at the Waynflete School up in Portland, Maine, so, but I was all excited about kayaking. This was just out of college. I got a call from a friend of mine, another college friend who said, "John, let's go paddling this summer in Idaho." I was like, "Ohio." "No, no, Iowa." "What, where, what where?" So, he told me all about it. I'm like, "Well, this sounds amazing." Actually, I'd heard of Idaho before, but I just wasn't familiar with it. There were four of us and – classic dirtbag kayak trip – we all piled in his two-door Ford Ranger pickup and with all our kayaking gear in the back. It was a bench seat, so we couldn't all fit up front. So, someone had to ride in the back in the canopy. This is a, oh, I don't know, a 16-hour drive or so.

But we camped out in the middle of the desert. At that point, actually, to check the river levels... This is pre-internet, pre all that. There was a 1-800 number you could call for river levels. We'd stop at these pay phones along the way, put in some quarters, dial the number and you'd have to scroll through this big list to get to the Bruneau River. I got to Bruneau River and it was running, I don't know 1,000 CFS or something, but it was running, it was great. We camped out in the middle of the desert. My first day in Idaho, we ran the Bruneau River, put it on the Bruneau River. I had been doing some kayaking before then and it just blew my mind in terms of the remoteness, the scenery. It was like another planet. I kind of remember kind of looking like the landscape in the old Bugs Bunny... I'm sorry, the old Road Runner and Coyote cartoons. It was just otherworldly. So, I had a fantastic trip on the Bruneau River, overnight trip, self-support kayak. We went on to paddle nine other rivers in that trip.

So, Idaho was always on my mind. Like, "Oh, my gosh. It's amazing." Again, my first day in Idaho, I paddled the Bruneau River. So, that's pretty iconic. Since then, I worked as a river guide and in the off seasons, I got to paddle some amazing places. I got to paddle in Pakistan, and Nepal, and Chile, and New Zealand, and Mexico, Guatemala and then came back to Idaho 10 years later to paddle the Bruneau River again, and it was even more impressive the second time. It really was like no other place on the planet in terms

of kayaking and being immersed in the landscape out there. It really just struck me, like this is a really, really special place. So I moved to Idaho, paddled the Bruneau River. And then as luck would have it, I got a job at the Idaho Conservation League, and I'm just now finishing up, or starting my 20th year at the Idaho Conservation League.

A couple years into my time at ICL, I was assigned to work on the Owyhee Initiative. My colleague and coworker John McCarthy had been representing ICL in previous negotiations and collaborations and efforts. He went on to a different position. I tried to step in and really was introduced to this amazing collaborative effort. Part of my job was to work on protecting the Bruneau River as a Wild and Scenic River and the canyon as wilderness. I'm like, I am into this. This is a great thing. But in collaboration, it was kind of a new thing to everyone kind of back then, where, I mean, there have been some initial relationships built over stopping or scaling back the Owyhee Bombing Range proposal from the Mountain Home Air Force Base. Some of the ranchers knew some of the conservationists from then but this was really a much bigger, more complex effort. It started and remains today all about relationships. It's one of these things where it's not just a cup of coffee. When I give a program or presentation on the Owyhee Initiative, it's 1,000 cups of coffee.

I remember that when John McCarthy would report out at our staff meetings on how the Owyhee Initiative was going and things, he'd be like, "Oh, no. It's all going downhill. Oh, we're sideways here. Oh, big step backwards." And then one day, he came in and said, "I've made progress." We said, "Well, what's going on?" He said, "Well, I went out again with my bundle of maps under my arm out to the ranch house again, and they're used to seeing me by now, showing up, and they had baked a pie." That was kind of one of the breakthroughs, is just having that discussion. A couple other things that seem to have come out of this has been really people moving from their initial positions or bumper sticker slogans onto the actual interests. From these kind of frankly, kind of tired tropes or things like — "no wilderness ever" or "cattle free by '93" on the other side or whatever it's going to be. You've got these bumper stickers, but behind that, there's a wide range of interests people have, clearly very diverse. But the art of the Owyhee Initiative was finding out where those interests actually overlapped. But it turns out that everyone kind of liked the landscape the way it is. And with that, what tools are available to keep it so?

There is one of the ranchers, I think he was the head of the Cattlemen's Association at the time, was in the back of one of the early meetings when everyone was talking, he was thumbing through a little pocket copy of the Wilderness Act. He was thumbing through it and he says, "You know, if what I'm reading is right here, it sounds like we can kind of keep doing what we're doing out here even if it's wilderness." And like yes, you can. That's kind of the whole point where we found some commonality in that, in terms of value in the open space, value in the solitude and the remoteness, and an appreciation for each other's interests. I am not a rancher, and there's lots of issues with

ranching in terms of environmental issues, but they're hard-working and they really like the landscape and being outside, and I really appreciate that.

Likewise, they may not be into Class 4 whitewater but they appreciate those crazy people who want that stuff. Everyone also agreed that with the increasing recreational pressure out there, we really wanted to minimize disturbance on ranching operations from recreationists, from impacts to wildlife like bighorn sheep lambing and things like that. So, wilderness seemed like a pretty good tool to accomplish those while also securing some access and some certainty for the ranchers and other interests. At the table, it was really important to have certainly the Shoshone-Paiute tribes who've been there since time immemorial, the ranching perspective, sportsmen, river runners, wilderness advocates, wildlife advocates, recreationists, everyone out there to figure out what we wanted to do. At the end of the day, no one got everything they wanted but we were able to, for all those parties, improve the status quo significantly. In essence, we resolved the wilderness issues out there that have been pending for decades. We removed the threat of a potential national monument that many from the conservation community were advocating for. We also provided the recreationist, motorized access enthusiast, like, certainty regarding cherry stems. Saying, okay, this area is not going to be wilderness. This is an access point to the river or to the overlook or to this camping area. So, there are these areas that these old roads out there or Jeep trails that were excluded from wilderness so people could still have that opportunity to mountain bike out there or drive out to these areas.

Really, at the end of the day, we really worked to resolve the wilderness and access issues to the point at which no conservation groups are out there clamoring for more wilderness, and the access issues have been resolved in and out of the canyons. There's a host of other issues out there that have not been resolved that we didn't even attempt to resolve, but what we have as a result of this dialogue is a better understanding of the other stakeholders, increased respect for these stakeholders. If another issue arises, which always does, we can just pick up the phone or go down and visit the ranch or meet for a cup of coffee and talk about that. It really has, I think, increased the ability to proactively solve problems out there and at least lower the temperature on some hot-topic issues, and we can have a solution-oriented conversation about those.

[00:11:50]

John: Yeah. It'd be a lot harder to just go out somewhere where you don't have these already, kind of, made relationships and continue dialogues and get anything done.

[00:12:01]

John Robison: Right. It's also good to say, okay, we're probably not going to agree on wolves for example, so talk about that, but maybe we can talk about this. That's been really helpful. That's just been really helpful.

One other thing that has been an outcome from the Owyhee Initiative that no one really knew of at the time is it really set the foundation for other collaborative solutions throughout the West. Stemming from the Owyhee Initiative, sometimes with the same players or at least the same collaborative approaches, where Idahoans dealt with issues like the Idaho Roadless Rule on forest management or on national forests and how to protect remote roadless areas while still allowing commercial forest activities where it was economical. And issues like the governor's sage-grouse management plan, which is not perfect and is far from complete, but at least we have a foundation there. It also led to the Boulder-White Clouds Wilderness, and so that resolved that wilderness issue. And then led to other collaborative successes, such as now there are over 11 different forest restoration collaborative groups on our national forests. So, each national forest has a small group of diverse stakeholders that work together to identify zones of agreement and then encourage the Forest Service to act within those and to base those projects within there. That has enabled a...been a force multiplier in increasing the pace and scale of forest restoration on Idaho's public lands. All that work, I think, stems back to the early success and the lessons learned from the Owyhee Initiative.

