Gathering Our Voice

Interview with Jack Feil
Interviewer: Nancy Warner
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Part One

NW: Okay, this is Nancy Warner and I'm here with Jack Feil at his home on Baker Flats and today is August the 11th 2010, and we're gonna talk for a little while about Jack's knowledge of Baker Flats, history in this area particularly as how it relates to harvest food and distribution, so again, thank you Jack for taking time to talk with me about this.

JF: Well, you're welcome.

NW: How long have you and your family lived in North Central Washington?

JF: Well, my grandparents came here to this Baker Flats in 1908.

NW: Wow. Great. And you've had that sign on your fruit stand for a couple years now already, that century old…

JF: Yes. Yeah. Yes, we have.

NW: Wow. So, what brought or attracted your family to this area? You told me a little about this before.

JF: Well it was actually a promotion by the Great Northern Railroad. They were looking for people to come out here to settle and grow fruit, and so they would have a uh, a be able to haul the fruit and stuff back East.

NW: So where did your family come from?

JF: They came here from Poughkeepsie [?] New York. My grandmother and grandfather were born in Kitchner, Ontario, Canada. They gradually migrated through Niagra Falls and into New York.

NW: Oh, okay. So they heard about the railroad promoting…were they promoting tree fruit growing areas or just farming?

JF: I don't know if it was tree fruit growing, but they did put out a pamphlet and that's how my grandfather and actually a friend of his got all into this and they both came out together from the same factory. He worked in the button factory. He was a foreman in the button factory, and so him and his friend decided to come out here and see what they could do.

NW: 1908. So, they were friends – they were friends through the button factory or other means?

JF: No, they were through the button factory.

NW: Okay. Huh. So they were being kind of adventurous just coming out here by themselves.

JF: Absolutely.

NW: How old were they, roughly?

JF: I'm not sure. I can't – I don't remember that. I'd have to add that up in my head.

NW: Well…

JF: My father was ten years old when they got out here, and he was born in 1898.

NW: Oh, okay. Okay, all right. So, once they were here, how did they settle in this particular part of the region? Baker Flats?

JF: I don't know that. Uh, apparently this is part of what they called the Patterson Tract. A developer had parceled this out and, uh, apparently it was available, and uh, so they uh, got into it that way, along with Mr. Baker, who was the railroad agent down here.

NW: So were there stories passed down to you about what they liked about the place? I mean, it is flat, so if they were looking to farm, then they found that would be an advantage.

JF: Well, it was not only that, but it was close to the river, and when they first started the orchard they had to haul the water up with uh, what we called a stone boat – they dipped buckets into the barrels, and the horses and filled boats would fill that up and water the trees with the barrels.

NW: Hard work.

JF: Mmhmm. Yep.

NW: Hmm, yeah. So it was good to be close to the river.

JF: Yes.

NW: A very dependable water source.

JF: Yes, it is.

NW: It took a lot of energy to get the water where it needed to go.

JF: Well, what would happen in those days, and we don't do it anymore – we have plenty of water. But you, uh, keep all the weeds away from the trees, and you hoe or cultivate right around the trees, and the trees will hold water for quite awhile, so it wasn't something you had to do, you know, every week or so, but they were managed – they were able to manage the water and not have to make too many trips to the river.

[5:00] NW: Okay. Well, I'm going to come back to get more information on that one a little further on in the interview because I'd like to know more about where they got their trees to start out and all, but before I forget, I want to ask you, do you have a copy, by any chance, of that promotional brochure that attracted them to the area?

JF: No, I don't.

NW: That would be interesting to find, huh. Okay, well just in terms of your background – just a few background questions before we get into more detail. We're asking everyone we interview how they've made a living over the last few years, and I kind of already know this from our previous interview, that you did a degree in pharmacy…

JF: Yes.

NW: And then you came home and decided to focus on tree fruit.

JF: Yes.

NW: So, you've been a tree fruit grower most of your adult life.

JF: Yes. I spent a couple years in the army and I, when I got discharged – I got an early discharge to come and help on the farm, and that's where I've been ever since. Well, before that, too, but…

NW: So, I don't remember Jack you told me where you were in the Army.

JF: I was in the regular Army. I was stationed in Fort Hood, Texas.

NW: Kind of a different change from North Central Washington.

JF: Yeah, absolutely.

NW: Hmm. Well, because we're asking people about food harvest and distribution, we're also exploring this question: have you ever had to survive with little or no money?

JF: Yes.

NW: Okay, could you describe to me how that influenced how you got your food? Did you trade or barter for food?

JF: No. Things were real tough around here in the late thirties, and my father got a, well, it was about the start of World War II, and my father got a job in a defense plant over on the coast, so he made some money there, but he also worked here for a year or two with the State Highway Department, and my mother – she worked in a grocery store downtown – clerking in the grocery store, so that's how we survived then. We did have – we did manage to salvage a few cherry trees, and that brought in some income on the fruit side, but the apple trees were all pushed out – there were no apple trees left.

NW: Did you say pushed out?

JF: Yes, with a bulldozer.

NW: Right. And that was because of apple maggot?

JF: No, it was because of codling moth, primarily. Some of the growers were able to be hanging in there, and uh, with the whole orchard invested with codling moth, why it made it awfully hard on 'em, and they could not survive, so it was, uh, kind of uh, law of the county, that if you couldn't take care of your orchard, spray it properly, it had to condemned and removed.

NW: Oh, that must have been so hard watching those trees go over.

JF: Yeah.

NW: How many – how much of your orchard was devoted to apples? How much did you lose in that?

JF: We lost most all of it. There were only a few cherry trees that we had left, and that was probably – we probably lost forty acres.

NW: Oh, man. Oh. Yeah, you loaned me a picture of you spreading water with a hoe – and that's - those were cherry trees.

JF: Yeah, they were cherry trees.

NW: You were a babying at that point, 'cause they were the only few trees you had left. [chuckling]

JF: Well, we, uh, that was the way we irrigated – with a rill. There wasn't sprinklers at that time, so we irrigated with ditches and we had to hoe off the ditches to make sure the water got through. That's what that was about.

NW: So, I think when I was visiting with you earlier – around Christmastime, it was winter, you said the story of your father with his friend and the button factory coming out here. Were there then other families that you joined you here at Baker Flats so you had kind of a community at Baker Flats?

JF: Well, that was my grandfather. And there was no other people except for Mr. Baker. He was the railroad agent – him and his wife, and it was just the three families.
NW: Oh, okay.

JF: There was no one else here at that time, and what we call Baker's Flat is just this area right around Polson, and as it expanded the name caught on – up on the bench up above here – to the north – is called Upper Baker Flat and then the area from just right about here clear on down to the Odabashion Bridge is called Lower Baker Flats, but it wasn't really – there was only one original Baker's Flat, and that was this, and they just cabbaged on to the name.

[10:04] NW: Okay, okay. Yeah, that kind of happens with names sometimes. So, what's the name of the other family besides Feil?

JF: Uh, William Dick.

NW: Oh, Dick.

JF: Yeah. His name was William Dick.

NW: So, the Feils and the Dicks, when times were tough, were there things that you did together to stretch your money since you were neighbors?

JF: Not that I know of. They were pretty well independent of one other.

NW: Okay.

JF: We all had our own water supply and, you know…

NW: Okay, alright. Okay, well, I…

JF: I…

NW: I'm sorry. Go ahead.

JF: No, I was going to say –we did have a community pump to start out with after we got the trees started. And there still wasn't electricity to be out here to run a pump so we had what they call a Poppin' Johnny motor hooked up to a pump down in the river, and it provided water for all the Feils, Dicks, and the Bakers. And one in the family, every night, one in the family had to spend the night there to keep it fueled up and lubricated.

NW: Wow – that sounds kinda fun.

JF: [chuckles] Ha, yeah, sleepin' there with the Poppin' Johnny.

NW: [chuckles] Haha – you'd have to be a pretty sound sleeper. It sounds kinda noisy – does it look something like one of those donkeys that they use in the oil wells?

