

1 Vard Coombs

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INTERVIEWER: Marsha Holland
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MH: It is February 7th, 2011. We are in Escalante, Utah and I am with Vard Coombs. Vard, if you would please introduce yourself and please tell me your birth date, place you were born. Then a little about the family you were born into please.

VC: My name is Vard Coombs. I was born in Boulder, Utah in a log cabin on February 24th, 1942. In my family, we had fifteen children including a still born twin. I am the second to the youngest. I had a younger brother, two years younger that was killed on a tractor when he was fourteen.

MH: And your parents names?

VC: My dad's name was Ephraim Hyrum and my mother's name was Florence Mary Snow, her maiden name.

MH: Snow is a big Utah name isn't it?

VC: Yes. Both my mother and dad came from Wayne County. My dad had heard about Boulder and he decided when my oldest brother was about a year old to move. They went to Boulder from Wayne County in December, with a team and wagon.

2 Vard Coombs

MH: Wow, which is a bad time of year?

VC: It is. I might add I am the second to the youngest. I have three older brothers, one that is twenty-three years older than, one twenty-one years older, and one twenty-years older than me. My oldest brother I did not know very well because he left and went in the Navy before I was old enough to remember. He would come home on furlough a time or two when I saw him. After he got out of the Navy he met a gal and got married and stayed in Portland, Oregon. He worked as a diesel mechanic.

I knew most of them except for him, he stayed away. My third oldest brother died when was eight years old with the flu. At the time he died, they thought if there had been some liquor in Boulder they could have saved his life. I am not sure that is so.

I have seven sisters and they had to go off and board to go to high school. They used to go the Wayne County and stay with my aunt's. My dad didn't like that so he bought a school bus and started the school bus between Boulder and Escalante. He drove it for a year and had too much farm work to do so he hired a man named Doyle Moosman to drive for him. Doyle drove the bus for a year and then the school district bought the bus and took it over. So, Doyle Moosman drove it from twenty-three years. When he was ready to retire, I wanted to drive it. But at the time he retired, I was the bishop in Boulder. There was a family that had moved into Boulder and had seven kids and he didn't have a job. The man applied for the bus driver's job. The school district said I could have it, but since this fellow didn't have a job I said to give the job to him. So, he drove for two years, then he moved back to Arizona. I have been driving it ever since. This is my thirty-sixth year.

MH: It seems like it would require a certain type of dedication, too.

3 Vard Coombs

VC: When I was in high school, I rode the bus to Escalant when the road was all dirt and the road was just barely enough for one car. I have seen a lot of changes in the time that I have been driving on it. The Department of Transportation has widened it out, but just piecemeal. There is one stretch of road that all they did was grade it and smoothed it out and put the oil down, and I can't believe how long it has lasted.

MH: Well, they fight in several places.

VC: Oh, yeah.

MH: Well, the road must be a great friend of yours, almost a wife?

VC: Yes, well it is. (laughter) I can tell you every nook and cranny. I figured with the school bus I have driven over a million miles on that road.

MH: So, you are an expert.

VC: Yes, I feel comfortable with it.

MH: Let's go back to your family a bit. Your parents moved over to Boulder, but was there a Coombs family that had some connection to Salt Gulch.?

VC: We didn't ranch in Salt Gulch. The Coleman's and LeFevre's were in Salt Gulch. I am related to the Coleman's through my mother. It was my mother's mother that was a Coleman. She was from Wayne County. The Coleman's that were in Salt Gulch were from Wayne County, from Teasdale. My dad owned a place in Salt Gulch for a while; in fact he owned a lot of places in Boulder that he told me he traded off. One ranch I really like now, he said he traded for a horse. My dad did a lot of freighting in Boulder with a team and wagon. There is a place ten miles out of Escalant that they call the Cream Cellar, where they packed cream to and left it there in a cool

4 Vard Coombs

place. That is the farthest anyone would go with freight on a truck. So, they would leave it there, and my dad would come over with a team and wagon and haul it on into Boulder. The first items he took in to Boulder was a piano. It took two wagons to get it there. Also, he had one of the first cars in Boulder. The people who had cars had the problem of gasoline. They would bring the gasoline out to the cream cellar and he would freight the gasoline in with a team and wagon. At that time the road that went into Boulder came in from the southern end of Boulder. He said when he would come in with the gas, it would be in a fifty gallon drums, and the cars would be lined up waiting for him so they could fill up. By the time everyone had filled up, the gas would all be gone.

