

1979 Tractorcade to Washington D.C.

Interview with Jerry Stapleton

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Conducted in the Kinsley Library, Kinsley, Kansas

Interviewers: Joan Weaver and Rosetta Graff, Kinsley Library

Joan: Jerry, can you describe your farm as it existed in 1979?

Jerry: How many acres? I'm not recalling. I had bought two quarters of ground from Jess Deckert, and was trying to dry land farm. I didn't have too much machinery, primarily just trading work with my dad (*W. A. "Dub" Stapleton*) for the use of the machinery.

Joan: Did you just have crops? Or animals?

Jerry: Yes, I had a cow/calf herd, but my dad had given my wife a heifer calf when we got married in '69, and we were slowly building a herd. We added about 30 heifers at one time that I had to borrow money for, and my dad said, "Well, at this price, you can make it, so don't worry about it." But going into debt for that many critters at that period of time was pretty daunting. Luckily, it worked out. It helped us out. Statistically, I can't tell you exactly, but I've always felt like I had two good years and then we got into the Carter years with the high interest rates and things were really going downhill. Pretty much of a struggle. I remember at that time, we were really surviving by a large garden and here a cow man actually was resorting to milking goats to give his kids. That was an experience in itself, that life went that way. I'd never dreamed that I would have goats, much less appreciate their personalities. I can see why they're one of the first domesticated animals that man had.

Joan: How many goats did you have?

Jerry: Too many, actually! We started with one old white Nubian goat that milked harder than the hubs of hell. It definitely built your arms up, but she gave a lot of milk for a goat. She was the centerpiece of the goat herd; she was the queen bee. Her name was Duchess, and she certainly was. She didn't take anything off of anybody. I'm not sure where we ended up, I sold them to a friend of mine finally when I started working in the oil patch. We just had too many to take care of and take care of them like they should be, so we got rid of them. But the kids enjoyed them, and they were a positive aspect. I never thought I would be in that situation.

We did a lot of canning, had a big garden.

Joan: Were you working outside of the farm in '79?

Jerry: No.

Joan: That came later? When did you start? I assume it was to support the farm.

Jerry: This was after the Tractorcade. In '84, things really got tight. Things didn't improve. In '79 things were not looking good. Prices were down and nothing like now, but it seemed like everything we bought... JFK said that the farmer buys retail, sells wholesale, and pays the freight both ways. Even for a Democrat, he certainly did seem to have a handle on that. Actually, personal opinion, I think he would be a fairly conservative Republican now, the way politics are going, but he did have a clue. I think he had a handle on it. We were kind of caught in that. I'd borrowed enough money that we were feeling the pinch. I had gone into a joint venture with my brother, I think it was '73 or '74, and we had bought some tractors and expanded the equipment to a little newer so we could farm the irrigated ground a little

better. We rented some ground from Lee Turner at Great Bend. That was another experience, a whole other book.

Joan: When did you start irrigating?

Jerry: I'm going to say in '74.

Joan: That was an expensive deal too.

Jerry: We went into a situation with my dad's long-time landlord on one quarter, and they did put a well down and then we put the system up. So we borrowed money for that, plus the machinery. Then we rented two quarters from Lee Turner, which was a very daunting task because Lee in the goodness of his heart was letting us do all the legwork for him, getting set up and getting the systems up and getting the wells down. We got to do a tremendous amount of uncalled-for labor, getting them developed. Lee was pretty good at that, using other people for his gain. It was very time consuming at the time. Bill (*Jerry's brother*) was very fortunate to be teaching school, it was pretty nerve-wracking getting things going. But with all of these expenses, when prices started turning down, you know that inflation is a governmental policy. It's a monetary policy. We started getting massive inflation especially under Carter. Other aspects of the economy were pretty good; I've heard that some people in the oil patch thought things were fine at that time. Nevertheless, farm notes were getting up to the 20% interest rates. I think the most that we ever paid on an operating note was 18.5%. But those type of costs on top of trying to service notes become very daunting. There were a lot of people went out (*of business*). Some of this might be anecdotal, I can't remember the exact number, but I think it was around 12 or 15 farmers that we had counted just there in the Lewis area through the Lewis bank went under in that period of time.

Joan: This would be in the early '80's?

Jerry: That would have been in the early part of Mr. Carter's tenure. I think probably those type of things was what was really pushing people. They could see that things weren't going to get better. And they didn't. They actually got people off the tractor. You know, farmers like to tinker with stuff and grow things. To get them actually involved doing something for their perceived self-interest was sometimes very difficult.

Joan: So how did you hear about the AAM?

Jerry: Well, my dad had taken on a young man (this is history) that was at my Aunt Rose's boarding house in Wichita. His name was Laurence Miller. Pop said, "I will have you come out and work for me if you will finish school and finish your high school education. Well, Laurence did that, and after high school he started farming and putting together a hay business and this now is Butch's Hay Service. Butch had been with Laurence years ago. But Laurence never was one to let anything stop him, and he was a mover and a shaker and always expanding, sometimes successfully and sometimes not successfully. But he could see that things weren't getting any better, and he'd been out west and heard about the farm strike in Colorado, southeast Colorado. He went out there and to my knowledge was probably one of the first people in all of this area that came back with a farm strike flyer. He brought it by my dad's and said, "Look at this. This is not what it ought to be." Well, I had been in political science and history and I'd taken a class in economic history. When they started talking about parity, it kind of rang a bell, and I thought, there's something to do with parity economics and I think maybe we ought to look into this. Subsequently we found that in southwest Kansas around Johnson there were

some people involved. And we got to looking around for any place locally, and at that time Lewis' strike office was not open. Bev Cornelison, Bonnie Russell's sister from Larned, she and another gentleman (I've been trying to think of the gentleman's name) they were having a little strike office in an empty building that the Farmer's Union in Larned had. So I went up there to man the phones and try to help out up there. Then subsequently, Lewis got active, and I came down and started helping there.

