

Interviewees Name: Bill Bickel
Interviewed by: Andrew Hobbs
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Interview Conducted at Tom Bickel's Home

Andrew Hobbs interview transcription

Andrew Hobbs: Alright Bill, again, Andrew, (handshakes)

Bill: Andrew

AH: good to meet you, thank you for having us here today

BB: It's mutual

AH: thank you, thank you... we'll do a little groundwork and then talk about the property a little bit. Tell me, quickly a little bit about yourself, where were you born?

BB: Stanford

AH: (mishears) Stamford... Connecticut?

BB: California

AH: California... excuse me. I'm showing my regional preferences!

(both laugh)

BB: Now known as Palo Alto, but I think at 1940 it was Stanford

AH: Ok... named after the railroad magnate, obviously

BB: Yeah, yeah... It's the university hospital

AH: Ok

BB: It was the only hospital in the Palo Alto area in 1940

Ah: And how many people were there at the time, was it an agricultural kind of thing?

BB: I have no idea! You know, when you're born you don't have any idea, it was a pretty rural area though

AH: So you weren't there for a very long time

BB: I stayed in... we lived in Los Altos... actually, when I was born the parents lived in Menlo Park, which is just adjacent to stamford campus... and then they, in like '39, they moved to... built a home in Los Altos and moved there, then world war one.. world war two came along,

there wasn't anybody! We were out in the middle of an orchard, in an area that had been subdivided, and it wasn't until the G.I bill took place in the late 40s and then people started building houses... so... there was... you know, it was really a rural area... remote... and during the war years, nobody had any gasoline, or, you didn't travel much, so, I don't really remember much about that until the 1950s...

AH: Ok... incidentally the paper I'm writing for Steve is about Palo Alto, the tech corridor and it's called "From Orchards to Apples."

BB: Oh yeah, I grew up, I grew up in a combination pruning apricot orchard uhh, it was off Portola and San Antonio Road... it was at the end of Portola, by San Francisquito creek. I stayed home until I graduated from high school and I got married and left

AH: And what year did you graduate?

BB: '58

AH: My dad was born in 41, so your'e round my dad's age... what did you do after you graduated?

BB: After I graduated from Berkeley?

AH: From high school

BB: From high school I went to Cal... Berkeley

Ah: You went straight to school?

BB: No, first I got married, then I went to school

AH: ok... and... What did you go to school for?

BB: Civil Engineer, engineering degree. Graduated with a bachelor of science degree and three kids.

Ah: ok... (both laugh)

BB: Lived in Oakland, and, uh struggled like anybody does at that age and then I went, uh, practicing civil engineering I went to Contra Costa county, and then I went to Napa and I stayed there in Napa for 30 years. Then I ended up managing the public works department in Napa and retired 20 years ago.

AH: so that'd be... round 2000, 96

BB: (proudly) 1995

BB: Christmas of 95! That was my Christmas present to my self

AH: And thats when you came out to this area?

BB: Oh, no, i've been coming up here since 19... 53? 54...

AH: Was this piece of property in your family?

BB: No, i'm.. Tom's cousin. We were raised like we were brothers. But.. His dad purchased.. at that time it was a hunting camp. I was a deer camp, and it was 200 acre homestead that's just over this ridge behind you (Points due west) and it was a side hill, went up like that (motions the shape with his hands) and we started there and then in the late fifties... this area was being logged at that time and after it was logged, uhh, he was able to acquire additional acreage around that homestead, and as the Cooley ranch, uh kinda squared up it's lines... thats what they were doing, thats what they said they were doing at the time... we were good neighbors and the Cooleys wanted to make, uh, the additional land available to an adjoiner, rather than sell to another party, so... this expanded from 200 acres to about 700 acres... probably, i'm guessing in uh, 1960.

Ah: Ok, and it had been Cooley Ranch

BB: this was, this was part of the Cooley Ranch.

AH: What had they been up to at the Cooley Ranch, is that where they were farming sheep?

BB: They had a combination, uh, they, it was sheep, i believe. I'm not, I just don't recall. The others that are talking with the Cooleys would have a better handle on what the Cooleys were doing... At that time were just using this as, uh, well.. when my uncle acquired it, it had been logged, so this thing was just, trash pile, and downed trees and so, we came in and tried to remove a lot of the evidence of the logging... burned... one controlled burn after another to get rid of the slash, uh, tried to do stream restoration through this stretch, so we got, shade canopy... This had always been a popular spot when they were through here deer hunting, to come and bathe, because, as you saw out here in the creek there's some deep pools. So, this was always a shaded area and so thats why the house and the complex was built here. On the property.

AH: And this house was part of the original hunt camp? or....

BB: No, the two hundred acres was separate and... as kids we'd call it hard ass flats because there was a 16' by 16' plank platform on the side of a hill that we slept on... If you rolled off, you'd roll a long ways

(both laugh heartily)

AH: Ok, so this area, was developed after the hunt camp had kind of...

