**Roger Giles**

**Interviewer:** Today is January 16th, 2020, and we at the Ashland Library are speaking with Roger Giles of the Giles Ranch.

**Interviewer** What year did you graduate high school?

**Roger** 1966.

**Interviewer** Where do you live?

**Roger** I live in Liberty Township in Clark County.

**Interviewer** Now these questions are just a springboard. We're trying to find out as much as we can about how ranching has changed in Clark County since the 20s. And you said before that you came here in ‘47.

**Roger** Well, my father and grandfather, they bought the original ranch where I live. It was called the Eastman Ranch at that time. And they bought it in 1947 in the fall. I was born in the fall of 1948.

**Interviewer** Your family came from Ford County?

**Roger** Yes. They, my grandfather and father, never moved and (they) lived in Clark County. They lived in Bucklin, in Spearville in Ford County and in that area. How far back you want to go?

**Interviewer** Well, let's deal with your Clark County story, if you don't mind. So, you're the first generation that's lived in Clark County.

**Roger** Yes. On a permanent basis.

**Interviewer** Has your family always ranched or run cattle?

**Roger** Yes.

**Interviewer** Did you farm on the side?

**Roger** Yes.

**Interviewer** What types of crops did you raise?

**Roger** Well, mostly you were talking Clark County. OK, well, in Clark County, we've raised alfalfa, wheat, corn, soybeans. And milo, I guess we had milo for a while.

**Interviewer** Are you raising to farm or are you raising to feed animals?

**Roger** Feed animals mostly.

**Interviewer** What breed of cattle do you usually run?

**Roger Giles**

**Roger** We run... we bought our original cattle herd in 1952, Hereford cattle out of Colorado. And then starting in probably the 70s, we began the slow switch over to Angus. And then in the late 1980s, we switched to strictly using Angus bulls. We're strictly Angus at this point.

**Interviewer** What prompted this switch?

**Roger** Gardiners, basically. We'd bought bulls before from Henry, off and on, not strictly. And then Mark, when the EPD's come out and stuff after he got out of college, we sat down. We'd tried a lot of different cattle on heifers. You know, we did Longhorns, Jerseys, anything for calving these. And they went with EPD's and we visited with him extensively on that and we decided we would try it. And after about two years of that, we're pretty well sold on the EPD and the way to do that. So, we began to switch strictly. All the other breeds had failed to recognize it as quick as the Angus breed did. They were a good 10 years, 10 to 15 years behind them before they all kind of woke up, begin to look at EPD's.

**Interviewer** Tell us what EPD means.

**Roger** Expected Progeny Difference. It's a system I can't totally, really explain, better ask Mark. But basically, it allows you through information provided by breeders, commercial and seed stock breeders both, to be put in a database, which gives you an idea (this is just a rough idea) that the probability of calving ease, and different traits of the animal. This has been expanded from what it originally started from. But of course, our main goal then was the calving ease. It certainly worked there and it continues to as we've expanded things and what we look for now.

**Interviewer** What do you look for now?

**Roger** Mainly you look for a carcass, a lot of carcass value. You're trying to provide an animal that will be a great eating experience. Going back to when I got out of college in 1970. Basically, the per capita consumption of beef in the US begin a steady decline from the late 60s all the way to about the mid-90s, actually the late 90s. We were losing market. At first, they come out and they had tenderness tests. They had all kinds of tests about animals for an eating experience, because a person would go to a restaurant and he'd have a good eating experience, or he'd have a poor experience. So, there was no consistency. The hog and chicken people began all this even ahead of the cattle. So, we kept losing market share there, which at that time was mostly domestic US-type market. So that went on. It would take a full afternoon to go through that, but anyway, that's what the EPDs did. It allowed you to give a consistent product that could be proven. And when they began to come back with carcass data in the mid-90s, then I think that's when a group of ranchers formed the U.S. Premium Beef. Mark is on that, and my brother, he was on that original deal too, there's a board. And that's what they are trying to do, is find a market that they could do. By this time, we're into exports and National Beef was the fourth largest beef packer in the US at that time. Still, they are the fourth largest, but their kill compared to the two largest, it's like nothing. So they were always fighting for a position, you know, because they had to combat-- they had to bid against those people and develop their own markets.

**Interviewer** So you were worried about being able to sell in America as well as exporting outside?

**Roger** Well, we were originally losing market share until then, fairly rapidly. And then within a few years after U.S. Premium Beef started, it forced... Basically, for a while, they had, not a corner, but they had access to reliable cattle, especially for export, for high-end restaurant-type trade. So, what that did was force all the packers to come out with programs if you could furnish those cattle. Now, there was program cattle clear back in the 1960s, I went to school at TCU, and through a program, we toured through a good part of Texas, Kansas, and Oklahoma, and there were back in those days what they called "Sweetheart Deals" for different large packers.

They would furnish a commodity, cattle from an area. Back then, they knew that a certain set of cattle come out of this area, that on average, this is what would happen. If you had enough volume of those cattle you could make a little better deal with a packer to furnish these cattle on a consistent basis, but they still varied. But this here is what we went with: we knew the industry then at the time, you had to produce... From the 1960s up until then, everybody was after, "We got to get a product, cheaper, cheaper, cheaper to compete with it."

And then some acquired the lightbulb-come-on set of people, that, "No, let's produce a superior product that we can get more money for, something that somebody wants to eat." That's where the switch began to come in. And now we're on this. We're not trying to compete on a cheap basis necessarily with pork and chicken, we're giving you an eating experience and you get things out of beef that you can't get elsewhere in other meats. And so that's where we are and through the EPD with everything coming out now, all the genetic testing and stuff that they have now.

