

Interview with  
Rachael Best

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by  
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Misti Turbeville: I thought that we might just start off with a little family history. Do you remember your grandparents?

Rachael Best: Just vaguely--my grandfather was killed with a car wreck when he walked out in front of a car on 54 when I was three years old. He moved down from Burlington, and Daddy was seven years old. That would have been probably about seventy-five years ago now because my father's mother's been dead. . . .

MT: And you moved down to this area?

Best: Yeah, the farm where we are now. Yeah, it's the same farm. It was my grandfather's and then my father inherited it, and then I inherited a third, and of course I'm buying my sister's third, and then my brother has a third of the farm.

MT: What did your grandfather do before he bought the farm?

Best: I think they ran a boarding house in Burlington and then they moved down here. I don't know what he did. He probably worked in some kind of factory--there's so many factories in Burlington. But I know that they did run a boarding house.

MT: Tell me about the farm. How big was it and what did your grandfather and father farm?

Best: Daddy started a farm--well, he had the farm, basically. He used to thrash wheat a long time ago when I was little, and he would go all around over the community thrashing everybody's wheat in the summertime. Then he had a sawmill. So I guess on a small scale you would call him a diversified farmer (laughter). And then he had some grain, and he had sheep, and I remember when I was really small every once in a while he would kill a sheep. Then there wasn't any regulations on selling the meat, so they would dress the animal and then go around and sell different people some of the--they called it mutton, then. Then when I was about--I'm fifty-two--and I guess when I was about eight or nine years old, he started selling barnyard milk. You milk the cows just in the driveway, in a barn, in a bucket, and you strained it up of course, and put it in milk cans and set the cans out. You had a big cooler with water in it --it wasn't very big, probably held a hundred or two hundred gallons of water--and the cans were sitting down in it. And then the next morning you'd set them out in the mailbox and this truck would come along and pick them up. Then we built this extension barn--milking barn--and I guess we must have milked thirty-five cows, or something like that. And after Charles and I married, we came back--after Daddy decided he wanted to retire. I think we tried to milk around seventy to ninety but I think we did get up to a few over a hundred a time or two.

MT: So it turned into a dairy?

Best: Yes. It turned into a grade-A dairy. We probably milked a couple of years in that driveway before we built the parlor. Probably when I was about twelve years old we did that. That would be forty years ago. And then after we came back we built a milking parlor and we built some more silos and a mix mill, which is one building that grinds all the feed and has pipes that run over to the silo where you feed mixed grain onto the top of the silage, and then you feed into your milking parlor too. Like there was a bin for corn, a bin for oats, and a bin for supplementing. And it all ran into this mix mill and ground it up and then it ran into these different little tubes where you wanted it to go.

MT: All of this was done by hand during your father's time?

Best: Yes, yes, we did it by hand. Of course all of it now is all by automation.

MT: Did your father have any help?

Best: I think he had one or two people to help him, and when we were farming we probably had about two full-time and two or three part-times.

MT: Those with your father--were those full-time? ✓

BEst: Yeah, they lived on the farm. They did the milking, mainly. And then when we had the crops, now, Daddy and Charles too--when they were mainly running the farm--this equipment is so expensive, you don't have many hired hands that you allow to run those big tractors and big silage cutters and things like that. And the risk of accidents, you

know. There's so many things on a farm that a person can get hurt with. And you think of all the money that you've got in them. And those pieces of equipment--they just aren't careful enough to take care of them. So we usually did the cutting--maybe let them haul silage into the barn, that type of thing.

MT: Could you describe your family to me--your mother and father, your brothers and sisters?

Best: Well, I've got one brother. He's a Methodist preacher. And I've got one sister. She lives up in Graham. But they were never really interested in the farm. Now my mother--she was a really hard-working, just a wonderful lady that did for everyone. And she baked cakes and went to the Kerr Market. That was our spending money, what Mama made. 'Cause Daddy, he didn't give out that much of his money. (laughter) Although he gave me more than he did the other two. So I was the baby, I guess, and the pet. So anyway, I never helped my mother--I always helped my daddy farm. I would come home from school, say when I was twelve, and I would go over to the sawmill where he was working and drive the tractor back home. So I learned to drive the tractor when I was about twelve years old. And I always helped him on the farm. I never helped my mother. So when I got married, I didn't know how to cook. (laughter)

MT: What did you do on the farm?

