

Butch Crofts
The Caretaker
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Interviewer: Martha Herden
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Martha Herden (MH): Good afternoon, and we welcome you today on January 13, 2012. This is our first official Blanco oral history interview for 2012. My name is Martha Herden; and it's my honor here to be today with Butch Crofts, who I think anyone in Blanco and Johnson City would definitely call the caretaker of Blanco and Johnson City. Butch is our funeral director for both towns and has been in the business for well over forty years. He's got an amazing, generous spirit; he is kind and considerate; and I don't think there's a family who has dealt with Butch in their saddest of times that would not walk away saying, He helped us get through it. They would agree He helped us get through it. So, Butch, we're happy to be here with you today.

Butch Crofts (BC): Thank you.

MH: And, of course, my first question to you is: is your name Butch?

BC: It's been Butch for sixty-four years since the day I was born, actually, down here in the old courthouse here in Blanco. I was named—my actual name is Harvey Ernst; I was named after both my grandpas: Harvey Crofts and Ernst Klappenbach.

MH: German?

BC: German. But when I was born, the doctor, Dr. Flannery, came in and told my mama—he said, "Well, Anna, you've got a big old butch," because I was—I weighed nine pounds and something, which was big in those days.

MH: Uh-huh.

BC: For sure. So here I am, an old man; I'm still Butch.

MH: But I understand that you were just considered to be a precious—

BC: I was. I was. I was a—and I can't imagine why they would name someone as precious—some child as precious as I was—why they would name me Harvey Ernst.

MH: [laughs] So you just kind of knew you were precious?

BC: Well, that's what I was told; let me clarify that.

MH: Well, I'm sure it was true. Where did you grow up at, Butch?

BC: I grew up in Johnson City behind the funeral home over there—little frame house. The house fronted on 290 (US 290); and my grandparents, Crofts, had a ranch just a couple of miles out of town. I spent as much time out there as they would let me.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: But that's where I grew up.

MH: And do you still have some of the ranch still in the family?

BC: Yes. I still have the part that my—my grandparents saved the ranch for us. They had plenty of opportunities to sell it and take life easy, but they didn't. And then my dad inherited his half of the ranch, and he had plenty opportunities and could have used the money to sell it, but he didn't. He saved it for me. And so I ended up with 288 acres out of the original 2800 acres.

MH: Do you see yourself wanting to carry on that same tradition for your grandchildren?

BC: Absolutely. It would break my heart if I found out that I did something wrong where my kids wouldn't get it from me.

MH: It says you have a very deep love of that land.

BC: Absolutely. And I'm trying to teach my grandkids to love the land just as I did.

MH: Well, that is meaning you're being a wonderful steward of the property that you were entrusted with. That's what you're doing.

BC: I'm trying to be. I really—I am, yes.

MH: Yes.

BC: Yes.

MH: To do that for that length of time that it's been in the family—that's a wonderful statement, Butch.

BC: And it's—a lot of people would laugh at that because in this Hill Country, um, it was hard to—it was hard to ranch with 2800 acres. But it's kind of a joke to do it with 288 acres.

MH: Do you have cows?

BC: Yes. And again, I, you know, we can't make any money off of cows on 288 acres; but my hope is that at least my kids and my grandkids will know where a hamburger comes from.

MH: Yes. [laughs] Instead of McDonalds.

BC: Right...right

MH: It came off the cow first.

BC: Right.

MH: That's good.

BC: Yeah.

MH: Did you have any siblings growing up?

BC: Yes. I grew up with my younger sister. She, Kathy, she's three years younger than I am. She lives in Missouri. And my mother has a daughter—makes her my half-sister—Marlene Edwards, who lives in Johnson City, by a previous marriage. And my dad had a son by a previous marriage, Joseph Harvey Crofts, Jr.

MH: Who were you the closest to?

BC: Oh, I was closest to, I guess to my little sister, Kathy, because we grew up together. My oldest sister, Marlene, is fourteen years older than me; so she left home before I got too big. But she was my second mother, no doubt; and I'm very close to her.

