

Maureen and Mike

# Mansfield Library

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

## **Archives and Special Collections**

Mansfield Library, University of Montana

Missoula MT 59812-9936

Email: [library.archives@umontana.edu](mailto:library.archives@umontana.edu)

Telephone: (406) 243-2053

This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

**Oral History Number: 396-041**  
**Interviewee: Jake Frank**  
**Interviewer: Bob Brown**  
**Date of Interview: August 18, 2007**  
**Project: Bob Brown Oral History Collection**

Bob Brown: This is Bob Brown and I'm interviewing Jake Frank at his ranch near Park City, Montana, on September 18, 2007. Jake served in the Montana House of Representatives in the 1957 session and was active in the rural electric—the REA, the Rural Electrification Association—as well as being involved in the Montana politics for many decades. Jake, where were you born?

Jake Frank: I was born in Fromberg, Montana.

BB: About what year?

JF: Nineteen fifteen.

BB: You were raised on a ranch?

JF: Yes, all my life. When our folks came over from the old country and, of course, the power company used to go to the bankers. So at that time, they liked those German people that came over that knew how to work. This is when the sugar factory came in. They needed some beet laborers. At that time, everything was hand labor. They were the kind of people that they had that could really do the job. The whole family worked sincerely. That's how it came to be. So that's where I was born and raised. We moved to Park City then in 1913.

BB: Your family homesteaded in this area?

JF: They didn't homestead, but they worked as laborers. The Great Western Sugar Company was starting out. They were busy recruiting labor for the farmer who did raise the beets. We were the beet laborers to start with.

BB: Your family worked hard and eventually acquired land and became ranchers?

JF: Yes. They left Fromberg and came over. He rented a piece of land then down here at Park City. He rented that piece of land and he bought 80 acres. From there we became farmers and started to run our own farm. This was in 1917, I guess they did that.

BB: You eventually branched into the horse business?

JF: Yes, I did. That horse that I had there, I want to say it like this: we weren't poor. We just didn't have any money. Our dad died in 1920. So then my mother raised us. I was the youngest

one of the ten kids. I was three years old when my dad died. Our mother stayed by us kids and raised us on that little farm. Times were really tough because there was a time that the Ku Klux Klan didn't want anybody else to own any land other than the laboring man. Nobody was supposed to own it. We weren't supposed to ever own any land. This is terrible.

When I go back to some of these things that happened, we just had to work for them, follow me? So then my dad died in 1920. He came over in 1912 and he put all this kind of together before he died. Then our mother stuck by us kids. If you can imagine, I was four years old when dad died. We didn't have a car, electricity, or anything. We lived on the cream checks and on the eggs. This is how we got by. She stayed up at night and knitted our sweaters and stuff. It was how she hung tough on all this and all that. This is the way we survived. Our German people were the people that knew how to farm. They knew how to work. In those times, we didn't have a car. We didn't have electricity. We put up ice for refrigeration in the summertime, follow me? We put that out in the wintertime and put [it] up in the ice house. This is how we just kind of survived.

BB: It was tough survival. Did you have an opportunity to go to school?

JF: I went as far as a senior in high school. Things were kind of tough. I had to quit my senior year to go to work. We always needed a little outside income. Dad had put together some horses. How he did this, I don't know. When he came out here and he started getting some good horses together, he bought his first stallion from the Hobart Horse Company in Iowa. He said, "We're going to raise good ones." That stallion was the backbone of all the good horses that we raised. So this is what it was. This is how we finally just bought that 80 acres. Then we bought another 80 acres later on in time.

It was kind of a tough life. We just didn't have any money. Really the thing that was upsetting when I go back and look over it now, is how they abused us people in some areas. We were just supposed to be the slaves. This is kind of how it was. We just had that one good horse there. We raised our horses when Dad died. We kept them. We raised all those good horses and we had one team. We raised the colts. Of course we would ride those colts and do all the things now. We had that team. We'd cultivate the garden at noon. That team, we had them so my brother had a place down by Laurel. At that time we didn't have bale hay or anything. It was all loose.

They'd load up that wagon with that team without a driver and send them back to Park City. They'd come back home and stand in the yard. This is how we just stayed in the horse business. Of course I went to riding. I herded the Park City dairy herd one year, a dollar a cow a month. You'd go down through town and pick up their cows and herd them all day. I would sit down and cry at some of those old breechy cows. They knew how to crawl the fence, the city people's cows you know? I would sit and cry. My mother would bring my lunch out at noon and cry a little bit. We had to do it to make a dollar a month for herding the cows. I had about ten cows.

So we had to do all those things. The only thing that we bought was, you had to have a pair of shoes or clothes or something. This is how we went on. We just learned the hardships and we just kept going. This is the way it was. My mother raised us all. She started the kids out. I was the last one. So I took over the farm then and took care of my mother. I met Esther and we got married. We built a room on the end of our house for my mother. That was the first thing we did was get her a separate place. Anyway, this is the way we lived all through the hardships. It was good work.

BB: Jake you mentioned that you felt sometimes as though people were making slaves out of you. Who was?

JF: They used to have the Ku Klux Klan. They were the instigators.

BB: They were here in this area?

JF: Oh, yes. They had the second strongest Ku Klux Klan organization in the state of Montana.

BB: Here in the Billings area?

JF: Yes. They'd come in and put their white clothes on.

BB: You saw this?

JF: Yes. We'd run home and hide, turn out the lights and stuff. They'd go up on top of the square butte down here. When they got through chasing everybody home and everything, they'd get up there on that square butte and build a big fire to show them that they were in charge.

BB: There weren't any black people in the country then.

JF: No. they didn't want anybody—

Karen Frank: It was Germans.

JF: It was the German people.

BB: Was this during World War One?

JF: Yes. It was after World War One.

BB: The Loyal League of something? They were anti-German to some extent?

JF: Yes. They were anti-everything except the banking business.

KF: They used to [call us?] Dirty Dutchmen. Dad would tell stories about when he used to leave school, other kids used to chase them home. The principal would watch while they would run home so they wouldn't get beat up.

BB: That was probably during World War One.

JF: Yes, it was right after—

BB: The Nonpartisan League, that kind of politics was going on?

JF: All I knew it was as the Ku Klux Klan. They went by that name. They were vicious. They got by. One of them was the banker. You had to be one tough fellow. They shipped them into this country. They'd come into New York. Then they'd ship them to Denver. That was the headquarters. They were setting these people out to be the laborers for the sugar factory, follow me? They were trying to get the beet business established. They needed these people who knew how to raise those beets. That's how come we got into that. So they shipped us from Denver to Fromberg. Then from Fromberg, when our folks left, we rented a place in Park City.

My second oldest brother, he and dad were the horsemen. They stuck together. We lived in the same house for quite a while. My niece and I were born about 30 days apart or something like that. Anyway, they came to Park City, the horses. That's what used to amaze me, where I got these horse people. My dad came over here, but he knew this horse business. He went to the bank. The people that owned the place, I don't know how he got this done, I couldn't do it today the way it was. Of course times are different. He went to the bank. The guy that had that little farm that we have down there now, he wanted to go to California.

