

1979 Tractorcade to Washington D.C.

Interview with Peggy Arensman

November 27, 2012

Conducted in the Arensman home, Kinsley, Kansas

Interviewers: Joan Weaver and Rosetta Graff, Kinsley Library

Also present: Marvin Arensman

Joan: Peggy, what was your farm like in 1979? How much land did you own or how were you farming? What do you remember from the '70's?

Peggy: Marvin had a big cow herd. He also went into Oklahoma and bought cattle and brought them here. He bought bulls and would work them, and they went to the feedlot then. He had wheat at that time, later, we raised Triticale. It's a cross between rye and wheat. It's really good with cattle because there are so many different ways you can use it.

Joan: About how much land did you have?

Peggy: About 6,000 acres. We had a hired man here, so I always fed the hired man. Then when we got to going to D.C., Marvin took care of the cattle here, and I took care of the lobbying. So we still had a division of property.

Joan: Now was the farm your sole source of income at that time? Or did either of you work off the farm?

Peggy: Yes, it was the sole source.

Joan: So how did you hear about the American Agriculture Movement in the beginning? How did you get involved with it?

Peggy: We went to Hays to listen to a speaker that we'd heard advertised. I can't even tell you now who the speaker was. But there was something about the whole thing that sort of caught fire with us.

Joan: Was there a group of you that went up?

Peggy: Yes, it was in one of the college's buildings up there.

Joan: Do you remember about how many people attended?

Peggy: Oh, it was a huge group. The whole auditorium was packed.

Joan: Do you remember the reception that the speaker got?

Peggy: Very good reception, stomping feet and yelling and standing up at some points.

Joan: Would this have been in 1977 maybe?

Peggy: Later '70's, but I can't pinpoint it. Can you Marvin?

Marvin: I'm not for sure.

Peggy: Can you remember who the speaker was?

Marvin: No, there were several people talking.

Peggy: I don't either. We went to the inaugural ball. It's the only time Marvin's ever worn a tux!

Joan: What inaugural ball?

Peggy: We went to Reagan's inaugural ball.

Joan: Okay, this is going to be a little later then, this is after you were involved.

Peggy: Yes, this will jump around.

Joan: Well, let me ask questions and we'll try to keep you chronological. I get confused sometimes about these things. Okay, so you went to Hays and you liked what you heard. Then what did you do when you came back? How did it get organized down here?

Peggy: You know, I don't know.

Joan: Who were some of the other farmers in Kinsley that were involved.

Peggy: I can't even tell you that because there were people from Offerle and people from on north and west of us here that worked out of Lewis. I don't know what the Kinsley office was like, but the Lewis office was all business. They kept someone in the office at all times, just like a regular office. We took turns sitting in the office; we were office help.

Joan: So you worked over in the Lewis office? Basically, you were an information office, or what went on.

Peggy: Right. There were a bunch of people from there that went on to D.C. We'd get the tickets straightened out and try to help people with money if they couldn't afford it themselves. All that type of thing, Have you talked to Jack Wolfe?

Joan: Yes. So, the first thing in Lewis and probably Kinsley, too, was a tractorcade to Topeka, where a bunch went up. The Kinsley people were put on a bus, I think, in December of 1977. Were you involved in that at all?

Peggy: Yes.

Joan: Did you go up with that group on the bus?

Peggy: Yes, and we took a couple of our kids with us too.

Joan: Which children were those?

Peggy: Randy went, and Jody went.

Joan: About how old were they? ... Jody was five, and Randy was about 13.

Peggy: That sounds about right.

Joan: Was that because you didn't have someone to leave them with?

Peggy: No, we wanted them involved. We wanted them to see what we were doing and why.

Joan: And you had two older children. Were they already out of the household then?

Peggy: Pretty well, yes. They were old enough to do their own thing.

Joan: The first trip to Topeka, what do you remember about that?

Peggy: Oh, we had a friend from Abilene that had a prize bull. It was a beautiful thing. He was very, very tame. He brought him and led him around. He was in the parade.

Joan: He was on the capitol lawn or something?

Peggy: Yes, we went around the capitol, but we were also in a big auditorium. I don't remember what auditorium it was at this point.

Joan: The bull was out in the parade and outside in the auditorium?

Peggy: Yes.

Joan: And there were a lot of signs. Were there tractors, or did you just walk in that parade?

Peggy: (to Marvin) Do you remember?

Marvin: We were in front of the capitol, giving speeches there.

Joan: Speeches in front of the Capitol, outside.

Peggy: A couple of guys from South Carolina were up here, those guys from the South were in here.

Joan: Speakers?

Peggy: Yes.

Joan: Then did you contact or alert your federal representatives there? Let's see, was Bob Dole there at that time, or were you just demonstrating?

Peggy: (Bob) Dole and (Dan) Glickman. And American Ag had an office there in Topeka.

Joan: Now I'm going to ask you this question, but you may not know. Was this when W.I.F.E. was starting also? Or was this a little later? Which came first? And what does W.I.F.E. stand for?

Peggy: *Women Involved In Farm Economics.*

Joan: Were you involved in that before then?

Peggy: Women came before, but I wasn't involved in W.I.F.E. until after that. Lewis had a W.I.F.E. chapter also.

Joan: Now why were you involved at Lewis? Because you were living here, right?

Peggy: Yes, we were living here. But Lewis was more active, and they were all business. Well, if you're going to do something, you'd better do it wholeheartedly.

