

## *Gathering Our Voice*

Interview with Gene Fitzgerald & Helen Hitchner

Interviewer: Nancy Warner

Date: November 26, 2003

Transcribed by: Nancy Warner

Nancy Warner: Today is the day before Thanksgiving, the 26<sup>th</sup> of November, 2003. If we could start by you giving me your name and telling me how long you've lived here?

Helen Hitchner: Well I'm Helen Hitchner. I'm a Davis girl and I've lived here for 82 years.

NW: What's your birthday?

HH: August 16, 1921.

NW: And also Gene?

Gene Fitzgerald: I'm Georgene Davis Fitzgerald. And I was born here but we've been gone off and on over the years. But I think I can say I've lived here all my life. And my birthday is January 8, 1936.

NW: So your family homesteaded here, or your dad, as you explained it, took over a claim.

GF: My grandfather, not my dad.

NW: Oh right. Could you just talk a little bit about that?

HH: Well they came in I think it was August 5<sup>th</sup> they arrived here in 1888 from California. They had been on the trail for three months cause they left there in May. And grandmother homesteaded the property right here where I'm sitting, the house here. And I'm not just real sure. We never have caught up with the part that Grandfather homesteaded but they each had one. And then there was a fella that came with them who also homesteaded a piece here and when he died he left it to Grandfather. I think that's where your place is [question to Gene].

GF: I'm not sure. I was thinking that was further south. But I'm not positive. No, by golly, I think it was the home place where Charlie's is because when I read that I was so surprised that he would have his name on the place. I'm not positive about that. It's been a long time. You'll read it in the book [referring to the Davis Family History]. Check us out.

NW: So your grandfather and grandmother made a living ranching and farming?

HH: Yes, and they really were quite diversified. He lost all the cattle in the winter of 1890 and so he went into gardening and they hauled it different places to market because there was no market here. He went to Republic and Greenwood, BC – Republic, Washington and Greenwood,

Suggested citation:

*Gathering Our Voice* 2011, Initiative for Rural Innovation & Stewardship

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BC, and I guess that they tried one time to go to Winthrop. Chancelor, that mine up there was going real strong. But it was just simply too long a haul. And they couldn't and it wasn't as far as Republic but it was a lot worse. So they gave that up and then just went to Republic and finally Greenwood.

NW: Where's Greenwood?

HH: Not very far. It's very close across the border. [side discussion] North of Molson and Chesaw, in that area.

GF: You can go up through Oroville and make a loop and Greenwood is kind of in the center of the loop.

NW: So truck farming and then he also carried the mail for awhile?

GF: The stage and passengers and mail and meals. And I think after they lost the cattle times were really hard and they just did whatever they could to keep things going and keep things together. Sold horses, I think, bred and sold horses. He had a stallion that was a pretty good stallion.

HH: That turned out kind of bad though because the horses got mountain fever and they lost a lot of them. They lost the colts and the mares that had been bred by this Tallyran stud.

GF: Then of course the orchards, I think that became, as soon as they came into production that became kind of the mainstay. [undecipherable side comment] And by that time there was a little bit better transportation. In the early days the transportation was pretty iffy but eh, you know, railroads weren't in yet so they still had to go by boat to Wenatchee, by steamer to Wenatchee. But then they could get them over to the coast cities by train.

NW: So they'd take the apples down the river in boats?

HH: Um hum, yes. And grandfather packed his right here across the road here at Charlie's place. There was, let's see that has been removed. But there was an apple warehouse over this rock cellar and they packed the apples there and stored them in the cellar until they could get them transported.

NW: So were there little sawmills for cutting lumber to make the applecrates?

GF: There was, yeah, up in the Loup Loup and the Chiliwist. Early on? [question to Helen] How early? Pretty early in the Chiliwist.

HH: Real early because the lumber for the house came from near Ruby . . .

GF: Up the Ruby Grade. We'll do that next spring if you're interested.

NW: Oh yeah.

GF: So yeah, there were little sawmills. And I think, you know, every orchard did their own packing at that time. There weren't the coops and so on. Every orchard did their own packing, usually had their own label and marketing.

NW: Did you have your own label?

HH: Oh yes.

NW: Oh, do you still have copies?

HH: Noooo, I don't think there's any that exist anymore. Grandfather must have given that up when they went to Pullman. When they took the kids down to go to school. And I remember my oldest daughter tells about the time that granddad asked

GF: Her granddad, your father

HH: Yeah, my father, her granddad. Asked [were you in on that to Gene] Sandy and Georgene to go up there and burn all that trash up there. And they packed those labels out and burned them. Sandy said, "why, we didn't keep even one!"

GF: I don't think before or since have we ever done such a thorough job of anything! [chuckle]. But being able to have a bonfire was quite a thrill.

HH: They had waxed paper for wrapping the apples in the boxes and we used those for years for wrapping sandwiches for lunches. So they didn't go to waste either.

NW: So was it Davis Canyon Apple or was that the name of the brand?

GF: I have no idea.

HH: I think that it was a twin W but I'm not positive about that.

GF: Well the Twin W, there were generic labels and Twin W was one. And then the grower would add their name to it in some way. And so some of the growers had their own label but then there were the generic labels too.

HH: I just really remember two W's on this label over apples. And I'm just positive that's that what it was. Was a Twin W with W L Davis.