He wanted to sell his equity in the farm, his horses and cows, everything. My dad went to the bank and talked the banker into loaning him enough money to buy him out. That's how we got our fourth piece of land. So Dad got in that. They loaned him the money and he bought him out. Then that fall he had to have a sale and disperse of all the extra property that he had. So that's how it came that he got that little farm down there. Then he got sick two years later.

They would have one of the girls, one of my sisters, raking hay. This one horse rubbed the bridle off. He started to run. Dad was out stacking. So he got off of the stack and went on down to try and stop him. He got a hold of the one that still had the bridle. It knocked him down. That time there were just those dump rakes. They rolled him that quite a ways. Finally my sister thought about it and jumped the rake to let him out. That's where the start of his hurt began. Then from there on, it just got worse. Those were some of the tough times. I think about it a lot. My mother taught us then not to lie, cheat, or steal. Those are out. "If you ever do it, I'm going to whip you."

So what happened then, I've got to tell you this story. It seems like it had to have been God's help on that. So my brother Pete had a friend who was planning to be a professional boxer. His

folks lived in town. So he came out there and he would work for us. He'd help and train out there and so forth. He did get to be a good boxer. My mother kind of liked that. I got to tell you this one story here. Then I'll hurry and get on to something else. So those guys would run us kids around from school. The superintendent would see it happen. He would just think it was all right.

BB: These were Ku Klux Klan people?

JF: Yes. They existed. They were the ones that were behind everything that they abused us poor people with. They were the ones that were calling the shots.

BB: Are you Catholic?

JF: No.

BB: I know there were some anti-Catholics in the Ku Klux Klan.

JF: I think they did have quite a bit of that. I don't know about it. That kind of got a whiff of it, but we were just busy saving our lives. I wanted to show you how this thing would work. This boy would come out there and he was training for boxing. He was a tough boxer. He'd come out there and they'd pitch the manure and stuff. That's how you got your exercise.

KF: He came out and stayed with Dad. He was working for him on the farm. He was training for his boxing. He used the farm work to train so he could get tough to be a better boxer.

JF: He would come out there. It was something. He would come out there. He told Pete. Pete got to complaining because us kids would have to run from school. The bigger you are, the more you got whipped. He asked Pete about that. He said, "Who is doing this?"

He said, "Well this guy and this guy." He was a senior and a big strong guy, the bully of the school. Of course his uncle was in the bank.

Pete told him, "We don't want to go up there anymore at night. They'll whip us."

He said, "I'll go up there." Dave was my older brother. Of course we always had an ear out for excitement. He said, "I'm going to go up there and see this guy." So we walked up with him, Pete, Alec, Dave, and me. So Alec went into the drug store and this big bully was in there.

He said, "I come up here. They always tell me you wanted to fight somebody."

He said, "I thought I'd come in and I'd fight you."

He stood about that much taller than Alec. That guy said, "Well, Alec, I don't know you and I don't know if I want to fight you."

My brother Pete said, "You always want to fight me."

Alec said, "That's why I came."

They went out under that street light and Alec was tough on these ribs. He knocked him out of wind three times and this guy said, "Well, you can't whip me. Let's just quit."

Alec said, "You can't whip me either." So then they called off the fight.

During the week this was tough in Park City. They were so upset that their champion got whipped by this kid so the next Saturday night we went up there. Dave and I tagged along. We knew there would be a little excitement. We ended up there and my brother was up there. They set the schedule. So they got Pete in there so they could whip Pete. Pete said, "I've whipped. I'll never forget this." They pushed him in there. Pete was so tied up that when they pushed him in, he swung and he hit that guy and knocked him unconscious. Man, this is a whole turn of things. So then we all found out, something's got to be done. We took them over. From then on, we started boxing at home.

I want to tell you about the wisdom of my mother. So then there were some boys moving up to Columbus. At that time they used to have boxing teams. They needed a lightweight boxer. I was boxing pretty good by then. They came down to get me to get on that team then for a lightweight. They had this team that would put on boxing matches in various towns. My mother listened to this for a while. She said, "What is this about this boxing?" They told her. I'll never forget this. She said, "I'll help teach you how to defend yourself, but not just to go whip up somebody." She wouldn't let me go box on that team. I also thought about what a wonderful frame of mind she had. Anyway we'll go on with something else.

BB: You learned a few boxing lessons anyway?

JF: Oh yes. We boxed. I'll tell you what, we changed the attitude- they found out we wouldn't run anymore. That changed a lot of it.

KF: He's been on the offensive ever since.

JF: Not really, not really.

BB: So I think the question I was going to ask you, was there an event or a person in your life that inspired you to be involved and interested in politics and to run for the legislature, which you ultimately did. You kind of touched on some of that. I understand the experiences in your early life that kind of molded your opinions and your personality as they were. Your mother, obviously, was an important influence in your life. Do you remember a politician? Do you remember a political incident from when you were a young person that might have—

JF: Yes, there were a lot of people. Of course, we weren't party people because we didn't know what the difference between the Democrat and Republican Party was all about. We had a few of those people in Park City that were probably along with the Republican Party and so forth. I suppose that one teacher that I had was probably a big influence on me when I went to school. When I started school, I couldn't speak English very well. Just to show you how tough they were, I was in the first grade and this teacher asked me something. I didn't really know what she said. I said, "What?"

She just slapped me. "I asked you a question." She knocked me right out of that little stool.

I came out there crying. That caused a little commotion. The second graders in the other room came out. This other teacher came over. She was loyal. She did more to change than anyone else in the whole school I think. She wondered why I was crying. I didn't know. So she went in and asked the kids what happened. "He didn't answer something so she slapped him." Boy, that teacher took my teacher by the hand and gave her a little lecture about how she didn't know what she was talking about. Just to show you how long this relationship lasted, she was my second grade teacher.

She taught school. Then her husband died and she retired from teaching. Then she got sick before she died. She picked her pallbearers and I was the only one that wasn't one of the old pioneers that she picked for a pallbearer. That was years later. All those things toughened me up. You don't have to run if you're right, but don't steal or cheat or anything. This was kind of what our bringing up was. We had a neighbor who was a Republican. We didn't know then about politics. We had this old John Wold. He's dead now too. He was one of the instigators in me getting into politics. He said, "You've got to have some people in there that can understand what's going on. The farmers aren't getting their share."

BB: John Wold was a local farmer? He had some interest in politics?

JF: He knew government. He knew who was getting cheated and who wasn't.

BB: Did he ever run for office himself?

JF: No. His boy did once. He's the one that built these co-ops and all that stuff. He started that co-op in Laurel. It's sad today like it is. He was one of the guys that kind of talked to you about doing what's right. So I got to be secretary of the Farmers Union. I was county president. I served on the state board on the Farmers Union. Don Chapman was probably the guy that did more for the farmer—[Leonard] Kenfield was pretty good too. He didn't last long. He died.

BB: Don Chapman was a farmer from Scobey or up in that area?



JF: He was a farmer. Then he also was president of the Montana Farmers Union for quite a while.

BB: This would have been in the '30s?

JF: This was about '45.

BB: Leonard Kenfield was also—

JF: He was state president. He was after Don when he resigned. Then Leonard became president.

BB: When were you active in the REA, during that same period?

JF: I really was active in the Farmers Union—

BB: At the same time?

