Denny Denton

Denny Denton (Winfield Denton, Junior) lives 13 miles south and east of Mineola. His great-grandfather started buying land in Clark County in 1895.

Diana: Where in Clark County did they come to?

Denny: Well, he bought the part of land the ranch is on right now. It was a man called Jamie Thompson, the owner of the land, and my great-grandfather was in the grain business in Leavenworth, Kansas, and Jamie was living at Kansas City and they got acquainted. Jamie and his father-in-law owned land here, but the land was going to be sold. They were going broke and it was going to be sold for taxes. He talked my grandfather into catching up the taxes in return for a half interest in the land.

Diana: What was your grandfather's name?

Denny: Winfield Denton

Diana: Just to come for the land is why he came? To purchase it?

Denny: Yeah, he got a half interest in it, and then he started buying other land, adjacent property. Then in 1902 or thereabouts, he sent a construction crew out from Leavenworth, Kansas. They came out here and quarried the sandstone rock and built that ranch house that I live in. And then he found out that he didn't own the quarter of the ranch that the house was on, Jamie Thompson owned that quarter only. So, he forced a sale of the ranch to a friend of his in Leavenworth named Dee Assick. And a year later, his friend deeded it back to him, except he owned one hundred percent, including the quarter with the house at that point.

Diana: So where had he lived before he built the house?

Denny: He never lived in that house. He always lived in Leavenworth, Kansas, on Esplanade Drive. The house still exists on a bluff up above the Mississippi River. It looks out over the Mississippi River.

Diana: So how did your grandfather get out here? Transportation?

Denny: He would ride the train and he was an early automobile enthusiast. He kept an early automobile of some kind to drive back and forth.

Diana: Where did he come in on the train?

Denny: Either Ashland or Minneola, but neither one exclusively.

Diana: So which part of Clark County did they settle in? I mean, did he buy land in. Is it all in the north part?

Denny: Well, no, it's 10,200 acres and part of it sits on the corner of Central Englewood and Appleton Township.

Diana: In the county map?

Denny: Yes, and it would be four townships, but Appleton is actually two townships. Sometime before I was doing anything about it, Appleton and Brown Townships combined into one township and they just called it Appleton.

Diana: Were there any schoolhouses on the property?

Denny: Yes, there was.

Diana: Do you know what they were called?

Denny: Yes, it was called Walnut Hill School.

Diana: Was it pretty close to the ranch house?

Denny: Not real close, it would be two miles north and one mile west. Supposedly, the teacher stayed at the ranch house.

Diana: Was your grandfather married when he came out?

Denny: Oh, yes. He was married and had adult children by the time he bought the ranch. And in 1908, he sent his son Robert out, and he managed the ranch from 1908 to about 1912 as a sheep operation.

Diana: What type of land the ranch is made up of.

Denny: Well, the ranch is made up of roughly 1,300 acres of farmland and the rest of it is all in grassland. The farm land is all on the north end because the ranch sits where Clark County switches from farmland to grassland. You know, everything south of the ranch is grass all the way to Highway 160 and everything north of it is farmland all the way to Ford County line.

Diana: So what kind of farm ground is it? Is it rich soil?

Denny: The farm ground that we have is... when I was doing land judging in 4-H, it was class one farm ground, and you had to downgrade it to class two for lack of rainfall.

Diana: So, the grassland, is it all native grass?

Denny: Well, they broke out some canyons and stuff in the early day, and they didn't farm it very long, I should say, ridge tops. I don't know when they were put back to grass, but certainly before World War II and maybe quite a bit before that.

I'm not sure. I don't know if anybody knows for sure now, but the ranch had its own elevator. According to my Grandma Denton, he tore down an elevator in Beloit, Kansas, put it on a railroad and brought it to Minneola and brought it out the ranch and assembled it in the side of a little canyon at the north end of the ranch, in the farmland.

Diana: It was a wooden elevator?

Denny: It was an old wooden elevator. It was still standing, well when I moved back home in '93, it was still standing.

