Paul Harden

Paul Harden's family came to Clark County in 1884. He lives northeast of Ashland in the Lexington area.

Diana: What were your family's names?

Paul: There was Nathan Harden and he had several children. The oldest one was Charles Harden. I think he was 17 at the time and then, when he turned 18, he was also able to prove up a quarter.

Diana: So where did they come to in Clark County?

Paul: The north half of Section 22 of 31 south and 21 west. One quarter where Fritz Blau lived in Lexington and the other one was the quarter directly to the east of that that's now part of the Shattuck Ranch.

Diana: And where did they come from?

Paul: They came from Iowa. They had been there several years prior to that. They came from Terre Haute, Indiana. One of my cousins, did some research and actually met and visited with some distant relatives that were still there at the time. He actually found the gravestone of our great-great-grandfather, Nathan Harden, who was the father of Nathan Harden, who brought his family to Clark County. His grave is south of Terre Haute.

Diana: Do you know why they came to Clark County?

Paul: We don't know for certain. We believe, just seeing the ground that he bought and some other ground he bought later, that he was probably more of a cattleman than he was a farmer, because he ended up with a lot of grass and broke out some ground that probably never should have been broken out.

Diana: So how did they get here?

Paul: The story we've been told is that they rode the train to Kinsley. Now, it may not have been all of his children, but at least he and Charles rode the train to Kinsley, got off and walked southwest. I guess when they came over the ridge, they liked what they saw, and that's where they proved it up.

Diana: Did they build a house or have a dugout?

Paul: We do not know the answer to that for certain. We do know that both Nathan and Charles were carpenters. In fact, Charles built the house that my dad was born in, I grew up in, and my brother Jim now lives in. That was built in 1908 by Charles. But Nathan, his father, was also a carpenter. Our understanding is that they came in the fall of the year and that would have been a little tough. So, we do not know for sure how they spent the first winter.

Diana: So there was a community there when they came?

Paul: That's when other people came also, in '84 and '85 and '86, so we do not know how many other people were there, but the community soon developed after that.

Diana: So possibly, because they were carpenters, they helped build a lot of Lexington, then.

Paul: That's possible. We do not know the answer to that either.

Diana: Was there a school on their property?

Paul: No, there was not. There was one to the north, about a mile and a half.

Diana: Do you know what it was called? Was it the Coyote School?

Paul: No, the Coyote School was further west on Bluff Creek, or just to the south of Bluff Creek. It's in the Lexington book that was written by John Franklin Vallentine. I think it was the U-2 School that it was called, but I'm not certain. It was actually built on the northeast corner of the northeast quarter of section 16 of 315-21W. The reason I know that is, I bought that quarter soon after we were married. There were some rocks and all that were there and had been farmed through, but you know that's where the foundation was.

Diana: So you think possibly that your grandfather... Is it grandfather or great-grandfather?

Paul: My great-grandfather was 18.

Diana: And would they have been more ranchers or farmers?

Paul: They both broke out their ground, so they would have been farmers, but there is information in that Lexington book. There used to be a paper that was called the Lexington Leader, and the publisher of that went through the neighborhood to different people's farms and ranches and described them. And from what I remember of that story, they had, I believe, hogs, cattle, and horses. So they had a little bit of everything, which seemed to be quite normal for most people then. You needed a little of everything because there wasn't a store half a mile down the road.

Diana: That's true. So, they were homesteaders. Where did they have to go to prove up on their land? Do you know?

Paul: I'm assuming... Clark County had started then, so I don't know if they had to come up to Ashland. There's a number of questions like that I wish I had asked my grandfather. He might have known the answer to a lot of those.

Diana: There were several land companies in Ashland that had moved from Dodge City down here and from Cash City, so it's possible that they came to Ashland to do that. So, describe the land that they first settled on.

Paul: There were two quarters, because the oldest son turned 18, so he was able to also get a quarter of ground. It now is terraced. I think part of it's actually been put back to grass now and it was probably not as good of ground as what his father got to the west.

Diana: It was basically just native grasses?

Paul: It all would have been, and they would have broke out part of it to farm it. How much they did, I never heard.

Diana: Did they have a creek?

Paul: They had one nearby just to the west, and to the south was Lone Tree Creek, and back then it was named that because it had one tree on the entire creek. Of course, now there's thousands and thousands along there. My grandfather one time pointed out to me where that tree was at and it's ground that Mick Sharp now owns, that used to be owned by Eric Strodtman.

Diana: Did they plant trees?

Paul: Actually, my Great-Great Grandfather Nathan did, having come from the east. It was quite barren out here from everything that we've heard, and he sent off for cottonwood slips (I think they were called). They were brought in and he planted them. Those were the ones that were removed by the county about 15 to 20 years ago along the east side of 29 road. But he had planted cottonwoods along part of his and then he had a relative by the name of McDonald right to the south that also planted cottonwoods along his west side, along the edge of the trail. When you call it a "road", obviously nothing was improved. It was just a trail.

Diana: Do you know how they farmed their fields back then? Did they use horses or mules or oxen?

Paul: From what I remember my grandfather saying, I believe it was all horses. They were in the barn where my brother Jim now lives, where I grew up. It was built-in 1907, by Charles Harden, and there are names still put up above on pieces of metal of horses that my dad remembers from when he was a kid that my grandfather farmed with.

Diana: Were they a certain breed?

Paul: I do not know that. Yes, they were work horses. They had both work horses and cattle horses, probably quarter horses or something like that. I don't know for certain what but some sort of draft horse.

Diana: But your dad remembers horses, not mules.

Paul: Correct.

Diana: How did their land grow? I mean, did they purchase land? Did they homestead on more land?

Paul: Well, our understanding is that both Nathan and Charles had their quarter of land. In 1892, there was a recession and a lot of people in Clark County and across the nation, I believe, a lot of them lost their land. Our relatives, the same thing happened to them. So

Nathan, the father, decided to move down to Oklahoma. But his son Charles had a family by this time. By that time, all four of his children would have been born, and so he started over and went to the south, where the current homestead is on section four of 325-21W, and then he bought ground further to the south and continued buying some further south. I do not know when he bought some other ground, but Charles, in less than 20 years he had bought four farms that he was able to put his four children on. They were evidently paid for in that 20 years stretch from roughly 1900 to... Well, my, grandfather got married in 1919 and he moved on to one of those farms.

Diana: Were they close to each other?

Paul: No. Chet Bratcher now lives on one and he is related to me through our great-grandfather. It's my great-grandfather. I think for him, he has to add two more greats. Then there was another farm that a daughter was put on, and then I think her family sold that. But all of those were further south over the ridge and over towards Protection.

Diana: The Bratcher place is northeast of Sitka?

Paul: That's correct. It's still in Clark County and then... I knew I should have written some names down, I was thinking who now owns where the daughter lived. Her name was Laura Harden and she married a Gilchrist and lived close to the cemetery in Protection. There was another farm there.

Diana: He did really branch out!

Paul: Absolutely yes. My grandfather was born in 1897 and somewhere around there is where we believe that Charles, his dad, began buying land. Obviously, farming was very lucrative for about 20 years.

Diana: Do you know what kind of crops he grew?

