Interview Transcript: Bob Johnson's Second Life Story Interview
Interview date: August 22, 2011
Prepared for the Sonoma State University Field Stations and Nature Preserves

Introduction

This is the second of a series of three interviews with Bob Johnson. The purpose was to record the highlights of Bob's life story. Questions used for the interviews were partially based on selected questions from the StoryCorps list for life story interviews (storycorps.org). Questions were developed by Matt Thompson, and additional questions were provided by Terri Yost (Bob's daughter).

The interview occurred at Bob Johnson's house in Pacific Grove, CA on August 22, 2011. Matt Thompson conducted the interview and prepared the transcript from the audio recording. Informal off-topic conversation was not included in this transcript.

Interview Transcript

Matt Thompson: It appears to me that Salinas Valley and the Monterey Peninsula are two different worlds. Why did you move out here to the Peninsula?

Bob Johnson: Well, I lived on the farm the whole time I was there and I didn't want to live in Salinas. It's the murder capital of the world. My wife had a great aunt who owned a house down here on Eighth Street. It was a lot like this one. It had a view of the bay. She always liked coming over here to Pacific Grove. She said, well when we retire let's move over there. It was kind of a no-brainer. I got my wake-up call when one of the first guys to ring my doorbell was circulating a petition. I asked what it was about and he said, it's to protect the land from the damn farmers. I said, you rang the wrong doorbell buddy! I said, you don't know what you're talking about. I asked him, are many people signing it, and he said oh yeah, you're the first guy who gave me any trouble. I said, you know why, I'm one of the damn farmers! I've been protecting that land a lot longer than these people have ever thought about it. That's when I still owned it.

MT: We have a few more questions to cover regarding school. What was your favorite thing to do for fun back in elementary and high school? For example, what did you like to do after school?

BJ: I got on the bus and went back home. It was an 18 mile bus ride. The bus went on River Road and then on 101 Highway. That shortened it to about 15 miles from the school to the farm. The bus didn't go up to the farm on Old Stage Road. Somebody had to pick us up in Chualar and if you were not on the bus they would have to go looking for you. So, we never really had after school activities because of that.

MT: So what would you do when you got home after school?

BJ: When we got home it would be about 4:30. We got out of school at 3:30. We had a

few chores to do, did our homework, had dinner. It was not like living in town. It's different.

MT: If I asked some of your classmates what they remember about Bob Johnson, what would they tell me?

BJ: I don't know. I was active in student affairs there. I guess I was a good student because I got into Stanford. They would probably tell you that. They all knew I went to Stanford. There are not too many of those people left. I did have some classmates that were extremely successful. One of them was a guy named Howard Leach. He became an ambassador to France under George W. Bush. Another one was Michael Murphy. He lives in San Francisco. He wrote several books and he established Esalen Institute there along the Big Sur coast. He was in the same class during high school and Stanford. Howard Leach went to Yale. That's where he got the Bush connection.

MT: You mentioned you were involved in student affairs. What did you do with that?

BJ: I was in different clubs and committees. I was the treasurer of the student body in my senior year. It's hard to remember exactly what we did. That's over 60 years ago.

MT: Are there any friends from back then that you still keep in touch with?

BJ: From high school? I had some very close friends that have passed away. I have one who lives up in Woodland. He has a big cattle ranch up there. Another one whose widow I'm still in contact with. Locally here, I don't think there are any. Either they passed away or I just lost contact with them. There was a couple in the ag industry that I still see. They weren't in my class but I'd run into them. They were in the seed business or tractor business or other farmers.

MT: While you were there in school, was there a teacher or teachers who had an especially strong influence on you?

BJ: Probably my math teacher, Everett Lindquist. He was a Norwegian. I can probably name a few other teachers but his comes to mind immediately. There was another one too. His last name was Farr. He was a physics teacher. He was an excellent teacher. Those two names jump out at me. They could relate their subject so well and make it understandable. They were just good teachers and good people persons. They could relate to the students and explain something complex in a way so the student can understand it. There are a lot of teachers that can go right over your head, especially when you're very young. They don't try and find out how much your understanding. They give you an exam and you don't do very well because you didn't understand it. They don't ask what didn't you understand. These two guys were engaged with their students. They weren’t just going through the motions. They liked the job that they did. They took pride in it. The students can sense that. Some teachers act like they can't wait until the bell rings. You just get that feeling.

MT: Do you have any favorite stories from elementary school or high school that really stand out?