Now you can just constantly can make it better, just a lot more rapidly than you could before. By the time you knew you had a bull that could produce, he was dead. But time you had enough progeny from him to really figure out what was going on, he was really old. And so, a breeder back then, if they wanted to hold semen off of him, to produce, they would have a lot of semen drawn off a lot of critters and some of them just proved nothing. So, you were just out that money. This allows a lot better deal what you do.

**Interviewer** It's less of a gamble.

**Roger** Yeah. So, you had commodity cattle up until then. The Hereford breed, my family come in here trading Texas cattle in 1870s, not in Clark County, but in Pawnee County. They were based at a commission house in Kansas City. They'd come out of Illinois, so they went in and sold these cattle out, these were Longhorn cattle. That's what my great-grandfather traded. His dad and brother sent him out here to trade these cattle and that's what he did. And then after the blizzard of 1886, then (I've still got the letter), he wrote a letter back to his dad and brother. They were partnered, they had been buying land in Nebraska. I don't know what they were doing up there so late in the year but anyway, he wrote back and he said, "We can no longer operate the way we've been. We've had all these open winters and this year's proved that we've got to change our ways." And because he had, and again, this is a family story, but he had like 3,000 steers over-wintering up in Pawnee County and he lost every one of them. So then, he said, "I need blooded cattle." So, he went into the registered Galloway business. And we've still got all those papers he had from 1890 through the 1900s on that.

But anyway, they changed what they did because what was going on wasn't working. He saw they needed better cattle. So for years, people improved the Longhorn cattle through Galloway, Angus, Hereford crossing. Well, the Hereford breed, at that time, most of the

breeds back then, even Angus and Hereford, those were huge cattle. They could travel and stuff. Then somewhere in the 1930s, somebody came up with this idea where you want an animal that's all meat and no bone. Well, the old Ace Reid cartoons show a guy with a pry bar trying to him off a little pebble rock because he's high-centered.

So you had that, and that's what you had through the 30s, 40s, and early 50s. And then by the 60s, when I'd become more knowledgeable, then you began to search for things, that's when we went to the exotic crossing with the Simmental and the blah, blah, blah all down the line.

We tried it all, and every one of them had its traits, but you could never get away from calving difficulties. So anyway, at that time, Angus cattle when they first started were not real big cattle. There were small also because they were breeding that way, but they had, because of their pelvic tilt, they were easier calving cattle. We used to do pelvic measuring and tilt and all that when we selected heifers. Well, then you move on as you learn or whatever. But now, this is becoming much, much easier to do. But back then, in the early feeding days of the 60s and 70s, you were killing cattle in the feedyards at a thousand or eleven hundred pounds. Twelve hundred pounds was a big animal out of the feedyard back then. He was probably 20... a young one would be 20, 22 months of age, almost two years old by the time you killed that way. And now, what our program is at this time, and we're still looking, we start killing our cattle at 13 months of age all the way up to about 16 months of age. Those cattle weigh a thousand to eleven hundred pounds. Twelve hundred was a big one in those early days. And now, we are killing out at that age at fourteen to fifteen hundred pounds.

So this is the improvement made over that period of time and I don't know where the end in sight is on that.

**Interviewer** So it took 50 years to improve the breeding

**Roger** Well, I guess it'll be a better deal. The other thing that a lot of people don't understand is that I grew up on the tail end of shipping cattle by train and all that stuff. And through the 50s, we used to run a lot of cattle in the Flint Hills and they'd ship out of there, cattle weighing... And that was back when you still had somewhat bigger animals, there was two deals. The animals that won all the shows were the little squatty ones, but people who knew what cattle were about, did not have those cattle. So you get into this and that was the big fight when I was in college as well. How come all these cattle that do the show looking are pretty lousy cattle. But anyway, that's the deal.

So over time, you take an animal for what he's truly worth, but you had all these different directions everybody was going. When I was there, we bought... When I was young, in the nineteen thirties, early forties, my grandfather, he worked for Swift and Henry out of Garden City.

**Interviewer** Who were Swift and Henry?

**Roger** They were a big Packer Commission firm and they bought fat cattle and also arranged cattle pens and stuff. They had a commission firm. The country that he covered was eastern Colorado, northeastern Mexico, a little bit in western Oklahoma. But that that's where he traded for them. And they would go out there like to La Hunta a lot. And there's cattle pastures to the west of La Hunta, and they had big Santa Fe yards and the guys would drive cattle in.

At that time, in the 20s and 30s, you still had your trail drives down in northeastern Mexico and Colorado. They'd drive in there, the buyers would come out and they'd go make the cattle trade. Then you had to order your cars. Then you ordered your cars and when the cars come in, then the cattle would come in and you sorted and loaded them. Then you hauled them to Kansas City and it was your job to set them up and show them and sell them. Then you'd go right back out. My dad said there was times that he wouldn't see his dad for maybe 60 days because all he did was travel back and forth. And so anyway, that's how that all went back then, but they traded a lot of cattle. So when he began to break out on his own after the 30's, he had tons and tons of contacts out there and bought a lot of cattle straight. We were steer operators mostly back in those days. We really didn't switch clear over to cows until the 1990s, to more cows. And we were still running a lot of steers back through till 2000, I suppose, and then we went mostly to just a cow deal.