JF: No, no – this has a huge fly wheel on it. I don't remember, but I've seen pictures of 'em. Probably four, five feet in diameter – heavy catch diameter – and that would turn and every so often when it would slow down a bit, then a piston would fire and it'd give it another twirl, and every once in awhile – that's why they called it Poppin' Johnny because every once in awhile – it didn't fire bang, bang, bang, it, and then, when it started needing another surge of power, it'd do another pop. And it ran on Benzene.

NW: Oh my gosh – you're kidding! Where'd the benzyne come from?

JF: I don't know.

NW: Oh, that's interesting, isn't it?

JF: [chuckles] Yeah.

NW: Oh my gosh – that is interesting.

JF: So were these used up and down the river, these poppin' Johnnies?

NW: As far as I know, this was the only one. I'm not sure, there might have been others.

JF: Wow. That's interesting.

NW: Did you know Nat Washington, the long-time Democratic Senator from Ephrata, whose father was one of the instigators of the Grand Coulee Dam?

JF: Uh, I didn't understand.

NW: Oh, I just wondered if you knew Nat Washington.

JF: No.

NW: Oh okay, well he described something to me like this – sort-of – up the by the Grand Coulee Dam, that they might have used for irrigation in his family…

JF: They could have.

NW: Hmm. I never have seen a picture of it though.

JF: I'm sure there were other ones, but this is the only one I know about.

NW: Hmm.

JF: And they came to me by word of mouth, I never did see it – I wasn't born at that time, but I was told about it.

[13:18] NW: So [background noise; telephone ringing]

Part Two

[0:00] NW: I know I said I was going to wait until later to ask you this, but I'm going to ask you now while it's on my mind. Where did you get the – where did you get the trees to start developing the orchard?

JF: They grew the trees here, and that was one of the ways they started. You know, there wasn't any apple production so they grew trees for C and O Nursery, and they grew their own trees, too, and they would grow trees, [inaudible], bud 'em, and when the trees were ready to dig, they'd dig 'em for the C and O, and they'd get paid for growing the trees for other people to plant.

NW: Oh, okay. That's great. So how long did they do that?

JF: I'm not sure, but I think it was probably several years before they get into production of their own fruit, and also, another way they got the money was they would – they grew vegetables here and probably once a week, I'm assuming, once a week they'd load up the wagon and go to town and peddle it downtown. Watermelon, corn, tomatoes, all kindsa stuff, 'cause they were – my grandparents originally – they were from a farming family.

NW: In Ontario?

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JF: In Ontario, yeah. So they knew all about how to do that. There was a lot of self-sustenance, too. I've been going through a lot of the old stuff in the house, and there was a sausage-maker, a cabbage cutter for sauerkraut, and I know that they did preserve their meats with – they'd smoke 'em, and corned beef, stuff like that. They got by pretty cheap, actually. It didn't take much. It didn't take much money.

NW: Did they also can meat?

JF: Not that I know of. No, I don't think they had the means to can meat and eat. Usually you have to do that with pressure.

NW: They did have a sausage-maker, though…

JF: Yes. Mmhmm, which would have had the salt and stuff in it, as a preservative, and smoke too, probably.

NW: So they knew how to smoke hams and sausage…Huh, yeah, they probably had a lot of knowledge. I know I probably asked you this earlier, but I don't think it was with the recorder going. The ethnic history of your family – is Feil English?

JF: It's German.

NW: Okay. And what was your grandfather's name, Jack?

JF: My grandfather's name is Henry. Henry Edward.

NW: Henry Edward Feil. And then your father?

JF: Was Harold Otto Feil.

NW: Okay. And also just for my understanding and maybe for other people, too, who would be listening to this tape, your relationship to Dan Feil and Bob Feil is…

JF: My brother is Bob. Bob is my brother. Dan and the boys there at the boat shop – Dan, Dick, Tom, and the daughter Becky there – my niece and nephews.

NW: Okay. And Rochelle who writes at the paper?

JF: She's a grand neice.

NW: [chuckles] Okay, yeah. I haven't met her yet, but I look forward to it. I enjoy her column.

JF: Yeah, yeah, she's a very interesting person, really. Really talkative and friendly.

NW: Okay, well, Baker Flats. When we talked before back at Christmastime, it seemed like you said you and your brother had some history about this place that you wanted to pass on, and it is a distinctive part of the region, I mean, when I first moved here, people talked about Baker Flats, and I know that it's the first place apricot trees bloom in the region.

JF: Yeah, it's very early here.

NW: Yeah.

JF: We're early like down around Crescent Bar, we're not quite as early as that, but we're early like Rock Island, and we do – apricots is the kinda thing we've grown for a long time. Early fruit.

NW: Well, so, Baker Flats – how you describe it and think about it – what do you like about most about the area? You've spent your life here.

JF: I just lived here and stayed here. [chuckles] Yeah, not that I particularly liked it, but I didn't dislike it because it's home to me.

[4:58] NW: Well one thing that I've been curious about, Jack, is I did an interview with Skip Johnson who grew up on the river – of course, he's younger than you – but he grew up on a farm that's now the Hydro Park, so he as a boy used to spend a fair bit of time by the river, and he's fished for sturgeon and so on, and I know you've spent, while you were growing up, a good amount of time by the river…

JF: Yes.

NW: So I was just wondering if there are any things from your childhood – your experiences with the river – that you could tell me about that strike you as special or unusual at this time in your life. Neat things you saw.

JF: Well, I used to hunt arrowheads. We had sand dunes down there, and they'd get uncovered, and I'd pick 'em up. Also, we'd get some driftwood from the river for firewood, and I just liked to spend time down there. It was very quiet and peaceful, and I'd sit on a rock, maybe skip some rocks in the river, and I'd get away from everybody. The folks were up here doing their packing and apple picking and stuff, and it was my time to get away. Part of why I am what I am, and I'm a little bit on the independent side.

NW: Had a big river as a role model…

JF: [chuckles] Ha – yeah.

NW: [also chuckles] One of the feistiest rivers in the world… So, did you ever see any wildlife down there? That you remember or anything?

JF: No, no I never saw any wildlife down there when I was growing up. There's more wildlife down there now because the dams have created a foliage and growth where the deer and animals can hide – there's raccoons, and one of 'em got hit on the road here the other day, and so, it's different now than it was then. Because then the river would come up, and it would wash all the sand away, or the grass that might have grown. It would wash it bare, and, so there wasn't any, like there is now, there's a lot of green reel on the river bank, and at that time there was none.

NW: Because it flooded on a regular basis.

JF: It flooded every year. Regular basis.

NW: Kinda scoured things out.

JF: Yep.

NW: Yeah. So, how 'bout fishing? Did you ever do any fishing?

JF: Oh, just playin' around, I never really fished seriously. Never did catch anything but squaw fish and shiners, and stuff like that.

NW: Oh, that's good stuff! That counts…

JF: Well, it helped preserve the salmon, because they call 'em – now they call 'em pike, minnow, or something like that. They don't call 'em squaw fish anymore, they don't like that name, I guess.

NW: Right, yes. There's squaw fish throughout the West, and they probably don't call them that anymore. So, why do you make a reference to the salmon? They were helpful to the salmon?

JF: Well, these fish are predators, and they eat the little salmon fry, and they spend a lot of money paying people to catch these, I still call 'em squaw fish, I don't know these pike minnow or something like that, they call 'em. But anyway, they do pay people to catch those, and eliminate them as much as they can as a predator to the salmon fry. I know my grandparents and the family, they used to, in early days, they used to put out a throw line at night, and they'd catch fish – maybe sturgeon, you know, or whatever else, and so, that's – they'd come down in the morning and see what they had.

NW: Oh, I would think whoever was tending the Poppin' Johnny would be tempted to do some fishing.

JF: Ha – yeah.

NW: You're out there all night…

JF: I think they slept out there with the … it was a ways away from where they had the throw line.

NW: Oh, huh. Wow. Were there stories about, like, how big the sturgeon were that they caught?

JF: No, I never heard much about that. But they did catch some pretty nice-sized fish.

NW: Yeah. Yeah, I bet. I wonder what they used for bait.

JF: I don't know…

NW: Skip Johnson told me they used to use ham hocks.

JF: Oh.. [chuckles]

NW: But they weren't successful…that's when he was a boy.

