

Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: James Young

Date of Interview: February 21, 2017

Location of Interview: Washita National Wildlife Refuge, OK

Interviewer: Amber Zimmerman

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 27 years

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held: Wage Grade maintenance personnel at Washita National Wildlife Refuge, Oklahoma

Most Important Projects: Worked on building the Centennial Trail; helped with banding ducks/geese;

Colleagues and Mentors: Wade Pratt, Ken Butts, Johnny Parker, David Maple, Danny Moss, Ralph Bryant, Paul Swanson, Ron Price, Dan Zerby, Brent Giezentanner

Most Important Issues: Not having the right equipment needed to do work on refuge.

Brief Summary of Interview: Mr. Young talks about early life growing up in Oklahoma, picking cotton from the age of five, and marrying the only girl he ever loved. He held several jobs before joining the Fish and Wildlife Service, including owning his own store. He would spend 27 years at Washita National Wildlife Refuge, while also helping out at other refuges including Optima National Wildlife Refuge and Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge. Mr. Young shares stories of his time with the Service and feels very lucky to have had the position and career he had.

AMBER: This is Amber Zimmerman, the heritage coordinator for Region 2 and I am interviewing Jim Young today here at the Washita National Wildlife Refuge headquarters. It is February the 21st of 2017. So welcome Jim.

JIM: Hello Amber.

AMBER: Glad to have you here today. So we've already gone over what we're going to be talking about. We're really excited to hear about Jim's experience, he worked as a maintenance worker here at Washita for twenty—

JIM: Seven.

AMBER: —seven years.

JIM: Almost on full-time.

AMBER: Almost (chuckling). Alright, so I guess we'll go ahead and get the back story before we get started on your Service career. Could you give me the very beginning, where were you born and when?

JIM: Well I was born Sayre, Oklahoma 3/19/41. And there was twenty members of my family served in World War II and I've always been real patriotic because of that. My folks moved to California, my folks divorced when I was five years old. I had four different sets of great grandparents that homesteaded at Berlin, Oklahoma, south of Cheyenne. And we came back to Berlin because I had so many family members there. I started pulling cotton when I was five years old, just so we could eat. You got two cents a pound and I could pull a hundred pounds a day and that was two dollars.

AMBER: Wow, that's amazing! So you grew up in Sayre in western Oklahoma areas.

JIM: I've never been out of western Oklahoma. Roger Mills, Beckham, and Custer.

AMBER: So outside of cotton picking as a kid, what else did you do out here in western Oklahoma?

JIM: Well when I got in high school, my uncle was a foreman on a big ranch south of Cheyenne and I spent all my time on that ranch in the summertime. But cotton was king, and I always went to a country school, little country schools turned out six weeks every fall so the kids could help harvest the cotton. I would work all summer, when school started I would buy me five pairs of jeans, five short sleeve shirts, some underwear, and a new pair of shoes. Then with my cotton picking money in the fall I'd buy me five more jeans, five flannel shirts, a coat; I pretty well supported myself from the time I was five years old.

AMBER: Wow that is amazing. Okay so you mentioned you went to the country schools out here in western Oklahoma. So was there any teachers or mentors in your family or in the schools that really influenced your life?

JIM: Well I've had a lot, being raised like I was raised, I never had the opportunity to be a kid, I always had to act like a grown up. So all of the people that I admired and looked up to were older men, 60, 70, 80 years old. And they'd been a big influence, of course, on my mother's side I had three uncles, three boys were born in 39 months. And

they were all World War II veterans and they were always my heroes. We came back from California when I was five, all my uncles were in World War II and my granddad had me drive a team of wagon full of hay and cake so he could feed the cattle. And I'd been infected with the cattle disease ever since I was five years old.

AMBER: Cotton and cattle, alright. And I also know that you've got a lot of experience with horses.

JIM: Yes, I have a little experience with horses.

AMBER: So that's how you got the job done back then, wasn't necessarily the way we farm today then.

JIM: No, no there wasn't any tractor.

AMBER: Not the easy way.

JIM: We lived there at Berlin and there was one big landowner, I don't know how many acres he had, but there would be twenty family members pulling cottons; aunts, and uncles, and cousins. Well at four o'clock every Saturday afternoon, everybody would go to their respective homes, they would clean up, and they would come back. The ladies would get in the back of the pickup, us kids would get on top of a load of cotton, it was twenty miles down to Elk City. We would go down through the [unintelligible@00:04:56, sounds like breaks or brakes] to Elk. The gin was right by Main Street, we would take the cotton to the gin. The ladies would do their shopping, and then they had a preview at twelve o'clock, when we got out of the preview, we'd go back to the gin, we'd get in an old empty cotton

trailer, snake our way all the way back to Berlin, get home two, three o'clock in the morning. Next Saturday was ready to do it all over.

AMBER: Wow! And so you're talking about a cotton trailer pulled behind a team?

JIM: We had pickups.

AMBER: Oh, thank goodness. I was like, you really did things the old fashioned way. [laughing]

JIM: One of our grandpas, he could do anything; I've seen him roll a smoke, he always smoked Bull Durham, come in little bitty sacks. I'd seen him loping a horse and roll him a cigarette, but he could not drive a pickup. One Christmas, there was about seven or eight of us grandkids, we were little bitty farts, and he got out to open the gate and that pickup started rolling, and run through the gate, grandpa was hollering, "OH YOU S.O.B, WHOA, WHOA, WHOA!" There's a big ole deep canyon, just before it went over that canyon, it hit a rock and stopped. But he never did master a vehicle.

AMBER: Oh wow! So you went to all of your schooling out here in western Oklahoma, and I know that you and JoJo have been married a very long time. Did you guys meet while you were still in school?

JIM: I went to school at Stafford, the refuge in Foss Dam took out Stafford School, they started buying this land for this refuge in about '55 or '56. And there were so many families that the government bought them out, the school didn't have enough kids to continue and

that caused Stafford School to go out. I guess I was in the eighth grade, girls were the furthest thing from my mind; all I wanted to do was play baseball or basketball. And one day my sister, she was younger than I, a couple years younger. She said, "You need to come to study hall right after lunch." I walked into study hall and JoJo was in there, and she said, "This girl wants to meet you."

AMBER: [chuckling] Oh really!

JIM: So the next day we wound up at baseball diamond on the bleachers, and she was sitting on one end and I was sitting; it took us about thirty minutes until we finally got together; we've been together now for almost 60 years.

AMBER: That is awesome.

JIM: Well it's pretty neat to get to marry the only girl you ever loved your whole life and get to spend most of your life with her.

AMBER: It is, what a blessing. And I know she's been with you all the way since school times, so obviously with all of your careers, including your Service career, and we'll talk about that here in just a minute. Before we get to that though, I'm pretty sure before you came to us at the Service, how many kids do you have?

JIM: We have three, two daughters and a son.

AMBER: Two daughters and a son, and—

JIM: And eight grandkids and four great grandkids.