BB: this started in about 62, 63. Part of this cabin has been added onto multiple times, and uh, it was a... Shoot, I think my wife and I came here just after we got married, it couldn't of been here in 58. I dunno, i don't remember. College years are a... escaped me.

AH: Yah, that happens...

BB: Eh... but, uh, yeah, this developed slowly over a long period of time and uh, Tom and I used to joke, we thought maybe since we were from the San Jose area... I don't know if you've ever heard of the Winchester House,

AH: oh, yeah, the Winchester Mystery House

BB: OK, we often thought that uh, his dad was related to the Winchesters because he was only happy when somebody had a hammer in their hand.. so, uh, we've constantly been building stuff and changing stuff. We built all the bridges ourselves, and anything thats here has been built by us.

AH: You guys ever bring a mill up here and...

BB: He's got his portable saw mill, we make our own lumber now

AH: Beautiful

BB: But, uh, we only take trees that have come down on their own, or as their dying... with this beetle. We don't cut any sound trees.

AH: lets see... so you don't really have a sure recollection that you'd been out here in 58, you think that the first time you came out was probably...

BB: Oh, no, I know I was here before I got married

AH: Oh, you didn't know if you'd been here with your wife...

BB, oh, no, no... And sometime in the seventies his dad gave me that spot down, that cabin that you see by the apple orchard, he gave it to us to use for our family cabin, and so my kids spent a lot of time. We'd come up, we lived in Napa, we'd just come up here for the weekends... and I'd be the slave labor for his dad. And my kids would play in the creek and my wife would read to them and so, uh, they have a, my kids grew up with a real interest in this place and in nature as itself, it gave them a good foundation. A good expansion on their education and they also learned to read and listen up here, because in the afternoon when it was hot in the summer, my wife would take them down to the creek and they'd sit in the pool of water and she'd read to them. And she'd ask them questions about what she'd read them.

AH: She'd test their cognition...

BB: Yeah

AH: When you had first started coming out here you'd mentioned it had originally been a hunt camp. Was that something you were interested in or...

BB: Oh, we... al... Our dads had hunted up here in the 20s and 30s, and my dad used to come up here during... well his dad was in the service in the Pacific, my dad was pretty lame and he wasn't military... wasn't equipped to be in the military physically, so he hunted here with friends during that... they actually came up here before the Golden Gate bridge was built, so the came across the harbor on a ferry to Sausalito.

AH: OK, thats a

BB: That takes you back a ways

AH: yeahh.. so, hunting had been something you were
(Bill begins to sound nervous about talking about hunting)

BB: It's always been. I duck hunt. I, I... my dad, his dad and I were partners. My dad and his dad were partners in a duck club. I ended up taking over my dad's chair and then, ended up, my son ended up Toms...

AH: I hunt geese.

BB: Yeah? (relieved)

AH: There's a lot more in Connecticut than Ducks...

BB: Yeah? Well there's a lot more in Geese in the Sacramento River Valley than you would realize. Uhh, before there was rice, that's all there was in the Sacramento Valley was, uh, geese. It was almost like a alkali grass, alkali soil out of the Sacramento River Valley from, uh, Marysville Buttes across to the west side... and the water distribution system didn't go in until the nineteen, uh, 1910s. So, when the water became available, it went into rice and with the rice came ducks, so... I just wrote a... historical... I just got through writing a historical piece on that area where we duck hunt, and, uh did the research on what it was like before

AH: it's interesting how conservation and hunting kind of go together

BB: They go together, yeah! I'm a big fan of Ducks Unlimited, and California Waterfowl Association, and you know, they do a lot of conservation, our duck club is in a conservation easement, this is in an Ag preserve, in a conservation easement. Uhhh.. hunters have an appreciation for the environment that a lot of environmentalists don't understand.

AH: there's a big difference between love and an ax to grind

BB: true. well put.

AH: thank you. so, as you were coming up here, through your boyhood, as you were getting older, how did the game change, what were you seeing earlier, what did you see later

BB: We only focused on deer, and we only hunted deer. When we built this, the use kind of expanded, and we started looking at pigeons, and turkeys, and quail... and wildflowers and new trees and growth and... uh, our horizon kind of expanded as our years continued and less interest in deer hunting and I think we stopped deer hunting around this place 25 or 30 years ago. I mean, I don't think, I don't think there's been a deer killed on Tom's place in the last 25 years....

AH: they certainly aren't scared of humans

BB: oh, my uncle, we used to... there used to be abalone shells all over this area right here, and we had 13 to 15 deer that would come in here every evening to eat... we fed em! Even fed em sheep feed. And it was, you know, it was a magnet, I mean, the kids just loved it. Everybody, people wanted to come up here just so they could see the deer! I was sleeping down at... after slaving for a day, down here, I went down there to have lunch and I fell asleep in my lounge chair on the porch and my wife was sitting next to me, and uh, very quietly, and a doe came up and was... I'd been sweating... and I guess she smelled the salt, and all the sudden this tongue is raking across the top of my head (both laugh) It was a hell of a way to wake up!