At one time he had a dealership for International Trucks. Later on he did a lot of freighting with those trucks. That was how my younger brother died. My dad was hauling some freight over the Boulder Mountain before it was paved. He got stuck in the mud. He wanted me to take the tractor up and pull the truck out the next morning. My little brother got upset because he was never allowed to drive the tractor much. Dad let him take it. If you are familiar with the tractor, it has two brakes, one for each wheel so you can turn sharper in the field. But, if you are on the highway, you need to have the brakes connected together, so if you step on one, it will pull with the other one down. He didn't have the brakes connected, so he was going down the hill and hit the brake, the one brake and flipped the tractor over on top of him.

MH: That is a sad story.

VC: The night I was born they were having a dance in Boulder. The only doctor in Boulder was a chiropractor. So, they went to the dance and got him. Like I said, I was born in the cabin at the time; we were having a bigger famed house built right next to the cabin. It wasn't quite finished when I was born. I was seven years old before we had electricity in Boulder, that was in 1949.

5 Vard Coombs

We didn't have running water and had to carry our water out of the ditch. We heated with a wood stove in our living room and a wood cook stove in the kitchen, was all that we had. The upstairs was not heated; we piled on the blankets at night. In the morning you could see your breath. To keep warm, we had the old flat irons, heavy metal, put them on a stove to heat them up and connect them to the handle of the iron. We used to heat those up and wrap a towel around them and put them in the bottom of our bed to keep our feet warm.

MH: Did it work?

VC: It worked.

MH: Even in 1950, Boulder was just still such a remote place. Did you get that sense that you were isolated?

VC: Yes. Boulder has really changed now, and I can't believe the things I am seeing now. I never thought that Boulder would be like that because it was so remote.

MH: What kind of things are the most surprising to you now?

VC: The number of people. People used to come by and visit, but they would not stay. Now there are mostly retired people that are living there. In the seventies, in 1975, there were a lot of people who said they were going to stay and live off the land. Well they found out they could not do that and always would leave. But, now, people are staying. I think the population has more than doubled.

MH: Boulder had a few distinct family groups, in Salt Gulch, as well in Boulder, and now there are so few of those now.

VC: What I call the native families, there are not many of those anymore.

6 Vard Coombs

MH: I have been able to interview some of the Salt Gulch families, like the Halls.

VC: Horace Hall and my father were two that did a lot of freighting together; they had the first trucks in Boulder.

MH: In another interview I read that there was a garage out by the Cream Cellar and people would have their cars out there and go from there by car out Widstoe. Is that correct?

VC: Yes.

MH: What was the road like going north towards Grover?

VC: My earliest recollection of it was that it was not very good. In fact, the road that went around the Boulder Mountain actually followed a cow trail. (laughter) The same way with the road between Boulder and Escalant. When they first started taking cars across there, the one place we call Phipps Pasture, cars would get stuck there and have horses hook up to them and pull them out.

MH: Phipps Pasture would be the route that would end up over by Chimney Rock.

VC: Yes.

MH: I have hiked extensively through there; it is a very challenging area on foot.

VC: It is.

MH: It is phenomenal to me that Phipps was the route.

VC: It is. I am not sure how the route went into Boulder from the south. It didn't go over Hogs Back, it came in from the south. There was one particular place, I can't remember what they called it, it was a difficult place to get down, probably down into Boulder Creek.

7 Vard Coombs

MH: The route Boulder to the north, your memory is that it was just a dirt trail.

VC: Yes, and closed in the winters. It was really a mean road because the soil on the mountain was heavier than the sand in Boulder, it got muddy and sticky.

MH: It is interesting though because of the numbers of people who came over to settle from Wayne County. There was thoroughfare there, but just seasonal and rugged?

VC: Right. When my folks first got to Boulder, when they would sell their cows, they would drive them over the mountain on horses to Richfield. We had a ranch; he bought a ranch from Amasa Lyman. That is where we lived, what we lived on. We had a big garden every summer. I have put up a lot of hay with a team and wagons. We never had a pick-up then, we had a wagon with iron rim wheels, we used that like a pick-up to go out and do our work with. We have had some pretty scary times with a team of horses. One time we were hauling hay, when you haul hay loose, you would put ropes underneath it to help pull it off at the barn. We would pull up alongside the stack yard, then have another horse hooked on to the ropes and it would pull it all off. The fence where the hay stack was made of board. After we got the hay unloaded and started out, the wagon started to scrapping on the board making a screeching sound which scared the horses. They were forced to go around through a corral to get out. One of my brothers couldn't hold then and the other ran out to shut the gate so they couldn't get out of the corral. The horses just went round and around that corral until lone of the wheels come off, before we got them stopped.