MH: That's good. What are some of your—just a few of your earliest memories of Johnson City as a teenager—as going to school there? What are some of the things that you—strike out to you that you remember.

BC: Well, of course, everybody knew everybody. And I mean *everybody* knew everybody. You saw the same people over and over again; and they were, generally speaking, good people. Good people. My oldest sister, Marlene, tells me she and her husband spent their—most of their married life in Houston and Bryan, Texas—so away from where she grew up. And she always tells me that one of the things she missed—although she's moved back home now—one of the things she missed in all those years was all the characters in a small town like Johnson City. And it was always fun to recall

these different names of different people who were just local characters. And in the city, you know, everybody's anonymous; you don't really *know* anybody.

MH: Right. But in a small town everybody knows everybody.

BC: Yes.

MH: And that's a good thing.

BC: And the characters really make it fun.

MH: Did you play sports in school?

BC: Uh, yes, I did. I was never an athlete; but in a small school like Johnson City, I played football. And, in the—in those days we—the only sports we had was football, basketball, and track. And I couldn't run, and as I was telling my—a couple of my grandsons yesterday as a matter of fact—I could not dribble—'cause we were playing basketball together, and I told them I couldn't dribble a ball and walk at the same time. [both laugh] And they thought that was funny, but it was true. It was absolutely true, but I enjoyed my football years.

MH: Was there already—and I'm thinking there is—the rivalry between Blanco and Johnson City?

BC: Absolutely. *Absolutely!* And we beat the snot out of Blanco—

MH: Oh, my goodness.

BC: —every year that I was in high school, particularly my senior year.

MH: You said that with emphasis.

BC: Yes. [MH laughs] Yes, and of course at—*now* I'm good friends with a lot of those boys that we played against.

MH: Uh-huh.

BC: And some of 'em I consider some of my best friends, but we did.

MH: Do you think over the years you've seen the rivalry change? A little bit?

BC: Perhaps a little. With the dying off of the people we've been burying, a lot of those hard feelings—uh, some of those hard feelings have gone away in spite of the fact that some of these folks have tried to keep it going.

MH: Um-hm. I've had children in school come up to me and ask me, "Now, why is it that we hate Johnson City?" [BC laughs] And it's kind of hard to explain exactly why, and I try not to tell them why because it's, like, oh, well, it's just there.

BC: Yes, that's right. And the folks have intermarried and so.

MH: When you were growing up and, let's say, getting out of high school, were your parents already into the business of the funeral home; or did it come afterwards? What time did that happen?

BC: No, my dad and mother started the funeral home in about '43—in 1943—and they bought out the Ross family in Johnson City that had a funeral parlor. And then in '47, the year I was born, they built the funeral home that we still use in Johnson City.

MH: Still using now?

BC: Yes...yes, and my dad had great foresight. I'm sure that he was questioned about building such a large and functional funeral home in a little town like Johnson City.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: But even today, it's still what we think is very functional and large; and in fact twenty years later, when we built *this* funeral home, we use that one as a general—as a floor plan as far as we could.

MH: For this one?

BC: For this funeral home here in Blanco.

MH: What are some of your earliest memories with your parents being in the funeral home business—just a couple of things that you—that stand out to you that you can think of before you got into it?

BC: Probably the ambulance service. Because in those days, until '72, all of the funeral homes in communities—one of the services they provided was an emergency ambulance. And in '72 is when the law started coming down that an ambulance had to have all this equipment and so forth, and it made it impossible for a funeral home to stay in the ambulance business, and that's when the local emergency, uh, volunteer ambulance corps started.

MH: Uh-huh.

BC: But before that time, all the little funeral homes had an ambulance service; and looking back, I just can't imagine how we were able to do that. But we did it, and I think

did it well, but there were lots of stories about running ambulance calls and the things that would happen on those ambulance calls.

MH: But you were going out—if I'm not mistaken, you were going out to pick up someone who was deceased?

BC: No. No.