**Interviewer** Why?

**Roger** Because the steer deal back then was still a margin business. But from what we learned from early on there, from 2000, we still bought steers, but we were very selective on what we bought. More selective, we used to be pretty sure to only buy western calves and northern calves like out of Nebraska, pastured cattle. We've run country from Nebraska, Colorado, never been to Wyoming, and just a little bit in Texas and some in Oklahoma, but mostly Colorado, Nebraska.

**Interviewer** Why did you like northern cattle?

**Roger** The southern cattle, you had a lot more sickness on them. Our theory was if you bought the better animal, you'd pay a little more. But right from the start, with sickness, health and all that and gain ability even out in the country. We had a $35, $36 advantage over southern cattle. So, you could buy southern cattle cheap, but if you get a bad deal, you could lose a bunch them, of five, six percent death loss plus you did a lot of doctoring.

Everybody back in those days had their Bloody Mary Mix, which is another thing that we got rid of, is all the antibiotics. But they were cheap and that's just the way it worked when everybody wanted rid of that, because that was part of our problem. People breaking me off an animal or they would stand in the wrong place because of breed. There's a lot of trend. A lot of people began to say, "Well, that's their problem." But people finally realized, "I'm selling not to the packer, I'm selling beyond him." And that's where we are now. And that's why everything's so much better in that regard.

But that's kind of why I went all that way, as I see it, I guess. But when I was a kid, I told Addie the other day, when I started grade school, my grandfather still traveled a lot, buying cattle. He'd make a circle. If my grandmother could go, when I was in the fifth or sixth grade, he'd just come up and get me. We'd pull out on a Thursday or Friday and then make a swing on the cattle buying. I got to ride along and hear all the stories that they and all the guys that he'd been trading with. The people we used to pasture with, he'd set his deal up in the Flint Hills in the late 1930s and we worked with those same people for three generations. This generation back there now, they're running mostly their own deal, but we sent cattle back to them on a grazing deal. I know back in World War II, my dad had just got married and they went back to HAROLD TOLBEN?????. He was kind of a crippled up, older gentleman and they set their deal up for the summer. He said, "Well, we can do it, but I don't have any

cowboys. Everybody's got drafted." He said, "We don't have anybody to do it." So, my dad and mother then, they would go back once a month and ride the cattle and stay at the bunkhouse. They'd ride their own cattle back there on the deal, because that's just what you had to do back then, because all the guys had been drafted at that point. They did that two years. Let's see, what else do you want to know?

**Interviewer** Everything! Would you describe your land? What percentage is farm ground? Do you have deep canyons?

**Roger** We're on the northern part of Bluff Creek and it's fairly... The west side is really rugged and that's the Young Brothers Ranch, which, Nancy (Bryant), her family has. We've leased that since 1991 or '92. And then our ranch borders them on the east side, their east side. They bought the Eastman Ranch first in '47 and then in '52, they bought part of what was called the Potter Ranch, north of that. Then through my dad's lifetime, we now own the whole Potter Ranch. He said, "My goal in life is to put that back together." So, he did.

And then now we own what was the Degnan Ranch, the original Degnan Ranch up there in Clark County, we bought that in the late 1980s. So through the years, my dad put together what used to be about five different ranches. And that's the other thing, from back in the day, that would support a family back through there in the 70s, and by the 80s a lot of that, you couldn't do it. So a lot of that land, people moved out. Of course, like in the case of the Degnan family, they all got older, and they finally just went down to a generation that didn't want to do it. And then the Eastman Ranch, I'm not sure. They bought it originally from the old... I'll think of it in a minute.

But the Drake ranch, the Drake Ranch in northeast Clark County, it was east of us. He owned, he was an Englishman. This is back, now we're talking back in the 1800s, and anyway, he owned this ranch. And then he ran the country from there all the way to the river north of Bucklin. That's the country he used. One reason we know a lot about the history of that is, there was an older guy, he went to work for him, I think he said in 1900, he's dead now, he said his job was to build windmill towers and put them up. And he lived on that ranch for five years right where I live. From that, he learned the well trade and moved to Spearville. And that's what he did for a good part of his life, was work on windmills. So then he and dad did the windmill trade. Then he went to farm for us when he got older and couldn't do wells. I know on one deal, he and dad dug a well there and built a wood tower and put it up there. And would have been prior to the 1950s sometime. WHAT WAS THE WELLMAN's NAME???

**Interviewer** Was it there till the fire?

**Roger** No, it had come apart. Dad rebuilt it once, the wood part, and the he finally put up a steel tower. But that's kind of from back in there.

One of the deals, he was handling cattle when I was a kid in the 50s, early 60s. You have two ways when you gather cattle. You ride out real early and then ride back, you're always horseback. Then the other way, up in Ford County, you had to come back. We used a grain truck with stock racks on it. You'd load a horse by backing to a ditch. Up there, we run cattle on wheat for years, all the way into Holly, Colorado.

So we had some pretty big routes, at times. Of course, we didn't drive out to Holly in a day, but we farmed out west of Dodge in Ford County. Anyway, we just used a pickup with stockracks on and jumped in the back of the pickup.

I was telling the wife the other day, we had the old frame of that thing for years, but the first trailer we bought was the Hale Trailer, $750, and I thought we were going to go broke, according to my dad and granddad, for buying something that expensive. That was in 1970 something. Other than that, you rode it or put it in the back of the pickup.

**Interviewer** He didn't mind having to take stockracks in and out of the pickup, either though?

**Roger** We had one pickup that we just pretty much left them in. Dad had a deal we could add in the winter, it was a hood that fit up over the cab to keep the wind. And we had goggles for the horses, you'd fit it up over the eyes and then you'd goggle them so the wind wouldn't hit them in the eye. I still had that, until the fire.