JF: I think they probably used dough balls, or maybe fish meat – you know, they'd tie it up and put it on the hook, stuff like that.

[10:03] NW: Hmm. Hmm. How about beavers on the river? Were beavers part of what you knew growing up?

JF: Well, yeah, there's been beavers here. They're all along the river. I don't know what they think they're doin' – they're gonna dam up the river, but they certainly are down there. And they'll take a poplar tree maybe two and a half feet in diameter and they'll down it. Yeah, they'll chew it, and then it'll fall. And sometimes they'll drag it off into the river, and most of the time, they'll just leave it lay there, though.

NW: Have you found their burrows in the bank? Their lodges in the bank?

JF: No.

NW: Never?

JF: No, I never have.

NW: Muskrats? Very many muskrats around?
JF: I don't know. There might be – I never seen any.

NW: Huh. All right. Well, one thing, Jack, you've – you were in the army for awhile, and I know – I think – we've talked about your other travels. But, wherever you are, and people ask you about your home – where you come from – how do you describe it to someone? Someone who's never been here? What is there that…

JF: I can't really think of anything special that people have asked me about Baker's Flat – just don't have anything special about it.

NW: Or even North Central Washington, where you live. Say, you were – well, I suppose you found yourself trying to explain yourself to people in Texas, in the Army, what your home was like, what you missed about your home. Maybe, what you missed about your home when you were gone?

JF: Oh, I missed the trees. I missed the trees and the river. They didn't have rivers down there in Texas like we have here, obviously. Yeah, the trees.

NW: The mountains? I mean, you're right here at the base of some pretty spectacular mountains. You have a pretty good view from here, don't you?

JF: We just more or less take the mountains for granted. And we take the River for granted, too. It's there. It's always been there. It always will be there. We don't make an issue of it.

NW: Yeah, it's just something steady. Kind of like the sun. [chuckles]

JF: [chuckles] Ha, yeah. Yeah.

NW: Okay. Well, you – you from a personal standpoint. I want to ask you, what are you most proud of in your community? We're asking everyone to consider this, as well as, what are you most proud of in terms of yourself and your family? So those three different things, what would you say is something you're most proud of in your community? And it doesn't have to be limited to Baker Flats – just, however you define your community – whether it's East Wenatchee or Wenatchee Valley…

JF: Well, we're famous for fruit and, that's pretty much it.

NW: 'kay…

JF: That's what's most important. And, a lotta people don't realize that. They think growth and development is what should be here. I completely disagree.

NW: 'kay… How about yourself? Something that you're proud of? Or your family? You have a lot of things to choose from…

JF: Well, I think survival through the Great Depression is what I'm really proud of, and many people didn't survive, and so they had to take other jobs, and they left the farm, and we did manage to stay on the original parcel that my grandfather and grandmother had, and we kinda built on that. I had another piece here that I bought, and I had some down below, in East Wenatchee. So I think just surviving, surviving the downturn. Proud of that.

NW: A lot of changes, too. Not only the economy, but just the changes in management, changes in the market, transportation…

[14:35] JF: Yeah, there are changes that way. We still, I still haul the fruit to town in the truck – and that's the way it used to be. Nothing has changed there. We now – picking bins – we used to pickin' apple boxes. Made the apple boxes on the ranch – that was a big deal by the box – what we call the box shook on the bottoms, and the sides, and the end. We had a box-making bench, and we'd make the boxes before harvest. And of course, the spraying and stuff, is a lot different now. We use speed sprayers, and before, we used to have to spray by hand. Used arsenic and lead. As far as I know, nobody ever had problems with that, although they make a big issue of lead now. I'm one that was around it all the time, and I'm eighty-three years old, and I'm pretty healthy, so I don't know. Ha, I don't know. [chuckles] I don't know about these things, the stories they tell.

NW: I've met some pretty healthy elderly orchardists – you're not the only one. [chuckles] So, you have seen a lot of changes. There are some things that have been constant. When you're talking about how you grow vegetables here and you take them to town to market them along with your fruit. I was thinking that, your fruit stand has been up for a hundred years – has that always been right here at your house?

JF: Well, the fruit stand hadn't been there that long.

NW: Okay.

JF: The orchard has been there a hundred years. But the fruit stand, as best we can tell, started in the late – the late twenties or early thirties.

NW: Still pretty old…

JF: Yeah, still pretty old. We're probably one of the first. This happened to be the main route between Seattle and Spokane – Highway 2 – they'd come over Stevens Pass. They didn't have the Interstate down by Ellensburg – that wasn't there. They had a terrible road there – crooked, and dangerous. So this was the main route. And people, they'd see all these fruit trees. And sometimes they'd see cherries ripening, or apples ripening, and they'd – the way our fruit stand came about – my grandmother, she'd be out irrigating – my grandfather had passed away by that time, so she was doing the irrigating and stuff that she could do – and people would stop by and

ask her for fruit. So, she'd have to – she's very obliging – so she'd go and pick some fruit or whatever and sell it to 'em. So she got the idea to put the fruit out on the little stand there; actually, it was a box-making bench. She nailed some troughs along the side and made a cover out of sheets. Put the fruit out in paper bags and while, she wasn't there – why, we'd have a jar, which we still have today. [Door opens in background] And, that's pretty much the way it went. We have another company here…

NW: I'm taking this off…

JF: Yeah, go ahead.

Part Three

[0:00] NW: Okay, so we were talking about the fruit stand, and you were starting to say it's been the same since it's started.

JF: Yeah, basically the same since it started. The reason it stayed the same is because we have grandfather rights, and once we violate the grandfather rights, then we have to do all this new things that they have to have. They have to have toilets, and washing places, and can't have the fruit stand right on the highway – they have to have driveways into it. So we value the Boulevard Park, where they can just pull off the highway and right in front of the fruit stand, so I can't really do too much to change it. I still maintain those grandfather rights.

NW: I see. Okay. All right.

JF: We'd kinda like to, to keep up with the other people, but we get our share of the business, so we think that people of our [inaudible], and it's an important part of our success in the fruit stand. And the fruit stand was – had a lot to do with our surviving the Depression, too.

NW: Did it? Well that's…

JF: Yeah, we sold cherries and mostly cherries, and of course apricots and peaches, too. People liked to be able to get the fruit fresh off the trees, and that's what we provided. We still provide that today – we're careful that we pick fruit as ripe as possible without losing it.

NW: Right.

JF: And people appreciate that. They can probably maybe buy it a little cheaper in the stores, and probably if it's been picked in California – it's been picked a week or more. That's what we pride about our fruit stand. We grow most all of it ourselves. We do occasionally buy something from outside, but 98% is we grow right here on the orchard, and I plan varieties that follow one another, so that we have a steady supply. I really pride myself on my apple varieties. We have over two hundred and fifty variety of apples, sometimes not too many of one kind, but anyway,

I'm real proud to have that many varieties. Kind of a hobby with me now, and I've been – now I've been doing some breeding – hybridization. And I have a certain amount of success with it. I do that primarily so I can have an apple at the fruit stand that I developed myself and nobody else has it!

[2:57] NW: Mmhmm. Yeah, that's good!

Part Four

[0:00] NW: I think it's so interesting about all the varieties, and I know that's something that you're well known for – all the varieties at your fruit stand. It's worth stopping here even without the fancy drive-through and bathrooms, because you've got things nobody else has, and you're long-established, you know, part of the Sunset Highway loop and there must be all kinds of historic photos of your place over the years.

JF: Oh yeah, a lotta people take pictures of the fruit stand.

NW: Yeah! It's a landmark. You're a landmark! [JF chuckles] You're fruit stand is a landmark.

JF: Well, I don't really look at it that way, but you're right. It is.

NW: It's a landmark. And you know, people gauge north of Feils or south of Feils – you know, coming into town. It's a landmark. So, when they started growing fruit…when you're grandmother and your grandfather came with their experience and they started growing trees and selling them to the nursery, were those Delicious trees, mostly?