MH: No?

BC: Unh-uh.

MH: *Really?*

BC: No. We would pick up the folks that were hurt and take them to the nearest doctor or the nearest hospital—

MH: Uh-huh.

BC: —and then have to come back and pick up if there were any—

MH: Oh, my gosh.

BC: —deceased victims.

MH: I don't think many people realized that aspect of it.

BC: Oh, yeah. And it—but it was—unlike today, I mean, there was no—we never gave any medic—the only thing that we had that we could do except put 'em on a cot, put 'em in the car, and take off, uh, we had oxygen for heart attack victims—

MH: Um-hm.

BC: —that we would—and we were almost always—we were just by ourselves—one person. Sometimes you'd pick up somebody going through town that you knew that—of course, you knew everybody, but—and you'd have somebody go. But I started going on ambulance calls when I was probably thirteen or fourteen.

MH: How did you handle that stress?

BC: I never felt any stress.

MH: Really? [BC nods] It was a job to do.

BC: I had—in fact, I can remember one call—an early-morning call, a wreck several miles out—and I had a new FFA (Future Farmers of America) jacket on. In those days, you got a FFA jacket; and it said “Johnson City” on it.

MH: Were you proud of that jacket?

BC: I was. I was. I was a freshman, and it was a brand new thing for me. And when we came through town headed for the hospital, well, I had my back to the window; and I was trying to comfort these people or whatever. And everybody in town saw this Johnson City FFA jacket, so it immediately got all around town that it was school kids involved, and it—then it got into the—it was a bus had turned over. [Laughs]

MH: Oh, no! [laughs] It's called the rumor mill.

BC: That's right. That's right.

MH: So let me guess. You didn't wear that jacket again? [both laugh] Um, tell me about your parents a little bit.

BC: I think if my dad had been of my generation, I think he would've been a hippie. He was raised on a ranch, and he was expected to be a rancher or be a man of the soil or whatever.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: But he just—he didn't fit that mold at all, and he ran away from home when he was—I think he fifteen or sixteen, and he never was estranged from his parents, but—

MH: Right.

BC: —but it was—I don't know, it might have been sorta like a mutual consent thing. [both laugh] Get, go, go.

MH: Yeah, got one gone.

BC: But he had an artistic side. He became a concert violinist out in El Paso, and then he—and evidently he—this was his passion.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: And then he was supposed to—his orchestra was gonna put on a show in the Majestic Theater in San Antonio, um, like next Friday. And it was a big deal to him because he was going to have a solo part, and it was sort of his out coming and his chance to really then take off and go somewhere. And then like the Friday before it was

supposed to open was Black Friday when the Depression hit—the stock market crashed. And of course, they cancelled his show; and that was the end of his musical career.

MH: It stopped right there.

BC: Yes, that was it, although he loved music all his life—played the piano and so forth.

MH: How do you—

BC: But that was the end of his career.

MH: How do you think he was different from you in the business?

BC: I think that he was—I'm not gonna say more compassionate—but perhaps benevolent is the word. I don't think he was as good a businessman as I am, and what that all means is that he had a lot more sympathy for people, and he would just bend way over to try to help people whether he got paid or not.

MH: Whether he got paid or not.

BC: And I'm not as benevolent as he was. I try to be benevolent, and sometimes I think I'm too benevolent, but he really had a kind heart. He really had a kind heart.

MH: It's an interesting word that you choose, yes. I think you *are* benevolent.

BC: Well, I thank you, and I appreciate that. But he was a lot more concerned with people than he was with money.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: A *lot* more.

MH: How about your mother?

BC: My mother was a little German girl who didn't speak English when she started to school; and I think she told me reluctantly that when she came to school, that she and her sisters were made fun of. I'm sure they didn't smell right because they were poor—just German squatters. And, you know, didn't speak English or barely spoke English.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: And so she was definitely different, and I think that affected her. I think it gave her an inferiority complex which lasted the rest of her life.

MH: Really?

BC: Um-hm. Sure did. That's how I see it.