**Interviewer** Things change.

**Roger** And then other big thing that changed, we fed bundle feed, which I suppose... Do you know what that is?

**Interviewer** Did you have to hand-bundle?

**Roger** We had a binder, the old binders, they took a nine foot swath. That's what they took and you went around. Really, they were developed to bind corn, Kaffir corn and shocking. You had a bundle that weighed from, say, eight pounds to fifteen pounds. And then you would shock feed in the fall of the year, you'd get two or three of them and you'd drag them and then you'd stick them into a shock of about 30 to 35 bundles. It was a lot of hand labor, but you could throw 150 of them on a pickup. You know, our own deal was in the winter, when it got cold, you fed half a bundle that day. Then if it got covered up, you'd feed two bundles a day. If you stayed covered up, you'd go to one bundle day. If you fed that, that was two bundles. And you had to get along on the ground. So that was kind of the deal.

**Interviewer** When did you go to bailing?

**Roger** Probably not till somewhere in the 70s. We were some of the last ones to bundle. That would probably be in the 70s, late 60s or early 70s. In the spring of 71, that was the year of the big blizzard.

I had just got out of college, I graduated in December of 70. And that Blizzard was coming in, and so they sent me from Ford County or from Belfont and down to my granddad’s. My granddad lived in Bucklin, so they said to go down there. We had the ranch where I live now, and then we also leased a ranch east of there in Kiowa County, and we had a man who lived on that ranch and we only had one four-wheel drive pickup and he had it over there. But anyway, when the blizzard hit, we were in town there and it blew for three days and 26 or 27 inches. But all our deep canyons were just level full. So my granddad, our phones weren't out. The electricity was out, at least in the country. So at that time, Seacat Feedyard was operating. Bob Seacat, and he bought a lot of his grain from Bucklin Grain and he made Bucklin Grain come down and he asked...

We tried to get our time too, but could only move north and south on the highway. So we're trying to find a way down there because we didn't have four wheel drive. So anyway, Bill Matson was his name, he came down to my grandfather, who said, "Well, if Roger will go with us and guide us in down the ridges. Because we can't get down there. We've got to go down off the top of blowing ridges." He said, "Then I'll get him down there to your cattle."

So we started out with four of us in an old Jeep and carried four scoop shovels. If we got stuck, we just dug out and we went down one ridge. There's kind of a long ridge that runs almost cleared to Seacats, if you know how to zigzag a little bit. So anyway, I had him take me to our south end, kind of in between ASHAN'S?????? now. They weren't there then. But we had an old W9 International tractor there and a big old four-wheel hay trailer. And that's where our hay was. So our plan was to get me into there, which is about two miles or three miles north of the Seacat Feedyard and then I'd get that tractor load of hay and start up through feeding.

Anyway, we got us down in there, we had to come off the ridge down into the bottom of the creek and the tractor was there, it had a snow drift over it. And it started right up. I still got that tractor.

So I said, "Yeah, I'm good." I went and hooked onto the trailer and he started up. It took him a while, it's about a mile back up to the ridge. So when I started out up through there, all of a sudden it just pegged out hot and I thought, "Oh, gosh, someone didn't put antifreeze in it!" Because I'd been in college all the time and I thought I froze up the deal. So anyway, I was down four miles south of the house. I thought I had to walk all the way. But old Bill, he got on top of the ridge and said "You know, I'd better look back one more time." And boy, I was sweating like that. So they come back down. Well, we went back and he took me back north then to above the house and I said, "Well, I'll walk in." Because you couldn't get his jeep down in there.

So I walked down in. Well, the old house down there we had at that time, we locked it. But the wind blew the key off down in the snow but finally, I got in. So our telephone still worked. That house, it didn't have electricity, but we had a Good Morning heater. It was just a four-room house. I've still got the house too, it survived the fire, but anyway, I called on the phone in to Bucklin to Granddad. He called the mechanic that we used there in town and described it. He said, "Well, it sounds to me like you're out of water, like somebody drained the whole system out of water. So it's like there's no water in it because the fanbelt wasn't stuck or anything." He said, "If it's still running, you're just out of water. Low on water or whatever."

So anyway, I called Bill Rich, who lived over on the Degnan Ranch at that time and asked him if he could get me some water over there. I didn't have a vehicle, so I saddled a horse and rode back down to do this. If I had went our normal way, which would have been out of the wind, but this was busting it. The horse starting out, it was just chest high. The snow was just too hard. So I turned around, went up, and got on top where it had blown off and then zigzagged my way down. And Bill, I met him over... So this was before cell phone stuff. So he had a 4020 John Deere tractor and he started to come in off that other road, but he finally got it in so deep in that he couldn't push any more with it. So then about the last oh, probably quarter to half a mile. We carried two five-gallon buckets. He helped me carry it to where the tractor was and then put it in.

It was getting on toward dusk then, and he wanted to get back home. He said, "You going to be all right?" I said, "Yeah." So that old tractor, I tied the horse on behind and loaded the hay and started back from the house. Well, again, the normal trails were packed, so you had to do it. I had fence pliers, so I just began to cut fences and stay on the ridges to get back up there. I'll always remember that. I don't know why I did it, but I saddled a colt. I decided if I had to kill something in the snow, I'll do that. And so anyway, it wasn't really a bright move because he wasn't all that old. So anyway, I got that horse. He never did lead good, but he did after that.