[00:14:11]

John: Yeah. That's really cool how far-reaching the implications of just this kind of methodology where you actually like... Because Craig would talk about how having these places with multiple people who live there or have lived there or just care about the value of the land itself, coming from conservationists, that you have these much stronger advocacy groups for certain places. They can tell, in the case of those forests, like, what we want to be done there.

[00:14:47]

John Robison: Right, right. What's also been nice is this shared vision of the landscape. There's a nice little quote that I can't remember fully here for this, it's kind of long, about the purpose of the Owyhee Initiative. It's on the... It's really encompassing, and was something that whenever an issue comes up, like, "Hey, what's our position on this, or whatever? Are we going to deal with this, or what's our side on this?" We'd go back to that and say, "Hey, is it encompassed by that position statement?" And we'd go, "Yeah, we're going to advocate for behalf of this mutual shared goal." So, that's been really helpful.

[00:15:27]

John: With the Owyhee Initiative, is the Idaho Conservation League still very present there?

[00:15:33]

John Robison: Yes. We are. It's been hard in the last two years because of the blip, the COVID blip, but we're still engaged. A lot of the work we had done has largely been accomplished. There are other things that we weren't able to accomplish legislatively that are still out there, but also, since we first convened in 2002, some of the other aspirations we have like a rangeland center and a science review to better inform range management decisions, a lot of those have kind of been already addressed through the University of Idaho's

Rangeland Center or just the internet and all the researchers out there. Some of the programs we weren't able to accomplish or get to have kind have been addressed in other forums. There are still some big issues out there, where components that are still outstanding.

One, is our Cultural Resources Protection program for the Shoshone-Paiute tribe. There was initially funding for that, but that was not replaced. So that remains something to be fulfilled and followed through on. Travel management planning in the Owyhees was supposed to be completed 10 years ago. Right now, and with the increasing recreational pressure, we have so many people out there who have no clue about recreating responsibly on our public lands. So, they're currently driving through the sagebrush or through the wilderness. We really need to have a big emphasis placed on travel management and monitoring and education and enforcement. As it goes, the same goes is that you've got their dirt biking through in the Owyhee front. You're supposed to stay on existing trails and you're not supposed to pioneer new trails. As the saying goes, is that if you're pioneering a new trail, well, your front wheel is breaking the law but your rear wheel isn't. We really need to get a handle on that out there. So, that's been an issue.

I had a nice conversation with one of the permittees, who said just from the start, he is not a wilderness fan, just doesn't get it. But looking at all the increased recreation out there with UTVs and ATVs and dirt bikes and whatever, he was like, "John, we got this thing done just in time." That's an important part of it, where the ranchers did see the value or are seeing the value in having wilderness, but we need better enforcement on this. There's one interesting thing, just in terms of taking a step back to the collaborative, and just to put a little reality check on this. If there is an easier way to solve a problem than collaboration, you should do it. It is like the hardest, longest, most uncertain path there. But in this case, from multiple perspectives, certainly talking from the conservation perspective, we attempted to do a suite of things out there to protect the landscape, from litigation to lobbying for national monument status, to whatever, whatever, and all those failed.

At the same time, other parties try to assert their influence over the landscape and the decisions out there and they largely failed. Everything was kind of in limbo, a big stalemate out there. In the meantime, people just weren't that happy with what the BLM was or wasn't doing out there. There was a general dissatisfaction with land management in the Owyhees. That's where coming together, we said, "Wow, it'd be nice if the BLM did this. And, yeah, I agree too." So, we actually found those zones of agreement. I was lucky enough to get to go back to DC to help lobby for this and meet with our congressional representatives and along with several folks from the Owyhee Initiative. I remember going back, and joining me in these meetings was the former president of the Idaho State 4x4 Association.

[00:20:17]

John: Oh, wow.

[00:20:18]

John Robison: And the head of the Owyhee Cattlemen's Association. I remember going into a congressional office and meeting the scheduler there at the front desk. We all introduced ourselves, and the scheduler panicked. He was like, "Oh, no, there's been a horrible mistake because you're all three scheduled at the same time. I know you want to meet the senator at different meetings because clearly you're from different interests, and so I really apologize for this mess up." We're like, "Actually, no, we're all here for the same thing."

[00:20:52]

John: That's really cool.

[00:20:54]

John Robison: That made the biggest impression of all.

[00:20:56]

John: Yeah. It's like that unified force. That is really cool. It's a big spread of people.

[00:21:02]

John Robison: It's a big spread of people. Not everyone got on board, but anytime you have the Idaho Conservation, like the Idaho Cattlemen's Association, the 4x4 Association, Wilderness Society, river outfitters all on board, you run with it. That's a great thing. It's also been important to follow through when an issue comes up again. Eventually, the Owyhee Initiative is going to fade away and close up shop and pass the baton on to some other collaborative group who can help honor the agreement and the like. But after the legislation passed, there were some questions that came up, like, hey, is the boundary supposed to go on this side of the reservoir or this side of the reservoir? Is the cherry stem supposed to go here or here? What about a turnaround at the put-in for a truck and a trailer? In each of those cases, the Owyhee Initiative reconvened. We looked back over our original maps, our intent, all this stuff, and were able to provide the BLM with the direction saying, "Yes, we all agree that the wilderness boundary should be over here and not over here," and that these are minor things that the BLM didn't have to go through congressional approval for so they could make these.

Now, there were some boundary changes that did need congressional approval, where it was a big enough shift of a boundary correction. Again, the Owyhee Initiative provided support for the BLM and the congressional offices to actually make that change. Say, "Yeah, we all agreed with it. The boundary's supposed to be here," and that was really significant. Having that dialogue has been really important because there's been such a turnover with BLM staff, field office managers and district managers, that it's been really nice to have the institutional knowledge or memory of the Owyhee Initiative. When a new BLM manager comes on board, a lot of times, when they make the rounds and do

the meet and greet, they meet with 10 different people and they get 10 different perspectives. In this case, with the Owyhee Initiative, they can have one meeting with the Initiative, with 10 different people, and get the same perspective. You don't have to guess what different groups are going to say because we're all on the same page regarding the issues within the Owyhee Initiative Agreement in the legislation.

[00:23:50]

John: Wow. Do you have, like, any sort of timetable for when you think the Initiative is going to be passed on or is that just kind of...?

[00:23:59]

John Robison: I think it's probably later this year, really. I think that's because so many of our key stakeholders have retired, like Craig Gehrke, or have passed on. Like Herb Meyr has passed on. So I think it's good to pass that baton on, but there's other collaborative entities like the Idaho Rangeland Restoration Partnership that have several of the key, the same stakeholders involved in that effort that they could kind of pass that on. If the Owyhee Initiative, the question that comes up, they could convene a subcommittee of previous Owyhee Initiative members for that. I think it's good to wrap things up, kind of institutionalize some things, and then kind of you pass the baton on to that.

[00:24:56]

John: Yeah. Is there any similar projects that the Idaho Conservation League is looking into?

[00:25:04]

John Robison: Yes. We've actually had a, I think that we are going to be using the Owyhee Initiative, I think, as a jumping off point for travel management planning and just get folks up to speed on that. So, that's another big issue. There's still going to be range management issues that come up or sage-grouse issues. We're going to use our relationships with our partners at the Owyhee Initiative to help inform our position on that. We're also trying a similar approach on the Payette National Forest to resolve recommended wilderness and travel management access issues. These are areas that there's about 200,000 acres of recommended wilderness acres, areas, that are in limbo administratively. We are convening a group of dirt bikers, mountain bikers, snowmobilers, hikers, wilderness advocates, and sportsmen to try to figure out, can we use a similar approach to resolve the wilderness and access issues there and advance everyone else's interests as we do this?

