

**Roger and Norma Jean Felps
Blanco—Our Home Town
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**Interviewer: Bobbie Abbott
Videographer: Barney Cline**

Bobbie Abbott (BA): Blanco is the hometown of Roger and Norma Jean Felps. Both are descendants of pioneers who came here in the 1800s, and their home place is built on the McKinney Loop on land inherited from Norma Jean's family.

Roger Felps (RF): That's right.

BA: Roger, tell us about your roots. I think your great-grandfather came before the Civil War?

RF: Yeah, they came from—from Tennessee and settled along Miller Creek between Blanco and Johnson City. And, uh, I don't know what [inaudible]—

BA: That was Jacob Felps?

RF: Jacob Felps, yeah, right.

BA: Uh-huh.

RF: And my great-great-granddad and then Benjamin Franklin Felps, that was his son, so he's my great-granddad.

BA: Uh-huh.

RF: And George Felps was his son, so he was my granddad.

BA: One of them donated the land to the Miller Creek Cemetery?

RF: Jacob Felps donated the original block of land. I think they've added to it since then. But—

BA: Uh-huh. And, uh—

RF: —[inaudible] Miller Creek Cemetery.

BA: What about the one that had the Indian attack?

RF: He was...he was a Felps; he was a—I guess you could call him a cousin—maybe a third or fourth cousin of my dad-and they got caught over close by Round Mountain—him and his wife—killed by the Indians.

BA: And they were the last ones in Blanco?

RF: Yeah, last ones, or everybody says the last ones.

BA: Yeah?

Norma Jean Felps (NJF): He had red hair.

BA: He did? That Felps?

NJF: We still have red hair on the Felps family.

RF: Yeah, there's a lot of red hair. But I always said he just probably slow—couldn't run fast enough. [NJF and BA laugh] You know—you know, we can joke about it now, but—

BA: Then you were born in Blanco County.

RF: Yeah, I was born over on Yeager Creek between the Y (U.S. 281 and 291 E intersection) and Henly.

BA: And Henly, uh-huh.

RF: And then we moved up here on McKinney—close to McKinney when I was six years old in 1939.

BA: Well, McKinney was a community.

RF: Yeah, but the only thing there was the schoolhouse and church. You could [inaudible][Schoolhouse and church were together in one building?]

BA: And the church—

RF: Same building, yeah.

BA: People settled around them.

RF: Yeah, and of course, the graveyard.

BA: And you went to the first grade?

RF: I went to first grade there at McKinney School in '39 and '40, and then the following year, they closed it down, and everybody consolidated with Blanco.

NJF: With Blanco.

RF: With Blanco.

BA: Okay, Norma Jean, your ancestors settled here in McKinney too, right?

NJF: Um-hm. They were the first settlers here. They came from Illinois right after the Civil War.

BA: Uh-huh.

NJF: Nine wagon train were in the wagon train—nine wagons and they brought people with them like my da-, grand-. Great-grandfather was a beekeeper, and so he brought his hives and everything; he set that up. Then we had a man that brought apple trees that he had, you know, wrapped up in burlap and brought 'em all the way from Illinois, and he settled at the head of the river 'cause that's where the springs are that started the Blanco River. We had a preacher; everybody in this wagon train belonged to the Church of Christ.

BA: So the roots in this county from the Church of Christ.

NJF: Yeah, right around in here, yes.

BA: Yeah.

NJF: Everybody that's buried in the cemetery up here is either kin to one of those people that came on the wagon train or married into the family—Church of Christ.

BA: Do they still bury people in—the cemetery's right at your gate, isn't it?

NJF: Yes. We still bury people there.

BA: Uh-huh.

NJF: Buddles [motions to Roger] and I just put our tombstones in there.

BA: Really?

NJF: We're ready. [Laughs]

BA: But you were born in—

NJF: I was born in my great-grandfather's house about a mile and half down here where the first lavender farm of Texas was planted. That's where I was born in 1934, and my mother always told me that she scrapped cotton the fall before I was born in Jan—in April, and she bought her first gasoline-powered washing machine. I'm one of nine kids; this was a big thing for my mother— [BA laughs] —this gasoline-powered washing machine, and she kept it all those years even after the motor, you know, went out on it and all, and she still had it when we moved back to Blanco, and she gave it to me. So I've got it in the yard planted with flowers in it.

BA: It's still working.

NJF: Yeah, still doing its thing.

BA: Well, now, in McKinney they had what they called tabernacle?

NJF: Yes, the men of the congregation built a tabernacle; it's right down here on 1623 where you turn off of 1623 and come on McKinney Loop. You can still see it there; they made a house out of it now, but that's where they met in the summertime. Now in the wintertime, they met in the building where the school was because of the weather. And they didn't have a preacher, per se, every time the same preacher—traveling preachers would come through. At that time, the Church of Christ was in Blanco itself. It was, you know, where the Episcopalian church is now. [218 Pittsburg Street]

BA: Um-hm.

NJF: It was over in that neighborhood, and they had six members when they started. And in—this is in 1857, so the congregation has really been around over 150 years.