Diana: What kind of crops have been grown?

Denny: Well, right now, like everyone in the area, we do wheat, milo, fallow rotation. Before that, from the time my dad moved back to the ranch in 1949, it was pretty much just straight, every other year, wheat. Which was pretty much what everybody did at that point in time.

Diana: Has the way you farm wheat changed?

Denny: Oh yes. The farming methods when I moved back in '93, it was still traditional around

Minneola, that every other year wheat farming you'd leave the wheat stubble to grow up in weeds and then farm it the next spring. And just within a few years, everybody started growing no-till milo. At that point in time, the prevailing thing became one third wheat, one third milo and one third fallow. As long as I farmed, I did it a little different, because I wanted wheat for wheat pasture every year. So I used the four year rotation.

Diana: Is no-till more productive than actually cleaning off the fields every time.

Denny: For milo, no-till is a necessity. You're just not going to grow it otherwise. They've never managed to prove that no-till wheat is more productive than traditional wheat. What you can say is that you always have cover on the ground if you're no-tilling and it doesn't turn into a dust bowl in a drought.

Diana: Yes, which is common, right?

Denny: No, people are having to go back to conventional till because of herbicide resistance and the constantly increasing price of herbicide. Most of them will conventional-till wheat, but if you're going to grow milo, you have to no-till. It's just mandatory.

Diana: So how has farm equipment changed from the time your grandfather first started farming? Did he use horses or oxen?

Denny: He had to have, but you know, he was a wealthy man, for one thing, so they had what was supposed to be the biggest gasoline powered tractor you could buy at that point in time. It was called the Big Four Tractor.

We have a picture of it in Minneola in front of the railroad station, pulling six grain wagons, except they aren't loaded with grain, they're loaded with wool from the sheep. But they ran that elevator as a country elevator. So, the local farmers could bring grain there and they'd buy it. They had a scale and a wagon down inside the elevator and then they would.... I don't actually have a picture of it, but I'm pretty sure that they would haul the grain in a six-wagon train too. I'm told that a grain wagon could hold about 200 bushels.

Diana: So about the size of a small truck?

Denny: Yes, it would be about the size of a semi now.

Diana: Did they cut their own wheat?

Denny: Yes, they did.

Diana: What would they use?

Denny: There was a shed on the side of the wooden elevator and they had a threshing machine and a steam tractor that ran it. I have picture of that.

Diana: Did they use a pull-type combine with a tractor or something?

Denny: No, back in those days they used a... oh, what did they call them? They just bundled the wheat. And then they'd throw it in the threshing machine and you'd have a big pile of straw, and then they would have a wagon that the grain would run into. I do have a picture of the threshing machine and the steam tractor and the wagon.

Diana: Did they do something with all of the straw that they got off of it?

Denny: They would have had to. One thing that it would have been used for was bedding for the barn stalls where they kept the horses, because even though they had, at the very least, a gas tractor and a steam tractor, I don't think that would have been enough. I believe the wagon that was getting filled with grain was pulled with horses, too.

Diana: The big workhorses?

Denny: I don't know. Just from the picture, I'm not sure I could tell you whether they were big or little.

Denny: They didn't use mules, though?

Denny: They may have, that's before my time, so I can't say for sure. I can tell you that they had four horse barns on the ranch.

Diana: Did they raise horses like they raised cattle, to sell?

Denny: I don't know the answer to that either; my guess is that they did not. I could tell you that they also had 16 acres of sheep sheds.

Diana: When they first started, they raised sheep, right? Is that what you said?

Denny: Well, I don't want to say when they first started, but from 1908 till 1912, when my Great Uncle Robert, everybody called him Rob, according to Dad, was out here running the ranch, it was a sheep operation.

Diana: Do you know how many sheep they had?

Denny: I don't. My sister Debbie does. She did her paper for her master's in library science on the ranch, she went back and researched the tax rules. It turns out that in those days, they taxed you so much a head on your animals. So she was able to get the numbers from the tax records. She went down there. At that point in time, they were in the basement of the courthouse.