I think most people were involved, Alvin (*Wheaton*) brought that up, it just got to the tipping point that we couldn't see that things were getting any better. I just went primarily to implement the farm bill, because at that time, the farm bill said right in there that all that had to be done was for the secretary of agriculture to sign it into action as having 90% parity and non-recourse loans. It was written into the farm bill! All of the Tractorcade, all of that could have been avoided by putting that into action.

Joan: That was Bergland?

Jerry: Bob Bergland. Yes, I met him later at Farmer's Union, probably 10 or 12 years later, at a Farmer's Union convention, and he talked all the time about parity of income. I told him afterwards, "Bob, maybe you misunderstood what we were trying to get across, but parity of income is a socialist concept, and that's not what we were trying to say. We were trying to say parity of pricing for agricultural products." If you would wade through that one book that I gave you, (*Unforgiven: The Story of How America has Exchanged Parity Agriculture for Parity War* by Charles Walters, Jr.)the idea of parity pricing for agricultural products came about clear back in the 1700's with the French physiocrats saying that to back the franc up, they could tie it to agricultural products. The problem even our founding fathers talked about that, because we didn't have any gold in the country when there were the 13 colonies. We did have agricultural products, but had no way to store them. So it was bandied about actually in the fledgling Continental with agricultural products. As an aside, the said, "Well, we can't store the grain, but we can make it into whiskey, and we can store that!" So that was even thought of, of course that might have been consumed, so I'm not sure that would have worked out or not. But the history of parity goes back a long, long ways. I was involved with the Farmer's Union for a while, primarily because George Peek, (*one of Farmer's Union founders*) back at the turn of the century when the Farmer's Union first started, really did quite a bit of research into parity too. They were originally based on a parity concept.

Joan: How would you define parity?

Jerry: Well, there are many economic designations, but parity is primarily a way to judge the buying power of a product against what it is being sold in the economy. 100% parity would say, "Okay, this has 100% buying power to get a certain basket of goods." Originally, the Steagall Amendment in 1942 probably was instrumental in the recovery of the United States after World War II without having massive inflation with all the guys coming back because it was tied into the bonded warehouse, the grain bin storage. They were setting up a certain parity price on that. The original parity date was right before we went into WWI, 1916 or 17, because they considered that to be the golden age of economics. Things were pretty well balanced in the country. Herbert Hoover was the "czar" setting the price for the reparations after WWI with Germany. At that period of time he set the value of a bushel of wheat at \$2.25. Now that was the basis for all parity past that time written into law. Now we ended up with a bastardized version later which was 90% of 90% of 90%, which is the modern adjusted parity. They kept saying, "Well, you guys are so technologically good that wheat isn't worth as much." Well, that's beside the point. If the economy functions at this level at \$2.25, and it goes through a multiplier effect. It is wealth that never existed before. It came into being because of something that was grown. Oh, when you study it, it is so simple, but it's hard to get across. But when you have that as a base, it was

just like the gold standard, and at that time we were on the gold standard, but it was \$2.25 a bushel of wheat and \$35 for an ounce of gold. When you take it through the economy, you have the multiplier effect and everything was operating without borrowing a bunch of money and going in debt and having fiat money and all that.

Joan: If parity then was a bushel of wheat at \$2.25, as the rest of the goods and things went up, then it was supposed to go up correspondingly, right?

Jerry: Well, yes, ideally it probably wouldn't have gone up at all, because everything else would have balanced out. But people figure...before the Tractorcade, I think wheat was right at \$2.25, and all of our inputs were skyrocketing.

Joan: And all of your costs.

Jerry: Because we had gone to a fiat borrowed currency. Actually, when Nixon opened the gold window, we were off the \$35 limit on gold. I knew at the time I should have bought a lot of it, but I didn't have the money to do that.

Joan: But the government wanted you to turn all gold in, the way I understand it.

Jerry: That was back in the '30's. Roosevelt had you turn it all in, but very few people were put in jail over that. There was some held back.

Joan: I got a piece from my safety deposit box, from my mother. It was a gift! I guess you could keep gifts. Okay, so you had heard from the Colorado people. Did you start going to meetings?

Jerry: Oh yes, there were strike meetings all over the place.

Joan: By "strike," what did the farmers mean?

Jerry: Just to back off. I think primarily it was just to get people's attention. We did burn some wheat.

Joan: You did? Your family?

Jerry: You know, dry land farming, you get cheat (*grass*) in it. Cheat's endemic, if you just get a little bit behind, you've got cheat. All of our wheat had cheat in it, and we burnt some wheat with cheat in it. And they were like, "You burnt some wheat with cheat in it!" And we said, "Well, we would have cut it." And we burnt probably 40 acres of wheat. And there some people that plowed up the wheat and did things like that.

Joan: Did you publicize that you were burning it?

Jerry: I tried. We didn't get anybody out there just to see that or take pictures. But word got out.

Joan: That would have been in '77?

Jerry: Yes, this would have been in the spring of '78 or somewhere in there, because it was mature. We would have cut it. But just, I don't know, as time went along, it kind of snowballed. We got to the larger meetings that were held. People came from other states and when Texas got involved, I don't

know, but there were a lot of people from Texas got cranked up. Then the American Ag Movement paper, when it started, I'm not sure, but it was Micki Nellis and I think it was Alden Nellis, out of Ardale, Texas. They came up and started writing about it, and it became a little weekly newspaper.