JF: Delicious and cherries, yes. Mostly Delicious. I'm assuming Wine Sap, because Wine Sap was a popular variety at the time. There was some other varieties, too. Up until the Great Depression, we grew like, uh, Spitzenberg was a popular variety. There were other ones. Ben Davis – I can't remember 'em all. And then when the Depression came along, and they removed the orchards, and they were replanted – they were replanted to more profitable varieties, and the Spitzenbergs and the Winter Bananas, Wine Saps were not replanted. So then they were replanted to Delicious. In the early days, they had a variety of apples that were grown back in the East, because this was new country out here, and they had to find out what would grow good and what didn't grow good, and they had Baldwins, and the Baldwins grew here in this part of the area – they had what they called a Baldwin spot – a spot on the apple, a real nice apple. But we couldn't grow it here at that time. We can now – I do grow some now, because we found out it was a calcium deficiency that caused that, and it also grows on Jonathons too. We have solved the Baldwin spot problem, but the Baldwins are long gone. Good apple, but people don't know about 'em.

NW: Hmm. Yeah, it's kinda like fashion almost, the way apples come and go? Or is it more than that? Why did people stop wanting Winter Bananas?

JF: Well, the main thing about the Winter Banana, and I know first-hand about that – it was a yellow apple, was easily bruised, and when they quit packing 'em in the field, they run 'em over machinery, and they somehow all bruised. So, they just couldn't handle 'em that way. So then they quit growing winter bananas, except that it's a good polonizer for the Delicious, so they still grow Winter Bananas for polonizers. Excellent polonizing apple. Blooms every year. And it's a good apple on its own. It's good – fairly good tasting. It's a real good cooker. Beautiful apple, with a little pink cheek on it. Yellow with a pink cheek. Kind of a waxy color. We sell all, all we can grow here.

NW: And what about the Spitzenberg? Is it – why did it fall out of fashion?

JF: Spitzenberg is a unique apple, and it seemed like every disease that an apple could get, the Spitzenberg will get it.
NW: [chuckles] Oh.

JF: They can have Fire Bite, and they attract Coddle Moth, and all the bad things, and so it just wasn't replanted. We still have Spitzenberg. Actually, when my grandparents – the area they came from, out from New York out to here, is where the Spitzenberg was discovered. In the Hudson River Valley, and so we always have Spitzenberg because my grandmother liked to make a Schnitzel Pie, and without Spitzenbergs, we'd have no Schnitzel Pie, and they were just delicious.

NW: Oh! Is that family recipe still around?

JF: Oh, well, I kinda – I kinda watched her make 'em, so I wrote down kinda what it goes through, but it's actually a Amish recipe more than anything else, and they lived in an area where there were a lotta Amish, and they shared a lot. They were Amish were real nice to get along with, and they would share. Well, what it basically was, was open-faced sour cream apple pie.

[5:10] NW: Oh, that sounds great!

JF: It is great.

NW: And so the Spitzenberg is good because it's tart?

JF: It has a certain amount of tartness to it. It has a flavor all its own. Good cooking apple. Also, good eating apple. We sell quite a few of 'em. [Background noise; phone rings]

Part Five

[0:00] NW: So, I'm thinking that people came here with experience, and they brought some apple varieties with them, like you were saying, and then, the longer they were here, they found some of these things worked and some didn't, so they…kind of moved on and tried new things.

JF: It's true.

NW: So, where did the new things come from that they tried?

JF: Well, the main new thing, about the time Delicious was discovered, they found that it done exceptionally well here, and where it was originally discovered, it was not – it didn't have the typiness, the points on it. But it'd grown here, it did have the points, it had the color, it ripened about the right time. And it just took over. Delicious, in my opinion, is the best apple grown. People will argue that when they buy one in the grocery store, because it's probably been, harvested about seven, eight months ago, and it loses its flavor. But a Delicious, ripened to perfection off the tree – you bite into it, the juice runs down your mouth, it rolls and goes up your nose – tremendous apple. Not a cooker, though.

NW: Too watery.

JF: Well, yeah. Not tart enough.

NW: Oh hmm. So then, if you think about when you went away when you were in the Army and then you came home, what apples did you come home to, when you started having a more active role in running the orchard? Maybe after you got back from college?

JF: Yeah, well it was always the Delicious. We always had Delicious. We had Wine Saps, too. And then we bought our orchard when we lost that place down there. With money, we bought another orchard down in East Wenatchee, and it was a Delicious orchard.

NW: So, has the pattern been, Jack, that – I know this is the pattern for many orchards in the region – that Feil, your family, became pretty invested in Delicious, but did still have some of these other varieties.

JF: Some of the older varieties, yes. Just a few.

NW: And you just kept them, but other orchards didn't. So, why?

JF: Well, these orchards were pushed out. I'm talking about during the Great Depression.

NW: Oh, okay.

JF: And then, after the Depression ended -- I don't think it's ended yet – I think we're still in the Great Depression – but anyway, that's another story. We planted to the newer red varieties of

Delicious. Golden Delicious came along; it was a nice compliment to the Red Delicious, and we were able to grow real good Golden Delicious here because of the lack of rainfall and stuff that used to russet(?) the Golden Delicious. So it went on with those two varieties, until the newer ones – they started developing the newer ones, and so, they were highly promoted – the newer varieties. Myself, I don't see the advantage of 'em, but marketplace determines what we grow.

NW: But you're kind of set in your own market by focusing on having a huge variety of old-time apples.

JF: Yes, heritage apples at our fruit stand, yes. What we take downtown – I quit growing Red Delicious. Red Delicious don't grow very good here in Baker Flats, because it's too warm, and they're too early. Get a lot of sun scald. So, Red Delicious don't grow well here. So we've concentrated on other things.

NW: Uh huh. Okay. So, early is good for things like apricots, because you're the first one out the door – the first one to market with apricots.

JF: Lots of times, yes.

NW: And then it works well for you, probably with cherries being kind of early, too.

JF: Yes. Our cherries come on at a very good time. Just before the Fourth of July. The Fourth of July is a big cherry sale season. With our Delicious, we come just a little bit too early. We get a lot of hot weather in September, and too many times they get sunburned, and they wouldn't be good quality. I've taken out all my Delicious trees, except a few that we sell on the fruit stand.

[5:00] NW: So, if you could go back to the packing of apples – if we could talk about that a little bit more. The shook that you would buy to make your apple boxes, where would you get that – in town?

JF: We used to get it from the lumber mills. One was the Harris Mills up the Entiat – up at Entiat. And I think that's where we got it primarily, but there were other box mills, too. Down by Malaga, and Ephata. Buy the shook; get a truckload of it, and they were all bound together with baling wire, and some people were really good box-makers. I mean, constant pounding all day long. They knew how to make boxes.

NW: I've heard. I've heard. I've talked to orchardists who you may know down in Quincy Basin, who grew up in Omak, and he would make 500 boxes a day.

JF: Yeah…

NW: When he was a kid!

JF: Yeah, that's pretty good.

NW: Yeah, I think he was really good!

JF: Yeah, I think I make maybe a hundred.

NW: [NW and JF chuckle] Yeah, I think I'd do well to do fifty. But I guess you would get better with practice. Well, so, how would you get to the Harris Mill to get your shook?

JF: We'd drive up there with a truck.

NW: Did you - was that when the ferry was still available?

JF: Yes, yes, there was a ferry there.

NW: So, would you put your truck on the ferry, or would you just go on the ferry?

JF: You know, I don't remember too much exactly how they did get it. They could have gone down to the bridge here, to get up the Entiat. And I don't know exactly when the ferries started going. But they were going at that time when we were making boxes, for sure. And the ferries could handle that weight, all right. They would handle eight cars. The Orondo Ferry. The Entiat Ferry was a cable ferry. It wouldn't handle quite the load that the Orondo Ferry would.

NW: Oh, did you just say the Entiat Ferry?

JF: The Entiat Ferry – it was a cable ferry.
NW: Oh.

JF: And it kinda – it had a cable stretched across the river with pulleys on it, and they'd have the ferry kind of at an angle to the ferry. And the current would come, and it would push the ferry across the river. And they had -- I don't know what kind of power they had on it; I don't know they even had power, because every once in awhile, it'd break loose and wind up down here near Wenatchee, and then the Orondo Ferry would have to come tie unto 'im, and tow him back up.