JF: No way before then. Nobody wanted a farmer account.

Unknown Female: For electricity?

JF: Yes. So what happened, Don was on there then. I was elected onto the state board of the Montana Farmers Union for a while. I knew all the history of what went through with us people before we got electricity and who we had to look out for now.

BB: It was possible that a private power company power line could go right by someone's home and they couldn't get electricity from the wire?

JF: Yes. There were hundreds of them all the way through. Here we were, we sat down there and the power company had to give these people the right-of-way to get through their place to get to one of their loads. They had special loads. When they went through, they had to have them sign a release before they would ever give you power. They came by and they went right by our place. Our neighbors ran the Park City dairy route. He was one of them. Another neighbor wanted to get power and offered to pay the power company the whole cost of the line if they'd get electricity. They still could have the line if we could get them electricity. The three of us farmers did. The other one was on the Park City dairy. They said, "We don't want any rural business."

BB: Was that Montana Power?

JF: Montana Power Company. There was no other power company as rotten as they were. They were the only ones in the area. So then we got this thing going. It wasn't really until when Roosevelt got in. He called in (unintelligible) Massachusetts and the senator from—

BB: From Nebraska, George Norris, and Sam Rayburn from Texas?

JF: Yes Sam. They were the ones that came in and said, "We're going to electrify rural America."

BB: Jake, it was maybe at about that time that you decided that you were probably a Democrat? You had maybe become more aware of politics and that kind of thing because of Roosevelt?

JF: That was it. Roosevelt was the guy. They called them [power company] in and said, "We'll loan you the money at three percent interest and you electrify rural America."

They said, "We don't want any rural business." That's what they told him.

Then Roosevelt called in Sam and George Norris and said, "We're going to electrify rural America. We want you to sit down here and guide us on how we're going to have to do this." So that's when I got interested too. We wanted electricity and couldn't get it. We had to go get a right of way. So we all went to work. They'd pay us ten dollars a day. We had to take the crosscut saws...we had to do a lot of things to prove that we needed the electricity. So we cut these trees. Then we got that little co-op started. We had a bad one in our little area. That's the one that stripped me. They got the power line built from the east toward Worden. Those two guys on the board of directors didn't want to extend that line past Worden. They said, "We don't want any of this. This is as big as we want to get."

BB: On the co-op?

JF: On the co-op. They were elected on the co-op, not appointed. They said, "We're not going to take on these bad bills."

So the fight was on. I was amongst it. We said, "Well how did you get power when I can't?" Then we had to pay three dollars a month for our co-op. I was active in it and then I followed John Wold. He was the second guy elected in our area. He retired and insisted that I take his place.

BB: On the REA?

JF: That's right. That's where I got on the REA. That's where we got the full scope of all of it. They didn't care. They would leave you sitting out here. They didn't care. They wanted the big loads. They had it so well figured that they were going to get these guys hooked on and then if they didn't want them, they'd just shut them off and keep the good loads.

BB: This is Montana Power Company?

JF: Yes. They'd have the line. The lines had been taken over because we didn't—

BB: They wanted profitable customers.

JF: That's right.

BB: It sounds like the same thing was true of those fellows that wanted to stop the line at Worden. They didn't want the REA to get into the same area either.

JF: That's right.

BB: Eventually the line was extended. The REA line was extended.

JF: Oh yes. That's where I got into the fight. How come it was you guys that got electricity when we can't, see? It was a tough fight for quite a while.

BB: That kind of led you into the Farmers Union.

JF: I was in the Farmers Union before I was REA.

BB: Oh, I see.

JF: It was the Farmers Union that led me into the REA. We had to run that.

BB: Was there a leader in the Farmers Union that got you involved in the Farmers Union?

JF: John Wold.

BB: Oh, him too? I see.

JF: Yes. He was the guy that helped me get on that board. Wherever there was somebody for a co-op, he said, "Take Jake. He'll do the job." So that's how I got on that.

BB: That would have been when, in the '20s or '30s?

KF: He went to Farmers Union school in 1938 it looks like.

BB: What was Farmers Union school?

JF: It was in Great Falls.

BB: That's not a regular school. It was a training program for Farmers Union people?

JF: For farm people.

BB: What did it last, a week?

JF: It lasted about a week. Every local sent their presidents and secretary to that school. That was more to kind of get them educated on the co-op, follow me? That's where the profit is.

BB: During that era, you must have started to remember and take some notice of politicians like Roy Ayers and B.K. Wheeler and Sam Ford?

JF: B.K. Wheeler was really respected in our area. That's all we knew. We didn't know other legislators. We had one other legislator who was in there. He was a power company stool pigeon. We knew that.

BB: He was from this area?

JF: Yes.

BB: Who was that?

JF: His boy ran for the legislature—Leuthold.

BB: John Leuthold.

JF: He never stood much for—he was a big wheat farmer. He was running for governor when he got killed [in an auto accident]. So that was another one of the deals.

BB: Do you remember anything about a guy, this would be before your time a little bit, but a guy named Joe Dixon?

JF: No. I don't think he was in this area was he?

BB: No, but he was governor and was defeated in 1924. You would have become just barely aware of him. He was very crossways of John Leuthold. Old John Leuthold was an important member of the state Senate when Dixon was governor. They were both Republicans. Dixon was eventually defeated and kind of lapsed from the picture. Modern historians have a very high regard for Dixon. The trail is pretty cold on him by now. Leuthold lived on and finally died in a car wreck in 1940.

JF: Yes. I didn't know him. We weren't in politics then. If he was crossways with old Leuthold then, he was a legislator I think. It was his boy that I ran against and defeated.

BB: I want to get to that story too.

JF: That's what happened there. You can see where the connection was there with the bank. I don't know how...it's just that there was about ten guys that decided they weren't going to have Leuthold back in that legislature. They insisted that I run.

BB: This was in 1957.

JF: Yes way back then. It kept leading up to the same group that was doing us harm any place. They were always involved in some office. The Republicans saw to that. Park City had a tough go because there were a lot of pretty good Republicans. They were a little mixed up with the equation of it, you know? You had to do it. It was still a strong Republican county. I was the first Democrat ever elected in the history of that county. The thing of it was we really started to fight. We had our Farmers Union locals. We had four locals. That's the one that switched the whole thing was the Farmers Union locals. We had one in Park City and one in Columbus, Absarokee, and Molt. Of course they'd meet once a month.

KF: The issue you were dealing with was electrification?

JF: They all needed electricity.

BB: It sounds like you kind of recognize this as a power structure kind of a thing. The guys that had influence with the banks and the utility companies didn't do much for farmers.

JF: That's exactly right.

BB: So the farmers got together through the Farmers Union and kind of conducted a political uprising against the power structure?

JF: Absolutely. Don Chapman was the guy. Herb Ross was the first one. He was the one that got Bob Purdy to come over from Wyoming to manage our co-op creamery. We had a co-op for everything that there was. We went to sleep at the switch and let the big corporations take them over. Now they've got back to what we've had before we had the co-ops. Rural Electrics is probably the only one. It gets to where it's kind of nip and tuck. People take a lot of things for granted. This electricity belongs to them, but they don't realize that they've got to fight for it.