MH: Mm. Was she as outgoing as your father?

BC: No, she wasn't. She was until her mid-years, and then she became—she began to have nervous problems.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: And—but she always struggled that she wanted to be Anna Crofts, businesswoman; and it just—I don't—of course folks like that regard—it doesn't matter how far you go; it's not far enough.

MH: No. You're right. I hear you saying that, and what I'm sensing is that she wanted deeply to be respected.

BC: Yeah.

MH: And the business was a way that she could, perhaps, reach that.

BC: Yeah. And even though she was respected and she was a very pretty woman, she just never got over it.

MH: As you were getting ready to get out of high school, was college always something you wanted to do?

BC: It was. It was a given that, at least to me it—I never thought about *not* going to college.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: Because I wanted to improve myself and be something.

MH: Did you have a feeling that the business was going to be something that you would wind up doing, or you weren't quite sure at that time?

BC: No, I really was not sure. A small-town undertaker is a tough deal. And, of course, a lot of things—a lot of careers are tough, but the thing about being a small-town undertaker is that you're on call 24/7, 365 days a year.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: You go to eat supper downtown; and just when you order supper, well, somebody dies; and you have to get up and leave. You sit down to open gifts at Christmas, and everybody's sitting around—all the family's there having a good time—you gotta go get somebody.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: You can't go on vacations. We've never been to Vegas; we've never been on a cruise. Port Aransas is kind of our getaway because we can be back home in about four or five hours if we have to be.

MH: Right. Right.

BC: And so I saw that in my folks, and I really wasn't that crazy about having to live my life like that.

MH: Did you have some idea of what you—of something else you wanted to do?

BC: Not really. Not really. I started at A&M. My brother-in-law was an industrial engineer—Marlene's husband—so I thought, "Eh, that's cool. I'll try that." [MH laughs] Well, one—yeah, one semester of that at A&M, and I found out that I *probably* wasn't gonna be an engineer.

MH: [Laughs] That was not going to be your cup of tea.

BC: No...no. So I changed my major to business and still wasn't just real serious about what I was gonna do.

MH: Um-hm. How did you come into the business?

BC: The summer after my freshman year at A&M, I was madly in love with this little girl from Pflugerville; and she had spent her freshman year at University of Texas. And the lady who had the funeral home here in Blanco forever—her name was Ruth Wall—my dad, or I say, "my dad"—we started getting some ambulance calls over here, and we thought that was kind of strange, and then we had a funeral over here. Well, come to find out Mrs. Wall had just closed her doors. And so my dad came to me, and he said, "Look, Butch, if you have any ideas of coming into this business, this is our opportunity. We need to put in a funeral home in Blanco; we need to do it right away before somebody else does." So the Lord will help you if you let Him, and, and it was all like He laid all this out for us. Linda and I got married in August. We started—well, I mean my dad had bought this property.

MH: The land?

BC: The land. But it was just bare land. When I was a little boy—‘cause I can remember coming over here and mowing this grass and kind of cleaning this lot up a little bit.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: So we need to move now, so Linda and I got married, and we came over here, and we rented a house about a block away and started building this funeral home. My dad signed a note for me so that Linda and I could build this building, this funeral home. And then several years later, we bought my dad and mother out of Johnson City, so that’s how we ended up—

MH: So you have ‘em both.

BC: Right.

MH: How did Linda feel about you being in the business?

BC: She had no idea what it was going to be like.

MH: Really.

BC: I mean, Linda’s no dummy by any means; but she was a trooper and a worker. And there was never any question from her about, “Are we gonna—you know—Do we have to do this, or do we have to do that?” We just *did* it.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: And so she jumped in it and became—although she’s not licensed, she’s been a driving force for me all these years; and I never make decisions without her input. I’m afraid to because most of the time she’s right.

MH: It has a way of happening.

BC: Yes! [grins] I hate it when that happens.

MH: It has a way of happening. It’s just what we women seem to do.

BC: Yes.