[00:26:15]

John: That's really neat.

[00:26:16]

John Robison: Yeah.

[00:26:18]

John: You talked, like, your first experience kind of with this landscape was as a kayaker.

[00:26:26]

John Robison: Right.

[00:26:27]

John: Do you think that your time working there with the Idaho Conservation League and speaking to people like ranchers there, do you think it changed your perspective on land?

[00:26:39]

John Robison: Oh, absolutely. I mean, I still have my own lens that I look at the landscape through, but also, I think I've got additional appreciation and respect for other viewpoints out there. Again, when I think of the Bruneau Canyon, now I'm down there looking at the water flow and the rapids and where I'd like to run it. The ranchers, they're looking at the green-up up top or how much weight they can put on their cows. Motorized folks are judging, hey, can I still drive out to the overlook and take a look out there? Chukar hunters are working the slopes. I think it's depolarized things quite a bit, where I see someone else out there, even if they're not doing what I think, what my passion is, they're pursuing their own passion, and hopefully, they're doing so in a respectful way that, that's in a responsible way. But I think it's made me appreciate their experiences as well.

I think that we also found a need to help preserve this remarkable landscape and saying, "Wow. This is so cool. Let's all work together to try to protect each other's experiences out here." That means let's keep it remote, let's keep it wild. There is a broad agreement among the Owyhee Initiative that the roads should not be substantively improved. They shouldn't get worse, but they shouldn't get better. So, the BLM should keep it kind of high clearance, four-wheel drive roads out there, and also have a kind of a neighborly approach to this. When you're driving out there on a back road, and you see another truck coming, you slow down. You roll down your window, you check in and say, "Hi." And say, "What's the road look like up ahead, and how's it going?" That experience out there by and large, has been pretty rewarding and uplifting.

[00:29:04]

John: I bet, yeah.

[00:29:06]

John Robison: If you think about the increasing polarization these days and how it actually is affecting not just how we relate to each other or manage our government or our attitudes toward each other and things are getting increasingly dysfunctional. I find that collaborative efforts like the Owyhees are a bit of an antidote to that. We still have issues and conflicts and difference of opinions, and that's part of it, but we also have a mutual respect for each other and a willingness to hear each other's opinions out, and a curiosity about

those, as opposed to just trying to score points by putting the other side down. That has been, in my experience, as in my 20 years at the Idaho Conservation League, it's been those uplifting parts of collaboratives that have been the most rewarding.

[00:30:16]

John: Yeah. It's a very different strategy than I feel like you see more commonly now with people.

[00:30:24]

John Robison: Right. Yeah.

[00:30:26]

John: "This is what I want. I'm going to prove your perspective wrong."

[00:30:31]

John Robison: Right, right. Yeah. A lot of it is just meeting people where they're at, listening to them, and understanding that everyone has a piece of the truth. Also, I think that the Owyhee Initiative was successful because we... This is a bit before my time, but we all worked from a shared understanding of the landscape in terms of what the boundaries were, what the recommended or the wilderness study areas were, and we had a shared baseline there of what was on the table and up for discussion. We worked from a shared set of facts. There wasn't anything like, "Well, that's fake news." No, no. We all worked, like here's our foundation here. That was successful. We also checked in with each other and with the BLM throughout this to say, "Hey, if we put the boundary here, does that make sense?" The BLM couldn't advocate for this but they could at least say, "Well, if we were to manage this area's wilderness, yeah, this is a manageable boundary. A boundary down there doesn't make any sense." So, we got some feedback from them to help guide our efforts so they're actually manageable. In the whole, we were also able to, from a conservation perspective, protect the best of the best. We were able to protect 517,000 acres of wilderness. We ended up releasing 200,000 acres of wilderness study areas as part of that trade-off back to general management, but we protected the best of the best. As I recall, the BLM had only officially-officially recommended 80,000 acres be wilderness.

[00:32:27]

John: Oh, wow.

[00:32:28]

John Robison: This just showed that working with the agency directly wasn't getting any of the results they wanted, but it was working together that we were able to get this larger mission, the open space protected. The other thing that was significant was that in most of the cases, much of the cases, that the ranchers said, "No, we don't want this wilderness because we want flexibility. We don't want this wilderness. We don't want this wilderness." That was fine. Those areas became wilderness study areas. But there's

one place that the BLM had overlooked for wilderness characteristics. The ranchers said, "You know, this area right here, that should be wilderness, and it's not wilderness right now or recommended wilderness. That's where the big horned sheep go up and lamb, and I want to make sure that they aren't disturbed by a bunch of people running ATVs out there. So, let's add that back in."

[00:33:23]

John: That's really cool.

[00:33:24]

John Robison: That was a really significant component of this, and just shows that there was a good dialogue and understanding of each other's perspectives. Another component, a success part for us, was the grazing retirements. A lot of folks from the conservation community or the larger environmental community were critical of our efforts because we're working with the enemy. We're working with the ranchers who are doing bad things down there. What we found was it is true that most of the allotments in the Owyhees are not meeting the BLM's standards and guides for range management, and livestock grazing mismanagement is a component of that. Some of it is historic, some of it is ongoing, but there's an issue out there. Some groups address that or try to address that through litigation. That's an important tool. We use that from time to time as well on some management issues, but it really wasn't solving problems in the Owyhees.

So we said, what if when we pass this legislation, we have a provision in there that says if a permittee donates their grazing permit back to the BLM, that the BLM shall retire it permanently and not offer further grazing. Normally, if a permittee donates a permit, the BLM has to offer it to some other permittee. So, you have to keep livestock on the landscape out there. But this was a special provision that said if a permittee donates it, the BLM shall keep that cow-free, livestock-free forever. We partnered with a third party who was interested in ecological restoration. They had a grant available. They were willing to compensate the permittees who donated their livestock permits. They would say... This took a lot of work, but we went ahead and were able to, through this legislation, able to retire over 145,000 acres of really sensitive habitat from livestock grazing.

[00:35:55]

John: Oh, wow.

[00:35:59]

John Robison: The ranchers were compensated. These were willing sellers. They could since use that money that they had been... They could use this money to reinvest in other livestock grazing operations in more tenable allotments. The allotments that were retired were really high value for sage-grouse, or redband trout, or other, or rare plants, and they weren't as economical. It was kind of just a money pit for the ranchers in some cases. It just was leading up to lots of conflict. By retiring that, they were able to keep their

operations whole and invest in continuing operations so they're still part of the landscape and part of the rural economy, but these really, the most sensitive areas got retired. That's been a great success. There still have been some issues with some livestock getting into these closed allotments. We're aware of those. What's been interesting is we have, when we've encountered those, certainly, we alert the BLM but also, we call the rancher and say, "Hey, I saw your cows down by the creek over there. It looks like they got out of the fence." They go, "Oh, wow. Thanks. Appreciate that. Yeah, we're going to get back in there." Again, it's the point where instead of crying foul to the BLM on this, it's more like hey, let's help get Bessie home. You're working with the ranchers, in some cases, they're actually more responsive than the BLM on this, to get the livestock back in their pastures where they should be.

[00:37:46]

John: And, like, keep up goodwill too.

[00:37:48]

John Robison: Yeah, exactly. That's been a really key part of that.

[00:37:52]

John: Is it still ongoing, this retirement program?

[00:37:54]

John Robison: That retirement program, the last one was completed probably about 10 years ago but we have a... That provision still stands so that is still an option out there and one of the things that it's nice to have in the back pocket if a similar situation arises.