Marvin: Western Lewis and Belpre.

Joan: Western Lewis and yes, Belpre.

Peggy: Darrel (*Miller*) and the Jones (Dolores and Doyle) from Offerle were involved.

Joan: We've talked to Darrel and we're about to talk to Jones, I think. The next time they went to Topeka was in '78, and that time they drove tractors from Lewis. Did you ever drive a tractor?

Peggy: I drove a tractor downtown in D.C.

Joan: They had quite a few little tractorcades in towns around here, also. But the only time you drove was actually in D.C.? Well, I don't know, why don't you tell us about your involvement in D.C.? You were telling us, did you start going to D.C. before the big tractorcade, or was that after?

Peggy: Oh no, a long time before.

Joan: Okay, so the year before, in '78 probably, you were going to D.C.

Peggy: Now as I look back on it, it was surprising that I did that, because the only time I was out of state was when we ran off and got married. I had never ridden in a plane. I was really a green country-woman. I don't know why I got it in my head that I could lobby, you know. But at the time, it didn't seem to be any question; it was just the next thing to do. But I don't know why.

Joan: Did you have any education with speech?

Peggy: Just in high school.

Joan: No training, but this was something that was important?

Peggy: You know, the farm is not only important to the people that live on it now, but it's important to the other family members. If you lose the farm, you're letting the other family members down, as well as your past family members, you know.

Joan: The heritage and the future. Were you worried about losing the farm?

Peggy: Oh yes. Everybody that was involved was. That was why we were doing this. With the farm bills, we had worked for four years to trade Eastern-seaboard boats fuel oil for the farm bill, some of the things we needed for the farm bill for wheat. Dole graciously decided to trade his vote for one of them. Everything had gone just fine when it came to the fuel bill. Everything went through like it should have,

and we were very excited because this was a biggie with the farm bill. When they were doing the vote, we were all outside the chamber and those halls up there are marble, so anything that happens echoes. When the vote came through, Dole did not vote the way he had agreed to.

The farmers started crying, because there were a good deal of them that knew ½% raise in interest would put them out of business. So it was a very precarious situation they were in. That was when interest was so high, you know, 22% or 23% for farmers. Some of the cotton people down south were paying 35%, which was illegal. But when Dole didn't vote the way he had pledged to vote, the farmers started crying. It was the most eerie sound in that hall. It wasn't a quiet sobbing. It was really heart-wrenching. I think that was one of the most heart-wrenching things that I've ever been through was standing there with my friends and listening to this. We were wondering what person was responsible for that, and what did we not do or what did we do.

Joan: Did you ever find out why he changed his mind?

Peggy: No. Dole used to say he didn't have a very high opinion of farmers. He used to say he could do one thing for the farmer before an election and he'd get elected. And the bad thing of it was, he was a Republican, and that's pretty well what happened. So many of the farmers out here didn't pay attention to what was actually going on. We didn't make our people be responsible for their votes. I'm afraid that's still going on.

Joan: So when you went up there and you lobbied, what do you mean by that? What were your activities?

Peggy: Well, there were several things I did. I testified, and as I as I showed you, I had a red folder with my testimony in it. It would be all typed up, and I'd have my card on the front and you had to have 100 copies to hand out and then whatever committee or whoever you were testifying to, you had to have a folder for each of those.

Joan: So it would be in the senate that you were testifying to? Or the house?

Peggy: Well, the house and the senate and then the ag committees. Sometimes there were other committees. Once in a while, we'd lop over into the military and a lot of the time we were testifying to finance committees.

Joan: You told us before the tape (let's get it on the tape), why was it a red folder?

Peggy: Because we were operating in the red. We were also wearing red. While I'm thinking about it right now, I was an outreach office for five to seven people, depending on what timeframe we're talking about. I was one of Ted Kennedy's outreach offices. Do you know what an outreach office is?

Joan: No.

Peggy: You collect information from the newspapers and various publications and see that these people get it. Ted Kennedy told me several times, "I know nothing about wheat. That's not in my area." So when he was going to be voting on a bill that had to do with wheat and cattle and that type of thing, he would have his ag committee chairman call and we'd go over it. Then, when I found things that were interesting, I'd cut them and send them. We took five to seven newspapers all the time, and it was a real interesting thing.

Joan: You personally took that many?

Peggy: Yes. We had a round-robin newspaper, and we would cut it and send it on to the next person in different areas. The government tells different things to different areas! Another thing that I found that was very interesting, was that I thought the agriculture news would come out of the USDA. It does not. When you lobby, they'll tell you that agriculture is not that important, but the only news that comes out of the basement of the White House is agriculture news. If we're so unimportant, why does it come out of there?

Joan: So you said you would spend like a week at home and then a week in D.C. and go back and forth?

Peggy: Yes.

Joan: Testifying. Did you work in the AAM office there in D.C.?

Peggy: Well, I didn't just work in the office. When I went to D.C., I had a full week of work. On a good day, I could fit in two to three testimonies. You'd give ten to fifteen minutes of testimony, but you might have an hour of questions afterwards. My health was beginning to fail at that point. I could do three testimonies, and then I'd be shot.

Joan: Now, were you alone doing this? Or did you have someone with you when you would go?