BA: Well, weren't there more people in the McKinney Church of Christ in Blanco at that time?

NJF: Yes, yes. But for some reason—and I don't know that my mother ever told me the reason why—about 1931 or '32, they closed the church down out at the schoolhouse up here and moved the congregation to town and built another building down there, and we started meeting down there. That was our social life too. I mean, [if] we went anywhere, we went to town on Saturday afternoons—church twice on Sunday. That was it.

BA: And the tabernacle—Roger, I think you told me that—something about people coming and horsebacking, wagons and—

RF: Yes, very common, yeah.

BA: That's, for this—

RF: Kind of before our time, but just, you know, we saw the end there.

BA: Yeah. And that was like in the summer?

NJF: Yeah. In the summer—

BA: People gathering.

NJF: I don't ever really remember meeting in this one down here off of 1623, but when we moved the congregation to town, the Baptist church and the Methodist church and the Church of Christ went together and built another tabernacle where the old parsonage of the Methodist Church is. [SE corner of First and Pecan] That's where we held our revivals every year.

BA: Yeah. So it wasn't really a church. It was—the get-together was the essence.

NJF: Yeah, get together.

BA: Yeah. Well, what about childhood? Roger, you grew up on—around the river, and—

RF: Right, yeah, I grew up the river about five miles below town on Cox Road. Ted Oaks owns it now, but we grew up there, and we had about a mile on the river. Dad would farm and ranch it 'til I was in high school. Then it wasn't really making ends meet, you might say. And so he started working out. First he started rock-veneering houses, and then he went to building houses.

NJF: Construction.

RF: Yeah, still ranching and farming.

BA: Well, the river played a big part in your life when you were a boy, didn't it?

RF: Oh, you bet. You bet.

BA: What'd you do?

RF: Any chance we got, we's either swimming or fishing one in that river, and back at that times, there just—there wasn't that many people there like there are now. [inaudible] I could take my fishing pole and my .22 squirrel hunting or something and go anywhere up and down that river, and everybody knew you that—nobody cared, you know.

BA: You did some trapping?

RF: Yeah, I did a lot of varmint trapping, and we made a little bit of spending money. That and—you combined out for—a lot of people raised wheat and oats back in those days, and maize, and Daddy had a little combine, and we'd combine it out. He'd pay me a quarter a day. And so end of the week, I'd have a dollar and a quarter.

BA: Whoa. Well, you sold your furs too, didn't you?

RF: Yeah, sold my furs. That's in the wintertime, you know. Take my furs down here at Red & White [Store]. Walter [Bindseil] bought 'em. And at first, we had to stretch 'em out and dry 'em, you know, and take 'em to him that way, and then later on he bought 'em fresh, and then we'd—they'd just freeze 'em after they got 'em.

NJF: Tell 'em about picking up pecans for your dad.

RF: Yeah. When we first bought that place down on Cox Road, he was—we had to—we was leasing the place up here, and they asked us to leave before we was really ready to, but—so they had bought that place down there, and the payments on it was gonna be six hundred dollars a year. And it would have been fine. He'd gonna stay where he was and make a crop and then—before we tried to move down there. But we had to move down there in the fall, and he's scared he wasn't gonna make the payment. But we got a lot of native pecans, and we thrashed on the pecan tree, and I think he got fifteen cents a pound for 'em. But he sold five hundred eighty-something dollars worth of pecans. [RF and NJF laugh] That made the first payment, and you know, well, you're giving some away to friends and kinfolks, or we could have made the whole payment then with the pecans.

NJF: Yeah, that's a lot of pecans.

RF: I think of all the years we were there, that was the best pecan crop we ever had.

NJF: Tell 'em how much you got a pound for picking 'em up.

RF: Yeah, he paid me a penny a pound for picking them up [NJF and BA laugh] —me and Donald, my older brother, a year and a half older than me. We picked up a lot of pecans. A penny a pound, it takes a long time to add up. [RF and NJF laugh] Well—

BA: Well, tell me about the Red and White Store, Norma Jean.

NJF: Well, that's where they took their furs, but that's where my mama took her cream to sell and her eggs to sell. That's what she bought her staples with. If we didn't raise, you know, raise it, and she didn't have it in her garden and have it canned, she didn't

buy. She—that was her spending money right there. And any time the chickens needed feed – okay, that’s when sacks were really colorful. You heard of sack dresses?

BA: Yeah.

NJF: Feed sack dresses?

BA: Feed sack.

NJF: Okay. My sisters—I have three sisters—and we got to take turns going in and picking out. She always bought three sacks of chicken feed, and three sacks would make a dress.

BA: One dress.

NJF: One dress. So we got to go in and pick out, when it was our turn, the sacks we wanted. And one time, we really got perturbed because Sylvia and Marjorie weren’t in the car, but Bonnie and I were, and we were going home. And going down, there’s a long hill going toward Cox Road, and she had a sack of feed on either fender. Well, you know what happened—and split the sacks. (BA laughs) We nearly cried, and we had to go home and get the buckets and come home and scrape up the feed, but it didn’t help the sacks. We—I don’t know whether it was my dress that time or if it was Bonnie’s dress, but it was a bad thing that happened. We laugh about it now, but that time it wasn’t funny.