BJ: It's been a long time since I thought about that. I do remember since you showed me that picture [see picture below of the old Chualar School] . They used that building for a lot of things. The Japanese people used that building to teach their kids Japanese after school; on the steps of that old school. I used to go over there with some of my friends and learn a little Japanese. I've forgotten it all by now. There were these two kids, we must've been around sixth grade, and these two guys couldn't get along with each other. They were fighting all the time, picking fights with each other. The teachers were getting set up with it. We had this one teacher; I'll never forget her, Mrs. White. She was a no-nonsense teacher. When you got in her class you knew you were going to behave. That was it. The word got to you before you got to her class so she had her groundwork all laid out for her in advance. These two guys got into it one day and she grabbed them, I forget if it was by the ear, the arm, or what. She dragged them over to the old building, she had the key. She had unlocked the door and took them in there, and gave them both boxing gloves. She said, I'm locking you two in here until you get tired of beating up on each other, and you can call me when you're ready. All the other kids were running around trying to look in through the windows and through the vents. You could hear those guys going at it. Finally they came out and they said, okay we've had enough! Those guys never fought again after that. She would probably be dismissed and called up for child abuse or something now days but she had the key and she solved that problem. Those two guys were buddies after that. I never forgot that. We never told her parents about that and the other kids didn't. We didn't want to get the teacher in trouble. She was a damn good teacher.

MT: Let's talk about Stanford. How did you decide to go to Stanford?

BJ: I had several friends who were going there. I knew it was a pretty prestigious school and if I can get in there I ought to go. I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I think I

only applied to UC Berkeley and Stanford and I got into both. Now days I see what my grandchildren are going through. They're straight A students and my grandson couldn't get into UC Santa Cruz, let alone UC Berkeley. In those days it was a little easier to get into those universities. Anyway, I ended up there. I just thought it would be a unique experience.

MT: You said you knew some other classmates who were going there?

BJ: Michael Murphy was one of them. There was a girl, her last name is Lawler, Pat Lawler I think. There was another guy named Johnson, Bill Johnson. Another one, he was killed at age 56, one of my closest friends, Homer Smith. There were about four or five of us.

MT: Did that make it easier, going to a new school with some people you knew?

BJ: I don't think it really made a whole lot of difference. You're meeting new people and rooming with new people and staying in a dorm. You get acquainted with a lot of people pretty fast. I'd see those guys from time to time. Homer and I were very close friends. We would do things together. But, the other ones I would see on campus and we would get together with the Salinas crowd every once in a while. As the years went on we all went our separate ways.

MT: Did you live in the dorms the whole time?

BJ: No, I was in a fraternity. Homer Smith, my friend and I, both pledged the same fraternity.

MT: Which fraternity?

BJ: Theta Delta Chi. I lived there for three years. The first year was in the dorms. So, I made a lot of close friends there in the fraternity because you're living with the same guys every year for three years. You get to know them pretty well. The ones who haven't died I'm still in contact with, more so then in grammar school or high school. I've been seeing them at reunions. We used to have fraternity reunions but there hasn't been one of those for quite a while. There are class reunions. We get together from time to time but the problem is that we are widely separated by distance. My best friend lives in Phoenix Arizona. We're in communication by e-mail. When they had that big fire in northern Arizona I sent him an e-mail asking what happened to his place. He said miraculously it missed his place thanks to the firefighters. It's a place called Greer up in northern Arizona. There's one who lives right in downtown San Francisco. He comes down here periodically. He used to have a place in Carmel. He comes down and has dinner with me while he's down here. We catch up on whatever's going on. His name is Robert Ruggles.

MT: What was your major?

BJ: Economics. I knew I wanted to go into some kind of business. In those days you

didn't have counselors that were that good. If I had known, I would have probably gone to Cal. I wanted to be a business major as an undergraduate. Stanford only had an MBA in their business school which means two more years after you graduate. So the closest thing I could find was economics. I majored in that. The only thing, I was halfway through Stanford when I decided I wanted to come back and be on the farm. They had what they called the Food Institute at Stanford so I took a few courses from there but it didn't have much to do with growing food. It was more about analyzing food, fats and oil, and all that kind of stuff. It didn't have a lot to do with agriculture but it had something to do with food anyway. I took all the courses in the Econ department like accounting, statistics, and that kind of thing that would help me when I got back to the farm for actual application on the farm. When I told my father I wanted to come back to the farm he said you don't have to go to college to be a farmer. I said, I'm not so sure about that. That's when I said I would kind of like to go to UC Davis. He said you started there [Stanford] so you're going to finish there, so I said okay. When I got out of there I took a lot of correspondence courses from UC Davis. A lot of those are available on the Internet now these days from UC Davis. That was very helpful to me for sure. I got a good liberal arts education from Stanford. It's come in handy over the years for a lot of things including farming.