Anyway, I got back out there. Well, that night, you couldn't let the tractor run all night, we had to run it full of gas, it had a gas engine. So every night then, I'd have to get two five gallon buckets, drain all the water out of the radiator and the block and then take it in the house and set it to do it. Every morning, I'd pour it back in, go down the road and load the cattle hay. I had one set of cattle clear over west where it's really rough that we couldn't get to for about two or three days, when it began to break open. Then what I would do was on those was, if I got time, then I would take one saddle horse, I didn't have a pack saddle, but I'd load three sacks of cake on one horse and then you'd have to ride three or four miles to get over to them. They had running water and they would come up on top and then I'd cake them.

Well, then we had a guy from Oklahoma that had come quail hunting up here. He was an Air National Guard pilot. He called up and said, "Well, we're not supposed to cross the line, but you can't see the border." He said, "I know about where you are. If you'll spot me where to do it, I'll drop hay." It was small square bales. So anyway, I went there a lot of the time when he would be there and I rode over there. Well, he dropped the hay, all right. But most of it dropped in between the hills there and the cattle couldn't get to them. So then I carried two throw ropes, and then I'd set the horse on the side and then go get about two bales at a time and dally up and drag them back up. But by the time you got them cut and got the next two, they were pretty well ate up. I did that for three days and then Bill (Rich) was able to finally get up from his place and he helped them. He had silage, so he hauled them cows silage.

So that's what I did. And I was telling my daughters when they were young, telling this story, and they said, "What did you eat?" And I said, well, my granddad loved sardines, sardines in mustard sauce. He thought for some reason they was going to quit making them. He bought like three cases of sardines in mustard sauce, that and pork and beans. I ate that for about a week.

**Interviewer** Cold.

**Roger** Yeah. Well, actually, I could cook. I had like a pound or so of bacon and a dozen eggs there. So I could cook breakfast, but you had to cook it on that Warm Morning heater.

**Interviewer** Do you know what your losses were?

**Roger** Not really that bad. We had a set of cattle that we had on wheat. There's only like 25 of them, but they packed down a spot and they just stayed in that circle. It was probably five days by the time we get to them and we couldn't drive them out of that circle. They just would not leave. We even took a tractor and backed a track into it and tried to get them out on that track. Finally, we were able to push them behind that. We got them north there to some water, to the tank, and they all drank.

But those cattle, they never did well after that. They didn't die, but they just got messed up. I thought we'd lose a lot of baby calves, but we really didn't. Not as many as we did in '79, when we had two foot of snow on the level for about 45 days. It just snowed and it didn't blow. So a cow couldn't get to any grass, you had to feed her everything. We took a front-end loader trying to push it off, but even old cows had calves melt down into the ground and then they couldn't get them up. So every night, we had an old trailer house there by then, and with those cattle, we would bring as many baby calves in as we could by dark. We'd warm them up, put milk down them and then take them back out and try to pair them up the next morning. We had that one old farm truck, where we'd put the ones we picked up dead. We had 48 dead calves at the end of the snow on that pickup.

But you'd take that and you'd push it down so the calves would have a place to lay, we'd bed them down with old hay, but the cows ate everything you'd ever lay out. They'd be laying down nice and the calf would be standing out in the snow. There were a lot of frozen feet, frozen ears. It was a nasty winter, but that was the second time that old tractor saved me, because Cathy was pregnant with Jenny then and we were down feeding and I saw a cow out there and she was lying down. I thought she'd had a calf. And I went off into a sandbar and got stuck. We had 2-Ways (radios) at that time and we tried to get ahold of Seacats because we were just west of them. I couldn't get them, so I said, well, it's getting along toward dark and so I don't get any help. Well, I got to walk the two miles up to where that tractor was parked, but it was on the creek, so it was blowing snow. I walked up to there and got the old tractor started. By the time I got there, she'd got a hold of Bobby, and they sent a crew over and they had pulled her out already. So I learned I was being stupid. It's better the calf died than your wife and baby. So that's the story. Those are the stories and the things I kind of remember, every family's got those stories.

But like I say, the 40s were the pick-up years for agriculture, the 30s were tough. My grandfather, he farmed in Ford County. He also farmed a section of ground in Finney County, north of Garden. And he told me '31 or '32 was the last wheat crop he got off that place. It was rented ground, but he said he had a real good crop. But back then they didn't have many elevators. So when you sold your grain, then you ordered in a car and then you loaded it on a wagon, or I think he had a one-ton truck, but you scooped it off. It was all piled on the ground, so you'd scoop it on there and back up to the car and then you'd scoop it into the car, and then you'd scoop it to the backside of the car. Three to four times. He said, "I did that for twenty-five cents a bushel." And he said all of his equipment, in the 30s, it would start blowing and covering it up. He said, "I dug it out twice and finally gave up."

So that's a story, but that's not Clark County. I do have one story about Clark County, it's on land we have now. A guy that was there in the 30s, I always ask him on that because he lived on a ranch right next to it. And he and his wife was newly married, but he said in the 30s, this one pasture we call the Potter Pasture (that's first one we bought on that Potter Ranch) on the side of it there was all these big gouge outs in the land, you know, like somebody coming in a planted it and it blew. He said, well, actually, it was never farmed. It blew because the grass was gone. He said what they'd done, the grass all died out. Well, then the cactus came. He said that pasture was just solid cactus. So the government, in their wisdom at that time, paid him so much a load to cut the cactus out and throw it in a wagon and throw it in a pile and burn it.

**Interviewer** By hand?

**Roger** Shovel, you chop it off. And their idea was that the grass would come. But he said one thing he learned from watching that was that there is always a little grass around that cactus that cattle couldn't eat. He said as soon as he chopped that cactus out of there, then it was gone. He said that's when it started blowing. And he said he always thought they were wrong, but back in the 30s, you did what you were paid to do. My grandad said back in there they had those deals where they'd buy your cattle and then you dig a hole, shoot them and push them in.