Best: What did I do? I milked, and I hauled hay, and later on, after we had it, I hauled silage and baled hay--I used to run the hay baler. Whatever needed to be done, you

know. And I always felt like you never know when help is going to walk out, so if you . . . (phone rings)

(Best answers phone)

Best: As I was saying, I think it is important for a person to be able to handle your farm yourself if your hired help gets unhappy and walks off. So that's always where we tried to stay--at a level that we could handle it ourselves and our family, regardless of the help situation, because you never know what you can count on with them.

MT: Did your brother and sister help out the way that you did?

Best: Yeah, as long as they were there, until they went off to college. Probably not as much as I did, because I liked it more than they did. (laughter)

MT: Did anyone help your mom?

Best: My sister helped my mother, um-hmm, yeah.

MT: What was your mother's daily routine like?

Best: Well, she was quite an active person, she was active in the church, in the district, in the state, and in mission work. I know one time she went on a trip to the United Nations in New York. And then she was also active in her Home Demonstration Club work. And then in her later years she enjoyed being a pink lady at the hospital. She loved chickens--which I've never cared for--she had her little chicken house and her little eggs. And mother was an extremely good cook. Like she had to have a cake or a pie every day, you know. All this good food. She really was a

good cook and a really hard worker. When I was small she made butter and sold that at the Kerr Market. Our lifestyle has changed quite a bit.

MT: Where was this Kerr Market?

Best: She went to Burlington. We usually go to town in this area at Burlington.

MT: Was this on weekends?

Best: On a Saturday morning, um-hmm. And she would sell butter and eggs and cakes. I guess that was the biggest thing she sold. She made a lot of cakes, and its really strange, you know now we have this hunting preserve, and some of the people that my mother used to sell cakes to occasionally come down. I mean, they are really elderly people, but I know Lawyer Vernon she used to sell cakes to. Now he comes down to the shooting preserve occasionally.

MT: So she was known for her cakes?

Best: Um-hmm. She was known for her cakes.

MT: So she did that on Saturdays, and then these activities that you are talking about are volunteer activities?

Best: Oh yeah, yeah. She didn't do anything for pay. Other than I think one time she did take census. And I know one time I took census, too.

MT: What about her role on the farm and in the home? Did she ever help with the farm work?

Best: Yeah, yeah. Like the milking and all. (phone rings) But as far as getting up hay--I don't ever remember my mother getting up hay.

(Best answers phone)

MT: So your mother did help out with the farm work?

Best: Um-hmm, um-hmm. She helped milk, and of course she tended to her chickens. That was pretty basically it.

MT: Did she have a garden?

Best: Yeah, yeah. She did a lot of canning and freezing and that type of thing.

MT: Did she do all of the cooking for your whole family?

Best: Yeah, um-hmm.

MT: Did she have any help?

Best: No, she didn't have any help. Occasionally maybe she would hire somebody to come in but not on a regular basis.

MT: Did she pretty much run the house?

Best: Yeah, my mother and daddy were real congenial to each other. They worked together. They were a good mother and daddy.

MT: How about coming to decisions? Like when there were decisions about the farm . . .

Best: Daddy did that. He made the main, big basic decisions.

MT: Did your mother mind at all?

Best: I don't really remember. Daddy just ran the business. I don't ever rememeber her. . . . I guess she

didn't object, because I don't ever remember her saying anything about it.

MT: Were there any decisions that she would have been the one to make? On the farm or in the home?

Best: Oh, she made the decisions in the home. But as far as decisions on the farm, he did most of that.

MT: Your hired hands that you spoke of earlier--who were they? Were they single men, or . . .

Best: Well, now over the years we've had a lot of different ones. I think a long time ago we had a colored family that worked. The colored man worked for my father. And then later on after we came back I think the same ones worked for us. And we kept them a while. You can usually say they'll span or last five or six years--that's usually as long as they last--and then they kind of get unhappy and move on. Sometimes three years. And then we hired someone else. The last people we had was some single white boys. We worked a few Mexicans but they really didn't. . . . We just worked them on a day labor basis. These were not very good working Mexicans, so I didn't keep them very long. And then when our children grew up, the boys helped on the farm.

(tape turned off so Best could help an art student)

(problem with recorder--some conversation lost)

MT: Who do you think you are most like, your mother or your father?

Best: Oh law. Say from my daddy's standpoint--the develish side I think I get from my daddy's standpoint.

(laughter) He liked to kindly pick on people, and he never met a stranger. I think I maybe get a little bit of my mouthy side from him. (laughter) And then my mother, she was always so nice and good to everybody and did for people all the time, and I like to do things for people too. Maybe I don't do as much as my mother did but I do like to do things for people. In my community when someone marries I usually always offer the lodge, and lots of times I fix the flower arrangements for all the bridal showers, and that kind of thing.