[00:38:15]

John: That's cool.

[00:38:16]

John Robison: Yeah.

[00:38:17]

John: It's kind of like conservation easement in a way.

[00:38:19]

John Robison: Yeah, yeah. No, it works really well. The other thing that was really a big success for the Owyhee Initiative was we played a supporting role, was getting the land exchange completed with the State of Idaho. There's a checkerboard of state parcels intermixed with the wilderness. They weren't really being optimized for either State of Idaho needs for maximizing long-term financial revenue for trustees, and they weren't being managed to their full conservation value as wilderness. And so there was a big land swap that took a long time to get underway. It wasn't quite as large as it should have been, but we got the core areas addressed. So what should be wilderness is now wilderness, and

other areas that aren't as sensitive and were managed by the BLM can now be managed by the State of Idaho, and it just consolidates operations for them. As a result of that, we added about 15,000 acres of wilderness. Now, one other thing that was interesting was that the language in the Owyhee Initiative said that if there's a land exchange, all of the parcel that's within or touching the wilderness shall become wilderness.

What we found though, there's some areas in there that frankly the road goes right through the middle of it. So, you really don't want the whole thing as wilderness. We worked with the BLM and the Owyhee Initiative and everyone else out there, the ranchers and permit holders to say, "Well, if you're going to acquire this permit, this part north of the road should be wilderness and this part south of the road should not be wilderness." We were able to provide that guidance and recommendation. The BLM incorporated those comments in the land exchange. As a result, we just have a much more integrated landscape out there that serves everyone's needs a little bit better, including for sage-grouse, bighorn sheep, as well as for the Department of Lands and their trustees.

[00:40:29]

John: Oh, yeah. That's really neat. We're about at the time that you wanted to talk to.

[00:40:35]

John Robison: Yeah, yeah.

[00:40:36]

John: Is there any other stories, or like a lesson?

[00:40:40]

John Robison: Let me just think for a sec. I think I covered the bases there. But just that the Owyhee Initiative was a really remarkable effort. I'm so glad that my conservation career overlapped with it because I've taken the lessons from there and applied it to many other forums with a lot of success because of the people I learned from the Owyhee Initiative.

[00:41:09]

John: Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. This has been really great.

[00:41:12]

John Robison: Yeah.

Jared Talley

[00:00:00]

Anika: We should be all good. It is recording now. I was going to get these questions pulled up on the computer but since it's not... But I believe... Let's see. Yeah. I think that's kind of a big part of what Shared Stories Lab is about, is kind of combining the... Obviously, we really firmly believe in the scientific aspects. I love that we get to partner with GEM3 because that's what they're focused on. I'm excited that we kind of get to bring this, yeah, like more kind of narrative story side to it and see like what other questions. Yeah. Kelly's given us a lot of really cool examples from people that she's talked to about how like ranchers would take their cattle to the same place in the sagebrush every time because they saw elk doing that. That's something that maybe that observation wouldn't have been made unless someone had thought to ask that question.

[00:00:52]

Jared: Yeah.

[00:00:52]

Anika: So, yeah. I think things like that are so cool. Yeah, I think we already kind of talked about this but just to get it on the record, do you want to tell me a little bit more about your background and your connection to Idaho?

[00:01:00]

Jared: Oh, sure.

[00:01:01]

Anika: Yeah.

[00:01:03]

Jared: We'll just do it again. I was born and raised here in the Treasure Valley but on the southwest side of the Treasure Valley which is a distinction that I have to, more commonly, I have to start making this distinction. Both sides of my family, mom and dad, their families go back a long time and homesteaded back in those areas. So, Beaumont and Murphy were the two homesteads, or what's currently Beaumont and Murphy. So, we got a lot of experience in this valley. We've ran cows, farmed onions. There's been engineers and construction workers. I mean, we've done it all somewhere around this valley. Left high school without a degree or diploma and worked in a lumber yard because I just figured labor was kind of what was in the cards for me for the rest of my life, and I didn't see what an education did for me for that. And then with the housing recession in the 2006, 2008 area, I had worked my way up to middle management and had to lay off a guy. He was an old guy that started with the company and he really, he'd just grown for 30 years with the company, and he cried.

He's this kind of macho guy, and he was crying. He said, "You ruined my life." It did not make me feel right because I didn't really understand it. The next day, I read a New York Times article because I was trying to understand why decisions at the federal and country level were making it so I had to be in this position that it didn't feel right to me. I couldn't understand the article, and it's because I didn't really have good education. I went to that same year, CWI, College of Western Idaho opened up. So I went there and got an Associate's. Thought it was fun. Went to Boise State, finished my Bachelor's. Stayed at Boise State for a Master's in Policy Administration. It's in Natural Resource Management and Environmental Policy, and then went to Michigan state to do my PhD in philosophy. So, I'm currently, I don't know however to describe myself sometimes, but most generally, I'm a scholar, practitioner, researcher or something like that of environmental governance and public land management in the West.

[00:03:21]

Anika: Neat. That is so cool. Yeah.

[00:03:22]

Jared: Yeah. I'm currently, I work with BSU, and I'll be back here in August in an assistant professorship role. Currently, I'm with University of Idaho as the science and technology policy fellow, placed 80% of my time with the Governor's Office Species Conservation, 20% of my time with the Governor's Office STEM Action Center focused on rural education for K-12.

[00:03:44]

Anika: Nice. Neat. Yeah, tell me, I'm interested especially in that last part about the K-12. Tell me more about that. What do you do for that?

[00:03:52]

Jared: Well, initially, when I started with STEM Action Center, one of the synergies that we had found together was I'm passionate about the health of rural communities, and that means a lot of things. I mean, that can be healthcare itself, it could be education, it could be economies, it could be land policies, I mean, these sorts of things. I work in all those dimensions. The STEM Action Center has wanted to prop up their programming in rural communities, but they were having trouble trying to figure out how to frame it, and so I've been helping them. One of the big things that I've done and we've been working on is trying to figure out what are the STEM jobs in those communities? Because a lot of the programming for STEM education goes to computer science and engineering. Those are wonderful, but those jobs don't always exist in these rural communities, which means they're not going to be part of the programming that's very kind of urban-centric. We ran an analysis, like there's environmental science jobs, there's agriculture jobs in the sciences, animal science and such, then there's food production and distribution jobs in the sciences. They need engineers too, but specifically, focused on food production.

There's mining, there's forestry. I mean, there's these jobs actually, these STEM jobs exist in these rural communities, but we're not training our kids to get those jobs.

Because one of the big issues for rural communities is you send your kids off to get an education and if they don't come back, that community dies. We need to be able to go get the education and then bring that educated student back to the community to get that job to support the community and keep that community going. When we started looking at that, now we can start framing and finding programming that meets the criteria that's necessary to do that, right, to help kids get jobs in their own home when they're done.

[00:06:01]

Anika: Yeah. Oh, man, that brought up so many interesting things that I had never even thought about. I really liked what you said about... You make a really good point. Yeah, it's something that I never thought about, that the rural communities just have different jobs that are needed and necessary to support that community. Yeah, it makes total sense that teaching maybe computer science and engineering would be valuable but would be those skills that would kind of lead them to maybe go outside of that community and not come back. Yeah.

[00:06:26]

Jared: Yeah.

[00:06:27]

Anika: How do you go about encouraging people or kind of, like what's the method or strategy for encouraging people to come back and work in their communities again?

[00:06:36]

Jared: Well, we don't actually have to encourage people to come back. I mean, you hear this all over the place, across the board, at least through the West in my experience. People want to come back.

[00:06:47]

Anika: Yeah, that would make sense. Yeah.