AMBER: Awesome. So I guess go ahead and let's get caught up to, before you started with the Service, I know that certainly wasn't your first job.

JIM: No.

AMBER: So let's talk work. What did you start out with other than cotton picking at five and as a kid?

JIM: I got married the last semester of my senior year, my wife, she was in her second year at Southwestern. She had took a 40 hour business course and there was a supermarket there at Clinton. I was working for them and going to school at Merritt, west of Elk City, and when we got married we moved to Clinton and I went to work for Fowler IGA, worked in produce. We got married in December of 1959. And August of 1960, they were building Foss Dam and the contractor was a big shot from California. Anyway, the main foreman had a motel room there in Clinton, and he always came by the store every afternoon. That was before the equipment had much air conditioning, and he would always come buy him a pint of ice cream, go to his motel room, take him a shower, and then he'd would go eat that evening. When he'd come in that evening and he said, "We closed the gates on Foss Dam." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yes sir we did." And I got off at six o'clock and I told my wife, I said "We've got to go to Foss Dam." She says, "What do we want to go to Foss Dam for?" I said, "Well they've closed the gates on the dam and I want to get a picture." And I've got a picture of my wife standing down at the south end of the dam by that draw down, and there's probably ten or fifteen acres of water out there.

AMBER: Oh, how awesome. Any chance you've still got that picture?

JIM: I asked my wife if she knew, because I knew you were going to ask, she says, "I don't know where it's at." I dug it up one time and brought it up and showed it to Parker.

AMBER: Well if you ever happen to come across it again, you know where to find me.

JIM: We're going to make a little more of an effort to find it.

AMBER: So even before the refuge was, you guys were already here seeing the beginnings of it.

JIM: Well when you've got four different sets of great grandparents that homestead this country; we've never lived over twenty miles, either one of us, where we started. Not many people don't venture that far from home.

AMBER: So you're working produce, and I know just from knowing you before that you ended up a store of your own to run. How'd that happen?

JIM: I guess in 1963, I would have been 22; Frito Lay had a route come open and the boy that had the route suggested I put my app. in and I was likely enough to get hired or whatever and I worked for Frito Lay for ten years. Well I called on the little store at Butler and I told my wife, I said, "That thing ever comes up for sale, Bill ever decides to sell that thing, I would like to buy it." Well we had bought eighty acres of land and then we bought a half section. Well Frito has this rule they want you broke and your nose to grindstone. No outside activities

and I had a supervisor come out and ride with me and I said something about buying this other land. Well within a month, they came out and checked me out, fired my butt.

AMBER: Fired you for owning your own property for farming.

JIM: Well they had some other reasons, but that's the real reason. And it wasn't two or three months later I heard that Bill had his store for sale and we went up and bought the store and we ran that store for about ten years. And during oil boom in the '80's, one of my buddies called me one day, he said, "Hey, I hear you been might wanting to sell." And I said, "Well the thought crossed my mind." He said, "What do you want for it?" And I just pulled a figure off the top of my head. A week later he calls, he says, "When do you want to inventory?" I said, "What do you mean inventory?" He said, "You remember I called you about buying..?" I said, "Yeah, but I thought you were just BS'ing me." He said, "Oh no, I'm serious. I've been to the bank, I've got the money." I said, "Lloyd I told you what I'd do and if you're crazy enough to do it, we'll inventory the first of the month." Well I had no more and sold the store and I always got my hair cut over at Jones Barber Shop in Hammon. Jack Warner and Joe Hutch had both retired; I was in there getting a haircut and old Warner said, "Young, what are you doing?" I said, "Oh, I'm just playing around down at the farm." He said, "Well the refuge has to have a couple maintenance guys," said, "you need to get your butt out and put your application in." I didn't think too much about it, so I went home and told my wife, I said, "Old Warner wanting me to go up and put my

application in.” She said, “Well you know you’ve got a boy just fix to start college, it should would be nice if you’d get on a pay roll.

AMBER: Good timing again then.

JIM: Yeah, we’d sit there, my wife had that little old typewriter, we worked for four hours filling out all that paperwork and brought it up here. I was in the top three and I was selected, but before I could get hired they put a freeze on the hiring. So they couldn’t hire me.

AMBER: That sounds familiar.

JIM: Well about a year later, old Ken Butts called me again, he said, “Are you still interested?” I said, “Yeah, I guess so.” Well we go through the whole rigamarole again and I come out the top three again. Well one of the boys had a military service so that bumped me back to number two. When they did the background check on him, he had a felony. And I didn’t realize it until my retirement party, but ole Brent Giezentanner and I had always been buddies, when I was in the store, he was a manager out here. And we had a JC Chapter and one year I’d be president, he’d be vice president, and we’d switch. Anyway, we had a real nice relationship, and I didn’t realize that Giezentanner pulled a few strings for me out at the regional office.

AMBER: Okay, so who was the manager that actually hired you?

JIM: Ken Butts.

AMBER: Ken Butts hired you, and that was after Giezentanner had left a few years before.

JIM: Yeah.

AMBER: Well that worked out pretty well.

JIM: Well when Giezentanner was here, he said, “I’m going to be the manager of Aransas.” Back then they had the trainee deals where the kids could go to college and work. And anyway, he’d been down there and then they, when this refuge got opened, they sent him up here and he got to be the manager. Well while he was here, the Hawaiian Complex came open and he told me, “I put in.” I said, “Giezentanner, you don’t have a chance of going to Hawaii. You don’t have that much experience, there’s no way.” About a month later I’d seen him, he said, “I’m packing my bags, I’m going to Hawaii.”

AMBER: [chuckling] Well that worked out really well for him too.

JIM: Well then he came back to the regional office and [unintelligible@00:15:14] Frank, I can’t remember the man’s last name, had been the manager down at Aransas for thirty or forty years and he finally retired. Well we were down there eating lunch one day, and Ken Butts had been an assistant manager at Aransas before he became the manager here. Well we were eating lunch down there and old Hollingsworth, he popped off, “Well I can tell you who’s going to be the next manager at Aransas.” Old Wade says, “Who’s that?” And he said, “Ken Butts.” I said, “I can tell you who’s going to be the manager at Aransas.” He said, “Who do you think?” I said, “It’s going to be Brent Giezentanner.” He said “Ahhhh.” I said, “You don’t know that guy, he’s got a lot grit and

determination.” And he wound up with it.

AMBER: You called that one then.

JIM: Well I guess I did.

AMBER: So you worked here for 27 years, and during that time, Ken Butts was the first manager. How many managers did you work under during that time?

JIM: Six.

AMBER: Six managers. Not bad for 27 years; we’re a very small refuge.

JIM: Out of those six, there were five of them that were Okie’s and seemed like the people that are raised in your own local, I don’t know, I’m must be prejudiced, you’re an exception to the rule Amber.

AMBER: Hey, I was born in Oklahoma.

JIM: Well I know and you came off the ranch too, you’ve got some common sense.