Joan: Now, as I remember, for the American AG, you didn't pay dues or elect officers or things like that?

Jerry: I guess it was the original ag version of the Tea Party. We did end up, that was one of our first little schisms. There were some that were wanting to set up a new farm bureau and just do it that way and get insurance companies and whatever to help support us. They said, "Hey, it's been done that way before."

Joan: Did that way not work?

Jerry: After the Tractorcade, a lot of the long-term organization, there was some discord and there were some problems with it, but they started out with American Ag Movement Inc. We even had a little schism here. I was a grass rooter. I said, "Hey, we did this grass roots, and we can have (we called them) spokesmen."

Joan: Is that what Darrel Miller would have been?

Jerry: At one time. Steve Hartnett (Stafford, KS) and I traded off for several years, I would be the alternate and he would be the spokesman and vice versa for several years (*in the south Central Region of AAM*). Darrel and some of the others wanted to be with the organized people in Texas. As things went down the road, and especially when Reagan got in, things changed and took some of the pressure off. It kind of took the wind out of their sails. But you know, we've had lots of movements all throughout. We've talked about Kansas Populism before, there were the Grangers and the Farmer's Union folks came in, and everybody had their time in the sunshine to do something about the farm problem. I don't know, a lot of the farm problem is a blessing because we've been so darned good at it that nobody in this country has had to really want. They haven't been hungry. That's not to say we haven't had hunger in this country, but overall this population has been exceedingly blessed by never having the kind of want that some countries have had to deal with on a continuous basis. So you get into a situation, whether you've agreed to it or not, you throw your product on the open market and if the board deems that you have an extra bushel of wheat, the price goes down! When you've consumed all your own production, that was a different situation. Then you either had it taken, or coerced from you, or talked out of it. Or given some other type of thing, so somebody else could do something other than farm. To go back to ancient history, it's said that's what a lot of the ancient religions were for, to get a bushel of wheat out of the farmer!

Joan: You are tithing in wheat, huh.

Jerry: That was somewhat facetious, but I hope you see what I mean. Surplus is anything past what you and your own family can consume. When you put that on the market... a lot of people couldn't understand the Ag movement, because most urban dwellers think that we actually control the price. I remember one of the first times I was down in Washington lobbying, and I went over and over and over with the young man that was the manager of the hotel/motel place. We'd rented it by the month with people just rotating in. He couldn't understand what we were doing. Finally I said, "We can't control the price. We put it on the board. It's like taking a Ford and saying, well you've got 100 too many Fords and so the price goes down." Well, the car manufacturer then has the option of just shutting off

and slowing down his production and controlling the production verses the market. Well, the farmer doesn't. He goes in trying to make a surplus every year. He has to, because he might have a drought, he might have bug problems, all of these things that he goes in trying to produce the very most that he can every year. He's aimed toward producing a surplus. Then when it goes on the board, nobody asked me, but it's there, okay, we got too much we've got a surplus of wheat. I've often thought that if you could put all of production in 365 days on the board on one day, I've often thought that perhaps the price might be up a little. But we always go with perceived production. We go with the production out of South America on a whole different time schedule, and we're going on a not even a real surplus all the time, but a lot of times a perceived surplus (*paper traded bushels*). We think now, oh my gosh, it just dropped under \$8 a bushel of wheat today. I don't hang around very many farmers now, but I'm quite certain on what they used to talk about, that, "Oh boy, that's a good price." Well, it's not, in comparison to what fuel is, what parts are, what fertilizer is, what a combine costs now. Oh gosh, my renter said it is \$300,000 for a new one, perhaps more than that. (*Over \$650,000 for a new series International...*) That's mind boggling. I bought a used International for \$17,000, which I thought was too much. Now \$300,000? Yes, it's like sitting in a living room easy chair, but it's still just cutting wheat. The combine combines the old thresher and the header in one thing and it has air conditioning!

Joan: And a GPS.

Jerry: But \$300,000 for that and \$8 wheat, it still doesn't compute.

Joan: That was an excellent explanation that you just gave about the surplus. I had never thought about the farmer. I mean, I knew it was happening, but I never put it in those terms. Producing a surplus and not making any money on the surplus.

Jerry: Oh, any agricultural policy when you only have the producers (I guess now they're about 2% of the population) you're a minority, so most of the Ag bill now is not aimed toward the farmer. If you go into parity economics, the whole thrust of parity economics is that that is the backbone of the economy of the United States. It doesn't matter if it is fisheries, lumber, wheat, milo, corn, beef, pork, chickens, any of this or agricultural products that never existed before coming into this economic situation. If they are monetized at a certain price, they will actually stimulate the economy without borrowing money against it. I think that there is something very vital here that if we had any wisdom in Washington or the rest of the country, I think it probably would be the economic salvation for the world. But instead, we have treated a real blessing like so much pottage. It's nothing, and used it as just a pin ball game, an economic pin ball game, just to satisfy things. We've traded the monetization of actual real wealth for the monetization of debt. When Nancy Kassebaum was down there in Washington. (We had got to know her very well. We were at the first public meeting that she ever went to, and we started talking to her clear back then. My dad and myself and just a few others sat out on a parking lot under a street lamp with the lights on the car so she could read some things we had. We got to know her quite well over a period of years.) But when we were down there, they had an economic bill come up and during conference it was added that we had monetized and bought, I think it was something totally outrageous, like Polish War Bonds. We told her that was put in, and, "Oh, it couldn't be!" We looked it up and yes, it was there. And that's the monetization of debt, and that's what the Fed does, that's what quantitative easing is. We are monetizing debt. When the Fed comes in and buys back our T-bills, that's the monetization of debt. It's just a house of cards. It will not stand.