[00:06:48]

Jared: That's what they actually want to do. They just can't, they can't find the job to come back. So, we're helping them stay on a path to go out, get your education, and then come back. And recognize that we're using what we're just calling the 4E framework. It's expose, explore, experience, and expertise.

[00:07:12]

Anika: Nice.

[00:07:14]

Jared: Some of the research about child development has shown, and this is where we've kind of developed this framework from this research, is that from kind of pre-K, kindergarten through fourth grade, the best thing to do is just expose students to different career paths, right. Just show them possibilities. It's kind of like we joke around the firefighter model, right. Everyone wants to be a firefighter growing up because they were just exposed to it. This is kind of like getting into these classrooms and showing what's even possible. What a forester does, a wildlife manager does, what a systems manager at a dairy plant does. That's the "expose." From fifth to eighth grade is "explore." This is where we're actually giving them information about these jobs and letting them explore which jobs that they would actually want to go into. And then with these sorts of information, we can figure out the programming to help them get into those jobs. Ninth through twelfth, high school, is "experience." This is getting them internships. Getting them the experience in that job to verify that that's what they want and get them the credentials to get into the right programs at university to get the degree to come back. And then university after high school, that's "expertise." That's where they go get the expertise, and then they're, hopefully, I mean, they've got the motivation to come back pre-built into most of them. If they don't, they're not going to want to come back anyways. And then they've got all of that to bring them back.

[00:08:44]

Anika: Yeah. Wow. I really love that, how that's kind of based on this idea of the different kind of stages of childhood development. I think it's so clever too to think about exposing them to the possibilities and making them excited from a young age about what you can do. Because I think it sounds super cool and fun to be like a wildlife manager or something like that and to work in a very hands-on way that's really invested in your community, yeah. It sounds like a lot of the focus is on empowering people and making sure that there's jobs that are valuable and fulfilling. Yeah.

[00:09:13]

Jared: Yeah. We're operating in this imaginative context. From my own experience, I could not ever, if I look back in my life, I could not ever have imagined, like it was just near impossible to even imagine me being in the role I am now both as an academic but in governance as well and in the work I do across the West. Couldn't have imagined it. It wasn't until an ex, actually, had me helping revise some of her graduate applications did I realize — wait, I could do this. It started helping me imagine that wait, this seemed insurmountable, but it's not, and I can do this. And then I went and did it. That's kind of an analogy for what we're trying to do is help students and help kids at different levels be able to imagine themselves in a different role. Once you can see yourself, like actually say, "Oh, I can imagine me doing that," then if you want to, you'll do it.

[00:10:17]

Anika: Yeah. Absolutely.

[00:10:18]

Jared: Assuming that we've got the programming right.

[00:10:22]

Anika: It sounds like you're also a great representative of somebody who comes from a homesteading community who also has experience in academia and working in the governor's office and things like that, which is really neat.

[00:10:30]

Jared: Yeah. I've bounced around in a lot of different communities, and I understand rural Idaho and the rural West, and I understand academia and I understand governance and policymakers. I've got these...

[00:10:45]

Anika: You're just like the trifecta.

[00:10:46]

Jared: It's not a trifecta, but I call myself a translator sometimes, right.

[00:10:49]

Anika: Yeah. I think that's a great word for it, yeah.

[00:10:50]

Jared: I help translate between these communities.

[00:10:53]

Anika: Which is a very... Yeah, I think that's kind of what our hope with Shared Stories Lab is, is like, kind of highlighting and identifying these people who are really good at providing bridges between different communities, yeah.

[00:11:05]

Jared: Yeah.

[00:11:06]

Anika: So, that's a really important skill.

[00:11:07]

Jared: Well, thank you. I appreciate it. It's fun. I enjoy it. It gets me going every morning.

[00:11:12]

Anika: Have you seen, with this program with the K-12 have you seen any results so far or how's that going?

[00:11:17]

Jared: No. I mean, we're on the back end of it, on the kind of the program analysis right now. There are a ton of programs, a ton of money spent all across, and it's like where we developed that 4E framework in order to do a gap analysis to figure out where our gaps are. It's like if we do have programming already that's kind of doing some of that, we'll keep doing that. Let's fill in the gaps, and then we can go re-tool the whole thing.

[00:11:41]

Anika: That's a very smart approach, yeah.

[00:11:42]

Jared: Yeah. It's a process, you know, but it's moving forward.

[00:11:46]

Anika: That's super cool to hear about as somebody that really only experiences Boise and doesn't have a whole lot of familiarity with what's going on in rural communities. I think that's a really important perspective, yeah.

[00:11:56]

Jared: Yeah. Well, thank you.

[00:11:57]

Anika: It's cool to hear. Yeah. Do you want to tell me more about what you do in the governor's office?

[00:12:00]

Jared: Yeah. Well, it's a program, it's called the Idaho Science and Technology Policy Fellowship. It's a program that's funded by the three big public universities in Idaho: U of I, BSU, and ISU, and U of I manages it. So, I actually work for U of I. They pay my paycheck, I guess, is what I should say.

[00:12:24]

Anika: Neat.

[00:12:25]

Jared: The way I kind of explain this program is they put me on loan to a government office. We just talked a lot about my 20% loan time to the STEM Action Center. The other 80% is with the Office of Species Conservation. That office, it's a small, nimble, but powerful office in the state. There's federal Endangered Species Act regulations that Idaho, pretty much every environmental decision in Idaho has to run up against somehow because there's just so much diversity here, and some of it needs to be protected, right.

[00:12:59]

Anika: Yeah, for sure.

[00:13:00]

Jared:

But this is a state agency that kind of, the best way to maybe think about it, is middlemans between the community and the Endangered Species Act, right. Their express purpose is to help move towards delisting and keep from listing and help any threatened or even rare or declining species from getting listed, but at the same time, supporting Idaho economies and communities. So, finding that middle ground instead of it's like — oh, the community has to go to save the thing, or the thing has to go to save the community. It's like no, no, there's actually wonderful ways to... And then start with honestly, a lot of rural community health. If you get a healthy community, they're so flexible and creative and big thinkers. They can figure out how to do things better, and we, the office, excuse me, not necessarily me, but help them do that. There's two sides of the office, the terrestrial and the aquatics. Those are the two big ones. The terrestrial does a lot with sage-grouse and the aquatics does a lot with salmon.

Those are the two big ones in the state. My role is maybe a little harder to define. My purpose of choosing OSC or/and being chosen by, went both ways, was to learn something I didn't know. I know a lot about rangeland. Sage-grouse, there wasn't... It's not like I'm by any means an absolute expert, but I know more than a lot of people. It's like, I didn't need to spend more time in sage. But I did need, I didn't really know much about salmon. I mean, I knew some, but the actual details of salmon restoration here in Idaho, I didn't know. So, I said, I want to learn. So, that's what I've been working on. I've been working on learning salmon in Idaho. We're in partnership with Boise State right now, one of my colleagues in the School of Public Service, we're actually creating a survey to do a statewide survey of people's perceptions on salmon restoration, which will help formulate the policy. Governor Little has 26 policy recommendations for salmon recovery.

They're wonderful, and they're holistic, and they're spread, but policy recommendations don't necessarily translate into policy implementations, like what *is* the policy. This is going to help that office figure out how to build policy to help while respecting the beliefs and the perspectives of Idaho citizens. That's one of the big ones. And then the other role, so my research, like on the academic side, is in collaborative conservation specifically in the Intermountain West. Because we have public lands, private lands, state lands, the West is so unique in the way environmental management works across all these different jurisdictional levels. Collaboration is almost necessary. You can't just make unilateral decisions. They have to be in collaborative spaces. So, I've spent a lot of time thinking about, writing about researching but also organizing, facilitating, and being a participant in collaborations around the whole West.

