

## **1979 Tractorcade to Washington, D.C.**

### **Interview with Lester Derley**

**December 3, 2012**

**Conducted in the Kinsley Library, Kinsley, Kansas**

**Interviewers: Joan Weaver and Rosetta Graff, Kinsley Library**

**Also present: Janet Derley, spouse**

Joan: Lester, can you start out first of all by describing what your farm was like in 1979? How big was your farm? Did you have animals and grain? What was your farm like at the time of the Tractorcade?

Lester: It was irrigated. I started farming in 1971 with Carl Donovan and Lenora Donovan. At that time, we had flood irrigation, 120 acres in the middle of that half section on the Donovan farm. Earlier, before I got started farming, after I got out of the service, one day Dad came by there. I was working at Cross Manufacturing after I'd got out of the service. I'd worked there for five or six years or so. Dad came by and I told him I would like to start farming. So we took out that day and drove down towards the Ogden farm, which is now where Kenny Unruh lives. They had the ground for sale, and Dad said it was too high. So from there, we drove east down the road north of the house and Carl and Lenora Donovan lived over there on the half section. We drove in there that day, and Carl decided that day or the day before that he was going to quit farming.

Before that, I'll back up just a little bit, Carl Donovan and my dad were real good friends. They cut wheat together while I was in the army a couple or three years. So we just happened to go by that day and drove in there. Carl was up in the yard and the mower was up in the yard, so we drove in there and Carl got to talking a little bit. He said, "I've decided I'm going to quit farming. I'm going to rent this ground out." So, well, there we were. "I've got a couple guys in mind." Well, I'd got out of the service a few years ago, so Dad talked to him quite a little while there that day, and we went home. I guess he called a couple days later and said, "I've decided I'm going to rent that ground to you." It was four quarters, and then they sold a quarter, which I bought (Dad and I bought). That's where I got started farming in the Centerview area. Renting and bought that quarter from Carl at the auction that day. I had four quarters and a few years later Bernard Graff had the place where we live now. He decided he was going to retire and move to Greensburg. I bought the Graff place, the Bernard Graff place, and that's where we live now. I rented his ground to go with that, so I had a total of 1,600 acres, which I still farmed today. I still have the original ground I started with in 1971, still got the ground. It's changed hands to Swishers, but I still have the same landlords, the Donovans. The Donovan kids are all... Dandy lives in Mesa, Arizona. I hear from him every year, or twice a year, to make sure the crops are in! But I still have the same landlords I started out with and 1,600 acres.

Joan: And you grew wheat?

Lester: I grow dryland and irrigated wheat. I have five circles of irrigated crops, I irrigate corn; I irrigate milo; I irrigate soybeans.

Joan: Is that about what you were growing in '79 also?

Lester: No. Some of that irrigation came in about '82 or '83. But in '79 I had that 120 acres of flood irrigation over the ground north. Then in the later years, in the '80's they put that circle in. Probably in 1979, I just had that 120 acres of flood irrigation.

Joan: And you didn't have animals? You didn't have cattle?

Lester: Floyd Crockett was a dear friend of mine from Fellsburg. For several years, Floyd and I ran cattle. We helped build that church here in Lewis. We were trustees for several years, and we traveled around and helped build that church. He ran cattle over there for, it had to be, 20 some years. We brought some yearlings over every year, and we put them over on corn stalks and milo stalks and wheat pasture.

Joan: Were you doing this in the '70's also?

Lester: Yes.

Joan: Okay, so you did have animals at this time.

Lester: Yes

Joan: Was the farm your only source of income?

Lester: Yes. Well, later, what year did you start teaching, Janet? She taught for 19 years. She taught at ~~Greensburg~~ Kinsley.

Janet: I substituted in Greensburg, but started in Kinsley. But in the '70's I was a farmwife.

Joan: How did you hear about the American Agriculture Movement?

Lester: Well, it started out in Topeka. There were some guys in Colorado who went to Topeka...

Joan: Well, how did you hear about it before Topeka?

Lester: There were some guys out there in Colorado who started it; they had meetings. I think it was probably through Darrel and Karen Miller and Dub and Clara Stapleton and Marj and Ed Scheufler.

Joan: Do you remember going to the local meetings when it was first getting started?

Lester: Some of the meetings we went to were in Kingman. There were some meetings; I just don't remember where they were. Jeff Meade wrote that stuff down. Jeff and Zelma went to those meetings and Darrel and Karen Miller and Stapletons. I remember one time they went clear down to... this was in preparation for the Washington, D.C. trip, it was down in Kingman. There were meetings clear back before that. We went to Topeka, of course, I remember those guys coming by Lewis with their tractors. They came from Colorado and went by on Highway 50. But it has been a long time ago.

Joan: When you first heard about it, why did you want to become involved?

Lester: Well, this agriculture was going through some tough times back in those days. I thought maybe we had a voice they needed to hear back in Washington, D.C. and Topeka. Of course, a lot of it didn't pan out, but then I think it made them aware of what was going on out here in the country on the farm. With the low prices and the tough times we were going through, I thought it was a worthwhile thing to get involved in.