MH: You know, the saying is, “Behind every good man there’s a good woman.”

BC: Yep. And she has been there for me.

MH: That’s wonderful. And how many children do you both have?

BC: We have two. We have a son, Andy, Andrew Harvey; and he's known all his life that he didn't want no part of this mess. In fact, I can remember him saying when he was in the seventh grade that he was going to be an electrical engineer.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: And that's what he is—a very successful electrical engineer. He designs little tiny computer chips and evidently does it very well.

MH: Wow. And your other—

BC: And daughter, JJ (Jennifer Jo), who really didn't know what she wanted to be. She would—JJ was always a hard worker—never minded getting her hands dirty. And she went to get a couple of years in college and didn't really know what she wanted to do, and then she spent six months in Australia working for some friends of ours. And when she came back, I told her that she needed to have a plan when she gets back that goes beyond this coming weekend. [both laugh]

MH: That's a good plan. That's a good one.

BC: So she said she wanted to get into the business—the funeral business—and we needed some help at that point. Our business had grown, and we needed some help, and so she got her—went to school, finished, got her schooling, and got licensed and became an excellent funeral director. And then she had these two little boys and divorced her first husband; and then she found this new guy, married him, and so now she's—this has been several years ago already—so now she's madly in love with her husband, and she's got these two little boys, and so old Dad just kind of got shoved to the back.

MH: Well, I just heard a repeat phrase. You just said, "She's madly in love with her husband," and I heard you say earlier that you fell "madly in love" with Linda.

BC: Well, that is true.

MH: So she's following her heart.

BC: Yes. Yes.

MH: How do you feel about JJ not being in the business?

BC: Well, I regularly get angry about it because she is wonderful with people, and anybody that she has ever touched—uh, years ago or whatever—they come in here,

and they ask, and they walk right past me—I've been here forty-five years [MH laughs] — this is *my* business, and they walk right past me and ask for JJ.

MH: Oh.

BC: [grins] And it makes me angry.

MH: Yeah.

BC: But that's the kind of impact she has on people. But she's still involved in the business, and she's kind of our backup and does a lot. She does all the monument sales, and she still knows what's going on, so—

MH: You know, Butch, even though they might come in and walk past you and ask for JJ, that is without a doubt a high compliment to you.

BC: Well, I'll keep that in mind the next time it happens. [laughs]

MH: Try to do that because it is. She's very much your daughter, and you've done a great job. Um, do you see yourself retiring?

BC: You know, Martha, we have—Linda and I have just allowed ourselves to start talking about that just in the last year or two, and so the answer is yes. It's gonna come; it's gotta come. I do not want to hang around until I'm in the way. JJ has told us that she does not want to end up with this business 'cause she said she had the same thoughts that I did except she's strong enough to carry 'em out. She said, "I don't want to have to live my life the way you and Momma have lived your life."

MH: Um-hm, um-hm.

BC: And her husband takes good care of her, so I'm happy for her for that.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: So I don't want to hang around till I'm getting in the way, and so that's on our minds, yeah. It really is.

MH: Well, you said it earlier: "The Lord has a way of showing—of laying everything out."

BC: That's right.

MH: That'll probably be the way you'll work it out for you.

BC: That's right.

MH: I believe last year, if I'm not mistaken, you had a little bit of a health scare.

BC: Oh, n—yes.

MH: Did that—how did that impact you? Tell us about that.

BC: Eh—

MH: Now you didn't think I'd bring that up, did you?

BC: [Laughs] I didn't. Well, I'm not the greatest patient in the world.

MH: No.

BC: But I'd had these pains for—just, you know, tightness in the chest and all that for several days, and I finally kind of—I knew I had some kind of problem.

MH: Uh-huh.

BC: I didn't want this problem.

MH: Right.

BC: So I go down to Dr. Weaver's office; and the next thing I know, they're loading me in an ambulance; and so I called Linda on my cell phone and told her what was going—and so to make a long story short, they put one stint in my heart.

MH: Uh-huh.

