

Bob Scowcroft, narrator

Anneliese Abbott, interviewer

November 30, 2023

BS=Bob Scowcroft

AA=Anneliese Abbott

AA: This is November 30, 2023, and this is Anneliese Abbott doing an oral history interview with

BS: Bob Scowcroft

AA: So Bob, thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview today!

BS: You're welcome.

AA: So why don't we start, tell me a little about when and where you were born, and if you had any connection with agriculture when you were a child.

BS: I was born in Providence, Rhode Island, 1951. I had no connection with any form of agriculture.

AA: So then, when and where did you go to college, and what did you study?

BS: I should say, I say no connection. We never had a garden. We didn't camp. Because we were in Rhode Island and then Connecticut, we went to the beach a lot. But almost all of the family's time was obsessed with the game of golf. I was brought into golf starting at age 5 with my first lessons. The so-called "outdoor environment beauty" was, in my later years, an artificially sprayed, colored, manicured experience. Walking golf courses year in and decade out, until I was about 18.

We moved a couple of times. My last high school, we spent two and a half years in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in a nice house, a little out in the countryside. Remarkably, we were surrounded, literally this little development of 15, 18 houses was surrounded by Old Order Amish farms with horses and buggies. We did a favor, we helped capture some escaped horses, and that farmer across the street would come by every Wednesday with a basket of produce and an occasional cheese. And that was the very first inkling that this food was fresh harvested and tasted better than what my mom was getting with a block of frozen string beans, boiling up water and throwing it in the pot and then on the plate. And she started taking us to the Lancaster County farmers' market. It was a revelation to go there and get pastries and food and beef and bring it home, knowing that it was harvested or slaughtered a few days before. That was the very first time I thought, "Wow, food doesn't come from"—I didn't even think about whether it came from a can or a brick, but thanks to the Amish community around us, I got an education. (3:09)

I went to college at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Those were the times where politics and disturbances unfolded across the country. I wanted to get outside of my home life

and get away from the golf course. I was very good, I made the [Pennsylvania] states, but I wasn't going to make a career out of it. I couldn't get a golf scholarship or anything like that, like my father wanted me to get. But I went to Emory, and life changed once I got there. 1969, demonstrations, riots, occupations in campuses. Between '69 and '71 over 800 campuses in the United States had US military or state police presence. Not 10, not 50, but there was a general upheaval. We forget about that. Probably rightfully so. Though it's coming, I think, again.

Every discipline, every major required a thesis, a years-long paper, with one exception. The Political Science degree required that you pass ten classes. And being lazy and not interested in classes, sometimes even attending, Political Science seemed to be the way to go. I barely passed them. I'm not proud of it. I regret it, actually, quite a bit. But it seemed to be more important to go to another state to see the Allman Brothers band, or to go to DC and be in streets than it was to attend a dry political science presentation and read an absolutely irrelevant political science book that was rooted in the '50s and not in any way connected with what was happening on the streets right before me. (5:40)

AA: So when you were in college, were you involved with any of the food co-ops or natural food movement or any of that?

BS: No. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. The only thing I remember is that different student housing, group houses, party houses, that somehow there was an understanding—I don't know who or what, I didn't know anything about it—that we always had to have organic Lundberg rice on the shelves. I said, "Okay, that's what the rules are. What does organic mean?" But we never even got into that. That's the only memory I have of food-related conversations. The Students for a Democratic Society, SDS, opened a co-op and a macrobiotic restaurant that had incredibly cheap student-oriented food in a little buffet line. Money was so critical for me, I was just starting to get disengaged from my parents and had to make my own way. Going down to the macrobiotic buffet a couple times a week for 50 cents or 70 cents seemed to be the way to go. And they had an open mic. One of my friends was teaching himself guitar and would sing there sometimes. But that was about it. Probably took more seconds just to say that than it's worth as we go down the road here. Had no clue. (7:25)

AA: So what got you interested in environmentalism?

BS: I'd say that—you got me thinking about this in the notes you wrote—probably the next awareness was after, I did graduate, but I was on academic probation and social disciplinary probation all four years of college. It gets a chuckle, but again as I say as I give a lot of presentations, I point that out that I really made a major mistake in hindsight. My last year in college I had some good professors and very interesting classes in political science. Even then, I had to get a 3.8 just to get my [cumulative] 2.05 C- [which in turn allowed me to graduate and get my] degree.

Immediately, a buddy of mine who was very influential convinced me to become a world traveler. I went to Asia for four months, I rode horses around—we wanted to follow Marco Polo's trail, so we went to Afghanistan and rode horses in the Hindu Kush, which is something most college kids didn't do when they graduated. Came back and bummed around, then came out to California to sell Earth Shoes. I had a friend who had a job [opening up Earth Shoe stores and this one was in Palo Alto]. I had never had a real job like that, I was always swinging a hammer

or helping somebody clean up in a carpentry site. The carpenters who built the Earth Shoe store lived in a remarkable commune, and within three months I knew I wasn't a shoe salesman. This commune was a "squat" on 800 acres with 60 people [living there]. And it felt like the most engaging and stimulating and beautiful place in the world. I called it the true Woodstock nation, with some humor attached to that.

But relative to your questions, there were two very large gardens there. One gentleman who lived in a tipi had been studying directly with John Jeavons, who may or may not have shown up in some of your research. He was the coordinator of one of the large gardens, and it was in my truly appropriately termed "neck of the woods." We lived about a mile off the road, and I built my own cabin there. Actually, I was there four years, on and off. And I got to help prep the soil and learn about compost and eat the squash. Then eat more squash, then eat too much squash. We weren't really good at orderly planning and garden management, per se. But that was really cool. I liked gardening. And I liked eating the product [resulting from] my work.

But that ran its course, and I left there and traveled, both hitchhiked and bus, from Palo Alto, the commune in the mountains above Palo Alto, to the Panama Canal and back. That was another amazing adventure that took many months. I think I can wander off on some of the parts in between, and I did when I wrote this down. But what happened was I ended up in DC. I needed the country between a bad romance and myself. Was pretty adrift. And I actually got a job again selling Earth Shoes again. Another close friend worked as a motorcycle messenger.

We got pretty discouraged about not meeting any [interesting women], not being in relationships, drinking too much beer, and just being in the DC scene. So we bought one-way tickets to Anchorage, Alaska [with the intent to get] straight and healthy, and started hiking more. We ended up spending most of the two months we were up there in the true bush, eight and nine-day adventures, hiking in and out, culminating in hiring a plane to drop us off above the Arctic Circle in a Native village. It was intense the first day, but we got a real direct glimpse of subsistence--caribou, whale meat, cultural relationships to food—that a book could never have truly illuminated to both of us.

I came back and hung out a little longer. The commune was ending, in a good way. It became a state park. Magnificent state park, this property. I went back to DC thinking, what was the next adventure? I could always sell Earth Shoes. And I saw a brochure that said, "Alaska needs your help." I went into the [Alaska Coalition] office (parked in the back of the Friends of the Earth DC office) saying, "Hey, I just got back, I'll empty your wastebaskets, refile your paper." Somebody said, "Hey, would you just answer the phone? The phone's ringing off the hook. We need somebody to answer it and take messages." I said, "Sure. I've got a couple months and I want to do something different, want to help."

That moment at the Alaska Coalition very quickly turned [on the fact that] I was a really good paper filer and had the gift of gab to answer the phones and get information appropriately. And the timing, though random, was great for me because a wealthy individual gave several million dollars to the Alaska Coalition to wrap up and organize the country to pass the Alaska Lands Act. I was offered a job as the office manager that paid twice as much as cleaning up wood piles or the bits and pieces of work I was getting. And I accepted it. I had met a woman very different than I was who was just fun to be around, very casually. And that blossomed, both the job and the relationship. There I was, [in mid April 1978, when] they offered me [a job] to be an organizer and do phone bank work in five states. I got a couple creative ideas on how to generate mail, raise money, and bring in business community [support] on behalf of the legislation. Got raises and worked there about a year. How's that for a run-on sentence? (15:28)

AA: And so then, where did you go after you worked there?

BS: The right place at the right time. The gentleman sitting next to me [worked on] a door on sawhorses. And I'm working on transitioning the BLM North Slope land into a national park, Brooks Range National Park amendment. And he's fighting [pesticide] spray drift. He was quite the eccentric, wonderful character working on pesticides and would lean over and tell me a horrific story or two, and we'd both go on our way. Actually, the [Alaska Lands Act] legislation failed, and at that point Judy and I decided that when that session of Congress was ended we would both move back to Palo Alto. I had never given up my residency, my license. And her sister lived there, so we decided to move out there together.

He went to the [Friends of the Earth] executive director—actually skipped the ED, went right to [FOE's president,] David Brower, who you may or may not have heard of. David was the arch druid, you know. One of the great environmental elders of all time. And handed Brower a \$10,000 check and said, "I've just seen the best organizer I've ever come across. He intuitively knows how to do it. He succeeds in doing it and comes up with really good ideas no one else has come up with while he's doing it. You should hire him as the first national organizer for Friends of the Earth."

So Brower went and cashed the check and then told the executive director and the DC legislative director that he had just hired a national organizer to work with them. The fact that Brower had just about resigned as the founder and did not have the right to hire randomly like that, and that he had already cashed the check, really upset the more appropriate process and protocol. But they both came to me and said, "Okay, this is already a fait accompli I guess, so we're going to pay you this amount." I think it was \$7,800 annually. "Take the other \$2,200 for overhead and costs and insurance. You'll get a few of the bells and whistles. But the day that money runs out, you're gone. Do we have that as an agreement?"