NW: I'll keep my eyes open. . . Well I wanted to ask you a little bit about the stories you heard about wildlife when you were growing up. Gene and I did take a little drive and so I heard one of the stories about the cougar. But especially sitting here in your home where you have so many different examples of wildlife [referring to mounts on walls]. What did your grandfather tell you about wildlife, sage grouse, sandhill cranes? What kinds of wildlife to you remember them talking about?

HH: I don't remember anything about sandhill cranes but I do remember dad telling about his mother sending dad's older brother down to Rattlesnake Point with a shotgun and he said he would come back with a bagful of prairie chickens and that would be their meat for dinner. And, but as far as the deer were concerned I think that winter of 1890 killed as many deer as it did livestock. And they just didn't have – I don't remember any stories about deer. And even when we were kids growing up why rarely did we see deer.

NW: Did they talk about market hunting during the Cariboo Trail days? Did you ever hear any stories from the miners who might have come before your grandparents?

GF: Ok, it might be important to know that W.L. Davis, our grandfather, died in 1915 before even Helen can remember. So those stories were handed down again. And for my part I didn't ask the questions that I should have or listen to the stories as much as I should have.

HH: I think that's a teenage thing.

NW: Yeah, I always ask people because you never know what you might remember.

GF: I do remember Paul Stout, whose place we passed, he's ninety, saying that as a youngster he remembered salmon being in the river. Big 50-pound salmon so thick you could almost walk across them here at Rattlesnake Point. There was a good hole there where they spawned<sup>i</sup>. I was talking to Millie [Gene and Helen's sister] just the other day – if this is too boring you can turn that off – I was talking to Millie the other day if she ever remembered dad fishing for salmon, talking about catching them. And she didn't and I don't either and I was puzzled by this. I know that once in awhile Dad would go fishing and maybe catch squawfish . . .

HH: And he caught carp. Great big carp like this [holding her arms out to measure] that he'd put into the cow trough, water trough.

NW: Oh that's interesting. Would they eat it or would the carp eat the algae in the trough?

HH: I guess, I don't know. One time he had one in there and the cow got into the trough with her front feet and killed the fish. Not on purpose, it just happened. Just being a cow . . . [laughter]. But I remember we kids were always just thrilled with these big carp that he brought back. And they'd live for weeks in the trough.

GF: And of course the squawfish were so boney I don't think Mother ever let him in the kitchen with them.

NW: When you say squawfish what do you mean?

GF: Well it's a native fish in the river and they – I won't swear that it's a native cause now they're trying to get rid of them. And they pay people to catch them and get rid of them because they eat baby salmon. So they have a program to pay people to catch them. It just seemed funny to me that Dad didn't fish or talk about fishing for salmon when they were so thick.

HH: And in their letters before they were married when Dad was summering down there on the river he told Mom that lots of time he couldn't catch fish for his dinner. That the river was barren. And that's why I was so surprised too when you told me the story [to Gene] that Paul had said about the salmon.

NW: So when did Paul say that he saw the salmon?

GF: Well he's 90 now and he was the youngest and he tagged along after his older brothers and remembered going down with them. And at that time the Indian people had the fish trap – you saw the Matura picture of the fish trap – and although, that would have been about the same time period. Paul is 90 so he would have been about 10 when he remembered going down there.

NW: That's a good age to remember.

GF: Another story Paul told from his young years going out and getting sharp-tailed grouse from the creek up there. Is that the same as the prairie chickens?

HH: I don't know that they're the same but they were all over this country.

GF: I don't know if they're one and the same bird or not but anyway . . .

NW: They're different species – well I mean the sage grouse is different from the sharp-tailed grouse but they did refer to both of them as prairie chickens so I don't know. But it seems more like sharp-tailed habitat.

GF: Well he would go out with maybe just a slingshot and get a mess of sharp-tailed grouse along the creek up there, Chiliwist Creek. And he said they wintered on birch buds and of course now they're trying desperately to reestablish the sharp-tailed grouse and not having a whole lot of success I've heard. There is something missing that they're not getting the results that they hoped for. Is that true?

NW: Well I know there are some challenges. I don't know about up on Chiliwist.

HH: I don't think they have any up there. It was up above Tonasket that they were working so hard.

NW: That's where we [TNC] have property and we do have sharp-tails on our land. That's the Barker Mountain Preserve. But it's only been recently that they've started showing up again. So yeah, we're optimistic that their numbers might be coming back. I heard the same story about the birch trees from the farmers on the north end of the Waterville Plateau where the sharp-tailed grouse used to be thick. And it wasn't even all that long ago that you could still hunt them, like in the 60s and 50s. But one farmer said that the native water birch were believed to harbor one of the pests that would then get into the apricot orchards and so there was a movement to cut down a lot of water birch.

GF: Really?

NW: And this was down along that area. I don't know that that happened up here. So for a combination of reasons – I just think it's habitat loss.

GF: Yeah, I just wondered is that the black birch? That this was a key that was missing now that a lot of them had been cut. I wish that the Game Department or whoever would really work on establishing a sharp-tailed grouse colony up Davis Canyon and in the Chiliwist instead of the turkeys. Turkeys are not native here and I've read that they're really destructive too and would eat anything and lots of it. I just wish they had established a colony of sharp-tails.

HH: I think I probably talked to Fayette Krause with The Nature Conservancy about putting some up here and he said they were trying that up there first.

NW: Yeah this is a good time to bring that up again because there are watershed groups forming as part of the subbasin planning effort. There's a group on the Chiliwist that's going to be getting together and this would be a really good priority to bring up. And that's nice to know that it would just be restoring what was here.