BC: And it was—I got out about as light as you can get out to have had a heart problem like that. So—

MH: Did you have any thoughts that maybe you were gonna—that was it? Did you think you were that bad [inaudible]?

BC: No...no.

MH: Good.

BC: Not really at all. No.

MH: Good.

BC: And I—if I died today, my greatest grief would be that I’m not here to teach my grandkids some things. Um, I, yeah, I think Linda would be okay; and my kids would be okay. But I feel like—you know, I may be kind of arrogant—but I feel like I’ve got something that I could teach my grandkids as they grow up, and ‘course I never felt I was that near death then. And I’ve seen many people who say that when they’re not near death; and then when it gets close to it, they change their minds.

MH: Um-hm. Butch, what is the—if there is a best part of your work, what is the best part that you could say—the best part of your work?

BC: When people—when a family comes in here; and after the funeral, they say, “Butch, you just, you have no idea how we were dreading this; but you made it so easy for us. There is—we had no idea it could be this easy.”

MH: That’s a high compliment. It’s a high compliment.

BC: It just makes me wanna jump up on a table and take a bow. That, and the other one is when folks come in and they say, “Now this is gonna—Momma just looks terrible—this is gonna be a closed casket funeral. But we wanna come see her. Family wants to see her.” So they come in, and we open the casket for the family, and they come back and say, “Butch, I don’t know how you did that; she looks wonderful. We’re gonna leave the casket open for everybody.”

MH: Aw.

BC: And again it—that’s just—

MH: That’s a—that is—

BC: It’s a wonderful feeling when people—when we can do that. Can’t always do that, of course.

MH: Right.

BC: But when things come together like that.

MH: Is there a harder part? Is there one—something that stands out in your mind that’s the toughest?

BC: Without being—going into specifics because I have to say that I—and people don’t understand this, but I enjoy this business because of the thing that I’ve just said. If—

MH: Um-hm. It’s obvious that you do.

BC: —if I can, it's my job to take this bad time and create a good memory, which is not all reflective of me but a good memory of Daddy's funeral. And it involves old friends coming and telling stories about your daddy and things. People that you haven't seen in years drive up here from Houston to be a part of this with you. That's all part of it. Um, but generally the part that is so hard and that I just—that's depressing—is the families who are so torn apart from internal jealousies or fighting over money or fighting over whatever.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: And brothers won't talk to brothers, and this one's in jail, and this one—we don't know where she is. We haven't heard from her in years. I hate to see that.

MH: You didn't—

BC: And it's becoming more prevalent.

MH: Prevalent. I was just gonna say, as I'm listening to you, I would think that it—being human, it inhibits; and it messes or slows down the grieving. There's all these processes of grief—the shock, the anger, the sadness—and if you've got such a division, it's gotta be really hard to work through that grief.

BC: Oh yes. And if you can't share it with the people—whether you love 'em or not, they're still the people you love the most, your brothers and sisters or your children—

MH: Right.

BC: —and if you can't do that because this one's a complete idiot or there's this animosity and hatred—hatred that you just can't get over—but, you know, I mean, we've been hearing this story since Abraham.

MH: You've got it. Yes.

BC: I mean, there's no hate like the hate of two brothers.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: And it—I mean, you just—

MH: And it's very true. It's very true. Is there anything humorous that stands out in your mind? [both laugh]

BC: There are many. And a lot of people have said I ought to write a book, and—

MH: That's right.

BC: And I have, and quite frequently I hear to—people relate to me stories that I have even forgotten about things that happened on their grandpa's funeral or whatever, and I tell 'em, "Well, I try to block those things out." You know, when the—if the hearse didn't start or something like that. [MH laughs] But, you know, there've been so many humorous things—some that were humorous to others and not to others, but—oh gosh dog, I wish you'd give me a little time to think about this. But if you can imagine it or name it, it's happened.

MH: It's happened. Yes, I would think so.

BC: From, you know, people falling in the grave, and—

MH: What?

BC: —and all, yes—

MH: At the gravesite?