AH: I.... I've never had that experience!

BB: But yeah, she stretched her neck out as far as she could... and when you're bald, you know, there's a lotta space up there for them to lick (laughs)

AH: thats amazing! so... it was basically just sort of let go. Not the lifestyle- i'm reticent to call it a lifestyle, but the practice of hunting the land, was sort of let go, as time went on

BB: Ahh... yeah. When my kids started going off to college, then their participation here really kinda dove off, and then they started raising their families and it would become more vacation oriented, than hunting. My son, one son lives in Denver, and he hunts to this day but he doesn't hunt here, he hunts in Idaho or Montana, Colorado, uhh and he's... he is uhhh... not a meat hunter, he's very selective. He doesn't mind going and hunting for two weeks and going home empty handed. When we drove up here from Palo Alto, this place was basically umm, supplementing our families meat. I mean, we enjoyed venison, and I can remember deer hanging in the garage and they had a table set up and my dad and Tom's dad would have a butcher table set up, where they'd butcher it- and they didn't waste anything, you know, the bones went over to my grandmother, who lived on the other block, and she made soup stock outta the bones, we didn't waste anything.

AH: again, that appreciation

BB: Yeah. I mean, It was... his dad, when they lived in Pacific Grove, not a rich family! Never has been. But, uh, his dad, was known to go down to the... he had an arrangement as a boy, he would go out in Monterey Bay and fish, he'd get a free boat for exchanging half the catch with the owner of the boat. And then, he'd put the fish in a gunney sack and put it over the bar of his (motions like a bicycle.... and push his bicycle back to Pacific Grove from Monterey... From lovers point. Lover's point in Monterey Bay, which was probably a three mile trek. But when he went and dove for Abalone... they ate.. Tom and I were talking the other day about the fish chowder our grandmother used to make. Take the heads and bones and scales and everything! So, we had an appreciation for game as a resource, not as a hobby.

AH: so, lifestyle, it's almost an ok term for it. Part of your living.

BB: Yeah! It was part of our lifestyle. And as we got older, and possibly more successful, we didn't need that as a supplement to our... for food needs. We saw it as a part of our lifestyle. I still duck hunt, ehh, even though I've had some, you know you get old, you get some problems... but I'm more selective in what I shoot, i mean I'll sit out there and I'll... the limit may be seven, today, my limit is two. I don't need that much game. But I enjoy being there! We were talking the other night... sunrise and sunset. If you look on my phone, my pictures are sunrise and sunset.

AH: Because that when *your life* takes place...?

BB: Yeah! You know, you see the sun coming up, there is nothing, to me there is... sitting out in the middle of the Sacramento Valley in a duck blind and watching the sun, the increment of it coming up, and watching it changing the colors and the morning sky, is just as pretty as watching the colors as the sun goes down, you have different color spectrum in morning than you do, in the evening. In fact, it's on my computer at home, I have a sunrise that has a lavender, it's a lavender sunrise! I've only seen that a few times!

AH: I have a photograph of the Green Flash, at it goes down, it's the same thing, one in a million

BB: Yeah! Or the bright reds that uh, we live in Roseville now, and um, course I'm looking over Rooftops because I can't see the horizon... But, some of the sunsets... are incredible, depending on the cloud cover, and the atmosphere. I don't know if it's poor atmosphere, or otherwise, but... you get some incredible colors! And that's what I live for, is watching the changes in the day. I like to wake up and be able to look down at the grass. (Laughs)

AH: me too, me too. My friend asked me why I live in the burbs, and I said it's because I can't live in the woods yet... Do you feel like being around here has given you that sort of opportunity on a much larger scale, to see changes over time to a large piece of property? Or do you think it's been so incremental that it's been difficult to quantitate?

BB: Well, when I first came here there were no buildings.

AH: there was, probably more ruins...?

BB: no

AH: from the logging...

BB: Oh, yeah, there was crap! And there were cables and pieces of equipment, but there wasn't a lot left, by then, but... I'd never really thought about it, no. We think our footprint has been one of improving the physical appearance of the place as opposed to just building at random. We've tried to fit things in without making a huge footprint, this was... (motions to land around us) this was a log deck, from the house here back, to where you guys are parked. And, so, we built on the log deck, I mean, it'd been uprooted and changed... And this was a cooler spot than the rest of the area around it. Um, in the summer, that's pretty important, if you're familiar with what Cloverdale's like in the Summer.

AH: It gets really hot up here, right?

BB: Yeah! It's as bad as Sacramento. But, uh, I don't know, I don't know how to answer your question, to be honest with you.

AH: That's ok... Um, Do you feel like the logging had cast a die? Or do you think that the damage from the logging got pretty well...