AMBER: [laughing] There you go. So I know our wage grade professionals and our managers have all worked together to get stuff done on the refuge, but I know sometimes there’s different ideas about what needs to be done and when and how, especially. So you worked through six different managers and a lot of staff turnover, right?

JIM: Oh yes. We had, I don’t know how many assistants we had. I know of four; seemed like the girl assistants were just head and shoulders above the boys. Why, I don’t know. And there were four

girls out of this refuge that I worked under, became managers at different refuges.

AMBER: Yeah, and you’re still friends with several of those right?

JIM: Yes.

AMBER: Jennifer.

JIM: Yeah, Jennifer, she went to Aransas.

AMBER: Jennifer Sanchez.

JIM: Yes. She was over Matagorda Island, and when Giezentanner retired, Bruce Spencer and I and our wives went down to Giezentanner’s retirement. And Jennifer told me, said “If you ever come down here, I’ll take you out to the island.” And she took us out there on the barge, we got out there; she drove us around about two hours, she said, “I’ve got things I’ve got to do, here’s this scout, if you don’t want to swim back to shore, you better be here at four o’clock because I’m leaving.” And we took off, I guess that was one of the main highlights of my career, was getting to explore on Matagorda Island. The cranes were there, and you got to see them in their habitat.

AMBER: Oh yeah, a little bit different than what we’ve got up here in Oklahoma.

JIM: Yes, yes.

AMBER: So you enjoyed some trips down to the ocean throughout your career, or was that not something you got to do very often?

JIM: My wife is, she's a fish, I'm not. I'd rather be out in the middle of a pasture.

AMBER: Nice to visit but not to stay.

JIM: Yeah.

AMBER: Well did you get to take any other really neat trips during your career?

JIM: Well one of the nicest deals, I was lucky enough to get to go to NCTC at [West] Virginia. I was one of the maintenance guys selected and when David Maple was here, he put in a kind word for me. I don't know how he convinced somebody to select to me but anyway, I got to go and that was a real treat.

AMBER: So that would have been, is that one of the wage grade workshops?

JIM: Yes. Got to meet boys from all over the United States.

AMBER: Well that's always neat. So that would have probably been in the early 2000's then?

JIM: Yeah.

AMBER: Okay.

JIM: The neatest thing about this, one uncle I was telling you about at Cheyenne, he was on them islands, Atoll.

AMBER: Midway Atoll.

JIM: Yeah, there was another. Anyway, he was over those islands and this one kid he run a boat between the islands. I

got to visit with him at the meeting up there.

AMBER: Oh neat, so you guys had some other maintenance from everywhere.

JIM: All over the United States, yes.

AMBER: Oh wow, that's amazing.

JIM: That was really a neat deal.

AMBER: Now I know a lot of times we talk about your experience here working at Washita, and we do have our satellite, Optima, and you were the main one that went up and worked for years up at Optima. You have any Optima stories to share?

JIM: Well I sure do. That Optima, Wade Pratt always took care of it because he had a boy that lived at Liberal, just north of there, and after Wade retired there wasn't nobody that wanted to go to Optima, so I opened my big mouth and kind of volunteered. The first time I ever went up there, I thought this is the most God forsaken country in the whole wide world, but I learned to love it; that's a different ecosystem, you're see birds and animals up there that you won't see anywhere else in the state of Oklahoma. You're talking about the Optima deal, one time when Wade was up there, he came back and he had a picture of a moose.

AMBER: We have that here framed.

JIM: I said, "Wade, what in the world were you drinking? There's not any moose up there!" And he showed me the picture. Well that was kind of a neat deal.

AMBER: Yeah, we have that confirmed moose sighting. What year, was that in the '80's?

JIM: Yes, yes.

AMBER: Yeah, 1980's. Well I know Optima is certainly a different beast, it's got some sandier soils and I know I've heard a few stories from you and our co-op farmer and how important that relationship is. Do you have any of those kind of fun stories?

JIM: Well I've got one that's not; on this refuge I knew every farmer around here. If I was out working, there weren't nobody around, I felt free to go steal a pickup or tractor, whatever I needed. Well me and another boy was up there, we were on the northeast corner of the refuge in one of those 6 cylinder, 3 speed Dodge pickup, 2-wheel drive. And we set that sucker down on all four wheels, we couldn't go anywhere. So I told Rick, I said "You stay here, I'll walk and find us some help." I walked about a mile, came to this real nice farm home. Walked up there and I asked, I'd seen a tractor sitting out there, I asked the lady, I said "Ma'am, can I borrow that tractor," said, "I've got a pickup stuck." Said, "I've got a boy with me," I said, "as soon as we pull the pickup out, I'll bring that tractor right back to you." "No sir, I can't do that." I said, "We sure are in a bind." She said, "Well I'll loan you the tractor, but I'll have to follow you up and follow you back." Well we got over there and we got the pickup out and got the tractor back home. Got home and I was telling Wade about it, he said, "Oh my God! You didn't go over to Meyer's place did you?" I said, "I guess I did." He said, "Well you're lucky he wasn't at home."

It was his daughter that gave me permission, the government confiscated his land to make the Optima Refuge and when they were building the fence up there, they was some Mexican boys building fence in a pickup and he shot the tire out from under the pickup and the pickup rolled and almost killed them. He had a real nasty taste about the federal government and the refuge in particular, and that's how close I came to getting wiped out with being stupid.

AMBER: Well at least help was there for you. Now we had long time co-op farmer up there.

JIM: Yes Ma'am.

AMBER: And I know you got to be real good friends with him. You want to tell us about him?

JIM: Wayne Overton farmed the refuge as co-op manger up there for 35 years. And I'd go up, I'd work 12, 15 hours a day, no help. But after we got cell phones, we didn't have cell phones for a long time, after we got cell phones if I got in wreck or needed some help, all I had to do was call Wayne. I know I got stranded with my tractor on the same place I buried my damn pickup. I called him, he brought his tractor, we buried his tractor. So he said, "Well we got to have one of those stretch ropes," those nylon stretch ropes, and Maple was the manager, I called Maple, I told him I said, "I going to have to have one of those." He said, "Well just go get it." So went and got the thing, and Wayne had a bigger tractor, we took that bigger tractor over and stretched that rope out, we walked out both tractors and he came to my refuge again.

AMBER: Well he was always a really good co-op farmer.

JIM: Yes, and when he finally decided retire, who was it?

AMBER: That's when Danny was the manager.

JIM: Danny was here.

AMBER: Danny Moss.

JIM: I told Danny, I said "Danny we've got to do something for Wayne." And we got a plague fixed up and his daughter lived right there by the refuge and his son-in-law was the bails bondsman. And I worked up there real late, it was about nine o'clock at night, I was trying to get this thing planned so Wayne wouldn't know about it and drove up in the yard. His son-in-law come out there with his rifle and he thought I was some kind of bad guy.

AMBER: Oh no!

JIM: But we planned that little get together and had several of Wayne's good buddies, and he was really proud of that plague.

AMBER: Yeah, I remember seeing that plague at the office.