Joan: You know, the first Tractorcade was in 1977, December 10, 1977. Did you go on that one? They had a bus that left from this area.

Lester: I didn't take a tractor on that one. I went...

Joan: Did you drive up? Or didn't you go at all?

Lester: Well, I remember going with Jack Wolfe.

Joan: Now, he drove his tractor that didn't have a cab on it. I mean, it was an old tractor.

Lester: I think that I went up to Topeka one time. Didn't they go twice?

Joan: There were two times, in December of '77 and one in '78. I think in '78 there were more tractors, I think the first time there were a busload.

Lester: No, I didn't go on that. I went the second time.

Joan: You went in '78, but you would have just driven up in a vehicle.

Lester: A bunch of us went, and I rode with somebody. I just remember going up.

Joan: Do you have any memories about what that was like up there?

Lester: No, I don't.

Joan: You father was still alive...

Lester: Lloyd, yes.

Joan: What did he think about you being involved in the Tractorcade?

Lester: Well, he didn't know about it. Of course, I remember him sitting out there along the road. The first Tractorcade went by just south... he lived outside of Belpre there a half mile. I came up and I told him that the tractors would be coming by. Well, that was the first one he went on down. But he just couldn't get a handle on why they needed to be doing that. But he went down to the highway just south of the house a half mile where I grew up, a half mile west of Belpre, and they went down there along the highway and they went past us with the tractors and the flags going east. He just couldn't get a handle on why they needed to be doing that.

Joan: Didn't quite approve?!

Lester: Didn't quite approve. But he was interested to see the tractors and the American flags everybody had going down there. I remember sitting there with him and I think that next year I got more involved in it the second time around. We went to Topeka and all went around the State Capitol down there. I was standing down there with Jeff Meade and the tractor was doing a wheelie, and trying to go around the wheelie out there in the middle of the street and it about tipped over. Jeff and I was standing there on the edge of the curb, and we backed up there and that was right there in front of me and we just almost fainted. That tractor going around like that in a circle like that, blowing smoke.

Joan: You don't know who was in it do you?

Lester: No.

Joan: Jack Wolfe was just here and he said they did donuts, and that somebody's tractor lost a wheel doing this.

Lester: Well, I don't remember that. Jeff was standing over there and I was standing over here and looking down there and he came around doing donuts and that thing was just like that, and I said, "Oh!" and we just about lost it because there he was, that tractor was going to lay over on its side. Boy, we just almost fainted right there. But he finally got that thing back down on its wheels and bounced you know.

Joan: The one Jack talked about, he said they lost a wheel and they chained it up or something. Anyway, he finished the parade with three wheels. How do you do that on a tractor?

Lester: I don't know, I didn't see that. Jeff Meade and I were standing on the curb and we looked down there and he wasn't very far from out here at the church. That thing went around and did a donut and started to tip over on the side and I thought, "Well, it's going to go over, just lay over. Then it finally came back and bounced." And Jeff and I went, "Oh!" and almost fainted.

Joan: Okay, your father didn't maybe approve or understand what this young guy was doing. How about the rest of the community? Were they supportive or was it mixed?

Lester: I suppose it was mixed. There was this group... there a lot in the area that approved and something had to be done with legislation and trying to do something in Washington, D.C. That's the reason the thing was hatched in the years following that. Then we went to Washington, D.C.

Joan: And your father's farm was doing okay, so he didn't feel the need?

Lester: Well, it wasn't doing okay, but he just didn't quite understand why we were taking those tractors down the highway.

Joan: How involved were you, Janet? Did you do anything with it?

Lester: No, she didn't. She was at home. She had three little kids at home, and of course... Looking back at that deal, I don't understand why I left either.

Janet: I did get a generator!

Lester: I did get a generator because it was in the wintertime and of course she wouldn't have any lights... You never did use it, did you?

Janet: No. But originally, you were only going to Indianapolis.

Lester: There was supposed to be somebody there that was going to go from Indianapolis or somewhere on into Washington, D.C. and I was going to come home. And thinking back on that....

Joan: Well, Leo Schinstock came out and they brought you from Washington back, so that's when you came home. But you think maybe they were supposed to go to Indianapolis?

Janet: No, it was --- you know, they live up on the highway on the north side.

Joan: Was it Alvin Wheaton?

Lester: Alvin was involved.

Janet: But wasn't his son going to come up or something...

Lester: No. Alvin was involved in it, but I can't... Leo Schinstock, when I got to Washington, D.C., Beverly and I flew home, and Leo brought my truck home, and his wife (*Mary Ellen*). Originally, I thought, "Well, I'm going to go to Indianapolis, then I'm going to come home." Well, that didn't happen, so I was gone three weeks and left her there with three kids. I've been hearing about that probably ever since! Anyway, there she was with three little kids. Nothing happened while I was gone, thankfully. I kept in contact every day, of course.

Joan: Were you supportive of why he went?

Janet: Oh yes. The sign on the truck was done by Judy Simpson.

