Interviewer Today is January the 30th, 2020, and we are speaking with Keith Randall and asking him about his early ranching experiences and about his family's farm and ranch. Sir, when did your family move to Clark County?

Keith 1889.

Interviewer Did they immediately establish a farm, a ranch?

Keith My great-grandfather, his name was E.V. Randall, Edward Vernon Randall purchased an existing ranch.

Interviewer Do you remember what it was called?

Keith No, you know, I really don't know, for some reason, the name Carpenter's in my mind, but I'd have to go back on the abstracts and look at that, but there was a ranch there that he bought. And then, of course, what he owned varied over the years. Because back in those days, land was bought and sold and traded. It didn't have the value that it has now. They changed land almost like we would vehicles today. But more or less, the basic ranch that he bought stayed intact.

Interviewer So your family holdings were established in 1889?

Keith Yes.

Interviewer Are you the third generation and fourth?

Keith Fourth.

Interviewer What was your family's traditional role in this area?

Keith Ranching, that was my great-grandfather, grandfather, my father, all of their brothers, other than one uncle, I don't think anybody for the last... Well, I'm taking the first three generations, not my generation, because we all left for some time, but my father and grandfather and great-grandfather and their siblings were all involved in ranching, farming.

Interviewer You say your generation left. Did you go off farm for an income?

Keith Yes, I spent almost 40 years in banking and my brother was never involved in agriculture. He was a clinical psychologist living in California most of his life.

My cousins all left. We were not encouraged to remain in agriculture. It's a tough way to make a living. Really tough way, they'd been through such hard times, all of them. And I don't think you can find anyone in my generation who was really encouraged in any way to stay.

Interviewer When did you graduate high school?

Keith 1960.

Interviewer And you're saying that the people you went to school with as well were encouraged to leave the farm or ranch.

Keith That was very typical. In fact, of my father's generation, most of them remained in agriculture because they really didn't have a choice and they're not here today to visit with any of them, but I've talked to (besides my dad), his siblings, his first cousins, neighbors of that generation, and almost every one of them indicated that they had something they would have probably preferred as an occupation. But they didn't have any choice, they had to come back to agriculture for multiple reasons. And so they stayed and most were, you know, reasonably successful, earned a living, but they sure did not have any enthusiasm for their children to remain.

Interviewer You came back?

Keith Well, I came back in banking and I live out, actually I live where my great-grandfather first started. The original ranch headquarters is where I live. Not the same house, but we came back with another occupation, so to speak. Now we still have the ranch and continue to operate it. And I have a son who is, interestingly enough, in banking, who now operates the ranch. He doesn't live here. And I have a grandson who really loves it, who doesn't live here either, but he'd be the sixth generation.

So we have a very small ranch now. My great-grandfather's original ranch was divided up amongst multiple... He had a large family and multiple heirs got acreage. And so the original ranch was broken up into much smaller units. So that's kind of where we are.

We are not, for small operations today, even medium sized operations, they're almost all dependent on other income besides agriculture to survive. Either the spouse works in town, they have oil and gas income, they do something or have some other money coming in besides agriculture.

Now, for the really big operations, that wouldn't be true necessarily. They have a lot of outside income. It's just a hard way to make a living.

Interviewer You see that trend continuing, don't you?

Keith Oh, absolutely.

Interviewer You say that you ranched. Did you farm as well?

Keith We did. My dad put our farmland into what was called the Soil Bank in the late 50s, 1959, to be exact.

Interviewer Is it still...

Keith It is still in grass, well the Soil Bank disappeared. It was kind of a forerunner of what is CRP today.

Interviewer I'm hearing that CRP is changing drastically. Do you plan to still leave your ground in CRP?

Keith Oh, no, we don't have anything in CRP, that land that went into the Soil Bank came out. It was a ten-year contract and when it came out in '69, we didn't re-sign it. It's just used as pasture land today.

Interviewer Forgive me. I should have asked, what was your grandpa's name?

Keith My grandfather was Howard H. Randall.

Interviewer And your father?

Keith Paul Randall.

Interviewer And you had one brother?

Keith One brother, Don Randall.

Interviewer And who are your children?

Keith My children are Jim Randall and David Randall. David is now called Devlin Goldworm. He changed his name, it's an artistic thing. He's an art teacher. That's his professional name is Devlin Goldworm, but he was born David Randall. Within the family, everybody calls him Dave.

Interviewer And how many grandchildren do you have?

Keith Five.

Interviewer And you have one grandchild that is still very interested in the ranch.

Keith Well, yes, he's 20... How old will he be? He'll be 22 this coming summer and has graduated from Garden City Community College. He doesn't know what he wants to do for sure, but he loves cattle ranching and he works. Right now, he's working full time for a farming operation out of Garden City. So he loves agriculture.