Peggy: That again depends on where I'm at now. Not out of the office, I went by myself. Once in while Jeff Wolfe and I would go into Wichita and fly together. I worked with Texans because we started this because of the cattle. Because I said we had cattle in a feedlot. We knew there was something wrong with our markets. They weren't what they should have been. Supply and demand, there wasn't such a thing. That's how we got into all of this was trying to figure out what was going on and you know, they were playing with our money and it would be nice to know exactly what was going on.

Joan: Did you figure it out?

Peggy: To my satisfaction, yes. I found out that the Board of Trade at that point was governed by a computer that was usually the size of a home computer.

Joan: And it was making decisions?

Peggy: It was accumulating information, yes. I was interviewed for a job in the USDA. There were some things that people who are not on the farm just know that you don't do. Well, I didn't know a lot of these things until I did them. They were showing me through the USDA and I asked several people, "What is your job description?" Well, for every person in the USDA there are seven farmers out there. That was when I lobbied, there are less now. Anyway, I would ask, "What's your job description?" Well, I was not aware at the time that when a new president came in, he appoints his own people and then they sit there until they retire. So a lot of them did not have a job description! I get real nervous knowing here I was asking them what their job was!

When we went into the inaugural, Marvin was to ride in the parade. At that point, Elizabeth Taylor was married to Senator Warner, just outside of D.C. He had a horse farm there. Marvin told me he wanted to meet the horse, but I had a feeling, he would have liked to have met Elizabeth Taylor! Anyway, we got up there and the MIA's came back, so he didn't get to ride the horse. A lot of the

parade and all was cut back because of that.

Joan: So he would have been riding in the parade. Would he have been representing farmers? Or just riding in the parade.

Peggy: Just riding in the parade.

Joan: And you said the MIA's, did you mean *Missing In Action*?

Peggy: Yes. Do you remember? They were from Vietnam, Carter brought them back.

Joan: Who got you the ticket to Ronald Reagan's inaugural ball? This would have been in 1980, no, 1981.

Peggy: Yes, the president has 100 tickets that he can distribute on his own. They're usually given to people that work for him. So we were some of his people. (I don't tell that all that often.)

Joan: Okay, so that would have been in January of 1981, I would imagine. Were you there in Washington D.C. when the Tractorcade actually paraded? February 5, 1979, I think it was.

Peggy: Yes, when the Tractorcade came in, they had permits and all to come in. It was, I guess it sounds like out here in the country that it was kind of a free-for-all, that is was not orderly. The farmers did not tear up stuff; they came in and they were very orderly. What they did was they broke them up into small areas and small amounts so they could handle them if there was problems. The police... we made friends with a cop on the beat there, and the cop was asked where he was when the tractors came in. He said, "Well, they handed me this stick and said 'Go out and stop the tractors'! I looked at the stick and I said, 'I can do that.'" He'd never been out of D.C. before, and he got out on the street and here came the tractors! He looked at the size of the tractors and he said, "Who gave me this little stick to stop tractors with!"

Joan: And you said you drove a tractor some?

Peggy: Yes, we went to a grocery store, and I don't really remember what that was all about at this point, but we went to the grocery store at one point.

Joan: You drove it then? Well, where did you stay in D.C., either when you were lobbying or during this time?

Peggy: Kansas had an apartment up there. For the most part, that's where I stayed.

Joan: Were the farmers back here supporting you? Paying for your plane tickets? Or were you doing this personally?

Peggy: About half and half. The round trip plane tickets to D.C. at that time were \$123. So we're not talking about what we are today.

Joan: But back then it would have been worse than it would be today.

Marvin: That's when all the guards were on the street. I won't ever forget it.

Peggy: Yes, we were watching the parade, and as the president came, at one point, David Senter and I were in Texas lobbying for Reagan. Texas was a pivotal point at one time, and that's when we were down there. We were up on a rise watching all the parade.

Joan: Which parade is this, the inaugural or the Tractorcade?

Peggy: The inaugural parade. The president stopped when he saw us. He stopped the parade and told us to come on down. All of the buildings were outlined with machine guns. Of course, when he did that, and they stopped the parade, everybody turned the guns on us. It was kind of a sobering thing! There were so many helicopters overhead that the city had a heartbeat, you could feel it, a pulse.

Joan: When you say, "Us." You're talking about...

Peggy: Marvin and I and David and his wife.

Joan: David...

Peggy: Senter, from Dallas.

Joan: He was another cattle rancher?

Peggy: He was dairy.

Joan: We had somebody tell us that the dairy farmers weren't that involved because they were doing pretty well at this time.

Peggy: Depending on where you were. And you want to remember, everybody's got their own ideas too! But David was so involved that he sold out and went to Washington D.C. and ran the American Ag Office. He's now a lobby for the milk people.

Joan: So he's still involved?

Peggy: He most certainly is. Yes. And his son is in there with him.

Joan: And you said that you were maybe offered a job. Did you seriously consider doing that?

Peggy: I did, but I decided that what I could do to help the farmer from there would be miniscule at that point on. And I would have had to live in D.C., and that just would not work. I had two children at home, and the green country kids wouldn't be very good in D.C. Mother decided she needed to be home with the kids, rather than off flouncing around in D.C.

Joan: Approximately how many times did you go to D.C.? Do you have any idea?

Peggy: I don't have any idea. Do you?

Marvin: 30 or more times.

Joan: 30 or more time, and usually for a week at a time.