HH: Dad said when Uncle Ed would go to the point down here for the grouse, the sharp-tails for dinner, he'd come back with a gunnysack full. Now how big the gunnysack was but most of them were 50 to 100 pound bags.

NW: So what year would that have been roughly?

GF: Probably in the 1890s.

NW: And then between the 1890s and the 1950s, which is when you left home [referring to Gene] what happened to the sharp-tailed grouse?

HH: They overkilled them. And I think Uncle Ed probably had something to do with that too [laughter]<sup>ii</sup>.

NW: Too many trips to Rattlesnake Point with a big gunnysack.

GF: Ok, what Paul Stout told me up there on the Chiliwist was that several things converged. Number one was that a lot of country was opened up with logging roads so people had better access back in there. The Depression hit and people were hungry and looking for groceries, and they were easy to kill and people would go up there by the carload and just bring back

HH: A gunnysack full [laughter]

GF: And then of course the dry years came along in there too that was hard on the country and the inhabitants the wildlife and stuff. So these things just kind of converged.

NW: Yeah, you can just picture how that would be. It was the same up on the Waterville Plateau, except the logging roads. But that would make sense.

HH: Well then the homesteaders came in in the 20s. Starved out in the 30s. But there were homesteads everywhere. If they had any laying hens they sure didn't eat them so they'd eat the sharp-tailed grouse.

NW: Ok, well that makes perfect sense. How about beavers? I want to ask you about beavers. They played such a huge role in this country before the trappers came in and I don't know that we've ever really understood what the country must have looked like.

HH: You mean how important the beavers really were?

NW: Yeah.

HH: Well I don't remember a beaver ever being on this creek [Davis Canyon] but when we lived up in the Chiliwist we had them all along the creek up there. And what they did for the fishing along that creek was absolutely astronomical. They made the fishing. And clear up to the head of the Chiliwist Creek. We'd go up there fishing in ponds that came up to your waist and just spread out over acres. And after we sold the place the fella that bought it thought he could get more irrigation water. So he went in and he had the beavers trapped and he tore out all the dams. Well it wasn't long and there were no fish. It wasn't long until the water supply he got was nothing. So what they did up there sure taught me that the beavers are an important thing to us too.

NW: So what kind of fish were in the creek that you would fish for?

HH: Not many rainbows, mostly cutthroat and then that other one that doesn't have scales – brook.

NW: How far up did you ever see salmon? There's a big barrier isn't there?

HH: There's falls right here that they can't get up so we never did.

NW: So when did you sell that property?

HH: It must have been in the early 60s. No it was in the 50s because Sandy was born in 40 and she was nine years old when we left up there, when we sold it, so that would have been about 50.

NW: Sandy live right down here? [house next to Helen's]

HH: No, she lives in Idaho. This is my youngest daughter [Mary Lou].

NW: So that's a really good description of the Chiliwist with beaver. But you didn't really ever have them here between the spring and the river.

GF: On the river. They like apple trees [chuckle].

NW: But you never had any dams . . .

GF: Actually no. From here on down is not dependable year-round source of water [from Davis Canyon spring to Okanogan River]. It's intermittent.

NW: I guess if we could jump ahead a little bit from the 50s when you left your property on the Chiliwist and then you came here to live. And what prompted that move?

HH: My husband's health.

GF: But you built this house right after the second world war.

HH: And then we rented it the second time we lived in the Chiliwist. But it was his health that prompted us to leave up there. He just couldn't do the work. Bad heart and a bad back. Bad combination for farming.

NW: So were you doing wheat farming up there on the Chiliwist?

HH: Some wheat, cattle, dairy – mostly dairy.

NW: Did you make your own cheese?

HH: No, we sold grade A milk. Well, first we sold cream and then we went to Grade A milk.

NW: So how would you get it out?

HH: By car. We transported it ourselves.

NW: So you'd take the milk down . . .

HH: About every other day.

NW: So you had a truck?

HH: No we had a station wagon that we carried it in.

GF: Five gallon cans?

HH: We had a neighbor that also did Grade A dairy so they'd take it one time and we'd take it the next. So it wasn't . . .

GF: Was that Hubler's?

HH: Uh huh.

NW: Hubler?

HH: Hubler.

GF: The old Pete Miller ranch if you see that name on a map or something.

NW: You mentioned Miller when we were out doing our driving around. So you moved back down here . . .

HH: And he worked in Okanogan until he died.

NW: He died in 1985?

HH: No, 1970. My second husband died of cancer in 1985.

NW: Oh I see. And your first husband's name was . . .

HH: Kenneth Mosby [side conversation can't hear on tape]

NW: And your second husband's name?

HH: Norman Hitchner.

NW: Somewhere in there between the 70s and 80s Fayette Krause came along and talked to you about The Nature Conservancy. So I wanted to hear about this story.

HH: I think that it was Elliot Marks that we heard from first, or I heard from first. And I just am not sure where it was but anyway they explained that DNR had listed this property up here as a special place because it was one of a kind and it had been so well taken care of which I credit to Dad. And that The Nature Conservancy, this group, was interested in talking to me about it. Well, I didn't want to sell any part of the ranch. That was Dad's territory and I didn't want to sell it. And so they had a little bit of a time talking me into it. Finally Elliot Marks did make the grade and talked me into it. So what finally determined was it was to be kept nature, you know natural, and not abused or anything and I knew that Dad would approve of that. So that's why I finally gave in and sold it.

NW: Did Elliot come over here?

HH: Yes, a couple of times in fact.

NW: So have you seen him since then?

HH: He's retired, he's not the chairman of the state anymore.