Interviewer All you do is win the lottery...

I'll be very frank about the fact that grandpa, while I would love to see him come back here, I have not been terribly encouraging about it. I'm just like my dad.

Interviewer You want him to have a living?

Keith I want him to be able to make a living.

Interviewer On your family farm and ranch. What kind of crops did you raise?

Keith When we had farmland? Well, wheat and milo, and of course feed for cattle.

Interviewer OK, so you cut your wheat? You didn't raise it for wheat pasture.

Keith Well, yes, actually, from after the Second World War, starting in the 1950's, Dad planted mostly milo. He didn't plant much wheat up until just a few years before the land went into the Soil Bank.

He liked the milo, he thought it was more drought-resistant and it provided more feed for cattle in the winter. So we were more into milo than the wheat. We didn't have a lot of farmland, ever. There was, oh, gosh, maybe somewhere between four or five hundred acres was all the farmland there was.

Interviewer But you mostly farmed for cattle.

Keith That would be a good description of it.

Interviewer Are cattle all that you ever raised? Did you get into sheep? Goats?

Keith No, never. Well, if you want to go back to 1889, where my great-grandfather came here from Iowa, he brought sheep with him. Didn't go over real well with the neighboring ranches. Interesting times. No real conflict, but it was tense. Let's put it that way.

I don't how long he kept the sheep, he eventually gravitated to cattle, and we've been cattle ever since. Now, there was a time in the early 50s, well, actually going back before that, because clear back into the 30s when my dad, when he and my mother were first married, they had hogs, besides cattle. I mean, they always had cattle, but they did run some hogs. We still had hogs clear up when I was a kid in the early 50s. Hog farming has changed radically. And that would be an understatement.

Interviewer You didn't have A frames and shells.

Keith And so, yeah, these hogs lived in the mud. They had a little shelter, but basically they lived in a muddy pen. You couldn't do that today.

And Dad had turkeys, which was not uncommon. Back in (this was before my time) but back in the late 30s, up through... I think he had them up until about the start of the Second World War. He raised turkeys.

Interviewer Did he sell them? Or were these just for his family to use?

Keith Oh, no. These were market turkeys and there were actually several people in this area that were raising turkeys.

Interviewer Did you butcher them? How did you sell them?

Keith No, I don't know. I don't know how they were marketed, but we have got a lot of pictures of those turkeys down there. And of course, we had chickens but that was just for our own use and all that. Every farm did that kind of thing back then. But no, the turkeys were to sell and that's one of the many questions that I never did get around to asking Dad, was how he sold those turkeys.

Interviewer Okay, well, you wouldn't have refrigeration...

Keith Because we didn't have electricity.

Interviewer When did you get electricity?

Keith 1948. I still remember when the REA came in. Prior to that... of course, I can still remember not having anything. I can remember the folks lighting what we called "coal oil lanterns" at night. My memory of that is pretty fuzzy; I was probably four or five. And then Dad got, it would've been a forerunner of today's wind turbines. We called it a wind charger.

It was about, I suppose, 25 or 30 feet high, it had a little bitty propeller and it generated... It had those big glass battery packs that sat on the ground. It made enough electricity that you could run a few light bulbs in the house and that was about it.

Interviewer And when the wind came up, it got a lot brighter.

Keith Yes, they did. And then after that, he got a big, old, what was referred to as a Kohler Light Plant that ran off of what we called white gas. It set out in a shed and just thundered during the day. That was the loudest, biggest thing. But it generated enough electricity that you could run a few light bulbs plus a refrigerator.

Interviewer So your mom got a refrigerator in the early 50s?

Keith This would have been the mid to late 40s and then in 48, the REA came in. My dad loved the electricity. He always told me, he said, "You can take my cars away from me. Take every modern convenience, but don't ever take that light switch," because for somebody that lived most his life and farmed with horses and didn't have electricity, to him, electricity was one of the most special things in the world.

We take it for granted, you know. We don't even think about it unless you flip a switch and it doesn't come on. Then you call CMS!

Interviewer Well, not to be indelicate. When did you get indoor plumbing?

Keith We always had it. Strangely enough, without electricity, they had fixed a system. There was a windmill fairly close to the house and there was an underground pipe that went into an underground tank and it was pressurized and that had enough water pressure going that we always had an indoor bathroom. Now there was an outhouse, but it wasn't used.

Interviewer How did you heat your water?

Keith How did we heat water? We had gas, they used butane. What's called butane, instead of propane. Butane has to be stored underground because it freezes. And we had a big… it's still there… in the backyard of the ranch is big old buried butane tank. But that was, you know, gravity feed into the house. We had a floor furnace.

So we have always had heat and always had indoor plumbing.

Interviewer Very nice.

Keith It was, it was very nice. Dad built a house down there at the ranch in 1930. My mother never was without indoor plumbing.