MT: How else did your education at Stanford influence your life later?

BJ: I learned a lot about society, history, and how if you don't learn it you repeat it - that kind of thing. How government works, how society works, all good things to know no matter what business you're in; how to work with other people, to achieve goals, that kind of thing.

MT: So you developed skills there that you were able to use?

BJ: At times I was able to use things I learned in my dealings and for what I was doing.

MT: Anything else that really stands out about your time at Stanford, a story?

BJ: There are a lot of things. The different fraternities on campus were doing stunts of various sorts. One of the funniest things I saw happen there, I can't remember which fraternity did it, I think it was a climbing club that did it. One morning we got up and we looked up at Hoover Tower and there were big massive footprints going up the side of the tower, all the way to the top. I think they had them on all four sides of the tower. They must've done that in the middle of the night. I think they were probably cut out of heavy paper and pasted on there with something. As freshman pledges at our fraternity, this is how we bonded as a group. We were going to play a prank on the current members of the fraternity. In the middle of the night we went out and stole every one of their cars. It was down hill to the main library. In those days they didn't have power steering or steering wheel locks so all we had to do was roll the things down the hill and have somebody inside steering it. I think we managed to take every one of them without having the keys to the cars. We rolled them all down there and parked them in front of the library and put up a big used car lot! We put prices on all of the cars. How we got

away with it - nobody in the fraternity house woke up and heard us taking those cars. The cars sat there for the better part of the morning before the owners figured out the cars weren't there. So as the new crop coming in we got to know everybody really well from that escapade.

MT: On to the next subject. I heard you not only farmed but you did some ranching as well. Is that true?

BJ: No, I didn't, my grandfather started. In the 1800s there was no irrigation. There were wells to supply houses and livestock and that was it. So it started as strictly a cattle and grain operation. You can grow grain in the winter time. If it rained enough you got a crop, if it didn't, you didn't get much of a crop. I think I mentioned that the first well drilled on the property was the year before I was born, 1929. It developed from there into more and more irrigated farming. That's what I got interested in, because about the time I was in college there were some new innovations coming in for farming that were revolutionizing the industry. I thought this could be exciting to be involved in and I wanted to be a part of it. The biggest single thing which was a huge innovation that started back when I was in the business, the problem with getting lettuce, and I'll use lettuce as a primary example because it was the number one crop there for 70 years, getting it to markets in the East. It was problematic to say the least. To pack it, they had big heavy wooden crates in which they'd have 24 heads of lettuce and an equal amount of ice. They packed the lettuce and ice and if they took too long to get them to market the ice melted. The railroad was supposed to have refrigerated cars. It's very bulky and 24 heads of lettuce could weigh well over 100 pounds with the crate and ice and everything else. Plus if the ice did melt at all somewhere along the way, perhaps if it was put on a siding, and it was not refrigerated the lettuce would get kind of mushy and not crispy looking like it's supposed to be. Somebody came up with this idea called vacuum cooling. This is one thing I would like to take somebody on a tour to see how they do that. I don't think they quite understand how we get a head of lettuce from here to New York City in less than 48 hours, and on a supermarket shelf looking just like it would if it were on a shelf here for two days. They have this huge cooling facility. They take the lettuce now and pack it into cardboard crates and they can put 300 of those crates onto one truck. The truck takes them directly to the cooler. A forklift can take all 300 cartons and drive them into the cooler. They close the door to the cooler, pump all the air out, and then they chill it. Because air is an insulator, you remove all the air, and you chill the lettuce right to the heart of the head itself. You don’t cool it from the outside in because there would be a spot in the center that would be the same temperature as when you harvested it. They'll chill the whole thing down to between 34° and 42°F. They chill it down into the 30s. In the refrigerated truck that takes it to the market they maintain between those two temperatures. They have monitoring devices so if the refrigeration system goes bad the trucker is responsible. As soon as that thing is chilled, that same forklift takes the lettuce out and shoves it into a refrigerated truck. They slam the door on the truck and it's on the way to the East Coast. They have two drivers on the truck and that truck goes 48 hours nonstop until it's on the East Coast. You could fly but the cost is prohibitive. Things like strawberries can be flown, but not lettuce. In Salinas during the peak of the season there's at least 1000 refrigerated trucks a day leaving town. That means there are at least 1000

trucks coming in too.

MT: Have you read John Steinbeck's East of Eden? I remember that part about packing the lettuce and ice. Was that very accurate?