I mean, from New Mexico to Washington state and everywhere in between, California, Nevada, Wyoming, Montana, Oregon, Arizona, right. Like pretty much everywhere in the Intermountain West. So, I bring a wealth of this experience about what collaboration is, how we can make it work better and the promises of it but also the reality of like when it doesn't work and why and how to navigate that collaborative landscape. Back at OSC,

they have such a collaborative mission because they work with landowners and the federal government. Again, it's baked into what they do. I help them think through their own collaborative efforts like when things aren't going well, it's like how do we figure it out? When things are going well, what did we learn? So, things like that. I'm helping, I'm doing some trainings for the office as well, things like that.

[00:17:28]

Anika: Yeah, very cool. That's so neat. Man, I just love hearing about this because it's like basically what we've just been talking about and what Kelly's been talking about for months and months is this kind of bridging between policy and academia and these communities which are really important, and making sure that people's values and the health of their communities, like you were saying, is put first. I think that's so... Yeah. I love hearing about that.

[00:17:53]

Jared: Yeah. Or at least not... Maybe not put first, but at least put equal with other stuff, right.

[00:17:59]

Anika: And factored into those, like there are trade-offs like you were saying in every situation and that those trade-offs are considered like you said, holistically, as opposed to just like, we have to do one thing or the other.

[00:18:09]

Jared: That's exactly right.

[00:18:09]

Anika: Yeah, yeah. That's so cool to hear. I'm interested also in hearing about, you kind of mentioned that like you started doing your Associate's and it made you excited and so you kept going. What do you feel like made you keep going and continuing through school?

[00:18:22]

Jared: Well, paradoxically, we just talked about, I couldn't have imagined where I am now before in my life. I actually think that's kind of helped me because I know a lot of my friends and colleagues and undergraduates I mentor, and they come in early and they have an idea of what they want out of the university, right. I want to be an engineer or I want to run a business or whatever. I didn't know. I had no... I couldn't imagine. I didn't have any idea.

[00:19:01]

Anika: A blueprint, yeah.

[00:19:02]

Jared: Yeah. So, my Associate's was, I was just enjoying learning, right.

[00:19:07]

Anika: Nice. Yeah. That's awesome.

[00:19:08]

Jared: I was taking philosophy courses, I was taking math courses, I was taking physics courses. I was like anything that piqued my interest, I was like, "I'm going to do that." I wasn't ever, because when I started, I was still working full-time so I wasn't like, "Oh, I need this to get out. I don't want to take on debt." I was paying for it all. I wasn't looking at what's the quickest way to get out of here. I was just doing what I wanted to do. It turned out that that for my Associate's, it was liberal arts because that captured all the weird intricate or the disparate ways that I went. But even at Boise State when I came here, it kind of was very similar. I was doing a lot of physics, a lot of mathematics and a lot of philosophy. It came to the point where I did decide I want to graduate sooner rather than later, and I could graduate with a philosophy degree or I could wait another year and graduate with both a philosophy and a mathematics degree. I was looking at what my future looked like, and I applied to the Master's and they didn't need the mathematics degree. So, it made sense to just graduate and move on, but part of the paradoxical thing, it's like I'm sitting here with the STEM Action Center saying, "How do we help people imagine?" And it's like the lack of my imagination is actually why I ended up where I'm at, but.

[00:20:28]

Anika: That's cool that it's kind of both. Like yeah, not feeling held back or limited by anything and kind of being like what can I do, versus kind of having maybe a model or a representation of, like you can do this.

[00:20:40]

Jared: Yeah. There's a role for each, right. It's not, there's no one right way.

[00:20:44]

Anika: Yeah, yeah, man. Well, this is kind of switching gears.

[00:20:47]

Jared: Of course.

[00:20:47]

Anika: But I am interested in hearing about sagebrush because you were mentioning earlier that when you went into the governor's office project, you were kind of more interested in the salmon side because you already know and have extensive experience with sagebrush. That's one of our questions is, do you have any specific stories about sagebrush that you want to share?

[00:21:05]

Jared: There's nothing that actually just pops out. Like, "Oh, this is the best story."

[00:21:11]

Anika: I can ask other questions too.

[00:21:12]

Jared: Yeah, no. I'll tell you just a little about my experiences with sagebrush. They're not wonderful inspirational stories.

[00:21:22]

Anika: No worries. Even little things, yeah.

[00:21:22]

Jared: But it's the things that pop up into my mind when... I've been raised in sagebrush. When people that are new to the Intermountain West, I bring friends in from like Michigan, and I drive them out in the desert and they're just like, "Oh, my Lord. There's so much sagebrush." That just, that doesn't cease... That doesn't surprise me. I was just raised, it's normal. Two stories, I guess, crossed my mind. One story and one just example. The... years ago, I was a teenager, and I had this old jeep and as teenagers do, we're stupid. My buddy was driving the jeep, and we were on this two-track out in the middle of the desert that, just, it was horrible. For some reason, I thought it was a good idea to go stand out on the bumper and hold on to the rack while he was tearing across the desert. He took a corner a little too fast and knocked me off and I rolled a good, I don't know, 50, 60 foot through the sagebrush or through the desert. I remember I probably would have gotten much, much, much more injured had the sage not been there.

[00:22:35]

Anika: Yeah. To kind of slow your fall.

[00:22:36]

Jared: It slowed me down quite a bit. I ran through a few sagebrush, you know, like rolled through. Anyways.

[00:22:44]

Anika: That's great.

[00:22:44]

Jared: The other one is I do spend a lot of time just walking around, like when I'm facing a big decision or I'm really stressed or something like that, I actually just go out into the desert and walk around. It's very relaxing for me. I'm also an artist, and I do wood carvings and wildlife wood carvings. I love the just kind of the grittiness of sage itself, like the trunks. They're not pretty in the way that like a deciduous tree is. They're rough, but they're of the desert. I mount a lot of my work with sage because I think it's just wonderful. So, when I'm out there walking around, I literally look at every bush, every branch, I am

paying attention to, and I'm thinking like how would I form that into a base for a bird or a prairie dog or something that I'm carving. Yeah, when I'm walking around, I'm looking at everything.

[00:23:53]

Anika: That's very cool.

[00:23:53]

Jared: Every piece of sage does not go outside of my viewpoint. I'm thinking specifically about how that works and the piece that I'm thinking about.

[00:24:02]

Anika: Yeah. It's nice to have such a, like a fond appreciation of a thing and especially a thing that you can access within a reasonable distance of Boise.

[00:24:10]

Jared: Yeah.

[00:24:11]

Anika: Yeah. I love, that's like one of my favorite things about Boise, is that you can go walk in the Foothills or drive an hour away. I remember when I was a kid, we lived... I'm from Idaho but I've always lived in Boise. When I was a kid, we lived in southeast Boise and my parents had built their house in this new subdivision and they built it behind, we called it the back 40. It was just like a big field of sagebrush because no one was allowed to build on that field of sagebrush. So, we just always had that big view. There were always mice and owls and things like that. Yeah, I think it's so cool to hear other people's stories whether they're like funny about how it maybe saved you from becoming more injured. Yeah. That's so lovely. Man, yeah, tell me more about how you do your wood carvings and fashion? You said you make the sage into a base for the wood carvings?

[00:24:54]

Jared: Yeah.

[00:24:55]

Anika: What's that process like?

[00:24:56]

Jared: Well, it's really not actually very...

[00:24:59]

Anika: Too much of a process.

[00:24:59]

Jared: It's not too much of a process.

[00:25:00]

Anika: Because you were saying it seems like maybe they're already kind of... Like you probably don't do too much to them.