BB: So John Leuthold, Sr. was a prominent state legislator from this area and later went on to run for governor and as we mentioned, was killed in a car wreck while he was running for governor. Then his son, also John Leuthold, also from this area, replaced his father—maybe not directly—in the state legislature. So you mentioned about ten guys got a hold of you and said,

“Jake, we’re going to try and break these guys’ hold on this thing.” The guy to defeat for public office is probably Leuthold. Is that what happened?

JF: That’s exactly what happened.

BB: They wanted you to do it. So tell me about that. Who were the ten guys? They were Farmers Union people?

JF: Most all of them were farm-oriented. Either they were a member of the local elevator or the local co-op. So it was kind of a tough challenge.

BB: Did they meet with you at your home?

JF: That’s how they started. Then we had a meeting in Columbus. Then they called in all the leaders in that area and said, “Now we’ve decided that we’re going to run Jake for the legislature. He’s going to need some help. You’re all going to have to get in behind this thing.”

BB: Did you feel overwhelmed about that or were you ready for the fight?

JF: I was ready for the fight. I kind of thought it would be all right. I had been whipped around for so long and we knew that something had to be done. There were a bunch of guys that were good, loyal farmers of the area that wanted me to run for them. They were going to support me. I thought that was kind of an honor.

BB: It is an honor and you were a leader in the REA and the Farmers Union then anyway. So you had some experience.

JF: It was. It was a tough fight. I got in there—

BB: This is in 1956.

JF: What happened then, I beat him by two votes. He asked for a recount. He ran the recount and that’s the one that really got everybody upset. I won by just about two votes. After the recount, I beat him by nine votes. He had somebody that was stealing some votes for him.

BB: It’s better that it went that way than the other.

JF: So it was tough. Where I lost out, and I wouldn’t have it any other way, that is when we started seeing Wellington D. Rankin was the guy that was robbing all the poor and running over them and doing whatever he wanted. He would go to the pen and get somebody out of the penitentiary and bring them over and maybe put 40 cows and a trailer house next to somebody who he wanted to buy their farm. They let him go. The guy didn’t even dare leave his wife and

kids to go to town with a gangster out of the pen being up there. They thought that was all right.

That was another legislature deal. John was all right, but he wasn't all right. He is a nice guy and that's as far as he wanted to go. He had a recount and I beat him in the recount. Then they really got onto this deal here. I introduced the graduated land tax. That's the one that got out a lot of good people for it. That was kind of like when they had the Homestead Act. You'd give every poor man a home. We were seeing these big corporations and Rankin taking over these little family farms. My idea was that—if I had been a little bit sharper, I think we would have made it. Every poor man may have a home. We were thinking of that. So how he's going to have a home when Rankin could move a gangster in next door and buy that farm. He'd move to the next one. That's the circle that I was trying to break. They kind of overruled me a little on that because that was getting too political. Political, hell, it's just the difference between right and wrong.

BB: I'm not sure I'm tracking on...What did your proposal do?

JF: It was the graduated land tax. I had it in there. At that time, we didn't have one. It was a start. We didn't have one guy in Park City in Stillwater County who had 500 head of cows. We were going to use the 500 head as a base. From there on up, you'd have an increase in taxation. The guy with 600 has to pay a pretty high price on the 100 head of cows.

BB: So the tax would be on livestock? Was it like the graduated income tax?

JF: The whole thing would take care of all of it. You had to have a scale with which to start with. So if he got up to 500, he couldn't buy anymore land to run anymore cows. There was no reason for it. It was just a good start for it. Boy, I tell you what, Rankin came in with his crew—

BB: He wouldn't like that for sure.

JF: You'd be surprised at the stool pigeons that he got to go with him. That was one reason why I lost. They put in all this money. They ran Leuthold the second time. The second time he beat me. We had three races. It was all right. You see my whole thinking was that if you had the graduated land tax, you had to have a base of where you're going to stop. Some places, 500 cows wouldn't take that much land.

BB: Would you pay any tax at all, say, if you just had 50 cows?

JF: You'd have a regular tax.

BB: The tax wouldn't kick in until you had 500 cows.

JF: That's right. Willard Fraser was the guy that was at my side to help me get this thing together.

BB: He later was the mayor of Billings. He ran for Congress I think. He was a legislator and he helped you with this?

JF: Yes. He thought this was a great idea. I was a little bit awkward too with some of those professionals. Hell, they got some people talking about the graduated land tax, you wouldn't even keep two cows. You know how stories get out.

BB: Was it defeated in the House of Representatives or did it get over to the Senate?

JF: I lost the election.

BB: Was this in the form of a bill?

JF: I had it in a bill and we lost it in the House.

BB: So then there was a Democrat majority in the House right?

JF: Yes.

BB: So you must have lost it to Democrats. Do you know who they were?

JF: Well, yes. All the Democrats, I can't tell you exactly which ones we lost it on. It was a close race. Babcock was in the legislature at that time. Of course he was one of the guys..

BB: He was Republican.

JF: Yes.

BB: He would have been in opposition to you.

JF: Oh, he was. He led the fight in the House. We lost it in the House. I can't tell you all of them right now. I'd just have to go back and look it over. [Dale] McGarvey was one of the guys that was good for us. We had some good Democrats in there. We had Leonard Kenfield, the president of the Montana Farmers Union. He helped lead the fight too. He came in and thought this was a great thing. So we had a tough go.

BB: The Farmers Union was probably the most important opposition to the Anaconda Company in terms of organized opposition?

JF: Oh, definitely.



BB: What was your impression of the Anaconda Company when you arrived in the legislature?

JF: If you let them have everything they wanted, they were nice to get along with. They had their buddies up there. They had their long-term—George O'Connor that George Holecek beat from Carbon County. He was one of them. He was a full-time Montana Power Company employee after he lost the election. He was one of them.

BB: You kind of saw the Montana Power Company and the Anaconda Company working together?

JF: Well, I suppose you'd have to say it. They needed each other.

BB: They closely cooperated from what you could see?

JF: Absolutely.

BB: Do you remember the watering holes?

JF: Yes, and I quit going to them. You had to be dedicated. I had an upstairs apartment at the time. I walked to work every morning and walked home at night. Times were tough. Ten dollars a day we got paid. Montana Power Company and the Republican Party got real close then. This is what I was going to tell you. That's when they built up their strength together.

BB: One impression that I've had from my interviews has been that the Montana Power Company and the Anaconda Company probably cooperated with each other to a great extent in the legislature. You had Republicans who identified more with the Montana Power Company and you had Democrats that identified more with the Anaconda Company, especially the Democrats in Butte. Was that your impression?

JF: Yes, I think that's about right. The Democrats from Butte were pretty solid. Anyway, they didn't have one Republican, I don't think, from Butte at that time. They were all Democrats.

BB: They weren't Farmers Union

JF: No. They weren't like Don Chapman.

BB: Do you remember a guy by the name of [Mervin] Dempsey?

JF: Yes.

BB: McGarvey told me an incident about Dempsey that he thinks involved you.

JF: It probably did.

BB: Do you know what I'm talking about?

JF: No.

BB: The other guy's name was [John J.] Cunningham?

JF: Go a little farther.