BJ: Oh yeah. Well, it did happen. I'm sure the way it played out there where the thing got put on a siding – oh I know what it was. In the book there was heavy snowfall and the train couldn't get over the Sierras and I think they had to stop in Sacramento of all places. The ice melted and the lettuce was just like mush. As I recall in the book, the businessman said you're crazy, there were so many things that can go wrong and one of them will. It won't get there as fast as you think it's going to. In the early days it was all done by train. By the time they got almost completely converted to vacuum cooling the majority of it went in trucks, all happening about the same time. When Eisenhower became president, he's the one who said we need a national highway system. That's the interstate system we have now. That's what made it possible to put it on a truck. They put it in a truck and it doesn't come out until it gets to the city where it's going to be distributed. With the railroad they had to take the car and if it was going to a city beyond where the railhead is they would have to transfer from the rail to a truck and time is lost. The lettuce is going to warm-up in all this process and they didn't have as many refrigerated trucks as they do now. The railroads finally lost all that business. I don't think there's anything shipped by rail anymore that's that perishable. It's almost 100% refrigerated trucks now. They're mostly independent truckers too. You hear the moment the price of fuel goes up, the price of your food goes up. Those guys burn a lot of diesel between here and the eastern coast and everywhere in between. Before the interstate road system it would've been suicide to put that on a truck with the roads the way they were. I don't think the roads or the trucks that we had in those days would have been up to it.

MT: So it was vacuum cooling that allowed ranchers to turn into farmers?

BJ: Well no, irrigation made the difference. Irrigation made the difference between growing crops in the summer time and doing nothing except raising your cattle.

MT: Did the grain crops require irrigation?

BJ: Grain crops can benefit from irrigation if it doesn't rain. You put the seed out and hope for the best because that's all there was, the water from above. They had good years and bad years with their grain crops. A really good year they would have a bumper crop. Some years it wasn't even worth harvesting. They just put the cattle out and let them graze on it. That's when a plant this big of wheat or barley was too low to the ground to even harvest. That was an exception.

MT: So your family were ranchers in the past but by the time you came around you were farming?

BJ: When I went to Stanford they were developing more and more irrigation on the ranch and I could see that everything was coinciding about the same time. We had more

and more irrigated crops, vacuum cooling came along, and the transportation system took a giant leap forward. Another thing vacuum cooling did, it reduced the cost of harvesting and shipping the lettuce dramatically because instead of these wooden crates which were very expensive, we had cardboard boxes with the labels already on them. They could be packed in the field. This is another thing, if the heads got damaged, they'd throw them into a truck and haul them to a packing plant where they trim the lettuce, wash it, and put it in the crates. That was so long ago. I'm sure the lettuce they're putting in the cardboard cartons right in the field now, they're absolutely fresh and cut a few minutes ago. Within a couple of hours they're chilled down to optimal temperature so we know they're getting there in much better condition at lower cost to the grower. The packing cost and the shipping cost both went down because the weight went down. You're not paying to ship ice and wood. That was a huge factor in the lettuce business. Everything rode on the coat tails of the lettuce industry. Whatever lettuce did the other industries benefited by it. With broccoli, they couldn't develop a pack like that because they found out that broccoli had to stay wet. So, they developed what they call liquid ice. They would pack the broccoli in a cardboard carton just like the lettuce and then they pumped this liquid ice in. The ice fills every cavity in the box and every nook and cranny in the heads themselves so the broccoli is constantly in contact with moisture and constantly kept cold. That's how we're able to ship it to places like Asia and it arrives in good condition.

MT: I saw on a map the next canyon down from Chualar, going east out of Gonzales, there's Johnson Canyon and Johnson Canyon Road. Was that named after your family?

BJ: No. All the Johnsons lived in Chualar Canyon. I don't know how many times I've been asked that question. Is that named after your family? Nope.

MT: What was your most preferred crop?

BJ: Probably broccoli. It's fairly easy to grow, I enjoy growing it, and you can grow it just about every month of the year too. Lettuce is seasonal. Most of the other crops are somewhat seasonal. With broccoli you can change varieties for the different times of the year. It eventually got to the point where they were growing so much broccoli down in the desert in the middle of winter it wasn't worth trying to grow broccoli for harvest in the December, January and February period. We were always getting rains and it's hard to harvest then. Slime would develop on the heads. You could grow it 12 months a year if you wanted to, if it was profitable. We could pretty much grow it eight or nine months out of the year.

MT: I heard you were president of the Farm Bureau. Could you tell me more about that?