Paul: From hearing my dad talk and a little bit from my grandfather, they did plant wheat. They also planted something when my dad was a kid that was called kaffir corn. Dad said that it grew fairly tall and it had grain on top of it. They would harvest that with a binder and they would bind it into bundles. Then they would come along and, I'm guessing, they probably shocked it then. At some point, they would take and cut the tops off. Dad said that they would cut them off and then those would be threshed so they would have the grain for the cattle and horses. The rest of the plant they could use just like we use hay and feed it that way.

Diana: How did they harvest or did they have a tractor by then?

Paul: My grandfather was one of the early ones to get a tractor. His brother was actually a dealer for Allis Chalmers in Protection, and so I think he had Allis Chalmers and I'm not sure what other types. But evidently, they were fairly early users of tractors. But like I said, Dad still remembers horses and I think if they planted some sort of row crop, I don't know if they were still trying to plant corn then, but Dad said they would use the horses to cultivate, to pull the cultivator down the rows, because the tractors weren't necessarily designed to do that.

Diana: Was planting done with the horses?

Paul: I do not know the answer to that. Obviously, early on, it definitely was. But how long they continued to use horses to plant and finally switched, I don't know the answer to that.

Diana: I know my grandpa used mules for a long time, and then he had a Caterpillar tractor.

Paul: With the tracks.

Diana: Did they also raise cattle during this time?

Paul: Yes.

Diana: What breed of cattle?

Paul: From what my dad has said, he used to tell a story about riding on a wagon pulled by horses with his grandfather, who would be Charles, down across the creek and up the hills. They had a field of 40 acres up there that they would plant to feed.

He said that his grandfather had a leather coat. Dad said that as a kid, he could barely lift it, it was that heavy. His grandfather would take that coat off, hang it on the pole in the middle of the wagon, and then he would start forking bundles of cane hay on to the wagon. He would just talk to the horses and they would pull up. They were trained, so they would go and stop when he wanted them to stop. When they got the wagon full, Dad said his grandfather would reach back down in and pull the coat off. I guess when he started getting cool, he would put the coat back on and they would go down on the creek. They evidently had Hereford cattle, because Dad talked about cows with horns. That would have been in the 20s.

Diana: Do you think they had a large herd? Was it cow/calf?

Paul: It was cow/calf then. By the time we came along, my dad was running stockers and never did have a cow herd, at least that that I was aware of. But yes, my great-grandfather, and then my grandfather, had the cow herd.

Diana: Would they have cattle to begin that, or would they have mainly raised their calves and kept them?

Paul: I have no idea.

Diana: On the stockers, did your dad go to the sale barn?

Paul: Yes, when he started doing that, I remember as a little kid coming into Ashland. I think it was Raymond Broadie that had the sale barn, and Dad would buy cattle there. One of the Kirks, I think it was Harold Kirk that used to be the auctioneer down there when he was young. Then I remember going with dad sometimes to McKinley-Winter in Dodge City. It is now Winter Livestock.

Diana: Did he ever use a cattle broker?

Paul: Lots of times. As years went on, he used Neil George and bought a lot of cattle that came out of Kentucky and Tennessee through Neil George.

Diana: When he got those cattle, what did he have to do? Vaccinate? Brand?

Paul: When I was a kid, I don't remember that they used any vaccinations then, but soon after, they started using some. My dad used to talk about a medicine that they called Booger Red, that if you got a sick calf, you'd just give him a shot of that. All they needed was one shot and they got over it. Well, Booger Red turned out to be Terramycin, and by the time I and my brothers were running cattle, Terramycin was about as effective as giving them a shot of water because they'd gotten immune to that. Then Penicillin, when they started using that for cattle, was very effective too. And then that also wore off. That has happened down through the years, things that worked in the '80s they don't even use anymore.

Diana: Do you remember if he had a large death rate when he bought cattle out of Kentucky?

Paul: Sometimes very little, and then every once in a while, you'd have a wreck.

Diana: When did he usually buy his stockers, in the spring?

Paul: Both. Dad would run cattle on wheat pasture so he would buy them in the fall of the year for that and then cattle for his grass in the summer. He would buy those in the spring of the year. So my brothers and I, we ran a lot of cattle through the facility.

Diana: Did he keep them for just a certain amount of time? What weight did he like to get them to before he sold them?

Paul: The market determined that a little bit. If the market was good, you might go ahead and sell them, and the groceries would also determine that. If you had a wet winter and spring, you had lots of lots of wheat pasture and then a lot of grass.

Diana: Did he also supplement wheat pasture?

Paul: He would put cane hay out to help with bloat and to have them used to where to go to in case of a snowstorm. On grass, my dad was a very early adopter of giving protein, on grass and late in the summer, as the protein level on the grass got lower, he would give the cattle a lot of cake.

Diana: Did he have a certain number that he liked to run? How much pasture did he have available?

Paul: Well, that varied greatly. There was a time he and his older brother Duane were partners. While they were partners, they leased all of George Perry's grass. George Perry was a grandfather of Jim Harper and Dad leased a lot of farm ground also from George Perry. Well, there was ground on the Mount Jesus Road that Dad leased back then and in later years I leased it from George Perry before he passed away. I would guess Dad probably had at least 2,500 acres of grass all together, what he leased from his dad and from George Perry. But I remember in the wintertime, Dad usually ran around 2,000 head of stockers because he had

quite a bit of wheat ground. That was usually a good way to make some money. At least you had the opportunity to make some.

Diana: That's true. When he sold them, did he sell them to a feed yard or did he sell them at the sale?

Paul: Most of the time... he may have sold some through the sale barn when I was real little. I do not remember that, but I know as I got older, he would sell them through Neil George, who he bought them through. Neil would get a cattle buyer, usually out of Dodge City, to come and look at them and usually he would sell them that way.

Diana: He had them in several different locations. How did he go check him? Did he use a horse or did he use a pickup?

Paul: Checking them, he would use a pick up because that was fast. If it was wheat pasture... He was one of the first guys that I ever knew of that had a DewEze bale bed. That's an old one, and it's still sitting in the pasture north of my house. He was an early adopter of the round bales right after they came out.

Diana: When would that have been?

Paul: I'm going to say approximately '71 or '72, probably around 1972, because my brothers and I would load small square bales when we'd come home from school in the fall and we'd put 110 bales on a bobtail truck. Dad would then take it the next day and he would go feed with that. Once he got the round bales, then... But I was in college when that happened, but then he would feed that way.

Diana: Did he have somebody help him feed?

Paul: At times, when we were kids. When we were little, my dad almost always had a hired man. Dennis Brown from Protection, I think, worked for him for a while. Jim Rollins. I keep finding people around here that had worked for him for a while.

Then when he had four strapping young boys, he no longer had a hired man. He no longer paid a hired man, I'll put it that way, but we had compensation in other wonderful ways.

Diana: When did he start bringing you into the operation? When did you start doing chores?

Paul: As soon as we were old enough. I remember going with Mike, if we were gone until after dark, we had to go get the milk cows in. That was west of the barn and you'd take a flashlight out there that you hoped did not quit on you.

Diana: So how many milk cows did you have?

Paul: I just remember two.

Diana: Did you milk twice a day?