I said, "You know, I've never made this amount of money. It's fantastic. It's in San Francisco—double fantastic, because I'm moving nearby. And the only thing I say back to you in the contract we write is that if I very clearly and independently raise additional money that would not have come in without my fingerprints on it, that I can stay until that money runs out."

We all kind of chuckled and said, "That's kind of an aggressive response, but sure. If you keep raising money to do this, then you can stay." And we framed it as national organizer of Friends of the Earth, director of environmental chamber of commerce. (19:04)

AA: What year was that?

BS: That was in 1979, basically. So Judy and I got in a van and parked it in Houston and went to Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, circled back again through Mexico and drove [the VW bus to] California. I set out to, FOE had about 18 chapters, so I met each of the chapters. They all were independent. Brower selected people who were doing very different work. The current management of FOE at that time were very pleased to see someone attempt to bring them all together under one umbrella. I did that. They were irritated or happy or wanted to be independent or wanted more support, and I managed to do that in a manner that was positive for all.

Then I started writing retail outlets and asked if they were open to writing letters on Friends of the Earth's behalf relative to projects that we were working on. One of [the projects] was Eric's spray drift campaign, to stop it. Another one, we had a transportation specialist, and

he was working to stop triple-car 18-wheelers and widening of six-lane superhighways into eight-lane superhighways and instead [to use transportation funds to] start building bike lanes and bike trails. The third one was outfitters working on the next iteration of the Alaska Lands Act. It went really well. I had about 60 bike shops. I had about 40 outfitters.

And within a year and a half, I had 1200 natural food stores. Blew everybody away. Nobody had any idea that this kind of economy and retailer quantity of individuals were even out there. I went to the second Natural Products Expo and set up a card table outside. The owner of the expo let me do that. And I [handed out brochures and a poster]—the material was anti-spray. No large nozzles. Got really into—excuse the pun—into the weeds on equipment and wind velocity and spraying Agent Orange herbicides. Natural food retailers really wanted to support that work. And they introduced me to the term “organic” and “sustainable,” but mostly in a one-dimensional level. But I came back from that expo with buckets full of \$20 and \$50 bills and said, “Hey, folks, I think I hit the gold mine here. Here’s \$1800 that I got in three days, in twenties and fifties. Mark that up as ongoing salary.” They were like, “Whoa, yeah, but let’s write some actual proposals to continue to fund this work. Nobody anywhere is organizing retailers in this manner.” They had professional development staff raise some thousands more for me, and I was off and running. (22:55)

AA: So then was the spray drift the main issue you were working on, or were there other ones?

BS: I switched to Peter’s (FOE staff) work on bike trails, separating some of the federal monies into urban alternative transportation. They just didn’t need more superhighways. So I was working on that. Became sixth grade-level educated on it. I could give six sound bites, but the seventh one was mysterious to me. Alaska, I knew [those issues] really well, absorbed a lot about it. And there, I had outfitters—this was also really cool, through Brower, this relationship with Galen Rowell, who was one of the great outdoor photographers. We got his slide show, and so I would offer a slide show to an outfitter and request that they hold an Alaska night. If I had a local contact to come [and speak at their evening event], I would put them together. But if they would put up a day pack or a pair of shoes [for a raffle], whatever they wanted and felt comfortable towards, I’d ask for a \$1 or \$2 ticket to a great Galen Rowell Alaska slideshow. And any income generated from the raffle would be returned to Friends of the Earth as a donation. And then the last part was that everybody in the audience would write a letter to whomever we wanted to leverage, whether it was a Congressional office or Senate. So I would look for outfitters in those districts. And there, too, I would turn around and say, “Here’s \$72. Here’s \$210.” And it added up.

The key moment where really the transition took roots was these brochures. We had brochures going to the natural food stores, and a farmer, Sy Wiseman, from the North Bay, and a retailer from the Rainbow People’s Co-op Collective (Stuart Fishman] in San Francisco, who only sold organic produce from around the North Bay, both came to the office and said, “Hey, we picked up your brochures. We see Friends of the Earth and a couple of others in the stores where we distribute. And we’ve seen your name in the emerging publication that covers the trade show, the Natural Foods Merchandiser. And we need your help. The California Health and Safety Code 26569.11 is up for reauthorization. We got it passed by a state assemblyman named Vic Fazio two years ago, and we all agreed to put a sunset clause in it if it just wasn’t working or didn’t make any difference. But we now know that it does make a difference. It’s just a four-page law

that simplistically outlines what you've got to do to put that health and safety code on your [organically] labeled products."

The California Department of Ag wanted nothing to do with the word "organic." It was way too controversial for them. They were opposed to it whenever they could be. But Health and Safety said, "Hey, if you say it's organic, that probably means there's no pesticides on it or used. So sure, we'll oversee it." Especially since there's no enforcement code, there's no inspection code, it just says, "If you want to use these numbers, you've got to agree to do this."

The last part was, a very persuasive part, "Look, Bob, there's 9000 plus-or-minus chemicals out there, and you've got to believe in reincarnation if you think you're going to have anything to do to reduce or eliminate them." A rather humorous line. So I said, "What if I came back as a mosquito or something?" We had several comedic routines around that. But the bottom line was that they made a lot of sense. They really intuitively knew that I'd rather be positive and working on good things for change, rather than sitting next to Eric that year. He had one call after another of someone who had spilled chemicals or gotten cancer or blamed their blindness on herbicide drift on them. It was just one discouraging call incident after another. And the flip side was, "Wow, organic, we're not using any of these! And we're in the farmers' market, and we're making some money. And our property's beautiful." So on and so forth. So it really called to investing in optimism instead of using distressing stories as leverage.

So I went to Brower and the board and said, "Okay, I want to endorse the reauthorization of the California Health and Safety Code." And much to my surprise, Brower said, "No. No, we can't take on another one like this. It's too controversial." As was the environment around Friends of the Earth at the time, nobody took no for an answer on just about anything. They rather appropriately explained that they were already in hot water on fighting nuclear power, on fighting construction of dams, on stopping certain weapon systems, on saving the whales. They were up to their tushes on controversial items that people were attacking them on. Where did they get off, now, all of a sudden denouncing the entire agro-industrial system, too? And I pointed out that this wasn't denouncing it, it was providing an alternative to it.

And they kind of thought about it and said, "Look, we have a board member whose wife is nationally known as a nutritionist at Columbia University, Joan Gussow. Why don't you send a note and this draft reauthorization to Joan and see what she thinks?" And I did, and she wrote a four-page letter back that outlined her questions about whether organic was more nutritious and that it could be attacked, because certain claims were already being placed out there by certain farmers. She could not scientifically quantify that. She didn't even know how to really research that. But the more she thought about it, the fact that there would be an organic label that would visually identify a product as different from the industrial boxed cereal or can of beans, that it might open a marketplace and that consumers would finally have a real choice. And she, therefore, endorsed the Friends of the Earth supporting the reauthorization. And the board as well said, "That's a good letter. Sure, go ahead and sign off on these farmers' initiatives." It was a farmer initiative, and it was a small group in Davis that had brought it forward to the assembly.

Now, they couldn't find any—Vic Fazio had gone to Congress, and they couldn't find an assemblyperson to carry it in the state legislature, until they got a freshman, just-elected assemblyperson [representing Monterey and Santa Cruz, named Sam Farr. And Sam agreed to carry it. We got our letters, state activity. It passed, rather uncontroversial. They added a few more words. They would not put in enforcement, but they took away the sunset clauses. So it was now the regulation of the land through this law. And it was the first law in the country. There were several regulations in other states. I think Maine had one through MOFGA in '74, Oregon

had one in '77 or '78, but these were out of the state [government] departments that said, "This is how [the term] organic might be used appropriately." But there was no legislative backing of that [until California made the labeling law permanent]. And all of a sudden, I was the organic expert, which was laughable at the time. But I knew more about it than anyone else, because Friends of the Earth had supported it. (33:02)

AA: So why was Friends of the Earth opposed to organic farming? Because it does seem to fit so well with environmentalism, so why did they consider that more radical than saving the whales or stopping nuclear power plants?

BS: It's a little hard to emphasize, to absorb that now, but the conventional community was subtly threatened by this. They didn't want another label that was truly alternative to their products. And there was really probably one of the first, at least verbal--I'm not sure I ever saw any advertisement--that organic was hippies. Organic was dirty, longhaired, back-to-the-land people that were really cool and grew too much squash. It was hippie food. And if that didn't get you concerned enough, then they probably had marijuana gardens nearby. And those were the two connections to the word "organic" in the '70s. And everybody would nod and smile and say, "Hey, Bob, you know any of those people? Ha, ha."

AA: And so, after that legislation, after working on that, what was your next involvement with organic food and farming?

BS: I didn't have the time to search it out for you directly. I put a note for myself to do that. But either the second or third Ecological Farming Conference, the first one being 80 people in Davis, the second one being about 130 people in a frigid Christian summer camp in January, with the heating not really working. The third one they invited me to be the keynote speaker and introduced me as the first environmentalist to endorse organic. Some had taken pride that no one endorsed organic and really did not want to be part of the system. Sort of the *Whole Earth Catalog* type of truly dropping out and nothing to do with anything. But others wanted to grow the market, saw the economy of the market. There was a distributor of organic food in the market now. They needed to make a profit, pure and simply. Can't farm and lose money at the same time, for the long haul, anyways.

So I was introduced and gave a keynote on this organic health and safety code and the vibrant activity I was discovering in the retail community, my experiences in attending the Natural Products Expo. And there's good news on the horizon. It's growing. Other environmentalists will see the light someday, and we'll build our coalitions. I'm a grassroots organizer at heart. It's the gift of gab, how to motivate. Always had it. I have honed it much better now. But it seemed to come to me very early on.