NW: He has a bigger role, he's the division director now who manages Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. So what year was that?

HH: Well it was after 1970 and before 1973. It was in that period somewhere.

NW: That was early . . .

GF: Bob Pyle was working for them at that time and I had occasion to meet him this last September on a butterfly class for the North Cascades Institute. And quite by accident we found out his involvement in this. He is such a dynamic person and so interesting and I said, "Aha, I know who sweet-talked Helen into selling part of the ranch!" [laughter] And he laughed.

NW: Do you remember Bob Pyle?

HH: Well I don't. Because when they started coming there'd be so many different ones come and I'd maybe meet them once or twice. Now Peter Dunwiddie, he came a couple of times with Fayette, and what was it their latest magazine several articles were written by Peter and I really enjoyed them because I was impressed with Peter. But Fayette and I became good friends.

NW: He spent quite a lot of time studying the vegetation up here over a period of years. There's another person who works with DNR named Dave Wilderman. I don't know if you've met him yet.

HH: I don't think so.

NW: He's worked on a fire management plan for both the DNR and Nature Conservancy. So you're right – there have been a lot of people involved and it would be hard to keep them straight especially over such a long period of time.

HH: Fayette I think came the most of any of them. And he was here for a longer period of time. And I still hear from him. In fact after Bob Pyle went back and he took some corn from your garden [referring to Gene] he shared it with Fayette. So I got a note from Fayette.

GF: Bob Pyle has promised to come back over for a visit next spring or summer with his wife.

NW: I'd like to walk around up there with him.

GF: It was funny how it worked out. Course this area wasn't on his itinerary but we did stop here that Saturday afternoon down at the ranch but there wasn't time to go up the canyon. We did take a short drive up the Chiliwist and actually one of the fellas from San Francisco who was a really good butterfly expert too found an Oregon swallowtail up there at Stout's. And that was a life, it went on his life list for butterflies. So he was pretty thrilled. So everybody really, the class, enjoyed this area and stopping here.

[off microphone conversation about gardening]

GF: And mother and daddy did too. They had garden down there where our orchard is, they had a big truck garden down there during the Depression years.

HH: Tomatoes by the truckload.

GF: Different things that Dad peddled to the stores uptown. At that time there were several mom and pop grocery stores that he would keep supplied. So yeah, I'm carrying on a long tradition of vegetable peddling.

NW: One thing I would like to talk to both of you about is what you think some of the most important conservation successes have been in the Okanogan during your lifetime. I mean we talked about the downturn of the sharp-tailed grouse and there have been some things that have gone down but we're trying to learn more about things that have gone well too both from a habitat protection standpoint but also from a stewardship standpoint. You putting some of your land in longterm conservation, we would consider that a success. It's always going to be habitat. But it doesn't always have to involve ownership – it could include things like riparian

restoration. So what kind of things come to mind when you think about habitat improvements or good conservation during your lifetime?

HH: Well the thing that comes to my mind is the ranch here. Dad was a first class conservationist. He didn't overgraze his pastures, he rotated them, and he rotated crops and he never ran more cattle than what the land would provide in a good way and he was just a good example that everybody didn't follow but nevertheless. And he did some irrigating. I think the irrigation is one big thing that has made a difference here. But I don't know – my mind is a blank.

NW: That's ok. It's kind of a big question.

GF: Well one of the things that comes to mind and it doesn't involve wild animals, in 1939 he worked with the Soil Conservation Service and the CCC people did a lot of the actual work in contouring. We could go up there next spring because you can still see the contours. But anyway it was flooding every time they'd have a rain it would just wash that gully clear down across the highway. So he went in there and did contour ditching. And there's some old pictures of one of them that was freshly done. And then they planted perennial grasses and stuff there. And of course this stopped the erosion and the flooding and held the water in the ditches so the grass flourished . . . a few miles further south there's a similar gully that continues to wash to this day. It hasn't for a couple of years but it's due. So I think that was a really good thing that Dad did that has made a difference in this little spot.

HH: I have a picture of him and my father-in-law, I think he's in the picture too, standing in the bottom of a gully out here behind the barn that if you got down on the ground you barely could have seen their heads. It was that bad from the washing – the spring runoff. There was just nothing up there to stop it and it all sloped this way.

GF: It had been farmed. They had grown grain crops up there and cut hay and stuff up there and so it was very vulnerable to flooding.

HH: The soil was light and sandy anyway. But we never saw that happening again after the contouring.

NW: So that's a success. Your father sounds like he was a really good steward and took care of his land. How did he share his practices with others? Was it through the Grange or just word of mouth?

HH: He worked in the Grange a lot but he was also pretty responsible in getting the Soil Conservation Service up and going in this county.

NW: Oh really.

HH: Uh huh. They called him the father of conservation.

NW: Is that right? That's great! So the Okanogan Conservation District then traces their history back to him? Do you know more about that story – about how he organized it?

GF: It's in the book [the family history]. You'll read it – it's in there and there was quite an article in the Washington Farmer about this and I think I quoted it in its entirety. But it's been so long since I read my book that I can't remember what I wrote.

NW: Well I'm going to jump ahead to that part. That is exactly the kind of thing I'm looking for – on the ground successes doing erosion control and planting vegetation along streams to slow down the water flow and increase the percolation of water. Those kinds of things.