BB: You know, I don't feel the logging has done damage. Uh, you know, trees mature, You know, it's like... we live and die. And trees do the same thing. Uhhh.. our most productive years are when we become adults, through middle age. That's when we're keenest, uh, when we're the most productive, when we can do the most things, those of us that are healthy. Um, as then as your senior years, you sit back and enjoy your memories and see your accomplishments, and appreciate what you've, what you've learned to enjoy. Trees do the same thing. They grow, and mature, and then they start to die. The same as us human beings. We mature, then we have that long damn dying process. Where you deal with nothing but one health issue after another. This is the first... this is the second time I've been able to be here in the last five years.

AH: Today?

BB: This weekend. This week.

AH: Congratulations

BB: Well, I've... I've had a lot of things that I took care of a daughter that was quite ill, for two years, and then when she passed away, I found that I had weakened considerably by... I sat with her for practically two years, and, uh, that did a lot of damage. Both physically and emotionally and I paid a price for it for the last couple of years. So, I haven't been able to come up here. Came once last year, and uh, I have a mobility problem, i've lost, pretty much, the use of the left side, much like a stroke, but I, through physical therapy and focused concentration I can move around but there's a lot of things I can't do, that I'd planned on doing. So, you, you kinda change. But, I'm going back to the trees. The trees do the same thing. So I think the logging was an appropriate evolution for this area because these trees had grown and died here for years and provided a lot of nutrients, there's a lot of timber here and at that time, i'd been the first time that heavy mechanized equipment was readily available after World War Two, and there was a tremen... the combination of both political and population issues, the GI Bill went in in the late forties, made financing available for families that had come out of the depression, that had come back from World War Two, to be able to get loans to buy and build homes. Buy and or build homes. That changed this entire country, the fact that people, a generation had gone through the depression and they'd been left with nothing. And they went off to war and the economy had picked up and now had jobs again, families had jobs, and they could, they could buy homes. Which, the families had lost everything. So, these homes really meant attachment to the land again, much like the farmers had done when they'd came out west, on the wagon trains. This is my perspective. And, you needed the lumber to build the homes. Because, we weren't an industry based on making steel studs.

AH: Not yet!

BB: Not yet! You know, so, I think that the logging was necessary, and there wasn't, you know, the environmental evolution, as I call it, where people were so concerned and sometimes anal about the environment. To the extent where they won't allow anything to take place. Common sense seems to have fallen to the wayside. But, the logging that took place here was, in my view, and natural evolution of society, as the society progressed. Much like, now, you've got this computer and technological industry, i mean, none of this stuff existed when I was a kid, there wasn't even TV sets, when I started. And to see the things that have taken place in my ilfespan! From communication, technology, medicine, space, I mean, I've lived... Heart transplants are taking place, organ transplants are taking place... Orthoscopic surgery.. Man on the Moon! Cloning... You know, I expect, one of these days, I seriously believe they will be able to bring mammoths back.

AH: sure

BB: I don't see anything as impossible, because of what i've seen in this lifetime, but when you look at my lifespan, versus generations before me, so much progress has taken place in the last fifty years, imagine whats going to take place in the next fifty!

AH: Where you look at the generations before, maybe they could get down to a thousandth of an inch, and your generation, to my generation, just quantum leaps...

BB: Yeah! So, you ask... you know, my, my issue or concern at this point is, you know, logging took place, and it... satisfied a need of society at the time but, these trees are going to grow and die, just like you and I die. And now they're gonna die.. they're going to live with no purpose.

AH: And they'd live with a purpose, if they go to a national identity by bringing people homes?

BB: Yeah, but I mean, If you and I just lived our life and did nothing, and accomplished nothing, it would be pretty stagnant. It wouldn't be too interesting. You put the tree there, it grows and matures, and then dies, and it was never put to any purpose... So, you've got these... you know, it's like the national parks, they don't allow anybody to put out the fire. It does a lot of damage... I mean, the environmental focus, has changed the landscape. It needs to come back to a balance where you do a little bit of everything. But you do it with... you know, you don't just clearcut. I object to clearcutting. I don't think it, I believe in selective harvesting.

AH: Forestry! The real deal-

BB: Yeah! The real deal. So anyway, You know, I look at this place, and I worry about... Tom and I drive around and we look at trees that we've watched grow, over the last fifty years, and we're watching them, just perish, due to beetles or... and yeah, when they fall then we pull em, if we can get to 'em, and we pull em and take them to the saw mill and we make what we can out of them. The lumber is, you know, you don't get the same quality, you just get lumber.

AH: But a hundred, fifty years ago, that wouldn't have happened because the fire would have come through and pushed the beetles out?

BB: The fire, yup. The Indians really knew how to manage the land. There was an indian tribe, or family, that lived here. We know that because we found evidence of them...

AH: Arrowheads and...

BB: Arrowheads and stones, and you could see in some of the rocks along the creek where they ground acorns.

AH: The little areas where they were making flour...?

BB: Yeah, and they'd leech it out. And there was always water here so it was the natural place for them to be... and they were nomads, they moved, you know, spend a season here and they'd move inland somewhat, and then they'd move back to the coast and then they'd come here...