BJ: In the late 1960s, yeah. It was good. On our ag tour I like to pound it into these people. Everybody I talk to here say they're all worried about the general plan. They don't want the farmers to build anything on agricultural land. In their head every square acre in Salinas Valley is prime agricultural land. Well, that is not true. The most prime land is right up at Castroville, Salinas, Spreckles, and down along the river through Gonzales and Soledad. When I was president of the Salinas Grower Shipper Association,

the supervisors all got together because Salinas was expanding toward the North and West very rapidly, right on the best soil you would find anywhere in the world. We made some kind of agreement. They were going to build this road or street called Blanco Road and if you look at the map Blanco Road is the South and West perimeter of Salinas. Davis Road was already there on the North and West side of Salinas. There would be no growth of the city of Salinas beyond those two roads. The only structures that can be built there would be agricultural related. It happened there was a 40 acre parcel outside of that perimeter that was grandfathered in and they had to let that housing tract go in. Of all things, my mother bought a house there some years later. I thought, how ironic. Anyway, I was pointing out to the people, see this expanse of beautiful cropland, all the way to Salinas. Over 40 years ago we determined there'd be no growth in this direction toward Salinas, otherwise you would be looking at housing tracks right now. There would be no vegetables here at all. I said, that's what the farmers think of their land. The girl who was our interpreter and guide took us by the headquarters of the D'Arrigo Company, I don't know if you've heard of them. They were a pretty big family-owned organization and they built their headquarters facility there. Tanimura & Antle did the same thing, on ag land. It was their land and it was to support their agricultural activities. They had to jump through more hoops to be able to build that facility. It wasn't like they were trying to build a motel or something. They said it was so difficult for them to finally get through the planning process and all they were trying to do was support their own agricultural activities. That's how strict it is already and people over here are saying we have to be stricter so farmers don't develop their land. This is a battle that I've been in and out of ever since, from before 1968. It was sometime after that, Caltrans came in and they wanted to build a freeway right through the middle of that tract of land, right up through the back end of Fort Ord, connecting Salinas to Monterey. That's because the environmentalists do not want a four lane highway on Highway 68 which is the main road from Salinas to Monterey. The farmers stopped that. It's only freeway, it's only this wide, and then there's going to be a gas station and convenience store and something else. Where does it stop? Look what happened to I-80 going to Sacramento. We said no. You're not going to build a freeway through that land.

MT: What do you consider to be your biggest accomplishment while you were president?

BJ: The UFW came to town about then. We had our hands full dealing with that. I don't know if I have any particular accomplishment. The big issues in those days, and as always, are land use, water, labor, and pesticides. I was involved in all of them at one time or another. I was on the Board of Directors of the County Farm Bureau for a number of years and I was on the state board for six years after that. I think we did some positive things towards the seawater intrusion and water reclamation. I was involved in that. As far as the labor problem, we did the best we could. As far as any positive results from it, I can't take any credit for anything. It seemed like something that had to run its course, and it did.

MT: Was there anything that you wanted to accomplish that didn't happen?

BJ: I think we accomplished everything that was accomplishable. We set things in the right direction. Some things are long-term. I'm president of the United States and I'm going to fix the economy, well you haven't time left, it's running out on you. That's the way these things are. You keep things moving in the right direction, if that's an accomplishment. If something happens on the next guys watch I guess you can call it an accomplishment. You did what you could.

MT: What would you have done in your life if farming was not an option?

BJ: If there was anything it would probably have to do with aviation. I toyed with the idea of becoming an aeronautical engineer and it turned out that would've been pretty exciting for what followed after that.

MT: At what age were you thinking about doing that?

BJ: I was first just trying to think of different careers that I wanted. I never set my heart on anything in particular until I realized that I really wanted to be in some kind of business. Here I had a business right under my nose and nobody had any interest in taking it over. It was a no-brainer. If I had gone another direction it would have had something to do with aviation. I was always interested in it. I built model airplanes. Most of them crashed. I used that kind of glue the kids get high on now. They don't build model airplanes now they just sniff the glue. I had this uncle who was only six years older than I am. He was a real aviation nut. He built a lot of model airplanes. He even built a kite that he tried to tie himself to and have a friend fly it. I never saw it but I heard about it. I guess I hung around him enough so it kind of rubbed off on me. I was always fascinated by something flying, something heavier than air. Before I got to Stanford my uncle was a fighter pilot in the Second World War. He came back and bought a Piper Cub and the first thing he did was teach me how to fly it. My mother said don't you ever go up with my brother. I said, oh no, I won't. So, I learned to fly an airplane at 16 and then I took more flying lessons while I was at Stanford with a friend of mine. He ended up, unfortunately, killing himself in an airplane accident in Alaska. He got interested in aviation too. He bought a helicopter business somewhere in the Bay Area and he found out he could lose a lot of money in that business. He still did a lot of flying. He was only 66 years old and he had an amphibious plane up in Alaska that he was flying. I think he was landing in this lake and forgot to retract the landing gear after he took off from the pavement and the thing went end over end or something like that when the landing gear hit the water. That was the end of him. He came down one time when the grape boom was starting in the Salinas Valley. It was all money from investors trying to evade taxes somehow and get tax write offs on investments in the vineyards. I didn't want any part of it. My friend lived up in Oakland so he flew down in his helicopter and he landed beside my house kind of like Prince William did with his girlfriend. He said, I want you to take me down, I have some partners who want to invest in some vineyards and we want you to be a partner too. I hopped into the helicopter and we went down and looked at some vineyards. We stopped and talked to some guys who knew a lot more about it than I did. By the time he got through I said I still didn't want any part of it. So he said, well, then we won't do it. If we don't get you in we're not going to do it, and they didn't. That