HH: Another thing that Dad was responsible for was the dam at the mouth of Graves Coulee up here about a mile. And he had a ditch. The canyon would run all through the fields up on top and lots of times in the spring a lot of water was going to waste. So Dad decided to put in this little low dam and then he had a ditch running along the sidehill to put that water into the dam instead of coming on down here. And the ditch was the faulty part there because the hillside was so sandy that it wouldn't hold. And he'd spend days and hours up there trying to get that ditch to hold. He just fought it all the time. But lots of years he got some pretty nice water up behind that little dam.

GF: The idea of course was that it would percolate slowly down into the spring and increase the flow during the summer.

NW: So do you think it worked?

GF: Like Helen said I think getting the runoff into the dam area was the problem. He didn't have the equipment and money was probably, always short, to do it in a way that was really beneficial.

HH: To have lined the ditch so it would have held.

NW: So when we did a little drive around Gene was telling me how reliable the spring is and always has been and that's why your grandfather, he spotted a good thing.

HH: Yes he did.

NW: And so that's really nice when we have these droughts to know that there are some places that are consistent in their flow. So I guess it would be nice if you could both think about any changes you have seen over the years even though it is fairly consistent. Any drier times or how would it react in flood times. Have you seen much change at all?

HH: It's always run. On years like this year it wasn't as much but it's never failed.

NW: Your grandparents obviously used it for their own domestic purposes . . .

HH: They irrigated below the house.

GF: Twice in our lifetime here it has flooded, a gullywasher up above, and runoff that was pretty impressive [laugh]. And it had done it before. Because down where our place is [east of highway adjacent to Okanogan River] in the orchard and stuff when we started clearing it - it was just a web of gullies. None of them really went to the river they just kind of fanned out over that flat area. But in 48 and 72 – isn't that the years that it washed and flooded and went clear down past our place.

HH: Several of those have been caused by cloudbursts up above that you just don't control.

GF: Right

NW: So summer cloudbursts are what you're talking about?

HH: The '48 one I think was in June. It rained – that was the year that it rained every day in the month of May.

NW: That's drive us crazy now.

HH: Yeah, oh wouldn't people scream!

GF: When that cloudburst hit in '48 it just absolutely quit in the Chiliwist as if there was a curtain and never got a drop in Malott. Here and in the Chiliwist drainage it just came down in buckets.

HH: Mary Lou was not a year old. She was still having a bottle. That would have been 42 that – they called it a waterspout that came right down over the Chiliwist. It hit the Chiliwist and washed that road out and hit here but there wasn't, like you said, there wasn't a drop in Malott. It was so, the water was coming down so hard that you couldn't see 20 feet out the window. That was in June cause the folks had gone to state Grange. And we had come down from the Chiliwist to finish up the haying and you [Gene] were to stay with us.

GF: I remember it so it couldn't have been '42. I was about 10. Ok, I can't remember.

HH: But then there was another one in '48.

End of side one

HH: My husband Kenny said that they were down in the field loading up the last load of the hay – they were going to wind up the hay that afternoon – and said that they saw this cloud form and start to whirl. And just coming down like this and that’s why they called it a waterspout. And they ran the horses all the way back to the barn, which they ordinarily would not have done and they didn’t quite get that load into the barn before it got wet.

NW: Did it get ruined?

HH: Well, Dad probably used it because he salted his hay. But I never saw anything like it.

NW: He salted his hay?

HH: Rock salt, to keep it from combustion and he said it made it more appetizing for the cattle. And then you didn’t have to salt the cattle so heavily.

GF: I remember when they were hauling hay, I was pretty little, still hauling hay putting it up in the big barn with the sling going up. And Dad would be up in the haymow 100 degrees, hotter than blister. He was the one who was stacking and who was to holler when they were to drop it and pull the trip rope to drop the hay so it could be leveled out and then he would be out there scattering it and leveling it and, just hotter, throwing the salt out and I would, I remember taking down a quart of lemonade to him periodically and he’d drink the whole, chugalug the whole quart. And sometimes he’d let me sprinkle some rock salt or some salt around.

HH: If he was ready to trip the rope his holler of “Let her go!” you could hear all over the ranch.

NW: Did you ever get to ride in that thing?

HH & GF: No, heaven’s no! [laughter]

NW: Wouldn’t it be fun? Maybe not.

GF: Well look at the pictures of the old barn. Course it’s gone now. But some of the brave ones. Who was it [to Helen]? Alice said she did – I know Dave did. I never did. But there was a ladder up the end of the barn there where the haymow went or where the hay went in. And from time to time somebody had to go up there and fix the pulley or grease it or something so there was a ladder that went up clear to the top of the barn and there was a little perch up there that you could [stand on]. Course Dad I’m sure had gone up there. And I think it was . . .

HH: I went up there lots of times.

GF: Well I didn’t. That was stupid! Alice [sister] did and I know Dave did. I don’t know that any of the other kids did. But by the time my son came along, Dave, it was getting pretty rickety and they didn’t use the barn anymore. So he was really . . .

HH: Well at one time it would hold 100 tons of hay.

NW: So that hay that was stored there was grown right out here.

HH: Down on the Fitzgerald property – what is now<sup>iii</sup>.

GF: It was rill irrigated. And I rill irrigate five rows of tomatoes and it is a pain in the neck. And to think that Dad and others before him rill irrigated how many acres? It limited the amount of irrigated land that you could have because it was almost a 24-hour a day job to keep those ditches open and keep the water going.<sup>iv</sup>

HH: [laugh] And then your water'd be gone somewhere else.

GF: It was quite – I think of that when I'm down there messing with my five rows of tomatoes and what a job that must have been.