Diana: When did they start raising cattle? Did they have some with the sheep or...

Denny: Well, as soon as 1912, this is what Grandma Denton said, the sheep got a disease and they all died. And at that time, my great-grandfather called Rob back to Leavenworth to help with the elevators that they owned and returned it to a cattle operation. He would hire a ranch manager. There's even one family in Minneola that was brought out here to be the ranch manager. They still have the original contract, supposedly.

Diana: Were they furnished a place to live on the ranch?

Denny: Yes, they lived in the big stone house that I live in.

Diana: So what type of cattle did they grow? Certain breeds?

Denny: I don't know the answer to that. I know that at times, at least, most of the grass was wintered out because I have a copy of an agreement between George and Pearl Abell and Winfield Denton where he rented the big pasture, which at that point in time, I think even when my dad moved to the ranch, the big pasture was 6,000 acres of grass, so that would have been the majority of the grass on the entire ranch. It was all in one big pasture.

Diana: Did they rent it by the year or by the season or...

Denny: Yes, it was by the season. I'd have to go back and look at that, I can't remember whether it was by the acre or by the head. I just remember seeing George and Pearl Abell's names on there and that it was a year's lease agreement. So I'm guessing it was probably by the acre.

Diana: So how many head could you run on 6,000 acres? If it was in good shape?

Denny: Stockers, if it was just a grazing season, I would say you could easily run probably 600.

Diana: When did the family start operating the whole ranch themselves?

Denny: Well, except for Rob, nobody lived on the ranch until 1949 when my father, Winfield Denton and his wife Betty Jo Denton and their 18-month-old son moved to the ranch. It's been operated by either Winfield and Betty Jo or myself since 1949.

Diana: Did they pick a certain breed of cattle.

Denny: Since 1949, we've always been a stocker operation, we have never had any cows.

Diana: So where do you get your stockers? Are they steers mostly now?

Denny: No, at least as I think back, there were almost exclusively heifer stockers. The reason for that is that we worked through an order buyer in Russellville, Alabama. Almost without exception, heifer stockers are $20 a hundred cheaper than a steer and $15 a hundred cheaper than a bull. So, when you sell them to the feedlot, you usually get somewhere between $3 and $5 a hundred less, so it just makes sense to buy heifers, because of the big difference in the price when you buy them in the south.

Diana: When you buy heifers, how old are they and about what do they weigh?

Denny: You buy them at weight. Right now, I usually buy 500 to 525 weight heifers.

Diana: And you buy them when?

Denny: I'll buy them over the winter, usually. At the end of grazing season, I put them on the video. I sort them off and we sell them on the video auction, but you have to sell them in numbers. You'll always have a few left over because to sell them on the video auction, you have to make up load lots. They prefer 8 weight feeders, which is what the feedlots want anymore, that's about 60 to 62 head alone.

Diana: When your dad ran the ranch, did he have someplace that he sold them?

Denny: Yes, from the time he moved to the ranch until I moved back, they were all always sold at an auction, cattle auction, well, not always.

Diana: Like the sale barn?

Denny: Yes, a sale barn, one of the ones here, predominantly. Now, if he could get somebody to buy them on the ranch, he would do it that way because it's way cheaper. You don't have the freight. You have to have as bad of a shrinkage, you don't get rinky-dinked by the sale barn, where they pick off cattle to sell at their odd-lot sales so they can pick up cheap for their feedlot. Things like that.

Diana: What did you feed the cattle on top of the grass that they were on?

Denny: Well, as a rancher, I look at cattle as combines, their job is to harvest grass and convert it into something that's saleable. So my goal is to feed them the least that I possibly can, because I want them to utilize that rumen to convert grass into pounds of beef that I can sell.

Diana: So you don't actually cake them or feed them?

Denny: Well, if you run cattle in the winter, you're going to have to give them a protein supplement because the grass liquefies and there's less food value in it for the bacteria in the rumen of the cattle, and you've got to give them extra protein or basically the liquified just slows down the processes in the rumen. In order to keep them in condition and especially on a stocker, which is a growing animal, they need a protein supplement to keep them healthy.