The other keynote was a guy named Bob Rodale. It was really cool just to sit at the tables and get to know him, and of course see him again as the years passed, to get to Rodale Farms, meet Maria decades later. That was an early influencer, to get what he was all about. And to hear about his dad, sitting over tea or wine or coffee over those years. In hindsight, for sure. (37:09)

AA: And so did that change your perception of organic farmers, when you got to actually know some of them?

BS: I never bought the “hippie-pot” equation. Though, it wasn’t out of the question, it wasn’t incorrect that many small farms had a plot somewhere growing some plants and were living in communal or group situations as well. That’s the back-to-the-landers, which actually exist to this day, though it doesn’t get nearly the kind of attention it did then. They were virtuous and tried to do something really off every grid possible. And these were actual components of it. Organic gardens and roll a joint at the end of the day.

As I got out and about, I started to meet farmers whose—mostly daddies—told them—and mostly sons—“Don’t you dare ever poison this land, this soil. I did it this way. I don’t care whatever terms you use. I don’t know if I’m organic or not, but I’m from the ’40s and ’50s. But you’re taking over, you want to, but don’t you dare. That’s my legacy to you.” And these were serious family farmers who took their dad’s and granddad’s wisdom and just from their youth embraced crop rotations, soil fertility, cover crops. And in doing so, many of them discovered that they could get a premium if they called it organic. Sure, I met stoners, and there’s sort of two threads, if you will, in the early days. But pretty quickly it evolved into more the economy of profitability, with the word organic. And those farms and families that came with the legacy were very moving to me. And I listened and absorbed everything I could get from them. (39:52)

AA: So did you notice any major cultural differences between working with the environmentalists in Friends of the Earth and then being with more of these organic farmers?

BS: I think there was an evolutionary merging in many cases. As FOE grew in its presence with the word organic and in the marketplace and at this expo, some of the national groups began to change their attitudes. I’d say more on a person-to-person basis than institutional priority. Pioneered the teaching plan approach. I participated in, and I generally supported the conversation of where we want to be in five years, but I found most strategic plan conversations to be too rigid, to not have the built-in flexibility to say, “Holy shit, this is really important, it’s happening right now, and we need to get on it.” In the larger bureaucratic environmental groups, it’s like, “But we’ve got this plan.” That didn’t work too well with me. And of course, FOE and Brower were a great influence on that. We were fast, and when something happened, we moved on it.

But I developed personal relationships with a number of other national environmental groups just by being in the same meetings and the receptions, “What are you working on?” And one of them led directly to the whole Alar moment in time.

I’ll say one other thing. I won’t say her name, but an acquaintance through the Sierra Club particularly embraced the environmental chamber of commerce idea and applied it to a project up in the Sierras where she got very different businesses to sit in the same room and say, “Look, you really can’t ski if it’s been clear-cut. You really can’t fish if the water’s too turbulent.” And brought together sort of a Sierra business council. And I’ll be damned but she didn’t get the zillion-dollar McCarther fellowship for the most brilliant idea. I had a moment saying, “Uh,” and she said, “I know, I know, yes, this is how the cookie crumbles.” We laughed about it, and I still laugh about it to this day. But it also validated, I had a damn good idea and applied it and made it work in a really productive manner. (43:15)

AA: Was there anything more you want to say about that EcoFarm conference and how that started?

BS: It's a joyous celebration. All threads and planks of the organic and sustainable community [attend]. There are passionate debates. There are new issues. But it's the closest thing to an "all women and men are equal" tribal gathering, celebration of what we do, off any particular grid. And part of it is the actual location of the Asilomar Conference Center. That's integral to having a conference like this. Because Asilomar is a very unique conference center. It's a state park, actually. It was built by Julia Morgan, designed in the '20s. It's a magnificent cathedral, magnificent meeting hall and redwood rooms and 700 people eating together. Seventy feet from the ocean. I'd take meetings on the log on the beach almost every year, if the weather is appropriate.

And people get irritated sometimes, and that led in one particular case to the commitment of the EcoFarm Conference to offer full Spanish translation. So if you don't speak English, you can put on headphones and get all the major workshops translated by professional Department of Defense translators, actually, because the Defense Language Institute is a couple miles down the road and they volunteer just to come over and do it. Now there's even delegations that come from El Salvador, Mexico, and [Guatemala] to attend. A few folks from overseas. From forty states.

It just recharges my batteries for forty more years. I go every year. It's fantastic. My humor line is, I love to just go in and sit at tables. I don't set meal meetings, I just find an empty table where I don't know anybody, or a full table with an extra seat. I just ask around, "What are you doing here?" and listen to the conversations. And usually it's "my third conference" or "my first," or "I've been to nine." I generally catch their attention when I say, "It's my thirty-eighth." The narrative is, if you come to the first one, you're blown away. You feel like you missed the seed exchange or oral history caucus of five people, these little caucuses everywhere come popping up on bulletin boards. And if you get to the second one, then generally you find the rewards you were looking for, and you're knowing you're going to be doing the third week of January as long as you stay in this field for the rest of your life. It's that powerful.

So I don't want to ruin the rest of your life, but if you get to a couple of them, you're toast. (47:12)

AA: And that's changed a lot over the years, then, from the first time you went when it was at the camp.

BS: Yes. For one thing, one key thing is that seventy farmers are organized by two people who've been doing it almost thirty years into donating ingredients so that every single ingredient is certified organic. And the executive chefs work with those two people to get menus. And then they do the call out ingredients. So you eat certified organic pastas and tacos and beef stew, or vegetarian or vegan, three and a half days. And for a convention center to be able to pull off those logistics is very unique. But they agree with that in contract and have done so. At the Christian center we got 20-gallon cans of tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches twice a day. It wasn't the same.

There are wine tastings. There are political elected officials that come, political staff that come, major media does presentations of how it works to write for *Civil Eats*, or to freelance for the *Washington Post*, how you pitch an article to the *Post*. And there's six workshops at a time. So it's distressing if you are a sponge. But it's okay. (48:59)

AA: So now, I think you said you started working with CCOF in 1987. So can you tell me how that started?

BS: CCOF was founded in the '70s as a volunteer group of individual farms verifying each other. And it got a little more codified and a little more organized. For about 12 years it was just visiting, saying, "Yeah, this looks good, I'll certify you. You come to my farm and certify me." Information was exchanged, and it was a nice club. And in the early to mid-'80s, sort of similar to the expo and the emergence of an organic marketplace, a new board president [took office] in '85 and said, "We need to codify this certification program, the rules, what materials you can and cannot use, and hire staff." And the chapters agreed. They created an assessment system, which was 0.05% of the value of organic sales. Not your sustainable or in transition, just your certified organic sales. To pool that money to hire these two staff. And that happened, and the staff tried to codify it, and more farmers joined.

They set a goal [or having full time staff] in '87, but two staffers couldn't really pull it off, and one was farming in addition to this. So they decided to hire an executive director to make it real and to turn it into a professional organic certification trade group. They put out a call and an announcement, and I saw an inch ad in the local newspaper. FOE went bankrupt in '85, and we had moved to Santa Cruz. And we discovered that our son was severely handicapped at nine months. I got a job as a secretary at the university stuffing pink sheets in the blue file and helping the education program hold classes, because it had full family insurance. I was obviously willing to do anything, and did that. Did two things off-hours there. One was to attend EcoFarm each year, those two years. And the other was to contract to do the media for the global meeting of the International Federation of Organic Ag Movements that UCSC sponsored and held. So I did media outreach, having known a lot of reporters through FOE. I got a relatively small amount of money, but just kept my fingerprints on outreach to reporters, that there's an important organic conference happening out here.

So I had a couple of organic jobs, and I applied and had a rather surreal interview process and got the job and accepted it, and immediately resigned my [UCSC] secretary position to do so. My wife had also gotten a job that had insurance, so we switched it all to hers. I joined up, and I was supposed to start January 1 of 1988, but I started working there around Thanksgiving and afternoons in December as I wound down my work at UC. (53:02)

AA: So what was CCOF like when you started?

BS: Hah. One of the first lessons was, when one applies for a job—especially at the executive level—to look at the books and see its financial state. I was so excited, I had known CCOF, I had met volunteer leaders at EcoFarm in the '80s, and we had tables out in the hallways, the so-called "table top," and I think there were five tables there at the time, and one of them was CCOF's. And I was just, "This is it! I can do this. What a wonderful career direction, to be positive all the time and support and be an advocate for such production systems." Lo and behold, I got there, and Mark, one of the two staff, said, "Thank God you're here. I'm only working half time. More growers want to join, and we don't have the capacity with two half-timers. We need another staffer, and before we could really get that staffer, we can't make rent in a month. We can't pay our two half-timers salary. Obviously we can't pay your salary. And we have never filed federal tax returns."

So that was my introduction to the career path. And I knew there was a minority of CCOF chapters that did not want to codify it and make it statewide. They liked the chapter system, the community system, the collaborative-visit-each-other farm system to declare themselves and others certified organic. So they were not happy. With a few exceptions, they were not outraged either. They just didn't like this and how it was going. So I had to prioritize what I was going to do, and I decided the first thing I would do was raise money to meet those immediate obligations. I really couldn't come home to my better half and say, "Wow, I got the greatest job! There's no money, and there's no plan to get money now that I've gotten it." So up the creek, no canoe, no paddle, and no organizational idea on how to proceed.

