

**Joe Bryan: Family in Bryson**

JB: I have a lot of good memories about Bryson, particularly amongst the neighbors. I remember the ladies most of all in the neighborhood were really nice to the family over the years. They were Miss Davidson, who lived behind what is now the barbecue pit. I have a lot of good childhood memories of her being good to our family, especially my grandmother. My grandmother, I grew up with her, she lived in our household with my parents. The place in which I live, the farm, it goes back to, as far as I can recall, it was purchased by my granddad in 1916, and he built the home that is now there. And he died in the early 1930's. They settled in Bryson, coming from the Bunker Hill community. He passed away in the early '30's and my grandmother continued to live on there, and my dad took care of her over the years, 'til he passed away in 1971. He operated a feed business in Dellrose and had the farm at Bryson, and that's pretty much my background, growing up on the farm and working at the feed mill.

**Joe Bryan: Farmed All My Life**

JB: My grandma passed away in 1975 and we continued to stay on with the farm, and I have farmed all my life in the community. That's pretty much where my roots spring from and I've continued to do that and enjoyed doing it.

**Joe Bryan: Childhood in Bryson**

JB: But Bryson, is, like I say, a good place to live, always has been. I have no regrets, having stayed here over the years. Even though our neighbors have changed over the years, we've still been blessed to have good neighbors in the neighborhood, and that's what's really nice about living in Bryson. I have a lot of good childhood memories of growing up with kids in the neighborhood. We were all close over the years and still stay pretty much in touch with each other. We've, a big thing back when I was a child, was having community football games on Sunday. Down around at the store here in Bryson, we'd have football games and baseball games on Sunday afternoons.

NT: Where would they play those, relative to where the store is?

JB: Right, just at the east end of the store, there was a lot there in the Presbyterian lot, there, and we played there on that corner, Sunday afternoons. A lot of boys in the neighborhood and from the surrounding areas, we'd play. Most of those were quite large at that time, and I got hurt a few times playing with them because I was smaller, but still had a good time. And we'd play baseball in the pasture on our farm, some Sunday afternoons in the summer time. Had a lot of good experiences, I enjoyed baseball.

**Joe Bryan: Helping Dad on the Farm**

JB: Pretty much just took care of livestock on the farm. I always wanted to drive the tractor at an early age, but being small, my father kind of refused to let me do that, although I wanted to. Had one occasion-- he told me to stay off the tractor-- while he was gone, I got on the tractor one morning, in the, at the barn, and I pretended I was driving it and I turned the switch on, and I drove it through a couple of gates and did quite a bit of damage, so I learned a lesson the hard way. [laughter] To stay off the tractor. And he'd let me go over to the mill at Dellrose, and I would help prepare feed. Different farmers brought grain in to crush at the crusher and I would throw it into the crusher and we'd make feed there at the feed mill. I'd help sack it out and there was

always plenty of work to do there at the mill. And if not the mill it was at the farm. So I stayed busy pretty much all my spare time, helping him.

**Joe Bryan: Changes in Farming**

NT: How has farming changed over the years?

JB: Very much, and I must say, for the good. The small farmers, the farmers in the Bryson community when I was a child, they were, well every one who lived around here had a farm. And they farmed that farm and made a living off of it. The difference today is that those farms are combined and operated by just a handful of people. Back then it was maybe a farmer to every 40 acres or so, and today there's one farmer that's doing maybe 500-1000 acres or more. And modernization of equipment and chemicals has made farming much easier to do, and where it was one man to 40 acres then, it's one man can do practically almost a thousand acres today. It's really changed a lot.

NT: UmHm.

JB: There's not as many people making a living off of farming today as there was back then. What was good memories of past farming is that the neighbors helped each other out, if they lacked a piece of equipment or enough labor, they were good to share and help each other carry on the farming operations in the community.