NW: So they were just dirt-lined ditches?

GF: They had a horse-drawn ditcher. You see 'em – I think there's one up at the Museum [Okanogan County] you see 'em and it was just a metal shovel and I suppose there were two-ditch ones and four-ditch ones, I don't know. They would make those ditches and you just had to take a shovel and chase water until you got it through.

NW: Did they have headgates?

GF: Flumes, usually with one-by-twelve boards in a v-shape and holes drilled in. I mean it's a simple thing. Holes drilled in where your ditches are and Dad used corn cobs, dried corn cobs to plug the hole. And this was a fun thing for me to tag along with him and carry the corn cobs and put them in or take them out as needed to let the water out [or stop it]. There are remnants of a ditch down north of our place that goes out to that field that's now grown up to quackgrass and elm trees, belongs to the PUD. But there's a remnant of the ditch that carried water over that way and he irrigated that field – they called it the Point Field, and then south of our house, also.

HH: He irrigated Sudan grass in that field.

NW: The Point Field?

HH: Uh huh and then eventually he planted it to grass or to alfalfa and it was the most beautiful alfalfa field you ever saw.

GF: It was kind of subirrigated too that one was.

HH: That Sudan grass. We had to walk through there to get to our swimming spot and you could just see that stuff grow! It would get twice as high as we kids were.

NW: So you had a good swimming spot on the river when you were growing up?

HH: Oh yes we did.

NW: Is it still there?

HH: No

GF: It isn't, it washed out. Well we used it in the 60s when we lived down in the blue house there so it must have been '72 – the flood of '72 completely changed the conformation of the river bank there. And there's still just a little rocky spit there but it's not a swimming hole anymore.

NW: Do you have any pictures of that?

GF: I think there is one – I think it's just people out in the water so I don't know that it shows the conformation of the river.

HH: We're standing closer to the shore and Alice and Margaret and Dad - Mother must have taken the picture cause that's where we were. It was a little eddy and then this rocky point sticking out there and we could swim behind it. And there was hardly any current. It was just perfect.

GF: And in those days the river, pre-dam, was a dangerous river. There were whirlpools and dropoffs and Dad always cautioned and insisted that we all learn to swim.

HH: First time we got in the water, he saw to it that we could all swim.

GF: And he always cautioned us that it was dangerous water.

HH: We'd swim across the river when it was lower and not so treacherous and we'd catch one of those whirlpools once in awhile and the water would be so much colder you'd just really have to swim to get out of it.

NW: Could you talk a little bit about how your dad did handle the cattle? Like were they down here in the winter or were they up in the hills – what was the seasonal management of the cattle?

HH: Well he had two herds – the dairy herd and the range herd. And course the dairy herd was kept closer here. And he milked them in the wintertime and his theory there was well you had to feed them anyway, you just as well have them producing. And in the summertime, when they

were dry, they could be out on the hills foraging for themselves and not have to worry about milking them. And eh, the range cattle he fed here in the winter time with the hay that was in the barn and put up and then in the summertime they were out on state land, state and federal lands. Up in the Buck Mountain area.

GF: He had a Forest Service permit in those years. This was before my time – I don't remember it, just by hearsay.

HH: That was in the 30s and there was a lot of poaching going on – people were hungry during the Depression. And the mill in Omak had gone on strike. So there was a lot of calf stealing going on. And so the Association decided to try to keep better track of the cattle so they rode every two weeks and would push the cattle back farther on the mountain which was roadless, by the way, pretty much except the road to the lookout, and eh we would go back one day and stay overnight. And the next morning we would push cattle up on Buck Mountain as far as we could and then have to come home. And during the summer that was the most looked-forward to of anything I can remember as a teenager. And then when fall came the cows came home pretty much on their own cause there were no fences. And they just kept wandering down so there wasn't any big roundup until the later years when they rounded up the ones that were to go to market.

NW: So for many years it was just raising beef for family use?

HH: Oh no. That was a family income thing.

NW: Ok, but you wouldn't go do a roundup to then haul some of them to market?

HH: Oh yeah. But lots of times they waited until they came down on their own accord but then eventually they went to this – it would take almost a week to round up everybody's cattle and pick out the ones for market. Then they would drive them to the railroad in Malott.

GF: Very early times down in Wakefield, there were corrals and stuff at Wakefield.

HH: And that was before my time. Dad's cowboys were girls and so everybody that could would go on these drives cause it was a big job rounding up – there must have been eight or ten cattlemen in this association, the Chiliwist Cattle Association. So everybody that could ride a horse got to go that wanted to. And boy, we kids looked forward to that. We'd ride almost anything that had four feet to get to go.

GF: Dad gave up his range permit in the 40s maybe right after or during the war. He gave up his range permit and then after that he only had about 25 brood cows that he ranged on the ranch here.

NW: So when he did have a lease it was in conjunction with several other ranchers here?

HH: Oh yes, Stouts, Starzmans, and Fries, and Phillips, Millers, Mackie's in Malott.

GF: Burdetts?

HH: Well Burdetts weren't in it when I remember.

GF: [can't hear – more background in the Davis Family History]

NW: So were there grazing associations all over the Okanogan?

HH: I suppose. I know this one was called the Chiliwist Cattle Association.

GF: There was probably more up around Loomis, and Pleasant Valley.

HH: I think they did cause they ranged on the east side of Buck Mountain whereas our was on the west.

NW: Discussion of cooperative management and grazing associations [hard to hear tape] It's always neat to hear about it – it must have been fun, those range rides.

HH: Oh they were.