Interviewer Now, going back to the family farm and ranch. What kind of cattle do you remember your dad running?

Keith Well, they were mostly Hereford back then.

Interviewer Were they purebred, cross?

Keith Oh, no. We didn't have... Dad ran stockers. He did not have a cow herd. And he bought stockers and they were mostly Herefords or Hereford crosses

Interviewer Do you remember how he got his stockers?

Keith Oh yeah. He went to auctions and bought them.

Interviewer Here in Ashland?

Keith There was a sale market here at Ashland, Raymond Broadie used to run a sale barn and I don't know who had it before him. That's probably in the Clark County history book, or the Ashland history book. That's been gone a long time.

But yeah, there was a sale barn here, but the big sale barns were at Dodge City, which was called McKinley/Winter back in those days, not Winter, it was McKinley/Winter. And Dad went down to Texas. He occasionally bought cattle out of Amarillo, Texas, and had them trucked up here.

We got into calves in the mid-60s. He started running a cowherd, but before that he ran stockers.

Interviewer How did you sell them?

Keith Through auctions, we loaded them onto trucks and went to auctions.

Interviewer OK. When you say "truck", you know that the modern mind imagines a semi with a trailer, but you're talking single-axle trucks.

Keith Well, they had cattle trucks. There were commercial haulers, but they weren't anywhere near the size they are now.

They were just single, long flatbed stock trailers they ran with trucks. I don't know how many they can hold, but probably half what they do today. All these big trucks, you know, they haul 50,000 pounds and I suppose these were maybe half of that. We didn't have anything like that. We hauled cattle. When we were bringing something to Ashland, it was like an old wheat truck we put stockracks on. That's all we had.

And no one had trailers. You didn't see stock trailers at all. No one pulled them. We didn't have four-wheel-drive vehicles. There were a few, but not very many. Machinery has really changed.

Interviewer How has it changed?

Keith Well, in the fact that we didn't have four-wheel drive pickups or trucks. Dad usually had a little Willys Jeep that was four-wheel drive. But that was to get to town and back. But most trucks... George Pike, Kirb's dad, they had a Dodge Power Wagon. And that was quite a... Kirb still has that thing.

Interviewer What is a Dodge Power Wagon?

Keith It's a great big pickup, like a one-ton pickup with four-wheel drive. It would sure get through the mud. That was one of the very few around.

Interviewer OK. You used this just to get to town. How did you feed your cattle?

Keith With a sack or gunny sack, we didn't have these cakers that are on the back of pickups now. You went out, you put your pick up in low gear and you jumped out, you jumped in the back and you poured the sack out the back, or some guys just carried it on foot. But there are different ways. But a caker didn't exist back then.

Nor did bale feeders. There weren't any such things, round bales hadn't been invented yet, so feed was put up in what we called "shocks", which was a cold, hard job in the winter.

Interviewer How did you shock your feed? By hand, or did you have a shocker?

Keith We didn't shock, Dad never did do that, but I was sure involved in putting up a lot of shocks.

Interviewer And how did you put them up?

Keith That was done by hand. They were laying out there wrapped up, but you went out and picked them up by hand and stacked them up in what looked like tepees.

Interviewer And why did you stack them in a tepee?

Keith To shed moisture.

Interviewer Did it shed most of the moisture? Did you have a lot of wastage?

Keith Well, you know, we always bought feed, never did put it up to my knowledge, he never did have the machinery for that. We bought that from neighbors. I can't really answer that, Cara. I think they stayed pretty well. Now they got eaten up every year. They didn't keep them like they do round bales. You see round bales sitting around that are two, three years old. You didn't see that was shock feed. It was consumed.

Interviewer Did anybody around here do silage?

Keith Oh, yeah. No, I'm not, I'm not going back... See, I was growing up in the 1950s and I helped neighbors put up silage. Terrible job. Hated that. I was always a truck driver. There was no such thing as air conditioning and so to get air, you had to roll your window down.

Interviewer The only reason I ask is my family put up silage. And I, praise God, was too late to have to fill the silo, which my grandpa did. Then you had to walk on it and tamp it while you filled it.

Keith Now we used trench silos. We didn't have... No one had an upright silo around here that I'm aware of. These were all trench silos, and I was always a truck driver. Of course, these silage cutters were like one or two row that just took forever sitting there. Of course, you ran alongside with the truck. You went with them with your window down. So you're filling up the cab with silage while they're filling up the truck. Oh, it was a hot, dirty, itchy job.

Interviewer My family ran custom-cutting crews.

