

K-3

10-26-85

(Omit discussion regarding land Rachael Best sold in Alamance County)

LH: What was your feeling about OWASA?

BEST: OWASA? I think that's just a front for the University. And I think that Everett Billingsley just has a job to do and I think Everett, I know Everett, you know I've gotten to know him through this, he and his wife come out here. He's just basically doing his job--and I think he does it well. (laughter) He makes Thomas (Teer) so mad he could stomp him. But, I think he's doing a pretty good job. But, the university hired him to be their front man, the ugly man, to set up here and you know, and it seems not to bother Everett for somebody to get mad and cuss him out, and he just sits there and grins and goes on about his business. So that's kinda how he is.

LH: You had to deal with him when you were in the CCA? What did you do?

BEST: What did I do? Oh, one time I ... (phone rings)

(Omit phone conversation)

No, my feeling are the reason for the Cane Creek is for expansion. I think it's a triad association or something decided several years ago that it'd be one metropolitan area from Chapel Hill to Winston and I think this is just in the plan. And they could get all the water they really needed out of Jordan, and see there for awhile, some of the people from the University, Dan Okun, was telling about the quality of the water was not good. Now they've turned all that around, and after this temporary damn has been built, and say: yeah, I think the quality of the Jordan is O.K. So, see, that was just a political move right there. So, uh, I think that they do know that the water brings people and that was one reason for bringing it on, and I think in their long plans they have a plan to phase out the dairy business around here, you know, which they can easily do.

LH: Why do they want to phase out ^{the} dairy business?

BEST: Well they, the people in Chapel Hill don't...well one time we had a meeting and some lady got up and she said, "I don't need, we don't need the dairy farms out here we can go to the A&P and get our milk." You know, long range, they don't realize that some way or another there's got to be these hard-working farmers to produce this food. They just don't even stop to think about that. So I think they would rather have houses, and people with the Triangle Research and the University out here on this land and just phase out the farm land and I think that's what they will eventually do. Of course, with the prices that the farmers are getting for milk right now, they aren't having to do it, the government's doing it, because it's so little money for the hard work and the many hours that you put into it. Plus, who can farm \$5,000 dollar acre land? I mean, you can't afford to do it. And some of it's worth even more than that on 54 highway. So the land we sold, is half a mile off 54 and kinda back in the woods, for 3900, so it's just hard to justify farming that price land. That's basically what I see has happened.

LH: So when you were in the CCCA, ^{you} spent some time figuring out the other alternatives?

BEST: Oh yeah, I was an officer, it's been four or five years ago now and I've forgotten what office I had. (laughter) I've had too many other irons in the fire since then. Anyway, we have always been supportive, you know, whatever my neighbors are doing, and if I think it's right, you know I'll be in there helping them.

LH: What are they doing now?

BEST: Well they're getting ready for this barbeque. See they still owe right much legal money. So that's what's got to be paid off. Now as far as what Thomas Teer's doing I guess he will mainly do this on his own... as far as paying the legal expenses but I do know they do owe several thousand dollars, and that's why their having this barbeque and Fall crafts fair again. And what they do lots of times like Thanksgiving or Christmas, some of the farmers will get together and barbeque shoulders and sell them—just take orders for them, and that's been, you know a pretty good money maker. But at first everybody was jumping in there helping and paying financially and you know as it kinda wears itself out over the years, and people quit contributing financially. That's right. You get tired. So... what else do you want to know?

LH: Well, you know one thing I was wondering is if you were the only woman in the CCA? Did you feel like everyone contributed equally?

BEST: Oh no. Everyone helped. It was really a total community project--just totally.... in this area. About as big and good total cooperation as anything I've ever seen.

LH: All kinds of people were doing things?

BEST: Everybody.

LH: Single people?

BEST: Yes. And you know, we just all got in there. See for instance in the barbeque, well my job always, I season the barbeque. (laughter) And then, but we were

all getting in the kitchen together, and as I say it would be like a doctor and a lawyer and a farmer and a whatnot just standing there working side by side, and ^{then} it didn't matter what you were, it was that you were just in there helping and everybody appreciated you helping, and that was it. That was enough right there. So I think it has been good for that. And then on the other way I look at this-- I guess I see it in two ways. If we are having all this expansion coming in... I think we really should be in on the groundwork, on the plans of the thing. Now I know there's an awful lot of people coming in to stay, and, I know there's a lot of water in the Jordan, but I think this could be another ^{re} source of water too. And I think it looks like a real shame to get rid of all these farms in order for the water. Because I think the food is just as important as the water.

LH: Do you think there could be a compromise?