NW: [NW chuckles] Must have been exciting for the people on the ferry!

JF: Yeah.

NW: Because the river was a little bit wilder then…

JF: Yeah.

NW: …before these dams.

JF: Yes.

NW: Wow.

JF: Every once in awhile, a cable would break, or break loose. I remember several times that that happened.

NW: So this place that you've stabilized with the nice red metal roof – the packing shed just north of the food stand – is that where you would mostly make the boxes?

JF: Yes. Yes, we made the boxes right there, at the shed, and the made boxes – we'd haul 'em out to the orchard. They'd picked in the boxes, and bring 'em in. And take more boxes than what we had for picking, so we'd have the boxes piled there by the shed – take that – use boxes from there. Lots of times we'd use the picking boxes year after year, and so they became more of a picking box, and we used the new boxes for packing.

NW: Oh. Uh-huh. Okay. And so you were using the big wooden ladders for picking? And the canvas bags?

JF: Yes. And then you'd recycle your boxes.

NW: And then as you picked during the day, were there other members of the family or crew that were taking the fruit back to the packing shed?

JF: Yes, what we used were old Model T Ford trucks that had a big, long bed on them – they were modified – and we'd – when the pickers picked the apples, they'd have 'em rode up maybe two or three high. We'd have 'em rode up on the Model T truck, and when we got a truck load, why we'd load it into the warehouse.

NW: Oh, okay. And what warehouse did you take 'em to?

JF: Well, we packed our own fruit at that time.

[9:57] NW: Oh, right. So, when you were ready to sell your fruit, some of it you sold to the fruit stand…

JF: A very small quantity of the total.

NW: So then, how would you get the rest of your fruit to market? Would you take it to the train, or…

JF: Well, there was brokers who'd buy the fruit. It was brokered.

NW: Did you have your own label?

JF: No, we did not have our own label.

NW: Oh, okay. So, so, you would just – I don't know a lot about how this works, so I'm learning a lot from you. Would the brokers, would they be like cattle brokers, where they would come and look at your fruit and give you a bid? Or would you go to them and see what they were going to pay?

JF: That's basically way it was. We would go to them and see what they were gonna pay. And my brother has a good story about that. Maybe you can get that from him. They was sittin' around the table one time, and it was ridiculous what they offered us.

NW: Oh.

JF: And Bob knows all about that, and that's when he decided apple business was not for him.

NW: Oh yeah, hmm. They were making you into price-takers. You were getting to be price-takers instead of price-makers. So, how – were there efforts in the orchards to kind of team up and do marketing then or not?

JF: No.

NW: No, everybody was just kind of doing there own thing?

JF: Yeah.

NW: Yeah.

JF: Yeah, well there might have been some cooperatives, I don't know. We weren't involved in the co-ops. I know Skookum had been around for a long time, and Wenoka, and I know when they started – I suppose they were going at that time. But I don't really know. We didn't participate in that.

NW: Because they were kind of more in the Stemilt area, weren't they?

JF: Well, these warehouses….Skookum was pretty much always down here in Wenatchee, and they had a number of – they had some co-ops up near Chelan, at Chelan Falls. Because it was too far to haul those apples from Chelan down to here, so they'd pack 'em up there, so they wouldn't bruise, you know. An apple in a loose box – if it gets shook very much, why it's going to bruise, so they packed them up there.

NW: So, the – somewhere I saw an-email. You probably saw this too – maybe you did, maybe Kim shared it with you. There was a packing – one of the old packing lines that was for sale – one of the orchardists up in Chelan was selling, and I immediately thought of you, 'cause I thought – it'd be great in your old packing [inaudible] to have a line. Or the museum – they already have that one in their display…

JF: Yeah.

NW: So, did you have one of those kind of an automated thing with a belt and everything?

JF: Oh yes, yes.

NW: Everybody had one of that in their shed?

JF: Well, no not everybody. Some of the smaller growers, they would bring their fruit and have it packed.

JF: We packed other peoples' fruit…

NW: Oh…

JF: Not very much, but some.

NW: Oh, okay!

JF: The local neighbors. Yeah, we had a washing machine. Of course, we sprayed with arsenic and lead. To get that arsenic and lead off of there, you had to treat it with acid, muratic acid. And it would go through the wash, and then wash all that stuff off. And then it would go on to the sorting table, and the roll, the rope around the spindle, and it would dabble with roll, and the sorters would pick out the culls and put them in the cull bin. Then it would go on to the grater, which was basically a cup that had a weight on it. And when the apple weighed the right amount, why that would trip the weight, and it would drop the apple into that bin.

NW: Oh. Oh, that's pretty neat.

JF: Yeah, that was pretty modern equipment at that time. Pretty modern equipment.

NW: So, are we talking 1940's? Or thirties?

JF: No, thirties.

NW: Okay. So, what happened to the culls?

JF: Well, basically, they just dumped 'em. I think they did make cider out of 'em. I mean, apple vinegar cider. And they did use some for cider, too, I think. But we didn't dispose of 'em at the orchard; they were hauled off, and there was a broker downtown who would buy them. And he had contacts where he would dispose of em. We used to have a big vinegar plant down here in Wenatchee. I don't think many people remember that – it was Smuckers.

(15:07) NW: Oh, really?

JF: It was a great big tall, kind of round building; kinda tapered like an inverted tunnel. They made a lot of vinegar here. And then when the culls – when we got DDT and that stuff, there wasn't many culls anymore. So there wasn't enough apples to keep the vinegar going, so they moved it.

NW: Oh, that's interesting! So, who do you think would be a good person to talk to about the vinegar plant? Any names come to mind? Besides Smuckers?

JF: I don't know anyone who's been around much at that time, anymore.

NW: Maybe I could talk to Wilfred about it. Wilfred Woods. Would he remember?

JF: I don't think so. I don't think he's as old as I am.

NW: Um…

JF: He might have some articles. Yeah, but the vinegar plant. Yeah, that was a landmark. It was a huge, huge deal. And they had ways to speed up the process to make vinegar. I can take my apple cider that I have now – as a matter of fact, I do have some. And it starts to ferment. You can just let it ferment. And of course, it first turns to alcohol. Then the alcohol converts to vinegar. You just leave it sit, and the mother of vinegar will form, and turn the alcohol into a vinegar. We never bought any vinegar at all – we just made our own.

NW: Really? Good.

JF: Good vinegar!

NW: You bet! So, let me ask you this, Jack – I'm thinking about your whole, sort of nutrient cycle at your farm. And what did you use your fertilizer? Were you running animals in your orchard for…

JF: No. We did use some manure, but manure wasn't too good because it created another problem. And when you fertilize with manure, barnyard manure, you would get zinc deficiency.

NW: Oh really?

JF: And that would cause, well, zinc deficiency – the leaves on the end of limbs would get small and die off, and so we pretty much, when that didn't work, why we got nitrate from Chile. Bat guano, from the bat caves down there. It would come in burlap sacks, and was sodium nitrate. Sodium nitrate's what it was, and I think I still even have sacks of that around turned hard.

NW: Oh, do you?

JF: But that's what we used to use for fertilizer. Because you had to replace the nutrients. You can't – there's no way getting around not replacing what the tree and the fruit uses up. So there kinda trying to do that organic now, I don't know if it's going to work or not. It seems like they're doing some composting that might work, if the soil is good to start with. You can't grow organic fruit on poor soil. If you don't have the very best of soil to start with, you're going to lose on organic. Well, organic…[JF chuckles] I have a problem with organic. It's a buzzword, really, as far as I'm concerned. I don't think organic fruit is any healthier or any better for you than conventionally grown fruit, because it's highly regulated – the pesticides and stuff – there's nothing on that fruit that's going to hurt anybody. And – but it's a buzzword, and people like to think they're getting a healthier, safer product, by it being labeled organic. The only thing that's really safe is natural – where you don't use anything on it. Because organic pesticides – there's some toxicity to that. But anyway, that's just my opinion.

NW: Yeah.