I asked for some donations, and we got some. I said, "Hey, I'm here, we're short, we need to do this. We need money to file our tax returns, we need money to pay our penalties, and a few of you that have been paying, you're already certified and have been paying your assessments, if you could pay it six months or a year early, that would be really helpful." And actually a few did. So there were some \$800s, \$1200s, \$75 came in. We did make rent. We did make a little bit to hire an attorney to file what we decided were three years of tax returns. Mark had filed I think an '85 state tax return, which put us on the map, and we discovered that we had three years from the first identifiable tax return to file both state and federal. So we filed two more state returns and all three federal returns. The deadline was January 31. So I had about 40 days to file five tax returns. And we did it.

And we did so in a manner that we were declared a nonprofit, but we actually had not received our IRS status. So as a parallel to that, we had an incredible IRS agent that worked it through how we would file all the returns, and then said, "You've got to file under a particular status." So I filed under a (c)3 nonprofit tax exempt status, which was what we wanted to be so that gifts could be tax exempt. He said, "That will buy you time. I'm not sure you are that, but you file that and then we'll come back at you once we review all the material you submitted." So we did all of that, and it was determined that (a) we owed a \$3,000+ fine for not filing all our federal taxes ever, up until then. The state didn't fine us. It just accepted the fact that we were late with two more. And they also said that they didn't think we were a (c)3. They thought we were a (c)5, a trade association, and we should refile as a trade association.

So at that point we were still extremely stressed with salaries and rent and all the costs of running a professional nonprofit. And Mark's college roommate, who went in a [different] career direction such that he was the road manager for the Grateful Dead. And the Grateful Dead have a foundation. And actually Cameron, I think, runs that foundation to this day. And he helped us ask the Rex Foundation for a \$10,000 grant, which was to be awarded to the EcoFarm conference organization, which was a (c)3, educational (c)3, who then passed through about \$9,000, \$9,500. And he made it happen fast. And EcoFarm made it happen fast. And all of a sudden by March and April we were nearing \$10,000 in the account, in the first four months there. And we paid back everything with that. It's a little hard to believe, with interest and the growth of the economy, but a salary of \$400 or \$500 or \$600 a month half-time was a really good salary. So \$10,000 out of the blue, or \$9,000, really relieved a lot of concerns for the short term.

And lastly, I had an attitude such that I went back to the IRS again and said, "Okay, we've paid our fine. We now want to contest that fine and get all the funds back. You have to understand that a disconnected group of certified organic farmers in the most rural parts of California never really connected the dots as far as filing federal returns. And they hired someone to do that, which was me. We did it, we paid our fine, and we really think that you should understand that and accept it and realize that we will never, ever again miss impending deadlines

under any circumstances.” And they bought it. They gave us that \$3,000 back as well. A cool little tale. (1:01:19)

AA: So how long did it take before CCOF was finally financially self-sufficient?

BS: Well, so we were rolling. We were adding farmers, we were attending more conferences. I made a pledge, I went to every chapter meeting and met every leader around the state. And all positive, outgoing, friendly meetings. With at least three or four chapters we agreed to disagree, still, that there was a need for an expensive executive director and a statewide organization. It got draining, depressing at least once or twice. Basically every executive committee meeting and almost every board meeting, there was a motion to fire me as the target. But there was a new president of the board, and we worked really closely together. He was down in San Diego. We were on the phone a lot. Things were happening in a big way. And he was both physically intimidating, he was seven feet, certified organic tomato and berry grower, and he wouldn't put up with any guff. And he had the support of three-quarters of the board. So people were like, “Oh, come on, not again! For what reason? Bob's great, he's doing great work for us.” They'd be like, “It's not really against him, it's just that we don't want to have this.”

The few times it got a little more out of hand, Bill would say, “You don't have to have it. Go and start another group of your own. You don't have to be in this one. Go, volunteer with each other.” Well, they wanted the CCOF name, they wanted the label, they wanted the visibility in the marketplace, because there were still neighbors in their farmers' markets that would take a piece of cardboard and write, “Organic” next to it. There was nothing they could do about it, unless they were holding a CCOF sign and had verification paperwork. So they wanted the law enforced, but they didn't want to be part of the system to pay for it. And that had implications later on when we started writing the next generation of these laws.

But we had several epic events that again put incredible strain on our system. We had four employees and two part-timers and two interns, so what was two half-timers and me, within two and a half years there were five or six of us in an absurdly small office. We actually got into the office going up a fire escape on the back of this building on the main street in Santa Cruz. And we had a combination triple [header]—I don't have quite the word to describe it—we had Alar, and the cyanide in grapes bringing the attention of pesticides and chemicals and alternatives to the nation's evening news. We had an incredibly visible [event of] fraudulent [organic sales] activity. There were [still] these cardboard signs in the marketplace that people were pretty sure they were cheating, but they were selling a tabletop of carrots, and the proverbial squash. But this was a million dollars' worth of falsely labeled carrots, a whole different tale.

And then we had a 6.9 earthquake and lost our office in the middle of all of this as well. Thank God, no injuries to staff, but six people died here in that earthquake. It was a very traumatic and dramatic way to work our way through it. This was all in two years. And we were still short of money. (1:05:56)

AA: And so what was the state of organic agriculture in California when you started there? What were the farms like?

BS: To this day, there was the one acre concerned about the twenty acre, size and scale. The twenty acre was concerned about the hundred acre. The hundred acre was very concerned that

there was about to be two five hundred-acre organic farms coming into the program. So size, scale, and market competition became a conversation within the organization. At the same time, I remember—I couldn't find her name last night—but the first academic peer review assessment of organic was done by an ag economist at UC-Davis, I think in '89 or '90. And she determined that the gross organic sales in California was about \$89 million dollars in that year, or the year before. And that caught a lot of people's attention, even though other commodities were doing hundred million and two hundred million, all of a sudden it was like, "Whoa, \$89 million, how many farms? CCOF had a couple of hundred. There's some money there. And actually, those farmers with 500 acres are selling a million dollars, two million dollars of that 89 themselves. I should take a look at this."

And so that leveraged more conventional growers to begin to reach out to CCOF, what it would take to put a parcel into our program. We allowed parcels, not entire farms or organizations, to do that. And that accelerated our growth. But Alar and cyanide and Meryl Streep combined to blow the doors off our organizations and eventually led us to found Organic Farming Research Foundation as a last chance to raise much more significant funds to keep us above water. But yeah. I met Meryl a couple times later on, but her decision to co-found Mothers and Others for a Livable Planet with a woman named Wendy Gordon and work in concert with NRDC was a change-maker, difference-maker of epic proportions. (1:08:52)

AA: Yeah, so tell me more about that, about the Alar.

BS: Well, what happened was NRDC by this time had really begun to appraise and embrace issues around chemicals. Eric at Friends of the Earth had done it for so long, but he was eccentric and he didn't play well with others in the sandbox. But other environmental groups were beginning to become concerned about nitrate pollution, water pollution, dead zones, so on and so forth. They tended to identify them in a singular manner. So it was not a systems approach to, "Hey, nitrates in Minnesota roll down the Mississippi River" and so on and so forth, or "Spray drift gets on food, some of which is tested, and EPA says, 'Oh, it's below the limits, it's not a problem if you eat just six avocados a year.'" The standard diet was very problematic and most likely still is, because the standard diet sets the baseline for which you can use certain chemicals. If you're under that, it's been determined by somebody somewhere that you're not going to get cancer, you're not going to get poisoned, you're not going to get sick. But people who ate a ton of some of these particular commodities were shown to bioaccumulate some of these chemicals. So NRDC did a study of 20 of them and pointed out the bioaccumulation problems in the standard diet, and how some of them were just utterly unnecessary to even use.

Alar was one of those. It was sprayed on all apples' skin to stop pests from poking a hole or damaging the skin. It had nothing to do with growth or more significant tools. It was all about [cosmetic apple] skin damage. And *60 Minutes*, NRDC in its media brilliance helped facilitate the creation of Mothers and Others for a Livable Planet as an outside, mothers-based NGO to work on banning or reducing the use of these 20 chemicals. *60 Minutes* [featured] Alar as the spokeschemical of this 20-page report and interviewed NRDC and interviewed farmers. I can't remember, they must have interviewed either Meryl or Wendy. Here's this group joining with NRDC to help reduce or ban these. And it was national news. The industry reacted with sort of a sledgehammer, "Environmental extremists, food's safe, food's easy to eat, food's cheap, alarmists." They didn't quite throw the hippies at NRDC—they were not remotely connected to anything like that—but they went after them in a big way.

And then a couple weeks later, some grapes from Chile were found to have—I think it was cyanide—in them. And so food safety became the issue. And the report was also revisited. “What is going on here? Is that really used in Chile? Or is that a terrorist in food contamination? What’s happening?” That made the headlines, continued the visibility in a significant way. And a number of reporters reached out to CCOF and some of the other groups around the country, because there were now other established organic verification groups that were respected and spokespeople in their regions. Maine, in particular, Vermont, the Midwest, Ohio, OCIA there. And we said, “Look, you can buy organic, and you don’t have to address any of these.” NRDC had one person in particular who held a position of power and just would not use the O-word. It was never going to be used in any publications, it was too extreme, it has too many bad images. But she said, “We will call for sustainably labeled foods.”

And okay, agree to disagree. If you point anybody to me, you have to understand that I’m going to be an organic advocate. And we went along, and about six weeks later the *Donahue Show*—I think it was Donahue—got Meryl Streep, who was an actress extraordinaire and the real “get” for your talk show, on to talk about Mothers and Others. And she talked about chemicals, and her positions, and then he said the classic question, “How have you adjusted to this with what you know? What do you do?” She said, “Well, personally, I only feed my children and myself certified organic food. There’s no doubt about it. I’ve read the reports. It’s available in Connecticut, where I live with my family, at farmers’ markets, and I don’t eat anything else.” And you can almost count down the impact, because that was global news. Now I guess they call them “influencers” or something, but one of the world’s most knowledgeable movie stars only fed her children organic food.