JIM: I just believe in acknowledging things when people do things and make a good hand. Everybody thinks their important and they're the main cog, but there's always somebody that carried the mail for you; you didn't do it all by yourself.

AMBER: And those relationships with our neighbors are so important and I

know you've spoken before about being from the local community and that being kind of a bridge between the refuge and the local communities. Did you see any changes over time with the local communities and their relationships with the Service while you were here?

JIM: Well Hollingsworth created more problems than anybody.

AMBER: He used to do law enforcement, so I know sometimes that's not all that popular.

JIM: Well they'd be out feeding their cattle, and here he'd come after dark harassing them because they were out feeding their cattle.

AMBER: So I know you've got a lot of really fun stories on some of your community stuff. You talked about you and Johnny Parker, another one of our maintenance workers, who's retired. You guys, well I would say got into trouble, but you got some of your equipment stuck here at Washita from time to time too, you got some locals here that helped you out as well.

JIM: Well the neatest thing about me and Parker of all the stories that I've got to tell, when the refuge celebrated their 100th Anniversary, Maple came up with this brilliant idea we were going to build this walking trail. Well we finally got it all tied together and Johnny's uncle, he's an engineer deluxe, and he built this little box blade that goes behind a lawnmower.

AMBER: Alright.

JIM: And Johnny had our little riding mower down there, pulling that little box

blade. I had the little 340 tractor with a little 5-foot we were smoothing it up so we could blacktop it, and people were going by, stopping, honking. I told Parker said, "If we don't get this heavy equipment off here, we're going to cause a wreck."

AMBER: [laughing] Nice. Now that's the Centennial Trail that's open now, and ya'll opened it in 2003, and it's still open today, still a really nice project and you and Johnny did a really good job on that. That's got some wonderful plaques there commemorating it, and we take kids there a lot. And I know, a lot of maintenance workers don't get the opportunity to work with kids a whole lot, but I remember from when I was here, seems like a lot of you guys have a soft spot there, so you helped with environmental education from time to time.

JIM: I always had a soft spot for kids. Talking about the trail, Johnny built a three foot pine log, he split it in half and built the most unique bench and we had it way back on the southwest corner. Went over there one day and somebody had stolen it, I know they had to haul a bobcat in there to load it because you couldn't load it.

AMBER: Yeah, I heard that thing was pretty heavy.

JIM: Oh my yeah, and Parker was furious and I don't blame him. Anytime Johnny ever built anything, you could take it to the county fair and win first prize.

AMBER: Carpenter extraordinaire.

JIM: You might get frustrated with him because he's not going to do it in thirty seconds.

AMBER: Hey, quality takes time.

JIM: Yeah, yeah.

AMBER: So just bouncing just real quick back, I know that you were always really, well you had a soft spot for kids and you helped with environmental education stuff, was there any of that you particularly enjoyed, any of those events or any of the things we got to do with bringing kids out to the refuge?

JIM: Oh it was always fun to see the kids. So many children don't have the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors and that was always the neat thing about our refuge. When the kids come out here, they're going to experience the real deal, it's not a man-made imitation type deal. They're going to get to see the prairie dogs, if they're lucky they might see an eagle or the geese or whatever. But getting to see that wildlife, that's just the rewards for working all year.

AMBER: Definitely. So do you have any fun wildlife stories for us, anything interesting you've ever seen out here or happenings or goings on?

JIM: Well one year we had an exceptional year. I think we got over 50 inches of rain that year. And Hollingsworth planted a little dab of corn over at the point, and that thing just completely turned to corn. We had the office corn crop, and out there by Neal Longs, the moist soil unit, the very south unit and we had a little flock of turkeys over there. And I got to get in that ears of corn and shucking them and going over there and every morning when I

check my pumps, I throw some corn at them. I was over there one day, wasn't paying no attention, scattered this corn and this dang gum armadillo, he was about 20 foot from me and he kept coming. I thought well that fool, well next thing I know he's running up my britches [or breeches] leg. I just knew he wasn't going to run over me.

AMBER: [laughing] That's so funny. Well speaking of corn, I know you guys planted corn for some netting and you did quite a bit of that back in the day right?

JIM: Oh that was the nastiest job of all, banding those; the ducks were lots of fun but the geese, that was a nasty, nasty job.

AMBER: So you banded mostly Canada geese?

JIM: Yes. Back when we were doing the banding, if we had two or three hunters [unintelligible@00:31:30] that was a big, big deal. I don't ever remember getting a snow goose in a net. Now the funniest thing about the deal, we used to have deal set right below the office here and we'd caught them, brought them up here, had our crates up here. We were banding them and they turned one loose and all a sudden you hear "boom" turn "boom." Ricky Johnson was sitting over here across the road in his wheat field, he was shooting them faster than we could turn them loose.

AMBER: [laughing] Oh no! Well that was a really fast band return.

JIM: Yeah, he got a do-better talk. [laughing]

AMBER: I bet. And he and his family have been co-op farmers here for a long time. And Earl, was Earl still co-op farming when you got here?

JIM: Oh yes, Earl was the original.

AMBER: And their family owned the property.

JIM: Right. Neal Long had that land over there, he owned that land.

AMBER: Wayne Vignal

JIM: And Wayne Vignal and Jesse Hines, Jesse Hines had that on the north side of the river there.

AMBER: And then the Johnsons had a pretty big portion as well.

JIM: Yes they did, they sure did.

AMBER: Did you work with all of those pretty closely during your time here?

JIM: Oh yes, I had a real good relationship with all of them.

AMBER: Well you knew most of them since before the refuge was here though right?

JIM: Oh yes, yes, yes. Yeah I know one winter we got a whale of a snow and I was about the only one working, so I got the old grader out trying to blade the roads around. So I just made a pass through Earl's driveway. And they had a little women's meeting in Butler an Organization, the 20th Century Club. Anyway, that night was a 20th Century Club, Frances told my wife, he said, "Boy, I sure do thank your husband for cleaning our driveway out."

AMBER: Well that's called building bridges with our neighbors; I think neighbors area really important.

JIM: Well you know, if you want a neighbor, you've got to be a neighbor. And you can't mistreat people, if you treat them crappy that's the way they're going to respond that way. But if you try to be a neighbor, it's a two way street.

AMBER: It sure is. And speaking of being neighbors, I know a lot of times we've done a lot of working with our neighboring refuges. And you got to go help down at Wichita Mountains lots of years, especially on their roundups right?

JIM: Right, right.

AMBER: You want to talk a little bit about that.

JIM: Well that was, of all the things I got to do, I suppose that was the highlight of my career. There's a big ranch at Vernon, Texas, the Waggoner Ranch, my granddad, my great granddad owned part of that; he died in 1894. So my family has had the livestock disease for a long, long time. And after Ralph Bryant left our refuge and went down there, I weaseled my way into getting to go down there and that was really precious to have that experience.

AMBER: Now did you do roundups for the buffalo and the longhorn?

JIM: No, I didn't have enough nerve for the buffalo.

AMBER: Alright, so tell me what you usually did for a typical longhorn roundup.