Lester: Judy Simpson painted that. She now lives in Williamsburg, Kansas, there on 35 on the 4-lane before Ottawa. I think she still runs that barbeque place there at... Williamsburg, wasn't it?

Joan: I was wondering about that sign. Was that sign on your truck the whole way, and it lasted the whole way? I mean, it always looks in pretty good shape. It went through a lot of ice and snow. Was it made of canvas?

Lester: It was made of wood.

Joan: Out of plywood, that's why it lasted.

Lester: Oh yes. She painted it.

Joan: It was a nice sign. We've got pictures of it.

Lester: We've got one at home of the boys standing with it, but we can't find it yet.

Joan: We've got several pictures of it.

Lester: Judy Simpson was a neighbor of ours that lived right down the road west of Jeff Meade's. Up there, but her husband passed away several years ago. But Judy Simpson, she is still... I think her folks had that barbeque place there in Williamsburg, didn't they? And she's still alive and she's the one that painted that sign, and she's...it's a town on that 35 four lane between Emporia and Ottawa. She's still alive.

Joan: Okay, and this was a truck that you owned or your father?

Lester: I owned it.

Joan: You owned it. And your responsibility was to keep everybody fueled up?

Lester: Yes.

Joan: And propane, we just learned before, for the trailers.

Lester: Yes. We had a big, I don't know how big, a thousand gallons of diesel fuel. I was up early every morning. A lot of the tractors didn't need fuel every day, but then a lot of them got up late at the night and we'd be out there fueling tractors up. It was cold. All the trailers needed propane, and I had that.

Joan: So you would go to a gas station and load this thing up?

Lester: I had a lot of bulk fuel trailers along the way. They would be there and I'd see them and then I'd get off of the road and fill that thing up.

Joan: Who had the bulk trailers?

Lester: I mean, you'd see a bulk trailer in a town someplace like Volz (*oil company in Kinsley*) and they'd fill it up.

Joan: And the money for the fuel came from?

Lester: Well, you know, there was a lot of money that farmers gave along the way.

Joan: Not just the farmers back here, but farmers along the way?

Lester: There was some. Of course, we had money, or Marj or whoever had the money, I suppose gave it to me and we'd fill things up. There was a lot of money over here before we even went.

Joan: Right. They asked for donations and got it from the local farmers. Okay, before we had the tape on, you were saying that you think they left from Pratt or Kingman?

Lester: Yes, in thinking back on that, I think it wasn't Pratt, it was here in Lewis and then we went from here to Stafford and then to Hutchinson. So it was somewhere, I think those guys from down in Kingman, which is a lot them from Kingman and Hardtner and Pratt area came up and then we went from there to Hutchinson.

Joan: Okay, let's see. We were talking and you remembered when... how did you get the word that the Wolfe trailer had turned over.

Lester: Oh, I've been thinking about that these last few minutes.

Joan: Did you have a CB in your truck?

Lester: No. Yes, I'm trying to think about how it came about. He was ahead of us. He was going to go on down there and be down to Washington, D.C., the way I've got it in my head. I just don't know, I can't remember.

Joan: You were in the group?

Lester: Yes, but why was he out ahead of us? I can't remember.

Lester: I think my fuel truck was a 1976.

Joan: So that was a pretty new truck! And you were letting other people drive it!

Lester: (No, no one else drove it.) It was a '76. My dad and I both got red trucks the same year. Of course, I had a farm sale in, what year was it, '85? '84 or '85, I sold that truck at the farm sale.

Joan: So by '84 o4 '85 times were tough enough that you were selling everything because you weren't making a living?

Lester: Yes. I had a farm sale and sold all of my trucks and equipment and I was out of farming for probably...well, I worked for my brother-in-law, Ron Schultz, out at Trousdale and then I came back and started farming again. I started farming with my neighbor, Norm Frederick. We started doing things together. My dear friend is still alive today, or course he's retired. He moved to Hutchinson, Kansas. He sold his farm what, five years ago? And my son Jay is now farming down there with us; he lives there on Norm Frederick's place.

Joan: So you sold the truck at that sale. How about the sign. Did you keep the sign?

Janet: I don't know where that sign went.

Joan: A lot of them still have their signs!

Janet: Did they say they have their signs?

Joan: They have their signs. Oh, they have their tractors, nearly everybody still has their tractors that went on the different Tractorcades.

Lester: Well, that sign just got away from us.

Joan: It was probably good wood!

Lester: Yes. But anyway, I was back farming in two years and got started farming with this neighbor of mine, Norm Frederick, and have been ever since. Because we've been in that same house... well, there was that one year that we was out then we were back in again.

Joan: Okay, so we've got you on the road to Topeka, and the tractors are converging. We've lost the Wolfes and you are heading out east from Topeka. I'm just amazed on this Tractorcade how bad the weather was the whole way. What are some of your memories of that trip?

Lester: One memory, I got up to Kansas City, before we went to Sedalia, the Missouri State Fairgrounds. Really, we got to there, and we were met by the National Guard. In my mind, I couldn't hardly believe what I was seeing, of course Marj... But they had Army or National Guard or whatever it was, on the side of the road.