Joan: So Nancy did not vote for that bill then? Or was it another one? She told me she didn't vote for something that...

Jerry: I don't recall now, that might have been, whether it was that specific thing or not, we went in and said, "Look, they've added all this." I don't know, what we'd gone down initially was is to say, "Implement this, because this is not just a selfish thing for farmers, getting a price for their product. It's looking after our own perceived self interest, no doubt about it, because it would have raised what we got." But we would have stored it and paid the storage fees on our own if we'd had a surplus the next year under that program. Put it back; we have storage facilities now. Put it back, and let us pay for the storage. There's a price, it's going to help you in the long term, you'll have a stable food supply that's going to be there all the time. There's not that much raw material in bread; there's not that much raw material in Rice-a-Roni. There's more packaging in a loaf of bread than what there is wheat in the bread. Still. To get that across to people, the actual outlay for parity economics at that time was so miniscule. We told them at the time, you think that this will cost, but it will pay you in the long run because your costs down the road are going to be outrageous in comparison. What we were getting at is the devalued dollar. And you're talking right at this time, 2013-2014, making nickels out of stainless steel, that's the devaluation of currency. We did it when we changed from 90% silver in the dimes and nickels and quarters and half dollars. That's devaluation of currency. I think it was 1965? That's devaluation of currency. That same, junk silver right now, you can go to a coin dealer and the last that I looked it was \$275 for a \$10 face, so that's 27 to one. Now, is silver high or is our dollar trashed? I would say that it is a very good indication that our dollar is trash. This is why there are old curmudgeons like me that lived through this, we actually figured out to first, not trust the government, because so many times lawyers lie and statistics lie and politicians are there historically forever to improve their power base, to improve their power structure. I believe in the Constitution. What all of this did to me was make me more cognizant of the history classes that I took, the government classes that I took, and become more conservative because I thought, I'm just as competent as those people are. They're just over here and have the power structure. When they tell me how things are, and they aren't, do your homework! My God, we've got mass media now, and they aren't even close friends to the truth. They are total strangers from it. And I don't care if you're left wing or right wing of the spectrum. We heard people from the left wing saying, "Oh George Bush is a Nazi. And George Bush did this..." Well, George Bush did things that I didn't agree with because I'm a constitutional conservative. I believe with Jefferson that the government that governs best is one that governs least. When I was asking for parity, I wanted a fair price, which would have been a self-leveling thing. When you're dealing with, as I told you, a situation where you are always try to grow a surplus, then there has to be some price regulator. The price regulator of parity would have not only helped me out, it would also have helped the dollar out. I mentioned the Steagall Amendment earlier, I think it was 1942, specifically, all of the discussion about the Steagall Amendment and everything there was not to help the farmers out. It was to help monetize the dollar so we would not have massive problems after the war was over. And it worked. I think there is a very good case to say the Steagall Amendment was basic in keeping this country from having a total... I mean, look at all the defense plants and all of the money that had been poured into those and all of the dislocations that happened because they had been shut down. And yet we had a transition from a war footing to a non-war footing that was really pretty well done. A lot of it was the farmer still had a pretty good price on his product. When Truman signed the modern adjusted parity at 90% of parity, and then, I said 90 of 90, he even said later... I think I screwed up. I should have kept the Steagall Amendment in effect." Because it started devaluing the dollar and inflation started. We had a lot of good years through the '50's, but still. There were pretty good prices as I recall in the '50's. There were ups and downs, and there have always been ups and downs. There were depressions in the '20's when the Fed first got out, they started playing around with the money supply and got an agricultural depression that I think good ol' Silent Cal (*Calvin Coolidge*) helped. He didn't jump in with government. He said, "Hey, we can do this and it will take care of itself." And it did! 1929 wasn't so... it was a different ballgame.

Joan: Right! Okay, did you drive a tractor or participate in the little tractorcades that were around here, like to Larned and...

Jerry: Oh, yes we did that.

Joan: And the purpose was there to maybe gain membership?

Jerry: Yes, and to advertise. You let people know what's going on, and a little of it is to show off. Guys would get their old tractors out and Jack Wolfe got his stuff out, and it was part social and part trying to let people know what's going on and part to trying to rally the base.

Joan: Did you or your family have a tractor that went in '78 to Topeka?

Jerry: We went down, ~~but we didn't take a tractor down~~ and dad took my brother Bill's tractor.

Joan: So you were there as part of the protest?

Jerry: Yes. My folks were at the age where they could go. I was usually fixing or feeding cattle.

Joan: Was this normal that of the people that were involved, the father was a militant as the son? You were in this together?

Jerry: I think in a lot of instances. You've got to remember that my dad would have been in his late '60's or early '70's when this was happening, but he was still very active. He had been a railroad worker and a union man. He was the first president of the Brotherhood of the Firemen and Oilers in Shawnee, Oklahoma. He worked on the railroad and the roundhouse there, but he also went in when he was 16 and helped break the strike. They had a wildcat strike. He was in there for several weeks staying in the roundhouse while they were shooting in the windows. So, he'd seen both ends of that. As an aside, he said that there's a need for the unions. He said that Franklin Roosevelt said, and check the contrast now, he said there was a need for a secret ballot, so the company can't come down on the man that works for the union. Now the unions want an open ballot so they can come down on those that don't want the union. So, quite a contrast in all the intervening years. He said at that time, that the problem with unions was that people that really care, the good workers, are also involved in the church and involved in their kids' schools. Pretty soon, the union meeting isn't as important and then the ne'er-do-wells and the slackers and the skunks take the union over. I think that was pretty well said.