And our phone blew up, our office went crazy. ABC News came up the fire escape, and we quickly, we had a little notice, interviewed me for the evening news. Other TV channels were telling stories of mothers driving to school and taking the apples out of their kids’ lunchboxes and instead putting in an organic apple. It was insane. And the outcome of that was that by the end of the year we had 700 applicants for CCOF. It wasn’t pretty.

So here we are now, in 1990, trying to manage with four staff, 700 new applicants with rather complex applications and parcels and locations and farm systems, wanting to grow organic. And out of money. So I went to a woman I met who was the executive director of a very innovative foundation in San Francisco and said, “Susan, I’m in trouble again. We really need funds. Can you make a grant to us, or do you know who could?” And I remember really the smile, “No problem. Just kind of easy. You go and found a sister foundation, and once you get your (c)3 status, we would be proud to make a significant grant to your foundation. And you probably know, you then re-grant it, pass it through to CCOF, and that should cover your education costs.” She was and remains brilliant to this day, because very quickly the education—we were answering calls over the country and overseas, a Japanese delegation. The Netherlands sent a delegation to Santa Cruz to meet with us. [We named our sister foundation the Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF).]

So it’s a matter of time sheets. We all had time sheets, and we put down how many hours we did of education each day, and how many hours we did of certification and trade association work. We had one employee who did mostly [organic] materials review and wrote booklets on what would be an approved organic material that would fit under the criteria. We paid almost all of his salary through the foundation monies that came through.

So we [received notice of] our (c)3 status, faxed it to Susan. She and her board approved it, and we got a \$20,000 grant within weeks. Went to two other foundations, and both of them

made \$20,000 grants. By the end of the year we had \$60,000 in the OFRF account, within which we moved almost all of it to CCOF. And we're again financially secure, able to hire more people, inspectors, and to grow the organization. (1:18:15)

AA: So you mentioned, you call it the "Great Carrot Caper," I think, with those fraudulently labeled carrots. Is there anything you want to say about that?

BS: Well, when I look back, the late '80s and early '90s were magnified by orders of magnitude as far as these events melding and welding into each other. There was a larger grower, two growers who grew most of the certified organic carrots in southern California and served most of the natural food stores. You have to remember that they were not serving the 200-unit supermarkets. They were serving probably 2000, maybe 1500 of the 2000 single natural food stores. So there were a lot of distributors, they would drive their trucks up with \$5,000 worth of certified organic carrots. So it wasn't necessarily efficient, but they were largely the sole proprietors of this product, and they could do that ten months of the year.

All of a sudden, in the eleventh and twelfth month, the marketplace was awash with a third company's certified organic carrots. And these growers couldn't figure out where they were coming from. And then they stayed in the market when they were starting to bring the fresh crop out of harvest and into the distribution system. And they complained to CCOF and said, "Hey, there's no federal enforcement, there's no state enforcement. What are you guys going to do about it? The CCOF label isn't really worth its weight in paper if you're not going to fight on our behalf." So the president and the board and I and the staff got together and said, "It's really true. We're really going to risk the entire label and the validity of our certification program if we don't point out fraudulent activity like this."

So we did two things. We hired an attorney to go to the state and sue them under the health and safety code for enforcement protocol. We wanted them to inspect this distributor and the so-called farms he was getting it from, based on our complaint. At the same time, we checked it out ourselves. An anonymous individual—who I still won't reveal to this day—went and posed as a distributor and got a tour of this cold storage operation that this person was running and took photographs of the 18-wheelers pulling in with Mexican conventional carrots bagged in 50-pound bags and saw them being emptied and repacked in certified organic bags. Took pictures of them as well. Gave them all to me under the ironclad, never divulge the whistle-blower's name. I took them then to a reporter for the *San Jose Mercury News* and said, "Here's the deal. CCOF cannot and will not stand for this. We're willing to put our entire verification system at risk to defend it in face of these blatant violations. I want you to go down to the factory and check it out as well. I would be surprised if they let you in, but I have photographic proof. Here it is." At the same time, we're suing the state to enforce it.

Boy, it was intense. They took a couple weeks for this all to unfold, and the state got really nervous and said, "Why don't you go to the county and have them enforce it under a consumer complaint?" And we actually did it. The county went to go inspect, and that that time the *Mercury News* decided to put it on the, as they say, the upper fold of the front page of the newspaper. And it was all the way, I remember to this day, the night before the reporter called me and said, "The editor's getting some cold feet on these pictures. He wants to know who took them and whether they were manufactured or not. We can't risk the journalistic integrity of this regular newspaper." And I asked him if I had to tell him. And he said, "I'll tell you what. If you know the person and will guarantee the person, I'll tell him what the potential risk of violence to

this person could be if it was revealed at any point, and see if he buys that.” So I did that, and he did that, and the editor bought that and put the photos on the front page. AP picked it up, *Times*, *Post*, it was a national story.

And that person, [the co-packer of falsely labeled carrots], was eventually, a few weeks later, caught. Turns out he was an ex-felon. And the entire operation was shut down, and CCOF got incredible kudos from many of the growers, even those that wanted me still to be let go as they missed the good old days. We defended the [CCOF] seal [and the California State Health and Safety Code].

This was unfolding while Washington Tilth, Oregon Tilth, and CCOF decided that we wanted to [work together to] facilitate trade between our three states. We all had sophisticated inspection and verification and materials protocol in place, [but the fine print was not exactly the same]. The three of us [got together and] agreed to rewrite our three state laws so they were exactly the same. We called ourself the Western Alliance of Certification Organizations and put some money into it. Oregon Tilth took the lead at writing the entire materials list of the allowable [materials] in all three states. And we encouraged them to move from one year to three years in transition [to organic certification. And we passed it in all three legislatures. We used the attorney we had hired [earlier] to enforce [the Health and Safety Code to serve as our voice in the Sacramento legislature.] And again, we called on Sam Farr to lead the way on that. We had a lot of fun with our acronym, which was Western Alliance of Certification Organizations, or WACO. Made it work.

And as if things weren't complicated enough, right around that time Senator Leahy [D-VT], chair of the US Senate Ag Committee, got interested in [organic regulatory] violations in response to a remarkable Vermont organization, Northeast Organic Farmers Association, NOFA-Vermont, and decided that the [US Senate] Ag Committee should just take a look at whether there should be a national standards. Clearly these carrots were going further than up and down the West Coast. He asked the staffer, Kathleen Merrigan, to do some research on what the differences were between the 27 states that had some form of certification [rules and regulations]. And Kathleen met with Mark Lipson [CCOF staff] in DC. And the story still needs to be clarified a little bit, but Kathleen says Mark walked in and said, “There has to be a national law,” and Mark says Kathleen said, “What do you think about a national law?” The bottom line is that both of them looked at each other and said, “We've got to have a national law.” And that started the work on the National Organic Foods Production Act, which was also unfolding at that time. I didn't get much time off those three or four years.

Maybe trying to close some of those threads. I had a charge to direct the research foundation, [OFRF], out of a P.O. [Box] and raise tens of thousands a year to cover CCOF's (c)3 applicable costs. [This meant that I now had to report to two Boards of Directors]. I had the charge to grow the organization from 700 farmers to any other state farmer that wanted to join. The board collectively gave the charge to both enforce the law—the safety code and eventually the law—anywhere we thought it was violated in the state. The three organizations had the charge to codify in the three western states, and we along with the other nonprofits came together and agreed to write the national law. By then, we created another acronym, Organic Farmers Association Coalition, OFAC. CCOF put some good money into it, educational, and other groups put a share into it. We hired a gentleman named Reggie to work with an attorney to help us write the national standards in collaboration with 27 other groups. We had national meetings, and a few other groups had invited other groups, like Center for Science in the Public Interest was one,

Rural Advancement Foundation was another. And Mothers and Others came in and said, “We’re with you, we want a national law.”

So I was a little stressed by then. And I had to find a new office and recover from the earthquake. Where are we? We’re only in ’92! (1:29:12)

AA: So how long was OFRF part of CCOF, and when did you split off?

BS: ’92 was sort of a key year. I’d been in CCOF for five years. And the ongoing, “Do we need an ED?” There were some really unfortunate incidents around the earthquake that actually did make me angry. And some false claims that were right out of the fake news [world] that made me angry. And I was getting tired of a few of these folks making up falsehoods about the organization in general and me in particular. And Bill had been on the board for five years and was feeling like his accomplishments were historic and it was time to transition off the board.

The way OFRF was set up at the time was that two of the three farmers that worked with me to create the paperwork and to create the (c)3 language were placed on the board as president and vice president. And Bill was on the board as CCOF’s president. And the language was such that there was always a seat for a CCOF president. So within a couple years, there were three CCOF ex-presidents and two of the founders still on the board. And that was sort of a moment when we had quite a bit of money passing through. And they kind of looked at each other and said, “In a few more years, this is going to be the organic farming research ex-president group. And we want to be national, we want organic farmers around the country, and we want non-farmer members. We want to grow it. We need minorities on the board. We need scientists on the board.” So they made a, “Hey [everyone, let’s] start looking for other potential board members.”

The way OFRF’s bylaws were set up, you had to be certified organic for at least three years and fully [active] in the [organic] marketplace. So that ruled out a lot of growers in the early ’90s who had just applied. It basically meant they had to start in ’86 or ’87 to be eligible by ’92, if it was a three-year transition. At a minimum. So [the OFRF board] said, “Let’s do this. If we get [at least] \$80,000 in the bank, we’ll [award] our \$40,000 to CCOF. [We would then post an E.D. job announcement for OFRF and use the other \$40,000 to fund] a fulltime OFRF position. [We’ll see, by the number of applications we receive], if this idea has any legs.”