RF: But Walter took your mama to San Antonio shopping.

NJF: She, my mother, always went Christmas shopping in San Antonio, and Walter Bindseil, who was—did the feed store at Red and White—always gave her a ride.

RF: He’d go in for supplies.

NJF: He always went for supplies, and he would give her a ride down there. Her and Aunt Nealie [Nalie Lilian Townsend Smith] usually went with her. And that—one Christmas—I always found where the stuff was hid—I had the book read that, you know, that she’d gotten me. [BA laughs] And when we opened up the gifts on Christmas morning, she said, “Norma Jean, I got you something else. Where’s your manicure set?” I said, “I didn’t find a manicure set.” She said, “I must’ve lost it somewhere.” She said, “I really did; I really got you a manicure set this year.” But see, I was like fourteen or fifteen, and oh, I still think, “Oh, where’s my manicure set?”

BA: [Laughs] Never found it?

NJF: Never found it. But I sure read that book; it was really good. [Laughs]

BA: It's one you never found it.

NJF: That's right.

BA: Uh, you shared your childhood with a bunch of cousins.

NJF: Oh, yeah. We kind of all lived up and down the river here. Uncle Ben [Bennie Valentine Smith] —he had three daughters: Bernice [Lilian Bernice Smith West] was the oldest, Bernell [Bennie Bernell Smith Polley], and then Jo Ann [Jo Ann Smith Hobbs] was more my age. And then, Shirley Smith Beck—she lived across the river. And then, Bonnie and I lived up a little further. Well, we would walk to each other's houses, especially in the summer time, and play because we didn't have as much work once we got the field work done.

BA: Um-hm.

NJF: And Mother would let us play in the river and go see the cousins. And of course, we saw 'em at church—

BA: Yeah.

NJF: —every Sunday. But we were really big buddies. All the pictures we have is us four girls.

BA: And there were how many cousins?

NJF: Oh, goodness, I don't have a clue. 'Cause Mother is one of nine. I'm one of nine, and Mother [sound cuts out] brothers and sisters. My daddy's people were in—down here too, and he was, you know, the youngest of twenty-four or so—Joneses and Smiths. I've got 'em everywhere. But he's [nods to Roger] got a lot of Felps too.

BA: Well, I was gonna say, Roger, what about you? Did you have lots of cousins here?

RF: Yeah. Years ago it seemed like we did. We had a family reunion in the park [Blanco state Park] every year the Saturday before Labor Day. We made up the long table up there, and it was quite a few people.

BA: Tell me about the long table.

RF: It's at the upper end of the park across the river from here, and it was built in the '30s by the CC—.

BA: The CC—[CCC, Civilian Conservation Corps]

NJF: That's easy. If we had any kind of—like the reunions, that's where we went. If we took our dinner to town—to church with us, and we were gonna go to a show that afternoon, that's where we went to eat our dinner. And when our—

BA: It's still there?

NJF: Yeah. And our class reunions once we got out of school—that's where we had all our class reunions first when we started having 'em.

BA: It's right at the end of Blanco State Park, isn't it?

RF and NJF: Yeah.

BA: Right at that road, and it's still there.

NJF: It's still there.

RF: Where the Kendalia Road goes right by it by the end of the park.

NJF: And if we had any school parties, that's where we had 'em too. It's crazy; that was it. And when we were parking in the park—

BA: Oh, dear.

NJF: —that's where we parked. [Laughs]

RF: I don't think they use it that much anymore, but back then, yeah, the long table, that was—

BA: That was—

NJF: That's where you went.

RF: —'cause there was plenty of room there.

NJF: You had plenty of room for everybody.

RF: For everybody.

NJF: Whatever they found that you need a lot of room.

BA: Now you have to pay.

NJF: Oh yeah, but that's okay. They really keep it nice now.

BA: They do. It's wonderful.

NJF: It's wonderful.

BA: Norma Jean, why did your friends like to spend the night with you on Saturday?

NJF: Mother always had fried chicken, biscuits, and gravy for Sunday morning breakfast. And I mean, they wanted to come home with us. [BA laughs] But we didn't have that many beds, you know?

BA: Yeah.

NJF: And we could only have one at a time, so they'd kind of have to take turns coming home. But we had that every Sunday morning: fried chicken, hot biscuits, and gravy.

BA: Must be nice.

NJF: It was wonderful, and of course, we killed the chickens the night before. Talk about fresh; it was fresh food! [NJF and BA laugh]

BA: Roger, everyone in Blanco knows you by the nickname of Buddles.

RF: That's correct, yeah. Everybody.

BA: It's your nickname. Where'd it come from?

RF: I had a brother, Don—well, I've still got him. He lives down in the city, but he is about a year and a half older than me, and when I was born, he was trying to say *brother*, and it'd come out *buddles*. I don't know how that—how he done that, but—

NJF: It stuck.

RF: —and then it stuck because all the aunts thought it was a good name, you know.