NW: Big social event. I'll be a lot of courting took place.

HH: Well that's where Kenny and I got together.

NW: Oh, tell me that story.

HH: Well it just kind of happened I guess. He went to high school – he worked for Dad off and on with hay and whatever. Anyway we just . . .

GF: Helen was just a cute little brown-eyed . . .

NW: Oh I'll bet – you're still cute! So how old were you? 16?

HH: I was 17 when we were married. Dad had a request – I had to finish high school. And his mother had a request – he had to be 21 years old when he married so he would be an adult. His father was one of those people, one of a kind, that you never forget. And she insisted that Kenny be 21. He was 21 in April. I graduated from high school in May, on Thursday or Friday, and we were married on Sunday. We didn't wait any longer than we had to! [laughter]

GF: I'll tell you a story that Paul Stout told me about Helen and Kenny. Well it's in the book – you read it [to Nancy with laughter]. It's not, it's not. Well anyway they were on a spring drive when they took the cattle back and Paul Stout and Dad were riding up ahead and Kenny and Helen were bringing up the rear and, you know, pretty tight, and they let some cattle get away. And Paul was grousing to Dad that if they hadn't been mooning around they wouldn't have let those cattle get away. And Dad said to Paul, "Well Paul, you were young once weren't you?" Paul has told me this story. [laughter]

NW: Mooning around. That's great!

GF: I think it has a different meaning now.

NW: Yeah I think it does too.

HH: I think that's probably what Paul said.

GF: Well yeah, in the old way.

NW: Well so then after you got married then did you move to the Chiliwist?

HH: Yes. He and his brother owned the ranch up there. And his brother wanted out so when Kenny and I got married we moved up there. Well I think maybe George was around for awhile, several years maybe, but then he just wanted to enlarge his fields. But then he came back and wanted the ranch again so we moved out. That was during the war. And we went to the coast. But we weren't there a year and came back over here.

NW: You told me about that the first time I met you. Where on the coast did you go?

HH: Tacoma.

NW: That must have been quite a switch for you.

HH: Oh it was and I don't remember one bit of it that I liked. [laugh] I was a country girl, believe me, and still am.

NW: So you were over there for a year and then came back . . .

HH: And went back up, well we were here for awhile and built this house and then went back up the Chiliwist when George had gone to Hanford. He worked down there and still lives down there.

Side conversation between Helen and Gene about upcoming visits to relatives.

NW: When we were doing our drive around [referring to earlier trip with Gene] you said I should talk to Helen or read something she wrote about her years up in the Chiliwist? Oh I would love to hear a little bit about it.

GF: I did a little article about it that told a little bit about their socializing and what it was like up there before they had electricity and telephones and good roads.

NW: Oh ok, that's what you were talking about.

GF: It was really isolated.

NW: Is that in the book?

GF: No.

HH: I loved the Chiliwist. The wind didn't blow up there in the winter time but come spring it would blow and not stop. But I really enjoyed the isolation and didn't mind not having a phone or electricity. It hadn't been very long since we'd not had electricity down here so going back to a flatiron and stuff didn't bother me that much. We had lanterns and a gas-powered washing machine that Kenny had to operate so whenever we washed clothes he didn't work in the field, he washed clothes. But we had good neighbors. They weren't close. In fact we had one neighbor that was over the hill, with no road, just a cow trail to their place. The Holzhausers. So they were really more isolated than we were. And then the Pickets lived at the end of the road up there. So that was about three miles. So we really saw more of them than we did of the Holzhausers.

NW: So your second time up the Chiliwist was a long time – it was from 33 or 34 until the 70s?

HH: Not the 70s. We came down here I think in the 60s cause the kids were ready for school. And they'd closed the school up there. And it just seemed like it would be best to move.

NW: That's still a long time – nearly 20 years. And the whole time you were up there you had the beavers and the fish [can't hear this]

HH: I told you that we had cows up there just like Dad did, cause a cream check in the Depression was still a pretty good idea.

NW: A cream check?

HH: A cream check. So while we were milking the cows in the morning our two girls would go down behind the barn – there was a beautiful beaver pond down there – and they'd catch enough fish and go to the house and clean them and have fish for breakfast.

NW: So did the Fish and Game Department stock those fish in there? Do you remember that?

HH: They may have to get them started once the dams were in.

GF: Interesting story that had been kind of family lore. That grandmother, when they came up here from California, had missed the California quail so much and that she had sent down and had some live quail shipped up and they turned them loose. And it was just that – it was family lore – until about a year ago I found an article in the old newspaper, the old Okanogan Record published in Conconully, telling about this very thing.

NW: Really?

GF: Yes, so that was quite a thrill. They had brought bobwhites and California quail. Well I don't know if my quail are descendants of those originals but I like to think that they are. But the bobwhites didn't take hold.

HH: Paul tried raising bobwhite too and they didn't take. There's something here or not here that they need.

NW: I associate them more with prairies [discussion of bobwhite needs]. So that's interesting about the quail.

GF: And of course now there's more of a -- they're kind of frowning on introduced species. But I love the quail.

HH: They've been here so long they're more grandfathered in than a lot of the people.

NW: We don't consider them a native species down at the Moses Coulee project but it's like one of the – we're not really managing for them but we're not managing against them either. We are managing for sage grouse cause there are hardly any left and we want them to come back. But I love the quail too – we have them in Wenatchee and they're wonderful neighbors.

HH: I think sometimes maybe you see more in town than you do out in the country. Although we have a lot of them this year.