Joan: So your dad was actually on the tractorcade that went to Washington?

Jerry: He drove a pickup and trailer.

Joan: And someone else drove the tractor?

Jerry: My brother's tractor.

Joan: Your dad and mom both went. Can you relay any stories they maybe told you of the trip?

Jerry: As I recall, I think what they went on, there were three basic routes. I'm trying to remember if we were on the middle or the northern route.

Joan: I think the middle.

Jerry: We were coming through, and I think they had the snowstorm when they came through the passage through the, I don't know if it was the Cumberlands or Virginia somewhere. They had a lot of heavy weather.

Joan: Here's sort of an outline that I made to help your memory. I realize this is secondhand, but still. It came from Beverly Snyder's journal.

Jerry: Dad kept journals, if I could get those found and go through. There's probably a wealth of information there.

Joan: Was he calling back home to you at night? Or to the office?

Jerry: Pretty much, just to let us know what was going on. I know my brother's tractor went, but I cannot remember (*the name of*) that kid from Stafford (*Paxico, Kansas*) that went. Dad knew him. (*Larry Seele, a diesel mechanic. His parents, Lora and Ivan were at a AAM meeting when Dub Stapleton got up and said he had a tractor but needed someone to drive it. They knew their son wanted to go on the Tractorcade. He was on a motorcycle trip to California, so he came home and got off his motorcycle and into a tractor to go.*)

Joan: We may have his name somewhere. Although I'm not sure, we've had a mystery with some other people we've interviewed too. I don't think Beverly remembered it.

Jerry: I'm sure Steve Hartnett would know. Steve Hartnett is the gentleman from Stafford. I'm not even sure that my brother would even know who drove his tractor. All I know is that it's a kid from Stafford (*Paxico*) over there that Steve and Gerald Hartnett knew. I don't remember the kid's name at all. I heard it several times...

Joan: When the tractor got to Washington D.C., did the kid still drive it? Or did your dad...

Joan: While he was down there, I think probably Dad was in his pickup most of the time down there. But Dad could tell stories about when the snow hit down there, before we got there, there was some remnant when we got there two weeks later. He said some of the guys had blades on their tractors and they were acting like snowplows and dragging fire trucks to fires and ambulances to the hospital. He said it would have been a massive disruption in Washington D.C. if it hadn't been for the farmers. While we were down there, there was a number of fire departments that had "Thank You" barbeques and get-togethers for the farmers. Most of the people that were there, and even in my experience while I was there, the Capitol Hill Police and all of those folks thought it was great that we were down there. Some of the reasons farmers became very distrustful of the government, Clarence Bryant and several from out west, and I've heard this from a number of people that were there. My dad too said that on one day on a designated parade route, on one of the first days they were there, the police stopped them and they were not Capitol Hill Police. I was told by several people that they had their badges taped completely over so you couldn't see their number, and they were a bunch of New York City Cops. Now I was told that by a number of people; I did not witness that. That would make you a little nervous when things are going on. That's kind of stinky. News media at that time, I can tell you as a matter of fact, I had been over to the House building lobbying and came back by. It was the day they let the goats out. The goats were on the back side of the Capitol Building and fountain and on the steps. There were chickens and goats and everything and everybody was having a heyday. There were a lot of farmers

there, and I counted so many out and was blocking how many were there. I'm guessing several thousand, upwards of four to five thousand people there. It came out on the news that night, 500. The Capitol Hill Police usually gave you pretty straight numbers when they had any kind of a parade or anything. They were... usually if they said 10,000 you figured they were close. You figured if it came out on the news, if they said 10,000, it was down to 1,000. We had manipulation of the news even then. For their own purposes, why, I don't know. But I know, the three different routes, we figured there were upwards of 10,000 people probably driving seven to eight thousand support vehicles plus 5,000 tractors coming through the routes. The media was saying 500 tractors. Bob Bergland believed his media, and he hid in the basement of the Department of Agriculture for two days. He thought we were going to come down and lynch him! Literally. We heard that from a lot of people that were there. People that worked there said, "Yes, he was down there for two days. He wouldn't leave! He thought you guys were going to get him!"

Joan: Well, you maybe did in effigy a few times, come to think of it!

Jerry: That might have been. There was so much that when the news got to St. Louis (at that time there was a news hub in St. Louis) and got filtered down, the information that we were getting back here, oh, the farmers had torn up the Mall and torn up lights... I did a little bit of research on my own when I got down there. I went over to the different buildings and got the police reports. The only damage that was done, and the news media asked the wrong questions, the only actual damage that I could ever document was a four-wheel drive tractor running into one of their \$18,000 street lamps. Now, first off, they should have been asking, "What in the hell are we doing with an \$18,000 street lamp?" They didn't ask that. This four wheel drive tractor was being directed by six cops. He said, "I don't want to go." And they said, "No, you have to keep going." The rest of the damage, they said, we tore up benches and burnt benches. That was documented to be done by some homeless guy out there trying to start a fire. Where there was damage on the actually grass part of the Mall, that had usually been directed by police officers to put the vehicles there. The next year, the Maryland AAM put in a bid of \$1 to resuscitate the grass on the Mall. They did a better job! The parks people said later that is was the best job they'd ever had done on the grass. But see, this is Paul Harvey's "The Rest of the Story".

Joan: So you flew out and you were there in time for the actual Tractorcade and everything?