BA: And everybody in Blanco today.

RF: And everybody in Blanco, and growing up—nobody knew my real name was Roger. They didn't use it. And, uh—

NJF: Yeah. It's on his tombstone, Honey. *Buddles* is on there.

BA: Really.

NJF: People—most people don't know Roger is his name.

RF: When I started in high school, my English teacher kept me after school at the end of the first six weeks, and—scared me, of course, to death—and after everybody left, she said, “Come up here, Buddles.” I didn't know what I'd done wrong. She said, “I need to know what your real name is.” [NJF and BA laugh] “I can't put Buddles, on this report card.” So, you know, that stuck with me. Another thing, she signed my annual “To the barefoot boy.” And I thought, “Ha, ha, ha.” [Laughs]

NJF: He only wore shoes in the wintertime.

RF: That's the only time I ever wore shoes.

BA: Oh.

NJF: That's right.

RF: [inaudible] 'til I got way up—nearly out of school, I guess.

BA: Uh, both of you went through school in Blanco.

NJF: Um-hm. I was a year behind him, and he says I'll never catch up with him. [RF laughs] He tells me that every reunion we have. [All laugh] So we've known each other all our lives, but you really don't know anybody 'til you marry 'em.

BA: Yeah.

NJF: And you gotta be married maybe sixty-one years before you really, really *know* a little bit more about 'em.

BA: Well, if you were in school together, when did you notice each other as boyfriend and girlfriend?

NJF: I really didn't notice him 'til I was a junior and he was a senior. My brother Peanut [Carlton Forrest Jones] and he were in the same grade, and my cousin Val [Edwin Val Smith] was in the same grade with him, and he and Dutchman [Hilmer Flugrath] were hall monitors, you know. They kept everybody out of the hall at PE [Physical Education]. For some reason, I went in to get a drink or something, and I noticed his beautiful blue eyes. [RF winks.] And that was it. I don't know that I really chased him 'til I caught him or just let him know that I was interested. I don't remember; it's been too long.

BA: What do you think, Roger?

RF: I think she chased me. [All laugh]

BA: And you played high school football, right?

RF: Yeah, we played six-man football. They didn't have football during war because a lot of boys left—didn't finish school, actually.

BA: Um-hm.

NJF: They joined up.

RF: A lot of them—in seventh grade, they left. And then they started having football again when I was a sophomore, but I was working—combining out—and I didn't want to play football, so I didn't go out that year, but I'd seen what fun they had, so I did go out my junior and senior year. We won district my junior year—beat Dripping Springs—and then my senior year, we didn't, but the following year, after I graduated, they won district again.

NJF: My class. [Laughs]

BA: Your—and it's not on the board?

RF: It's not, yeah, that's right. [inaudible]

BA: At the stadium.

RF: [inaudible] At the stadium, at the concession stand, we've got a big sign up with all the years that they've been in the playoffs, and they don't have our date or the win.

NJF: Or ours on there. We're gonna have to talk to Dr. Buck [Dr. Buck Ford, superintendent] about that.

BA: Yeah, something should be done. Well, when you were in high school, did the Johnson City/Blanco feud play any part?

RF: Not really. They wasn't in our district, see, I mean, we—[shakes head] It was between us and Dripping Springs while I was in high school.

BA: But no dating, huh?

RF: No, no.

NJF: Oh, no. That—we wouldn't even look at them boys in Johnson City.

RF: It was like a big fence over at the Y. We couldn't go over it. [All laugh]

NJF: And they had some cute guys, but we just didn't look at 'em.

BA: Didn't do that. We'll talk about cute a little more in a minute. The first few years after you were married was the only time you ever were away from Blanco, right? When you didn't live in Blanco?

RF: We was away nineteen years.

NJF: Yeah. We got married, and he got a job on the ranch—7H ranch. He was a cowboy for a year and a half.

RF: Yeah, something like that.

NJF: And then we moved to town. That's where we lived when our first—when our daughter was born—on the Baker place. It's where Tom Murrah lives now—Tom and Susie Murrah and— I'm trying to say—Sarah Fulcher—that's Buster Fulcher's [Robert L. Fulcher, Jr.] daughter—had a horse, and she would come over every afternoon. I was walking 'cause I was pregnant and trying to get my exercise, and she would ride her horse in the park, and we got to be really good buddies. We laugh about that now when I see her. What good times we had, but, uh—

RF: Had a job for Henry McClain milking cows in a dairy up the river about—well, I guess, about ten miles out of town, and we worked there two years milking the cows, and then we left Blanco.

NJF: Started road construction.

RF: Yeah, road construction about a year, and then we went to Houston working a shipyard nineteen years and came back when we was both about forty, I guess. [inaudible]

NJF: And we says we served our sentence.

RF: Yeah, in 1974.

NJF: Living in Houston for nineteen years. [laughs] But we weren't unhappy—good neighbors, good friends.