AH: Would you say that you feel a stewardship that had been passed from that family to yours?

BB: Oh yeah. I feel that our intentions are to be good stewards of the land, wether it's here or anywhere. Where the duck club's the same way.

AH: What do you think your perspective, coming from civil engineering and management of community resources, things like that in a more developed area, how do you think that reflects upon your approach towards more naturalistic management, working out here?

BB: Hmm, good question

AH: I have to admit, when I heard you say you were an engineer earlier, I had definitely hoped to sort f ask you this question- my father is an engineer, and no matter what he works on it's approached like an aircraft engine...

BB: I've built roads, bridges, buildings, maintenance, I ended up with many hats, so... You know, I just hope that everything I did, had a measure of common sense approach to it, as opposed to... One of the reasons I retired, really, is I got so damn sick of the political decisions that are made. To satisfy some special interest.

AH: Napa was probably changing quickly too, at that time

BB: Napa was destroyed through urban renewal. When we moved there downtown Napa was cut stone buildings that had been built in the late eighteen-hundreds or early nineteen-hundreds by, there had been a lot of Italians that had come in and, it was... my wife used to go there for Fourth of July parades when she was a little girl. You know, we were looking forward to moving to Napa, it was really quaint, and the neat thing about Napa is that they were, they applied a good measure of conservation early on with the developing the agricultural preserve and retaining the valley floor, and limiting the county's general planned growth, it was 1%, and they stuck to it. All the growth actually took place down at the just the north edge, south end of the valley, north of Vallejo. But, in the valley floor, they had 40 acre minimums, and the wineries just sprung up from that, as a natural evolution. Living there, we left there because it was like living in Disneyland, on the weekends you'd, I mean, we couldn't even get out of our subdivision, on the weekends. And, we couldn't get served in a restaurant.

AH: So, what you're saying, if I'm understanding correctly, is that the minimum parcels created a market for very wealthy land owners to come in and buy it forty acres at a time

BB: Yeah! Actually at the time it ended up being very wealthy, you got a lot of, I mean you had places like Hershey and Coca-Cola would come in and buy large blocks of land because they wanted to create their own boutique winery as part of their... but in doing so they also helped to preserve, uh, the valley floor, and keep it from being residential. Because, Napa would have been... you know, growing up in the Santa Clara valley, where there was nothing, and then Palo Alto expanded all the way to San Jose, or vice versa, it's solid homes as far as you can see and I'll tell you that the soil in the Santa Clara valley is the best soil for growing things I've ever found in my lifespan. I can remember spading my father's garden and, you used a pitchfork. And, there was no dirt clods, it was just loose, black stuff. And we'd, between my dad and my grandparents that lived across the block, we grew all the food that we needed, other than meat. We had chickens, we had rabbits, uhh, but that came out of the depression years. Where everybody was self sustaining. So yeah, Napa has a somewhat similar soil but, very productive for vines and for berries, any of those kind of crops, but grapes became pre-eminent. And they also developed some marginal lands they found they could grow grapes on also, but... when I managed the roads department, we'd try to look at things from a common sense perspective, as opposed to just building for the future, you know, build for the current needs instead of spending all your money in one place, not getting much for everybody.

AH: And trying to predict the future...

BB: Yeah, yeah, we parceled it out in small doses everywhere and I liked that. And, it's the same thing we do here, we can't take on a big project, because it consumes, there's a lot of other things to maintain.

AH: Take on a little bit at a time...

BB: Little bit at a time. Piecemeal, and have a plan

AH: See what resources you can use from one place

BB: And we reuse a lot. I mean, we're constantly reusing, you don't just tear something down, you salvage it.

AH: It's gotta be hard getting material in...

BB: Used to buy a lot of used stuff, but... our folks were in the lumber business so, we had access to lumber forever. I don't know if I really answered your question.

AH: that's ok... I saw an answer in there

BB: Whole life cycle has been on trying to find a use for things rather than throw them away, we practice that here.

AH: so, you feel like conservation has been part of your whole..

BB: yeah, but it's not by training, it's just been part of the natural evolution of the way we were raised. I don't see the same thing in my children.

AH: go on

BB: My kids, are... it's a disposable society. Each generation changes a little bit, I would say Tom's and my experience is... we had parents that had gone through the depression. And that, that issue was driven through to us time and time again. "You don't know how hard things were." My kids, I feel... never went without. I mean, I know I did and i know my parents did, even to a greater extent, but I think, i think my generation has pretty much spoiled our children. The work ethic is good, but it's... you know, i'd like to think mine was better.

AH: I'm not going to disagree with that...

BB: it's easy to criticize your, the younger generations. But, look at the progress that the younger generations are making. I mean, it's just in different areas, all... You know, my perspective is limited by my experiences and your lifestyle is going to be different than mine because you're seeing things from a different perspective.