Jerry: I missed most of it, there were still tractors there.

Joan: Was your dad still there when you were there?

Jerry: Yes, he was there during all that. He was there all the time; he stayed there, I think they were probably there for a couple months after the Tractorcade.

Joan: So he would have been lobbying all that time. And you flew in about how many times?

Jerry: Well, I was there two different times. Once with my family and another one or two times just with a group of guys who went down there.

Joan: And your activities included while you were there?

Jerry: Just primarily... I was primarily lobbying, because I'd been in political science and felt more comfortable with that. Most of the stuff I was doing was legwork and research and straight lobbying trying to talk to different congressmen.

Joan: And you spent about a week each time?

Jerry: Yes, I think it was usually about a week. I don't really remember now, it seemed like forever when you were there. I remember getting back and literally it was like a Technicolor nightmare. We got to know Nancy Kassebaum really well by then. I remember her being in this dream/nightmare and saying, "I hate this damn town!" It is a beautiful town, there are far more green areas and it surprised me that it is was nice as it is.

Joan: And the buildings are beautiful.

Jerry: Yes, but just so many people there for very selfish interests. And I think that's what they never did get about the farmers. Yes, we were selfish. We were trying to say, "Look, we're trying to help bolster the whole economic situation." Actually, and it wasn't feigned. I mean, from what information we've been able to put together, it would have done that. When the basic raw materials are paid for, it has always been good times for everybody because it grows the pie. You take a multiplier, and if you get money at the base, it grows the pie. It's not a bigger slice of the pie situation. You always present it in economic arguments, "This will get so much and somebody else is going to lose." It wouldn't have been that way. But we didn't do it that way.

Joan: I don't know if you can answer this or not, but in talking to your mother, was there a different perception from her? What was her life like?

Jerry: Oh, mom was a good lobbyist, too. She was an exceptional lady, and not just because she was my mom. Most people that knew her... She had been raised in the Friends Church at Hopewell, and she was just a very caring and giving, sweet person. Most people that she talked to down there could come up with that pretty quickly. There was no falseness or anything with her. If she didn't care for you, she might tell you about it! She was extremely honest. That said, we got to know Nancy (*Kassebaum*) and probably the reason we got to know Nancy was because of my dad and mom. I called when my mom passed and Nancy said, "Oh, I'm so sorry." And she seemed to be genuinely touched. So I do think that she had quite a rapport with her. I remember Nancy telling me that my mom reminded her of her mother. She seemed to be very honest about that. So I think Mom was probably... I mean, Pop was kind of an old, independent, "man the gunboat" and was very knowledgeable and articulate and could talk. He wasn't an ignorant or stupid man by any means. But not an educated man, but I can't say he wasn't educated. He got an eighth grade education that was probably... he could quote Longfellow and things far more than anything...

Joan: They got a better education back then!

Jerry: They could cram a lot more into eight years than they do now.

Joan: At the time, did you feel you were having any impact on the elected officials or legislation?

Jerry: Oh, I think so. They might have been viewing us as a bunch of vermin crawling out of the woodwork, but I think most of them... I mean, Bob Dole, when he ran (*for the House of Representative on his initial entry into politics*), represented that he was pushing a parity platform. For whatever reason, at least he knew what the nomenclature was. I think that at least they found that they couldn't just operate in a vacuum entirely as far as the farm programs. The Republicans, of course at that time, it probably helped them. I think looking back, it probably helped them politically at least. They could see that there were people from a lot of states that were unhappy with Carter's ag program and his monetary

policy. So it probably helped get Carter just four years. I think the impact that way was...

Joan: You think it impacted him because he didn't get the second term?

Jerry: Yes. Because you don't get farmers off the farm like we did then unless something really is going on. You don't say "Hey we ought to have a farm strike" unless there's a reason for people actually getting involved.

Joan: That's one thing that intrigued me when we were doing the other interviews and the Tractorcade came up, that this stereotype I had of the farmer is that he is not one that protests. And this was a major protest.

Jerry: I think that probably history isn't going to give it the credibility that it really deserved.

Joan: We're going to try.

Jerry: I think there was... in retrospect, you just look at the number of people and the amount of... Carter, in his book, said, "Well, if they'd just stayed another two weeks, I would have signed it into law." Well, what an asinine thing to say. What a patronizing thing to say, for anybody to write that in a book! The man is a small, little man. I don't care if the press sits in and fawns on his every word. What a small, little person. Now, if you had the core belief that we should have gotten it, then do something about it. If not, don't sit there and patronize us and say, "Oh well, if you'd just stayed two more weeks!" It was a waiting game. A lot of people had to go home. The people from the South had to go home and start farming. Whether they were cotton farmers or corn or whatever they had to start. They'd already taken a hit economically, they'd already gone and were spending money to go down there, trying to let people know what a serious situation they believed themselves to be in.

Joan: Most protests are a weekend. They don't go on for months.

Jerry: We did what we could. We tried to explain intellectually. We tried to explain in a humorous manner-- the goats and the chickens let out, which ended up as cops' pets, mostly. But to get that many people from that many different backgrounds together at one time was a phenomenal situation in itself. The NFO (*National Farmers Organization*) wasn't able to do it. The Farmer's Union hadn't been able to do it in their time. The Grange hadn't been able to do it-- although they all had their own impact. We had the Farm Bureau where there has always been a schism there. The Louisiana Redneck, Roger Beal, he's a rice farmer (*not a fan of the Farm Bureau*). He went to several different regional things and out to Colorado one time. I said, "Well, I'm not supposed to speak here." He said, "Well, you get up here and give me some background. You back me up, man!" He said he was a redheaded redneck rice farmer from Louisiana. He called a lot, calling me and calling my dad. We were out there with the two old firebrands from NFO trying to get across to people and the press and others what all this was about. We have a press that when you send people through journalism school, it doesn't mean that they're all-knowing or that they know anything about anything. That's a despicable job, they just kind of... you don't present the news, you present opinion as fact. It's just a pathetic thing, and it is going to be the downfall of this country, political correctness and journalism. What happened to the old, "Who, what, where and when"? It doesn't happen.