Paul: I do not remember milking them the second time of the day. I remember when Mike

was gone, Jim and Phil and I would take turns so you'd get one morning off and then two mornings you would milk, and that was before school. So, we had to go down, and one cow was very easy to milk and the other was a pain in several ways.

Diana: How early did you have to do that? What time did you have to get on the bus to go to school?

Paul: Well, school was just before eight o'clock and we were on the bus, normally either side of an hour, so we were probably up at a quarter till six to go get the milking done. Then you were almost guaranteed to smell like a cow, and you didn't want to go to school smelling like a cow, so you would have to get cleaned up after that.

Diana: When did you guys start driving the school instead of riding the bus?

Paul: Mike was the first one, and there's (to me) kind of a humorous story there. Dad bought Mike's car, it was 57 Chevy. Mike was four years older than me, so when he graduated from high school, that next year I was a freshman. The seniors would ask me, "Do you drive like your brother does?" And I was clueless to what they were talking about. But they used to have drag races down south of Ashland on the River Road and I guess Mike would just... his car would blow everybody else's away. So, my dad learned something from that, when he bought for my sister and then me and then Phil. We all got to drive a Plymouth Valiant with a slant six engine and a push-button drive. So Mike's car would run. Ours, that Plymouth, if you put your foot in it, it would kind of go, "What?" and it would not take off very fast.

Diana: Did Jim get to drive that car too?

Paul: Our dad forgot something in between there because I can't remember what happened to the car, but Dad ended up having to buy Jim a car to drive and it was a Plymouth Fury 3, and that baby would also run. It was probably good that Phil and I did not have a fast car.

Diana: Probably so.

Paul: We might have wrecked and died, or something, who knows?

Diana: When did you first drive a tractor?

Paul: Age ten.

Diana: Do you know what it was?

Paul: We kind of had a choice because Dad had bought a second tractor. He had a 930 Case Comfort King. It actually had a cab but nothing else. It was hot to drive that, you didn't have much air. He also had a 560 International tractor, both of those were LP gas. Then I think, probably around the time that Phil started driving a tractor, he bought a 900 Case. It was a used one and also ran on LP gas. So Dad had three sweep plows, all of them with three, six-foot blades. So when each tractor made a round, it was three times 17 feet. But he had four boys to eventually, when Jim got old enough, run tractors.

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Diana: Were you all able to do it at the same time, because Mike would have been back from college?

Paul: Well, at that point in time, since I was ten, when I learned, Mike would have been 14, so he was 16 then when Phil learned at age ten. We've got pictures of those three tractors and three of us boys out there standing beside them.

Diana: Did you road them to the different fields?

Paul: Dad had ground all the way down southwest of Ashland that Gardiners now own. That was down by Acres, so we would take them out on Mount Jesus Road and road those. I look back, and kids always want to go faster. Well, there were two spots on the Mount Jesus Road that you could put the tractor into neutral and it would go faster than what it had been, while it was coasting down the hill. But yeah, we would road those down there, go through Ashland, and then go down and take the Angle road.

Diana: So how long did it take you to farm all the fields that your dad had?

Paul: Well, let me think. You could get about six to seven acres per hour per tractor if you were pulling the sweep plows. That was fast farming, because if you had to pull a one way, you didn't go that fast and it wasn't that wide. I remember that we would take the three tractors down to Acres of an evening and have them ready to go, and then the next morning, I remember sleeping in the pickup. Dad would wake us up somewhere around 5:00 a.m. and we would head down to Acres with Dad and Mike and me. We'd get there just as it was starting to get light and if you had no trouble, I think we could finish all of that in one day and move to the next field.

Diana: No headlights on the tractor.

Paul: There were, but with kids with sweep plows and as poor as those lights were, you weren't going to see very well. And, during the summer, you worked daylight to dark, no air conditioning, out in that heat, and you were ready to quit.

Diana: Did you bale your own feed?

Paul: Yes, I can remember Dad had an Allis Chalmers baler.

Diana: Did you have a swather?

Paul: He had a pull-type swather. Later on, he bought a used Owatonna self-propelled swather and then continued to update after that. He baled small square bales and, as I said, my younger brothers and I remember loading the truck up with those for him to feed with until around 1972.

Diana: You stacked everything manually.

Paul: Most of the time, Dad left the cane out. He bought what was called a bale stoker and it would put six bales on this and then you could drop them down and if everything worked

right, they'd actually set kind of like a diamond on the corner of the bale, instead of the strings being on-the-ground and rotting. So, he would just leave those out there and we'd go pick them up as we needed them.

Diana: Did you use all the wheat for pasture all the time, or did you harvest the wheat?

Paul: We harvested almost everything.

Diana: With your own combines?

Paul: Yes, I started driving a combine when I was 12, and Dad had a Case 1010 combine. No cab. Then, he traded that off for a used 95 John Deere. Then he bought a second and a 95 John Deere. Mike had allergies really bad, so it was tough for him. He figured out pretty quick he just could not be on the combine, so he'd drive the trucks. So, when Phil got big enough to run a combine, I think that's about the time Dad bought the second 95 John Deere, no cabs on either of those and no umbrellas. We used those for several years and he updated to a 105 John Deere. Then eventually, he bought two used 7700s.

Diana: When you said 'truck', what size of truck were you using? How many bushels?

Paul: Roughly 300. Now, when I was younger there was a picture of a truck, I never did drive it, but I'm guessing it probably held about 200 bushels. It had a hoist on it, not all the trucks had hoists, back in that time.

Diana: So you got to go up on the lift in the elevator, where they put the front tires on…

Paul: I watched that happen some, but since we had hoists on our trucks, we got to drive over that thing lots of times. Sometimes it would slide and be a pain.

Diana: Where did you deliver wheat?

Paul: Most of the time, from Lexington we would go down to Sitka, either at Wallingford or the Co-op, either place. Then closer to Ashland, we delivered there to Co-op or Wallingford. Then down at Acres, it was the same way: either Wallingford or Co-op.

Diana: Was the choice which had a shorter line?

Paul: Usually, because Dad was not particular with either one. If it was a time that he decided he wanted to sell the grain across the scales, Bunge down at Englewood, always at harvest, was ten cents higher than the Co-op. So, we were right across the road from the elevator, and instead we would drive down to Englewood and unload there. Dad would normally sell it, if he took it that far. He'd sell it right then.

Diana: Did you have your own gas tanks to fill all the tractors, combines, and trucks?

Diana: Yes, those combines that I mentioned, the 95 and those, were gasoline. That reminds me of a funny story. We had to fill the tank on the back of the pickup every morning, at harvest time, with gasoline. I think it was Phil, I'm not even certain anymore, that had put something in to keep it filling while he went and did something else and he forgot about it.

We were in eating breakfast and all of a sudden, he remembered and took off. I say, "Phil," and it may not have been him, but somebody remembered and went running back to shut off the gasoline. But we got to pump all that by hand into the combines, and of course, about three o'clock in the afternoon those tanks were not big enough if you got to start early, so you had to pump them again. So all of us boys built-up some muscle.

Diana: Did you have to grease the combines every time before you started?

Paul: Oh yes, absolutely.

Diana: Did you have a gallon tank of gas or oil to do that with?