BC: Oh, yes. [inaudible]

MH: What do you do?

BC: Here's a story—

MH: What do you do?

BC: My dad had some of the best stories, and here's a story that he used to tell me that—and this is back in the days when each little community, with their cemetery. They dug their own graves; the men would come together and go out and dig the grave.

MH: Um-hm. Um-hm.

BC: So the men had dug the grave, and they had come in, had the funeral at the funeral home. And so the funeral procession gets out to the cemetery, and they go up to the grave, and there's a Hereford bull in the grave.

MH: In the grave?

BC: In the grave. And so the men, they start beating on this bull trying to get him to jump out and get out of the way. So the owner of the bull, he comes running up and says, "Wait! Wait, wait, wait, wait! Man, I just—that's my prize bull; I just paid a bunch of money for him! You gonna break his leg!" [MH laughs] And he's real gentle so, wait

a minute, so the guys get their shovels and picks and stuff, and they dig a ramp so that the bull can walk out.

MH: Of the grave. [laughs]

BC: Of the grave, and then they have—

MH: And then everything carried off.

BC: Yes.

MH: So Butch, if you're standing at a gravesite and, for whatever reason, someone falls into the grave, what do you do?

BC: Well, you know, everybody hollers, and then you get 'em out; you pull 'em out. And 'course this is after—our boys, cemetery boys, are real good about—because sometimes a grave tends—is trying to cave in.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: For the soil condition or whatever, or maybe it's been raining a bunch. And so you warn people, "Don't get close to the grave."

MH: Right.

BC: Well, somebody has got to—

MH: —got to do it.

BC: —walk past the grave, and so it happens. [inaudible]

MH: But on you go.

BC: [Laughs] That's right.

MH: On you go.

BC: That's right.

MH: Um, I did some checking with some of your neighbor friends, and they tell me that there's more to you than just this side of you—being the undertaker for Blanco and Johnson City. I've been told that you have a artistic side to you. You know, and that you have some artwork—

BC: Are you talking about of recent?

MH: No, just, I don't know if it's recent; but you have some artwork in your backyard.

BC: Actually I do, and I'm very proud of that. As anybody who knows me can tell you, I have absolutely no artistic ability. I have absolutely no imagination. If things are not just here, it doesn't compute in my mind; but I made—I have a junk pile. One of my sidelines is welding, and I—'cause a small-town undertaker is kind of like a rancher; he's gotta be able to do a little bit of everything.

MH: Of everything.

BC: And I got a—so I'll weld to patch up equipment or whatever. And so I had this junk pile that through the years has been not one of my wife's favorite places because it's a mess.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: But she's starting to appreciate it more. So I had this junk pile out there; and all of a sudden one day, it just came to me. She is a fan of yard art, or whatever you call that stuff, metal; and so it just came to me in my mind to—I have some old hay rake teeth—and so I made it a spider, a black widow spider at that.

MH: A black widow spider.

BC: Yes.

MH: We will have to get a picture of that (BC laughs) since you're very proud of that. And [inaudible]

BC: Well, I didn't know if—as I say, I have no artistic ability. I didn't know if she would think it was ridiculous or if she would like it. But my grandson Bowie, who does have a lot of artistic taste, he thought it was great; so I felt a lot better. And then I went ahead and gave it to her for Christmas.

MH: Good.

BC: I think she liked it.

MH: Now, I also found out that you served as mayor of Blanco for about four years.

BC: Yes, I did.

MH: Now, tell me: how did it work out for you to be the mayor of the town and also the funeral director?

BC: It was scary, and it was touchy. And very disappointing to me about people—I had never seen people in situations like that.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: In business, there's only one right way.

MH: Right.

BC: You do the right thing for the people and hopefully for yourself, and you do what's equitable. But when you're the mayor, there's just situation after situation that it's not win-win-win; it's win-win-lose.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: Because what's right for Martha may not be right for her neighbor Butch.

MH: Right.