MT: Were you the baby of the family?

Best: Yeah.

MT: You were talking about how you could get money from your mother but not from your daddy . . .

Best: Not from my daddy! That's when the high school was downtown in Chapel Hill, and we all went downtown and ate lunch. Back then he used to give me a dollar a day to go eat lunch, which was--well, I was driving a school bus and I got twenty dollars a month. So a dollar a day was a lot of money back then! But he didn't give the other two that. I'd get whatever I wanted to get out of him. I'd argue with him and he'd give me whatever I wanted. They never would fool with arguing with him. I did, I didn't care.

MT: Do you think it made any difference since you helped him more on the farm?

Best: Well, probably, probably. And yet, being the baby too. And after we came back to the farm and daddy retired, he came over and helped us. He used to come about every day.

Daddy and I were always really close. I was really closer to my father than I was my mother. All our lives. We were always big buddies. We never ceased to be big buddies.

MT: You went to school at Chapel Hill High School?

Best: Um-hmm.

MT: Is that where you met your husband?

Best: Yep, I met him my junior year. Well, I knew him (before) but I started dating him my junior year. He grew up in Chapel Hill, out on Pittsboro Highway. His father worked <sup>the</sup> in Post Office in Chapel Hill. Then I went to High Point College and took business, and he went to State and took agriculture, and the next year we married and he went back to State and took another year. Then we worked awhile on the farm, and daddy didn't want to increase the farm, so we went to Oxford and he first worked with American Breeders Service breeding cows artificially, and he worked for Pine State Dairy, and he did milk testing and I helped him with the books at home at night. Let me see, we were married in '53 and Mike was born in '55, and then about two years and nine months later I had a little girl, Betsy. So then we came back to the farm. No we didn't, we moved to. . . . He got a better job breeding cattle in Shelby, so we moved up there. We didn't stay quite a year because we really didn't care for it that much. It seemed like it was a different kind of people, you know. We was really close to the dairy farmers in Oxford, and most of them was more educated type people than I found in Shelby. In Shelby I knew the people through the church, but

as a whole the farming population was a fairly ignorant type people. So I just didn't care for it too much. So we moved back to Cary, and he had Wake County where he bred cows artificially. And then after daddy retired we came back and took over the farm.

MT: You worked on the farm for a little while after you first got married?

Best: Um-hmm, um-hmm. I guess for about a couple of years.

MT: Did you live out here?

Best: Yeah, yeah. Mother and Daddy built--no, they didn't build a new house until we came back the last time. First time we lived with my mother and daddy. I worked, I did the billing in Mebane, in the office for Peaches and Cream. And Charles worked on the farm.

MT: So you lived with your parents?

Best: Part of the time, and then part of the time we rented a little house in the neighborhood.

MT: Would you have liked to have stayed on the farm from the very beginning?

Best: No, I think it was good to move off, meet other people, see how other farmers run their farms, which was good training for ~~C~~Charles because he saw how he wanted to run a farm when he got total charge of it. So I think it was a good experience to move away.

MT: How did your father feel about your husband, and about ya'll possibly taking over the farm?

Best: Well, it was okay, but he did make us work for a while, before he would turn it over, to see if we were doing it like he thought it should be run. Which he did, of course. We expanded right much, a lot more than he was, and he saw that Charles was doing a good job with the dairy. He (Charles) improved the production of the cattle--milk cows--so he (daddy) was pleased with that. But as long as he lived we always discussed things with him, and included him in when we was really making some major decisions.

MT: You spoke earlier about the problems of increasing as one reason why, even if you had wanted to, you and your husband couldn't have stayed on the farm right away.

Best: Well, you've got to borrow money to increase. And you can't borrow money unless you have some property in your names, so until Daddy was willing to sell part of his farm, we didn't have enough money. And of course you're not going to build on someone else's land anyway. So that was one reason we was waiting until he decided to retire, and he let me have my one-third of the farm, so we could borrow money on my one-third of the farm. And then we rented the other part of his land. We paid him rent each month for that (phone rings), and then we also paid him for the cows and equipment, market price.

(Best answers phone)

MT: What about your brother and sister and their shares of the farm. Were they interested in it?

Best: No, my brother is a Methodist preacher. Now he has inherited his third of the farm, which he is renting to someone else, but it's pretty much woodland. Then my sister, she wasn't interested, so she's selling me her share of the farm now.

MT: Were there ever any problems over the land--how it was to be divided up or anything like that?