**Interviewer** Did your grandfather have to shoot?

**Roger** He did some, not too bad. He was... I always remember in Bellefont one time at the elevator, one young guy, I mean he was older than me, but he come in whining about the price of cattle and what he was going to do. My granddad answered, "Are you broke it?" "Well, no." "If you haven't been broke at least twice, you're not working." He'd went broke when he was about 25. He said, "If you're not doing that, then you're not trying hard enough."

**Interviewer** The trick is not staying broke.

**Roger** Yeah. He said, "There's nothing wrong." He told me the first time he went broke was in WWI. He said he was up there and his brother and him were raised on a ranch in Ness County and his brother got called into the service. He left him there, and he got married while he's up there and had a baby. But long story short, he broke sod to make eating money for people at that time with Jeanne. He got two bucks an acre and it would take him all winter to break a half-section out. And he took in cattle and horses for Brumbines who lived up there, there's big ranches up there.

They didn't have money to buy cattle. They come out during WWII, the bank there and they told him, "You buy the cattle. We need beef for the war." And he said, "I've got no money and I've got no collateral." They said, "We'll loan you 100%." I think it was only three or four percent, or something like that. It wasn't bad, so he bought the cattle. But back then you'd buy calves, then run them two years and then you'd sell them. Well, by the time he sold them, the war was over. While they was there, they got the scabies. So he had to build a dipping vat to dip cattle and then that horse deal. They would take in horses for the winter, and then in the spring they help that ranch's cowboys. They start horses for them but anyway, long story short, he went broke. He said, "What I had was a used saddle that I bought in 1915." (I've still got that. He bought it used when he went out there.) And then he said, "When I got done, I had a wife, a baby, a Model T Ford, two saddle horses and my saddle. They said they'd let me keep the wife and baby and my saddle and took everything else." But he said his brother-in-law had this place in Ford County and he was a lawyer in Fort Worth. He said, "Well, the man I've got on the place farming it, he's got his own land and he's moving off. So I got all the equipment. You come down here and we'll start you out again." So he moved down there and started out again.

**Interviewer** Still had his saddle?

**Roger** Yes, a saddle, his wife and baby. He said the only pleasure he got out of it was the banker let him drive the car down to get there. The banker rode with him (to drive the car back) and then he said halfway back he knocked the rods out of that car and had to walk ten miles to get home. Found that out later.

**Interviewer** No good deed goes unpunished.

**Roger** Yeah. But those are side stories.

**Interviewer** Did you have to hire outside help or were you able to just work family?

**Roger** We worked both, through the years. This is back before Clark again, but they worked two or three or four young men and they had a bunk house up there. My mother cooked three meals a day, did all their laundry and everything. That's what they did back in the 40s, late 40s, early 50s. And then when we grew, our ranch size grew, I think one time we had five or six hired men. And then now, right now, we got basically one part-time man now and three girls and one son-in-law. We don't run near the cattle we run back then.

**Interviewer** So three girls and a part-time man and one son-in-law, so four and a half. And you.

**Roger** For what I'm worth.

**Interviewer** In your current farming operation, how much is farming part of what you do now? I know from the fire stories that wheat pasture saved...

**Roger** Yeah. The ranch has twenty-two or twenty-three hundred acres of farm ground on it. Some of it's irrigated, but not a lot. Most of it's not what you'd call really good farm ground. It's shallow soil, sandy. You can drive a hundred feet and hit three soil types. It's not it's not a crop-raising deal, but it's great for pasture if you get in early and everything. We come from what they called "summer fallow" country in Ford County. Deep soils and you see a lot of water holes up there. You do not have that here, it's kind of whatever falls is what you live on, but it's great on wheat. You never run into any mud problems. Almost all of our ground is planted to wheat every fall, wheat and triticale and then grazed out. We usually graze out half of it at least and then cut some. Grain is a by-product for us, we'll cut some.

**Interviewer** Do you circle irrigate?

**Roger** Yes.

**Interviewer** Do you cut your own wheat or do you hire a crew?

**Roger** We hire a crew. We quit in '86 or '88.

**Interviewer** You were saying several things about how you think ranching has changed in the last hundred years. The fact that now you have a horse trailer instead of stock racks. Other things, do you use four wheelers?

**Roger** Not for cattle, other than when we're calving, maybe, but we don't handle cattle with four wheelers.

**Interviewer** What major changes in cattle handling do you think have come along?

**Roger** For us, I don't get much has changed. My grandfather and the way I was brought up and Dad, there was "Let cattle do what you wanted to rather than make them." That was their philosophy. You let cattle, you show them the way. Now we're probably a little gentler than we used to be, but part of the deal back then was wild cattle, especially off western ranches. When I was... it would have been in '62 or so, somewhere in there, ‘62 or ‘63, I was probably 15 or 16, and they bought a bunch of cattle out of New Mexico and Albuquerque, off the desert. Well, they took one end of them and we leased country in eastern Colorado. And that was the last major... They sent them by rail. They still had rail service in where they was going. What come up here was a by truck. So anyway, they called down and Dad said, "Do you want to send these cattle up here?" These were little 38 to 40-foot pots back then. They could still get in there where I live.

He said, "Take them in there and unload them and then I'll be home the next day and I'll start working on them." Anyway, Ray couldn't get in there, but we could get to the north end of the ranch. I said, "Ray, I don't think you can get those trucks in there." And he said, "Well, get a portable loading chute and put it against the fence there." We had a trap, about a 200-acre trap there. And he said, "We'll just jump them out in there, they're all carrying this guy's brand down here and we'll get them out next morning."