Diana: What's an ideal weight to sell them at?

Denny: In our area, the market for them is the feedlot, so you're almost always going to be selling them to a feedlot. Usually it's not one that's very far away because they'll pay more for them because there's less freight on them and because they know they're going to have fewer health problems with them because they're from the local area. They're acclimated to the climate around here.

Diana: When you buy cattle that come from some other place, do you have a lot of trouble with sickness when they first come?

Denny: Well, at times you do. I mean, that's part of the stocker business, but it's not a fun part of it, I can tell you that.

Diana: Has the type of medicine that you use changed from the time you were young?

Denny: Yes. Shoot, they've got a better health plan than I do. You wouldn't believe all the stuff they get when they come in. They get a Draxxin shot, they get all kinds of wormer, they get IVR vaccine, they get blackleg vaccine... I guess that's about the size of it.

Diana: Do you doctor your own cattle, when you first get them?

Denny: Oh, yeah.

Diana: Do you brand?

Denny: We usually won't do that right away because they're stressed-out cattle and have been on the truck for around 15 to 16 hours. So all we do to them is, you know, everything's ready for them, the hay and the water and everything, it's all ready. We just walk them off the truck and let them rest for a few days and then we'll work them. Before we turn them out, we're going to run up through and give them a Draxxin shot and ear-tag them, mainly so we can identify them, so we can keep records on each animal individually on how much medicine they've had and what kind they had and that kind of stuff.

Diana: Do you go out and ride through the cattle every day?

Denny: Heck yes, twice a day if they're getting sick.

Diana: Do you do that in a pickup, or a horse or four-wheeler?

Denny: Usually these days, it's a four-wheeler. If we're having a lot of trouble, we might have to take a horse out there, but usually it's quicker or faster to do it with a four-wheeler.

Diana: You have lots of pastureland to cover?

Denny: Yeah, we have some grass traps that we put them in until we get them straightened out.

Diana: Yes. When you doctor, or when you first get them, do you tag and do that first doctoring, do you have people that come in and help like other neighbors, or do you just use your hands that you have?

Denny: We usually handle it ourselves.

Diana: Do you ever barter or trade work with your neighbors?

Denny: That's rare anymore. When I was growing up, all the ranchers threw in to work, but that just isn't very common anymore.

Diana: Has the ranch always had a hired hand?

Denny: Yes.

Diana: And how has the hired hand been paid? Is he given a house or beef or...

Denny: We've usually had one employee, he is provided with the house on the ranch, plus a paycheck. Right now, I have another employee that lives off the ranch.

Diana: Do you provide vehicles?

Denny: We provide ranch vehicles, but not personal vehicles.

Diana: Do they come to the ranch in their vehicle and then use...

Denny: They come to the ranch in their vehicle and then they use a ranch vehicle.

Diana: I want to go back to the machinery, what does the machinery you have now differ from what your dad had in the 50's when he first started?

Denny: Well, since we're not farming any more, ranching is a lot less intensive on machinery, but of course we've got different corrals than we had back then. We have a tub instead of a square fence for loading and working cattle and we have a hydraulic chute instead of a manual chute.

Diana: Do you move corrals around to the pastures?

Denny: No.

Diana: Do you gather your animals in before you sell them?

Denny: When we get ready to sell them, we'll gather them into the shipping pasture. We'll gather them and they'll come out and video them for the video auction and then they put them on sale. We walk them in and we have our own scale, so we weigh right there on the ranch, load them on the trucks and in two hours we're done.

Diana: Do you have any trouble getting trucks in to take your cattle to the feed yard?

Denny: Very rarely, because my dad relocated the main working corrals in 1962 to a spot right next to

the county road that comes down to the house so that we would be able to get trucks in and out. The old corrals were down the bottom of a canyon and it was kind of a problem. There were times when we had to hook on to the front of a semi and drag them up the hill. We just don't have that kind of a problem anymore, since the 1960's.