JIM: Well we start at the farthest spot from the refuge and we just start gradually clearing the pastures, driving them to the lots, and we'd lot them.

AMBER: On horses?

JIM: Yeah.

AMBER: Is it the refuge horses or did you bring your own?

JIM: Well I took my own down there, but a lot of the guys rode their own.

AMBER: So was this a one day deal or how long did it usually take you?

JIM: Oh it was about a three day deal.

AMBER: Three days, so that's a pretty long drive for some fairly wild cattle.

JIM: Yeah, I conned Maple into letting me go down there on that go down there on that deal.

AMBER: Did you ever had an adventures or misadventures with those longhorns?

JIM: Well I did the buffalo, I didn't have the any misadventures with the longhorn; they were all pretty simple, pretty easy. The only problem I ever had on the longhorn deal, I'd taken two saddles with me and my radiator got to running over and I had to use the bathroom and I got off my horse down in a little draw, and I stepped back up on my stirrup and my cinch busted on my saddle.

AMBER: Oh no.

JIM: And the refuge manager, I don't remember who it was, he came by. I said, "Can you go up there to my pickup and bring me my other saddle?" So I was almost on foot.

AMBER: I don't know that I'd be on foot trying to push cattle, but that could be interesting.

JIM: No. Ole Paul Swanson, he was a good friend of mine, maintenance man, and he was hired as a butcher when the refuge was first established. They had designated a number of animals that they had to dispose of to keep the population in check with the resources. And they had 'x' amount of help, 'x' amount of longhorn, 'x' amount of buffalo. And they would go out every day, they had a bob-tail truck with a winch, they'd shoot the animals, winch it up, take it into the butcher shop, and process it. They'd either take the meat down to the YCC Camp or take it to Fort Sill. And they did that until the government came up with this brilliant idea, everything had to be USDA inspected. And that's when they started having their sales.

AMBER: Okay. And so they still have those auctions now.

JIM: Yes.

AMBER: Have you been down to any auctions since you've retired?

JIM: No.

AMBER: No.

JIM: Well, yes I did. I did go down to one.

AMBER: Okay.

JIM: I did go down to one.

AMBER: Look like they're still running it about like they used to?

JIM: Well you're talking about; I had a lot of neat experiences. We were down there, you always had to pen the animals, they had a sale number; you go them lined up according to number. And we were trying to pen this one old bull; when they built new set of lots, supposedly it cost somewhere in the neighborhood of eight million dollars. And old Paul Swanson, my buddy down there, the butcher I was talking about, I was down there on duty, "Come, go with me." We went over there and them dang things are eight foot tall and little cubicles. I said, "My God, Paul, you're going to get an animal in these and you're going to miss it, you're forget it, it'll starve to death before we ever find it." And he said, "Well we're going to use bobcats to push these things up and down the alley." I said, "Well one of those old buffalo bulls will hook that sucker and throw it plum out of there." Well one day we were penning the bulls they had one old bull, an old, oh I can't remember. The boy that was pushing them up in the bobby, that old bull turned around and hooked that sucker, pushed that thing about a block.

AMBER: Oh my goodness.

JIM: And the bull finally turned around, he backed up, boy he got a head of steam and hit that old bull in the butt, and pushed him right in the pen.

AMBER: Sounds like a wild ride.

JIM: Yes, yes. We had the longhorn sale one time, and they had this old

Charolais looking cow, mean and wild and crazy as she could be. She almost jumped out of those pens twice. And old Ralph Bryant and I was standing up on the catwalk after sale, and I said "I wonder who bought that crazy 101?" Well there was man standing there beside me, and he said "What was that number?" I said, "It was 101, it's a yellow limousine looking cow." And he said, "Oh my God, I bought her." And he was from Minnesota. I told him, I said "You better take a real good look at her because when you turn her out, she'll probably be back down at the refuge within a week.

AMBER: Nice [chuckling].

JIM: We were having the bull sale, the buffalo sale, and they got the enclosed pens but they got some wire pens that they put the calves in. I was running the gate down there trying to pen them, and this dang gum little bull hit it and knocked me and the gate, knocked my glasses off; really created quite a wreck.

AMBER: Wow, sounds like it.

JIM: Yeah, the first time I ever went down to sales, I got a butt chewing deluxe. A boy from Mangum, he worked with the NRCS. And he came off a ranch. And we were down at the longhorn sale and we were down in the alley sorting, and old Sam was mad, he come by, "Boys we don't work animals on the ground, get up here on this catwalk." Well they had them long prods and paddles and stuff, and anyway after he went on by, a little bit we were back down there. He come by again, he said, "If I catch you boys down there on the ground again, you're going home." So we stayed up top.

AMBER: [Laughing] I bet. Now I know you mentioned to me before too, you were familiar with Drum.

JIM: Yes.

AMBER: Kind of famous maintenance worker down at Wichita Mountains. Do you want to tell us a little about that?

JIM: Well Drum is one of a kind. The buffalo on the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge, the buffalo in the late years were almost extinct. John Goodnight had a big ranch at Palo Duro Canyon. And they had slaughtered so many buffalo, his wife couldn't sleep at night for listening to the baby calves bawl. And she told her husband, said "You've got to get some of those calves, we've got to do something to protect them." Well he got 30 or 40 of these calves and raised them, and that preserved the herd of buffalo. Out of that remnant of buffalo, they sent 35 head to the zoo in New York. After the refuge was established, they sent 35 head back to Wichita Mountains by train, and Drum's dad got to drive them from the train station to the refuge horseback.

AMBER: Oh wow.

JIM: But the neatest thing about the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge, the man that my great grandmother sold the land to was Waggoner, old man Waggoner. Waggoner and Teddy Roosevelt and Will Rogers were all big buddies. Every fall they'd have a big coyote hunt down in that area. Well Waggoner had all that refuge leased and Roosevelt told him, said "This is the last year you're going to get to lease this.

We're going make Oklahoma a state, we're going to make a game preserve out of this."

AMBER: That's awesome.

JIM: And so Waggoner went back over into Texas and gathered him up a big herd of longhorns, drove them to Abilene, Kansas and sold them for \$53,000 and went back to Vernon, Texas, starting buying land. Every time he'd drill for water, he'd hit oil and it would just thoroughly hack him off. He put together over 510,000 acres, it was one of the largest ranches in Texas. And my great granddad is buried; they wrote a book a couple years ago and they had a picture of this cemetery and my great granddad's tombstone was the only one still standing.

AMBER: Oh wow! Wow, it's really amazing to have roots that go back so far in a general area.

JIM: Well my granddad tried to go down there in 1930, but it had rained and he just had a little old Model T car, couldn't get there. Well my wife got involved in genealogy. She came up with the paperwork where my great grandmother had sold the land to the Waggoners and we always wanted to find the grave. Well one of the cowboys from the Waggoners went to work for a ranch over south of Cheyenne, I heard about him. I took all this stuff to him, I told him I wanted to go down and find my granddad's grave. And he said, "Well you go down and talk to Dick Yeager," we took the paperwork and showed him. I took two of my old uncles, the one over at Cheyenne and another uncle, and we went down. The ranch foreman said, "I'm going to put

you with the oldest cowboy," and he said, "His dad is buried there." The man was 80, we were all over the ranch, finally about noon, he said, "Boys, I only know of one more so called cemetery." Well we spilt out, one of my uncles didn't get fifty foot and there the tombstone was.