Peggy: I would go on Sunday night or early Monday morning, going on the Redeye, and come home Friday afternoon. Things shut down up there on Friday afternoon. The Texans are very welcoming and they are their own group. Most of the guys that went to the inaugural were in Texas, but there was one guy that was a widower. He came in a white suit and white boots and I mean he was all decked out in white. We got in there to the inaugural and he said, "Where's the welcoming committee?" Well, there wasn't one. He said, "This is no way to treat our people in D.C." So the rest of the evening, he stood at the door as people came and went and welcomed people to the inaugural!

In that information, you're going to find Rural Women's Conference in the White House. I was one of the speakers for the Rural Women's Conference, and that was under Mrs. Carter, I believe. That was very interesting. The women's movement was real strong at that time, and they were one of them. The women's movement was there and they had a tea afterwards for a bunch of us, and they kept telling me that I didn't need to be shackled to this farmer and that farm. That I needed to be liberated, and I said, "Well, I'm more liberated than I want to be. Anything I want to run or anything my husband wants me to run or do, I attempt to do. I don't want to be more liberated."

Joan: Was the conference W.I.F.E., or was it separate?

Peggy: No, it was separate, just a rural thing. I was the state president of W.I.F.E, I was on the national steering committee for 15 years, which is the national group that steers the whole thing.

Joan: Now does the W.I.F.E still exist today? Is it still as active?

Peggy: I think those of us that were real active when I was active, we just got worn out.

Joan: This would have been in the '80's and the '90's.

Peggy: Yes. And there were just a few of us that were pretty active. We just got used up.

Joan: Why was it necessary to have the women doing this? Having an organization like W.I.F.E? You were lobbying for the farmer and the farm in general...

Peggy: I don't think there's any business in the United States where the wives are more involved. Farming is such an all-encompassing project that the men are needed on the farm and the women are more easily... can get away for a few days. That's pretty well the way it went.

Marvin: Women own about 70% of the land in the United States. That's why there are interested in all that is going on.

Joan: Now, back in the '70's and the early '80's, had you gotten loans in order to farm or to irrigate or anything like that? Is that part of the reason that you felt that you needed to lobby?

Peggy: You mean me, myself?

Joan: The two of you.

Peggy: Yes.

Joan: We've talked to some people where the banks had very willingly loaned and loaned and they

bought for irrigation, which is very expensive.

Peggy: When those high interest rates kicked in, all of a sudden the value of our land also fell.

Marvin: In one year, in the spring the dry land farm ground was \$1,000 an acre. Less than ten months later, eight or nine months, it was only worth \$250 an acre. The government took over and put a ceiling on the loans.

Peggy: The way they did that was that farm and home loans, they would only allow so high. That put a ceiling on it.

Marvin: And then that crashed.

Peggy: It was interesting what happened when Carter was in D.C. Usually, the politicians and their people are pretty slick, sophisticated people. Carter came in with his country people, and a lot of them you couldn't tell from us with the plaid shirts and jeans, you know. They just didn't fit up there; they just never did.

Joan: Now in the Tractorcade, people were really down on President Carter. At least we have lots of pictures of signs and buttons that are not very nice.

Peggy: From what I saw, my opinion was that he was good with international things and that type of thing he was very good with.

Joan: He had been a peanut farmer, and you would think he would have had a connection to farmers.

Peggy: You would have thought. You would have thought.

Joan: I assume that you would not only have testified in offices, but you probably visited senators and congressmen's offices and talked there. What kind of reception did you get from people and did you do more than the Kansas representatives?

Peggy: Yes. Whatever was the hotspot at the time was what we were doing. One of the interesting things about W.I.F.E., Farm Bureau and other groups that lobbied, Farm Bureau would put their own position papers out. So, when you go to lobby, they would say, "Here is a position paper. This is what you are to say." American Ag and W.I.F.E got the bills themselves, read them, and came to their own conclusions.

Joan: Again, before the tape, you said something about whenever you testified it was published in the paper? The local paper?

Peggy: Oh, that was W.I.F.E. (*W.I.F.E.'s paper was called W.I.F.E.'s L.I.F.E. LINE.*) One of W.I.F.E.'s policies. You couldn't just get up and say anything; it had to be published for you to say it. Their take on that was that it would be fact if it were published. You know how farmers are, they get kind of sneaky! If I knew something was fact, and could not find it published, I would go to the newspaper down here, and he was real nice about publishing it for me!

Joan: So then you could quote this published paper!

Peggy: Yes, and I was getting up and quoting myself was what I was doing.

Joan: Yes, you said you had a byline in the paper. Well, you have to be as sneaky as the congressmen maybe is the way to put that.

Peggy: Well, he knew what I was doing. One of the congressmen that I... I don't have a real high opinion of most congressmen... Ted Kennedy, I wasn't real fond of his lifestyle, but he had one of the best brains. Usually, when you were coming down the hall after we'd been there awhile, the congressmen realized that it's a red suit, it ought to be somebody I know, a lobbyist. They would say to their aide, "Who is she?" "Who is she?" Kennedy didn't do that. He remembered who you were, and he remembered your name. The things that he asked you were far different than the things that the other congressmen would ask. When a farm bill would come up, he'd say, "How does that affect your family?" And I'd say, "Well, that means that I'll be selling my farm." or "That means that my children won't be educated." He was always interested in how it would affect the family.

Joan: That's interesting.

Peggy: Yes. You wouldn't think that in his station that it would be all that important, but he always was. But not only did he remember my name and that I was W.I.F.E., but he remembered that Marvin raised wheat and cattle. He'd say, "Here comes my little wheat lady from Kansas."