Keith OK, You know what I'm talking about. There were those of us, of course when we'd start, we would run the trucks down through. First we'd back up. When we'd start filling the trench, we'd back up and dump, but then after the trench got filled to a certain point, we'd run down through it. We'd come from the top and go down through with the lift up. And we'd scatter it as we went down. And some of us, we won't name names here, but would occasionally start down through there and forget to have the lift going up. Or actually, the lift would be going up. What would happen is we would forget to put the tailgate up. This tends to bury trucks. My uncle would say, "Keith, you're killing me." Oh, well, they were good, memorable times.

Interviewer However, you know, we're trying to get these interviews to get information... So in 20 years, people who have never seen it done, maybe they can have a mental image of what it was like. Now I'm not sorry to have missed filling the upright silos. See, I always thought the trench silo was a blessing.

Keith You know, quite truthfully, since there were no upright silos around here, I'm not even familiar with that process. They just didn't have it. They were all trench silos.

Interviewer I wasn't around hay when I was younger because my daddy did silage. But you're right. They thought the two-row silage cutter was a major innovation.

Keith We didn't feed a lot of feed. I talked about the shock feed, but we only bought it for emergencies where there was like deep snow. Otherwise cattle were just ran out on pasture with cake in the winter. That was their feed.

Interviewer Those were good days.

Keith You asked me about machinery, let me go back to that. Not only do we not have four-wheel drive or air conditioning, there were no four-wheelers, no ATVs.

Oh, gosh, you know, machinery's just gotten so much bigger and more sophisticated. But, you know, we got along, we got by. I drove to school for four years without four-wheel drive, on muddy roads. I only remember getting stuck one time in four years.

Interviewer And it could be that the roads weren't graded as nicely back then as they are now.

Keith Oh, the roads weren't anywhere near what they are now. The ditches were not as deep and they weren't as well graveled. I could literally remember Dad, I'm going back to when Saturday night was a big time to Ashland, Kansas. Sometimes we would come in to a Saturday night movie as a family, and I remember going home in the rain in in that little Willys Jeep with four-wheel drive and literally getting stuck in the middle of the road. It was so boggy, you just couldn't go any further. The roads were that bad back in those days. If you get stuck now, it's probably 'cause you slid off the ditch or something and not because you're going to get bogged down in the road. So yeah, the roads are much better than they used to be.

Interviewer OK. I'm thinking about the kind of cattle that you would have been running in in the 50s. Describe those stockers. Were they nice, big framed, tall, rangy...

Keith No. They were nice cattle. We've got pictures, we've got old movie footage. Going clear back into the late 30s. Dad had a movie camera, 16mm movie camera.

Interviewer Have you had any of that converted?

Keith Yeah, we've got a DVD somewhere.

Interviewer Let's talk later. Because you could share.

Keith These are really interesting pictures because Dad, when he was a young man, this would have been in, I suppose, the late 30s, very early 40s. They didn't have the cattle working equipment that we have now, and he and one of my uncles and neighbors are out there and these are like 400-pound stockers. They're throwing them by hand. I'm serious. We've got movie footage of it. They knew how to do it and these guys knew how to work and they're out there throwing these calves by hand and branding and working them.

But back to your question about the cattle, these were not... They were nice-looking cattle, they were basically Hereford or Hereford-cross cattle. They weren't your Number-Two Okies, as we might call them or whatever. No offense to the Oklahoma people, but you know, these were not your Southern-breed type cattle. They were nice-looking stockers.

I remember one time Dad bought a bunch of Holsteins. Oh, boy, he regretted that. He lost so many of them. They were just awful. I don't know where they came from. I don't remember. I was a kid and suddenly he had all these Holsteins out there. He lost a bunch of them.

Interviewer Bull calves.

Keith I suppose they were. Yeah. He didn't run heifers. They were always, we always had steers.

Interviewer OK. You've been talking about how equipment has changed and your dad was throwing 400-pound cattle to work them. Do you remember when you first got a chute or working pens?

Keith No. You know, I really don't, because in my lifetime we always had one. This movie footage I'm talking about was before I was born. I was born in 1942, so my earliest memories

go back... I can remember the year 1947. I really can because there was a game we used to play as little kids on the church lawn over here and I don't remember what the game was, but you had to move from different points like point A to point B, and when you got to a certain place, you had to call out a year or a month or something. My little brain still remembers calling out 1947. One of the trivial things, you have no idea why your brain recalls this. But anyway, I have memories. Back when I was five and we always had, you know, the old mechanical-type chute, squeeze, or whatever you call it. We always had one. We didn't have calf cradles, but then Dad wasn't in the cow business. So cradles would have been unnecessary. But my earliest memory of when I got involved in helping to work cattle, there was a chute.

Interviewer So you have seen people go from that, and I'm assuming that... Did you rope and drag?

Keith No, we did not. My dad was not a roper. He didn't like roping because he said it made the cattle wild and he didn't want to see anybody with a rope out there. Maybe that was just because he wasn't a roper. I don't know. But you know, nobody... Again, I'm thinking of all the neighbors around and their family that had operations. I can only think of a couple of them that did any roping.