JF: I'm not an organic person, and you pay more for it. That's reason for me not to buy it! [laughter]

NW: Well, there's a whole spectrum of practices there, that – it's not exactly black and white – organic and conventional. There's a real continuum of practices, and I don't know that. I think consumers are becoming a little more educated about that – that it's not a simple distinction. Then there are values that people care about like small family farms and so on. (JF snickers)

JF: You noticed I kind of laughed at that.

NW: Yeah..

JF: Stemilt, one of the biggest growers in the world, are one of the biggest organic growers, so when you say organic – that doesn't mean small.

[20:01] NW: No, it doesn't…

JF: It means big, actually.

NW: Yeah, yeah it does. I was just saying…

JF: So a small grower can't, can't do it.

NW: Yeah.

JF: Yes. Unless for his own garden or something.

NW: Yeah, yeah. Well, I guess I was just trying to make the point that people can care about things besides organic.

JF: Yeah. Well, I would like to see a test done just to see what the difference is between fruit grown under the organic laws and grown conventionally, and see if there really is any difference! It seems like the better fruit, the larger fruit, is grown conventionally, and it probably has more food value in it than organic. But that has to be decided by scientists and testing. And they haven't done that.

NW: Yeah.

JF: They don't wanna go there.

NW: Yeah.

JF: And I think they're afraid what they're gonna find out. That's my opinion.

NW: Well, there's a whole lot of issues involved in that. Going back to sort of where we came from in this story – after the codling moth and the Depression forced all these orchards to be bulldozed – they were bulldozed as a result of that – then people were a lot more focused on controlling codling moth, which lead arsenic was introduced as the method for doing that. Is this right?

JF: What was that again? I'm sorry.

NW: Lead arsenic was introduced as the method to use to control codling moth, so you wouldn't have that problem again, so orchardists wouldn't have that problem again.

JF: Yeah.

NW: And so, so that started in the late thirties, early forties?

JF: Yeah, we used arsenic and lead, but that wasn't effective, wasn't really effective. Until DDT came along, we really didn't have an effective [inaudible] for codling moth. Actually, DDT – we used DDT for a number of years, and we found out that it caused other problems. It killed good

bugs. So we had quit using it long before they took it away from us. And we had other stuff to use at the time. So we use the safest materials we can, and that's the way it goes today.

NW: Okay. All right. Well for your own family, I've got a few questions here on harvesting food. I understand that you got your fruit – you grew your own fruit and you grew your own vegetables; you had a big garden. And where did you get your meat and your dairy and other foods here at Baker Flats?

JF: Well, we raised it. We slopped hogs. And we'd feed a calf, and that was in my time when I was younger. But before that, it was a lot the same way. My grandparents, you know, they didn't throw anything away. They had chickens, and of course, you know, like the old song "Comin' Around the Mountain," "they'll kill the old rooster, and then they'll have chicken and dumplings when she comes." They did a lot of that stuff – pretty well self-sufficient.

NW: Did they get food – did your family, and your grandparents' generation, your parents', yours', did they – have you done much in the way of hunting, fishing, or gathering from the wild?

JF: No. We weren't hunters. None of our family hunted; we just weren't into that. Didn't have anything against it. And of course, in the wintertime, there'd be a lot of these cottontails around. And I know my uncle, he'd have rabbit quite frequently. The cottontails – they'd have the big brushpiles – they'd take the brush out of the orchard and make piles out of it, and then the cottontails would make burrows, and they'd have their nest in there. There were just all kinds of cottontails. Good eating cottontails.

NW: How about quail?

JF: No. There was quail around, but we didn't have any. We weren't hunters – we weren't bird hunters or anything like that.

NW: Okay. So you talked about how your grandparents made sausage, smoked ham, sauerkraut and all – were those skills passed down? Have they been passed down through your family?

JF: Not really, no. No. What I have noticed is that the kraut cutter, they had crocks, and sausage press, and a meat grinder, so I knew what that was used for, but I never was in on that. My father was; he knew how to do that, and he did make corned beef from time to time. But that wasn't passed on to me. We depended on the grocery store.

[25:17] NW: Well, it was that time after World War II where the grocery store became much more important in other places, so I guess it did here too, huh?

JF: Yeah.

NW: How about, one of the other things we're asking people about, is how they learned to care for their land. And your grandparents came here as farmers from a different place, Ontario, they learned, and then they passed – surely they passed some of their practices on to your parents. And so, what were some of the rules about managing the land that were passed down to you? What were some of the guidelines and experiences?

JF: I really don't know of any. I think they just farmed the land, and there wasn't any conservation. Anything like that.

NW: Did they have cues, like when they would prune things? Were they watching the sights, or the weather, or the wildlife, or anything like that that told them when to…

JF: Not that I've heard of. I haven't heard of anything like that. We, when we're not doing something when apple harvest is over, usually when the leaves start coming off the trees – then we start to prune the pears; we can prune pears early. And then we wait pretty much until January to prune the apples, and the soft fruit, so it's just a matter of doing that when the time is available. And when it's snowing, or a blizzard or something. And we don't have blizzards here, not really. So then we just do when the time allowed, at the right time, in dormant season.

NW: You had sort of – was there some quiet time in your year – like back to the sixties and seventies, when you actually had time off in between – maybe in between the harvest and the time the pruning started?

JF: Yeah, there was days when we could take time off, yeah. It was – of course when I was growing up, I was going to school, so that took care of all that spare time. Well, aside from that, and the homework I had to, why I really didn't have much spare time. We used to be able to – there were places along the river that froze over, and we'd go ice skating. We had a toboggan slide up on the hill here, for recreation. Played cards and stuff at home, with the folks. And that was pretty much it. Waiting for the season to arrive.

NW: How would you get to school?

JF: Rode the school bus.

NW: Oh, okay. And that came out. Came out and got you. Were there a lot of young people, in Baker Flats then? Between your family and the Dicks?

JF: No, there weren't too many. I think there were maybe four or five kids who caught the bus out here in Baker Flats. They'd pick 'em up above here. Well actually, eventually, the Orondo bus came by for the higher grades, and it'd start at Orondo, and they'd have a bus load by the time they got to East Wenatchee. But now, my father – he had to walk to school. He walked from here down to, you know where Carmichaels Store used to be? The Mini-Mart is there now?

NW: Oh, the Shell Station? There's a Shell gas station?

JF: Yeah.

NW: Yeah, okay.

JF: And then, further when you go up the hill there. It's not a very steep hill. There was a schoolhouse up there. It was on the Parkhill property, the Parkhills were an old family here.

NW: Oh yeah! There's some Parkhills that live across the street from me!

JF: Probably related. And they walked from here to school and back. And the girls got to ride the horse – two or three of them on the horse. And also shared the school with some people up on Badger Mountain – the wheat growers up there. I think the Raineys, in particular – they used to go to the same school. And it was a one-house school. Mr. Sellers was the school teacher. That's how they got to school.

[30:20] NW: That was your dad's experience. Your experience was a lot more urban then. So you went into East Wenatchee. Of course it was small then.

JF: Yes. Yes, it was small. It wasn't near like it is now. It had a grocery store there. And a general store. They called it Ernie Lakes' Lake Store. He was kind of a justice of a peace and stuff. They had a drug store there. Old family – Raymaker had the drug store. And that was pretty much East Wenatchee.

NW: Oh, huh. So when you went to school in East Wenatchee, were you going to school with a lot of kids whose families moved here from Arkansas?

JF: No, there wasn't too many at that time, no. There was a few. But the Arkansas immigration didn't start until later on, when the trees were replaced with newer trees and producing, and they needed the harvest labor. That's when the people from Arkansas and Oklahoma started coming in.

NW: Was that the fifties then?

JF: Yeah. Fifties, sixties.

NW: So the people from Arkansas came in, and they picked fruit. So was yours always a family operation, or did you hire seasonal people to help you with your harvest?

JF: We hired people, oh yeah.

NW: So, would you – how would you find the people that you hired?

JF: They'd usually come looking for work. They came by. And a lotta the people I remember as a younger person came from the Midwest. Minnesota, Wisconsin, right in those areas there. And then, when we got the – when there was a lot of production, we quit seeing those people. And there were a lot of people from Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma, that came through the fall in the harvest. And then,at first they came from the harvest and then they'd go home. And then they decided to stay. So we'd have a lot of people with Arkansas roots here now permanently, and they've done real well.