Joan: That is remarkable.

Peggy: Yes, because of all the people that he would come into contact with.

Joan: How about Nancy Kassebaum?

Peggy: Yes, I lobbied with her. She was interesting. There weren't that many women there then, so it looked to me as if, like a lot of things, she had to work about twice as hard as the men.

Joan: Now, was she in the Bill that Dole sponsored in (I think) 1980, that the Senate did pass and she did not vote for it at that time. Do you remember anything about that?

Peggy: No, I don't. I can't remember if she was involved or anything. I just remember that it was such a heart-jerker when Dole didn't vote for it. I remembered being so embarrassed that he was ours.

Joan: Well, that must have been another bill because the one passed in the Senate.

Peggy: It was a farm bill.

Joan: A farm bill, but not the one that the Tractorcade originally went for, that Darrell Miller talks about. We have the number of that bill.

Peggy: Darrell was very good, you know, he used to work at a radio. I believe he was on Larry King's, did he tell you?

Joan: No, we'll have to ask him about that. Did Larry King do a program on the Tractorcade?

Peggy: I think so, you ask him. A lot of things have gotten jumbled up in my mind, too many people

and...

Joan: Too many years ago.

Peggy: Pretty much, yes.

Joan: You had all this involvement and all this lobbying, which started around '78, but you carried it on. You were very involved in W.I.F.E. and the AAM kept going too. Were there any other farm groups that you belonged too? Or was it those two mainly?

Peggy: Oh, we were involved in Farm Bureau and Farmers Union. But not as...

Joan: Maybe the difference where you said you guys read the bills and went after it, whereas they already had their lobbyists or whatever. What do you think was the impact of all this activity that you took part in? Was there an impact on farmers? What did you gain or not gain?

Peggy: I think it made the people as a whole more aware of the farm population. I think that people understand now that there isn't a good income, or it's not adequate. To have the farms healthy, there needs to be at least two incomes off the same piece of land. One for the person that owns it, and if the person that owns it farms it, he needs an income to pay for it and an income for the guy that is working it. Back in the Dirty Thirties, the USDA did a study, and the average... every 400 and some acres supported a business on Main Street. If that's so now, if the figures hold now, it would be very interesting to...

Joan: To know what that figure is now. A 400 and some acre farm...

Peggy: 449 acres.

Joan: Okay, that would be income in the area to keep a business on Main Street going.

Peggy: I'm full of trivia.

Joan: Can you point to anything specifically that you think, any legislation that came out of any of this? Do you remember?

Peggy: Oh, W.I.F.E. helped with quite a few things. What do you call the tax when you die?

Joan: Inheritance tax?

Peggy: Inheritance tax, we worked with a bill that went through for inheritance tax and got it raised.

Joan: And that's important to be able to leave the farm to your children, isn't it.

Peggy: Yes, and the wife or the husband. W.I.F.E. worked with several things, gasohol...

Marvin: The W.I.F.E. steering committee had many meetings in Denver with the Cattlemen from Colorado and Wyoming and that area.

Peggy: A lot of them were the cattlemen.

Marvin: While the livestock show was going on, the women would have their W.I.F.E.'s meeting. I was there a number of times for that. We always went to the Denver Stock show.

Peggy: I lobbied with pineapple growers and cranberry growers.

Joan: You must have made a lot of friends from all over during this time.

Peggy: I did. I met the most interesting people that I've ever met anywhere.

Joan: Are you still in contact with any of those?

Peggy: A lot of them, yes, a lot.

Joan: How about the people around here, what did they think about all this activity that you were doing?

Peggy: I think they thought I was insane.

Joan: For what reason?

Peggy: Because they thought I was radical.

Marvin: But when she got something through, they would sure go along with it then.

Peggy: The interesting thing is, that 10 to 20 years later, people would say, "I finally see what you were doing." or "What was that?" They finally understood what was going on, way later.

Joan: Way later.

Marvin: If they would have just helped with a lot of this, it could have made it a lot more powerful and done a lot more good. If you could have gotten people from the average farm or ranch around here to go and help you and work with you.

Peggy: I was in D.C. in the early days, out of Colorado and western Kansas they were saying, "Don't plant." And it was real interesting to see what happened up there. The congressman got real upset when the farmers said, "Don't plant." That told me that it was exactly what we should have done, but we all had mortgages and you know, bankers and people we had to satisfy and we couldn't not do that.

Joan: It started off that way, it started out to be a strike where you didn't plant, but like you said, you couldn't. You would have lost your farms quicker that way!

Marvin: But it would have been very effective.

Peggy: If everyone would have done it.

Marvin: If everyone would done it, it would have worked so well.

Peggy: If everyone would have done it, it would have blocked everything, you know, and the bankers would have...

Marvin: It would have really moved then. If it would have gone into a strike, then on down the line, what the farmer didn't raise would have affected the grocery store and the retailer. It would have been a terrific thing.

Joan: Is this something you would do again? Was it worthwhile? Is it something that if you had to do it over. Maybe there is one thing you would have done differently, you would have tried to get everybody to strike.

Peggy: I think I would have. One of the things that we did as a couple, was to pull together for that. It was good for our marriage.

Joan: I think we've had that before, farming, as you've indicated before, is a partnership. It takes both the husband and wife. to make the farm go.