It just wasn't something that was done or done a lot. Now the bigger ranches, my Great-Uncle Bently, who would be Max Mueli's grandfather, had a large ranch to the south of us. They roped. In fact, Dad's first cousin Elmer Randall, won the roping up at the Cheyenne Rodeo one year; he was pretty good. But that was not typical of the operations in our immediate area.

Interviewer Did you move cattle on horseback?

Keith Oh, yes. Everything was done on horseback. We didn't have any... Again, we didn't have four-wheelers or ATVs or anything like that, and so we literally did everything on horseback.

Interviewer Think about your home place. Can you describe your land? Is it relatively flat? Where is your place from Ashland?

Keith We're southeast of Ashland by road, not quite 12-miles, and I live right north of there now. I live three-quarters of a mile north. Where my great grandfather's place was is where I live now.

Interviewer Do you have running water? Do you have streams, creeks, running water?

Keith We have two creeks run through the place, Spring Creek's the big one that comes in on the west side. And then there's a smaller tributary to it that locally, we call Sprinkle Creek. And the two join together right south of where I grew up. And that, I guess you'd say, becomes Spring Creek. Spring Creek continues down and joins Day Creek, which is the big one that goes down through Sitka. Day Creek goes into the Cimarron River.

Interviewer Do they run most of the time?

Keith Well, they are a little bit right now. We've had such a wet couple of years. Typically no.

Keith Sprinkle Creek, got its name because it was very erratic. It would come up. Then it would disappear. It would come up. It would disappear. Sprinkle Creek, actually part of it right now is still flowing.

Keith Is that because of the fire burning the tamerix?

Keith No, we don't have tamerix on our place, or very little. And those few plants aren't going to be there too many more years because we're getting rid of them. We're not down on the river proper. We don't join the Cimarron.

Interviewer How would you describe your ground? Is it flat?

Keith No, it's not flat. It's just rolling pasture land.

Interviewer What kind of soil, mostly?

Keith Oh, gosh, how would you describe it, it's a sandy loam, red sandy loam for the most part, reddish. Not real bad, not like north of town, but it's a sandy loam. Alkaline, our water is very alkaline. Very hard water; to say it's hard is an understatement.

We used to have a Best Water R0 system. I've taken it out because Judi is not at home anymore, but she liked her R.O. system. But anyway, the guy from Best Water was down from Dodge City one day and I was telling him how hard the water was. He said, "Well, I'll just test it." So he goes out to a tap on the outside that wasn't going through the RO or the softener. Guess what? He looks at his little tester and says, "Well, something's wrong. This can't be right. This is a mistake."

So he pours it back and gets another one and he says, "I've never seen anything like this. It tests like 135 grains." It's hard water.

Interviewer So the faucets last two or three years.

Keith We keep Doug Brooks busy. Actually, we have a stock well, that has, strangely enough, really good sweet water and I just go and fill jugs over there. Straight out of the ground. No chlorine, no nothing.

Interviewer If he'd known, he'd have built the house there.

Keith Yeah, I wish Great-Grandpa had known.

Interviewer Sir, your family's role in the community changed with your generation going out and getting outside jobs. But you came back and are continuing at least. Did your family have to hire outside help?

Keith Dad did back in the late 40s after the Second World War ended. And he did it more because he could than he because he needed to. Everybody had a hired hand, almost, back then. The reason was for several reasons. One, there was a labor surplus of guys coming out

of the Second World War that had no jobs, no education. They needed work. They worked very inexpensively. And the times after the Second World War, up until the drought started in the 50s, were maybe the best times agriculture has ever seen in the United States. 1946 though about 1950 were just... It rained, commodity prices were high, expenses were low, they were making good money. They could afford a hired man. And so it was not uncommon for people to have hired men.

It was a very short period of time. That's been the only time, really, that we ever had any hired help.

Interviewer Do you know how they were paid?

Keith How they were paid? Oh, I don't know what you mean by that.

Interviewer OK. Some people would give them a beef as part of their payment or a place to live or...

Keith The guy that worked for us, his name was Herman Miller. I still remember him. He lived in the old house between us and Sitka that we still call the Robinson Place. The buildings are long gone. I don't know specifically, I'm assuming that Dad rented that house. It's on land that is owned by York family now.

But how exactly Dad paid him, I don't know. I can't answer that. When I was a little kid, Dad bought a ranch out in southeast Colorado in the late 40s and Herman went out to live on that ranch and work for Dad out there. That was a short-lived proposition, he only owned it for a few years, and then the drouth of the 50s hit, that was the end of a lot of things. Herman left dad's employment and went to work in a steel mill in Pueblo, Colorado. But anyway, I can't give a good answer to how he got paid.