NW: And so, then people started coming up from Mexico. There was the movement – the program -- in World War II, or post World War II – I guess during World War II. The broceros[?] – when young Mexican men were invited to come up and pick fruit, while so many of our young men were involved in the war?

JF: I didn't see too much at the time of the war. They did use some prisoners of war to help harvest. It wasn't a big deal, but we did have some POWs that would help, and when I was going to school, why, they let us out to work in the orchards or the sheds to get by the harvest. And really, the Hispanics didn't start coming up until later. Probably the seventies. It seemed like all of a sudden – while they were available! They were good workers. They enjoyed working, and did a good job. They seemed to know how to handle the fruit and stuff. Seemed like the other people that used to – they didn't want to pick apples anymore. It was hard work!

NW: Yeah, it looks like hard work.

JF: It *is* hard work! You got that bag around you all day long, up and down the ladder. It's real hard work. But these migrants, immigrants, didn't seem to mind that at all. They knew the faster they picked, the more money they made, and they done real good. Real pleased to be able to have them. Of course, that's leading to other problems now, because the United States, at that time, let them come in, virtually unimpaired. Now they're here, they want to ship 'em all back to Mexico. But it's our government's fault for letting 'em in in the first place. They should have had regulations to it, but they didn't. So they let 'em come in, and now they want to ship 'em back. I don't know. It's crazy. They're gonna have to have – they're gonna have to allow 'em to be legal. Just like the blacks. There was one time they thought they'd ship the blacks all back to Africa. Well, that was ridiculous. And it's just as ridiculous to try to say we're gonna ship all these illegal Mexicans back to Mexico. It's not gonna happen. Politicians, they're going to have to get together and get their heads screwed on straight, and say all right, let's deal with it now, close the borders, and then we can leave the ones who are here and have legal immigration. That's my opinion. That's – that's got nothing to do with this.

[35:38] NW: Oh, no, it does. I mean, the labor for agriculture is part of what makes it – it has to come from some place, and so, it seems it's very much a part of our future – where that workforce comes from.

JF: Oh yeah! Well, if we didn't have the pickers to pick our fruit and work in the orchards, we wouldn't be growing the fruit! We'd be buying it from China or Russia or something. We wouldn't be growing it here. They even grow apples in Mexico, and Argentina, and Chile, and so instead of having those people up here harvesting our fruit here, we'd go down where they are, and buy their fruit. It just don't make sense, realistically, at all to me.

NW: Well, I've got a few more questions here, Jack, though we've been hitting on quite a few of these. One, just general question for you, is, in what days do you think that you, your family, and your work here have contributed to the stewardship of this place? You've been here, for almost, well over here a hundred years.

JF: The family has, yes.

NW: The family has been here for over a hundred years, and you have a certain ethic. Your ethic is you've been adapting, and you've been hanging in, like you said. Definitely been hanging in, and you've been adapting, to me, in that you seem to be bringing back some of the old varieties as there's sort of a market that appreciates these heirlooms and so on. So, do you think you're a bit of a trend-setter; do you think that might be a contribution?

JF: I don't think I'm a trend-setter. I think I'm a loner, in that respect. (JF chuckles.) I don't think other fruit stands, a lot of 'em are just opportunists. (JF coughs.) They're opportunists; they have a place alongside the highway, and they can see they can make some money at it.

NW: Do you want to get some water?

JF: Yeah. Just been talkin' too much…

[38:00] NW: My throat does that, and it just needs a little break. I'll just stop there.

Part Six

[0:00] JF: You know, my mother, she was real – didn't have good lung capacity. The smoke. She could tell it when I couldn't even notice it.

NW: So, did she have asthma?

JF: Yeah, it was kind of an asthma, yeah.

NW: So, you're talking about your contributions to the stewardship of this place. And I don't just mean environmental stewardship. Community stewardship, economic, business…

JF: Well, just the fact that we're here. We go down and buy stuff; we buy clothes. We buy furniture. We pay taxes. So, we do contribute to the economy by selling the fruit to people out of the area – well, a lot of local people, too. And that brings money in, and that contributes to the economy of the area.

NW: Oh, absolutely. I'm guessing – have people sent you notes and cards over the years about your fruit? Your customers from outside the area? Do you have loyal customers, who've been coming here for years?

JF: Yes.

NW: I bet you do.

JF: We have a lot of 'em.

NW: Do you know who they are? Their names or where they live?

JF: Well, I haven't been tending the fruit much. My wife over there, she's done most of the fruit stand handling, and she used to have a lot of – she knew all the people from Waterville, up river. She would know them, I wouldn't.

NW: That might be a conversation at a future date, then. (JF chuckles) That would be a fun to talk to you about that! It would actually be really fun to do some little interviews with some people who come to your fruit stand! That would be so fun. It'd be actually a nice marketing piece for you, too. Well, a couple more things. How about a little more on sharing food. You said that sometimes the neighbors who didn't have a packing shed would use your shed. So, would they pay you or was that just kind of a neighborly thing?

JF: No, we'd have to get paid for it. I don't think Dad after charged very much for it, though.

NW: Mmhmm. How about butchering your animals? Did you – were there times when it made sense to get together with the neighbors to do the hogs, or…

JF: Oh, I'm sure that was a lot of it in the early days. I don't remember it, but they'd get together, and why – if they were killing pigs, then they'd all get together and do it at the same time. They put up a tripod with pulleys, and had a big old cauldron where they'd scald the hog and scrape the hair off it, and they got together in that way. Actually, there was quite a bit of social life here, too. I remember between the Feils and the Dicks and all the hired help that we had at that time – they'd have dances, and they'd have a phonograph, and they'd have a tub of beer, and you know, have parties like that – get-togethers.

NW: Yeah.

JF: On Saturday, something like that. Saturday night.

NW: So, when did that, when you think back to those kinds of gatherings, when was that? Was that like, in the forties, fifties, sixties?

JF: It was more in the thirties.

NW: Oh, in the thirties. So…

JF: It kind of went away in the forties. Well, 'course that's when the orchards went away, and we didn't have any neighbors much. A guy over here had chickens. Place over here – the Baker place – was virtually vacant; nothing was done much there. So, this was when the orchards were still going and stuff. We liked to have parties and shindigs – food and stuff.

NW: What kind of music do you associate with those gatherings?

JF: Oh, just old time dance music. Maybe some waltzes, but I don't really know. I think it was more just two-step, or fox trot or whatever, that kind of stuff, easy stuff they can dance to, none of this stuff they now. (JF and NW both laugh.) They call it dancing, and it's just grrr…. I don't know about this stuff. That's not…

NW: So, did people play? You said they have a phonograph…

JF: They had a phonograph.

NW: Oh, okay. So were there people that did play music live?

JF: Oh, we did have people who could play music. We had one guy who could play the harmonica real good, and I don't remember any fiddlers, but that was kind of a common instrument that people used to be able to play. I don't remember that, though. For their parties, they had the phonograph.

[5:11] NW: So, do you remember people playing the harmonica during the day? Like at lunchtime or something in the orchards?

JF: No, no. Well, maybe at lunchtime, yeah, but not otherwise. Usually that was after the work was done, and they were sittin' around, just relaxing, play a tune on the harmonica.

NW: So let me ask you this, Jack, 'cause I've been kind of curious about this. You know, I've heard people say in the late sixties and seventies, there was kind of a hippie era, where hippies were picking fruit, or kind of coming through as transients and picking fruit. Where did people, if it was the hippie era or earlier, where did people sleep? Was there a period of time where they

just slept in the orchards before the little housing developments started to be constructed? Or how did that happen?

JF: I don't recall. We didn't have any hippies like that. We had, what we had, were skid row people. There'd be buses running from Seattle or Spokane, and they'd bring over a load of skid row people, and they'd work maybe a half a day or until they got enough money to buy a bottle of wine, and then they'd just go, and they'd go back to skid row. And that was an everyday thing.

NW: Really?

JF: Oh yeah, they ran busses and everything.

NW: That's interesting! So, was that in the forties?

JF: Yeah.

NW: And fifties?