They wrote up the job announcement and description and hiring committee and posted it. I was putting in maybe four hours a week for OFRF to write these proposals. By then, OFRF had a part-time employee, Erica, who would check the PO box, answer the mail, check out the tape machine, who would retrieve messages, “Who are you?” “Do you have any [money], are you doing research?” So Erica was there for a day a week and handled that brilliantly and continued to raise a lot of money. And they did the announcement, and sixty people applied. Talk about validation of an idea. And I came home to Judy and said, “It’s sort of time. I’m exhausted going to all these chapters and defending the same groundhog day absurdities of some of these claims. I need to transition myself.” She was, “Okay, we’ve got two kids and need two salaries, but go for it.”

So they did a rather rigorous set of finalists, three finalist interviews, and offered me the job, and I took it. We moved OFRF into my house, which had been damaged a little bit in the earthquake, but by then had a little cubbyhole that was to be our home paper office space. It was truly a cubbyhole. And for about a year we rotated. Erica moved to Utah and hired another person, and Erica electronically and Natalie sitting in the back of the house answered the phone and the tape machine. And we ramped up and raised more money and continued. CCOF just had

to write a proposal to us [to receive pass-through educational funds]. We didn't stop; we just had to have it codified in the proposal. And we started rolling.

We added an extension agent of Hispanic heritage to the board. We added a couple of scientists to the board, an economist. We added farmers from other parts of the country to the board and raised more money and started making on-farm research grants. We published a newsletter. That led to several really innovative projects. And we moved [OFRF] out of my house. (1:35:22)

AA: What were some of those first projects that you did?

BS: I'd say the very first one was the *Searching for the O-Word* booklet. Later on we created the Scientific Congress of Organic Ag Researchers, a collaborative of scientists that wanted to be on-farm organic researchers, with an eye on peer-reviewed publications of what they'd discovered. We added a policy program that was grassroots by design and focus. And we wrote legislation. A lot of it really intuitively came out of the *Searching for the O-Word* book that Mark focused on. Two foundations got on it immediately and each gave us about \$125,000 to [underwrite] this report.

It was, again, just a unique idea that took off. The very first [electronic] codification of the [various] USDA [databases] was the Current Research Information System. Before then, you literally had to go to a library and photocopy or have someone from the USDA copy and send you—if you remember, fax machines were new back then—send you a research report on corn or beans, or whatever. But the CRIS system codified it [into an electronic database]. It was all scanned, all by topic, by area, with references, you could cross reference [any report by using keywords]. It was the first one.

There were 30,000 papers published. We hired with this new [restricted grant] money what we called the “night crew” out of UCSC's farm and garden students, that would come down at 4:00 in the afternoon, [using our] two computers that would dial up the CRIS system. They would run keywords on every paper. We had, I think, 25 [to 30] keywords [that would identify organic pertinent papers], and Mark would look at the results, and he'd take those [papers] and pull some aside. Then after doing this for almost a year, we discovered that there were 31 organic-pertinent federal research papers. There were several hundred not organic-pertinent, but of interest to sustainable researchers and farmers. And there were 29,600 that were in no way relevant [to our organic farming community. As far as we knew no other organization was investing any resources into this category of published agricultural papers.]

So we took the 30 out of 30,000, and we called for using the “Ronald Reagan” approach to [budget allocations. We just wanted a fair share of the USDA's research resources.] And we said, “In this context, we agree with that. Organic's 0.001% of the current research information system and the federal research funding. So we want just that amount [out of the USDA's research budget]. And it amounts to about \$3 million a year for on-farm organic research.” Which was a drop in the bucket with the hundreds of millions, approaching now billions that they're putting into [agricultural] research monies.

And that got some attention, but not any initiatives until we went to Washington DC and met, at that time, [Senator] Tom Harkin, who was the chair of the Senate Ag Committee. Brought our board president at the time, Ron Rosmann, to Tom and said, “Look, we've written the Organic Research and Education Initiative, OREI. And we'd like you to carry it and add it to the Farm Bill under this protocol. We have the documentation, we want \$15 million over five years

as part of Farm Bill funding.” And he was concerned, but [“organic”] was no longer a negative. It was just an interesting alternative marketing initiative. But not really part of government. And remarkably—Ron never told me this until we literally went in the room—Senator Harkin had introduced Ron to his wife thirty years before. So the first 15 minutes was, “How’s Maria? How’s the kids? How are you doing? How’s your farm? You’ve been organic all these years. I know it’s real; I’ve been there. I want to do something for you and the farm and for Iowa, the Leopold Center. We should do this.” Then he turned to me and said, “Can you make it happen? Can you organize nationally to do that?” And I said, “Yes.”

I discovered recently that an OFRF staffer who was with me, for her that was a memorable moment, because she was in the presence of a senator in the Ag Committee room. She [recounted] that I kind of stiffened up and looked at him and said, “Senator, I guarantee that it will pass.” She’s telling me, “I looked at you and thought, how can you say that?” [I don’t remember that exchange, but] I guess that’s what I said. We did pass it. And we got \$3 million [annually, for five years,] to be distributed through USDA’s grant-making program for peer reviewed on-farm farmer-grower collaborative research. And by the way, that’s grown to \$50 million annually [(\$250 million over five years) in the most recent Farm Bill.] that. It all came from Ron and Tom and Brise and I, [using Mark’s report and] sitting at his table [in his office]. Pretty cool. (1:41:54)

AA: Yeah, I found that *Searching for the O-Word* study extremely interesting as I’ve been doing my research. What is your perspective on this kind of bias against organic farming that was in the USDA?

BS: Certainly [organic farming] was not core to its mission at the time. [The biases were] ingrained. It couldn’t feed the world. It didn’t look good. It came from a different community that we can’t relate to. It’s not market professional. It gets rotten. It can’t be stored. I mean, you name it. It was across the board. And it took generational change at the USDA. It took a national grassroots movement. By the time the Organic Foods Production Act came into play, by the time rules were released, by the time the Bush administration and even the Clinton administration had to address the word “organic,” many constituencies had embraced it.

I was at the Produce Marketing Association annual convention, in Reno, [Nevada]. I was [one of three speakers] on the very first panel they ever held on the word “organic” at Reno, in 1989. [Also speaking was] this CEO of a significant supermarket chain. And also a CCOF [very large] acreage grower. Three of us. And the room was absolutely packed. The walls were packed, the doors were full, and the fire marshal had to come and remove some people because there were too many. And most of the audience was outraged, a lot of anger and [some] rage, at the supermarket CEO, who had sort of broken the supermarket [unwritten] code [of conduct] and offered pretty much full lines of organic [produce] to their customers. It was a California-based supermarket, but [with] 100-and-some-odd supermarkets [in play there was a lot of organically labeled product on their shelves. And the complaints from the audience were,] “What are you doing to us? You’re making us look bad. You’re making us look like we add chemicals.”

He said, “No. I’m responding to my consumer demand. And my certified organic produce in particular is flying off the shelves. And I’ve added canned organic soup, I’ve added bagged organic popcorn. Flying off the shelves. Greater profit margin. And if you have a problem with capitalism”—he was up front—“then we’ve got some other issues to really discuss here.” And that was a moment. It was really a moment [for me]. And I got up and just explained [CCOF]

verification and education, and that I was pro-organic farmers. I wanted to keep these growers, mostly family farmers, on the land and profitable. And I didn't spend time putting negatives on chemical use and abuse, unless it drifted onto my organic farmers' land. That's toxic trespass. You can't do it. You're liable for it.

Finally I said something like, "This outrage happened once before in history when people started icing their produce and shipping it east and calling it "fresh." People were outraged that they were putting ice on vegetables." I said, "Look, now you have the transportation system that can deliver fresh in 48 hours. Same thing goes for organic. It's labeled, inspected, certified, and profitable. What's the problem with all of this?"

That was an educational moment for me, to see the rage, to hear the USDA staff echoing that quietly in the hallways, and to watch the CEO come under withering criticism. What was fascinating to me afterwards was the Q&A, and a few folks were like, "I might look at it," and getting snarky stares by saying that in public. And then in the hallways afterwards, three people came up and asked for certification paperwork. Their neighbors were doing it, it was working for them, and they saw no reason why they shouldn't put a parcel and see how it goes. If nothing else, they might learn some practices they could use on the rest of their operation. And we always encouraged that. Don't bet the ranch. Take it as your on-farm research project. (1:47:35)

AA: What about the land grant universities? Did you encounter any anti-organic attitudes from them?

BS: Well, the SCORE network, Jane Sooby, did a similar type of paper on analyzing all the land grants in the country for organic-pertinent research. Specifically for organically certified land within their research system. And she discovered that, of the [approximately] 80,000 acres, the total of every land grant, [only] 400 acres were certified organic. And 380 of them were at the University of Minnesota. So one land grant had dedicated organic acreage. And a couple had set aside two ten-acre parcels. And it was our belief that you could not conduct on-farm organic research on conventionally managed parcels. It had to be transitioned for three years to an organic system. Soil fertility, crop rotation, so on and so forth. So that was problematic.

And the deans of almost all of these departments were particularly problematic, if not their fault, even. The postdocs and the PhDs and even the assistant professors might be interested in this, but they could not get the acreage that would be guaranteed to stay organic during the course of the particular research they wanted to conduct. Going on-farm introduced vagaries that didn't really fit. It was the round peg in the square hole. You can control academic research in a greenhouse, land parcel, for data collection. You can't necessarily control it as well out in the hinterlands. So there was a lot of resistance that was just structural.