Best: No, Daddy pretty much had three places, three different farms. So I got the home<sup>^</sup>place, and my sister got my grandfather's place and Roger's place, and then my brother got the part over on 54 Highway. ✓

MT: They didn't mind that you got the homeplace?

Best: No. Daddy gave me this, see, say fifteen years before he died, or anything was done with the other property. Anyone of the three could have come back had they wanted to, but the other two were not interested in coming back. It was pretty basically understood that the one who wanted to come back could. We didn't have any question about it.

MT: So it worked out well that only one of you wanted to come back, probably. Would it have been harder if the other two had been different growing up, and all three of you had wanted to farm?

Best: Yeah, because it wouldn't have been that much property, you know. There's about between three and four hundred acres. There just wasn't that much land. Not for two or three people to farm.

(tape turned off so Best could help an art student)

MT: Your husband and you got married in '53. This was before you came back to the farm, that he was working with the breeders?

Best: Well, we actually came back to the farm when we first married, for a couple of years. And then he was doing artificial breeding of cattle. We moved to Oxford. And then he was doing DHI testing, which is weighing the amount of milk once a month a cow gives and get the butterfat to see if a cow is paying for herself. And I did the book work for that. And then he worked at Pine State Dairy too. Granville county was a small county, and they didn't have enough cattle to breed to make a living off of just one job, so that's the reason he worked three jobs.

MT: Were you paid for your book work?

Best: No, I was just helping him.

MT: What were you doing?

Best: I was staying home. I had one little boy, and then I had a little girl while I was there. I stayed home and kept the children, and raised the children.

MT: Do you think that is important?

Best: Yes, yes I do, especially till they start school. I hate to see a little bitty kid have to get out of bed at six or seven o'clock in the morning. I think it's good that they can sleep until they get ready to get up. I think it's a necessity for a lot of people, but other people aren't going to take the time that you are going to take with your own child. You know, in reading. I think it's really important

to sit down and hold 'em in your lap and read to 'em, and they get to the place that they love books. And this creates an interest for them--reading, and books and things.

MT: Did you do any other sort of work before you came back to the farm? Or was this all during the period while your children were growing up?

Best: Let me see. My mother kept Michael a little while when he was little, and I did the billing, right before we moved to Oxford, for Peaches and Cream. When he (Charles) was in college in Raleigh I worked for the state library commission. I ordered books and processed books and that type of thing. And then I didn't work until the children were all in school. In fact, I didn't work any more as far as public work. Now I used to do a lot of volunteer work. Like I was a 4-H leader for a long time. And then I did work through the Home Demonstration Club, and I used to teach sewing classes, like matching stripes and plaids and that type of thing. Until I started taking art--then when I started taking art I quit these other things. Because this has been so much more fun. It's something I enjoy, and it turned into a business.

MT: You told me earlier that you had been interested in Home Ec in college . . .

Best: If I had gone four years I would have taken it. I was interested in crafts, I love to make crafts, and usually a person that's interested in crafts and sewing as a whole is usually a good artist. People that work with their hands.

MT: Were you interested in Home Ec for things that you could do in the home? Or would you have gone out and taught it?

Best: I could have. I don't know. I just like that kind of thing. I like to do flower arranging, and then I like to sew. I did a lot of sewing. Of course, I could sew when the kids were still home.

MT: Did you sew their clothes?

Best: Yeah, I used to make sport coats, and suits, and coats. I was really advanced in sewing.

MT: And you learned to cook?

Best: Yeah, I learned to cook. After I got married!  
(laughter) Oh, me.

MT: Did you learn by trial and error?

Best: Well, pretty much trial and error. I found out you can do anything you want to if you make up your mind to do it.

MT: While you were taking care of your children, you took care of the house as well?

Best: Oh yeah. Well, I usually had help a day a week. I've always had help a day a week.

MT: Ever since you got married?

Best: Pretty much. Yeah, I did the cooking. And then part of the time, about the time my fourth child was born I was cooking for my family plus some hired help. We had two men working for us then, for a while, and I was cooking for them. But during this time, you know there's been a few times that we didn't have any help, so I had to go help milk.

MT: So when ya'll came back to the farm, that was after you had been off the farm for about twelve years?

Begin Tape I, Side B

MT: . . . what things changed?

Best: Well, my mother and daddy built a house. I helped them build this house. And of course they moved out, and we moved into the home place. And then we borrowed money and built a total new milking outfit--a milking parlor and new silos--more big silos--and areas to feed silage, and lounging barns for the cows to sleep in, and I think we rented more land then. And really, over the years, instead of putting money in the bank, we've always bought land.