AH: We're, in general, terrible machinists, i'll tell you that... Hard skills, things like that, typically not my generations best skills, you know?

BB: No. And, my grandchildren's best skills is, uh, with a little device like that (points to phone), either a game boy or cell phone or.... You know, I've got grandkids that would sit on a couch, side by side and didn't speak to each other, but they texted back and forth.

AH: So, what do you think that...

BB: And, you know, I don't know where to go with that. I mean, I look at it and say "Good Lord!" My grandkids don't have any communication skills. You'd have to text them all these questions (Laughs)

AH: My thumbs aren't fast enough

(both laugh)

BB: Theirs are alright (laughs)

AH: How would you, as a parent and as a steward of it, how would you feel about coercing them to separate themselves from the technology to bring them here?

BB: I don't think you can. I mean, I think each generation grows, and goes, on it's own. Priorities change, generation to generation, I think it's a natural evolution, I look at my parents and my grandparents, their values, and expectations on a life are far different mine. You know, I worked in an era where I actually planned and planned about, and planned for, retirement. I don't ever remember my parents, and I know my grandparents never thought far enough in advance to... with the expectation that they were going to work until they died. And that was their expectation. That was never my expectation.

AH: To be honest, people look at my generation and wonder if we're going to be able to retire either...

BB: Yeah but they're looking at it from the standpoint... No, no no... Not looking at it from that standpoint. Your generation is looking at from, you're being told that there will be no money in the Social Security. And, and that is driving that conversation, it isn't about you setting enough money aside or making investments, or that there's something that's gonna come along that's going to permit you to retire. All the conversation is about, the political conversation about Social Security is going to bankrupt, because it's politically expedient, expedient to take that approach. There's some political agenda there and it's not that you're not going to be able to retire, just it isn't gonna be... now, when I retired, I worked for government, and I'd been told for years how much I was gonna get under Social Security. When I went in to apply they said, oh, you worked for government. You don't... you only get a quarter of what your expectation was. Because, you are on a retirement program through government, and so, your Social Security, even though you paid into Social Security for all those years, you get just enough to pay Medicare, Part A.

AH: Really,

BB: Yes.

AH: I didn't know that.

BB: I didn't either!

AH: bunk surprise.

BB: Yes. It's nice to find that out after thirty years I was getting a annual statement on what my Social Security benefits were going to be, only to be told... And not only that, my wife doesn't get any survivor's benefits on my Social Security, because I was a government employee.

AH: So all that talk of people running away with all those government pensions is probably BS, too?

BB: Yes. The biggest problem with politicians... One of my biggest politicians is that... take our state government, as an example. You have term limits for some spots, so you can be in the

assembly for two terms, and then you get, you run for state comptroller, or secretary of state... Yeah, you get your, if you're in, if you're in that one position for eight years, you can draw retirement for that. And then you get paid over here, and when you move to the next job, you retire, from that one, so you get a pension here and a pension there and you're getting paid a salary there. There was just something in the paper this last week about, there's an assemblyman in California, who is a retired policeman. Police officer.

AH: Huge pension there, too

BB: And he's got a hundred and fifty thousand dollar a year pension from CalPers for his, his service as a policeman... or firefighter, which ever one it was. And he's getting a hundred and six thousand dollars as an assemblyman. And he is one of the chief proponents that need to restructure CalPers. But he says, "Hey, I earned my re... I earned mine!"

AH: "Don't touch mine..."

BB: "You're not gonna, don't touch..." That's exactly what he said, don't touch mine. So, you know, a lot of the dialogue you're getting is scare tactics in order for... the politicians are trying to look for a way to take more from the taxpayer and move the money around. That's the... whether it... no matter what the program is you know, it's take from the successful to cover for those who can't be. Or haven't been. Or they didn't plan for. That's just the environment, the political environment that exists.

AH: That sense of, of...

BB: So, so, you can create your bucket list. And you can plan to retire. Now, both myself and my wife worked and when my youngest child finished announced he was graduating from college, she quit. So, we cut out that, that income. Stair stepped down. We went for quite a few years, and then stair stepped down when I retired. We had planned, so that we could pay off our mortgage and live on less money... Course I live on a, I told you we re-use things. There's nothing wrong with a perfectly serviceable used product, as opposed to going out and buying a new computer.

AH: Usually the old stuff is actually better in some way too...

BB: So, anyway, you know it, it.. but, you have to have a plan. And we spent a lot of our lifetime planning for, I retired twenty years ago. So, it's do-able.

AH: Do you feel, that, that... I'll just say it. Do you feel that that redistributive attitude exists in land use as well? Have you ever got the sense that there's some politician somewhere trying to get their hand some this area, or, has there ever been a struggle to try and keep...

BB: Oh, i think, I think government thinks that they should control everything. I think politicians uh, at all levels feel that they're empowered and have a better perspective than you and I have on managing our own resources. Because, they're politically saying that, "I'm looking at the common good." As opposed to the individual person. You know, from a philosophical standpoint, it's a great perspective, and it's an easy one to sell, but... I view it that it's a selfish perspective, that I'm smarter than you are.