probably saved him a lot of money.

MT: Have you flown any other airplanes besides a Piper Cub?

BJ: I ended up buying a Piper Cherokee. It's a single engine. Before that I had a Piper Tri-Pacer. They called it a milk stool because, well, the Tri-Pacer was one of the first tricycle landing gear planes to come out. They were all tail draggers. You would go down the runway until you get enough speed to get the tail up and then you take off. They nicknamed it the milk stool. I never had a pilot license. I knew how to fly and I had a student license at one time. It eventually expired. With the student license you can go by yourself but not with anybody else, not with passengers. Finally I had a chance to buy this Tri-Pacer and so I hired a guy to give me instructions. He did and I got my license. Actually I got my license in a Cherokee. The Tri-Pacer had an uncanny climbing ability. You can get that thing to climb at a very steep angle. I remember my instructor saying, if you get the examiner in here when you go for your license, don't climb this thing as steep as it can go. It's going to scare the daylights out of him and he'll flunk you. Just take it up nice and easy. I started running Cherokees so I took one of those up and took my exam in a Cherokee.

MT: How long ago was that when you got your license?

BJ: That would have been back during the 60s, late 60s probably. I kept the plane probably until all the kids went away to school. I just wasn't flying it enough so I thought, well if you don't fly it, it's like anything else, use it or lose it. I laid off so long one time I had to go to Sacramento for something and I hired a guy to go with me and give me a check out on the trip. I did okay but I just wanted to make sure I was still able to remember everything that had to be done. I kept the plane at the Salinas airport. It was tied down up there. I flied to places like Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, Canada, and Chihuahua, Mexico - pretty far. You always make sure you have plenty of fuel before the border of Mexico because you don't want to buy gas down there. A fellow farmer and I went down there together. There was a group of Mexican farmers that we entertained up here. There was one friend of ours who was a farmer and he was also a crop duster. It was a fun experience. He offered to take us on a ride over the whole area to show us a dam they had there for irrigation, and all the farms. He was going to meet us for breakfast at some restaurant, then take us out to the airport and go. We sat down and the waitress put down some water. My friend and I looked at each other and then at the water. He looked at us and started laughing, afraid of the water, right? We said, well yeah. He said this stuff comes out of wells here, there's no problem. These other parts of Mexico I don't touch the water either. So we drank it and it was fine. Anyway, he took us out to the airport and the airport was owned by two partners. They had gotten into an argument and they decided to divide the airport. I said, how do you divide an airport? He told us when we got there, here's a fence, and here's the runway going this way and the fence goes right across the runway. I said, how are we going to take off? He said, I could get over that fence no problem! I said, this is a hell of a way to run an airport. Anyway, he got us over the fence, we took off and got our sightseeing tour. We got back and landed without going through the fence, but I'd never seen anything like that in my life - only in Mexico.

MT: I heard you were plane spotting during World War II. What was that about?