AMBER: Wow, that's amazing.

JIM: And the Waggoners had one of the most, well they had a foundation sire named Poco Bueno. And my granddad had that bloodline, and I had Poco Bueno horses; I just buried one about five years ago, he was 35 years old. He was the last of the Mohicans.

AMBER: Really, that's amazing.

JIM: But that refuge at Wichita Mountains is so special, it is, and so much history. My wife got to room, well not room; when she was in college at Southwestern, Quanah Parker's granddaughter was going to school over there and she was on my wife's floor.

AMBER: Oh, how neat.

JIM: And there was a colored girl over there, I don't remember the colored girl's, but that was the first black girl that gone to Southwestern; this was in the '60's. And my wife said, every evening the whole dorm, the colored girl and the Indian roomed together, said the whole dorm wound up in those two girl's room. Said they had the most fun.

AMBER: That's great. So there were a lot of changes going on in society in general at those times. That's great. So we've talked a lot about Wichita Mountains, which is a big star here in

Oklahoma but shifting back over here to Washita, I know there were a lot of projects that you worked on over the years. Was there any projects that were particular near and dear to your heart?

JIM: Well the moist soil units, I just always felt blessed to get to work with moist soil units. There's not anything like being down at the moist soil unit at daylight pumping water and watching them birds come in.

AMBER: Yeah.

JIM: But the craziest thing that happened about moist soil units, we had this pump and it would only pump for twelve hours; it'd be out of diesel, wouldn't pump overnight. So I rigged up a 200 gallon tank, and I had it plumbed in would continually pump. Well I did it about late one evening, I got over there the next morning and we built this impoundment and that sucker was full of diesel. That tank on the pump had a vent hole and all the diesel, oh God I was so nervous and so upset and I called Maple, we had those mop up rags; we worked down there. That was the most frustrating experience I ever had. But before Johnny and I built that little box, the river would get a spot fixed to put the pump in and the river get up and wash it out, so we finally decided we'd put piling down there and run a concrete, and put a head wall and it made that operation a lot simpler.

AMBER: Yeah, that's still in place now. So were you involved in building all the units and putting in the lines and valves and the whole nine yards?

JIM: Yeah.

AMBER: Yeah, I know you worked a lot on those units.

JIM: Well it was just always a neat deal. One of my friends, he's got two, well his boys are grown now but when his sons, they were in grade school. He called me one day, he says "Is there any way I can get you to take me a tour of the refuge?" I said, "Well sure, when do you want to do it?" I said, "Pick a Saturday." He came out to my place one Saturday, I took him all over the refuge, took him through all the moist soil units, and we were getting ready to go, he said "I can tell you take a lot of pride in this place." I said, "Well a guy be stupid if he didn't, if you couldn't take pride in it, you don't have any business working out here." If it's just a job, you don't need it, you know. I never worked at a place that I [didn't] enjoyed, there was a few jobs that wasn't all that enjoyable but as far as dreading to get up in the morning, go to work; I never had one of those days. And I was always blessed to have managers that; I'm kind of bull headed and hard to get along with, all I want is somebody to tell me what to do and get out of the way and let me do it. And I was blessed to have managers that would kind of let me do my own thing. Of course when something needed to be done, they told me, and I didn't have a problem, but I was blessed to have managers that gave me a little freedom to paddle my own canoe. And you know if I've got a job to do, I've always felt responsible to do it. I was always kind of in charge of moist soil units, the rec. areas, and always kind of took pride in keeping things looking ship-shape.

AMBER: Speaking of rec. areas, were you involved in building any of the facilities on the rec. areas? I know there

was a tower at Owl Cove and since been replaced, but it was a lot of fun.

JIM: Yeah, we were involved in that. And those old plastic port-o-potties; we used to have the little wooden [unintelligible@00:49:19] an old 55 gallon barrel, just real primitive.

AMBER: Outhouses, huh?

JIM: Yeah, the real outhouses. And Ralph Bryant, he came and every 4th of July I'd get a call over there at Owl Cove, some of them kids would jerk it out in the road. And Ralph came up with the idea he was going to buy these real nice plastic units, and we got them in. And I said, "Well if we're going to do this, we're going to put them on a concrete pad," I said, "and we're going to bolt them to it." Anyway, I run all the concrete and bolted them down to it.

AMBER: Yeah, I guess you guys learned the hard way, you better bolt stuff down or somebody's going to mess with it.

JIM: Yeah.

AMBER: I remember bolting down the new trash cans even so they stayed put.

JIM: Well the neatest deals, one day we got a big flood down at Turkey Flat and the water got up about three foot above the port-o-pot, and so I went down there and unbolted it when the pad got dried up, put it on my trailer and took it into the co-op and somebody down there, Bud Blanchard, he run the co-op, he was harassing me and wanted to know what I was doing. I said, "Well I've got a bad case of the scours, I had to bring my port-o-pot with me."

AMBER: [Laughing] Well speaking of funny stories, there was two I did want to ask you about that I knew from before. I know as a staff, a lot of times there's get togethers for people's birthdays and stuff. And I remember a special birthday cake story that you told me that I thought would be really fun.

JIM: Oh well. We used, we had to change the buoys. We were out changing the buoys and Mary Ann Brock called, that's when she was down there 50-11 times a day. And Jon was talking to her, and I said "We need some fried chicken and some tater salad," and all this stuff. Well she didn't get it, but anyway my birthday, when I turned 50 I guess my wife ran off the mouth about it. And I was way down on the very south end working a water gap. About 11 o'clock, the radio started going off and I said, "I only lack an hour, I'm not coming up there just to have to come back for an hour." And finally after 30 minutes there was so much racket on that radio, I had to holler calf rope and come up there. I had no more than walked in the shop door, everybody had finished eating, had this big ole fancy cake sitting on the table. And I said, "Well I want to eat first." "No, no we've got to have some cake, we're through, we want some cake." Old Mary Ann hand me that knife and I went to try to cut it, well it was sponge cake with frosting on it, and everybody got a big kick out of that.

AMBER: A real sponge.

JIM: A real sponge. But she had a real chocolate cake later.

AMBER: That made up for the trick then.

JIM: We had a 15 year, no loss time accident deal here. And I was down, we had this flag pole down there, and I had the grinder down there, big ole grinder. And that sucker slipped and put a gash in my leg, I don't know how big it was; I never said a word about it. I went home, got me some peroxide and healed it all up. About a month later I was down there at the shop working one day, and old Brock come by. He said, "I want to tell you something." I said, "What's that Jon?" He said, "Next time you have an accident, if you don't get up there at that office and fill out that paperwork, I'm going to kick your butt!" I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "You know what I'm talking about!" I said, "No, I don't have a clue." "Yeah, you do." He said, "Your wife said something to my wife."