Paul: Dad had grease guns, so there were certain zerk that you needed to grease halfway through the day. They were five-hour zerks. The rest of them, you could you could get by with just greasing in the morning.

Diana: So what kind of breakdowns did you have?

Paul: Everything, anything.

Diana: How far do you have to go to get parts?

Paul: Dad, most of the time, ran John Deere, because there were always parts at Bucklin, Bucklin Tractor. Now at one point, in 1971, he bought two brand-new International Harvester combines. They weren't Case IH, they were still International then. Those parts were in Dodge City and when it got to the point we were having to replace parts, as those combines got older, he ended up going back to John Deere 7700s and then later 7720s.

Diana: So, from the time you started farming till you retired here recently, how has the machinery changed?

Paul: Well, it always gets bigger, more creature-comforts. I remember my dad did an interview with the Hutchison News back in 2008. The lady had asked him (her name was Amy Bickle) but anyway she asked him about the biggest change and my dad said, "Air conditioning with cabs," because he said you could stay out there longer without the heat and everything just being devastating on your body. And I would agree with that, I mean everything got bigger and all, but my kids all learned on combines with cabs and air conditioning. If they would get to griping about things, well, I would remind them that there were worse things than what they were doing.

Diana: When did you start your kids on tractors?

Paul: Linda and I had discussed this and read in farm magazines that kids did not make good decisions if they got in a tight spot until about age 14. My kids, now they got on horses before that, but they did not run a tractor until they were 14. So that was a lot different and, like I said, we were ten. Dad wanted to do it earlier than that and Mom wouldn't let him until we were ten.

Diana: Did they all drive a stick shift?

Paul: All my kids know how to drive stick shift, because I had pickups that were stick shift early, and then I still had a bobtail truck that I recently sold, and it had a stick shift. I made sure they all learned how.

Diana: Farm kids learn that.

Paul: Yes, my grandkids haven't and several of them that are driving don't want to learn how.

Diana: Let's go back to land. When you were farming, did you rent a lot of land or did you try to own?

Paul: I rented. Now, having said that, when I first got married and had come back from college to farm, my dad told me, "You need to get some debt with some land." Looking back, I think that was his way of helping provide incentive to get after it. So, I bought a quarter of land the first year we were married and then I didn't buy any more for 11 years. I rented 600 acres from Dona Fox and then later from her five children. Three hundred thirty acres of that was farm ground and the rest was grass.

Diana: So how did the rent prices change from when your dad rented stuff to when you rented?

Paul: Well, I actually began with a cash lease. My brother Mike and I started leasing from Dona Fox, in, I believe it was 1972, so that that was a cash lease. Later on, I went to a sharecrop lease after Dona had passed.

Diana: One third and two-thirds.

Paul: And then, of course, cash lease for the grass.

Diana: Did you have a written contract?

Paul: Yes.

Diana: Was your contract for more than a year at a time?

Paul: Yes, in fact I think when I started off I had a five-year lease. But when we started and when I signed the contract in 1972, wheat was $1.25 a bushel. Well, the Russian grain deal happened later in 1972 and wheat jumped up to two dollars a bushel, which it had not been there in decades. My dad told me it was $3 dollars a bushel during the war. I'd ask him once how much it cost to hire somebody. And my dad told me, the best header man running the header on a pull-type combine, you had to pay him $3 dollars a day. I said, "So, you're telling me one bushel of wheat would hire the best help there was for a whole day, and now a bushel of wheat, you can't even hire high school kid for a bushel of wheat an hour." And that's indicative of some of the changes that have occurred. And it's not that you're overpaying people, that you're paying by the hour, it's just the grain prices unfortunately, haven't kept up where they should.

Diana: They've changed like everything else does. When you first came back and when you were married, where did you live?

Paul: We lived in the old Otis and Dona Fox house. We lived there for 16 years.

Diana: Did you have to pay rent, or was it part of your lease?

Paul: What the rent was, if anything needed to be done to the house, I would pay for it and would do it. And so, and Dona knew me from church and I appreciated her faith in me and my new wife, and so we took very good care of the place.

Diana: And then, when you moved, that's when you built your house?

Paul: Yes, and that was in 1990. We built a new house. We had four children, we were in a rental house of 1300 square feet with one bathroom and a tub, no shower, and we needed to do something.

Diana: It was time to move.

Paul: It was time to make a change.

Diana: From the time that you started farming until the time you quit, did rent prices rise a lot?

Paul: Yes, because when I started, you could rent farm ground because wheat was $1.25 a bushel, you could cash lease it for five dollars an acre.

Diana: Did you rent pasture land, too?

Paul: Yes, I do not remember how much that was. I'm going to guess it was about three dollars an acre for grass, but that quickly changed, as prices increased on grain and cattle and everything jumped up in price rather quickly.

Diana: So, since you did pastureland, did you run a lot of cattle?

Paul: I did not run a lot because when I started farming, I did not have a lot of ground. I would buy stockers and feeders. You said something about checking with my kids about any stories.

Diana: Yes.

Paul: One daughter, she said one of her best memories was getting up early and going and catching the horses and saddling them. I had bought some cattle and I was starting them, so I had a small pasture on Bluff Creek. I called it the Brown Place, it's southwest of Ashland Feeders. I would start cattle there; it had shade and running water and I built a little catch pen. My dad had a horse by the name of Coco that three of my kids got to ride, and Coco knew cattle very well. I would ride my horse and I'd pick out a sick calf and point that one to my kids that were on horses and they would get behind him and take him to the pen. So Coco

taught my kids how to ride and how to handle cattle. My daughter said that's one of her best memories: getting up and doing that in the cool of the morning, you know, during the summer. When I sold the brown stock trailer that I used for that, I sold it the other day, my daughter said that made her swallow hard.

Diana: When you started cattle, how many did you start?

Paul: Usually, I'd buy a truck load which was dependent upon the weight of them, anywhere from 100 to, if they were lighter weight, 120 or 130.

Diana: What type of cattle?

Paul: Usually, I started off getting mine through Neil George, also, like my dad did, and later on through Frantz Betschart. They were the kind of cattle that you could upgrade. They would be really thin, lots of them didn't look like much.

Diana: Where would you try to buy them from?

Paul: These would usually come out of either Kentucky, or sometimes Tennessee, and then sometimes I even had some that came out of West Virginia.

Diana: What weight would you grow them to?

Paul: That would also vary, like I said with my dad, dependent upon prices and if I had something for them to eat. But before I switched to a cow herd, and I'll say this, I switched to a cow herd in the 90s because buying stockers was about to break me. There was a time-frame there where it was difficult to make money running stocker cattle, so I started taking cattle in. Then later I was able to buy some cows and start a cow herd.

Diana: When you said they took cattle in...?

Paul: I would take cattle in on the grass and someone would pay me for that. Then one year, I still remember, Randal Spare told me... I had all the cattle that I needed, but I was grazing off some wheat and needed more cattle. He told me of a guy that was looking for wheat pasture. I took his cattle in in February and then grazed off that wheat and they went out towards the end of May and his cattle were worth the same dollars per head in May that they were in February. But he owed me a pretty good chunk of money because they gained very well.

Diana: Did you watch them? I mean, did he come and take care of his own cattle?