Joan: Were they armed?

Lester: To this day, I can't believe... why would they bring out the army on the side of the road? We wasn't going to do anything. We were just going to go down to Washington, D.C. And why those ...

we got to Kansas City before we went off and started going to Sedalia, and they were National Guard sitting along the road. What were they thinking they were going to do? Confrontation or what? I've always thought about that, but then they were setting there and we just kind of went on by on into Missouri and down into Sedalia. Why they was there that particular day, if they thought there was going to be trouble or what. Of course there wasn't any, we were just going down on a Tractorcade to Washington, D.C. I always remember those guys sitting along the road.

Joan: Well, we've learned that in Kansas, the police were quite cooperative. They helped you get through. But once you hit that Missouri border, it wasn't quite as friendly. You had to get off on Highway 50 in Missouri, didn't you?

Lester: Yes.

Joan: Which was worse!

Lester: Yes, because it was two lane and slow going, you know. When we got to Sedalia, Missouri, at the fairground, the troupers came in they were real helpful about trying to help us figure out what we were going to keep things moving and keep things going. I don't know how many troupers were there that day sitting in that fairgrounds in what looked like kind of an auction area where the fairgrounds was at. There were a lot of troupers there that day, and they were real helpful and they were trying to help get things figured out how we were going to get on the road and keep things moving. Once we got through there, that deal up there at Kansas City, I've always thought about that, why there were the National Guard people sitting along the road. It kind of blew my mind when I was thinking about it later.

Joan: What was your day like on the trip? What time did you get up and get started?

Lester: I don't know. It was always dark when I got up and always dark when I went to bed.

Joan: Did you stay with the tractors and drive at 13 miles an hour?

Lester: I was always behind them.

Joan: Always behind them. Did your truck also serve as a repair thing?

Lester: I had tools on that thing, and there was always something going on. I had wrenches and pipe wrenches... I had things all along the side of that truck. I had the propane, the diesel fuel and just everyday there was just some little thing, you know.

Joan: Did someone ride with you ever?

Lester: No, I was always there by myself. I was always behind the tractors. Some were back with the trailers and pickups and the campers, behind them, and we were in front of them.

Joan: I can't imagine driving all that way so slowly.

Lester: Oh yeah, it was every day.

Joan: I guess it wasn't boring; you were always trying to see the road through the snow!

Lester: But then it got down, of course this was later, in Indianapolis, the beautiful snow that they had there. They didn't have any wind. I remember pulling into Indianapolis in the parking lot there somewhere and it was snowing that day, probably 10 or 12 inches on the posts along the edge of the road. It was so pretty, just standing up there. It was just snowing that day and there wasn't any wind. All that snow was on top of the fence posts and just beautiful. Of course, they don't have the wind back there like we have here. I remember pulling in that day and looking at the snow just piled up there. It was just beautiful stuff. And there was a lot of snow it seemed like, after we left St. Louis, down there, through getting into Indianapolis and all those towns along I-70. Like Greenville, is that town you get through on the way to Sedalia. Of course, there's a big fancy state prison there now, I don't remember staying in Greenville, but Terre Haute, Indianapolis, and Sedalia; there's a lot of places in between there you know.

And there were people out ahead of us trying to find places to park. Every day you had to find places where you were going to be that night. That was quite a job too.

Joan: And you stayed with the Scheufler's at night in their trailer.

Lester: I stayed with Marj and Ed Scheufler.

Joan: And ate with them. Marj did the cooking.

Lester: Oh my, yes. Whatever she could put together there, it was always a wonderful meal. They had to try to be nutritious, you know; she would fix us kind of a lunch. We had some things we could eat along the way during the daytime. Yes, first the mornings and then in the evenings, trying to put things together so we could eat. It was quite a job for her, Marj. She had to do that every day. Ed was driving the camper part time and then driving Titus' tractor part time. Junior was driving his wife, she was along too.

Joan: Junior was Jim Titus?

Lester: Yes. They called him Junior Titus. So every day was a new experience for him. He was just kind of a comedian-type of guy.

Joan: Well, tell us some stories about Jim!

Lester: I think it was up there somewhere in Indianapolis when his trailer froze up. Of course, trying to get his stool deal unplugged underneath his trailer house. Ed and I went over there and opened the door up, and there was Junior and Jean sleeping there. Of course it was so cold in that trailer house. There wasn't any heat and everything was plugged up and nothing was working. His trailer was plugged up, his toilet, underneath. And there he is breathing heavy. I mean, it was cold! It was cold, and he was saying he needed to get the trailer unplugged. So we had to crawl down underneath and pull the snow back away from that trailer and get up underneath there. Ed finally got the thing unplugged so they could use the bathroom. It had froze up. It's just stories like that.

Joan: Did this trailer not have a heater? Or it just wasn't working?

Lester: Well the toilet was plugged up. Evidently his heater wasn't working or something. We had to work on his trailer that time. It was up there close to Indianapolis somewhere, I don't know exactly where it was at.

Joan: Were the trailers back then insulated at all? Or were they basically....