Lastly, there was also no money. You're getting the kind of funds you're getting from the agro-industrial companies that want chemical research, and then early on, genetic engineering research. What companies are going to give a similar amount to study crop rotations and intensive cover crops, goat grazing between the rows [of grapes] type of research projects? Too many square pegs.

So that's where, again, now there's \$3 million FIFRA monies available. Now some assistant professors were coming back saying, "If I've got five acres donated, or dedicated, would you allow me to do this?" And we had a couple of great stories of gung-ho organic researchers, had great project ideas. OFRF had now funded them to the tune of \$10,000, \$15,000 to do it on-farm. They wanted to replicate it on the university and get peer-reviewed papers

published. And at least twice, the dean said, “It’s just not going to happen here. But I’ll tell you what, if you could raise \$50,000 in addition to this OFRF grant, if you could raise outside money, I’ll permanently dedicate 10 acres for an organic research station here.” At least two assistant professors did that, called the bluff, got the money, and they did it. And it wasn’t too many years later where you could hear second-hand, the rumor mill, those deans saying, “Yeah, I got the first organic research parcel certified here,” as a proud moment. When we knew what it really took for that to happen.

There was one more challenge in the academic world. It’s publish or perish. There were no peer-reviewed research journals designed to accept organic research papers that could be peer reviewed, and very few peer reviewers. So we leaned in heavily, and Garth got it, he started these two sustainable agriculture journals, and had peer reviewers from the academic community that would then review and publish papers in this journal. That was the very first journal that really adopted it. Eventually you had the three societies that are joined together, they got their journals to accept organic peer-reviewed papers, and it’s a very vibrant [organic research community] right now. Actually, a lot of organic researchers go to the Agronomic Society’s annual poster and research meetings. But it all started in the late ’80s, early ’90s, based on the shoulders of the ’50s and ’60s and those before us. We picked it up and did some great, great work in a very short period of time, really. (1:54:04)

AA: Do you have any thoughts on why these people were opposed to organic farming?

BS: Money. Simple. You’re going to lose market share. And your life’s work is being called into question. You work at the lab to invent a new chemical. It’s called into question. The sales force behind the chemical, called into question. The fundamental structure of the agro-industrial system is called into question. Do you accept that, or do you fight it?

I had an odd experience that’s really stayed with me. My wife and I had been married, we were thinking about having children, we said, “Let’s get one more adventure under our belts.” We both took leaves and went to Greece and Egypt for a couple months. While in Egypt, a friend of mine who was with Pesticide Action Network, which is a global NGO, said, “Hey, there’s a professor at the University of Alexandria in Egypt that teaches classes on pesticide contamination and sustainable ag. We’ll write him and see if he wants you to come to the class and meet his grad students.” And on a whim I said, “Yeah, we’re planning on going to Alexandria, sure.” And it all came to pass.

We looked him up, went to his office on campus. He invited me the next day. I came there, and there were about 30 grad students in his class. I gave my organic presentation. And I was blown away and totally unprepared for the sophistication of the challenges that I got about organic. Some of the papers they had read, and the problems with organic. Finally I turned to the professor and said, “Well, they’ve done their homework.” He kind of laughed and said, “Well, it just so happened that two weeks ago we had Bruce Ames from CropLife and CAST, which are both chemical advocacy organizations, come here to give a presentation to the class.” Unbeknownst to him, really, he keyed up all the anti-organic concerns that those organizations had and how difficult it is to farm organically and how easy it is to farm with these kind of chemicals. He hadn’t really thought to tell me that in advance.

I held my own, and I acknowledged what I didn’t know. I wasn’t an expert, I wasn’t a chemist, but I’d learned a lot about organic. I particularly discussed the yield question and the false presentations of, “organic yields aren’t the same.” They’re just extremely different. You

don't farm corn every year. You rotate your corn plot through a quilt of acreage. You can expand the acreage or contract it, but you never grow it on the same parcel for five to seven years. And that yield for that corn parcel was equal or even better than conventional corn yields. It just wasn't on 500 acres.

So that was fun. And the antiquities down there were really fun.

That's the longest run-on sentence for the last two hours that I've had. What do you think? (1:58:06)

AA: Yeah, do you want to really quick say something about Michael Pollan? You said he had quoted some things from you in the *Omnivore's Dilemma*, but he didn't really mention your name except once in the endnotes. Is there something you want to say about that?

BS: Only that, in a different way, that [book] had a similar impact as Meryl Streep and Donahue had, but fifteen years later. It just took the nation by storm. And all the book readers and all the talk shows had to have Michael on to talk about the book. I'm sure he made millions from that. He's a remarkable writer. I'm jealous when I read anything he's written. He had already done a major piece in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* on organic. He'd done his homework. And here he had his book, and his organic chapter—I think there's just four chapters in it—in large part was focused on Earthbound. I think it [placed] Myra in a sort of difficult position, because he had some outcomes in mind, or he certainly framed it before he interviewed them. And they took the interviews.

But he made sure that—particularly Fred Kirschenmann and I—that he spent a lot of time with us. Asked us about scale in particular, and market, and growth, and the state of organic. And I'm not sure how much it came through in [Drew and Myra's] *Earthbound [Farms]*. I like them both as individuals, and I've known them for years. Their uniqueness to the organic community was [bringing in] the concept of co-packing [other organic farmers' product under their brand]. They had 170 growers in their program, and they would pay in advance—which was unheard of at the time—and they would essentially contract out, let's say you're growing five acres of carrots. Well, they in advance would set a price for an acre of those carrots. And they would do that for fifty farmers. And they had the transportation and parcel and data management system that they could collaborate and co-pack those carrots into Earthbound carrots and sell them by 18-wheeler to supermarkets. And better yet, they'd then go to the supermarkets and say, "Look, why don't you just buy our program? Buy twenty items, and we'll almost literally come in and take twenty feet of your produce rack and put the green peppers and the carrots and the tomatoes and the squash and the cabbage, certified organic, beautifully laid out, through our marketing team."

And people always used to, and still to this day, "Earthbound's so big, they're killing us on price, they're grabbing market share." To an extent it's true. It's very difficult in New England to compete with Earthbound in the summer and fall when their harvest is still coming in. And they've had to adjust accordingly. But out west, and especially through the supermarket category, that large entity introduced cost-effective organic products to the conventional consumer. And I think Michael did a good job putting that out and fairly representing Fred and my position on the growth of organic. I'm not sure Myra and Drew would say the same by the end of their conversations. But I feel a little attachment to my own name and my own presence, and I've always had the superficial sound bite skill sets to say it all in two sentences. Except for your poor ears, that had to listen to two hours. But once I read the acknowledgement and got the personal

notes in the book that he sent me, I realized that his style of writing is to say, “A farmer said,” or “A representative said,” or “These people said.” He interviewed a lot of people. And then in the end he noted that two of us were much more deeply invested with assistance to his work. That’s cool. Must be to anybody. (2:03)

AA: So as far as the scale goes, he said a couple times in his chapter on “Big Organic,” which I think is the one you’re talking about. He says, “The sad fact is that the organic ideal, as set forth by Howard and the others, has been honored mainly in the breach.” And he said that twice, “Honored mainly in the breach,” like implying that organic isn’t really organic. Would you agree with that, or not.

BS: No. I can’t pull the context of what you’re saying out at the moment, “Honored in the breach.”

AA: Sir Albert Howard is what he was talking about, the founder of organic, the original founder of organic farming, Sir Albert Howard.

BS: Yeah, the spiritual nature, the honor of *Silent Spring* that played a role in a lot of (2:04; end of part 1) early, early, early farmers transition. “God, what a book, and I’ve got to stop spraying chemicals!” The difficulty of taking your passion, your vision, maybe even your religion, spirituality, and applying that to the marketplace might be impossible. And I think Michael’s criticism at least in that concept is unfair. Sir Albert Howard wouldn’t really recognize many organic farms these days. Probably would never think about the critically important recognition of labor, multilingual labor, the almost requirement of cost-efficient transportation and refrigeration. A lot has happened since those days. Compromise and adjustments, yes, have been made in many of those areas.

But my feeling is that organic is more available to more people at different economic strata than ever before. And Earthbound and the very large milk cow organic, produce at least, the table grapes, the Zaninovich family in table grapes, so on, Organic Valley got a 1200-[member] organic dairy. They are as large as it gets through sort of an Earthbound approach. That’s bringing an organic economy to a much larger level. And organics is between 6 to 8 percent of the food system. So hey, we’ve got 92 percent to go yet! What’s the problem here? We’re still learning. (2:35)

AA: So when did you retire from OFRF, and what have you done since then?

BS: It became extremely draining to ask everybody and anybody for all their money seven days a week. I like raising money. I’m good at it. But the grant making, policy making, media interview process—we had 14 staff and interns by the end, an office in DC. I had pretty much reached my limits. The multimillion dollar budgets were stressful. I was not successful in creating an endowment fund that would take some of the pressure off that. And I just saw dollar signs on people’s foreheads. Introductions would lead to, “I wonder if I can get them to make a gift.” And all of that was in my professional manner. Though I’d almost hit up my neighbors, “What do you do?” “I do this.” “You ever think of giving?” It was out of control.

And the other part of that, which Judy my wife [fairly points out], when something significant happened here, the next sentence would be, “And you weren’t here.” The travel, the

plane flights, conferences, making the rounds, benefit dinners. Yeah, I ate really well with great chefs and got a lot of invitations to speak. But it added up, and I couldn't do it anymore. It wasn't good for my health, and it was time for a younger person, a mentally younger person to step in. And I was 60, and that is not a retirement age for many of my peers, but a few of my buddies had already passed away, of cancer and other issues. So I thought, I'm just going to stop and focus on the home front and a few contracts, if people want to offer them to me. I'm not going to hang out a [consultant] shingle. And see what bus goes by next, see what happens.