Paul: I did that.

Diana: So, part of your deal was taking care of his cattle.

Paul: The deal was that I provided everything that they needed.

Diana: And then, if they needed extra supplement besides the wheat...

Paul: With wheat you don't need anything, except if you get a snowstorm or something. Then

you put some cane hay out and the mineral, and back at that time I was providing a mineral salt. When wheat starts growing fast in late February or March, you better have some mineral out or they're going to bloat and die.

Diana: Did you raise your own cane feed?

Paul: Yes.

Diana: So, you had fields where you were doing that. What else did you raise?

Paul: In the nineties, myself and my other two brothers that farm, we all started raising alfalfa because there was some money in that. Well, as soon as we got in, of course, the price dropped. That's just normal.

Diana: When you were doing alfalfa how many cuttings could you get off of it in a summer?

Paul: Normally four. I've had a couple of times on irrigated that I've got five cuttings.

Diana: Did you have a lot of irrigated land?

Paul: In the year 2000, Bill Rich quit operating my brother Phil's irrigation circle, and so I took that over. That was my first irrigated ground to operate and I had alfalfa on that most of the time.

Diana: When your brothers and you all started farming, did you do a partnership with each other or with your dad, or were you individuals for a while?

Paul: Our dad encouraged all of us to get out on our own, and this will entertain a number of people when I say this, my dad knew we all had both Harden and Riner blood in us and it would probably be better if we were all on our own, because we would all have our own ideas how to do something.

Diana: And opinions.

Paul: Possibly so. I think my dad was very wise in that.

Diana: When you moved to cow/calf, did you pick a certain breed?

Paul: When I bought mine, yes, I bought black Angus and started using Gardiner bulls on the cows, because at that point in time they were paying a premium of five dollars per 100 weight for anything with a Gardiner name.

Diana: Did you have a large herd?

Paul: By the time I quit, I had got up to about 140 cows.

Diana: Did you keep most of your calves to turn them into heifers?

Paul: That's how I increased my herd, was by keeping heifers. I tried to keep kind of a

younger herd. Anything that either had problems with their udders or had any sort of problems, or looked like they were starting to get thin. I just believed that was a good time to get rid of them, while they were still alive and worth something.

Diana: Did you have a certain size of calf that you were trying to produce?

Paul: I just wanted something that would grow well and that would sell well. I did not feed mine in the feed yard, so I would sell them to someone else then and let them feed them in the feed yard. But I wanted something that would do well there so that I could get a repeat buyer that knew these cattle gained well, and so next year he was willing to pay a little more.

Diana: When did you try to calve your cattle out? Did you do it in winter? Fall?

Paul: For several reasons, I ended up calving in the fall of the year. I was very happy with doing that, because the ground is warm in the fall and you don't get blizzards in September and October.

Diana: Usually.

Paul: You might get a snow, but I've never seen a blizzard in October. Now I have in November, and that was always toward the tail end of my calving season.

Diana: About how many cows would you calve out each year?

Paul: As I said, I got up to 140, and so that was kind of my peak.

Diana: Did you feed your cattle at a certain time so that they would calve at a certain time? I mean like feed them at night, so they would calve early?

Paul: I calved mine on grass. There's something called the "sandhills calving method" and that is to not let caves lay and not to continue to calve in the same location week after week, because we'd noticed that later calves, ones that were born later would get sick a lot more than those early-born ones. They think a lot of that is disease. So, I calved out on grass. I had a pasture that I could run around it quickly in the pickup, looking if I needed to hurry. Then later I got what's called a calf catcher that attached to my four-wheeler and I could catch the calf that way and tag it and then lead mamma to the next pasture over. So, I kept that same pasture for calving.

Diana: Did you have to doctor a lot of calves when they were born?

Paul: That saved me. It was extremely rare. I probably, in the years that I ran a cow herd, calving in the fall. I probably had to doctor five calves in all those years. I believe that moving the ones that had calved to different pasture is what helped me and not having to calve and be behind the windbreak and having everything laying down behind the windbreak and all that mess.

Diana: Did most of them calve during daylight? Or did you have a lot at night?

Paul: They would eat when they wanted to eat, so if I had time I would sometimes get back

to check them a second time. I would calve first-time heifers in a separate place, actually a place that you know well. I called it the George Seacat place and he had a pasture to the southeast of his corral, and that was a great place to calve my heifers. I could get to them and check them quickly, twice a day.

Diana: When did you wean?

Paul: I would usually wean in the spring sometime. If I had enough wheat pasture, if I grazed off my milo stalks and needed something else, many times I would fix it so only the calves could go out on the wheat and eat, and the cows would be eating milo stocks. The calves would get more protein that way and gain a little faster.

Diana: When it came to working your cattle. Did you just use family or did you have neighbors come and help?

Paul: Family a little bit. Most of the time, I had a hired man and so we would do that, and then I have a son-in-law that usually would come and help. He farms and ranches in central Kansas, near Marion, so he would usually come down and help.

Diana: Was your way of working cattle going out in the pasture and roping them off a horse or did you use a chute?

Paul: By the time I got my cow herd, I no longer was using horses and was using four wheelers. We would bring them into the corral, and I tried it a couple of different ways. I borrowed a calf-cradle one year and made a way to bring them from the tub directly into that; the effort to do that was not was not beneficial. So, we went back to just running them in the squeeze chute and working them that way.

Diana: When you kept some heifers and you sold the rest, did you sell them private treaty, or did you sell them at the sale barn?

Paul: Most of the time it was private treaty, so that I could get repeat customers.

Diana: Were most of them local? Or did you go away a distance?

Paul: Most of them were local.

Diana: They knew the product. So, one thing with pasture land, because we always have a little bit of drought, and not enough rain sometimes, did you have a grass management plan that you used?

Paul: More so, later on, as we hopefully got a little smarter. After my grandfather died, three of my uncles and my dad all owned the grass, that I had been leasing from my grandfather. The one uncle had the majority of the grass and I made a deal with him. He had 480 acres and I fenced that off into three different paddocks, which allowed me to rotate grazing, protect the grass a little more. Actually, probably, I could put a few more cattle out there. So that's when I first started rotational grazing and I continued to do that until I retired.

Diana: Let's talk about fencing. When you did that, were you using electrical fence or did you have so many strands of barbed wire?

Paul: Almost all of it was barbed wire fence, permanent fence. We have a lot of deer in our area and deer are notorious for being hard on electric fences.

Diana: Was your fence four wire? Three?

Paul: It started off, the interior fences were four wire, with one exception. There was one that had been put in by, I think, my grandfather years ago to separate the creek from the hills, and that was a three wire and we eventually replaced that with a four wire. Before the fire, I'd actually started replacing exterior fences and had made all of those five wire, the part that my landlord was responsible for.

Diana: Did you use steel posts, wood posts, or metal?

Paul: A combination of steel and wood. After the fire part of that fence burned, I was leasing that portion from my brother, Phil, and he put mostly pipe back in for the box corners, in order to not have to worry about the corner posts burning again.

Diana: Did he do most of the work himself or did he hire people?