Lester: Oh yes, every night Ed... of course Ed, I can't remember our trailer always working. Of course, it was a job to keep that thing in shape, you know, where it's working and not froze up.

Joan: Most people don't go camping in the wintertime!

Lester: Oh my gosh. Once we left St. Louis and Missouri and went toward Indianapolis, it was cold and it seemed like there was snow all the way. Of course, you had these meetings every night. A lot of these tractor people, everybody was trying to get together to figure out the route and this and that and where were you going to stay. Of course Marj and them had to get groceries. And think we got through *Wheeling*, Pennsylvania, and then there comes down through there Virginia or...

Joan: West Virginia?

Lester: *Wheeling (West Virginia)*, well, we went through there going into Pennsylvania. *Wheeling*. It was Pennsylvania, Ohio and then West Virginia or Virginia, then *Wheeling* was this town's name. At that time, they had started to open up these big malls. We got there that day. It was snowing, and this guy from down in Kingman had a big Case tractor with a big blade on the front of it. He was always out in front, and he got there that day ahead of us, and he was cleaning the parking lot. The people were getting stuck and they were finding places to... people were wondering, "What are you doing?" Well, there wasn't anybody there to clean the snow of this great big mall parking lot. He was out there just pushing snow and getting places to park. He was already in there working with that tractor. We pulled in there and he was out there pushing snow. It seemed like he was always pushing snow with that big blade. So it was interesting that time. All the time, people was always coming up and thanking you along the way.

Joan: The farmers?

Lester: Yeah, there was area farmers that couldn't come would come into these meetings and thank for us guys to go to Washington, D.C. to try to get something done. There was always farmers come in that couldn't go, they was always shaking your hand.

Joan: And fed you sometimes? Did they or not?

Lester: Well, I can't remember that.

Joan: Of course, you were having good food at Scheufler's!

Lester: Marj definitely took good care of us.

Joan: Let's see, I think there was one night I think you spent on the rise of an overpass was it? Because the road was so bad and they just had to pull over to the right?

Lester: There was an overpass there in St. Louis that the bridge was shaking.

Joan: Why was it shaking?

Lester: Well, traffic was stopped, and we was stopped. That wasn't good. I think that place was right

there in St. Louis. I think there was a wreck or something, the tractors were involved in something ahead of us. We was going up to that place in St. Louis where there was this bridge and we was stopped about halfway up and we, you know, we could just feel that thing moving. We was on there quite a while, maybe all night. Didn't move that night. Something had happened down in front of us. One of the tractors hit somebody. I can't remember exactly who it was now. They took awhile to get that straightened out.

Joan: I think that Beverly in her diary said that it seemed like every time you got to a big town there was a tractor accident because city people didn't know how to slow down!

Lester: I know there was in Washington, D.C. right in front of me. Nobody stopped. They hit this lady and everybody just kept moving! So anyway, it was on that bridge there in St. Louis and that thing was moving. There was a tractor accident down there in front of us, but I can't remember who it was.

Joan: How were people's attitudes? I mean, this was a difficult trip because of the weather. Just the trip in itself would be difficult, but when you add that weather... Did participants keep pretty positive?

Lester: We was really just positive, and we had... Everybody just seemed like every day to have a good time meeting other farmers at night in these rallies we had along the way. It was just positive all the way. Some of these places we'd just stop, and of course there was a lot of places where we were fed, too at the fairgrounds or wherever we was at. It was just positive that other farmers came in and thanked us for what we were doing. So no, it was... along the way, we really just had a good time. It was hard, it was really hard some days, you know, just trying to get through that snow. It was cold, and getting things started every day. So yeah, it was tough.

Joan: So you got up to outside of Washington, D.C. and stayed at Cherry Hill Camp City, was where you guys were camped.

Lester: Well, outside of Frederick, Maryland, there was some college before we got to Frederick, Maryland. I've been trying to think of that.

Joan: You know, I don't think we have the name of that college yet, and I haven't had time to investigate, but I will do that. Because nobody remembers the name of that college, but you were glad to have it that day. (*Frostburg State College*)

Lester: I'll tell you what, and I'm going to tell a story here that my wife should probably know about...

Joan: That's okay; it's time for her to know

Lester: We were lost! I mean, Junior was lost, and we just don't know where he was at that night with that tractor. We went up through this university, I think it could have been a juco, I don't know. I'm trying to think

Joan: It was before you got to Frederick? Right before?

Lester: I think it was up there somewhere in those mountains. Forests. You might use that word "forest". It was a college, (*Frostburg State College*) and anyway, you can imagine down in these canyons that the roads with snow was piled clear up. I mean, you couldn't even see over the top of it.

Joan: You're indicating like six foot?

Lester: Oh, higher.

Joan: Where they had plowed it and piled it up.