[00:25:04]

Jared: Yeah. I get my idea in my mind what I want to carve, and I carve it. The most recent one I finished was a prairie dog, and it's jumping up and there's a hawk, like, talon, and it just ends at its leg. So, it's jumping out of the way of being caught, being dinner sort of thing. I'd carved this and I was like, how do I mount this? Because I have to have it up vertical, like it has to be off the ground. For me in that one, I was looking for a piece of sage that I could cut off on the base and have it kind of an angle, and I could mount it to the outside of it up kind of off into space, like empty space. I ended up finding this really just amazing kind of twisted arch of a sage. So, I cut it off on both sides and put it... There was this one tiny little branch that was strong enough that I could attach the... You can see that it's attached. I mean, like you can see that that's what holding it up, but when you first look at, it doesn't look like that prairie dog is just out in space, and then there's just this piece of sage behind it.

[00:26:14]

Anika: That's so cool. Wow, that's so creative. Yeah. Wow. That is so cool. I love wood carvings too because my grandpa also did wood carvings. I remember doing all... He had machines but he also did like hand whittling and that. I think it's so cool that you combine it with sagebrush too and make it into like a whole natural art piece.

[00:26:32]

Jared: Yeah. And I carve the things around me. It's prairie dog, you know what I mean. That's just me walking around. I know prairie dogs, so.

[00:26:40]

Anika: Do you have particular, I mean, I'm not going to steal any of your spots but do you have like particular areas that you like to go to?

[00:26:46]

Jared: Oh, I absolutely do but they ain't my spots, right. They're our spots.

[00:26:51]

Anika: Everybody's spots, yeah.

[00:26:52]

Jared: All I ask is that people appreciate them, right. I do. A lot of time, it depends on time, like how much time do I have, right. Bonneville Point is a wonderful one that's just out off of Blacks Creek exit or you can actually get to it from behind Micron up on the rim above

Boise River. So, if you're going out Highway 21 towards Lucky Peak and you look across the river, it's up on top of that.

[00:27:18]

Anika: I know where you're talking about. That's where we lived below. Yeah, yeah.

[00:27:20]

Jared: Yeah. Kind of Columbia River area.

[00:27:22]

Anika: Very pretty.

[00:27:25]

Jared: There's a two track that'll take you from there all the way up to Bonneville Point. So, I spend a lot of time there. Out Swan Falls Road, that's out towards Swan Falls, south of Kuna. Out south of Cloverdale. I spent a lot of time out there out beyond Poen. I mean, this is just here in the valley when I'm just trying to get away. It's generally out south. This is actually an important distinction. Ten, 15 years ago, I would have been adding some places here in the Foothills. I don't go there anymore. I finally had to stop going there because of the people that don't keep their dogs on leashes. They don't understand how much that... I mean, there's a law to keep your dog on a leash, but they don't do it. I don't think a lot of people just are informed enough to understand actually how much damage that can do to wintering ungulate, deer populations, to the rodents. The rodents don't want to be around that trail, right. We end up with these dead zones in these trails. I have talked to many people on those trails, like, "Hey, you should keep your dog on a leash."

[00:28:35]

Anika: I've noticed that too but I didn't... Yeah.

[00:28:35]

Jared: And the way that they've gotten so angry at me even though they're the ones breaking the law, and I'm just trying to inform them. I always try to do it respectfully. I finally had to say I can't be here anymore. So, I don't go into the Foothills anymore. Sometimes I'll go up Highway 21 back towards Hilltop. There's a road, Highland Valley Road that it's open just in the summer basically. It goes up to a bird observatory on what's actually called Lucky Peak, not the reservoir but the peak, and I'll spend some time up there but that's not as often.

[00:29:05]

Anika: Nice. Yeah. Man, that's too bad. I had no idea the dogs... I mean, I guess if I think about it, it makes sense that because dogs can, even just their movements can cause so many things to like move in one area, yeah.

[Crosstalk 00:29:18]

[00:29:18]

Jared: There was some research that came out of Colorado just recently. It showed that, and I'm not going to get the details specific here, but it was basically showing that a hiker on their own had an animal disturbance radius, it was something like 15 feet. Basically, animals after 15, 20 feet, somewhere in there, as long as you're just walking by, they're just going to stay there and when you're by, they'll go, right. And then it was doing it for mountain biking, they had OHV, off-road vehicles. They had some actually surprising results there. Mountain bikes have a pretty small radius because they're fast. They go through quick and the animals just, like they freeze, and then they're gone, and then they're fine. OHVs are not as bad as we might imagine, although they do have a much larger radius. For OHVs, it's when they stop. But dogs have a huge radius, even a dog on a leash, I think it was something like a 100-foot disturbance radius because there's just this kind of natural predatorial instinct, and that's just on a leash. But then you take them off their leash and of course, their range increases drastically. So, anyways.

[00:30:35]

Anika: Well, it's interesting because the other day, I was talking to somebody who was telling me... She's lived in Boise for a while and she lives in the east end out by the foothills. So, she'll go walk in the foothills. She said during Treefort, she suffered this kind of out-of-body experience when she went walking on the trail because there were so many people in a place where she never sees people. She said it kind of disrupted her sense of place.

[00:30:58]

Jared: Yeah. I could see that.

[00:30:59]

Anika: I thought that that was really, like that even just yeah, this place where you go every day to go on a walk that is very important to you suddenly being filled could be... Because it is, you want to trust that people are respecting it and staying on the path and not being disruptive, but it's hard.

[00:31:13]

Jared: That's hard. That is hard.

[00:31:15]

Anika: Yeah. Tell me more about... I'm not super familiar with the status or what's going on with the endangered status of sagebrush in Idaho.

[00:31:25]

Jared: Sagebrush or sage-grouse?

[00:31:26]

Anika: Sage-grouse.

[00:31:27]

Jared: Oh, okay.

[00:31:28]

Anika: That's what I meant. Yes.

[00:31:29]

Jared: Yeah. No worries, no worries.

[00:31:30]

Anika: But will you tell me more about that?

[00:31:32]

Jared: Yeah. Sage-grouse are not listed as an endangered species, but that's part of because there's been 20 years of a lot of work. Sage-grouse populations have, you know, they're not thriving in a sense. They're not like on the brink. It's not like there's three breeding pairs sort of thing brink, but they require certain sorts of habitat. They require sagebrush, but not sagebrush that's too tall. They require like medium sagebrush, but they also require some open areas, and they require seeps and springs. Historic overgrazing, and I do want to be careful, that's historic overgrazing, things are different now than they were 100 years ago in 1934 when the Taylor Grazing Act was passed. It was in a bad shape. We're not 1934 anymore, but the land has changed. There is a broad recognition that we probably ought to do something different if we want this bird to be around. Also, this doing something different, what that amounts to could be really beneficial for the land as a whole, as well as the ranch communities. Changing our management around has...stands the opportunity to be more successful. But that doesn't happen, you don't get that sort of flexibility to make those changes if that bird gets listed.

[00:33:09]

Anika: Right, oh, yeah.

[00:33:12]

Jared: There was a thought, Fish and Wildlife Service was thinking about listing it back in the 2000s and there was a big response saying, "Okay, what do we have to do to keep you from listing it because otherwise things change real quick and we get locked in a corner?" So, for 20 years, there's been so much wonderful work about how to retool grazing management. The science around like, oh, juniper trees can be really damaging, fire. All these invasive species, all these things that impacts the grouse. The grouse itself, it's doing better. At least it's not really declining, it's been... It's not really rebounding either, but it hasn't been listed, and that should say something. But what it's done also is

it's really highlighted that we all as a community, not just the ranch community, not just the recreation community, not just managers and policymakers, but we all can do better. We can help this land. There's been this raising of western consciousness to think about how do we help this? What would it look like to put beavers back on this landscape, this sort of thing? Maybe it was sage-grouse that prompted those discussions. But yeah, so currently, BLM is going through their third revision on their sage-grouse plans. So, we'll see probably in the next six months to a year, what that looks like, but still not listed because of all the good work being done.