BJ: When the Japanese hit Pearl Harbor everybody was in panic mode. We had blackouts. You couldn't have any light emitting from your house. You couldn't drive with your headlights on at night if you had to go out. They were afraid we were going to be bombed by the Japanese. All you had to do was look at the map and say, where in the hell are they going to come from? They said, well we need to report every airplane that flies over. They had the spotting stations spaced, I can't remember the distance apart, they were close enough apart so I could see over to the next station. They had all of these charts showing silhouettes of American airplanes and Japanese airplanes with the names of them. For a kid that age who was into airplanes, I memorized everything. I had that down. The kids would do that on the weekends when we weren't in school. The parents would do it in shifts during the week. We'd be set up there with a telephone and a pair of binoculars. It was on a farm about 2 miles from our farm. They set it up in an old outbuilding, a barn or something. They had a B-17 training base at Salinas which is now Salinas Airport. The Air Force built that one. There were a lot of them going by that we would report and there were all kinds of other training flights. You had to call in and say the type of airplane, flying a certain direction, at a certain time. You just called that in. There were some funny incidents that happened with that. Somebody was there and a blimp was going over and they reported a submarine was flying over. I didn't do that. Years and years later I heard another story involving the airplane spotting. I was on an Alaskan tour, a tour more of the islands and the Bering Sea, and we visited Attu and Kiska, the two islands the Japanese had invaded and held for a couple of years. It turned out there was a Navy fighter pilot on the trip with us. He must've been well up into his 80s by then. He had a lot of recollections. I got acquainted with him and started talking to him. He actually had been a pilot in World War II and was called back in Korea. He told a story of a how he was in the Navy during World War II, fighting against Japan. The Japanese zero, which was their number one fighter plane, which we knew nothing about its capabilities, somehow had been in a gun battle in flight. Something hit the engine and the engine just died. He tried to land it on one of those islands but the landing gear caught and the plane flipped on its back and it killed the pilot instantly. The Americans discovered the plane there and it was totally intact. They took it apart and loaded it up and they took it down somewhere outside of LA probably near where the shuttle lands now. Anyway, they took it down to Edwards Air Force Base and they took it completely apart. They got all their engineers in there, they put it back together and got a test pilot to take it up to see what its performance was. He said, the funny thing is we were flying it over areas where guys like me were plane spotting and it never got reported. It was a Japanese Zero flying over California. That was pretty ironic. He said finding that Zero saved a lot of American pilots lives. They found out a lot of the characteristics of that airplane so they knew what it could and couldn't do making a huge difference for our pilots just to have that knowledge. They found out that the Japanese sacrificed airplane safety for performance. It was a very light airplane. Our airplanes were heavily armored and they had a metal plate behind the pilot's seat. That kind of thing made it much heavier. They said if you have any altitude under you and a Zero is on your tail, dive and he can't keep up with you. It's not heavy enough to keep up with you in a dive. You can

escape it. If there was no help around, that's what they did.

MT: When you were plane spotting at the beginning of World War II you must have only been around 11 years old. Correct?

BJ: 11 or 12. I think they probably abandoned that program after a couple of years because the threat was less and less. We do know that the Japanese had ships off the Oregon coast lobbing incendiary bombs into the forest. There is a record of that. There were no actual airplanes flying over US territory. There's just no way. They weren't going to send a aircraft carrier over here just to drop a few bombs. What would that accomplish? They needed all that stuff to combat our fleet. There was submarine activity here. They had those, what they called suicide subs. They fished a few out of the water here not far off Fort Ord. I think they were two man subs, not much more than a manned torpedo. They would have a mother ship that would get in close to land at night and put these guys overboard. I don't think they hoped to ever see them again. This was early in the war before the kamikaze thing later in the war. They fished some out of the water right here. They were small enough to put on the back of a large truck. They never did any damage here to speak of.

MT: Now I want to jump forward to more recent times. How long ago did your wife pass away?

BJ: Just four years ago, 2007.

MT: How did you meet your wife?

BJ: Through one of the friends I'm still in contact with from high school. I knew both in high school; the husband was a classmate of mine. He's the one that has the cattle ranch up in Yolo County. His wife, though she wasn't his wife at the time, was working at a girl's camp, and so was my wife. They met and got to be good friends. It was 1953 or 1954, I think. She invited my wife to come down for the big California rodeo. So my friend Hank, I don't know if they were engaged yet at that point, called me one day and said, Bob you got to do me a favor. My girlfriend brought this friend down who was at the girls camp and if I don't get a date for her friend, we are not going out. I said, okay I'll do that. So, that's when it started. I was just doing a favor for my friend. I went out with her two or three times during the week and had a really good time. I found out her father had a sheep ranch and she knew something about living in the country. They lived in Marin County but they spent summers and weekends up on the ranch. She loved the outdoors and the ranch. I had a number of girlfriends that I just couldn't visualize being out on a ranch so I didn't let things get too far, or whatever. At this time she was going to the University of Oregon which was a long way away. So, we didn't have any contact, a couple of letters but nothing serious. So the next summer she came down and visited her friend again. At the end of that summer she transferred to Cal. That was doable. At that time I was in the air national guard which I had joined during the Korean War because if I went I was going to go in an airplane and not on the ground. I was doing my weekend duties up there in Hayward, not far from Berkeley. So every time I had a weekend up

there I would take her out and she came down here a couple of times to see me. It just went from there. We got married in July of 1955.

MT: At what point did you know she was the one?

BJ: That's hard to say. It was less than a year from the actual wedding. It may have been the summer before. I can't really put a date on it.

MT: Do you remember when you first met her parents?