Lester: And the truck was sliding down this way and then you'd go a little bit and hopefully you didn't hit anybody. It was snowing so hard, and then finally we got to this college. Of course, Junior, I don't know if he found us that night or the next morning. But he was telling us later where he went into this town and was trying to find where we was at because we was all lost! It was snowing and we finally got to this college in this mountainous area before we got to Frederick. I know that. We decided we got inside this college and got camped in there, and I don't if it was a juco or what it was, but it wasn't that big a college. But anyway, it was a college. So we decided we were going to have something to drink that night. Ed probably had some liquor or something or I don't know what it was, but we were drinking. I think we all decided we wasn't going to be moving that next day. We thought we was going to be there for a while. Low and behold, that next morning, "Bang, Bang, Bang!" on that trailer door, "Get up, we're moving out!" I said, "What!" There was snow everywhere. We'd got parked in there, you know, and we didn't think we would ever get out of this place. You know, we were going to be there a day or two. That next morning somebody started banging on the trailer, saying "We're moving out."

Joan: I think the college wanted you to leave didn't they, because they were going to have classes.

Lester: Could be. But in my mind, you know, I was thinking about that, somebody beating on that door and telling us they were getting ready to move out. "No way." By golly, I got the truck kind of out there going, and the trailer got out away from where the snow was and got moving, and you know, we got outside that campus and started going I think towards Frederick and down towards that snow on the mountain, and there wasn't any. I mean, it just happened to be heavy snow that night. After we got back away from that gully, oh it was a few miles back where it kind of leveled out. There was snow, but hardly any like there was at that college. Trying to get out, snow was piled everywhere along that going down those canyon roads down through there to that college. I don't know how we got in there that night; it was just a blizzard. It was terrible. We knew we weren't going to move for a couple days so we decided we'd drink a little bit that night. So I got up the next morning and had a headache, but we all got up and started moving and started down towards Frederick. Frederick had a big truck stop down there and got down there and they ate. Of course, at that time, Frederick, Maryland, was a big truck stop for that area. Big place. Everybody was asking if the farmers and the tractors were going into Washington, D.C. They wanted to know all about what we was doing and how we was doing it. It was interesting that day after we got out away from that college and all that snow and got down there closer to Washington, D.C. That's somewhere down in there where Jack Wolfe joined us before we went into Washington.

Joan: Oh, before you went into Washington.

Lester: We went along there and the door opened up, and there was Jack Wolfe!

Joan: And he'd flown in!

Lester: Yeah, he was there ahead of us and came out there somewhere and he said, well, he was out there before we got into Washington, D.C. Of course, we went into a parking area. They have this deal

around Washington, D.C., what do you call that?

Joan: The Beltway?

Lester: Yeah, the Beltway. We was outside of that before we came in. Of course, he found us going down the road, and we stopped there that evening and opened the door, and there was Jack Wolfe. "Where'd you come from?" But anyway, he rode in with us.

Joan: So he rode in your vehicle, your truck.

Lester: Yes, and we talked.

Joan: What was it like when you actually rode in with the tractors to D.C.? Can you talk about that day a little bit?

Lester: Oh boy, it was pretty intense because they'd gone over this bridge, and they wouldn't let us move into where the Mall area was at. Of course, there was all those tractors before we'd gone in there. The Washington, D.C. Police, they were trained and they had keys to these tractors and they knew how to drive them. So we was outside the Beltway somewhere staying, I don't know exactly where.

Joan: Cherry Hill Campground.

Lester: Could be. Of course, there was meetings and this and that about these tractors. Of course, some of these tractors were burnt down in front of the Department of Agriculture, you know. They were set on fire and this and that. Of course, the D.C. police knew how to drive these tractors. I wasn't really involved in that. As we were going in that day, and we were parked, we parked along the street over there on one of these streets before you get down toward the Washington, D.C. Mall. We walked in and seen a lot of the things that happened before we even got there that day. We were there all day, and finally we ended up going around in front of the White House. We got the truck and went down the street, I don't know, I'll call it west, on the side, and then going down. We got stopped on a street that had a "V". The street went this way and another way. We were stopped there, and we were there, I think we were there all that afternoon and night trying to negotiate. The police wouldn't let us leave that area where we were at on the street.

Joan: You were stopped right there on the street?

Lester: Yes. They stopped us and they wouldn't let us go. Of course, all the other tractors were around the Mall up there, you know, they put them inside that Mall. We was stopped on the side over there with some tractors and my truck and... I don't know what time of night they finally let us go back out to where we was camped, because we went down a side street and went from there from the White House, Blair House, and came down on the other side. We just kind of went down there and ran towards the Agriculture Building but we got stopped on a side street, a whole bunch of us on the street with tractors. Things were pretty tense with the policemen. They wouldn't... we was just trying to negotiate, trying to get back out to where we could go. ~~I think it was the next morning, the next day. We was there all night trying to get back.~~ It was that evening after dark they finally let us go.

Joan: Did you find the police pretty cooperative or were they pretty stern?

Lester: Yes. They're, as we know now, they're there to protect things, the White House and

Washington, D.C.

Rosetta: Who was in your truck with you?

Lester: I was by myself.

Joan: But you were with...

Lester: ~~Jack Wolfe~~ Marjory and Ed Scheufler rode in with me.

Joan: I mean where you were stopped in the "V", you were all by yourself?

Lester: No, I was there with other tractors.

Joan: From our group?