Paul: He and I did a lot, and then we utilized people from Ohio, from Iowa. I think at one point we had five gals from Virginia that were in college. Then one day, right after the rain, Phil had some sandy ground that we could work on but it was muddy everywhere else. I counted up, he had 42 people out on him that one day. The next day, they only allowed him to keep one group.

Diana: That was generous.

Paul: Which was only right, because it had dried up enough the next day.

Diana: But it was nice of him to use all those people because they would have been setting around.

Paul: That was a very interesting day. Yes, they were all begging to go somewhere, and I think Holly was actually gone that day, and I've forgotten now who...

Diana: Kim Hazen

Paul: I think that's correct, and so she kept calling, "We've got these guys and they want to go do something." He actually got Jim to help, and so Jim and Phil and I were just trying to manage people.

Diana: Who got the benefit out of that? Did you learn a lot from all these different people? Did they learn a lot from you guys?

Paul: We all learned a lot, some of it for me, and I've already said this when we did the fire

book interview, I was always one of the people helping somebody else and so accepting help... I'd always heard people say how humbling that was, and I never understood that until I was in that position. It is very humbling, we were very appreciative. There's still some of those folks that we remain in contact with that came and helped. They loved being out here and then we have some red hills up there that are very similar to what's between Coldwater and Medicine Lodge, but with probably a little sharper canyons and all, and they all loved seeing that.

Diana: It's beautiful here, and especially I thought it looked neat with the black where the fire had gone, with the red hills, and then they kind of sparkled before the rain. Let's talk a little bit about cattle again, the type of cattle, the structure of the type of cattle that your dad raised and what you did. How has the conformation changed through the years?

Paul: Well, one of the reasons that I switched to a cow herd was, it was becoming more difficult to buy a higher quality stocker. Because if you've got good quality, by the time they weaned the calf at six months, it was already big enough to go to the feed yard, and so you were buying a lesser-quality animal in order to get something. Unless you happened to find somebody that had good quality animals but they were short on grass or they had overstocked or had a drouth or whatever, then you could possibly buy some good cattle. So I'd watched guys with cow herds for a number of years and had made the determination, if I could ever afford a cow herd, that's what I wanted to switch to. And I was eventually able to do that.

Diana: What about price? Has price changed a lot through the years?

Paul: Oh, it all has changed as a whole. Yes, inflation has occurred. I'm old enough, I remember when, if you got 30 cents a pound for a fat steer, you were in high cotton, because it had been 21 cents, 22 cents a pound. And so if you got 30 cents... Well now, I can't remember the peak. I think the peak was $1.70 a pound for fats, or somewhere in that area that it got to for a brief time. They're somewhere around, I think, $1.10 or $1.15 now. I'm not certain per pound, but they're not getting rich.

Diana: So how do the cattle market and the grain market feed off of each other?

Paul: They do to some degree. There was an old saying that I heard when I was young that, "Cheap grain makes cheap cattle." I think the reason for that was when there's cheap grain, the guys would feed cattle more and longer because the grain was cheap, so they would get them fatter. Well then, we ended up with a lot more meat because the cattle were fatter, and so that pushed the price back down. With people using the futures market, puts, and calls and all that, it doesn't follow that quite as closely now.

Diana: How has the last year, with the pandemic and people having to stay home, not going out to restaurants? How's that affected the cattle and the grain markets?

Paul: I don't think it affected it that much because people still have to eat. The problem was, for a while, in Dodge City and other places where those workers were getting Covid, they shut some of those plants down. So there ended up being a glut of both hogs and cattle. In fact, I saw where they actually went and killed baby pigs because everything had gotten slowed down and they didn't have room for the pigs to come in because those are scheduled very tightly. So, when the fat pigs weren't removed so they could put the smaller ones in to

start fattening them up, it meant there wasn't room for the piglets. The feed yards, it got pretty tough on some of those guys because they had cattle that are normally fed 120 days and I think there were some that actually ended up being fed 200. They were very fat, very overweight. Then they started being discounted because they don't fit the chain. For some people it became very tough financially. They got caught in that.

Diana: Aren't we still seeing a little bit of a shortage of butchers, private people?

Paul: On one of the things that happened because of that, I'm not going to say that we did not run out of meat, but certain cuts, it is my understanding were not available at certain times. Some people made the decision, "Hey, let's go see if we can get our own animal butchered or buy butchered." We buy beef through my son-in-law and he gets it butchered in April. So, when this deal happened, he called his butcher and said, "Well, I'm going to go ahead and book some animals to butcher next April." The guy said ok, then he happened to ask him, "So how far are you booked out?" This was last summer and he was booked until February already. I've heard that that's very typical, being booked nine months ahead.

Diana: Okay, so let's change gears. Let's talk about disasters. Do you know of any floods that have happened in your area?

Paul: In 1957, I would have been four years old. I remember glimpses of seeing Bluff Creek flooded really bad. Actually, the old wooden bridge over Bluff Creek was near where the cement bridge is now on the Highway 34. It washed the dirt away from one end of the bridge and flooded the roads and everything and took out fence. The county actually extended that bridge. Instead of trying to bring dirt back in, they made the bridge longer. That was a little tough. The year of the Greensburg tornado, which would be '07, Kellenbergers got flooded. On the other side of that ridge, it flooded, also. It came down through and I had an Alfalfa field, a dryland field, and it left all kinds of trash in that Alfalfa field and so there were repercussions there, and it took out a bunch of fence.

Diana: And that came down through the park and city park.

Paul: Close to the rim on the basketball goal is what I had heard. On our side of it, it is called Dugout Creek, that goes by the old Pike Ranch that Filsons now own, and it came up close to the cabin that they had built and just wiped out all the fence through there. It was devastating on fence. I don't know that anybody lost any cattle.

Diana: Or any buildings?

Paul: Yeah, I don't I don't think so.

Diana: Mostly fencing and crops. What about snowstorms?

Paul: Well, I'm old enough that I was a senior in high school in the blizzard of '71. You can tell stories about it and describe it and everything, but until you are there, there's nothing quite like being there. And I heard there was also a blizzard in '56. I'd have been three years old then. I do not remember that. I'm sure my brother Mike does, but I've heard that one was fairly bad too. But the one in 1971, there were no four-wheel-drive tractors yet and my dad had cattle strung out all the way from east of where we lived, all the way down to Acres. We

ended up getting to the last ones by going up on the ridge where the snow had blown off. We'd pull staples and drop wires down and cross and keep going till we got to where dad's cattle were.

Diana: Did you go by pickup?

Paul: We had two 4-wheel drive pickups, and so one would follow the other, and get ready to pull the other one out if he got stuck. We had those loaded down with square bales.

Diana: Did your cattle have any trouble getting to water?

Paul: I do not recall any problem with that, but my dad, in most places, had some protection for the cattle that was where the water was at, so I'm presuming the cattle spent... You know, there are some things that you don't remember. You're just homed in on getting the cattle fed and getting to the next bunch.

Diana: Did you lose any?

Paul: I think my dad may have lost very few. I do not remember that.

Diana: They had the airplanes and the helicopters come in. Did you participate in having them drop feed for you?

Paul: No, we got to all of ours. We did see a c130 fly over and attempt to push bales out to a neighbor's cattle. They missed them by about a half-mile.

Diana: It seems to be a common thing that the bales didn't make it to the right place.