Joan: Especially on TV. One impact that we haven't heard before, and that you mentioned, is that Carter didn't get a second term. There wasn't any real legislation that came out of it. Was there any other impact?

Jerry: Well, the legislation was there, we just couldn't get them to implement the damn thing. It was written into the farm bill at the time, and you know, farm bills are a bastardized thing anyway. I mean, I think Orville Freeman set up a deal. Well, he wanted to be fair, so he gave everybody an allotment for wheat. Well, you had the cotton farmer who then started double-cropping wheat, which he hadn't before. In the long run, unintended consequences, we probably had more wheat at that period of time than we'd ever had because everybody then was growing the damn stuff. It wasn't just a regional product anymore. So when you get a national farm program trying to solve problems sometimes, it's almost humorous in the consequences that happen. But I think in the long run, we had an impact. I don't know that I can say any specific things, but they knew they'd upset some people. And you know, that had to have an impact. You got a lot of people in urban areas that met farmers. That would have had a little impact in the long run. "Well, back in such-and-such, farmers came down and cleaned the street up." "Well, I got a goat from that bunch of farmers." The thing is, they found out that we weren't some green farmer with his cap on and an old three-wheeled tractor going down the road. They had a learning process also. Let's face it, what we have in the hills of Virginia, is a whole different farm than what we have out here. Those people learned too. The southern farmers that we met, they learned what we were about out here. We found that there were common things and common dreams. So long term impact, I think, was a lot of subtle things that existed.

Joan: How do you feel the people back here reacted to the movement? Was there a lot of support? Were there nay sayers?

Jerry: I think there always are. We had people that been involved in NFO and I know they had a little grudge because what they'd tried to do had had an impact, but not what they'd hoped. Somebody else comes in and does something. I had worked with the Farmers Union also because of parity and primarily afterwards, but there were a lot of people there that, "Yeah, we kind of agree with parity," but it wasn't going to take away from what they'd tried to do. But we had a little difficulty actually getting all the organizations headed in one direction at one time. Especially, when you get organized, they had their own little bailiwick with "No Trespassing" signs out. It makes it awful hard to compromise with others when in the back of their minds it's, "Where were you when we tried to do this?"

Joan: What do you think your dad would have said? Would he have said it was a worthwhile thing? Did you ever hear him talk about it years later that it was something he would have done again?

Jerry: Yes, I think so. I don't think he exactly ever stopped. It was an avocation to him. He bought an old Savin 770 copier and I don't know how many thousands of copies... not only fuel alcohol but several things he thought we needed. He wanted to leave the world a better place, and this was important to him not only for (not necessarily a selfish thing on his part) but it was for Bill and me and our kids. The more he got somewhat radical on some things as the more he got involved and then there are so many aspects of when you get started actually educating yourself about what's going on in the world. Sometimes you end up with a, "My God, how did we let this happen?" There's a lot of things over a period of time, I mean if you look what's happened over the last 50 years. People talk about all the acts that Bush put in after the Towers (*September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center Twin Towers*). That and if you take an airplane flight now... some of the things that we're incrementally changing in our own lives. Benjamin Franklin said that those who would give up liberty for security deserve neither. I think probably he was right. There has never been a safe place on Planet Earth in human history. You can't legislate "safe". You can do some things about prosperity. Capitalism and freedom have produced a country which has never seriously had want. We had problems with distribution of food, but not of food itself. We had some times that were thin, but nothing like what the rest of the world has contended with. So I get a little radical as far as I think this was the fountainhead

of human liberty and prosperity in this country and I think we are killing the goose that laid the golden egg in many ways.

Joan: So you're still active in politics?

Jerry: Yes, I work for the local conservatives and helped Mitch Holmes get in and I work for Ewy. Not to say there aren't some other good people, but I think that anybody that at least has read the Constitution or kind of has some inkling of what was trying to be said there needs to be supported. You can't go into... you know, people have tried this for years. The Collectivist Movement, even before the Bolshevik revolution, there's been Collectivist Movements that, "Oh, we've got to do this for the poor people." You know, if you give people the freedom to act in their own perceived self-interest and give them the freedom to sit there and do that, most people would start a restaurant and start building this and start doing that. They'd say, "Hey, I want to do this!" If you give them the actual hope, not a false little blurb to put on a TV spot. What do you think people came to the United States for? Not just coming across the border from Mexico, but for hundreds of years they wanted to come here? Because there was the freedom, not just a little blurb on a TV spot. But they could see that they were able to be whatever they could be. The D'Souza film (*2016: Obama's America*) that came out before this past election, what I got out of that was that even in this modern day age, D'Souza said that in India, "I did not have the freedom to be what I could be." He said, "I could be successful there on those terms, but the only way I could be successful on my terms was to come to the United States." And we are trying to take that away. This great, they call it "Social Justice". Boy, there's a term. It's the most anti-freedom thing that you can come up with, "Social Justice." What is the definition of "Social Justice"? You cannot solve everybody's problems through some all-encompassing entity. Stalin tried it. It all becomes a damning situation for all concerned. Pol Pot tried it, the Killing Fields. Nobody can become the perfection that these people envision in their minds. That perfection does not exist. They're coming around to put it here. You know when we had the American Revolution, the revolutionary part was, "The King does not sit below God; man sits below God." (*Kings are not sovereign, the people are.*) We are individuals, and we give up part of the social contract to these people to represent us and to take care of this crap that we don't want to contend with. That was the social contract, that you can defend the borders of this country better than I can defend the borders of this country and I will give you part of the power. We have people now having the audacity to say, "I will build a safe place for you, just believe in me!" We've had these charlatans and demagogues since the dawn of man, and poor little schlubs like me have bled to death in the ditch over them.