[00:34:43]

Anika: Nice. Yeah. I think that's a great, like you said, it's not necessarily like it's rebounding super well but I would still consider that a success story at least in the fact that it's not listed. Yeah.

[00:34:53]

Jared: Yeah. That's exactly right.

[00:34:54]

Anika: That's really neat. Yeah. Dang, let's see. I'm trying to think. I had a follow-up question that I spaced on. Yeah, tell me more about also the trout aspect because you were mentioning like you said, that you kind of wanted to focus more on that because you didn't know as much about it.

[00:35:10]

Jared: Yeah.

[00:35:10]

Anika: Are there things that you've learned from that that you think that the general public or just more people should know about?

[00:35:16]

Jared: I mean, I think maybe if I had to do like a 10-second sound-bite on it, it's like it's much more complex than we hear about in the news, right. Even coming to it with a history of understanding natural complexity and environmental management, I understand complexity. Learning about the specificities of salmon in Idaho, it just... Wow. I mean, it was incredible. I still don't know as much as some of my colleagues do, of course. It's very similar to the sage-grouse in respect that by helping the sage-grouse, we're actually just helping the land, and we stand to help the communities that we still have to be thinking about that, I think, more. I think salmon stand in a very similar spot. By helping the salmon, the things that we do like habitat restoration and floodplain management, these sorts of things, we are actually just helping the ecosystem and presumably and hopefully, we're able to help the communities as well.

One thing that I have been learning about is... Because the dams are a big issue right now. I mean, Congressman Simpson's proposal to remove the four Lower Snake River dams was met with vitriol on one side and celebrated on the other, and there's a whole range of people in between. The thinking about that, learning about it, it's like it is complex. There's actually not enough science to really even understand if we did actually remove the dams if that would even do much. It can't hurt, right. I think we all understand, eventually, that's probably part of the whole system, but it is just so complex. Trying to be informed about it, like I get paid to be informed, and it's still taking me months, and I feel like a drop in the bucket. Yeah, it's been fun though.

[00:37:21]

Anika: I didn't know that that was such a... I know that it has been an issue in Idaho and it's been a topic for a while now, but I wasn't aware that it was such a... It sounds like it's fairly controversial.

[00:37:32]

Jared: It is, but dams don't just impede salmon migration. Dams also help to provide water in a changing climate. Some of them provide a lot of electricity. They provide navigation corridors to get grain from the Palouse to market, right. These things are....

[00:37:53]

Anika: Really important.

[00:37:54]

Jared: These are important, right.

[00:37:56]

Anika: A lot of factors, yeah.

[00:37:57]

Jared: Oh, I mean, they provide recreation. Like what would happen if Lucky Peak wasn't there? There's a lot of boaters that wouldn't be happy about that and fishermen. Balancing all those values is really hard. By all means if everything aligned, let's take out the dams. I'd support it, but I also understand people's reticence to just saying, "Oh, let's figure it out afterwards." Because it might hurt a lot of people and that's hard. That's a hard balance, like what do we do?

[00:38:30]

Anika: Yeah. No kidding. Man, it sounds like you're just someone who is very good at, like I said, bridging these different communities and kind of seeing all the different... A person that you see all the different nuances of these situations. I think that's like you're saying, a very important thing in especially really complicated situations. Like questions of yeah, what are we going to do about the salmon, and are we going to remove dams or keep them, because there's so many different factors involved? Yeah.

[00:38:56]

Jared: Yeah. Well, and this comes out of my collaborative nature, I guess. I very rarely will offer you an answer or a solution. I don't think I know anything, right. Like every time I learn something, it's not that I'm increasing my knowledge. I have Peter Donovan from the Soil Carbon Coalition to thank for this. It really helped me frame how I think about even myself. I don't think I'm increasing my knowledge every time I learn something. I'm just increasing the depth, breadth and quality of my ignorance. I think that's really wonderful.

[00:39:31]

Anika: Yeah. I think so too.

[00:39:32]

Jared: I won't ever tell anyone the answer because I actually don't think the answer exists. It is so dependent on a certain place, and time, and values in people, and power structure, and management. I really prefer a method that says let's not try to simplify a problem. Let's try to make it more complex. Let's try to increase our bounds of our ignorance and let's come together and learn together, and in the process of learning together, we find, we figure out what to do together to move forward.

[00:40:09]

Anika: Right. It seems like that's really the only way that things can truly be done well and effectively and really solve problems because taking the short way out never truly solves anything.

[00:40:19]

Jared: No.

[00:40:20]

Anika: It's so understandable that when environmental issues arise, if scientists or people who are in charge in any way point at rural communities or rancher communities and say, "You need to do this," then that would obviously create tension for anybody.

[00:40:34]

Jared: Yeah.

[00:40:34]

Anika: So, yeah. I think it sounds like collaboration and a mutual understanding is really the only way that things like that will get taken care of, which is really important. Yeah.

[00:40:43]

Jared: Yeah. That's exactly right.

[00:40:44]

Anika: Yeah. Well, I really appreciate you talking about this. I don't have any other follow-up questions. I've really enjoyed getting to hear about your background and your experience. Is there anything else that you want people to know about your experience in academia or your background?

[00:41:01]

Jared: Maybe I'll leave with two things. One, we talked about this a bit before we started this process today, but everything I've been talking about and who I am and all that is a fine balance between — we do need the science. The science is necessary. We absolutely do. But something I run into all the time in this work is it's not enough. In academic philosophy parlance, that means it's necessary but not sufficient. We need more humanists, we need more social scientists, we need more people-people in these spaces, in federal land management. We need more people in state management. We need more people just across the board thinking about the human dimension of this. I start my classes, my environmental classes with saying, "Just so you know, all environmental issues are not environmental problems, they're people problems." Maybe I'm using hyperbolic language by saying "all," I don't know. But I think the point gets across. I'll just finish with a story. It's not a great story. It's just something I really enjoy.

In 1992, there was a big fire that ran through the Atlanta area here in Idaho, in kind of central south Sawtooths, I suppose, or south of the Sawtooths. I'd started going and hiking on this trail back there when I was a teenager, and it was right after it had burned. Everything was just, I mean, it was burned. It was a burned landscape, right. I have gone there at least once, sometimes and often multiple times a year since then every year. I'm 38 so that's 20-some odd years of going back every year and watching the land rebound, and going to the same place and camping in the same spot, this sort of thing. I know every rock and tree, like, just because I've gone there so much. It's pretty incredible, and what to me that experience has really shown is that things work out. They do, but it takes time.

This looking for quick solutions and quick answers and, "We need this done tomorrow." It's hard because like with climate change, we probably ought to be thinking about something quicker, but also reminds me to slow down and look at the winds, and things do rebound. It's been incredible. Now, like I remember the first time I saw a little pine tree maybe been four or five inches tall growing at this one spot. Now, that tree's, I don't know, 25, 30-foot tall. Just watching the land respond has just been absolutely incredible. There's sage and pine and all that. Well, it's beautiful. So, anyways.

[00:44:03]

Anika: That's so neat. Lovely. I think that's a wonderful story to end on. I think that's a great story, yeah.

[00:44:07]

Jared: Oh, there you go.

[00:44:08]

Anika: Well, thank you so much.

[00:44:09]

Jared: Thanks for inviting me today.

[00:44:10]

Anika: Yeah. I really appreciate your time.

[00:44:11]

Jared: Yeah, absolutely.