Paul: Of course, with the helicopters, you could just hover over them. I had classmates that got a ride in helicopters and I admit I was jealous.

Diana: So, you mainly did your own cattle. You didn't go out and help with anybody else's.

Paul: That's correct. The storm ended on Sunday night and by Thursday night we had got to all of dad's cattle. Well, by that time, we were needing to feed some of the first ones again, because there was a lot of snow.

introduction: When did you go back to school?

Paul: I think for me, we had Dad in good enough shape that we probably went back on Monday, after a week off.

Diana: I don't think school was open for a while.

Paul: They think they were closed a week in Ashland, if I remember correctly.

Diana: Or, if it wasn't a week, they started like on Thursday or Friday.

Paul: I don't remember getting to stay home, not really, although by that time I was a senior and I enjoyed my teachers and my classes and all.

Diana: Have there been any other storms? There haven't really been blizzards, but there have been some major snowstorms.

Paul: In the eighties, I remember a pretty good snowstorm, drifts and all. I had a four-wheel-drive tractor and I wanted to know how well I could get around in that, if I had to. I got everything fed and, I can't remember now who... if Jim was going to come and pull me out? But I decided I wanted to know, and so I drove my tractor up on a snowdrift that was probably eight feet deep, and when I got up on top of it, all of a sudden, I just fell in. It was an articulated tractor, so I started just turning my steering wheel and worming my way back out. Now it wasn't fast, but that made me feel a little better. It wasn't long after that, I bought a trailer that could hold six bales and I could dump them individually. That was my ace in the hole for blizzards. I could load it, go where I needed to go and drop one bale at a time where I needed to with my four-wheel-drive tractor.

Diana: What about fires beside the big one?

Diana: Well, in 1979 there was one that started on Giles at night and the wind was blowing out of the northeast and came down across the ground. I took my tractor and was working to put it out. I ended up on Giles and I felt very... Between the dust and the smoke, I decided that I need to stop and let things clear. When I did, I looked out the door of my tractor and my dual tire was hanging off the edge of a canyon and my disk had dropped off. The part of one wing had dropped off in that canyon. It was about 15 feet deep. I managed to get the disk to fold up, and that's when I decided I needed to go back to where I knew where I was. That could have been disastrous.

Diana: That's a major problem about fighting fires up in that part of the county.

Paul: Yes, if you don't know where you are, and of course, being on Roger's place, I had no clue. But personally, I just think that it was God told me to stop, and I'm glad I did.

Diana: There's been a lot of electrical lighting fires.

Paul: Yes, that one was in '79. There was one in the fall of 2000 that the seismographers started. That started on John Moore, on some CRP grass and, well, go back grass. That burned behind Dan Shattuck's house and across some of my ground and on to the north. That one, I fought it with my disk and I burned up some hydraulic hoses, but the insurance company for the seismograph company took care of my expenses. So that was it. And then then there was one, I don't remember what year, that started on Bill Shaw and Highway 34 and that went several miles across my brother's grass and what I was leasing and ended up over on Stephenss by the time we got that all stopped.

Diana: Did you have any fires started because the hot bearings?

Paul: Yes, wheat fields. Thankfully, none of those ended up being really serious.

Diana: Before or after the wheat was cut.

Paul: While we were cutting, and I still vividly remember a wheat truck, that that had pulled back into the field and the driver had stopped in some tall stubble. It started that on fire, and so I think it was Phil that jumped in the wheat truck and drove it out of the field, through the fence, into the pasture and down into a draw. I recall the fuel tank on the side of that truck was on fire and I vividly recall that truck going over the hill and I expected to see an explosion. That never happened, and eventually we went down there with a rag and beat the fire out.

Diana: Did you do a lot of fire-fighting with gunnysacks?

Paul: When we were younger, we would have some of those, but thankfully when I was younger we didn't have many fires. And then I learned later on, with a gunny sack, it gets dry pretty quick if you've got it soaked. So I got to where I learned to take one feed sack or seed sack and shove it down inside of another one. It was lighter, and if you swung it fast enough, it wouldn't catch on fire and you could beat out a lot of fire better. It was faster than a shovel.

Diana: It's been over a 100 years that your family's been in Clark County. How have you seen farming and ranching change from what your grandfather did, great-grandfather, till now. What are the big changes?

Paul: You have to farm a whole lot more to have a chance to make it. I mentioned that my great-grandfather put together four farms between 1900 and 1920. That's a short period of time to do that. It's worked well at times, but now the margins are very thin and it's difficult for a young man to get started without some help somewhere.

Diana: Are you preparing another generation to run your operation?

Paul: My daughter and her husband farm near Marion and he has both cattle and farm ground there. I told him somewhat facetiously that if he ever tried to come out here and take over, I was going to break both knee caps. He's in an area where it rains a whole lot more and the soil's better than it is out here, and I told him, "You need to stay there, where you've got a better chance to make it."

Diana: Had you started going from cleaning fields to going no-till?

Paul: I went to some minimum till; I never did it completely like my brother Jim has done. But I was doing some minimum till. But part of my program was grazing a lot of wheat, and cattle and no-till doesn't usually work very well because if you're trying to leave some stubble there and you're grazing it, they tend to destroy this stubble.

Diana: Did you just graze it all out? Did you decide, "I'm going to graze this?"

Paul: I got to a program where I was always grazing some of my own out. The landlords, I would harvest their crops for them.

Diana: Were most of them, two-thirds one third?

Paul: In later years, but of my own, I got to the point I felt like I was kind of not "putting all my eggs in one basket" by grazing some off and yet still harvesting some. And there were some years that the grazing it off worked a lot better. And then there's other years when the prices are good and the yields are good, why having the crops is better. I got to where I'd raise enough on my own ground for seed wheat and then the rest of mine I would have in rotation. Part of that rotation was feed for my cows.

Diana: Now that you've retired, have you rented your land out?

Paul: Yes.

Diana: And you have somebody that's going to kind of carry on the operation.

Paul: There's three different people leasing it. My younger brother, Jim, has my irrigated ground and my dry land alfalfa. Another guy is doing a grazing operation only on my farm ground, and then a third young man is leasing my grass up in the hills along with my brother Phil's grass. I think that's working really well. Again, I'm probably putting my eggs in different baskets that way.

Diana: Are you being a mentor?

Paul: I guess in a way I am, because I do have people ask me a lot of questions about this or that. So, in a way I am.

Diana: Do you plan to remain in the country?

Paul: As long as Linda and I both want to stay here and our children allow us to, so to speak. I told Linda that we built that house and I've never sat on the front porch of a morning and just enjoyed a beautiful morning because I either had work to do or went to church, one of the two. So, I've been able to do that a number of times now and enjoy some of the fruits of our labors.

Diana: So, looking back, what is the smartest thing you ever did?

Paul: Marry Linda. Besides that, and this is along the same way, I have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and I think that's been vital for me and my family and how we raised our family. As far as the farming side, just being aware of what's happening and observing, because there's some things that you realize the old way of doing things isn't necessarily the best any more. You need to be observant and watch neighbors. I've always liked to go to the things from K-State, from extension and learn new things and try some new things. Some of the things, I would kind of laugh at and other things were like, "Yeah, it's worth a try." I think it's important to always be willing to learn.