BA: And you inherited this land? Because—

NJF: Yes, my mother divided the place between me and my eight—there was eight of us left. I had five brothers—older brothers—and four of them served in the service, and my sister Sylvia was in the service, so we had—she had five kids in the service. And my third brother, Buck— [Alton John Jones] he was killed in an airplane crash in World

War II in '42, and my mother and daddy took the money—insurance money—and bought this place, so my sister Sylvia named it the Gold Star Ranch, which I thought was very appropriate. So we just call it “the home place.”

BA: Um-hm.

NJF: And in '73, Mother decided—we were looking around for a place; we wanted to come back to Blanco—and she said, “Well, why don’t you just come up here and build on this?” And I said, “No, that wouldn’t be fair to my other brothers and sisters.” She said, “Well, I’ll just divide it up between y’all,” and it really was wonderful because you don’t fuss with your mama.

BA: Um-hm.

NJF: You take just what she tells you she wants you to have, and nobody fussed about anything, and everybody was so happy that she did do it when she did it. She did it exactly like she wanted to do.

BA: She saw that.

NJF: Yeah.

RF: We ended up buying the other part.

NJF: My oldest sister, Sylvia, didn’t want her part, so everybody got nineteen plus acres, but Sylvia didn’t want her part, so my sister Bonnie and I split hers up, and I—we bought part of it, and Bonnie bought part of it.

BA: Uh-huh.

NJF: So it all stayed in the family. Yeah, it’s really great.

BA: And then, Roger, you built this house.

RF: Well, I built the garage and apartment over there on weekends while I was still living in Houston—weekends and, you know—

NJF: —holidays.

RF: —holidays. And then I got Jack [Jack Dudley Felps], my brother; he was a building contractor and bought Daddy out. And he had started this house before we moved up here. He had—was just fixing to put the roof on it—had the studs up and everything, and then I came in and helped him finish it.

BA: And that was like about '74?

NJF: '74.

RF: '74, right. Then I went to work for Jack building houses.

BA: And when did you retire?

RF: I don't remember.

BA: *Have* you retired?

NJF: Well, he's *really* retired from building houses. But, Honey, I think it was probably about '86 maybe?

RF: Yeah. But nah, about '89.

NJF: I don't know.

RF: I don't remember.

NJF: 'Cause I started driving the mail in '86.

BA: I was gonna ask you to tell about driving the mail.

NJF: And you were already retired then. My aunt Janie [Jane Artz Smith], Caroll Smith's wife, was a substitute mail carrier, and she was gonna retire, and she said, "Norma Jean, you wanna try and get this job?" She said, "It's a good part-time job." The mail route was 150 miles. It was the longest mail route in the United States because it encompassed Blanco and Johnson City. So I said, "Okay." Terry Elsey was the regular carrier, and he's the one that trained me, and the very first day—from reading everything as your car is moving—I got so sick [RF laughs] by the time I got to Blanco, I said, "You're gonna have to let me out of this car." He said, "You go get you some Dramamine and take it every morning." He said, "You're gonna have to. That's what's gonna happen; you're just carsick."

BA: Yeah.

NJF: So I did it from then on, but I started in '86, and I drove it fourteen years. The first two years, I drove the whole route—150 miles—and then in—they divided the route, and I got the Johnson City end, and it was really a blessing in a way 'cause I really, you know—I had this feeling about Johnson City.

BA: Yeah, I heard that.

NJF: And this really helped me 'cause they're such nice people there. [All laugh] I never knew. But I really made some good friends, and I see my people that I delivered mail to, and they'll say, "Oh, you did a good job," you know, and all this and all that, and I said, "Well, I really enjoyed doing it, but I'm glad I retired when I retired."

BA: Yeah, I'm sure you are. Well, you all have been very active in the community, I know. Right? The library [Blanco Library]—y'all have always supported the library.

NJF: Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am.

BA: Meals on Wheels?

NJF: Oh, Meals on Wheels is a fantastic thing.

BA: Tell a little what it is.

NJF: It has been here—we didn't start delivering Meals on Wheels 'til after I retired. And each church takes a certain—we take two months out of the year that your church delivers the Meals on Wheels three days a week. And the people you deliver them to are just—they're lonely. They're so glad to see you; they wanna talk to you; they're—some of them might be hungry, you know? They're glad to see you. They're really glad to see you. And we make so many new friends that way, and when I'm saying older people, some of them are older than us, and some of them aren't, Honey. [RF laughs]

BA: Uh-huh.

NJF: 'Cause we're getting up there. [Laughs]

RF: [inaudible]

NJF: We got tickled when my mother was in her eighties—probably eighty-five. We tried to get her to do the Meals on Wheels. She said, "No way." She said, "If they're hungry, I'll just cook some food and take it to 'em." And we have laughed about that to this day. And she meant every word of it. She would. But it is a wonderful thing. The Church of Christ does it in July and October, and we never have any problem with people not wanting to go and do it because everybody is so satisfied with the feeling you have.

BA: Worthwhile.

NJF: It's so nice; it's really nice.

BA: Well, the same thing with Good Samaritan.

NJF: Oh, the Good Samaritan is a fabulous place too. Now that—Bonnie Ashley, who was a good friend of ours—her son and our son Paul went to school together, and this was her idea to start this. It started off being called *Thee* Thrift Shop—T-H-E-E thrift shop.