**Joe Bryan: Self Sufficient Farming**

JB: Yes, I know that at our farm, back in my early childhood, we practically raised everything that we ate. We had a lot full of chickens. We used those eggs and we had hogs, we killed hogs for the meat. Cows, beef, we used that, and everything that, our milk, even our milk from the milk cows, we'd drink the milk from the cows. So we were really self sufficient in a way, even grew our own fruit, we had peaches and apples and things of that sort. And my mother, to have extra money, she sold eggs and produce from the farm. My father and her, a lot of Saturday afternoons, that was the thing to do, to take that produce into Ardmore and into Pulaski. They had routes and people they'd sell different products to. We got to meet a lot of people outside of the community that way. Lot of those things I miss. I look back and think about how we used to kill chickens. My mother would wring their necks, four or five chickens at a time, and which seems pretty gross today. I don't think I could eat like that today and drink milk from the cow like that either. But it didn't kill us, and we grew up healthy and all. But things like that you just don't see anymore.

**Joe Bryan: Elkton School**

JB: I went 12 years of school at Elkton, first grade through twelfth grade, and all those grades were in one building. And at the time, it was a large building at Elkton. It was a good school, good people, good teachers. Elkton, just three miles from my home, we rode the bus there. I rode the bus practically eleven years of my twelve years of schooling there. I have a lot of good experiences and memories on the school bus, riding to and back from school. The teachers were just all wonderful. The principals were really good. Everybody was close at the school.

NT: How big was your graduating class?

JB: There was, I believe, thirty three that graduated in my class. Our, my junior year, right before I became a senior, the school house at Elkton was destroyed by fire. It was a

really sad thing for the Elkton community, even the surrounding communities, because more or less that was the life of the community, was Elkton School. And it really hurt everyone when that school building burned, especially with my senior year coming up. It was really sad. The, my senior year, I'll have to say, wasn't that enjoyable, because they brought in a lot of portable buildings, and we had to walk to and fro to those buildings and it was really difficult and it wasn't very much fun my senior year at Elkton, but still overall I wouldn't trade my experience at Elkton school for what we learned and the friends that we made over the years. It was, we still, a lot of those students that I went to school with are still around in the community and we've stayed in touch pretty much with each other over the years.

**Joe Bryan: Next Generation Farming**

JB: René and I, my wife, we have three children. They're all married right now. They grew up on the farm, always enjoyed it, have a lot of good memories of them growing up there. The boys kind of bonded with farming, like I did, growing up. They still help out on the farm a lot, help me farm, help me to continue to do what I like to do, and they enjoy it too. They do not farm full time due to circumstances of agriculture right now, although they would like to. But they can practically do anything that I do on the farm. It's really been enjoyable for me for them to help me out, they're a big help in every way, and I'd like to think someday you know, farming would be good enough or prosperous enough, that they could maybe return to it. I don't know if that is going to happen or not. They are, they love to do it, and I really appreciate them pitching in and helping out as much as they do.

**Joe Bryan: I-65**

JB: That was in the, about the mid '60's, I guess it was. It was really a big, a big occasion, I remember the—my father used to take my brother and I on Sunday afternoons, over to where they were making preparation for the interstate, and show us the large construction equipment and all. We were just thrilled to see things like that, and hear the dynamite explosions during the week, as they were cutting through the hills, to prepare the roadways. And my father always would tell us that it was going to open up the community and change it. And I know going to Nashville before the interstate was completed, it was really a long drive, and once that was done, going to Nashville was just really, really convenient to go there. And it really made it easier on my dad, because he was, towards the end of his life, having treatment for lung cancer, and it made his ride up there a lot easier for him. So he got to realize some benefits out of it, before he passed away. But, it really made transportation easier, but it didn't really change this area that much either. We really thought it would, especially on the exits, that it would really open in up to more people coming in, businesses and things like. And it did happen in some places closer to larger metropolitan areas, but it didn't really affect this area here very much. That's not to say that it won't in the future, but for the time being, it's just pretty much like it was once it was completed. But it really made getting from one place to another a lot better, I'll have to say that.