Well, I dumped 300 or 400 out in there and the next morning, there were three left in it. They didn't know what a fence was, and I should have known because when my grandfather went down to look at them, I went with him. This old boy, his shipping trap was 4,000 acres. We went out on this hill and didn't see any cattle, he said, "Oh, the boys will bring them by in a minute." And here they come by the with three riders and they come back in a dead run in the dirt. He said, "You want to look at them again, I'll have them turn them around." And so anyway, he traded a lot of cattle, he was very good. He said, "No, I've seen what I've wanted to see.” So they made trade, then they had to go back to get them and line up. That's how that all come about. But anyway, on this deal, when they finally made a trade, they sent (these were calves they sent.) This is off that big desert country and they have cattle that they missed over time. So we got some that were probably three to four year olds that he threw it for nothing.

**Interviewer** How kind of him.

**Roger** That was a big mistake and that's when you don't take free cattle, there's a problem here. And so, anyway, I love 'em when they have horns like that and they were basically wild animals. We went together and we finally, on those cattle, we tried to let them mix with our own cows. We tried to bring them in and we got some that way. But there were about six or eight of these really wild cattle, even when the calves were young, they would go out and you'd try to gather them and they would run away from you. And if they saw a big clump of weeds or a great tall grass, they would lay down like coyote and try to hide.

When they got up, we finally started carrying two or three ropes. We'd tie them to a tree and we had trailers come along behind with pickups and stuff to load them in. And anyway, you'd rope them and tie them to a tree. But some of them, as soon as the rope set on them, they'd hit the brakes and they come right at you and you'd have to trip them. I don't know if you've ever done that, or seen that done, but one, I know I laid him out like three times before he'd stay down. You'd just throw them in air and knock the air out of them. It's not a thing they probably want you to do today.

That deal with the wild cattle, I know that we had one old steer that was really big and we never could catch him. He kind of stayed in this one, two or three section area. But if you'd speed up, he'd speed up, if you'd slow down. And he just had stamina and stuff. Finally, he got located up by my house. We have a really steep canyon deal with brush in it and Dad said, "I'm going to get him." He had a really fast horse and so he said, "You swing down below." And he said, "I've got it figured out. If you crash up through that brush and make noise, he's going to come out about right here and I'm going to catch him." Anyway, I did that and I thought, "This is going to be good." I could hear that steer crashing through the brush like he had horns. He couldn't go fast through there. That's what Dad was counting on. Well, I got off on the side where I could see what was going to happen and the steer come out right where Dad said he would, but right ahead of him was a bobcat that run under Dad's horse and squealed. Dad's horse went to bucking and he lost his rope.

He never did catch him. So that steer got away. The steer, all summer long we'd try to catch him and never could. I was telling these two guys in Dodge about him one day, and they said, "We'll send some guys down that can catch him." So they come down and they had two guys. They basically two-timed him; one would lope him in a circle and then another would come and lope him in a circle. They got him wore down to where they could get up on him with a rope. They hit him twice with tranquilizer gun and he began to slow more. This one guy thought, "Oh, I can get him now." So he roped him. It was the same deal as with those other cattle. As soon as that rope settle on him, that old steer just stopped and turned around and took into the horse. He was just running with the old steer just butting the horse in the butt and he was yelling, "Help, help, help!".

They finally got another rope on him and we got him tied down in a trailer. They had Hale trailers back then, and like I say, we were the last ones to get one. But anyway, they tied him down and took him to Winters Feedyard. They put him in the old Santa Fe yards, which are huge, I mean real heavy timber. And that steer would set in the middle of the pen, and anybody would walk by and he would just hit that thing as hard as he could and just splinter stuff.

Finally, Jack called Dad and said, "I'm not letting him out of there. Nothing will hold him. We're going to put him down right there." We got back ahold of Jack and somebody shot him and butchered him. I imagine the meat wasn't too whippy, but anyway.

**Interviewer** At least he made good hamburger.

**Roger** But it was quite a rodeo. Dad said, "Well, that's a good lesson on free cattle when they want to give you something."

But that going back to, like I say, our family came in with the Texas trail that come out of Illinois, they bought the Texas cattle trading and they did that. And then they came out and they went to, my great-grandfather, at the time, called blood cattle, which are Galloways, is what the breed is called. At one time in the early 1900s, he was the largest Galloway breeder in Kansas. Which doesn't say a whole lot, but everything...

**Interviewer** I thought Galloway's were Scottish, long-haired.

**Roger** They are, but they had already brought them into Illinois up there. They look a lot like a long-haired Angus and we've got a picture he had that was took in the late 1890s out in the

stockyards in Kansas City. He was selling these cattle and it showed the line up there. They looked just like Angus cattle.

But we had that photo dated, Dad took it but they said they couldn't find a date on the photo so they weren't sure. And he said, well, we took it to a guy who wrote a story on photographs. And he said that back then, photographers would put their own shadow of the camera or themselves in there, the shadow through all over. And he said they quit doing that in 1890 or '96 or '98, somewhere in there. But prior to that, that's what they did. It had to have been somewhere in there.

**Interviewer** So that's how you dated it.

**Roger** That's not an exact date. But we also know that he lived in Burdette and they have advertisements for Burdette, that's when the rails come through and part of that is called Brown's Grove. So it's when they switched from Brown's Grove to Burdette; I'm not sure what year that was.