BEST: Umm, hmm. I think that's what hasn't been even seen hardly, you know, in Chapel Hill. It's a thing of you know, water brings people, we want the expansion of people out here, we want the land regardless of the farmers, not even taking into consideration you know, hey these people are supplying milk for all this many folks in Chapel Hill-Raleigh-Durham area. And any time you ship in milk it's not fresh, and not the same quality as when you're right there locally.

LH: Is your Dad still in the dairy business?

BEST: No, oh no. We were, my daddy he died right along about that time, and he had already retired by that time. We've been in the dairy business about twenty-five years here. And he was in about thirty years before that.

LH: So you come from a long line of...

BEST: Yeah, but not as old as some of the other families in this area.

LH: What do you think is the next step? ^{mean is} I _{mean} there anything to be done, or do you sort of feel like it's been done already?

BEST: No, I think the dam will be built. The temporary's already there. And I

think they'd be awfully foolish, if they've come this far they sure have used a lot of taxpayers money, you know, not to. Because all the land's been bought but one parcel, so I think they've spent so much money not to go on through with what they had started. And I think it will be gone on through with.

LH: You think there's any way to get the community together again? To have some more say in this?

BEST: I think they've really, they've really hung in there and been listened to for longer than I thought they ever would be. You know they've held them off for this long, what is it seven years I think? And see they thought that when they came in here they would have the dam up, the permanent dam, in six months. You know they thought this is a bunch of little stupid farmers that don't know anything legally and we'll just move in here and we'll just build this and we'll just take there land for this little dab of money, and I think this has really surprised them. And they have had to spend a lot of money that they had'nt anticipated spending. But I think as far as the growth thing I think it will be built. I really think it should^{be} built after it's been this much money spent on it. And I think, you know, as far as growth, we have to make changes, and we'll have to learn to accept these changes. I mean, you know, at first you're prone not to want to. But I think.. I think you just have to accept that as part of life. And all of us around Chapel Hill are having to accept it real fast. (laughter) Really fast.

LH: So you think maybe one way to have a say in it is, sort of, how do you see that happening? Going to City Council meetings? Do you feel like there's any way ...

BEST: I think that's all past now. I think the years, you know, some of us, a lot of us did go to different meetings at different things and make talks but I think it's beyond that now. I think the people in Chapel Hill are going have to pay a lot, you know, they're going have to pay some of this money back through high-

priced water bills and that type of thing, which is already happening. But I think as far as going to any meetings now--everybody's aware of it, and they know that it's controlled by the University and there's nothing they can do. So you might as well work with them that's the best way you can, that's the way I see it. Because the longer you fight knowing that it's no winning proposition, the more money you put in it, and spend, and time, and knowing that it's nothing going to be done, you know, to stop it. I think it's brought up the value of the property though out here. That's one thing that it has done to a whole lot, people got more money than they would have at first. So that's kinda my feelings on the thing.

LH: Do you think you'll ever leave Cane Creek, the area?

BEST: Me? I'd love to have a place at the beach, but not all the time...(laughter). No, it's a good community.

LH: You don't think you'll be run off entirely?

BEST: No I don't think so. I guess maybe I look at this a little bit different from some of 'em. I would not like to get rid of my father's farm, I'd like to keep that. But as far as this land over here which I know is very valuable, on this highway right now, you know, it doesn't have the same sentimental value to me as my homeplace does. So I don't want to really get rid of the farm. I'd probably like to build a house over there on a mountain, you know, overlooking it, not the mountain over the creek but the next little hill we call a mountain...which overlooks the farm. You know we'll probably, eventually get rid of the lodge over there someday. But I'd still rather.. you know, I like this area. I like it because you're kind of in the middle of the state. You're right between the beach and you're right between the mountains and it's a lot of activity going on right here. And I like that. So I don't.. I don't actually see it^{as} that big a threat. I mean to me one way, as far as property values, it's a not a threat it's an asset because we went across the country this summer and seeing out in the Midwest where, you know, the land values

have gone down-- here we are boomin , and there they are, the banks have closed--everything's just folding up. You can't sell your property--you can't sell anything. And I think in that respect it's an advantage to us. That's why I say I got mixed emotions about it. You know, being in our age bracket, like I'm fifty-one and Charles is fifty-three and not wanting to continue in this hard, hard work of farming with more of the government taking out more money starting this month; and all the hard work that's involved for what you get out of it... I see it as an advantage to sell this land and not have to worry about it so much and not have to work so hard.

LH: If your sons were going to stay and do it then...