JF: Hmm, I don't know about the fifties, but it was in the forties, you know, when the labor was hard to get. The war was on, stuff like that. Probably into the fifties a little bit. But labor was hard to come by! Like I say, we had some people come from the Midwest. There were a few people from the South. They had, the schools were let out to help harvest. You got anybody you could get to pick, and then finally, when the, when we got more people from Arkansas coming up here – they learned they could make good money, and they were good workers – they picked a lot of fruit. And they'd go back to Arkansas with a pocketful of money, and that was good, and the word spread, and we got so that we had more and more people from Arkansas up here. And my wife over there, she's from Arkansas. (JF chuckles.) She didn't come up here to pick fruit though.

JF's Wife in Background: No, but my brother-in-law came in every year and picked fruit, and went home and bought a new truck, every year. Allen.

NW: Ohh… I remember talking to you on the phone in your lovely Arkansas accent! You still have that. That's a nice thing!

JF's Wife: I don't know how you'd lose it!

NW: Well, it's a lovely thing! I would like to talk to you a little – at another time, when you're feeling a little bit stronger. I can come back another time. Well, that's interesting about the skid row people! I was doing an interview last week with, what's his name – there are too many names in my head. Um - George Honey! From Entiat. Who spent his career in the Forest

Service. And he talked about the same thing with fire fighting, is they just go into the bars, and…

JF: Oh yeah! Absolutely.

NW: Just whoever's available to help fight fires, and, had to have been so time-intensive to be training people every day, to handle the fruit.

JF: Yeah. That was true about the fire fighters. We used to go up Lake Chelan once in a while. We had a boat up there, and if there was a fire up there, we kind of laid low. Because of there was a fire up there, they'd come and get you.

NW: Oh, shame on you!

JF: Yeah, well not really, but they had the power to take you and have you fight the fires.

NW: Yeah, recruit you. Yeah.

JF: That was true, very true. And that was true for the orchards, too. They didn't Shanghai(?) people or anything like that. But all you had to do, was get a guy to come over and get a couple bottles of wine, and they were happy, and so… but that was time during the War when labor was real short.
NW: Kind of a dramatic time.

JF: It was terrible. It was terrible for the growers. You didn't know whether you were going to get your fruit harvested. If you could get it harvested on time, you were on top of the world, but usually it was picked not at the proper time, and so, you just have to take your lumps. But thank goodness when the people from Arkansas and then the Hispanics started coming up; that was a God send. It was a God send; it really was.

[10:08] NW: Look, I have…We've been talking about how people work together, on certain things, to get the work done. And we already talked about co-operative marketing groups, and you said you didn't really participate in one; there were some of the examples with Skookum maybe.

JF: Skookum, and Wenoka.

NW: And I guess I just want to ask you this, 'cause you've been living on Highway 2, this major corridor all your life.

JF: Mmhmm.

NW: And so you've seen some changes in the way people move around – they're moving around pretty fast and furious out there right now. (NW laughs)

JF: Yeah, fifty mile-an-hour speed limit, and they pretty well obey that because…

NW: Yeah. So, we talked earlier about how you're marketing your fruit much like you always did. You're taking it to direct market; you do a lot of direct marketing…

JF: We do some.

NW: You do some, yeah, and packing – some wholesaling.

JF: Yeah, we take fruit to the warehouse, and we have it packed. That's the easiest way to do it.

NW: So, I guess here's my question, Jack. Over the years, and maybe this is going back more to the thirties, have you seen examples of cooperative distribution of food, not just fruit, that might provide some examples going forward? Like, one thing I heard earlier today, is form Marilyn Gearheart, who lives in Douglas. She talks about how, when the mail truck would go from Orondo up to Waterville, it would take produce, and so, it was a way to get mail and produce up to Waterville. And I thought, how brilliant! It would be tough to pull that off today with the post service, but were there any – were you aware of any creative ways people handled, had to get their goods to market?

JF: No. No. I can understand that, though, because that was a private carrier that this person was talking about, and they'd probably take some fruit or something, along with the mail.

NW: Oh.

JF: I can understand that, but no, I don't know. Our only markets have been the fruit stand and taking it to the warehouses downtown, where they do have the sale staff and stuff; they market it that way. It's awful hard to break in now into that market, because of the Wal-Marts, the Krogers, and the Safeways. They want to talk to somebody who can supply big quantities and certain size – so they don't go to the small grower anymore. That's just the way things are – Albertson's.

NW: But many small growers could make a large grower, if they…

JF: Through the co-op.

NW: Yeah, yeah.

JF: That's the way marketing's done now, though. They order a whole car-load of fruit. Of the same size, the same grade, and stuff. A small grower can't do that – it's just a thing of the past. You don't do that anymore.

NW: Well, let me – I've got just, this is my last question. But then I want to ask you if you have anything you want to add to this, but what gives you hope for the future about our food system? What do you think about the food we harvest and eat? What hopes do you hold for how we can maintain some self-reliance?

JF: I don't think things are going to change too much. Right now, we have the super growers that have thousands and thousands of acres. And they have the buyers that want to buy carloads at a time. If people want personal contact with the grower and stuff, that's why we have the fruit stand. And I don't see that changing. Things get bigger and bigger all the time, so I don't see things changing as far as the marketing is concerned. The distribution is pretty well set, and I think it's going to stay that way for a very long time. I can't see any way to improve it. And it's effective – it's effective. It gets to the stores in New York. And Houston, Dallas, Chicago, back East. It's a fairly efficient system. But if people want, you know, fresh fruit, and they want to talk to the guy who grows it, well, this is the place to come. 'Cause I – well I don't tend to the fruit stand much anymore, but my fella down there that does – his name's Octavio – he knows as much about the fruit as I do because I tell him everything. And he watches and grows the fruit, and when the fruit stand isn't growing, he's working the orchard in the wintertime – doing the pruning with his brother. I don't see much change. It's unfortunate that we're getting things like this industrial area that all used to be orchard over there. This side of the road is ag. lands of long-term commercial significance, yet you have urbanization coming in – the trail wanting to come in down here. That's going to destroy Baker Flats. It's just causing it to urbanize. And I am very upset about that. I'm fighting it tooth and nail. And I, I don't know what's going to happen there. We feel pretty good about it right now. Because we got it out of local politics. They were promised certain goodies by doing – by allowing, and voting for the trail, and so on. But now we got it in the Supreme Court, which is out of local politics, and they're going to make a decision, and I think it's one we'll be able to live with. Right now we feel very comfortable about it. But we'll just have to wait and see what the judges say about it. If they accept our case – they usually accept one out of fifty or sixty for appeal – and they did accept our case, pretty much unanimously. They're very much supportive of the growth management act – the state supreme court – whereas the local court, the surrogate court over in Spokane – they pretty well, well, you know, the county commissioner said it was all right, the judge – the local judge, the hearing examiner, so, they weren't going to fight that. So we had to take that to where it got a fair hearing. And the big issue is to preserve farmlands of long-term commercial significance. This is one of those places! And we're going to try to keep it that way.

(17:42) NW: Yeah. A hundred and two years.
JF: Yeah, yeah. (JF chuckles.) It's gettin' over on a hundred years, now. Good Lord.

NW: Not you, but just this place! (NW and JF both laugh.)

JF: Well, if I could live to be a hundred and two, I'd be real happy.

NW: That'd be interesting! Well, so is there anything else you want to add, Jack, that I didn't ask you about?

JF: Well, you know, this is … Baker Flats is a misnomer. It's Baker's Flats.

NW: Oh, right! It's Baker's, like Baker's as in the railroad agent that lived here until the Depression, and then they lost their orchard – lost their orchard land.

JF: Yeah, yeah they did. There was a Baker here later on – I don't know exactly the story of it. But anyway, he lost it. Lost it or sold it. That's what the name was. Baker's Flats.

NW: Did I – have I been saying Baker Flats? I've been saying Baker Flats, haven't I?

JF: Everybody says Baker Flats!

NW: Oh, okay. I'm glad I'm not alone in my… Well, thank you, Jack. I'm going to go ahead and turn this off. I appreciate all of your patience in all the questions that you've answered. (JF and NW laugh.)

JF: Oh well. I'm not doing anything right now anyway.