Interviewer But your father did venture into farming in Colorado. I've heard a lot of people did that.

Keith Well, it was a ranch. OK. This was the Smith Canyon area, maybe you don't know Colorado, but it's south of La junta, south and west of La junta and north and west of Kim, the little town of Kim, there's a major canyon that runs north and south that is called Smith Canyon. And parts of it are good ranching country. Now, what we had was not, we were in the hills, pretty rough country, really rough country. Dad had a small ranch out there, a very isolated 40 miles from La junta, Colorado and about fifteen miles back to Kim. Herman, when he was there, he had children and in the winter, he literally moved to Kim because the school bus wouldn't come up there to pick up the kids where he was living. So it was it was pretty isolated out there.

Interviewer You have talked a little bit about how you think ranching has changed in the last hundred years from being more mechanized to having four wheelers and Gators and other ways to take care of the cattle. You've also mentioned having a caker on your pickup.

What other things can you think of that you know have changed radically in the last hundred years?

Keith Well, it's kind of interesting because, you know, Jim and I, my son and I talk about how some of, a lot actually, quite a bit of what we still do has not changed at all. Like an example would be building barbed wire fence. We still do it just like they were doing it almost a hundred years ago. I wasn't out here years ago. But you still dig a hole, now we've got augers on tractors that we didn't have back then, but you still put a post on the ground and you still attach the wire the same way and stretch it. That hasn't changed a bit, but other things... We don't use horses hardly at all. We have horses, but that's more because the guys just like to ride, than using them out of necessity. Our cattle are trained, they follow a feed truck with the caker, just like it was the Pied Piper. They'd climb on and ride if they could figure out how to do it. So when we gather cattle, we just drag them into the pens with the truck. Doctoring sick cattle, a lot of that's done now with darts. We don't have to bring them in, we just dart them.

Interviewer Describe how you dart.

Keith Well, these are rifles that have darts with medicine in them. We used to use tranquilizer and we'd tranquilize them and then when they were down on the ground, we'd doctor them. Then they'd get up and they'd had a nice little nap and off they'd go. Well, now instead of doing that, the tranquilizer that a lot of them use is a little... You need to know what you're doing with that. So it's easier just to put the medicine in the dart and shoot them. Puts it right into them.

Interviewer How do you know what to give them?

Keith Well, you hope you know what their problem is. Sometimes you don't. It’s not an exact science.

Interviewer We've never used dart guns. So I don't know much about it and I don't know how you figure out how to doctor if you haven't got him up close to see what's wrong.

Keith Usually you're dealing either with a calf or a mature cow. And cows, fortunately, don't have a lot of ailments. If they have a problem, it's usually something like either foot rot or pink eye. And that's, you know, the prescribed medication for that's pretty common.

If you have something beyond that, you're probably going to bring them in and see what's going on. But with a cow, it usually pink eye or foot rot, unless there's a calving problem that you're going to have to bring them in anyway. Now, calves, that can be anything from what we call "quick pneumonia" or scours or something, but typically if you catch that quick enough, most your medications like Draxxin, which is very expensive, but that usually, if you catch it quick enough, you usually get a good response.

We think it's actually more effective and not as stressful for the animal as bringing them in. So, again, this goes back to fact we don't use horses anymore. Now, I need to retract that just a little bit. We do hire. You asked about hired help, since Jim doesn't live here and I am not doing that anymore, we do hire help for calving.

Interviewer Who do you hire?

Keith Sean Labelle.

Interviewer What does he do?

Keith Well, Sean does the calving for us and he tags calves and doctors them. Sean is very good on a horse, and very good with a rope. So he does do that, you know. But once we're through calving, well, then Sean's no longer working for us unless it's an emergency. So during the course of the rest of the season, we're doing it ourselves and we don't use horses or roping. And if you have one or you have a pair that needs to come in, and if you're not using a horse, you're going to have to figure out how to get them in and that means either bringing in a whole bunch of animals or using a dart. So anyway, we get it done.

Interviewer Do you have any family stories of disasters, not the fire?

Keith Other events?

Interviewer Or other events. You've talked about the drouth, you've talked about the 50s being so detrimental.

Keith Well, I'm not sure. Family tragedies way back in the 19th century or early part of the 20th century, there were some family tragedies, relatives that were killed. But otherwise, in my lifetime, besides the fire, we've had two major events. One was the flood of '57 and the other was the blizzard of '71.

Interviewer I've never heard of the flood of '57.

Keith Well, because it didn't affect Ashland, it rained from north of Sitka down kind of where we live, a very small area. A little cloud came over and stopped and built up into a big cloud and just dumped. Kenny Dome's dad, Bill Dome had a 20-inch-deep, empty stock tank that filled up. Fact. We don't know how much it rained. No one knows. No one could measure it. We were completely underwater. We live in a valley and that entire valley was underwater. We lost every east/west fence on the ranch and some of the north/south fences. Homes were flooded.