AMBER: [Laughing] Again on the birthday, then on getting hurt. Well hopefully you weren't injured too many times, I know some of this stuff.

JIM: No, that was the worse deal right there. Had my feelings hurt a few times, but that was kind of serious. I should have went to the doctor but I didn't, because we were so proud of that no loss time accident, ol Zerb, well I went to work just when they were building these garages. And old Zerb was up there putting shingles on it, Patty Hoban was the little assistant and he fell off there, and hurt himself real bad. Well she made him come here and sit in the lawn chair for a week until he got healed up so he wouldn't bust that no lost time deal. So I wasn't about to bust that no time.

AMBER: So you brought up Dan Zerby, I've heard lots of Dan Zerby stories over the years. You do you have any fun ones?

JIM: We could write the book on Dan Zerby. We used to have irrigation just right down here. When I first went to work, we irrigated this whole compound and that was the first job every morning in the summertime was to change our pipes. We had a little Sears's riding mower, we took the deck off and we had a little trailer for our pipe, and anyway that was kind of my job, and my pump got messed up. And I went down there to get my pump straightened out and my mower died, couldn't get that little sucker to start for love nor money. Finally walked back up to the shop and I said, "Zerb, you're going to have to come back down here and see if we can't get this dang thing to start." Well he messed with it a little bit and he said, "Well we're just going to have to take it up to the shop." So he hooks a little chain up on the sucker, he comes up that hill, right in front of that shop, right there in front of the shop door, and slams on his brakes. I couldn't stop, that mower hit that back of pickup bumper, it was a cast iron bumper, that thing went in a thousand pieces. We spent two days putting that back together, and I told him "Zerb you're never pulling me again. If you do, I'm going to hold on and when I want to turn loose, I'll turn loose." I had a big water leak here over there by the barn; they didn't have any equipment. When this refuge was first established, there was no equipment on it whatsoever and old Zerb was so talented he watched the Army surplus stuff and he could find two old pieces of something, he would build one. And he got two old Hough

loaders and he spent a whole winter building one and the thing didn't have any brakes on it. But he and old Joe would work on this water line, got it all repaired and old Zerb he was pushing dirt up on it. And the next load, he got too far and wound up right on top of that water and the water was shooting everywhere. Old Zerb looked around there and he said, "Joe what is that?" I said, "It's water, what do you think it is you crazy moron. You done busted our water line again!" If you get Zerb on a piece of equipment, we always had water trouble. Anyway, one day he got the electric line, he got the telephone line, he got the gas line, he got every utility line on the darn refuge. We spent a whole week putting everything back together.

AMBER: I recall a saying you guys related before, something about the right way and the wrong way.

JIM: Right way, wrong way, the Zerby way. Oh we had a lot of fun.

AMBER: So that was one of the changes I think that was more apparent, was definite changes in equipment.

JIM: When I first went to work at the wildlife refuge, I was kind of in charge of the mowing because I went to work there late fall. Had a little old 340 International Tractor with a little 5 foot mower. And you couldn't mow very much all day with that little deal. I used that for a couple of years and then we had a little 880 Oliver tractor, and we bought a little 9 foot mower. And I used that for, I don't know, two or three years. Well we bought a new farm tractor, we had this 986 International tractor; it sat over there at Cheyenne

Point one whole year and never been moved. And so I told Ralph, I said "Ralph, I'm going to get that tractor, take the duals off of it; I'm going to fix me a mower tractor." And boy Zerby threw a fit, "Blankety-blank, you can't do that! You can't mow if you can't see what you're doing." So I mowed with that thing for two or three years and then Ralph bought that 15 foot Alamo tractor and oh my, I was in hog heaven. And one year, got a brand new 7410 tractor and a brand new 15 foot Alamo mower. The closest wreck I ever had, I was mowing on the highway with the old International tractor, the axel stuck out about a foot past the tires, and I was mowing along the highway and I just glazed one of those highline posts, next thing I know here that sucker comes. You talk about being scared; I didn't know what I was going to do. Finally I just, it didn't hit me, it was still hanging and I called somebody. I said, "We got troubles." They said, "What do you mean we? Sound like you do." Anyway, the electric company came, I was down there when they put the pole up, and I said "What are you going to do with those insulators?" They said, "We're going to put up new insulators" and all this. I said, "I'd like to have one of them." So they gave me this big old insulator, I've still got it home; that's how close I'd come to meeting my maker that day.

AMBER: Oh my goodness! Wow, that's adventure.

JIM: One of the other most spooky stories, we had a water blow out down there by Owl Cove, north of Owl Cove. And we were going to build this little water deal, make a crossing and a pipe drop. And well we got it all built I had

my little 340 tractor down there in the lake; I had a little six inch pump, had to set up irrigation hose; we'd sprigged it in Bermuda (grass). Well one morning I was down there, got my pump all set, got my nozzles all cleaned out; way back, you couldn't see anything. And I came out of around that bend up on this little knoll, and my God as far as I could see was highway patrol and sheriff's cars. Oh Ron Price was our office manager, I called over, got on the radio and said, "Ron, what in the world is going on?" I said, "It looks like we've some kind of trouble." He said, "What do you mean WE?"

AMBER: Again.

JIM: They discovered that patch of marijuana down there. You talk about being scared. When I come around there, my God as far as I could see, and I was afraid to turn around and go the other way. I thought if I turn around, they're going to start shooting at me.

AMBER: Oh my goodness. Yeah, when was that?

JIM: It was in the '80's.

AMBER: '80's, yeah. Somebody had come and planted it on the refuge and then it got found.

JIM: Yeah, well Vernon Fletcher used to farm that land right north of that, and I know darn well it was his grandson. His grandson was pretty much a dope head, he came in and he knew the lay of the land and everything; never could prove it but pretty sure that was him.

AMBER: So that was project where you guys had to go in and pull all that up didn't you?

JIM: Yeah, oh my, we worked all day down there. That stuff was 12, 15 feet tall.

AMBER: I've seen pictures of Jon Brock in it. [laughing]

JIM: Yeah, that was quite an episode.

AMBER: So when you come out to the refuge today and you look around, I know there's a lot of changes that you can see from the time you got here to where we're at now. Can you tell me about any of those changes on the landscape, and if you think some of those are good or if you think some of those are not so good?

JIM: Well there hasn't been anything major. The main thing that impresses me is the upgrade of the equipment, having something to work with. When I went to work, we just had that old Hough loader, we had an old Austin-Western road grader, we had an old D8 cat with a pony gas motor we had to pull a rope to start it. And old Maple upgraded; before David Maple got here, every manager before that, each refuge is allocated 'x' amount of dollars. Well just before the end of the year, they've got to spend that money or lose it. Well you might have 500 brooms, but to get rid of that money somebody goes and buys another 1,000; they never tried to buy something that was worthwhile that was needed. And David, he would kind of figure out what the refuge could use or what it could need, like they got that 4-wheel drive tractor, he got new grain drills, new grain truck, he got a new backhoe, new

dozer, a new loader. After he got here, our money started being spent wisely instead of just pooped off.