So, you can call the Tractorcade and all like that a populist movement, but a lot of it was an awakening for a lot of people. Some of them went, what I would consider, off the deep end. I just became a conservative! I got to reading my history and paying attention to it. We blind ourselves in so many ways. I was in political science, I had a class in modern political thought and I look back and I think, "My God, we were putting our blinders on even then and didn't even realize it." I don't think it was a real overt, thoughtful thing, but a learned system in modern political thought. (*In a class on modern thought*), we didn't study Goldwater. What's modern conservatism except embodied by what Goldwater was saying? We didn't study him; he was laughable. He was not taken seriously by college professors in little schools in Central Kansas. Now, what about KU, what about the University of Pennsylvania? I'm sure those same things so in doing that we have blinded our own intellectual processes to actually think. We like to think we are so, so open to everybody, unless you don't believe like me. Have you ever noticed that?

Joan: I have noticed that.

Jerry: I really think that this country had the blessings of Divine Providence. I think of the founding

fathers, how could you get such an eclectic bunch of people to go through and get anything done? And they did it. It wasn't perfect, but for 200 years it's been a damn good shot. And we're going to have ignorance out of the lust for power, out of lack of honor. We're going to throw it all away. Isn't that awful?

Well, you started talking to a farmer. See what happens when you start out thinking about such things.

Joan: I was just thinking, you had a college-----where you went to school?

Jerry: Fort Hays.

Joan: And you were a Poli Sci major. I'm hearing from you that maybe also this American Ag movement really helped to shape the beginnings of some of those beliefs. That to change them from maybe what you'd been taught, or augment what you'd been taught or prove what you'd read, maybe not what you'd been taught. This was sort of the beginning, which has influenced your life quite a bit.

Jerry: I still think that there's a lot in current parity economics that we could gain from. I think there's far more here than... well, Keynesian Economics has been proven wrong so many times, and we still... it's an easy way to do things, you know, quantitative easing. It doesn't work; it never has. It won't this time. We're going to go through a massive financial problem. I don't see any way around it. The timing of it, I don't know. But anytime that you raise the debt by three or four times in the space of four years, there's no answers there. There are only problems that you stave off.

Joan: Any concluding thoughts about this Tractorcade of the movement or anything I haven't asked you about?

Jerry: I met a bunch of good people. My dad really got the joy of that more than myself, because I was...

Joan: You were farming and had a family.

Jerry: But a lot of those people are dying off now. I'm sure that's one reason you're doing this.

Joan: We missed interviewing your mom and dad. If you can find that journal, we would love to see it.

Jerry: I'll see what was in it. Like I said, some of those things were not exactly...

Joan: Public?

Jerry: I don't know how to put it exactly, it's just that my dad was an exceptional man, but he was also a difficult man at times. I loved him dearly, but in the back of my mind, I think I might be picking a scab off somewhere! I've not gone back and looked through those, I've thought several times of doing it and since I'm retired, I'm probably... this is the time.

Joan: It maybe. Is there anything else you want to add?

Jerry: Oh, I don't know. I've gone farther than what you planned on.

Joan: I do know one thing that I didn't ask you. How did your wife feel about all this? She had a very

young family while you were traipsing around.

Jerry: She is a very shy person.

Joan: Did she support you?

Jerry: You've heard some people say now that I'm blessed far more than I deserve. Well, I was blessed far more than I deserve with her. Sorry, I'm emotional. She was a little trouper. She was a shy and private person. Living with me, she got over some of that! She was the first secretary of the W.I.F.E. organization (*Women Involved in Farm Economics*).

Joan: Oh, she was? She was active in W.I.F.E.?

Jerry: She was a worker for them.

Joan: We've heard other people say that they thought being involved in this actually strengthened marriages.

Jerry: Well, she was a city girl. I had to go to basic training and stuck her out on a farm in the middle of nowhere with the coyotes and everything else. She was a trooper. She worked through all that. I got a true helpmate.

Joan: That is a blessing!

Jerry: Oh yes.

Joan: What do your kids know about this? Have you shared much with them? Because they were little then.

Jerry: Well, the two older ones went with us one time to D.C. I think Kristi probably remembers some of it, but I'm sure it was more of the Smithsonian and things like that. They didn't get involved directly. Oh, I think you'd probably have to ask them if it had any impact, but I think they could see that Pop and Mer (*grandparents, Dub and Clara*) stood up for what they believed in. They didn't just sit and take what was thrown at them. And I think the same thing for us. I think they could see that there was honor and integrity there and a want to help others. I think it's affected them from that standpoint. Perhaps they weren't involved in the ag movement, but what they had to go through. They didn't even know that we were struggling. We had chickens; we had goats! This was fun! Maybe they weren't getting new stuff, but they didn't know that. They didn't feel that they were... I think most people that I have ever met don't necessarily remember the good times. They remember the struggles where they pulled together. That's what the basis is, that's where the bedrock is.

Joan: That might be a nice note to end on, I really do.