Peggy: One time when I came back, I had had a meeting with the vice-president and with the president, and I don't remember who, but some pretty heavy stuff.

Joan: Vice-president and president of?

Peggy: The United States.

Joan: Yes, that's pretty heavy.

Peggy: I came home and Marvin came in the house and I was saying, "And I did this and I did that." And he just turned around and walked out while I was talking, and I thought, "Well, that was ugly." And he came back in, and he had the stool cleaner, and he said, "You'll be needing this." Well, that was his nice little way of bringing me down to earth.

Joan: Sounds like you weren't doing your job while she was gone!

Peggy: Oh, he was just...

Joan: I know. Okay, Marvin. What was it like having your wife go away every week?

Marvin: Oh, I got used to it. We ran this farm different than a lot of them, because it was large enough that I was gone a lot of the time from one farm to the other, or one place to another one with the livestock deal. I traveled a lot.

Joan: Away from the farm?

Marvin: To our different farms.

Joan: To different farms in the area.

Marvin: Yes, and in different states too. We were in Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Colorado, Nebraska...

Joan: But you still had a young child...

Peggy: Two.

Joan: Well, where were these kids?

Marvin: Well, I took care of them part of the time, then their older sisters took care of them part of the time. They had learned that a long time ago.

Peggy: They were in school.

Marvin: They were in school, all of them went to school, and seen that they went to school and was there every day. That was very important to us to have our kids to get the best education they could.

Joan: So you weren't a househusband, cooking the meals and everything.

Marvin: No, I didn't do the cooking. I had other things to do instead of the cooking. That was what I did a lot of the time. I looked more after the cattle than I did the farm ground; the hired man did the farming on this place. They took care, but we had these cattle in different places, on different ranches, that we took care of.

Joan: So how many people did you have working for you?

Marvin: How would you put that? The ones that we leased from?

Peggy: It would depend on what we were doing.

Marvin: There were always two to three here, but on different ranches, we had different people taking care of the cattle too. We were back in the Flint Hills for 20 some years. Then we were in Oklahoma for probably about 10 years. Then we were out in Colorado in Winterpark County. What did they call that? (*They can't remember.*) Where this place was in Colorado we were about 12 miles northwest of Pike's Peak. There was an 11 mile reservoir west of Colorado Springs, and I remember the cattle drinking out of this lake that was about 15 or 20 miles long. It was beautiful up there. It would only get about 75 degrees; it was the highest it would get up there in the mountains. We would take them out there for the summer.

Joan: You would lease the land for the summer, leave them there for the summer and bring them back in the fall to sell?

Marvin: You'd keep the cow, you keep the mother cow from one year to another. It was a terrific job to find farms to own, because we had 400 mother cows and all the steers and calves too, so we had a lot of cattle.

Joan: Did you get into the political arena too? Or did you leave that all to her?

Peggy: He went to Topeka with us.

Marvin: I'd go with her sometimes, but mainly I wasn't in it too much. There was always someone calling on the telephone at night if I was at home. I knew a lot that was going on about it, but I kind of stayed out of it as much as I could because we had the four daughters and the kids going to school and running the farm. I had more than I could handle without looking for any more. It was hard.

Peggy: He was very supportive.

Marvin: I worried more about the kids and stuff than I was anything else. I saw that they was taken care of.

Joan: And she just said that you were very supportive of her going.

Marvin: Oh yes, she did some good. Like that up there (*indicating a framed display on the wall*). We raised Triticale and sold it for seed to people that raised it. We had close to 150 farms that we sold Triticale seed to. I wish I'd had this year. It was bringing \$16.50 a bushel for seed. You know, you raise a few thousand bushel at that, it works!

Joan: It worked!

Marvin: We changed our farm over from wheat to Triticale, a lot of other people were still raising wheat for two or three dollars a bushel, while I was more than doubling that raising Triticale.

Joan: Is that a dryland crop?

Marvin: Yes, well, you could irrigate it too. But the protein on that is nearly as good as alfalfa. If wheat would make 40 bushel, this would make between 50 and 60 to the acre. We raised it and put our mother cows on it in the spring when they had their baby calves. The food value was terrific over wheat and other feed. That was the reason we went to it. But a lot information we got from the college, from Hays, and then there was one out at Denver that we talked to all the time. Actually, we furnished the seed for the Denver test plot for Colorado.

Joan: So you were in on the very beginning of the experimental.

Marvin: Yes. It was the most effective grain that we were ever involved in. When you got twice as much a bushel for it, it worked. We put the mother cows on it when they were having the baby calves, and we put them on about what, February? The first part of February, until they were ready to go to grass. The 15th of April was when our cattle were ready to go to the Flint Hills and Colorado and Nebraska and Oklahoma. That was usually the date that we left here with them. The health on it was so much better than what we got before on the dry stuff that we had to raise calves on. What I'm trying to say is, it worked so much better than what we had. The college guys would tell us what we were doing and how much our food value was according to what we were raising of other stuff. It was so much better!

Joan: That is interesting! Of course, I'm not a farm girl, I've never heard of that before. Can you think of anything else you want to add? I'm not sure I've asked all the questions. Rosetta, can you think of anything?

Rosetta: I just want to ask Marvin, did you lease all this ground?

Marvin: I leased part of it, but I owned part of it too.

Rosetta: So you owned land in Colorado, Oklahoma...

Marvin: No, all the land I owned was all in Kansas.

Rosetta: So did you own land in the Flint Hills?