Lester: *(No, I was the only one from our group, but there were other tractors.)*

Lester: Well, it was ~~during the middle of the~~ late that night that we left there, and we were there a long time that day.

Joan: The way she (*Beverly*) remembered was that ~~you~~ she got back to the trailer and the rest of ~~them~~ you weren't there and she was tired and went to bed.

Lester: Somewhere along the way, ~~we met~~ Beverly met up with Junior Titus and his tractor, and ~~we~~ they got back in there that night ~~or early that morning~~.

Joan: And then the others came in because they didn't know where you were.

Lester: Yeah, and we'd all got separated. So I was... it was a long evening, long night, getting back to where our camp was. ~~Whether she was with me in that truck, where we stopped at the "V", I don't know.~~

~~Joan: At least at one, she was in her tractor.~~

~~Lester: I was with this guy from Stafford, and this guy from Kingman.~~

~~Joan: Well, she was in her tractor, so she may have been in another group that again, didn't end up on the Mall.~~

Lester: Right. Once you got inside that Mall, you were in there. They wouldn't let you out. You had busses and all these policemen surrounding you. Our truck was sitting over here when the tractors went in, so we parked over here along the street and then later we went and got the truck and the other tractors and went down by the white house and around. That's where we got stopped.

Joan: So did you go to the big rally on foot? Maybe it was at the Ag Building or something?

Lester: Yes. We was walking around all that day and all the afternoon around the Mall and seen the policemen. They had busses around the Mall, all the way around, with policemen and those busses.

There was no way you could get out. So we walked around and we went to the White House and the policemen up there, we talked to them and walked back. We finally got back to the truck and we were going to go back to the campground. Well, we came back and found the White House and Blair House and went down along there and got stopped in that area. "Oh man, we're going to be here..." Finally, some time that night they let us go.

Joan: Now, how many days did you spend in Washington, D.C.?

Lester: Oh boy.

Joan: About how many, were you there just a couple days? Or...

Lester: It couldn't have been over about three or four.

Joan: And then you flew home?

Lester: Beverly and I flew home.

Joan: And Leo and Mary Ellen brought your truck back.

Lester: Yes, they brought it back.

Joan: About a week or so later? Or a couple weeks?

Lester: The next week, they came back.

Joan: While you were there for those two or three days, did you do any of the lobbying?

Lester: We went into the, I think, House of Representatives. We sat up around the top, up there.

Joan: In the Visitors' balcony?

Lester: We did that.

Joan: Did you meet with any of the congressmen or senators in their offices, personally?

Lester: We was in... we rode that train back over to the senate building a couple of different times and then we went to some of these offices and there was other guys that did the talking and we... Yeah, we was in the buildings.

Joan: How did Senators Dole and Sibelius and Senator Kassebaum, what's your remembrance of how they acted? Were they supportive?

Lester: Yes. I remember those people on the street that were lobbyists or that worked there, going down the street and turning around and talking to us. "Boy, you guys mean business! You're down here in your tractors and giving up your time to try to get something done." It opened people's eyes that we drove all that way down there trying to get something done for the farmers. There was some legislation that we attended and sat up in there in the back. I can't remember exactly, but it was something we was trying to get done. So, you know, I came home. It was interesting to see all that, and

the progress, and what they was trying to get done.

Joan: You sort of mentioned earlier-- was it a worthwhile trip?

Lester: I think it was for me. Just seeing the process of what tried to take place. You look at it now and a lot of things that we wish could get done we see on TV now, really, all they have to go through to get bills here to there and talked about on the floor. The government, it's interesting how things turn down there.

Joan: So you don't regret going?

Lester: No, I don't.

Joan: When you came home, how did people back here in Edwards County react to what you had done?

Lester: Oh, I don't know. I just feel like that... of course, a lot of the people that we was involved with still think today that we were trying to get the right thing done. It started out there in Colorado, of course, and came this way.

Joan: How about your father? Did he change his mind about it?

Lester: Not really. He was glad to see me home, of course, and my wife. But he was still skeptical about going. Of course, he didn't say it. He was still supportive as far that. But as far as doing that, he didn't think it was necessary.

Joan: Did you stay active in the AAM?

Lester: No.

Joan: Other farm organizations?

Lester: No, or course, I belong to Farm Bureau now; I have insurance there. I keep up on the Farm Bureau newsletter and what they're doing and this and that, but then American Ag, as far I can remember, kind of dissolved after a few years.

Joan: Well, it was quite an undertaking.

Lester: Yes, it was; yes it was, to get all those tractors going every day and just meeting the little farmers along the way. It was just interesting, the people you met. Of course, I like going to malls and watching people and visiting with people. You sit there on those benches anyway when you go to a mall. Somebody will sit there and strike up a conversation, that's what I go for, you know, to talk to people. It would be interesting to see Beverly's diary because she kept a lot of that. I was focused on trying to keep everybody going.

Joan: You were very important; everybody thought you were very important!

Lester: Oh, keeping the tractors going and keeping trailers going and driving that every day. It was quite a chore.