BA: Church?

NJF: Yeah, and it was such a neat thing. It was in town kind of where the Chamber of Commerce is now [east side of square] when it first started.

BA: Um-hm.

NJF: And then the churches all got together, and that's another thing. We worked certain days of the week each month. Church of Christ works the Thursday afternoons, and the Baptists work a certain day, the Methodists work a certain day, Catholics, every church. It's wonderful.

BA: It really is.

NJF: And you really get to see—you really get to interact with other churches, doing work like this, and you meet some of the nicest people ever, and they're so appreciative because everything that's donated to the Good Sam. When we clean it up, and we sell it, that money goes back into Blanco County—into the community. I mean, they take the money to pay for the utilities, but that's all. And they use part of the money to buy the food that we do distribute.

BA: The food bank.

NJF: Yeah, they buy it from the food bank. And a lot of times we may serve 150 families a month.

BA: That's unbelievable.

NJF: It just blows your mind that that's that many people that need help.

BA: Um-hm.

NJF: And like I say, they're so appreciative.

BA: Yeah. Those are two wonderful things. I asked you about thinking about some memorable characters in Blanco's history, and Roger, you said you thought Rae Doran—

NJF: Yeah.

BA: —was one that you will always remember.

RF: He owned a little ranch up the river here a ways, and like I said, he ran for every local office he could run for through the years and never got elected to none of ‘em, and he said it was because he was a—didn’t have grandparents buried over in the cemetery. [NJF laughs] Said he was a newcomer, said, “I’ve been here thirty-five years, and I’m still a newcomer.” But that’s just kind of the way Blanco was, but he was a—if you ever seen the program on TV *All in the Family*—

NJF: Archie Bunker.

RF: Archie Bunker—that was Rae Doran exactly. I mean, I think they must have met him first and just said, “Let’s make a movie out of him.”

NJF: When we got married, we invited them to our wedding. We got married on my mother and daddy’s front porch, and they brought us for a wedding present the nicest pot, you know—cooking pot—that you could hope to see with a lid and everything, and it was real—and they spent some good money for this, you know? It was really, really, really nice.

RF: [inaudible]

NJF: So when we were working on the road—on the road, construction—and we were moving, I guess for the second time, somehow I had taken this pot out, and I had left it outside because I had something in it, and I’d emptied it, and somebody stole my pot. And I regret that to this day because the Dorans gave it to me. It was the nicest one I had, you know?

BA: [inaudible] the Dorans. What about Dr. Flannery?

NJF: Oh, he was wonderful.

RF: [inaudible] Yeah, he was a character [inaudible].

NJF: Oh, he was wonderful. When he went in to get his blood test, you know, so we could get our marriage license— [turns to RF] Did you keel over and faint, or did you just feel like you were gonna keel over and faint? [All laugh]

RF: I don’t remember.

NJF: Dr. Flannery never let him forget that either.

BA: But you said he was a painless doctor.

RF: Oh, yeah. No, no, he was. He always said, “This ain’t gonna hurt *me*.” He didn’t say anything about not hurting you.

BA: What about prenatal care?

NJF: Okay, I had my first two babies with him. They were born in the courthouse [Old Blanco County Courthouse]; they were courthouse babies. And when I, you know, thought I was pregnant, I went in, and Dr. Flannery said, “Yes, you are, and here’s the date your daughter’s gonna be born”—well, he didn’t say daughter—“your child’s gonna be born in the middle of February. I’ll see you then.” Well, that’s when I went back.

BA: There, that was it.

NJF: That was it. Valerie was born five minutes ‘til midnight, and he did his best to try to persuade me to make her—

RF: —born on Valentine’s Day.

NJF: —born on Valentine’s Day, and I said, “No way.” She—her birthday is February the thirteenth—and he [points to RF] kinda got upset with me and so did Dr. Flannery.

RF: Me and Dr. Flannery talked it over; we thought she’s asleep in there.

NJF: I wasn’t asleep.

RF: It was about five minutes before midnight; we can put it down after midnight. He says, “Yeah, yeah, that’s right.” (NJF laughs) She heard it, though, so no way.

NJF: And see, we named her Valerie after her grandfather.

RF: Yeah. And he knew what she was going to be named.

BA: It would’ve been perfect.

NJF: Yeah, but it wasn’t her birthday. And she was born on February the thirteenth, and it was a Friday—thirteenth.

BA: Oh. I would have gone along with Roger.

NJF: No way.

BA: ‘Course, everybody agrees that Bernice Smith West—

NJF: Oh, yes.

BA: —was—probably is Blanco’s most memorable citizen.

NJF: She is; she is; she is. We wouldn’t have this book if it wasn’t for her. [Screen flashes to a picture of a book titled *Blanco County Heritage*.] Anytime we want to know anything, we say, “Go get the book.”

BA: She was Blanco’s historian.

NJF: She was. And we really didn’t have—when she was researching something, she’d ask you what you knew and all, and she’d put it down, and then she’d give—I’ve got a copy of nearly everything she researched. She made sure she shared it with all the family. It was fantastic.