Marvin: No, I just leased it.

Rosetta: Okay, I'm trying to get it in my head.

Joan: Are there any other good stories you have? Anything that happened to those farmers back in Washington D.C.? We already know that you were rubbing elbows with the president and the vice-president...

Peggy: Well, one of the things I thought was interesting, when you get an appointment with either of those people, they check you out, you know, really good. The last time I was lobbying, I don't know what it was about, but anyway, I was allowed in to see the president, but I wasn't passed to see the vice-president!

Joan: And what president was that?

Peggy: Oh, I don't remember, probably Reagan.

Joan: Do you remember what year you stopped going to Washington D.C. to lobby? During Reagan's eight years, or did you go beyond?

Peggy: No, I think it must have been at that time. I was very ill by the time I quit. I went to get out of bed one morning and nothing worked. I couldn't get up. I had rheumatism, four kinds of rheumatism and fibromyalgia. I was in a lot of pain.

Joan: Well, is there anything else you'd like to add about this time period in your life?

Peggy: Well, I appreciate my books from the library immensely!

Joan: Well, we're happy to do that for you, and we appreciate your doing this interview!

Rosetta: Your children, were they supportive? Your older children, Sandi and Jerri, were they supportive? I mean, they were going on with their lives, but were they supportive, or did they think Mom should stay home sometimes?

Peggy: No, I never did hear that. Randy used to roll her eyes, you know how kids will do, especially about newspapers. You know, she thought that was just going a little far, reading all these newspapers and just having newspapers everywhere. When she was in college, I don't even remember what class it was, but she was taking something to do with history. The professor got into the Tractorcades and all that. Randy told him after class that that wasn't the way it was at all, and he said, "Well, how do you know?" One of the things he talked about was going to Topeka, and she said, "Well, I was there." The other thing that he had told about was something in D.C., and she said, "My mother was at the other place, so I know that that's not right." He called me later, didn't he, to ask about it.

Joan: Do you remember any of the demonstrations that went on in February of '79? When the big group was there and tractors were on the Mall, what do you remember about that time period?

Peggy: They kept cops around the tractors, real closely. I never did figure out what they thought we were going to do, but they, you know, they didn't know what to do with us because we had a sense of humor. People in D.C. don't have the sense of humor that the farmers do. It's sort of strange. We used to call it Disneyland East, because it is sort of a strange place. But they wouldn't let people go to the Mall. They had children there that needed teachers. They had people there that needed doctors, people we needed to get onto the Mall to the farmers. So we'd go and get a bottle of whiskey and take it down and give it to the cop, and then we could smuggle people on and off.

Joan: Well, that's a new story. I hadn't heard that one. Were you in the big crowd in the Mall when they were on the Ag Building steps? Were you there then? Do you remember how you felt at that time?

Peggy: Part of what went through my head was, "This has got to be part of history." Then I was just a little afraid, because it was such a huge mob, and I wouldn't say it was unruly, but there was a lot of animosity there and quite a bit of fear and anger. So you picked up a lot of strange things from the others in the crowd.

Joan: And at that time, there were the guns on the tops of the buildings too. Did that make you nervous?

Peggy: Oh yes. There wasn't a time that did not make you nervous.

Marvin: There was a gun about every 20 feet on top of all the buildings for a couple miles. There was a soldier -- one with a regular rifle and every second one had a machine gun. And here we were down below there. We weren't over about 50 feet from them, with them dang guns aimed at you. That made you nervous.

Peggy: They had S.W.A.T cops there, and I don't know if you girls have ever been anywhere where a S.W.A.T cop is, but they don't use voice commands. They just use their billy clubs. There were letting farmers cross the street at one point there, and I was with guys I lobbied with from Texas, at that point I was the only woman there. We'd gotten back from somewhere. We'd been to see the mayor, I don't remember now what it was all about, but we came back, and we crossed the street and one of the cops started whacking at me with the night stick. The boys from Texas pushed me up against him, and I thought, "You're supposed to be friends of mine, and you're pushing me into this!" It took me a while to realize that they were pushing me into him so he couldn't get a good swing at me. David Senter that you heard me talk about it, he was a cop in D.C. He was on the police force in Dalles when Kennedy was killed.

Marvin: He was there when what-was-his-name shot...

Joan: Ruby?

Marvin: Ruby. He was there when that happened. They grabbed that... they loaded part of them up on that airplane, remember on the highway, on the edge of Dallas. It was scary.

Peggy: The tale he tells was not what we heard on the news at all.

Marvin: It was just about like a war had started.

Joan: So the S.W.A.T guy was just trying to keep you from crossing the street when he started swinging?

Peggy: I don't know what he was doing.

Joan: Well, he knew you were a woman. And you were at the front of the line?

Peggy: Yes. Well, I was just crossing the street with three or four men. This was not uncommon. This was not uncommon. You had to be there to see what was going on.

Marvin: It is fascinating. The inaugural ball, I guess you'd call it. I have never seen this much stuff in my life. We were in a room that was probably nearly a block long and a couple of hundred feet wide. When you came in there, it was cold. It was wintertime and there was snow on the ground. They had tables that were probably a block long and they put their hats and their coats on it. And honestly, it was three feet deep on there. It was mink coats and furs and some of these hats these guys had. It was just gorgeous stuff, and these women from these foreign companies, the oil companies, these ladies would come in their big gowns and have a trail of, what would you call it? A train that would be 40 or 50 feet long and would have two girls carrying the back end. Then the ladies would have these diamond necklaces and head deals. You've seen stuff on picture shows, but they don't show what these folks had. It just shocked you to see what they had!