BEST: Yeah...yeah. But ..um.. Yeah, I think if you really wanted to do that, you know, you could move off--Cassell County's land is not nearly as valuable as Alamance--and if you really was a diehard dairy farmer and just wanted to dairy farm you could move and buy some land of cheaper value than this, unless you were just sentimentally attached to your land here.... which I guess I am really. But I guess I want to see it sitting out...no we are thinking in terms of leasing ours, but it will be for dairy--part of it. We've always invested in land rather than saving money in the bank..and.. .. sometimes you wonder how you can meet all the payments on this land but you'll squirm around and do it. But it looks like it's a paying off venture right now. And see like out West that doesn't hold true. So it's kinda one of those things take advantage of the opportunity when it comes. That's kinda the way I'm looking at it right now. That's how I feel about it.

LH: One thing I wanted to ask you, get back to to sort out the controversy, what about the University Lake alternative? Did that sort of just die out?

BEST: Yeah. I think it could have been done easily. And I think they didn't want to do this because, you know, in fact Charles had a first cousin (he's no longer living) but he offered for free to get the topsoil out of that thing. Which you know, he could have taken the topsoil out of the University Lake which is all

the bottom is, is topsoil and sold that topsoil and cleaned out the lake, there's two or three contractors that wanted to do this for nothing, just getting the topsoil. And they would have had much more, much bigger water supply but they didn't want to do this because that was just a way of saying no we going to take this out here (Cane Creek) and if we do that it won't look like we was prone to need it. But as far as University Lake for all these people coming in --no it's not. Anybody shouldn't be so stupid as to see that with the growth that we're getting, it's not going to be enough water there. But yet there's an awful lot of water in Jordan-- and they did apply for that water a long time ago. And now I think they're going back and probably get water from University Lake too. No, I think the whole thing has been handled with "the Godfather" (laughter)--the University. You know, whatever it said, it's had its little fingers in it, this is what's gonna be done--and that's what's happened.

LH: Do you think the Cane Creek Authority did a lot of good?

BEST: Yeah. I think it does and I think it's helped other people. Now up in Gilford County and Randolph County--you know, the federal government just did not appropriate the money. Well, one of the boys that his house was going to be in the main body of the thing was my son's roommate in college. And so, he knew we had been through this fight and soon as this came up here they come over to see how we started on our fight. So it looks like theirs will not be built now. So they've won out. And--we didn't. (laughter) But maybe we helped them win out.. you know in the basic techniques that we went at this. And probably, you know, money-wise, maybe if this had been a few years later, say this federal money might not have been available, you know, for this project. But it's already gone too far now and the money, I guess has already been appropriated for this one. So I think maybe we have helped, one way or another.

LH: Depends on how you look at it.

BEST: Yeah. I think a lot of things depend on how you look at it. From the

selfish standpoint I know I'd rather not have it out here, which, you'll have to say with the terrain of the land, it will be a beautiful lake. It will have to be a beautiful lake. But I just hate to see my good friends run out of business for this when I don't think it was that necessary.

(Omit discussion of art class)

Rachael Best
31 October, 1985

Partial transcription--cont.

Side II

BEST: I think we've had a lot more fun running the antique shop and running the shootin preserve. See, I rent this out for weddings and barbeques and rehersal dinners and family renuions. Like, The Advocate has their training sessions out here, and T. & S. Sales has a lot of their dinners out here, when their people meet a certain quota they will give them a dinner. We rent out the lodge for that. So, see, there's some income coming in from that too, especially on off-seasons when you can't grow. I'm trying to make that be a money-making thing, too, at least pay for it-self.

LH: Do you talk to your neighbors about going into other things? Or encourage them to look at it in this way?

BEST: Well, not really. The dairy farmers, now...the bed and breakfast up on the corner, I did find the people ^(for that). They came in here and I got to know them and I suggested "Why don't you go up here and look into this business?" because it would make a beautiful bed and breakfast or a beautiful house. And so they did, finally after about a years dickerin of offsettin the biddin every ten days, they did get that place. Then another one of my good friends that's in Chapel Hill, they have a steel erection company... another old house that they had just about finished restoring over on the other side of our farm--I found that for them. ^(pause) No I really have not. Because I think this is a subject that you have to tiptoe on a little bit. Maybe if they see what I'm doing as an example. I built this place five years ago and I knew that they were fixin to zone the county. So I included the land back of here that's already zoned commercial. I had that done before they did that (the zoning). (But) I wish I'd gone ahead and zoned both

sides off this road commercial--but I didn't. So see, that would have to be taken before the planning board. But I've always thought that that would make a wonderful shopping center, right across there, because it joins both sides of Mebane Oaks and both sides of 54. But, really, long range I think if you get in on the planning stages of things, you're a lot more prone to come out ahead than if you cow-tail along and be the tail-end of it. You're gonna take what's left.

LH: Are some of the families having to do that now? Like the Teers?