AH: That "I know better than you..."

BB: Yeah, and I resent that. I resent that the government- which is us- after all, we elect em, we put them up there, and their attitude changes, "I'm gonna do all these things..." But they, just.. they continue to do the same thing that the people that they criticized before, that they always come away with the perspective that we can do it better than the private sector, and we just need to have your money in order to accomplish that. Your taxes. I'm a proponent that smaller government is better. We don't need all of the services that are afforded. People are able... if you look back, even during the depression years, people found a way to take care of themselves. And before there was government, and there was a time in society where, there was kings and landowners. You know, guys conquered land and then they ruled it. But, people still existed. People still got by. The standard of living is definitely better, and it's easier to live, and there's more things to enjoy, then, you know you don't have to work from dawn until dark... Guys don't go through three or four wives from the standpoint that they wore the first one out, and had to go get another one to take care of the... you know, if you look back in history, at what women, the living conditions that women encountered, in the eighteen-hundreds, pretty horrible. Pretty horrible. Not only did they cook and clean and take care of the house, take care of the children, but they also milked the cows, fed the chickens, took care of the garden, made the clothes, you know, they, they did all that... And all the men did was go out and hunt and fish.

AH: Probably not the easiest thing either, but...

BB: No, but that was the lifestyle. And that was the lifestyle of the Indians that lived here (motions around). The men went out and hunted and fished and women took care of the acorns and the children. Food gatherers.

AH: So, to go back to my question, do you feel that this area, specifically this land, has ever been under the duress of politics?

BB: Oh yeah, yeah. There's all kinds of government regulations on this place now. Things you can't do. I mean, you can't burn! You can't burn your own property. As a good example, you can't work in this stream, without somebody supervising, or approving it before hand. Even if it's a grant, the grant people who are proposing the work have got to work through some other governmental agency in order to get approval before the work can be done. So, everything you do today, I mean, you can't have a trash barrel out there to burn your trash, you've gotta haul your trash someplace. You'e gotta recycle these (picks up paper cup.) So, yeah, government is, you know, they may not be trying to take over land but they are certainly controlling what you can do on the land.

AH: So, there had been some...

BB: Are you getting the answers you're looking for?

AH: I'm not looking for any specific answers at all! I wanna hear your perspective on how this land has changed and how it's changed you- and, thats what we're dancing around.

BB: I don't... I really don't know that... I'm not sure that the land is being used differently then it was. If we've been good stewards, then the land is doing ok. If we've been bad stewards, that's judged by somebody else. Somebody with some other motive. Some other set of priorities. So, that's government saying, "You, you don't know how to take care of your land, of your place as well as we do."

AH: So, the way that you feel is that if this area maintain it's most authentic... what you would like to see for this area is that it maintains it's most authentic representation of what it could be, and has been.

BB: I'd like to see it just remain the way it is without any... I mean, there's a lot more people here than when I was a kid, look at... right here... I mean, today, was a new experience. I'd taken seeing that Galbraith Ranch out of my bucket list and thrown that bucket away years ago. I knew I was never gonna be able to get over there. As a kid, in my twenties...

AH: Even though you'd spent so much time (here) here... \

BB: I hadn't been over in that canyon...

AH: A few miles over, one canyon over...

BB: I hadn't been over there. That first, three quarters of a mile, that we drove on that road, I'd been there.

AH: up to the, up to the outhouse...

BB: Basically up to the outhouse. Because, we have a... Our ridge comes.. there was a canyon that drops down. And it was a beautiful walk, to come off the top and walk down and walk through, there was ferns and trees and it was just gorgeous. And it was a nice, easier walk out to walk out, I'd go out to the road where you came through the gate, i'd come out the same spot, walked and look at what was left of the mill and then walked back to here. Um, that was before we had jeeps.

AH: but it wouldn't have been done, so to speak, to go over to somebody else's land...

BB: Well, Tom and I were talking, once I tried turning left and continuing on, but the brush was so thick I couldn't, we couldn't find a way through it. But, I'd heard of this part of low peak that was mentioned here earlier, a high point you could see... there was an old forestry outlook station up there, and I just wanted to see what it looked like, but I couldn't find my way up to it.

AH: Is was just so grown over?

BB: I mean, the brush was so heavy and dense and everything... so... I took out going back to where we went back today, out of my bucket list, said I'll never be able to do that, because once you get to a certain point, you know... You get used to driving, using jeeps, and that certainly wasn't going to be able to get in there, it was... a pretty secure place.

AH: I'm glad you had the chance...

BB: You don't trespass. Don't trespass. One thing we don't do... we've never done here is... we don't... you know... well, we do trespass because I just explained how we used to... but... you know, not trespass from the standpoint of hunting. But just to appreciate, just to appreciate the forest.

AH: Try to respect each other's privacy...