BB: Dale said he thought that you thought they were—apparently you had Democratic Party caucuses. They were supposed to be held in secret. There was a suspicion that the Butte Democrats were running back and telling the Anaconda Company what you did. You collared a couple of these guys one night and had a little bit of a Dutch uncle experience with them. He said, "You be sure and ask Jake about that."

KF: Not my dad.

BB: What can you tell me about that?

JF: You know, you know as much about it as I do I suppose. I had a lot of scraps. They did find out that I wasn't going to run.

BB: I want to hear about this one.

JF: They were stool pigeons that were in our caucuses that carried that [information] over. "How the hell did they know that this quick? You're the only guy that would have gone over and told them." That's where I started.

BB: Where did you run into them?

JF: They'd have their watering holes. That's where they got half the guys persuaded if you gave him enough drinks. I wasn't much on the drinking. It was my responsibility to be at the watering hole to see what was going on. Then I'd have to walk through the other side.

BB: So you were at the Anaconda Company watering hole listening? Dempsey and Cunningham were there too. So you started a conversation with them there?

JF: That's where it started really. I said, "How the hell can you guys justify voting for something like this?" We did have pretty good Democrat guys from Butte. Butte was a pretty good (?). Hopefully they got a few of these guys in there. You see that damn watering hole, you'd give enough of these guys drunk, they'd say yes to something. Then they'd pick them out. They'd be in the balcony watching how you voted. I had no fear of them.

BB: You guys left the watering hole?

JF: Yes, we went down the stairs there. It broke up from there.

BB: The story Dale told me was that you challenged these guys for their disloyalty. Then I'm not sure what happened after that. He said the next day in the legislature, he said, "Dempsey and Cunningham showed up and their faces were plastered up by somebody that knew how to box."

Somebody, Dale or somebody said, "Mervin, what happened to you?"

He said, "Well, Cunningham and I were coming out of some place last night and we had a little bit too much to drink. We fell down the stairs." Dale said it didn't look like that to anybody. He said he strongly suspected that Jake Frank knew what happened to those boys.

JF: We were sincere about seeing that we had good laws for our state of Montana. I was a loyal citizen. Of course, I had been brought up by old Don Chapman. Don had taken a lot of abuse before he got sick there and had the heart attack. Don was the guy. He was a former senator, you know. He kind of knew what was going on up there. You could call old Don and he could tell you something. It was kind of a tough go. Damn it, I couldn't see how some people would send somebody up there with that kind of a disloyalty.

BB: Do you remember what the issue was?

JF: It had to have been over this graduated land tax.

BB: That's what I was wondering. When you said—I would think that Farmers Union Democrats would have supported something like that. These guys with the closeness to the Anaconda Company in Butte could care less.

JF: That's right.

BB: They probably had something to do with it.

JF: That's just what happened. A few of our Democrats went lame on the day when the vote came.

BB: I'm curious just for personal interest in the historical record, but there was a fistfight between you and those legislators?

JF: There was a scrimmage you could call it, yes.

BB: You must have gotten the best of it. Nobody said there were any marks on you.

JF: The thing of it was, they found out that I damn sure wouldn't run. That's the thing that they found out more than anything. I was sincere about doing some good. That's the thing that had to happen. I had to learn to fight when I went to school. They'd beat us up. We learned that we could fight back. That's what kind of happened. I don't know.

BB: You had been fighting the establishment all your life. They were a perfect example of the establishment.

JF: That's exactly what it was. Well put. I had George Holecek. He was a sharp old boy. He was the one that beat O'Connor in Carbon County.

BB: In the same election?

JF: Yes. He and I went in there at the same time. George was a sharp old boy. He knew what was going on and he knew how he voted. He didn't get involved on the things. I had been in Farmers Union and been with old Don Chapman. Don took a lot of abuse too when he was state president. In fact, his last letter he wrote to me before he died, I'll have to dig that out one day. He wrote this and I'll never forget what he said. He said, "Jake I'm not going to be around much longer. You will be. So you carry on the fight." He carried that to his grave. It was always for the working man. It was what my connection was. I say Don Chapman in Farmers Union that carried on the fight for the rest of the deal. That Don, he was in the Senate.

BB: Do you remember where Chapman was from in the Senate? I can find out.

JF: He was from country north of Great Falls. [Daniels County.]

BB: Up in the triangle there? Shelby or Conrad or somewhere up there.

JF: North of Great Falls. There was a little town that he ran there.

BB: Okay, I can find him. He's deceased I'm sure, right?

JF: Yes. Leonard Kenfield took his job. Leonard got killed in a car accident. Then Gordon Twedt took over. He wasn't worth a damn. He had been in the legislature [from Hill County]. That's kind of what happened.

BB: You served the one session in the House. The land tax of course was the big battle that you were involved in. Then you ran for reelection. John Leuthold had lots of support and money to make sure that you didn't get back. There was a big battle—

[Telephone rings]

KF: Actually it's for you Bob.

BB: What?

BB: [Returning to interview]: So they made a real effort to defeat you for re-election.

JF: Yes, they did. They damn near didn't make it. The thing of it is, I was a little short of money. The Leutholds weren't.

BB: They bought a lot of newspaper and radio advertising.

JF: Yes, and boy, his twin brother was in the bank. They worked the banks. They worked both sides every place that they could. It was just that they out-campaigned us. They had their machine to go on. In the bank, they were behind him because his twin brother was in the bank. So they had that. I don't know. I always kind of felt as long as I was putting up a good fight wherever I was, it didn't make a difference anyhow.

BB: You bet. Did you run again then?

JF: No. I ran for the Senate two years later.

BB: In 1960.

JF: Yes. I ran for the Senate.

BB: Who was that, Keller?

JF: Yes. Webster Keller, the senator, yes.

BB: He was a Democrat right?

JF: Yes, but he was [philosophically] a Republican.

BB: I see.

JF: Really.

BB: So you opposed him in the primary.

JF: Yes. I tell you, I didn't think that some of the things that were happening should happen to our poor people. That was the one I was worried about. I thought, "Well maybe we can get to them." Of course, when you get to Montana Power and I worked in the REA. They [the REA]

sent me to all of the meetings, Christ, clear to Florida to the REA meetings talking about how they [MPC] were abusing the public. There were a lot of issues that were coming out. I had to be on them. I was getting to the point where I thought, "God, there's a lot of people that couldn't understand it." Here was old Willard Fraser, educated like he was. I couldn't get my neighbor to understand that it was the thing we should have.

KF: Do you want some coffee?

BB: Yes please. You're talking about a specific neighbor or just the general public?

JF: Hugo Aronson was governor. That didn't do us much good.

BB: He was a common person.

JF: I went to him on two different issues and got it. One of them was that we had to have some money to pay for the grasshoppers that one year. I went to him and we had to have an appropriation of some money on that. I told him we had to have it. These farmers couldn't afford to do all of this. He went for it. He said, "We'll see if the state goes into some money to do this control." I thought he was just a gentleman, really. I wasn't so much opposed to him that I didn't think our Democrats were leading enough to get to it. If you got to him, he wouldn't do the wrong thing intentionally.

BB: I'd like to believe that about him. I liked him too.