MT: Adjacent?

Best: Um-hmm. Any that we could get around. Which is now paying off with the value of land coming from Chapel Hill. You know it's been hard. There are lots of times we've thought. . . . And we're still doing it. I'm buying my sister's part. So we're still struggling, paying for land. But we sold some last year that we paid twelve hundred an acre for. We sold it for five. So I think it's paying off. So you just struggle along a little harder. Banks can fail, but land doesn't go anywhere. That's kindly my feelings on that.

MT: What were you and your husband's roles on the farm after you came back to the farm?

Best: Well, I pretty much took care of the house, unless it was a thing like hay. We had to have extra help in hauling hay. I baled hay. Or get up hay. But other than that, unless the hired help left I didn't help milk. But if they left I did.

MT: Did your children help?

BEst: Yeah, they used to get up and feed the calves before they went to school. The two older ones did. Now the two younger ones had asthma, and I guess I got softer. I didn't make them get up. But the two other ones did. They got up before they went to school and fed baby calves, and then they had to milk in the afternoon.

MT: What has been the hardest thing about farming?

Best: I think in the last five years--we used to make pretty good money, you know--but in the last five years they'd take out fifty cents here and fifty cents there and I think it ended up about two dollars and fifty cents a hundred that they'd taken out in the last two or three years. And that was your profit. Plus, getting help. It's been very difficult for me. My husband has high blood pressure, and in the last four or five years he wasn't physically as able on the farm. And the kids--the two boys wanted to farm, but they didn't want to put forth the effort that we had put forth. You know, it's kind of farming, but if I have a date tonight, if something breaks down, I'll fix it when I get through (with the date). We didn't do that. If we had a dinner date or something we stayed home and fixed it before we left. So it

just got to be such a hassle that I just thought it was time to give it up.

MT: Just last week I was talking to someone, and she spoke of the dedication that it takes to farm that people don't have today . . .

Best: They don't have it today. Huh-uh, they don't. I guess we've all raised a bunch of spoiled brats. (laughter)

(tape turned off so Best could help an art student)

MT: You said two-fifty was taken out. I'm not sure what you meant . . .

Best: All right, the government took out like fifty cents a hundred one time, then they came back and took out another fifty cents a hundred. It was money that was taken out of our checks and given to the government. To help them, I guess.

MT: Per hundred--cows?

Best: Per hundred pounds of milk. Which amounts to a whole lot of money, you know. In a month, like it would be a few thousand dollars a month that would come out. Say if your milk check was eighteen or twenty thousand dollars a month, maybe there would be fifteen hundred or two thousand that would be taken out to the government.

MT: Is that just a tax?

Best: Well, they came up with this program a couple of years ago, two or three years ago, that they was going to take this out. Agriculture, you know, had gotten into such bad shape, that they were taking this out to help with the--it was not a tax, but it was almost like a tax. It was taken out

through the dairy, like Pine State would take it out and then they would give it to the government. But, just I think this past month the dairies have increased the price like seventy-five cents per hundred weight. So see, that was your profit, that had gone.

MT: Up until then, did you and your husband enjoy farming?

Best: Yeah, yeah. I think basically the thing that-- well, the children not being interested. Because we had always thought about passing it down. Although, as far as the home place, now, I do not intend on getting rid of the homeplace. Now this other land that we have acquired, it wouldn't upset me to sell that. Some of it we did sell this year, back on the back side. But as far as my home place, I don't want to sell, and of course none of the kids want it sold. They want us to keep the farm. Like it's just going to keep working by itself, I guess! Actually, this government program that they had this past year, you know, that they killed off all these dairy cows for beef? We would have made more money had we sold our dairy cows, and had them slaughtered for beef, than we've got leasing out this farm. But I wanted to farm, to keep it an active farm, as long as I can.

MT: We were talking about the dedication of the next generation. Is farming really just hard work, or is it that you have to be there all the time?

Best: It's really hard work. But if you like it, you don't think anything about the work.

MT: What are the rewards?

Best: Your rewards is to have a good crop, to have a good cow that produces a lot of milk. I really feel sorry for the boy that leased our farm, because the weather this year has been horrible, and his crops are terrible. It's really mind-boggling and nerve-racking. I always notice when planting time and harvest time comes my husband used to get really keyed-up and nervous and high-keyed, and nothing was right to him. You just kept your mouth closed and fed him good and tried to help him. Because they was trying to get the corn planted before it rained, and the ground was right, or either they was trying to get it harvested before it rained and got too muddy, or something happened to it. And see, if you have all this money that you have put into it--up into the thousands of dollars that you've put in a crop--and a hail storm or something can come along, or it can get it so muddy you can't get into the field to harvest it. It is nerve-racking. So it's a gamble. It's a total big gamble. You've got to be dedicated to put up with it.