Well, then my grandfather, after WWI, he just worked for Swift and Henry and farmed there at Ford County. Then somewhere in the thirties, he started buying his own cattle and putting them back in the Flint Hills. And that's where we started, basically, we were margin operators. We'd buy calves and sell them on a margin. Well, that worked pretty good, but he would trade cows and whatever. But in the 40s and WWII, there was a terrific demand for beef. So that back then, my dad said it wasn't a matter of whether you'd make money, it was a matter of, "Can you get them?" Because everybody was making a ton of money through the 40s on cattle. He said it's a matter of just getting ahold of them, because everybody was after them. I know one time we run up and down the railroad lines there from... Well, like he drove in and out of Sitka clear back through the early 50s or mid 50s on rail. They'd drive from the ranch down there and they'd load them out.

I don't think he ever drove in from Ashland. I guess Ashland had yards, but there was big stockyards Sitka, and then all the way from, I think, Kinsley all the way to Syracuse. He said he'd drove cattle in and out of all them railroad pens at some time or other. When I was a little kid once at Spearville, you never knew when the train would come in, so you had to sit there and they'd spot the cars for you and then you could unload and then everybody knew how to operate the brakes so they'd set. Sometimes you only had one spot, but most of the time you had two, if you were loading and unloading. Some places had a tractor, sometimes you just used a pickup. You'd take the brake off and then creep it forward. We'd just sit there and they'd build a fire, put on the coffee and sit and wait for the train to come in.

Then at daylight we'd drive out of there. I never got in on any of that part, I was too young then. But I'd go along and sit and watch.

**Interviewer** That's quite a change to your modern operation because you're working women now. OK. The difference in the, let's say the physical demands. I expect you have a lot better alleys now, and your chutes are probably wonderful.

**Roger** Yeah, a lot better than what we used to have. As far as working women, though, my mother, when she and Dad got married in the early 40's. In the 30's in Ford County, she would have been 10 or 11, in there, she was born in '23. She was born and raised at Wright and her job was... Her dad farmed and they had a little pasture and milk cows. Her job,

every day, was to herd cattle up and down the road ditches. That's what she did all day long. So she rode through all that. Then when they first got married, like I say, they'd go down there and ride pastures together. And then she did a lot of riding back then until she got too many kids. I'll always remember her story. We had a neighbor up there, Old Roy, he was pretty much a chauvinist. You know, a woman's place was in... and so he always frowned on her and always made comments to her because she was always out riding and working alongside Dad. They had the wheat cattle there and they were picking the fence up and they drove the cattle and then they were picking up these metal stock tanks and putting them on the pickup. So he handed his horse to Mother. Anyway, a long story short, when he threw the tank over, it banged like that and her horse jumped. I don't know whether she was holding him or on him, but she was bucked off.

Old Roy, come over and helped her up. He said, "By God, woman, if you'd do what you're supposed to do you wouldn't get hurt like this."

She said, "I never did like that old devil."

But he said she wouldn't have gotten hurt if she'd been where she should have been at home. So that's a story from back then. But my older sister and I, from the day you could move, you were with them all the time. I don't remember, there's seven in our family, so after she got so many kids, it got less and less times she could wrangle. But through feeding cattle, moving, everything. We were always drug along, sorting and whatever. You'd just go sit over there, you know. You entertained yourself. I remember my granddad, one time, I got a picture of it. He bought us each a buggy whip. He always rode with a buggy whip because he did all that sorting. So when he was just riding or whatever, he always had a buggy whip. We'd stand there with our buggy whips just waiting to do something.

Anyway, that's what we did. Back then, you just worked. The attitude back then of most of the people was... I tell you, one of the best deals to sum up that life is Jim Arnold, when he got that award at Dodge City. Yeah, I liked that. That speech summed up my dad and all that era of people that I knew. He said, "I don't know if I made a lot of money, but I had a hell of a lot of fun."

They were a generation that liked what they did, and that's the difference I see now in young people coming in. They're more business-oriented, you know. And not that that's bad, but these guys started with nothing and figured it out as they went. But no matter what you did, you enjoyed it, whether you were making money or not making money. I mean, you enjoyed what you did.

Like my dad said, I asked him, “Well, why don't you get a hobby?" He said, "What do I want a hobby for?" He said, "If you like what you do, you're having fun every day. So what do you want with a hobby?"

To me, Jim Arnold summed up in as few words as you can, what that generation... Their work was their hobby. Their life was everything. That's why all these people, they had stories and made fun of each other and they picked on each other. You know, they'd do all kinds of things, but they enjoyed it. They just never thought of... like my granddad said when he went broke, "I looked around and at first I felt bad." But he said, "There's older guys who have been in business for years going broke too. So I'm not..." So he just, like my dad said,

"If I die rich or poor will depend on the price of cattle." And he said, "If you owe the bank enough, they can't shut you down."

**Interviewer** How much is enough?

**Roger** I don't know. But George, those guys' philosophy was just that, you get into that era of people, back through my grands and that era of people, it was a... They wanted to make something, to do something with themselves. And then in my era, we got into a little bit of, well, "We got all this. We don't wanna lose it." And then you begin to make, not bad decisions, but maybe more conservative decisions. Then it's not only business, but it's a life style, a life of living. And I don't see...

Oh, I'd say we had wild cattle back then. I don't know if my daughters would know what to do with wild cattle. I mean, now they get one a little snorty, and they don't like it and "Let's get rid of that one." If they knock you down more than once they go to market with it.

But I think when you're young, you do a lot of things you shouldn't do. You hook on to one you wish you wouldn't have. But I survived most of it.