JF: I went to him and here I was a Democrat. He knew I supported [Arnold] Olsen in that time. He knew that. Everything I went to him with, he let us have. He said, "Jacob, leave your house. You have to get that done." He got us some money for the grasshopper control. We had some education money. I thought he was a complete gentleman as far as I was concerned.

BB: Did you ever have any experiences with Arnold Olsen or Forrest Anderson?

JF: Well, yes. Arnold Olsen was a top-notch guy. He fought a lot of tough issues. He really should have won that race that time. Anderson was too. Anderson was good to me. I mean, we had Anderson.

BB: You're talking about two Andersons, Forrest and LeRoy.

JF: Forrest was the one that I'm talking about. He was all right. I don't know. He didn't re-run [for a second term as governor].

BB: Yes, I think he had some health problems.

JF: Yes. I liked him. I liked Arnold too.

BB: Did you know General LeRoy Anderson?

JF: No.

BB: He was a congressman from the eastern district in the '50s, about the time you ran for office. Then of course you mentioned Babcock a little bit. You served in the legislature with him. So you probably have formed an opinion of him?

JF: Yes, I did and it wouldn't be good. The thing of it is, those guys would count the votes. Sometimes they didn't vote the way they believed, but they had a duty for somebody to do that, follow me? I don't know. I couldn't get too enthused about his leadership. The last time that I saw him, I was a pickup man at the rodeo in Butte. I had to get ready for the bucking horse to come out. I galloped over there. He happened to be sitting in the front row.

BB: This might have been when he was governor?

JF: Yes. I galloped over by there. He said, "How are you?" We shook hands. He got up and shook hands with me over the rail at the rodeo. I saw him one time later. He was a pretty good friend of mine—

BB: He's a likable guy.

JF: He did a lot when somebody told him to do it, I think.

BB: Nutter? Any impression of [Gov. Don] Nutter?

JF: No. I couldn't like him at all.

BB: Did you know him or ever meet him?

JF: Yes, but I didn't know him that well. It's this gut with me, you're either for something or you're against it. You can't be stranded on the fence all the time. All I do then is—the Farmers Union used to have their voting records on hand pretty good. You followed those voting records. You didn't miss them very far. So I couldn't get excited about Nutter.

BB: You mentioned Lee Metcalf at the outset of our conversation, maybe even before we turned on the recorder. Did you know him?

JF: Oh, yes.

Unknown Male: He was going to come spend some time with us after he retired.

BB: Stay here at the ranch with you?

JF: Yes, he'd come out here to see me. I always thought that the best times this state had for leadership was when they had Mike Mansfield and Lee Metcalf. He and his wife would come out.

BB: How did you meet Metcalf?

JF: It had been kind of a long relationship. Most of it was he'd be at the Farmers Union in school sometimes. I served on the Farmers Union State Board for quite a while. I had him—I met him wherever he had a meeting. I think that the best of it was he was our guy for public power in Washington [D.C.]. So if we had problems, we went to Metcalf's office. He could get it from Mike Mansfield. Mike liked Lee, too. A couple of times, Lee wouldn't have made it if it hadn't have been for Mike helping him. I liked that Mike, too. On some of these issues, you know, maybe he wasn't. He was a great man.

BB: I met them both and I have stories about both of them too. I won't talk about them until our interview has ended. Anyway, you felt that Metcalf was a particular champion for public power?

JF: Oh, definitely. There's no question about it. He's the one that said, "Let's go to these locals." I always tried to get him to come to our annual meeting. He couldn't make all of them. He got his message across wherever he went on public power. He was our mainstay guy as far as power is concerned, and it was in D.C.

BB: Probably for the whole country.

JF: Yes that's right.

BB: He stayed here. He was your house guest here at the ranch.

JF: Yes.

BB: Was that while he was a U.S. senator?

JF: He was in the Congress first.

BB: Yes, in the House first.

JF: He was in the Senate when he would come see me. I got pretty well acquainted with him. I was really a good friend of Mike's. Mike was up here when I would run for election. Absarokee was 100 percent Republican. They had Mike speak to the veterans. Mike got up there and by



golly, he got a bunch of Republican veterans too. He just told them, "You have to put somebody that's going to be fair and honest with you." He'd give me a little pitch at their convention.

BB: That probably helped you.

JF: Oh, definitely.

BB: He was a veteran of three branches in the service so he would have had credibility with the veterans. You, of course, met him and visited with him too?

JF: Yes, we'd go to his office. We'd go to Mike Mansfield's office. We were welcome there any time. Metcalf too. Metcalf was a slugger. Mike had to carry the thing diplomatically.

BB: Do you remember any of the visits that you had with Metcalf? Do you remember any of the things that you discussed?

JF: We had a lot of them on public power all the time. I was chairman of our local co-op. I can't recall any certain time that I just had—he used to come to the ranch here quite a little bit. We talked a lot about—he was a good Farmers Union guy. Don Chapman, Leonard—that was the crowd that I traveled with quite a lot too.

KF: Dad, actually, we spent most of our time on the farm. That used to be his dad's place. Then Dad bought this place in 1947. So we did the farm and the ranch the whole time we were growing up. My brother now farms on that farm. That's where most of the time we had, like when Metcalf came, it was down on the farm.

JF: Karen ran for Miss Montana and she was Miss Montana you know.

KF: It was a long time ago.

JF: It would be pretty tough for Miss Montana to have a dad as reactionary as he was. I must tell you something funny about that when she was running. I'll tell you—

Unknown Male: She was Miss Montana and Miss Congeniality too.

KF: Oh dear, you guys.

JF: Yes. We had the county fair. I hadn't liked the way the system worked for a long time. So I (unintelligible) feed a steer. Then he'd take it into the county fair. Of course, the guy that was going to sell his dad a new tractor would bid that steer up. They'd bid that steer up and get them more money. It was always a money making deal for that kid. They'd maybe make 200 dollars or above the cost of the feed. His dad went broke feeding that bunch of cattle. The thing we had was that I kind of got into this deal here where I insisted they should make the thing

practical. So I didn't let my kids take a calf. I made them take a colt. That was a three-year project that you have to ride that colt and train him.

When they got through, they had a broke horse instead of a fat steer that they'd sell to somebody. That was mine. I was gaining quite a little in Stillwater County. I was in charge of 4-H. Karen was riding a little colt. It was a very nice little horse. I told Karen, I said, "He's not responding right."

She said, "Oh Dad, he's doing just fine."

So she had to take him to Columbus to 4-H. Of course, here I was the big horse raiser. My kids all had horses. This one colt wasn't doing right. I knew he wasn't doing right. I ran over and put my spurs on. I said, "Now kick him." She kicked him and he bucked her off right there. Before she even got up, she took those spurs and threw the spurs at me. I picked up my spurs and she went back to get on her horse. She won (unintelligible).

Anyway, the theory was, you see what they do there. It's really against the regulations of education. So the kid came out with the 4-H calf, maybe the hired man helped feed that calf. Then the guy that wanted to buy a new tractor from their dad, they bid him up so it was a big price. It would look like this project was really making money. Well, their dad had 500 head of calves over there and was losing the farm on them. That was the issue that I'm talking about. That's why she had the horses. I said, "You're going to ride this horse. It's a three-year project." That's how it goes.