MT: What are the more personal rewards? You said you've got to enjoy it. What is there about farming . . .

Best: Well, you're your own boss. I think that's one thing. I mean, you doing at your pace what you want to do. You know what you've got to do to make it work, and you just are proud of what you accomplish. It's a self-satisfaction

thing. I think in this area now land is getting too valuable for the return of farming. It's going to be very difficult to farm this high-priced land out here. See, we sold some for five-thousand an acre. There's no way you can get a return back from farming on five-thousand dollar an acre land. I hate to see the farm family go around here, but I think it's the demand of expansion, I guess you'd say, of the town. And we just happen to be in an area (that is expanding). We went out West last year, and I feel like we're extremely lucky to have this valuable land. Out there they're going broke and their land is not worth anything. So at least we've got the land to fall back on. Out there they've got nothing.

MT: And either way it means the demise of the family farm--either because land is too valuable, or it's not valuable enough.

Best: Um-hmm. So you wonder who is going to feed all of us.

MT: What do you think about what they call agribusiness, or factory farms, where . . .

Best: I don't think it's going to work. I think you've got to have your devoted family farms here to make it go.

MT: Why?

Best: Because those people, they can strike, they can walk off right in the middle of a--like the grapes, you know, when they're ready to be picked, then they're no good! I think you 've got to have the family farm to survive.

MT: Do you think animals respond better to more personal care? Do you think it matters?

Best: I think that they probably would respond better. They get used to people that surround them, and they get used to different music. I know it's pretty much proven that cows don't milk as well on rock and roll music as they do on country music, a real calm music. Yeah, rock and roll music seems to upset them. It sounds crazy, but it's right.

MT: Let me get back to just a little bit more about your farm life--you and your husband . . .

(tape turned off so Best could help an art student)

(phone rings, Best answers phone)

MT: On you and your husband's farm, who made most of the decisions?

Best: Oh, we always discussed. We always have discussed anything, because there's one thing I learned when my father died. My mother had always helped him work, but he did not have everything in both their names. So we had to go back and pay taxes on her share of the land, which she had helped work for all her life, which to me seemed very unfair. So everything we have is in both our names. We have always discussed any major decision. Unless it's something like a piece of equipment or something. But certainly any major change like buildings, or land, or anything, we always discuss. Buying cattle, selling cattle.

MT: Unlike your mother and father?

Best: Um-hmm, Um-hmm. Well, it's gotten to be a much bigger business than what they were into. And like I had told you before, I think it's important if something should happen to him that I could--you can't sit there and let your cows wait until after you have a funeral, or after somebody goes to the hospital. I mean, that afternoon they've got to be milked, the next morning they've got to be milked. I think reality is reality. You face it, and you've got to be willing and able to do it. So to me this has just been an important thing for a lady to know how to do. Which I could. Pretty much the last three or four years we had the farm I pretty much ran the farm.

MT: You did? Why?

Best: Well, he had high blood pressure, and he just did not feel good, and had a lot of trouble getting regulated on his medication, and he had just kind of gotten tired of it. So I wasn't going to see it fall through.

MT: So what did you do?

Best: I did whatever needed to be done. I ran the farm. Pretty much all of the decisions. I hired the help, and pretty much made all of the decisions. I usually went and asked him, though, what he thought. One time our help walked off, and that was the last year we had it, so we both had to go back over there and start cutting silage. I think one of our sons was here then, and us three went over there and started cutting silage until we got some more help down there.

MT: Did you do any of the milking?

Best: Yeah, um-hmm. I usually had someone that helped milk, but during the harvest season, cutting silage, you know someone needed to stay in the fields and work, so I would go ahead with the milking and let them stay in the field and work.

MT: So up until these past few years you were primarily responsible for the house while your husband was responsible for the farm work, but you made decisions jointly?

BEST: Um-hmm.

MT: How would you describe your roles--would you describe it as a joint partnership?

Best: Yes, I think so. And then if he needed me to help him, I knew how, and would help him. But I had enough to do at the house.

MT: Did you have a garden?

Best: Yes, I froze and canned and froze, cooked alot--you know, cooked three big meals a day--we always had three big meals a day, cooked. So that's pretty full at home, right there.

MT: And you sewed for the children?

Best: Yep.

MT: When and why did you decide to branch out to include your other businesses?