Diana: Would you change anything if you could?

Paul: I've not thought about that. I would work to be a better dad than what I know I was, and probably most dads probably feel that way at some point. But my kids all tell me that they loved growing up on a farm and learning how to work. My dad taught them all how to run a

combine and they all appreciate that. They all learned how to work and figure things out and do things. So I guess they tell me I did all right. I have a little guilt.

Diana: That's good that they tell you did well, so do you have anything else you'd like to share?

Paul: Some of the fun things and some of the challenging things. My dad made a deal with my brother, Jim and I, if we helped him with wheat harvest, he would supply the combines and equipment to cut our wheat. So Jim and I harvested together for a lot of years and eventually Dad retired from farming and we continued to harvest together. Most of the time we either had our own kids or we would hire high school or college kids. I have forgotten many of the stories, but there are some hilarious things that happened. When you hire young kids with equipment, things are going to happen, and they did. I asked some of my kids, "Is there anything, any stories or whatever you would want me to share?" My older son, Shane, told me to tell about the time we were moving combines back from down by Ashland up to our direction. I was getting close to Danny Rich's house, and for some reason I never moved combines once I had kids. For some reason, I ended up in the combine, bringing it. I'm thankful that it was me because the side of the rim blew out on the front tire of the combine. When that happened, immediately the tire went flat and I had no control, none whatsoever. A neighbor was coming along and he saw me. I went off the road right where culvert was at, down into the ditch, which then made my combine tip forward. The neighbor said you could have walked under the rear tires and not touched them.

Diana: Did you have the header on it?

Paul: I had the header on it. It was a 7720 combine with a 24-foot header. It tipped down and I remember seeing the ground come up. It ripped the header off of the combine and twisted the feeder house, and then I sat there for what seemed like forever and then the combine went back down and bounced on the rear tires. Thankfully, it rained the next day, and we spent four or five days with probably eight of us in my shop, rebuilding the feeder house. That was one of the biggest projects we ever did during harvest. But thankfully I wasn't hurt and nobody was hurt. But there are some pictures of the combine afterwards.

Diana: Were you your own mechanic?

Paul: Most of the time, yes, unless it was something with the engine. My older son said a neighbor asked him one time, "How do you know how to do all this?" And Shane said, "Well, my dad was gone and my Uncle Jim was gone hauling wheat to the elevator and when you broke down, you didn't sit there and wait for them to come back to fix it." You looked at it and what broke? What do I need to take off? How is it going to be fixed? It was the ultimate in problem-solving.

Diana: You went to college. What was your major?

Diana: I got a degree in animal science from Fort Hays.

Diana: Did that come in handy?

Paul: Yes, but so did some other things. I took some accounting. That was very helpful.

Economics. I even took a home-improvement class, all kinds of things of showing us how to do things. My dad did not do much in the house, and so if Mom wanted something done, she either did or she hired it done. So I learned some things there and my father-in-law taught me a lot of things too. Harvest was a family time. We hired a number of people over the years to help. Probably the toughest harvest was the year 2001, because two months earlier was when Jim's son John Mark was killed in a car wreck. There were moments there, but it was all family. Then Bill Seacat told me that Jim had hired Daniel Seacat to help us at harvest. Bill said that they would stay up at night and wait till Daniel got home because he always had a story of something that had happened that day with running three combines and a grain cart and two semi-trucks. Things are going to happen and they did.

Diana: Did Linda cook all the meals?

Paul: We got to the point that if we were cutting on Jim, Jim's wife would fix the meals and if we were cutting on me, then Linda would fix the meals. Earlier, when Dad was still harvesting, Mom would cook the meals on dad. Sometimes she and Linda and Mary would all go together and bring something.

Diana: How big was your harvest crew?

Paul: If we could see that it was going to be a good wheat year, we had to have two semi drivers. So you had three combine drivers, a grain cart driver and then two semi drivers. So that was a minimum of six and then you had to have somebody extra.

Diana: To run parts?

Paul: And help move, because all those people were busy running something when you moved, and we couldn't always get someone, you know, either Linda, mom, or someone to come help. Now oftentimes they did. But it was always good to have an extra person because they never set around.

Diana: Did you have a gas trailer?

Paul: By then, everything was diesel on the combine and the tractors. So, if we were cutting Jim's wheat, he would provide the fuel. If we were cutting mine, then I would. Then with the semis, we could go several days without having to fill them and just go back because you had to fill them with highway diesel which was different than farm diesel.

Diana: You mentioned different neighbors. Are there some that stick in your mind as being very helpful or being pillars of the Lexington community?

Paul: More so when I was a kid, when I was little about everybody in the neighborhood had silage, so that was a community project with everybody helping everybody else drive a truck, run the packing tractor in the trench silo, and all of that. I didn't get to fork nearly as much silage as Mike did, because I was barely big enough to help kind of clean off a silo a little bit. Then that's when Dad switched to square bales and I got to start trying to drag square bales that weighed more than me.

Diana: What about community activities at the Lexington Schoolhouse?

Paul: Those were always fun, you got together.

Diana: Who usually started that? How did they get had a community dinner? Who was the one that usually called that?

Paul: I'm guessing it was the ladies in the EHU, Extension Home Unit, they would put it together. And when I was a kid, I think we had, oh gosh, probably four of those a year. In later years, it got down to where it was just once a year in December. I was on the school board, and it was always the same weekend as state schoolboard convention. So I missed the last several and then we have not had one, I don't know how long it's been. A long time.

Diana: Anything else?

Paul: It's a great way to raise kids. A lot of work. It continues to be a lot of work, and I like to step back sometimes and think about things, and one of them that I've thought about is my great-great grandfather, Nathan Harden, who came here. They obviously farmed with horses and did a little of everything. It was almost all manual labor and his son Charles would have had threshing machines and my grandfather would talk about that. And then my grandfather had a pull-type combine that I actually ended up with. That was the first combine my dad drove, he drove the tractor pulling the combine and that's actually on ground that I own now. I have that combine back that my granddad used to own. So, they went from pulling a pull-type combine and thinking that's a whole lot better than a threshing machine, which it is, because you didn't have a pile of hay and you didn't have to bring the wheat to it. You brought the combine to the field and cut it. Then self-propelled combines. Every generation had it easier than the previous generation and they still do today, but there's still hard work to do. I find that interesting that we do more labor-saving things and so that margin of trying to make money gets thinner. So, you have to operate more ground. You have to get bigger, and that's sad in one way to me.

Diana: It is so. What about Phil's being a combine engineer? I guess designer. Have you benefited from that?

Paul: Of course, brothers never like to kid each other at all and I've never asked Phil this question, but I think when he and I were working on those old 95 John Deere combines and Dad would make a comment about those stupid engineers and why did they do it this way or that way? I wondered if that put a burr under Phil to decide he was going to design something better, and they obviously did. He helped on a number of things on 9600 combines. He was a big part of those and Jim and I both owned one of those. We actually owned two of them together and then later I had two and Jim had one. But of course, when we had those 9600s, if there was any problem with them, we would always give the engineer brother a hard time. "Why did you do this?" "Well, the newer ones are fixed, buy one of them," was his answer.