Diana: When you were farming, what type of equipment did you have and what did you pay to have people do it for you? Did you plow yourself or plant or what?

Denny: I did everything myself except to plant milo. I never bought a planter because I didn't feel like I could afford one for the number of acres that I have. I would pay somebody to plant the milo.

Diana: What about cutting... harvesting the crops?

Denny: We never... I believe that since my dad moved to the ranch in 1949, we've owned a combine for one year. When he was renting combines, he would lease a combine every year, but within a few years, the machines had gotten so much bigger that we couldn't meet the minimum number of separator hours that you had to pay for to lease a combine. So ever since then, we've had... Well, as long as I farmed, I would hire somebody to combine and I would help haul it myself. I had a semi, a tandem and a grain cart, and I would haul it to town myself.

Diana: So how have the prices changed since you started till now, until you finished or you quit farming?

Denny: Well, as anybody would tell you, it's been up and down. Markets, you know, unfortunately, the best wheat and milo markets we had were during the drought and we couldn't raise very much. And, you know, I share rent, so I still have grain to sell. The last three years have been pretty grim, but this year wheat prices were better, you know, not really great, but better, and milo prices are the best they've been for quite a while right now. Right now, milo's a dollar over corn at the Minneola elevator.

Diana: So how has the cost of hiring somebody to cut it changed?

Denny: It just keeps going up.

Diana: Is it based on how far you are from... or how much they're doing?

Diana: Well, a custom cutter always charges so many dollars an acre. I don't know what it is now, I've been out of it for some years. So much a bushel over a minimum number of bushels. It used to be... I'm not sure what the minimum is. I think most of the time it was 20 bushels, maybe traditionally the price of it would be like twelve, twelve or twenty-three. What they meant by that was $23 an acre, 23 cents a bushel over... I think it was 20 or 30 over on wheat and 40 on milo and 23 cents a mile to haul it to town.

Diana: Like you said, it keeps going up. I want to talk about different things that have happened, like disasters. Do you remember any snowstorms when you were on the ranch?

Denny: Fifty-seven. It was because it was both the worst disaster when I was growing up that we ever had because I believe it was 40-some head of cattle that my dad lost that were smothered in a canyon. I was out of school for three weeks. It was three weeks before they got the roads cleared. Also because, even though it's the worst blizzard of... well, before I left home, and it didn't snow in Ashland, it rained. And it didn't snow in our south pasture, it rained. At the house, the snowdrift when the wind quit blowing, went all the way up to the top of the roof. There's a sheer bluff to the east of the house, and there was so much snow in the canyon that you could walk off the sheer bluff and over the canyon, if you were careful to avoid the little air space between the bluff and the snow drift.

Diana: Oh, yeah, somebody told me about the flood that they had in 1957.

Denny: Yeah, well, it was just all that snow. My gosh. Well, where those cattle smothered, there was still a snowdrift in there on the Fourth of July. I think it was still there.

Diana: Did you have to feed the other cattle or give them water or stuff to keep the rest of your herd alive? Do you remember that?

Denny: Well, I was young enough that I was only the third grade, I just remember Dad and, I think it was... Gage was his last name. I can't think of his first name right now. They were digging them out. The cattle would get in the canyons to get away from the wind and the snow would drift in and they'd have to dig them out because they'd be pinned up against the bluff (if they didn't smother like they did on the one canyon). They'd have to dig them out, but it was late in the year and it warmed up pretty quick, so I don't think there was any problem with water. There was, like you said, a flood, but all the creeks had water, I remember, the buffalo wallows were full, everything had water in it.

Diana: Do you remember any other big snowstorms? You weren't around for the one in 1971?

Denny: No, I was in Tucson, Arizona.

Diana: Do you remember the flood in 1965?

Denny: I do. We went up and our neighbor Butch Marshall had a brother-in-law that lived in South Dodge, and he gathered up all of his neighbors that had cattle sprayers when we took them up and pumped the water out of the basements in South Dodge. Because of all the cattle sprayers had suction hoses that you could throw into a pond or a tank at the windmill or something to fill the sprayer with.