BJ: That was a long time before because I had been up to the ranch with her. I met them up there. I also met them in Marin. It would have been some time in 1954, I think.

MT: How did that go?

BJ: It went fine. At first her father had the typical impression of what a farmer is; a guy with two cows, a horse, a buggy, and bib overalls. He finally found out I was in a real business and it was okay. When he started comparing the sheep business with my business he said, you got the better deal. The sheep business declined pretty much about the time I met him. It was going downhill and he sold off a lot of the property just to cut down on the losses. It was costing him money to own the property and run the sheep on it. He was better off just to get rid of it. That was the acreage north of Highway 128, around 10,000 acres. He sold that two years after I got married, in 1957. There's an incident I'll never forget, my father-in-law never forgot it, and neither did my wife. There was some official function my father-in-law and mother-in-law had to go to. It was right in the heart of sheep shearing time. So, he asked me if I would go up and help supervise the sheep shearing. I didn't know anything about sheep. I said I'll do the best I can. I got up there and talked to his foreman and ask what the best thing was for me to do. He said, I'll get the sheep into this corral. The shearers are paid by piecework so each one has this little cubbyhole and shearers. They're all electric. You have a piece of burlap sack or something and then there's a pen right outside where he's shearing where you keep this pen stocked with sheep. If these guys run out of sheep, say they finish one and they reach in there and there's no sheep to grab, they're upset because they're getting paid by how many sheep they shear. The foreman says, your job is to make sure none of these guys run out of sheep. I'll get them into the corral and you need to get them into those pens. Well, that was not easy. I managed to do it. There were eight or 10 sheep shearers to be supplied. They had a tally sheet on the wall and every time the sheep was sheared a tally mark would be made there. At the end of the day we had sheared 1006 sheep. I thought well that was pretty good, and I didn't think too much more about it. My father-in-law came home and he looked at the tally sheet and he said this must be some kind of mistake. We've never sheared more than 1000 sheep in one day before. I said, really? He never stopped bringing that up. Of course, a short time after that he sold off that ranch so nobody had a chance to do that. He said, you're the only guy who got these shearers to shear over 1000 sheep in one day. He said, you set a record that still stands. I knew I had it made with him now. I think that was the spring before I was married so I was still trying to impress him. I guess that helped. I've always had an attachment to the land,

mine, and the preserve up there. I had the same concerns about it that my father-in-law did.

MT: Do you think that's what led to your interest in following through with Fred's wishes?

BJ: No question. No question at all.

MT: So, you were married in 1955. Do you have any stories about the time you were married that you want to talk about?

BJ: I don't know if I want to get into that right now. There are a lot of stories there. We were talking about my aviation interest. My wife had a fear of heights. We would take her into one of those buildings in San Francisco with an outside elevator that you could see everything as you go up. She would face the back wall and ask, are we there yet? We would go to Yosemite and go to Glacier Point or any of those high points and she would stand 30 feet away. I'd say, you can't really see the view from there, won't you come over here? She would say, no you won't get me over there. So I always thought getting her into an airplane would be really tough. When I finally got my license and I can take passengers, I took my sister-in-law and her son the first time. They both threw up and I hadn't done anything. It was a normal takeoff, nice easy turns. No sharp turns, banks, or anything like that. So my wife said, if you're going to fly an airplane I might as well get in it with you. So we went up for a test ride out of Salinas. She got in and I could see her white knuckles. Thank goodness we had a low wing so she couldn't see all the way to the ground very easily. She didn't get sick, she was fine. She was wondering when this thing was going to fall out of the sky. I said, you know what, I have an idea. I said, I would like you to be able to fly places with me, but you're not comfortable I can tell. I said, why don't you take one flying lesson and you ask that instructor all the questions you want. Questions about, what makes this thing fly, so you'll be comfortable that there's really something holding us up here. It's not just a magic wand that if somebody takes it away we're going to fall out. She said, well okay, I'll do that. She took her first lesson and she came home, and I asked how did it go? She said, I don't know if you're going to like this but I'm going to get my license now, and she did. She flew all over by herself once she got comfortable with it. There was something about it. Sitting inside of an airplane she was perfectly comfortable once she understood the plane was really going to hold her up. I have no idea what the instructor told her, but he did a good job. Later on she took an interest in hot-air ballooning and she had no problem with that either. She even tried to get me to buy a balloon but I wouldn't do it. I said I would get you all the balloon rides you want without having to buy a balloon. That's a lot of work to roll one of those things up and stuff it back in the bag and put it in the basket too. I've done it.

[At this point we decided to schedule the next meeting and wait until then before starting the last section of questions.]

[end]