Where Matt Wilson used to live, that burned, that was the old Stacy Wilson place. He was Matt's great-grandfather. I think water was like three or four feet deep in that house. It was just the Sitka area and it was a major, disastrous flood. We built fence all summer long. It washed all our crops out. It was Memorial weekend in 1957 and Dad lost all his milo.

Interviewer Did you lose cattle?

Keith We didn't lose any cattle that I know of. I'm not aware that we've actually lost any cattle, because they could get to the high ground. And it wasn't quite like a fire that they had to outrun something, you know, they' just get up on high ground. Of course, cattle can swim.

Interviewer But you built a lot of fence.

Keith I was a freshman. I was between my freshman and sophomore year and I will never forget that summer. We did nothing but build fence. The wire from all the fences had wrapped. If you've seen flooded barbed wire, it catches trash and then it wraps it. Oh, my. That was a long summer.

And then the blizzard of ‘71 was really bad. That was where the National Guard was dropping feed to our cattle with airplanes and helicopters. Yeah, that was bad, and we spent days on horseback trying to... And we didn't... I don't think we lost any cattle in that. If we did, it was very few. They didn't get fed. It wasn't good for them. But we couldn't get around except on horseback. Of course, back then we were still using horses a lot.

Interviewer Well, you would have been out of college by then, wouldn't you?

Keith Yeah. I was living up at Ness City, Kansas, and Dad called me. That storm didn't affect us there at all. It was kind of a local storm down here. Most of Clark County was affected. I don't think north of town was affected. Once you got there, I don't think up towards Ford County, I don't think they got hurt at all.

Interviewer Did you come home and help?

Keith Yes. Dad called me, and Dad was the kind of guy that would never ask for help. Never. But when he called me and said, "Keith, I need help," I knew there was a big problem. Actually, I was able to get to the ranch in a vehicle because they'd opened up the roads and some of the roads had blown open and I got down there. But as far as getting around, it was just... I mean, it was just solid snow. It was so deep that there were places where you'd come to that you knew there was a draw, you couldn't even tell there was one there.

Interviewer How did you help?

Keith How did I help? Oh just trying to find cattle and get feed to them. So I spent about four days on horseback. Got the worst snowburn I've ever had in my life. I had never been snowburned before and I had on a broad-brimmed hat. And to this day, I can't tan on my face. I got burned so bad on my face from just the snow reflection. Yes, the blizzard of ’71.

Interviewer OK. I remember ‘71. My parents had a bunch of cattle they fed on the gain.

Keith So Comanche County got it too.

Interviewer Yes. Some of the neighbors couldn't get food. They worked in town and didn't keep much at home. My mother had to take food on horseback. She took meat and veggies over.

Keith That flood in fifty-seven was one of the very few times my mother was ever on a horse. We were coming back from Oklahoma. We been down at Enid for my brother's college graduation, and coming back, we drove into that storm that night, couldn't get... The highway was under water and we stayed all night with Mel and Maudine Harper down at the Harper Ranch, where Bouzidens are now. Next day we got as far as the road was open, but we couldn't get to our place because the bridge was washed out where Kirb Pike lives. Dad walked home and got a couple of horses and brought them back up there. And he and I got on horses and Mom got behind him on a horse and we rode horses home about a mile and a half down to where we lived. Mom was not a rider, didn't care for that kind of thing, but that was the only way she was going to get home, was on a horse.

Interviewer You earned that one. Is there anything else you can tell about how you had to deal with the blizzard of '71? You said that you had to come back from Ness City to help gather cattle and you spent four days trying to find cattle.

Keith Three or four days. I really don't remember how long I was down here. But that's really all. We were helping neighbors. Everybody was helping everybody. Just trying to find cattle and make sure they were OK. I don't think there were a lot of losses as far as cattle, but they sure didn't get fed for quite a while. Now, again, the Army or National Guard, whoever it was, was dropping feed to them. That was doing some good.

Interviewer Yes, it's a little hard to aim well enough to...

Keith Yes. We were renting land down on the river back in those days, what we called the River Pasture. And that's where they fed. I don't think they dropped any feed where we lived at all. It was mostly just trying to find cattle and get them fed.

Interviewer Made you enjoy being a banker even more. Right?

Keith There are benefits to sitting behind a desk.

Interviewer Do you remember if your ranch had a school house on it?

Keith No, we did not. Although there was one right beside us. Over from where I lived then, where Dad's place was, it would be exactly a mile west on what's now Z Road.

Interviewer You remember the name of the school?