Diana: So how long did that take?

Denny: Oh, an afternoon.

Diana: So how big would the sprayer be? I mean, how many gallons?

Denny: Well, the sprayer wouldn't hold that much, 200 gallons. But they weren't pumping the water into the sprayers, they pumped them into the road and it ran down into the drainage ditches.

Diana: So that was when the Arkansas River flooded?

Denny: It was, yeah.

Diana: And it took a while for them to get everything cleaned up.

Denny: Well, that part didn't affect us on the ranch, the only thing I remember is going up and helping drain out basements. But yeah, I'm sure South Dodge was completely inundated that time.

Diana: Do you remember any tornadoes?

Denny: The only one that I remember well, Jim Arnold and his wife lost their house in the 1950's. I remember getting in the pickup with Dad and we drove over to look at it. I mean, it was nothing left above ground and he never rebuilt the house. He moved to a different spot and built a house.

Diana: Didn't want it to come back.

Denny: Evidently, they considered that an unlucky spot. Yeah, and then Allan Thornback, just a couple of years ago. He lost his house in a tornado.

Diana: When did you first become involved in the family operation? Did you have cattle when you were younger?

Denny: Well, yeah. We were allowed to run 20 head of cattle at the ranch. It was a 4-H program, we bought 20 head at the sale barn or stockers and then you would run them on grass. You had to pay your parents grass rent and then you would take them up and sell them at the sale barn and figure up whether you lost or made money. And I was fortunate enough to be, well, when I was doing that, I was fortunate enough to make money at it. But that was definitely not guaranteed.

Diana: Was that like a pen of cattle that you did for 4-H?

Denny: Well, it wouldn't be a pen. Twenty head. A pen is 50 to 100.

Diana: Did you show steers at any time for 4-H?

Denny: My parents wouldn't allow us to do that. They said it wasn't real because they paid premiums. When you grow up, nobody's going to pay you a premium for your cattle.

Diana: You mentioned that you judged grass. You were on a grass judging team. Where did you go and how did you learn how to judge grass?

Denny: Well, we had a really good county agent named Don Wiles, and all the 4-Hers, he would recruit you for the land judging team, the range judging team, and the livestock judging team. I mean, he took it seriously. He'd pick you up after school and go out judge practice holes for land judging all over Clark County.

Then he had regional contests and I think it was district, regional, state, and national contests then. I was lucky enough to be on teams with some pretty sharp individuals; our land judging team and our grain judging team both got to go to national contest.

Diana: Do you remember the people that were on the team?

Denny: Yes, the grain judging team, I remember Allan Rankin. The land judging team was Harry Ayers and myself. I don't remember the other two people.

Diana: Do you remember where you went, when you went to the...?

Denny: They said they were in Oklahoma City. At that time, Oklahoma City had the largest land area of any city in the United States. They were on a 10,000 acre ranch that you couldn't see another building from. It was in the city limits of Oklahoma City.

Diana: And you were successful?

Denny: Well, yeah, we placed. On the land judging contest, I think we got 13th. I don't remember all the grain judging contest, but I believe we placed on that one, too. We won everything all the way up to the national contest. Now, Don Louth claimed until the day that he... as far as I know, he's still alive.

Diana: He did pass away.

Denny: He claimed that we won the land judging contest because the people that judged this one were wrong. And I don't know if that's true or not, but he believed it, though, because he told me that again, after I moved back home in 1993. He was still upset about it.

Diana: The land judging and grass and stuff, has that helped you in your operation?

Denny: Oh yes, especially helpful was in the range judging. He would get us a complete set of Philip's books, which the Phillips Petroleum Company, for whatever reason, had hired people to put out these books of native grasses and introduced grasses and undesirable plants, poisonous plants. I think there were six of these books, and he made us go out and memorize grasses and learn how to identify weeds. And on the farm land, he taught us how to judge soil and soil depth. It was definitely a learning experience and there was a lot to learn. I learned a lot of that!