Peggy: I liked watching the news up there, because their news is quite a bit different than ours. The morning after the inaugural, they told that there was a chinchilla coat on such and such a bus, and to please come down to police headquarters and claim it. And I thought, anybody with a chinchilla coat could have done better than a bus!

Joan: Now, that's something some other people have mentioned. What did you think of the media coverage of the Tractorcade and the farmers' issues and how the television and newspapers covered those types of things?

Peggy: Most of them didn't really understand. Is that what you're getting from other people?

Joan: I that they didn't cover it even.

Peggy: Yes. That's where the women did a good job. If somebody's not doing it, why you go over and do it together. They weren't printing what I wanted, so I wrote it up!

Joan: Now, were you involved in making any of the signs for the tractors or the buttons?

Peggy: Oh yes. We put sheets across the street up there. We sewed some sheets together (I couldn't tell you how many) but it went clear across the street. I found a... there's like sweatshops up there yet. I found some sheets that were worn out at the hotel where our office was. Then someone else got paint and painted on it.

Joan: Do you remember what it said?

Peggy: No. Something about the strike. Do you remember Owen Brewer? He worked for us for 30 some years. He was a little old fellow. He was a widower, and I brought back some stickers for the back of a car, bumper stickers. And it said, "Like Dolly Parton, I've gone bust!" I just thought it was

funny, but all of a sudden I couldn't find those. He had snuck those out and put them on his car! It seemed so out of character for him.

Most of what we did was so terribly serious, that it was hard to keep your sense of humor, and that was very important, you know, to keep a sense of humor and lightness.

Joan: Now, you kept your farm, but some of your friends around here did not. In the '80's they lost their farms. Do you remember what that was like during that time period?

Peggy: We lost part of our farm.

Joan: You lost part of yours. Did you use it to help pay off the other part? What was that like emotionally?

Peggy: Death. Literally. It was the death of the farm.

Rosetta: This here was the homestead? The Arensmen homestead? Did it make any difference that this was the homestead, you house, whether they could take your property or not?

Peggy: It depends on which class of bankruptcy you're in, or whether you're working out a deal with your bank. Some banks would work with you, and some just wouldn't. The bank we were with told us that they could make \$400,000 off of us by closing us out. She told us that she'd put us out on the road with no clothes or nothing.

Joan: That was a local bank here?

Peggy: Not here in Kinsley, no. It was in Spearville.

Joan: Okay. We've heard stories about some other towns and their attitude was that they could make money if they got rid of the farmers that were there because they could sell to corporate farms?

Peggy: No. Our farm, they would make \$400,000 out of our farm by putting us out of business.

Rosetta: So you sold part of your farm to pay off your debt so they couldn't take the homestead?

Peggy: Crooked people I know of are the bankers.

Joan: We've heard that before!

Marvin: No joke. If you're going to farm, that's one of the worst things you've got.

Peggy: They've got everything, all your records, and they know right where to hit you and what to do to you. Things have changed so much that the banker runs the farm rather than the farmer so much of the time.

Joan: This is a personal question, if you don't want to answer it, you don't have to. But you are both elderly. What's going to happen to your farm? Are the girls going to take it over? No. So your generation will be the end of this family farm, probably.

Marvin: You never know.

Joan: You never know. This is something else that is starting to happen all over. The children can't make a living, so they have left to make a living, and then the farm doesn't have anybody trained to take it over.

Marvin: It takes so much money to buy a farm now, it is just prohibitive for a young family unless your folks do the whole thing for you and just hand you a checkbook and say, "Here you go; you'd better take care of it."

Peggy: You didn't have one of those in your family, would you?

Joan: Somebody to take over the farm?

Rosetta: In my family, my dad always worked for farmers, but he never owned property.

Peggy: You're Fred's sister?

Rosetta: Correct. And you're Fred's age? (*Fred is Rosetta's brother.*)

Peggy: Yes. Is he still in Dodge? He was a nice fellow.

Rosetta: Yes.

Marvin: My grandfather and then my grandmother came out from Indiana, and when they came to Kinsley here, they came in a wagon with a team of horses. They had one milk cow, a dozen chickens and one mama pig. They came here in the fall, and honestly, they didn't have enough to eat to keep the family. There were four kids. Grandpa told me about shooting rabbits and pheasant and prairie chickens just to have something for the family to eat. They had that back in Indiana and Kentucky where they didn't have enough to eat. He was always so afraid that they couldn't stay or couldn't survive. I don't know just exactly how to put the rest of it, but anyhow, there were a lot of other ones come about that time. The Civil War was just over. They came out here about 1900, in that area. But if they could make it the first one or two years, they'd be alright. Otherwise, it was dangerous in that each of the families had to help the other ones because a lot of them just couldn't make it unless their neighbor or their folks would send money from back east to keep the kids and the families surviving. He told me about that repeatedly, that he was always so scared that they wouldn't be able to feed their family the next year.

Peggy: And literally, they didn't have enough to eat back east. That's part of why they came here.

Joan: And really, when you get up to the AAM, that's the same thing you were doing. You couldn't make enough money to feed and keep your family.

Marvin: That's the way it really was.

Joan: It was the same thing, only it started in a completely different way.