**Joe Bryan: Sunday Afternoons**

JB: The neighbors do not commingle with each other like they used to. They're not as close as they used to be, I'll have to say that. I know that even a family, on Sunday afternoons, all of my Grandma's children would come see her on Sunday afternoon, that lived here. They lived here relatively close, no further than Pulaski, although one, she did live in California, but those that lived here close, they made it a point at least once a week to get by there and see their mother. And I really miss that, because every Sunday afternoon, you could count on it, the house being full of family, and I miss that in a lot of ways. It seems like in a way, now a days, we just don't have time even for our own mother or father, you know, to go by and see them and check on them. But back then, all of her children made it a point, every weekend, to come. And I know one of the daughters, her only daughter that lived here in the community, she came twice a week. She came on a Thursday afternoon and every Sunday afternoon. And we, my mother and grandmother, would always have food and things prepared for them when they came.

**Joe Bryan: Two Churches in Bryson**

JB: There were two, the Presbyterian building which was up on the hill, and there was the Bethany Methodist, that was just directly across the road, down the hill from that. These were very beautiful buildings, especially the Methodist building, was really unique. It actually had a bell tower on it. I don't remember it having a bell in it, it may have at one time, but it was a really nice building. What I remember about it, the Methodist building, of course a lot of the people that died out that attended there, and there wasn't very many that was attending at either place during my childhood. But my grandmother, she did, she was a Presbyterian, and the memories I have of those places was the ladies. Early every Sunday morning, they would take flowers to the buildings to have there for the service that morning. I can fondly remember Mrs. Young that lived in the community, Mrs. Overton Young, and see her come across the Presbyterian lot over to the Methodist building, bringing a vase of flowers, many times over the years, to have them there for the service that morning. The Methodist congregation pretty much just played out by the early '70's. There was just a handful going there, and eventually they just closed the doors. Very beautiful building.

**Joe Bryan: Two Churches in Bryson-2**

JB: But I do remember also that that's where people voted when there was an election, everyone in the community would cast their votes there. It was a very nice building. The property sold and Albert Storey, one of the neighbors, bought the building and the lot. They sold the building, like a year later, and it was moved to Madison County [Alabama] and today it's a breakfast inn there. But they kept the building intact and it's really nice. And of course, the Presbyterian building, it burned to the ground, in the '80's, I believe it was, late, later '80's. And I believe it was maybe the next to the oldest church building in the county. I'm not sure, but it was a really old building and a really unique building. It had some beautiful stained glass windows in it. Of course, my grandmother went there, and there was the old Bryson school building which was adjacent to that, and it burned also.

NT: At the same time?

JB: No, it was actually a few years after the church building burned there. So, those three buildings, the demise of those, it was really sad because they were such a fixture in the Bryson community. And it really hurt to see those places burn. Also, behind the Presbyterian building, there was the largest oak in Tennessee. I don't remember if it was a red or white oak, but it was really unique. A lot of couples got married over the years under that oak tree, and it was just huge. The branches on the tree were actually like trees themselves. And it was destroyed by a storm a few years ago, and we all hated to see that leave the area too, but a lot of good memories around those things and even the old store buildings in Bryson.

**Joe Bryan: Russell's Barbecue and Store in Bryson**

JB: Really the only businesses that there were was the barbecue pit, and the store. Mr. Russell, he run those during my childhood. I have a lot of good memories of Mr. Russell and Mrs. Russell there, running those businesses. The store was another area, I kind of got in trouble sometimes, too. My mother would tell me not to go to the store, and I'd sneak off to the store. One day I was in the store, and my mother came in, and I hid behind the, one of the coolers, in the building, and just knew I was going to get in big trouble for that, but Mrs. Russell never told my mother I was there. She kind of saved my hide that day. [laughter]