BA: Um-hm. The big book there—it has families?

NJF: Yes. It’s—looking through it—it’s remarkable how many families I am kin to in here. Now [motions to RF] his family did not put in as many stories because Bernice kept prodding us— poking us, “Get your story in; get your story in.” She and Bill, her second son, Bill West, they really were the instigators, or we wouldn’t have this book.

BA: And it’s a treasure.

NJF: It is.

BA: It’s wonderful.

NJF: It is fantastic. We all made sure that all our kids—we bought our kids one.

BA: Uh-huh. [inaudible]

NJF: Everybody’s kids have got one.

RF: I’d like to mention one other character Blanco had was Wayne Smith.

BA: Wayne Smith?

NJF: That’s my uncle! [Laughs]

RF: He was the mayor down here for thirty-five years. Didn’t have no city council or nothing else and no problems hardly at all. Thirty-five years—that’s how Blanco’s changed. Now they got, you know.

NJF: We’ve got lots more business, baby.

RF: They’ve got a city council and all that stuff, and—

BA: He's history, though.

NJF: Yeah.

RF: Yeah, but, you know, whatever he said went. I mean, like we didn't have to—

NJF: Well, he had common sense.

RF: Yeah. He didn't have to talk it over with a bunch of other people. That was just like the way it was.

NJF: Yeah, he had common sense.

RF: And they named the dam after him down there.

BA: Oh.

RF: But he was—thirty-five years.

NJF: Yeah.

RF: And he just retired on his own.

NJF: Yeah.

BA: Back to Bernice—this brings up the subject of the Johnson City-Blanco feud.

NJF: Oh, word! That has been a family—it's been in our family feud forever.

BA: Well, between the two towns?

NJF: Yeah. If we ever play Johnson City, Bernice wanted to beat 'em a hundred to nothing if we could. One time we beat 'em fifty-three to nothing; that wasn't good enough. She said we should've smeared them more. And she honestly meant it.

BA: Oh!

NJF: Because she never forgave 'em for stealing the courthouse—she called it “stealing the courthouse.” Of course, it wasn't *stealing* it, but my grandmother said they had three elections. The first two Blanco won. The third one, she said so many of the names that voted had been dead twenty years at least [RF laughs], and she said they stole the courthouse.

BA: Stole the courthouse. Roger, what's your story about counties and all that?

NJF: About the way the Blanco County—

BA: How we lost the courthouse.

RF: Yeah, I [shakes head].

BA: You're not gonna choose one of them. [NJF laughs]

RF: No.

NJF: See, one of his kinfolks—I don't know if it's a cousin or whatever—

RF: At one time I had a lot more kinfolks over there [Johnson City] than I did over here [Blanco].

BA: Oh, hm.

NJF: Yeah, he did, you know.

RF: So I couldn't say a whole lot.

NJF: Sometimes I thought I married a northerner— [RF laughs] —from the north end of the county 'cause we're the south end.

RF: Yeah, but I never did live over there.

NJF: No.

RF: I had a lot of kinfolks over there.

BA: Well, the courthouse was only used three years as—

NJF: —as a courthouse.

BA: —as a county courthouse.

NJF: Um-hm.

BA: Why?

NJF: Because Johnson City stole it. [RF laughs] Blanco County was so large that they took this part of this end from the southern end and gave it to Kendall County 'cause Kendall County was so small. When they did that, Blanco was no longer in the center of the county, and LBJ's grandfather or great-grandfather or somebody—his name was Johnson, I know that much; my grandmother told me this—was in the legislature, and

they made the rule that the county seat had to be as close to the center of the county as it could be. Well, on the whole what was the center of the county? Johnson City. I really sometimes just whisper that name.

BA: Um-hm.

NJF: I don't. And there's good people over there, I realize that, but we were brought up, you know, saying they took our courthouse.

BA: Bernice said that they came in the middle of the night and took the county records. [RF laughs]

NJF: I believe she's right on that because they found part of 'em between here and Johnson City, and they had destroyed some of 'em. [RF laughs]

BA: Uh, Bernice's grandkids used to threaten her.

NJF: Uh-huh.

BA: How'd that [inaudible]

NJF: One Christmas she was in a snit. She was, you know—Bernice was either happy, or she was sad, and she either loved you, or she didn't like you. Well, she was unhappy about something at this Christmas. It was Christmas dinner, and they were having it up at her daughter's house, and all the grandkids were there that lived in Blanco, and she was just [makes grumpy sounds], and one of the grandsons spoke and said, "Mee-Maw, you don't straighten up, we're gonna—when you die we're gonna bury you in Johnson City." [all laugh] And I mean she squared herself away, and she was happy the rest of the day 'cause she believed him. They would've never done it 'cause she's buried in McKinney, but they threatened her with it.

BA: But one of her last things was the school restoration project.

NJF: Oh, yes. And I wish she had lived long enough to see it 'cause she'd be so, so proud of that. They have taken the old elementary building and have cleaned it up—sandblasted it, put new windows in, put a new roof on it. They have redone everything inside it and then added sixteen classrooms behind it. It is fabulous. You would love it.