Diana: How has your current operation changed since your folks had the ranch?

Denny: Well, you know, things are continually changing. I mean, it just changed. It's not like they kept doing the same thing for 50 years. After I moved home, we changed the farming operation from every other year, wheat to wheat, milo and fallow. Then we changed the ranching operation from set-stocking to managed grazing, where we have 36 paddocks and we run all the cattle in one herd and rotate them around the ranch to allow the grass to recover after the first bite before we graze it again. It also forces them to graze plants they maybe would not graze if they had a choice.

Diana: How has fencing changed?

Denny: Well, the main thing is that with managed grazing, you use a lot of hot wire.

Diana: Did you lose any pastureland to the fire in 2017?

Denny: Almost exactly half.

Diana: And has it recovered pretty well now?

Denny: Well, it's not completely recovered, especially on the ridge tops, where it is pretty shallow. For some reason, there seem to be roughly circular areas where there's not much there but weeds. Canyon bottoms, you know, where there are taller grasses and soil's deeper and there's more moisture, they seem to have recovered pretty well.

Diana: Did the fire jump a lot of the canyons or did it go down in them?

Denny: Oh, yeah, it burned everything in its path, but our ranch mostly didn't burn in the head fire. It mostly burned in what the fire department called the "flank fire". Even though part of it started in our ranch because our lines started the fire. And they did burn the northeast part of the ranch, but when the wind changed about four o'clock on Monday, the fire started burning back to the south.

It burned across the Herman Ranch, which joins me. According to Luke Rush, the ranch manager there, it only took a half an hour to burn 15,000 acres. But that's set a flank fire that burned over onto our ranch. But the flank fire was burning with the wind, so it never got really big or burned really fast. It just didn't.

In fact, the firemen were fighting it, and on Monday night they had to leave to go save Burton's house, and we told them to not come back until daylight, because they were going down in the canyon country and people were driving around places where they had no idea where they were going. And I

was afraid somebody was going to get hurt. They came back the next day and we were able to set up a shuttle of water tanks on one ridge so we didn't have to go up or down canyons.

We got out Tuesday evening about seven o'clock and finally met the Ashland Fire Department coming up from the south. On Tuesday, we hauled over 60,000 gallons of water to our south pasture to fight the fire with.

Diana: Did you lose a lot of fence?

Denny: Half the grass, half the fence.

Diana: Did you take advantage of some of the programs they had then to replace fences?

Denny: When somebody says they're going to pay 75 percent of the new fence, I can be a real good rule follower.

Diana: Yes. Like the Community Foundation had a system going and there were several other places.

Denny: The big money came from the NRCS. I felt that our NRCS agent here in Ashland, Adam Elliott, did an outstanding job. I mean, he set up a system where they used iPhones to check out the fence, and if the people that were checking it found something wrong, they would take a picture of it and send it to him and he would get a hold of you and take care of it. And he got everybody paid pretty darned promptly.

Diana: So what type of fence did they build back? Was it a five-wire fence? Did you use steel posts or wood posts or a combination?

Denny: Well, you had choices. You could use wood posts or you could use steel posts. And the biggest part of my fencing was perimeter fence that burned. And, of course, except for a little short section that involved the Bouzidens, it was all a fence between the Herman Ranch and ours. So basically, John Herman and I had to agree on how we were going to do it. And we got along pretty well. You know, we didn't have any big problems. We got together and agreed how we were going to do it.

He hired a crew to put in all the corners and brace points because he wanted it made out of steel and he had a machine shop somewhere. I mean, Herman's are a huge operation, and they made them up and he had a crew. Then I hired a fencing crew that strung all the wire, stretched it, and put the clips on and stapled the... I guess they didn't have to staple anything. They put the clips on the steel posts. Well, yeah, we did, because for line fence we used four steel posts and a creosote post.

Diana: Yeah, so did you take advantage of any of the hay that came in?