Oh, I've got it in records at home. No, it's literally right beside our West Pasture fence. Two of my great-uncles, when my great-grandfather moved here in 1889, they went to school there. They walked from where I live now, down to that school and attended off and on.

They'd go to school when they weren't needed on the ranch and then they'd leave and go to work. Then they'd come back to school. They were teenagers still going to elementary school because they had to miss so much, and school was not considered really all that important. Back in those days, I mean, they wanted to have an education, but it wasn't considered critical to success like it is today. And so they learned to read and write and do basic arithmetic.

Interviewer Can you say how the cattle that are on your place now compare to the types that were raised when you were a kid?

Keith They're all black now.

Interviewer When did you make the change?

Keith Well, when we... I have to think about that. When Dad moved to Hutchinson in the very early 90s, along about '91. He had been taking in cattle up until then, other people were bringing cattle in. When he was in Hutchinson, shortly after that is when I took over at the ranch and we brought in our own cows. And we had Angus cows, mostly, not all of them, but mostly. And since then, of course, my son operates it now and he’s got almost 100 percent black Angus.

Interviewer Why do you like them better?

Keith They're good cattle. I know it's hard to say why we like them better. From a marketing standpoint, you need to have black cattle. That's just pure and simple. The Angus people have done a fantastic job in PR and marketing. If you want to top the market, you'll need black hides. It is as simple as that. It is kind of interesting, because some of those cattle going through the ring are black, but they may not be Angus. But that's another story. We won't go there.

Interviewer OK, looking back over your career. What do you think is the smartest thing you ever did?

Keith You mean marrying my wife? You mean-career wise?

Interviewer Yes.

Keith I don't know if I could answer that. I ended up in banking.

Interviewer Why? Why did you go into banking?

Keith Well, that's where the job was when I got out of college and was looking for a job. I went to work with the Farm Credit System as it is now. It wasn't then. It was called the Federal Land Bank back then. And I had a contact actually here Ashland that got me in contact with the district office in Wichita. I went in for an interview and ended up with the Federal Land Bank and worked for them for almost 20 years.

Interviewer What was your college degree in?

Keith Ag economics.

Interviewer Is there anything that you would change if you could?

Keith I saw that on here. I have no answer for that. You know, we all live with 20/20 hindsight. You can't go back and change a thing. Yes, I had a really good career in finance and I have been in ranching my whole life to some extent. I can't give you an answer to what I would do any different.

Interviewer Well, the smart thing you did, what is your wife's name?

Keith Judi. Judith Ann.

Interviewer But that's a nice thing to say. How are you preparing another generation to run your operation? It sounds as though maybe you're not super-encouraging.

Keith I'm not.

Interviewer Because you're afraid he won't have a good living or you're not sure where agriculture is headed?

Keith All of the above. To be able to compete in modern agriculture, we're just not big enough and the amount of money and resources that it takes to acquire the resources to be successful is just extremely difficult. And I don't... I'm not saying that in a negative way towards the big operations because they're good people and they're running good operations and they could do that, but even some of them are being pushed to be able to do what they need to do to operate. And the amount of land, when you see land sell around here now, typically it sells to people who aren't making a living from it. They have other resources. Usually they don't even live around here. It's outside money and they just simply want to own the land.

It's free enterprise. You can't fault them for it, but it makes it very, very difficult for a young guy to get started if he doesn't come from a family or some kind of a business that has the resources to support it. We don't have that. And so, if he decides to do that, I'm speaking of my one grandson. I'll encourage him as best I can, but I'm not going to encourage him to get into it in the first place, because I just know it's... And I know that's not good for the future of Ashland, Kansas, but that's just the way life is now.

Interviewer You see Ashland continuing to grow smaller, don't you?

Keith Yeah. Ashland's very fortunate in that we have some very good businesses: Spottls Lumber, Ashland Feed and Seed, the vet clinic. We're a county seat, so we have the courthouse. We still have a hospital. You know, we got some major employers that other towns of this size don't have but those businesses will be dependent, to some degree, on little people like us who are disappearing. So you know, I hate to be negative because I'd love to see the little town survive and be successful, but it's going to be a difficult future.

Interviewer We're lucky we got to be here when we were.

Keith I agree.

Interviewer Is there anything that you would like to tell somebody 20 years down the road about your life or your experiences here?

Keith Twenty years down the road? I don't know what that would be. You mean in reference to the ranch.

Interviewer We're trying to save information for the next generation when they're old enough to be interested.

Keith Well, you know, 20 years down the road from a social standpoint, I can't address that. From the land standpoint, I hope that whoever's here appreciates and enjoys and takes good care of the land. That's what brought our family here, and that's what's kept us here. It is what put Ashland here, was the land. There’re things happening that worry me about environmental issues. So I hope they do that, appreciate it.

Interviewer Keith, thank you very much for coming in and speaking.

Keith You're most welcome.