BB: Well, Jake as you look back over your long experiences of somebody that's been a close observer of politics and has been a participant in it, known a lot of public figures and that sort of thing, is there any theme or any—what would be the story of politics in Montana from the 1930s up to the present? I know that's a big question. It's kind of a philosophical question. Have you seen some good trends and some bad trends? Over the course of your long lifetime, you've got more perspective than most people living today have in the politics of Montana. You can look back 60 or 70 years. None of the rest of us can. What's happened?

JF: What's happened is the big corporate interests took over the land and made peons out of the rest of us. That was what the fight was about when I was in the legislature.

BB: Is that still the fight?

JF: Oh, it's worse now than ever. I'll tell you why; that's the key issue of the whole thing of what the graduated land tax is all about. You let a guy get so big and he couldn't keep on buying land and let the family farmer go on. You see, this is another one that we've had that's really was important. When Roosevelt came in, and I was one of the first members on that committee, we'd go out there. Anybody that would be turned down at the bank, which would be our family

farm, follow me? They'd come over to 4-H, a Farmers Home Administration and we had a county office.

You had a county committee. I served on that committee a long time. You served on that committee and you financed it. You went out and you looked at the house to fix it up. You had a home economics teacher and a county supervisor that worked that. They made it so restrictive, you had to have a letter from the bank saying that they were no longer going to finance you. Then we'd take them in. We'd make ranches out of them. I mean that's where I got the idea that we ought to put this idea on hold to where they could never foreclose. When the bank didn't want him, fine. We had a place for them. Then that bank slips over. Then they come over and take over, indirectly, is the fellow that runs the Farmers Administration.

You've got them now or the fact that they let them do that. We lost it in Washington is where we lost it. The appropriations had to be made. This is the one that's really tough. We ought to hit that hard because we bought the first three farmers in Stillwater County under FHA, we took just good men. They didn't have two cows. They were agriculture oriented. They could run a little farm. The bank kicked them out because they weren't paying their bills. They didn't have enough income to do it and raise the family. So we got this thing in there where we got this right. The Farmers Home Administration, this was one of Roosevelt's deals. So he set up every county with an office.

You had a supervisor and a local committee. Their local committee had to have active farmers to serving on the committee. Here we would select the people that needed assistance. We set up the first three state (unintelligible) purchase by the people that farmed. We showed that this thing could be done. We took those people that were just good farmers but they had no means to farm or no means to finance it. So we took them to the committee. We got it approved. One of them was a dairy farmer. One was a chicken farmer. The other one was a hog farmer. We went all the way across the board and set them up, got them set up. It went on to be a success.

We thought we had won it. The bank didn't like this because it showed that the bankers had that sometimes overlooked a real good farmer, just because they don't have any money. That's what I'm trying to get across. We got that going. We did that. We did the leading deal in the state. They used our method of selecting the farmer, what he did, how he did, and made a success out of him. He was a successful farmer, paid taxes, his kids could go to school like any of the rest of them could. We had that. It worked so good that the banks got upset with it. They'd kick somebody out so then they'd come over to us and we'd say, "Sure. What do you want to do?"

The committee would go out and see how they were doing and what they needed. You can't run a dairy without a good dairy farm. So we made the state look at our three proposals. We took a guy with two bare hands and a good mind and made a good operator out of him. He was a man that was respected by everybody. You didn't need to worry about him being on PWA or

anything else. That's the one that kind of took me in. our local banker, you know, if you couldn't pay your bill you'd have somebody like Leuthold or somebody to buy him out.

BB: Are there not credit unions? Credit unions kind of fill that gap.

JF: Not very much. They do a lot of good. They might do a lot of good to just the borderline deal. They still have to make some money. FHA they got their money right direct from the government. We owed it right to the government, not the local banker or anybody else. That's the difference. They wanted to hire me as state supervisor on that one time. I'll tell you the only reason I didn't take it is because you had to be on the road a lot. My mother was alone on the farm. You had to be on the road so much I just didn't take it. I was really enthused about that program. It's still pretty good.

BB: What's the name of the program?

JF: Farmers Home Administration. Damn it, now by the time Bush got through with them, the other ones they had wrecked. They got them flat wrecked now. I'm going to go to the state executive officer on that. Be damned if they didn't take it. The bank took somebody that they had that they were going to foreclose. The bank thought he was good enough to take his bank with him. It should have been the other way around. When the bank says no, that's when we picked them up. We had to have a letter from all the financiers and the local bank that they couldn't finance him. This turned up wrong. He got mad and foreclosed on this kid. The bank still took him. Now that's how we lost that whole perspective. The banks don't want any competition. They don't want honest competition.

BB: There's been some tension and some competition between the banks and the credit unions in the legislature in recent years. So the banks see credit unions as somewhat of a threat I think.

JF: The thing about the credit unions and FHA, FHA can get government money. We had to pay it back. A credit union has to take local money. So then that kind of limits them.

BB: It's kind of a good concept I think to get the local people that pool their resources together and form their own lending.

JF: I agree with you. It's wonderful.

BB: But you're right, they've got to make money. They can't take any big risks.

JF: That's the only thing. I like the credit unions, but you see the credit union can't go out here and buy a little farm and ten cows and so forth. Then there has to be some repayment planned along with it in time. I hope that they just keep coming. You see what I'm saying is that when we had it, the bank couldn't say anything. You had three county committeemen. Then you had the local supervisor. He was appointed. He'd make the visitation. They had home economics

director too to help the ladies in the house. It was so good. Every once in a while, we'd step on the bank's toes because they'd want to foreclose somebody and we'd go pick him up and make him a hell of a farmer. They'd want him back. Of course sometimes we'd have to give him back because they could only take somebody that could have been turned down by the bank.

BB: You might have gotten the job during the Johnson administration?

JF: It was ahead of that.

BB: Kennedy?

JF: Yes.

BB: It might have been the director of the FHA in Montana?

JF: Yes.

BB: You were on the board?

JF: I was on the advisory board. The state director would be the one that would have been in the office. He would call the shots. You had so many good things. I loved that. I was on the Federal Land Bank for quite a few years. I mean we were limited there, but we took a lot of people. I know it was my leadership for some of those people that we got them to where they got a loan where the bank wouldn't give it to them. The land bank had to be pretty much on the land deal. You had to tie the production of the land in with the payment and so forth. It was good.

BB: We have a few minutes left. We're doing fine.

JF: I wanted to tell you that just like with the Federal Land Bank, they still are kind of Washington incorporated. Everybody likes to finance if you're making money. Some of them would show you how to run that farm and how to do it successfully. That's the one I tell you about.

BB: Once my dad was in a real predicament. He was going to have to sell all the cows to make the payment on the place. He talked to the bank for a little bit about that. He said, "I've known that guy for 30 years. He's my personal friend. He'll always loan me money when I don't need it. He never will when I do." He managed to save the place but without much help from the banker.

JF: That's the business they're in. You see, I had so many of these deals, you are lucky that I'm not worse than I am. Of course my mother always took me along. I would be the interpreter for her and all that. We had that little farm down there. I just tell you, it was nip and tuck. She held

us kids together. She told us not to lie or steal. We kept that going. She kept that going. They'd whip us on our way home.