BA: You were on the committee.

NJF: Yeah, we were on the advisory committee with a bunch of other citizens here.

BA: And it's gonna open soon?

NJF: We're gonna have a rededication of the building the twenty-fourth of August, and the kids are gonna be in it when school starts—third, fourth, and fifth grades will be in it. It's just wonderful. Where we went to school in the first grade—that's the computer lab that side, and where the sixth and seventh grade rooms were, that's the science lab, and then the old cafeteria is the new library. It is wonderful. And at the very front as you go in, on the left-hand side is a picture gallery and mementoes in there. Then on the other side is gonna be the Bernice West—all memories. It's gonna be dedicated to her. And it is the old bell that used to hang in the belfry that the class of 1951 found at a garage sale and bought it back and restored it. They've got it inside the building, and I asked Dr. Buck, I said, "Why? Why isn't it up there where it's always been?" "Somebody might steal it," and I had to start laughing. I said, "*Again?* You think somebody'd steal it again?" But he said, "No. We want it inside."

BA: And, well—

NJF: But I had several people to say, "Where's the bell? Where's the real bell?" But it's inside; it's beautiful.

BA: [inaudible]

NJF: It's beautiful.

BA: Both of you are known as local artists.

NJF: Hm.

BA: Um-hm.

NJF: Hm.

BA: Roger, your woodworking—

RF: Yeah, after I retired.

BA: We have some samples here. [The camera pans to some vases.]

RF: I retired. I thought I—maybe I'd just make furniture, but I got started wood-turning—making bowls and vases and rolling pins—stuff like that.

BA: Well, these three here—tell us something about those.

RF: Yeah. [Picks up a vase.] This one's out of mesquite; that's my favorite wood is mesquite. And it's—this was like what you call a burl or a knot on a mesquite tree. It was about that shape before I started working on it. I didn't have to do a whole lot to it

except hollow it out. [Picks up another vase.] And this is also a burl, but it come off a honey locust tree down there.

BA: Here on your place?

RF: No, it's, well, next door.

NJF: The Whitworths.

RF: The Whitworths' place.

BA: Beautiful.

RF: And a tree was in their yard that had died. [Picks up the third vase.] This is a piece of box elder come out of—

NJF: Church of Christ.

RF: —Church of Christ yard down there. There was a big one.

NJF: My mother planted this tree in 1959 when they built the new church building, and if y'all ever go by there, you're gonna see this stump—it's about this big around [motions with hands]—there to the side.

RF: Four foot—four foot in diameter.

NJF: Four foot in diameter.

RF: And the—[puts down vase]

NJF: And it died.

RF: The drought—it died [inaudible] during the drought, you know— [inaudible] died in '11—eventually died.

BA: [inaudible] And Norma Jean, you are known for your quilts; that's a prize-winning one that you have behind you there.

NJF: Yeah. [Stands up and shows the quilt.] Okay, Buddles, one Christmas I said, "Buddles, I want this quilt pattern." And he said, "How much is it?" And I said, "It's twenty-five dollars." He said, "Oh, my word." I said, "Okay." He said, "For a pattern?" 'Cause, you know, you think, Twenty-five dollars for a pattern? That's a lot. But I got it, and he looked at it, and he said, "Oh, how many pieces?" And I said, "Okay, it's called a sampler," and I said, "It has eighty-five different blocks in it. I wanna make it." He

said, "You'll never do it." Boy, that spurred me on; I was determined to do it then. [RF laughs.] And so it took me three months to piece it, and it took me three months to quilt it 'cause I quilt—hand quilt.

BA: But it is—

NJF: And it's gonna go on my coffin instead of flowers, and my daughter said, "That's fine, Mother, but it's not gonna go in the grave with you. I'm gonna grab it out." [All laugh] I said, "That'll work."

BA: And it has won prizes, right?

NJF: Oh, yeah. They asked me was I gonna enter any in the quilt show this year, and I said, "I can't do any better than I've done, no. I'm not gonna enter nothing ever again." [Laughs]

BA: No. We've got, I think, a pretty good idea of your life and your hometown, and a lot of people now are complaining, you know, that it's too busy, and 281's too busy, and there're too many newcomers and too many fast foods and so forth. And I'm just gonna ask you—last question—what do you think of your hometown?

NJF: I think it's wonderful. It's perfect. We've got to have change if we're gonna keep growing.

BA: Yeah.

NJF: That's what life's about is change.

BA: You agree, Roger?

RF: That's right. Yeah, you bet.

BA: Okay. Thank you very much.

NJF: It was fun!

BA: It was.

[A picture of the Felps in front of a wedding cake is displayed. Text: The Felps, October 14, 1951]

[A picture of the Felps posing is displayed. Text: The Felps, 2000]

[A picture of Roger holding up a vase is displayed. Text: Buddles]

Notes:

This interview was conducted and produced by the Oral History Committee of the Blanco County South Library District.

In spite of the best efforts of the Oral History Committee, some errors may be present in this transcription. Please refer to accompanying video for original source.

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