I did so, and I got a couple of contracts, which for the level we were at were economically larger than I thought I would get, to speak at conventions and to put in appearances and consult. I stayed in Santa Cruz, by and large, with a few exceptions. One, I still went to the EcoFarm conference, but that was a drive away. Then, starting in the early '90s, an organization called Sustainable Agriculture Food Systems Funders, a collective of foundations, mostly family foundations, started to meet and exchange ideas with each other. OFRF joined them, and I would attend their retreats every year. Had the multiple benefits of meeting new foundations that might give to OFRF, but also to share information on organic, on research, other policy connections that those families might be interested in. Those were the two travel and interactive events that kept me intellectually stimulated, almost spiritually moved—at least with EcoFarm—and I could do the rest of the communication from the house nearby and be more with my kids and with Judy.

I don't think now, really, I don't think she planned it this way, but around 2010—I've known Nell Newman since '92—she sent me some paperwork [to sign. I asked Nell about the paperwork and she] said, "Just sign here." I said, "What's this all about?" She said, "Dad set up five foundations, [one for each daughter, as part of the management of his and Mom's estate when they both] pass away. [I decided I wasn't going to wait around for him and Mom to pass away.] I would just pick up what he set up and go for it. I want you to be one of my two founding trustees, co-trustees." So I said, "That's interesting, sure." I signed it. The Nell Newman foundation was established, and [Nell], at the time, [was President of the] Newman's Own Organics company. [She donated] a significant portion of her profits from that company into the foundation and asked the [other two] of us to help her make grant awards. Her charge was, "We're going to split the money three ways," so we had one staffer [manage] who we wanted funded and [handle the resulting paperwork]. And we'd meet [as a board] and vote on it so it would be street legal. And it's really anything under the sun. And that allowed me to spread my wings and look at everything I was interested in and what ideas caught my attention and what projects deserved \$5,00 or \$20,000 or [even a] \$30,000 [grant award] each.

And I did that for thirteen years. And that was and [remains a deeply satisfying experience.] Recently I decided that, [after] a 13-year run, [my volunteer commitment] was taking even more time that needed [instead to be invested in meeting the needs of] our special needs adult son. And our daughter now has [her own] daughter, who I want to put ridiculously extra amount of time to be around. Lastly, I have 40-some odd years of environmental [and organic] tales to tell. And I think—I know I want to try to write it in a book. I get laughter when I tell [these] tales. I like to make people think. My presentations are generally well-received. [Over] the course of the last year or two, some of my buddies have written books and asked their editors to ask me to read them and give [their editor a promotional] blurb, either in the front of the book or in the inside, that, "Bob says this, this, and this."

One editor in particular [encouraged] me [to write up my organic] stories. She's been clear that there's no pledge, no commitment, but she has sent me a contract and has talked to the

publisher of the nationally known firm, imprint they call them, that there might be a book coming out by me next year. Then she dropped the other shoe and said, “You know, your life story, you have two books.” I don’t think I can write that well, but she said, “You’ve got to tell your adventure stories, you’ve got to tell your high school and college stories, too. But start in ’79 when you walked into the Alaska Coalition’s office and started getting paid to work on environmental issues, and see what happens.”

So that brings it up to now. And you gave me the questions to fill in, that have chapter heading potentials. (12:12)

AA: Yeah. So do you want to really quickly say what your philosophy of organic farming is?

BS: You’ll note the silence. I’m not sure I have one. Words come to mind. Joy. Good food. Celebration. Tough markets. Bankruptcy. Divorce. Mergers. Weather. Contamination. Laughter. Hugging. To me, I think that might add up into a very moving [kind of] spirituality that I embrace. How’s that?

AA: Very good. And is there anything you want to say about the current USDA organic certification standards?

BS: Yes. It’s pulling teeth to get improvement out of them. We talked about continuous improvement. It took them 30 years to get livestock standards. It’s actually the perfect example of the tenacity of an interest group, that absolutely positively dedicated themselves to never allowing an organic livestock standard, largely the Cattleman’s Association. They fought it for thirty years, until it finally came to pass. We got the final rules published in the Federal Register a couple months ago. They were first proposed in the ’90s. So that’s a problem. Improvement is a problem. And for me personally, the one area that I, the one time that I publicly [used] my name, such as it is, [was to post my comments in the Federal Register against allowing hydroponically grown items to be labeled as organic.]

Hydroponics, multi-storied growing operations are not organic. And the fact that they were allowed to be certified organic is incredibly annoying to me. There are whole new organizations created to fight it all the way to the end. Maybe like the Cattleman’s, the flip side of that coin. And I testified through the Federal Register portal when it came up again in front of the National Organic Standards Board. I don’t want to be publicly associated with the obscenity that is [food grown with] no soil under any condition, so-called natural chemicals, piped through plastic pipes or coconut debris-filled buckets as being an organic product. So that’s a problem. This group will stay with it, and I’ll lend my support to them for as long as it takes. In the few public times when I’ve been questioned or queried, I don’t have a problem with people growing lettuce in New York City in a three-story building that moves this water around in plastic pipes. They should be really proud and call it “hydroponically produced.” In plastic pipes. Be proud of it. Promote it. Market it. But don’t call it organic, because it’s not. (16:57)

AA: What do you think are the most important aspects of organic farming history to preserve and pass on to future generations?

BS: That’s a hell of a good question. There is clearly, it’s the stories and wisdom that the listener gleans from it that’s the most important part. “Oh, that makes sense, or that applies to me!” Or,

“Wow, they did that? They thought that up? Huh. Never occurred to me that I could go to Congress and write a law.” Or, “Really, deworming sheep can be done this way? Never heard that. Veterinarian never heard that. And yet there’s some papers on it, that OFRF funded. I think I’ll try that.” Or, “I’ll try something new, different. If it seems to work, I never thought about going to the local academic community and inviting a researcher to my farm. Or demanding that I be brought in to the student class body to talk about my farm, here in alternative production land.”

There’s wisdom. I’m not sure I have that much. It’s funny, I was with some of the board members at a conference, and there were some questions. I just whispered over, “God, I’m so in awe of the organic farmers that can answer these questions and talk about the berseem clover [cover crop] impact on certain soil types that really fix nodules in the soil, and they know all of this, and I’m never going to be able to, I don’t now that much.” They stared at me and said, “Come on, you’ve been listening to [organic growers for] thirty years, you need to pull [the answers] out. You know as much as half the organic farmers in the US.” That was a moment of revelation to me. Because I was afraid for years to allow organic farmers to come to my house and see the pathetic shape my fruit trees were in the back yard. Or my organic garden in the back yard. It was not even close to their magical [trees and vegetables]. Now I’m a little more confident that I can speak organic more often. Just by listening, and reading and touring, and even eating. (19:45)

AA: Is there anything else you want to share before we end the recording?

BS: I’m tired. It’s kind of exhausting. I think that you did some incredible homework to prep for this [interview]. I think what I want to share, these days I use the word “should” a lot. What will you—maybe not you personally this moment, or at least for the recording—there’s still a lot of “should” that should happen out there. There’s still an urgent need for collaboration of oral historians in agriculture to capture the [organic] elders’ wisdom.

A couple years ago, there was a panel at EcoFarm with twelve wholesalers, which pretty much represented every one in the West. Actually, they were from around the country and happened to be attending. “Oh, you’re here, Rich, tell us about wholesaling in Minnesota.” Or, “How in the world did you deal with trucks in the snow in Vermont?” And that panel told stories, went way over the time. Tears were running down our faces, both laughing and angry. One after another. And no one had captured the wholesaler stories. I actually raised a little money for a woman that had majored in oral history here at UCSC, and she didn’t quite pull it off. A couple of the wholesalers wanted to co-fund [that project]. There’s probably still \$10,000, \$15,000 just sitting out there. Just to interview five or six of these wholesalers that are now in their seventies and still doing this. Who’s going to do that? I’m really worried that the veritable vegetable story, and Dave’s story out of LA Produce.

I’ll tell one quick story. There was the produce markets, some of them are even shrinking these days, but they’re still pretty amazing. They open around 3:00 in the morning, where all the buyers just pour through and look at what’s available that day and order two 18-wheelers of peppers or mangoes or tomatoes or whatever. And Dave opened the first organic produce wholesale dock in LA, and they were not happy about it. What are you doing here? Trucker to trucker, you’re putting my business at risk. But he stayed with it, and built relationships. And one day he came out to get his car—and this is what he felt was the final confirmation that he belonged there and was respected and honored there. He couldn’t find his car. And another

company had taken a forklift and picked it up and drove it across the lot and put it on top of a 20-foot pile of pallets. And we were dying, we were laughing. And he said, "That's when I knew I was respected." And we were like, "How the hell did you get it down? Weren't you worried it was going to collapse?" But what a great story. What an interpretation of respect and acceptance that was in the trucking industry.

So there's more work to be done and [information that should be collected]. And I think there's got to be a caucus of organic oral historians. And unfortunately Irene has retired and probably dropped out of all of this to concentrate on her photography. But she'd been invited several times to attend the Oral Historians annual meeting. That might be a place where you or others could find peers. Or at least do a query on [contracting] me to come do a workshop for the next generation of historians so that you can get some recognition yourself and find some other brothers and sisters that should pick up on this work. Because we're moving on. We're passing our legacies to very few, really. So that's what I want to share. It's all on your shoulders, sister!

AA: Thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview!

BS: I hope it's been helpful. (25:02)