GF: Well and I'm sure that the quail are one reason that I can garden without using sprays. They're out there working all the time scratching around, summer and winter.

HH: If they think you have too much lettuce they'll just go right down the row and clean it out. [laugh]

NW: They help you thin. One other thing I wanted to ask you about and then I'll let you go. [barking dog] Do you remember any big bird movements up the river that you remember. Swans?

HH: No [dog “Cookie” still barking at squirrel]

Taperecorder off/on again

GF: Dad’s half-brother who was the oldest, not the oldest the second. He wrote a letter and I think it’s in the book too. But he mentioned remembering after he’d moved back east he remembered going over on the reservation when the ducks were ripe. He used that phrase – were ripe – apparently in the fall and going over and hunting ducks on the reservation.

NW: One last thing. Since tomorrow is Thanksgiving could you talk a little about your memories of your earlier holidays here? Did you have turkey?

HH: Chicken probably. Most holidays we celebrated with a family that lived right down where Waddell’s live by the name of King. And they had three kids – we had five at that time [before Gene’s time]. And we always celebrated holidays together because nobody had any money to go anywhere and how would you get there anyway. So we were just about as close as family at that time. They didn’t have any relatives around and neither did we. So we had each other. Thanksgiving we were out of school but I don’t recall anything very big. Christmas is the one I remember. I loved Christmas and I still do.

NW: Question (can’t hear tape)

HH: Christmas morning and Christmas Eve was just our family. We always went out and got a Christmas tree. When we were big enough Dad would go up to Graves Coulee and get a tree. Course then it was decorated and had candles on it which were lit one time on Christmas Eve. Not that the gifts amounted to that much – it was just a – because Mother and Dad apparently loved Christmas too and they just made it something that was so special. We made our own Christmas decorations – those big balls made out of tissue paper. I’ve been thinking that I should teach my grandkids how. But Grandmother [Phebe] would cut a circle of tissue paper about like this [holding up her hands] and then wedge it and curl those. You had to be careful because tissue paper tore real easy. And then she’d take a bunch of them and knot them together, tie them together with string, and then leave part of the string out to hang them by and that was a snowball. She made them different colors and taught us how to make them.

GF: I remember her, [Grandmother Phebe] writing in the letters I went through when writing the book and she wrote and said she was sorry that she was sending such a small package but she said, “there’s not much doing in the stores for Christmas around Colfax.” And I thought “Oh how nice that would be.”

HH: Another thing that we did that Mom probably learned from her mother was to make the paper chains. You cut little pieces of paper from Christmas wrap – we never threw a piece of Christmas wrap away –

NW: So you made chains out of old Christmas wrapping paper? That was a good idea.

HH: Yeah, and just make yards and yards and yards of that. We may have strung popcorn but we did not waste cranberries by stringing them. We ate them. What few there were.

NW: Yeah, cause you could grow your own popcorn but you couldn't grow cranberries around here. Boy they must have been a treat. Were they growing cranberries over on the coast? When you bought cranberries did they come in a can or did you get fresh ones?

HH: I think they got fresh ones but I'm not sure.

GF: I don't know when they started growing cranberries in Washington.

HH: On Christmas, course there was very little money, but I'm like Bill Petry, a friend of mine from Oroville. He said, "We weren't poor, we just didn't have any money." We didn't know we were poor, we just didn't have much money.

NW: Pretty much everybody was in the same boat weren't they?

HH: Yeah, yeah. So folks would get a little box of tangerines, sacks of oranges from Japan. And they would be packed so tight in the box and some of them would be almost square. And that was a special treat at Christmas time.

NW: How old were you then?

HH: From the time when I can begin to remember.

NW: One technical question, on those paper chains what kind of glue would you use?

HH: Flour and water. What a trick that would be now.

Discussion of pastes

NW: Do you have any Thanksgiving memories that stand out [to Gene]?

GF: There's one that came to mind when you mentioned that, that was really neat. We were living down in the lower house there along the highway. And I don't remember<sup>vi</sup>, my sister Gladys and our kids were really little – Charlie was just a baby. Anyway it was just an absolutely gorgeous day and the weather was just like fall. And there hadn't been any snow. Dad always liked to have dinner around the usual time at noon. So we'd had an early dinner and Mother and Daddy kept Charlie and all the rest of us – there was quite a bunch of kids and Gladys and all of us – and we hiked up to Flander's Spring and then on over to the old cemetery. Don was

birdhunting – and that was just a wonderful, wonderful day and the weather was just so perfect for that time of year.

NW: So did he get any birds?

GF: I don't think so. He just always needed an excuse to get out and hike. I like to hike just for the sake of hiking. But anyway it was a wonderful day.

NW: So that walk you went on – did it include the property that we [TNC] now own?

GF: Probably, possibly.

NW: Well this has been great!

- <sup>i</sup> Gene marked this statement out about the fish spawning in the deep hole when reviewing the transcript – they typically use gravels for spawning but the deep hole was probably a good place to hide.
- <sup>ii</sup> Gene notes in her transcript review comments that the decline was probably more habitat loss as orchards and alfalfa fields were planted.
- <sup>iii</sup> And on Charlie's in later years.
- <sup>iv</sup> Sprinkler irrigation started in the late 40-s or early 50's I think [comment from Gene]
- <sup>v</sup> Gene marked this out on the transcript saying that the years noted here are incorrect.
- <sup>vi</sup> Note from Gene that she doesn't remember what year this was – “My sister Gladys and her three kids were here and our kids were real little.”