AMBER: It was a positive change.

JIM: Well it always frustrated me, like maybe you had two of something and go buy another one just so you can say you spent the money.

AMBER: Yeah, it doesn't make much sense.

JIM: That was always something that was a burr under my saddle. But our refuge has always spent money pretty wisely up to that point, you know. When old Wade Pratt was our office manager, you could tear something up; we used to have \$2500 imprest money, you could go to town and pay cash for it. Well you go up there and he would give you the Nth degree to make sure that you actually needed it. Always said if everybody had Wade Pratt handling their money, we wouldn't have a short fall of money.

AMBER: Need more like that then.

JIM: Well the funny story about Wade, we were eating lunch one day, Ken Butts was the manager, and old Wade just went sound asleep. And old Butts went "Shhhh" he got us all out of the shop. I had a clock back there by the lavatory on the south side, turned that to 4:00, locked the door, and we all hid and he banged on that door. Old Wade likely had a wreck when he'd seen what time it was. But that's the kind of stuff that we used to, nothing malicious just good wholesome fun.

AMBER: Sounds like you had a lot of fun in your career with the Service here.

JIM: I did, I did. Well there used to be a boy down at Tishomingo, his name was Clyde Wooley and Leroy Ackley at Salt Plains, and Dan Zerby, and when you got those three together you had a real circus on your hands.

AMBER: Well I know we've been at it for about an hour. There was a couple other things I hadn't quite asked you yet.

JIM: Okay.

AMBER: As far as wrapping up some things, if there was anything that you would want to tell others about your career overall? If there was a take away message, on overall thought.

JIM: Well, I was at the first maintenance workshop meeting I got to go to when they very first started. They said, "You know there's only 120 maintenance positions in all of Region 2." And I thought to myself, you lucky fool, how lucky can you be to have one of those positions. When I first went to work for the refuge, I just got out of the store and my brother-in-law had been a mail carrier, he had been in World War II, then he got a mail route and he passed away from cancer when he was 32 years old. But when I got the job at the refuge, my daddy-in-law was so excited, I thought what's the deal, it's just job. Why are you so excited? I didn't realize how lucky to have I was to have the job and what kind of job it was. I started, when I first went to work I think I was making \$26.15 an hour; I was making almost \$30 when I quit.

AMBER: It's a good job and it's steady.

JIM: Well it's, the refuge job really depends on the manager you've got. If you've got a real good manager and gives you some freedom to stumble and make your mistakes, but if you've got somebody that's got, like the manager up at Salt Plains; he was a micromanager. I used to go up there quite a bit, he'd, "I did this. I did this. I did this. I told him not to move that rock. He wasn't supposed to set that post there." His people didn't have freedom to blow their nose. And I'd been so blessed to have managers that gave me a little rope and had enough faith in me to think that I might accomplish whatever it was I was supposed to accomplish.

AMBER: And I did want to ask you, do you have a favorite spot on this refuge?

JIM: Yes, I do.

AMBER: Okay, what's that?

JIM: That's the locust grove trees over—

AMBER: South of Owl Cove.

JIM: Yeah.

AMBER: Definitely one of my favorites.

JIM: You go into Pitts Creek there. When I was mowing, if I was in that area, I always made a point, that's where I always ate my lunch was in that locust grove trees.

AMBER: I think people that hadn't been out on the plains probably don't know the value of a good little grove of trees.

JIM: Well, well when Oklahoma was first settled, there was no trees to speak of in Oklahoma. Oklahoma was fenced with bodark posts, most of those posts were shipped in here from Kansas. There were very few trees in the early days of Oklahoma. And timber was a real precious commodity. And I've always had a real feeling for trees, I have trouble cutting one down or destroying it.

AMBER: I think it's great to see somebody with your passion. I think most folks in Service have a passion for the resource for sure, the outdoors.

JIM: Well if you don't, you've got no business being here.

AMBER: Exactly.

JIM: You need to find you another job.

AMBER: And then I guess just to wrap things up, now that we've done a lot of looking behind, do you have any thoughts to the future of the refuge and the Service, where you see things going?

JIM: Well, I don't know. Everything's changed so much, people don't have the opportunity to do as much hands on, they're too busy. When I went to work, Wade Pratt could take care of our paperwork in about 15 minutes, now we've got four or five people puts in eight hours a day pounding on the darn computer. I think sometimes a refuge has forgotten what's really important, it's a resource, it's not writing a dictionary of paperwork.

AMBER: So your words of advice going forward for refuge folks?

JIM: Get back to the basics.

AMBER: Back to the basics.

JIM: That's another thing that's a real bad; all the time I worked for the refuge up to the last few years, every time we had a regional supervisor, he was somebody that came off a refuge, he had firsthand experience, he wasn't somebody that had sat in front of a computer all his life. And that firsthand knowledge makes a lot of difference. You don't get that reading a book or punching a computer, you've got to get out there and get your hands dirty, get a little goose manure on you or grease or dirt.

AMBER: For sure. And I know even though you're retired, you're still out there getting your hands dirty.

JIM: Oh well, I'll be out there until I die.

AMBER: Well I really appreciate you coming in today.

JIM: Well Amber it's an honor. I didn't do anything to help you.

AMBER: Oh no, these are amazing stories and I'm looking forward to sharing those.

JIM: Well I was blessed.

AMBER: We were blessed to have you. Thank you, Jim.

JIM: I told my wife, I said as I look back on my life, I said I always wanted to run cattle, and she was the only girl I ever wanted to marry. And get to marry then only girl you ever wanted to marry,

and do all the; I always wanted a little store. The only thing that I regret that I haven't done as I got older, I was already married and had two kids at Vietnam, I wish I had went in the military. I think if these young people had to serve a couple of years in the military, it would be the best thing for this nation. It would teach them respect and discipline.

AMBER: I agree.

JIM: And responsibility. But I grew up in the best times in the United States. All the boys that I went to school with, I don't know, there's been one divorced, all the rest of us are still married to our first wives. We've never been in the pen.

AMBER: Well I think hard work and respect and patriotism are things that you've got in spades, Jim.

JIM: Well, I just can't help it. Whenever they play Taps at these funerals, I can't help but cry. My dad had a little military service and he'd been gone two or three months and my stepmother, we had a little family get together, and she brought me the flag that was on his casket, and it was, and she brought me his VFW cap. And it was so meaningful.

AMBER: Well I know through your years of service, here with the Fish and Wildlife Service, you met a lot of great people. So please also free to contact me if you know anybody else who'd be great for an interview. And if you track down any really neat pictures like those two, give us a shout, you know we'd definitely be interested in seeing those.

JIM: Okay. Well you need to get Jack Warner.

AMBER: For sure. Alright, I'm going to go ahead and stop this recording here....