BEST: No. They are still very much in the dairy business. But they are a total family. And workin really, really hard. So as Thomas and Evelyn get up our age, like she gets up and milks a lot of the times... it's a little bit hard. I think that's too hard for me--just totally too hard.

LH: How many people do you hire to help you?

BEST: What do mean? On the farm?

LH: Yes.

BEST: Well, we have two full-times and my other son helps part of the time. And Charles will go in at crop time. Then I have right much part-time help, say when it's crop time or we're gettin up hay.

LH: Do you grow a lot of corn?

BEST: Yes, we grow over a hundred acres of corn. (inaudible comment about silos) But it's hard to get help. You know it's very difficult to get help that you can depend on. That's what's been such a big problem that I'm sick and tired of it and ready to get out. If you don't have someone to stay there with your help, you're at the mercy of whoever wants to take you for a good ride. (laughter) And that's what's happened. You don't end up

making any money like that. I don't care what business you're in, you need to be with it. I mean, even here, I've got three great ladies, truly honest, and I don't worry at all about their honesty. But people will come in here and they'll look for me, although I tell them ^(the help) what they can sell things for, you still have to be right there to be on top of everything. And the same thing with Charles over there with the shootin preserve. To me, that's the most effective way to run a business.

(Omit discussion about promoting business)

BEST: But I do think it can be a real opportunity out here if they can't farm the land.

LH: What do you think it's going to be like in Cane Creek in about twenty years?

BEST: I think it's gonna be like between Raleigh and Wake Forest. I think it'll be one city. See, when we left Raleigh, Charles did artificial breeding of cattle. That was about twenty-four years ago and there were dairy farms all between Raleigh and Wake Forest. And now.. it's condominiums, and country clubs and shopping centers...it's one--continual--city. So I think that's what this will be, pretty much.

LH: Is that sad?

BEST: Well, it's according to how you look at it. There's still a lot of land in North Carolina. Riding around, there's still a lot of land. But I do hate to see it going quite as fast~~as~~ it is. Because it is going a little bit fast. Especially' Chapel Hill. And that's about all I know.

(Omit discussion of other people's feelings)

LH: Did anybody ever say something about what you just told me about women running businesses being pushy or...

BEST: I'm jack-assy enough that I'd say "I don't give a damn-- it's my life so go on about your business." (laughter) I mean, I guess I'm kinda ugly in a way, but people don't worry me, don't bother me. I just feel like that I'm doing what I want to do. And it just doesn't bother me.

LH: Do you think the women's rights movement did any good for women in that respect?

BEST: I think it got into the wrong hands, I think they did themselves more harm probably, than some of the things they did good. I don't know, I think it's up to the individual. I mean... and I also think my husband's brother has been through a divorce which I've learned from. You know.. the lady that was sittin in here talkin to me? She was in a divorce. And she said she finally got so tired of it, she just said "Give me whatever you want me to take." I'd die and freeze over in hell before I'd ever do that. Because a lot of this stuff came from me. You know, it was my daddy's farm. And if I hadn't hung in there all these years, I know we wouldn't have had what we got today! So, I'm just about mean enough so that nobody's gonna run over me--take advantage of me. I think a person has got to stop and think: "No one thinks as much of me as I do myself." You better stop and think about that. Because people will. People will run over you in this business. I mean I don't mean that I'm ugly to people, cause I'm not. I bend over backwards to do things for my neighbors, and people, my customers. And I figure, you know, I'm basically a pretty friendly person. But I do know that you have to keep your eye open in business, you know,

cause people will take advantage of you.

LH: Have you felt that people have tried to take advantage of you because you're a woman in dairy farming?

BEST: I think some of them feel sorry for me in a way. Because they feel like Charles is too young a man to have kind of given up. Although I can see how he feels, too. He felt like when the boys got through school, they'd come on back and help, and they hadn't come back to help that much and been that dedicated. And I can see, but I think that he doesn't have the stamina that I have. And that's why I keep saying: "You go run that business (the shooting preserve) and let me just take care of the farm," without him. Because if something upsets him--rather than going out there and facing it and fixing it--he gets in the truck and drives off. Not me--I go out there and fix it. You know, it's got to be fixed. Go on and face it and let's do it. And then it's fixed! But he runs away. Which he didn't used to do.

(Omit discussion of husband's health)

BEST: But I do think it's important to get yourself an education or something. I think you can have all the education in the world, but if you don't apply yourself it's not worth a tinker's dam. You got to work, too. And I see this... Now my girl's, they work a lot harder than my boys. I don't know why. And my youngest one, well, both the girls are really hard little ole workers. But (my boys) they kind of slide along like (inaudible)... It bothers me. And they don't want to hear how we used to do without, how little we had.

End of Tape.