BB: Yeah, everybody's privacy. You don't belong there, so you, you know, you don't have a right to be there.

AH: And if there's a momentary transgression, it's ok...

BB: We actually got a line that goes over there we were just never sure exactly ever it was... It shows on the map, and we tried to see if there was any landmarks. I looked for years, I looked for survey corners. I spent probably fifteen years, searching for property corners, where we could locate on this place, and I found some of them, but...

AH: So let me just get this straight, at least in my own mind, orientation wise... Galbraith's down there (motions east down road) and the Cooley Ranch was down there.... (motions northwest)

BB: No, that way (Motions towards the Cooley Ranch, upstream)

AH: Ok and, your....

BB: We go to the ridge. Up here. Right up there is what we call the Heliport, which is the highest place on the place.

AH: And it's cut open?

BB: Well we took a dozer up there and made a flat spot so a helicopter could land when they used to do controlled burns here... They'd set up a observation spot up there and the guy that was the fire master would sit up there and guide... And they did a lot of this burning with a helicopter. "Helitorch" we called it. They shot, they shot... They had a (inderterminable) and they shot Napalm out, to light the brush...

AH: I wonder if it was an old Viet Nam rig?

BB: Could have been! Tom, uh, Tom actually filmed it one year.

AH: Really ?

(some other participants say farewell as they're leaving the camp)

AH: Um... and they'd literally just Napalm it?

BB: Yeah!

AH: And what was the last time that that happened?

BB: You'd have to ask Tom, he remembers, I don't.

AH: But it was long enough ago that...

BB: It was twenty or thirty years ago.

AH: And that was the last time that there was a controlled...

BB: Well, they stopped doing controlled burns around here.

AH: Because it was too dangerous...?

BB: Environmental issues. Smoke. I mean, they used to have fireplaces in Santa Rosa. You can't have a fireplace in Santa Rosa anymore Can't burn wood.

AH: You're not allowed to have an outdoor fireplace in Rohnert Park...

BB: Even indoor! I think... Unless it's a burn day.

AH: I don't know if those exist in the burbs.

BB: Times have changed. Laws have changed.

AH: Whats your recollection of whats changed with the water? Do you feel the streams are in better condition, or...

BB: Well, they're definitely better than when we found them. Through this place because, we spent a lot of time doing what they're proposing to do with stream bed...

AH: Yeah, move the banks back, get the silt out?

BB: Yeah... Actually the banks are fine... We don't have much erosion here in the small stretch of stream through this place, but I think it's because of the things we did thirty, forty years ago. Where we put diagonal logs in and we created little riffles and, uh... I'd like to think that, anyway. There's other places upstream on the Cooley Ranch where you get a lot of erosion, and that erosion comes down through here...

AH: Who is stewarding that land right now? Is there...

BB: They're just establishing the new ranch.

AH: Is it still the Cooley family?

BB: The ones that are here, they've just built, they are doing that, they are trying to become stewards of this end of the Cooley Ranch...

AH: They're like thirty years behind you guys...

BB: Yeah, I would say that. And they're thirty years younger than we are!

AH: And they'll bring their own methods to it

BB: I'm sure, you know, Nancy probably could, could probably say, could probably tell you what their plans are. But I'm pretty confident they they're pretty similar to what ours have been. But this, this did not look like this, fifty years ago. There was no green grass, and the trees weren't trimmed up, and there was no place to sit... I mean, you could sit, but I mean, it was wild. There was white thorn that would grow in... we removed it all.

AH: So, you've worked on making a very small area of it very very homey and hospitable, and just sort of be a natural shepherd of the rest of it.

BB: Yeah, and we didn't, we'd just leave the rest of it alone.

AH: Is there anything else you'd like the world to know about this before we start moving towards the wrap up? You've been here a long time, you obviously love it...

BB: Oh, yeah. This is a pretty peaceful place to get away from, uh it's always been... You know, for thirty years we lived in the Napa Valley so it was an hour, oh god, sometimes depending on how I drove sometimes, I could be here in an hour and twenty minutes. Uhh, but for the most part, It was an hour and three quarters. I was wild... and young... now it's three and a half hour drive, sometimes four, to get here...

AH: Because you're fighting traffic?

BB: No, because we moved to Sacramento...

AH: Oh...

BB: When we retired... Yeah... And uh, we wanted to make some trade offs. That's the first time we'd ever lived outside of the bay area, what we call the bay area, living in Roseville. But for our age, where we are now, It's good for my wife and I. I mean, we've been married for fifty-eight years, so...

AH: congrats...

BB: Or condolences, either one will do... They both mean the same thing, a high tolerance for discomfort.

(both laugh)

BB: if somebody asked me, you know, if you were to ask me what do you attribute your long marriage...

AH: I'll ask you, "What do you attribute your long marriage to?"

BB: High tolerance for discomfort!

(Both laugh)

BB: Learn to live with it!

AH: I think that's a great place, lets just kill it (the recorder)

(Laughs, handshakes.)