Best: I had a neighbor that finally talked me into taking art. That was about eleven years ago. And evidently I did pretty well. In fact, my instructor thought I did much better than she could do. I entered a show at Mebane, and I

won--actually it was the second painting that I had ever painted, I still have that painting--so I won the first place in the oil paintings for the show. So I decided--you know I used to substitute teach in school, and I kind of liked to teach, so I decided--well, some people had asked me why didn't I teach art, you know, so I said okay. And I asked them up at the Technical College of Alamance about teaching art. And actually the day my daddy died I was out getting my art class, going around visiting neighbors, getting my art class organized, when he had his heart attack. They didn't find me for about three hours that night. I was out getting my art class together. I started teaching after I had been taking art less than a year, and I've been teaching ever since.

MT: What shape was the farm in when you decided to teach?

Best: It had nothing to do with the farm.

MT: It was going fine?

Best: Yeah, it was going fine. It was just one of my extra-curricular activities! (laughter) You see, I'd always--that's nothing new for me. I used to be in the Garden Club, and I used to help these 4-H children. I'd take them off, you know, on an overnight stay, or I always went to state 4-H Week in Raleigh and stayed a week, and Mama would help with the smaller kids. So it was nothing new for me to take up a new something I wanted to do. I've always been a little bit independent, I guess.

MT: And this was before your husband had health problems?

Best: Yeah, yeah, um-hmm.

MT: So you took the classes. But now you've got a business out here . . .

Best: Well, I started selling--I started putting out paintings in restaurants and things, and I loved it. It's great therapy, you know. If you have something that's really worrying you, you know, you can just paint and draw and forget the whole world. And so it did get to be a business, and I had some friends that said why don't you build a studio, and I had another friend, that displayed my work in Hillsborough and sold right much for me, that suggested that I do an antique shop and the art. She was an elderly lady, but she was going to do the antiqueing end. I built the shop, and we had a few things together, and I bought some antiques. I was in the process of learning about antiques, too, and I was teaching art and displaying art too. She lived about three years or so. I had to take over the antique end and the art end, too. I look back now and think, how did I run the farm, teach art, run the hunting lodge--because Charles has the hunting lodge and sometime's there's people that he wants me to cook meals for, and I lease that out for weddings and barbeques and that kind of thing--and I look back and think how did I do all this? But I did.

MT: That's exactly what I'm thinking. So, did something have to give?

Best: Well, the farm was the biggest problem, due to help. And I would go over there and see the cows getting out, and I'd try to get the fence fixed, and everybody would

promise me all these things, but they wasn't coming through. I'm one that if I want something done I want it done, and do it right. Don't make a mess of it. Charles had tried to get me two years earlier just to sell the farm, which if we had sold we would have made some money, and which now we've taken a pretty good beating on it. But still, this runs as a farm, it is a monthly income.

MT: Were your children grown when you started into art?

Best: Well, Sara is twenty-three now, so no, she wasn't exactly grown. A teenager.

MT: This grew out of a hobby--something you really enjoyed doing?

Best: Well, actually, my oldest girl had gotten on drugs in high school, and I was just really, really down, you know. And my friends said you need to do something for you. So that's when I started to take my art. It was great therapy. And then I just knew what it had done for me--and my mother was older, and I felt like it was good for my elderly neighbors, too.

(tape turned off so Best could help an art student)

MT: You were talking about the lodge that your husband runs. When did he begin that?

Best: Let's see, we built this (the Farm Gallery) six years ago. We built that three years ago, going into the fourth season this year.

MT: Is that when you decided not to farm?

Best: Well, I had had a big urge to build a restaurant out in front of this shop, so he said let's do this thing--he loves to bird hunt--let's do this thing of building a shooting preserve and a house, a lodge, rather than that (the restaurant), because the restaurant business wasn't quite as good then. I didn't want to run it, I just wanted to build it. So anyway, we decided to--we was trying to get some things that we could do after farming, you know. We were already thinking in terms of where to go after giving up the farm. So that's kindly how that idea came about. And this year, rather than having an open membership of people coming when they want to come, we're leasing it out to just ten members. It's a private lodge this year. But he's leasing some more land somewhere else. They have a hunt club, and people come and pay to come out and hunt, so they will have another place probably in three or four miles from here (so) that they can keep the people that's been coming to hunt. Of course, a lot of people come and bring their children, which is good, out to hunt. Although financially it's a better thing to lease it out to these ten attorneys and professional people, than it is to sit there. They'll have a schedule, you know--each person will know which day they're coming hunting the whole hunting season. And that'll be easier on him because he'll know who's got certain hunting certain days. And this other way, they might call that morning and say I want to come this afternoon, and they might call a week

before. Well, you never knew. You know you had to be there to answer the phone. So this will be much easier.