BC: And even though Butch is wrong, and it says it in black and white, or it's obvious, Butch doesn't see it that way; Butch thinks he's right too.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: And that was really hard for me.

MH: It had to be.

BC: And that was just hard; and along the same lines, I saw a lot of people's nature that I didn't know was there. Again, part of it was just someone failing to have the common sense to see that why you can't do this and why she can do that. And every—there were so many people, they wanted *their* street paved, and they wanted a fire hydrant at *their* corner, but that guy that lives behind them—to heck with him. I don't care if they get anything; just don't bother me.

MH: But then the strange thing I would think is that if they were angry at you as the mayor and then they had to come to you needing your services, that had to be tough.

BC: It was, and that was the scary part of it. And I don't—whether it affects my business or whatever—I don't like people being upset with me, and one of the things I'm good at is negotiating with people and getting people to understand, and I was able to do that in all but a very few cases.

MH: Yes, I can think of one of those cases—not when you were mayor—when your negotiating skills didn't work.

BC: What?

MH: Why, Butch and I served on jury duty together.

BC: Oh! One of the most embarrassing moments in my life!

MH: And his negotiating skills to get me to shut up did not work. [BC laughs] I got out of jury duty, and Butch didn't. One other thing I wanted to share about Butch that comes to my mind, you know; and actually, Butch, this is something I'll never forget. I would work at the Catholic church and help Butch with funerals and one day forgot that a funeral was coming up, only to look down at the church and go, "There's the hearse; oh my God." I went flying to the church in overalls to tell Butch, "I will be back in fifteen minutes ready for the service." I'm sure Butch thought, "There's no way." I was back, dressed, and Butch told me, "Mrs. Herden, you sure do clean up nice." And I told Butch, "Make sure you don't ever forget that." But I hope it's a long time before you ever have to worry about that.

BC: And she did. And she did. She was a mess, had dust and dirt all over, and came back real quick, just as pretty as could be.

MH: Thank you, Butch. Butch, I want to ask you real quickly as we're nearing the end of the interview: what do you see for the change of Blanco? How do you see it looking in about, say, five to seven years?

BC: I think a lot of it depends on 281. When they do whatever they're gonna do—TxDOT—with 281 between the Guadalupe River and Blanco County and Blanco.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: If they get that road fixed where it's convenient, I think Blanco's gonna explode.

MH: Um-hm.

BC: Not as much as Boerne.

MH: Right.

BC: But definitely, I think things are really gonna start popping here in a few years.

MH: Um-hm. Well, I hope, as good as you are at your work, I hope that you do get to find retirement before you have to get so busy that you're working yourself constantly. I do hope you get to go and be retired.

BC: Well, thank you.

MH: Because I think if anybody deserves to have a good, relaxing time on the river, I think it's Butch and Linda Crofts.

BC: [Laughs] I appreciate that. I appreciate that.

MH: Butch is—

BC: I'm looking for—one of my great goals in life is to hear my phone ring and not answer it.

MH: And not answer it. That's gotta be true.

BC: Because right now, it doesn't matter whether you're in the bathroom or pushing the lawn mower, you have a phone with you.

MH: You've gotta stop. Well, Butch, it's been a pleasure to interview you, truly; and I've always thought highly of you.

BC: Well, thank you, Martha.

MH: Highly.

BC: Thank you.

MH: You are a decent, kind man. I've watched people here in the throes of deep sadness, and you're able to put laughter and a smile for a moment on their face that they need at that moment. And Blanco and Johnson City are without a doubt blessed to have you and Linda and your family amongst us. You're wonderful people.

BC: Well, we work for good people. We really do.

MH: Well, God bless you. I know He called you to do this work, but I think He's also got a fishing pole waiting for you. [BC laughs]

[Text: WHAT TO TEACH YOUR GRANDCHILDREN

- Love God.
- Be in charge of your attitude; be happy.

- Do the right thing; be a person of integrity and principle.
 - Be the hardest worker on the job.
 - Recognize the gifts God gave you; use them.]
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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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