Denny: I didn't need to. Half of my ranch was unburned, and I had enough grass on the unburned part of the ranch because it was in March and I was just starting to buy all the stockers I was going to buy anyway.

Diana: So you just kind of postponed when you bought?

Denny: Well, I quit buying because I only had half the grass I thought it was going to have. But I was pretty lucky. I didn't lose any machinery, didn't lose any houses. Nobody got hurt. It burned within about 100 yards of my house, but it didn't burn it.

Diana: Let's talk about how your family has been involved in the community. Are you on boards or was your dad on boards? Don't you sit on a lot of stuff?

Denny: It was my dad and my mom. My dad was... I'm sure that he held every office that could be held at the First Presbyterian Church here in Ashland several times over, and my mom did too. Mom was a county commissioner. She was in P.E.O for I don't know, 70 years. She was in Civic Club in Minneola, Eastern Star in Minneola. She was on the Centennial Committee for the City of Minneola. I know my dad was involved too. They never had a swimming pool in Minneola; the City of Minneola refused to build one. So a bunch of the local farmers got together and raised enough money to build a swimming pool in Minneola. My dad loved to swim, so I know he got involved in that. And he flew gliders for a number of years and belonged to a flight club, a group of farmers in Minneola that owned airplanes. He belonged to the Masonic Lodge and the Shrine Club.

Diana: Was he one of the Shriner clowns?

Denny: Yeah, he loved doing it. He loved being a clown. Mom sewed him up a clown suit and he would march in all the parades. They had an antique fire truck, that they turned around at that point in time. Frank Reed built them a trailer, and they towed that thing around and they had a ball. They might have even had a drink or two while they were doing it.

Diana: What have you been involved in? Quite a few organizations to?

Denny: Yeah, I've been on the extension council, conservation board. I'm on the hospital board up at Minneola.

Diana: Are you on the museum board?

Denny: I'm on the museum board, I forgot that one.

Diana: Are you active in the church here?

Denny: Oh, yeah, I'm active in that. When I first came home, I joined the Methodist Church in Minneola because I had a boy in high school. He needed to get acquainted. And you know, I like the church. I didn't have a problem with that. It's just that when my parents got to where they couldn't drive anymore, I started driving them down to Ashland because that was their church. They weren't going anywhere else.

Denny: Then the people in there, I grew up going to church with them. So, we're trying to keep it going.

Diana: So how has your role in the community changed? Are you more active or less active? Are you active in both?

Denny: I'm more active now than I was when I first came back because I quit farming. When I turned 70, I talked to my boys and Kim and Debby talked to our nieces and nephews. Nobody wanted to come back to the ranch, so I basically hired a young man to be the ranch manager. I guess I still make the big decisions, but...

Diana: Is your ranch in a trust?

Denny: No, no. It was when my parents passed away, but right now it's incorporated and I own a third and each of my sisters own a third.

Diana: What's the smartest thing you ever did?

Denny: Smartest thing I ever did? Well, that's a hard question, I'd have to think about that for quite a while.

Diana: What would you change if you could?

Denny: What I'd change, if I could. I got divorced twice. I would change that.

Diana: So, it's kind of like the ranch is going kind of full circle from having a ranch manager early in the start of it and now going back to a ranch manager.

Denny: Well, I still live on the ranch. I'm actively involved in it, but, yeah, Kim and Debbie and I are unanimous that we don't want to sell. But after we're gone, there's going to be a lot of people involved in it.

Diana: So there's lots of nieces and nephews?

Denny: It would be our children. There's eight that will be inheriting the ranch.

Diana: Do they come visit?

Denny: Oh, yeah. We had them all out at the ranch for Christmas last year, thank goodness, because it sure wouldn't be happening this year.

Diana: No, it would not. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you'd like to add?

Denny: Well. I guess it's just been a privilege to grow up and manage that or be the steward of the Denton Ranch for a while. It's been a privilege and I feel real lucky.

Diana: Yes, so well, thank you for taking the time to let us interview you for this project.

Denny: I love to talk about the ranch, it was my pleasure.