MT: When did ya'll decide that you were going to get out of the farming business?

Best: Well, he'd been trying to talk me into it about five years. And I didn't want to give it up. So finally I just decided last year I'd had enough. So we leased it in December, this past year.

MT: Did he want to give it up before he had health problems or after?

Best: No, it was probably about the time he had health problems.

MT: Just hard to keep it going?

Best: Yeah, yeah. Just a lot of stress and all. And dealing with the thing of no help. You know it's been hard to get dependable help for ten years now. So it's been gradually building up.

MT: You don't have families like you used to--family help who could live on the farm. . .

Best: Well it's like I said before--Oh, you mean like the black families. No, no. The last that we had was single white men, and they would drink a lot, you know, and you couldn't depend on them. You never knew whether you were going to have to go milk or not. So it's just not worth it to me. Not the little return that you get. It was just like recycling money, you know--you had your bills--there had been some months that there wasn't enough in the milk check to take

care of the bills, and then maybe next month you'd make a little bit more. So it's just got to be too much hard work and too much responsibility for the return that was in it.

MT: Would you say that's the biggest change in family farms over the time that you've seen the family farm?

Best: Yeah, now if you've got enough children that are intersted, like son-in-laws and daughter-in-laws that's interested, I think that's the only way that you can do it. That you know you can depend on. But if you know you've got to depend on hired labor, no. You can't do it.

MT: Were there any other big changes that you have seen over the years? In farming in general, or in farm life?

Best: Well, I think that's probably the biggest change right there. And then, too, this thing of industry coming in, and population explosion and all that. I think that's probably the biggest thing. You have to move with the changes.

MT: Has mechanization changed farm life a lot?

Best: I think it's made it easier. But you've got to be more educated as <sup>to</sup> how to use all this fancy equipment. And one thing that you can save money in--if you are mechanical minded and you can work on this equipment. Because when you take it back in, maybe you can't find parts and you can't get it fixed, and it'll sit in the shop for a month, or six weeks. And see, you've got an awful expensive piece of equipment sitting out there doing nothing. ✓

MT: You were talking about how it is harder to make a profit farming. Is one of the reasons because of this machinery?

Best: Well, your equipment is awfully expensive. Like a tractor'll be thirty-five to fifty thousand. All right, you could have a nice house, almost, for that amount of money that you've got in one tractor.

MT: Is it worth it?

Best: It's not to me, right now. If you've got a farm and you think you need all this stuff, like all the push button stuff. You know, people in town have this idea that all you've got to do is stand out there and push buttons. Well, if you aren't there. . . . It's not all push-button, either. It's a lot that's still got to be done, and you've got to know how to work on it if it breaks down. Because you can't feed anything. Your feed's all tied up in these machines, and you can't get it out. It's kind of like a broken down computer! Pretty basically, it's the same thing. So it's not all the fantasy that people think it is.

MT: Do you think there is any hope of relying less on machinery?

Best: No, no, I think we'll have to be mechanized to keep up with the times, to get it done quicker. And I guess farmers will just have to move on out a bit for towns to expand, that's all I see that they can do. See, in this area we have to have bigger equipment than they have to have down east. Because of the red dirt. Down east it's sandy soil,

and you can take a small tractor, less expensive tractor, and plow a field for less money than we can up here, because we got this hard soil. We got to have a bigger piece of equipment.

MT: I have one other question--about the 4-H and Home Demonstration Club that you were active in. Is there something important there to pass on to the next generation?

Best: I think so, I think 4-H is really good training for young people . . . (phone rings).

(Best answers phone)

Best: 4-H just got some really good programs to train young people in. One is public speaking, and a lot them are for girls--like your cooking and your sewing demonstrations--and I think that's good. It gives the person experience talking in front of the public, which . . .

End of tape

Notes on end of interview, after tape stopped:

Best went on to say that she thought it was an asset for girls to know how to cook. "So many of them don't do anything," she said. She thought that they should be helping their mothers who work outside the home--helping to cook and clean. Best taught girls to sew, in a one-to-one apprentice-type relationship which is typical of many 4-H projects. "We had a ball," she said, talking about the sewing, and then afterwards they would just play around and have a good time.

"Don't you think everybody is too busy (today)?" she asked me. She thinks people are just too busy to do things that are simply fun. She suggests kids today are "feeling too pushed" and are "so give-out" with classes that they never really wanted to take or will never use.