BB: There are many people like you who had a struggle, as young people. You managed to make a pretty secure life for yourself. I think you acquired a fair amount of land and I think you've been reasonably successful in life. There's somewhat of a tendency for people like that who had to struggle hard and work their way up to be quite conservative in their old age. I think you're the exception. You've still got the same radical fighting spirit that you had 60 or 70 years ago.

JF: That's a good point. I'm glad you brought it up. I'll tell you why that is like that. That is like that, they had really given up. They weren't sure where they wanted the help. They figured that if they did it, he should get it too.

BB: Yes, I think that's right.

JF: That's kind of the theory that I've seen. If we didn't get these good people in time, they were sold out going down the street, people who knew more about how to run that farm than the county agent did. That's the point I'm trying to make. You're right. Some people got to where they about half gave up. They finally made it on through and they never let that happen again. That's the point she was trying to tell me.

BB: I think so. Of the people that I've interviewed, I think you have the strongest convictions still. You almost are a young man in terms of your idealism and your spirit. I think it's more typical for somebody who's fought the fight and started from the ground up, who was poor, and struggled and eventually reached some economic stability to be somewhat conservative in their old age. You're anything but that. You still have the same principles and the same concerns that you had when you were in your youth.

JF: I won't apologize for that. I'm glad I can still do it. We helped a guy when he needed the help. The average banker wants to help the guy that doesn't need it.

BB: You're probably in a position, and I'm being presumptuous about this here, you probably could have been a member of the board of directors of the bank here sometime in your life if you wanted to be.

JF: I think you're right.

BB: That would have been what a lot of people would have done. Most people would have done that probably. You've still got the same attitude toward the bank that you had before then.

JF: It's still there. It's still happening to some of the people that it happened to when I was there. You just have to.

BB: My hat's off to you for your consistency.

JF: If you can't help somebody when he needs help and he sure doesn't need you when he doesn't need you. The thing of it is, when a guy gets down, that's when he needs somebody to kind of boost him up. You've just got to do it. I've known guys that were failures when they were given the wealth of an outfit. They weren't just savvy on how to run it. I just think that our banks are like that. They like to do business with the banker. I had to go to school with a banker's son. He went to school at Park City. He had the one bank. [Meyer] Harris was a good banker.

He was a banker, they closed the bank of Columbus and closed the bank of Laurel and they had the bank at Park City. He bought those two banks and closed the one up in Park City. The reason that it stayed like that, there were all the beef farmers. The wife had to go out and milk their cows. It was tough. They got it done. See, what I get concerned about, Roosevelt was the guy that brought out REA. He said, "We're going to electrify rural America." So he sent these guys in and said, "You go figure it out and do what you have to do." So they started in the East and they've built a co-op for so many members. They all had to pay a 300-dollar membership or something.

They bought that farm and they financed it. They hired a supervisor that knew something about farming to help them. He did that. He got them going. When he got them going, the rest of them had to keep it going. So it finally went nationwide. The banks didn't like it. The banker called me in one time when I was chairman of the committee of Stillwater County. He said, "You can't be doing this and taking my business away." I guess maybe this is the thing that you're talking about that I still haven't forgot.

I said, "That guy over there last year, why didn't you finance him?" "Well, we didn't think he was a good risk." "Well, then if he wasn't a good risk then for you, he isn't now. He's a good risk for us because he's a good farmer."

That's what it takes to run this outfit. That's what happened. I'll tell you there are so many of our people that had really gotten hurt. They were just too tough to say no. When you see somebody taking a cut, I'd have to break these horses. You'd have to say, "Well we've just got to go on. You've got to learn how to do this." Right now is the key to what's happening to our agriculture. Nobody seems to be concerned about it.

I don't know what they're going to do with Bush. I think he's a rotten son of a gun. I'll tell you why in another statement. We've got this. You've got to have these people to where they're kicking them off the farm. They don't want them in town. All this good that these farmers have about how to get a crop out of a piece of land and how to do it efficiently—the horses you know? We've lost all of that. The big guy is taking them over. Not only have we lost that farm as a family farm, we've lost that guy as the farmer.

BB: There aren't as many working on the land anymore. As you look in the future, what do you see?

JF: It's going to depend upon—we're going to have to have a good president. You've got to have a president that has some knowledge about the ability of the working man to make a living. That's got to be. We did it with cooperatives. We thought we had the end there, except they just outmaneuvered the co-ops. So your opposition raised the price until they had him broke. This is the thing that's so terrible about what's wrong with our good farm operators. We had them to where they didn't want anything but the family farm. We knew that. Family farm was the number one issue of any community.

BB: Are you optimistic when you look into the future? It sounds like you're not, from what you've lived through. We talked about the same issues that concerned you involving landownership and the control of money and that sort of thing when you were a young man. You think it's evolved into a worse situation now. When you look into the future, do you see that getting better?

JF: No, it's going to get worse.

BB: Where is it going to end?

JF: Well I can't tell you. I think our people can be gouged about so long and they're in a position to where they've got to go look for a job. Labor unions aren't like they used to be. Their executive there is going to do what he thinks he needs to do. His big boss tells him what to do. I don't know. What I'd like to do, I'd like to see the time that we can still go back and say, "We're going to buy you a little farm if you're a famer. If you've got a farming background, we're going to get you a piece of land and set you up to farm it. You're going to make enough money off of that to raise your family." What I'm trying to think about is getting agriculture back in the hands of the people that know it instead of the guy that's just read the book. That's the big thing.

BB: There's a tendency toward corporate farms now.

JF: Yes. He couldn't run the farm. This one you can never repeat because their dad was such a good neighbor of mine. They were my neighbors. I liked them. By god, he sent all three of his boys to college so they didn't have to work like he did. They got to college and not one of them could run a farm. He finally sold the farm when the last one tried to make it. He was a good guy, but he just didn't know that managing that land makes him that much money. They had been to college too long. That's the thing that gets you. You have some of these guys in college. They get a degree, but they don't know what the degree is for.

BB: I hope those kids didn't major in agriculture.



JF: The thing of it is: I like my fight. I wouldn't give it up for anything. They don't have me whipped yet. The thing of it is, if you don't have some background to understand what actually happened, you can't read it all in a book. You have to know some reality of how this came about. What happened when we had an outfit working in D.C. that specialized in setting up the family farm? They had to have a supervisor that knew something about agriculture whether a dairyman or a farmer, whatever he was.

Our society has got to where, "Well, we can get our food from Japan." Hell, you let those Japs come over, they'll skin us for their standard of living. That should never have entered as happening. I get so discouraged when I go down on the street, there aren't many of my kind left. My kind, they were tough to the end. They quit fighting when they were buried. When a guy like Don Chapman says, "I probably won't get a chance to talk to you again, but just keep up the good work. We'll win." He had that spirit when he died.

BB: Well we're near the end of our tape. Is there anything you want to say in conclusion?

JF: I did all the talking. I should be listening to you. What do you think we should be doing?

BB: We're interviewing you for the archives. We've had a great interview. Is there anything that you want to say in conclusion?

JF: The only thing I'll say is that if we haven't gotten it straightened out, let's go hit them again.

[End of Interview]