Joan: This was in 1979. Then by '84 or '85, somewhere in there, that's when you sort of lose the farm and had to quit farming.

Lester: Well, for a year. Was it '85 or '86? '86.

Joan: Well, if you figure that out. We'll say it's '85, and if it's '86, we'll make sure it's right in the transcript. What was it like to have to quit farming?

Lester: It was tough. The boys were older; they were close to junior high, wasn't they?

Janet: The oldest graduated in '88.

Lester: To sell all your farm equipment that day, it was terrible. When I went to work for Ron Schultz, my brother-in-law over at Trousdale, do you know Ron?

Joan: I don't think I do.

Lester: Anyway, he was farming over there, and I went over there and worked for him one year and then came back. The Norm Frederick and I got together and said, let's see if we can kind of get things going again. Here's a neighbor struggling too and needs help.

Joan: Why exactly did you quit? Did you have loans for irrigation?

Lester: Yeah, and of course 18% interest back in those days; that was high interest rates. That's why this whole thing was bad in the area. 18% or 21%, you couldn't keep things going with that. We got overextended.

Joan: Other people said the banks were real willing for you to get overextended.

Lester: Exactly.

Joan: They weren't real cooperative after.

Lester: Anyway, we got things worked out with the bank and got started with this neighbor of mine, Norm Frederick. He was needing help and I was needing help, and we got to going again. It's been kind of a struggle ever since, but we got to raising some crops and buying some machinery.

Joan: And doing it together halves the bills.

Lester: Yes. And I got a truck and tractor and got a combine and started making things work again. The interest rates came down so then about 8 years ago (*we got an*) the oil well and that didn't hurt anything.

Joan: That's for subsidizing the farm!

Lester: And of course, I was thankful after our tragedy in 2002 (*The Derley's son, Troy, died.*), when Jay got through college and went to work on for Seaboard Farms in Leoti for about five years. We was hoping we could get him back to the farm, and he came back and worked for his father-in-law, Dale Zook for a year. Then Norm said, "Well, I'm going to retire next year." So he took Jay in for a year and

helped him. He worked for Norm Frederick for about a year and got to know the landlords on this side. This is when this oil income kind of kicked in. The day of the sale, I was able to buy a lot of his machinery and get my son Jay started. He's still there at Norm's place, been there about six years now.

Joan: So you can see your farm continuing?

Lester: I hope so, yes.

Joan: Not everybody is in that situation. Not even today.

Lester: Living there, we're hoping we can be able to. I'm 68. Hopefully in another two years I'm feeling good. Heart and health is good.

Joan: So many of the kids at that time, the farm couldn't support two families, so they had to go find another way to make a living. Now, to come back is a hardship or the knowledge isn't there either, I suppose.

Lester: Well, he's a K-State grad and his knowledge has been beneficial to me, because I think it made me a better farmer, actually. His degree at K-State, or any university as far as that goes, his knowledge of what he's learned and what he can apply to what we're doing with no-till and this and that. It's making us be a better farm.

Joan: Maybe this isn't a good word, but who would you blame for the situation back there? Was it a government problem, a banking problem?

Lester: Well, there was a lot of things out of control back then. The interest rates and this and that.

Joan: You couldn't raise your prices in order to make a living.

Lester: Well, prices were low and then you had high interest rates. Then of course, if you didn't have a good year, one bad year, and you know... I had one of them years. Yes, there are a lot of farmers who aren't here today because of the 1980's. What I went through, a lot of them are not back farming.

Joan: Rosetta, what have I forgotten? Lester, is there anything else you want to add?

Lester: Well, the experience with the Tractorcade. Jack Wolfe, I'll always remember him getting into that truck and not being a part of the Tractorcade, but he wanted to be a part of that Tractorcade so bad.

Joan: He still does.

Lester: I remember hearing about that. We were on our way somewhere, and oh, Jack Wolfe had an accident down there at Newton (I had in my mind it was Emporia, but it was Newton) anyway, he couldn't go and he wanted to be on there so bad. Of course, he wrecked his trailer. So anyway, he opened the door down there in Washington, D.C. and getting ready to go it, and he was crying. He really was. He got in that front seat, and he just cried. He wanted to be on that Tractorcade so bad. Part of it, being there when we went in that place and getting in the front seat made him cry. You know, he's a pretty emotional guy.

Rosetta: To see all of that. He knew it was going to happen, but to be there all the same. The unity of

it. That would be amazing.

Lester: Yeah, we come in that day, and I guess maybe Darrel or somebody brought him out there where we were at. To be a part of that; he was pretty well overwhelmed. He's a pretty special guy, of course, he went through a lot in the war (*World War II*). There's a lot of deals on there that you were just working so hard trying to get everything going, a lot of stuff just kind of left me.

Joan: Did you have a feeling you were part of history?

Lester: Yes, I do, I sure you do.

Joan: I think you were.

Lester: We were trying to go down to get some things done in Washington, D.C., that's where it all starts. Legislation down through Capitol Hill, trying to legislate things out here so we can kind of make things work out here. Things weren't going very good, I didn't think.

*Audio ends.*