MH: And that is just a happen-chance, you can't plan for it, just gotta be quick thinking.

VC: That is right.

MH: Was it alfalfa that you were growing?

8 Vard Coombs

VC: We raised alfalfa and oats, rotating between alfalfa and oats. Then we raised a lot of oats just to feed too, we don't so much now. To cut the grain we had what we called a binder, cut the grain in a shock about that big around, put one twine. We would go out with a pitch fork and shock it, by standing it up in a place, about as big around as this table, 3x 4, 3x5. Then we would haul it all in and stack it, it became a round stack. Then Lymans had a thrasher, they would bring it down we would get up on the stack and throw these bundles in the thrasher, it would pull the straw out one place, the oats and grain out the other place. That was quite an operation, there would be a lot of people come to help. My mother would usually feed them. It was that way all through Boulder. The thrasher would move to the next place. The Lymans owned the thrasher, Kirk Lyman.

MH: When you had the shocks, how high were they stacked?

VC: They were high, probably higher than this ceiling, stacked horizontally.

MH: I have seen in some of the old barns in Escalante, the pulleys and ropes that were used to haul in and stack hay. With the oats, was it good for the land to rotate with oats?

VC: Yes.

MH: Were you ever able to mill your grain or was it simply used for the livestock.

VC: Just for the livestock. There wasn't a mill there, there was one in Wayne County, between Bicknell and Torrey, didn't have one in Boulder.

MH: It made sense then that since few were growing grain to eat, no grist mill, not a great route to and from.

VC: The flour would be hauled in.

9 Vard Coombs

MH: Although it wasn't the Depression Era, was there still trading going on?

VC: I remember that my dad did a lot of freighting; he would go out and bring things like that in when it was needed. My mother used to make her own soap, like laundry soap. We had an old wringer type washer.

MH: One of the lucky ones, huh?

VC: Yes, (Chuckles) Monday was wash day; she would wash all day long. There were about five kids at home then.

MH: Did any of your brothers and sisters stay in this area?

VC: I have one sister that lives in Escalant who married Carl Spencer. The Spencers are quite established family here in Escalant. I have a sister who married Richard Lyman, who owns this place. I have one sister in Boulder, Elaine, she married a guy from Escalant, she lives in Boulder because he died in '77, Uvon Roundy. She lived about three blocks from here. But she stayed in Boulder since his death and runs the little store in Boulder.

I have a brother that lives in Monroe, one that lives in Manila. His wife is from here, he was living in Boulder and she got a job teaching in Manila, he went up there to see her one time at Christmas, maybe 10 years ago and on the way back, south of Price he hit some black ice and wrecked his pick-up. Now he is in a wheelchair, paralyzed from the waist down.

MH: Traveling in and out of here is tough. You are a living legend.

VC: I will tell you I have had some pretty hairy experiences on this road between Boulder and Escalant, not only in the bus but in the car.

MH: Eff Coombs, your father, sounds like he was an entrepreneur, and he made it work.

VC: He was, one thing I was talking about the wagon we had with the iron rims on them, he made those. He was a blacksmith. I spent hours and hours cranking the forge for him while he would do things like that, make horseshoes. The forge had a handle that you would turn to generate air. His shop burned down, many years ago. It was kind of funny, my brother just older than me, in the summer time we would sleep outside. We had a porch on the left side of our house that had a roof over it, he had a bed out there and was sleeping. The shop caught on fire at night. And my mother's bedroom was right there and she saw it was on fire. She went out and shook him, and said, "Anthony, the shop is on fire!" He raised up and said, "Yep, the shop's on fire" and he laid back down. (Laughter) But also we had on the shop another building that we called the ice house. We never had refrigeration then so we had this house that was filled with sawdust, almost as high as that door frame (6ft), and we would put big blocks of ice in there to keep during the summer. We got the ice from ponds that were frozen. I don't remember collecting it, just remember the ice being there, not how they got it.

MH: The ice would preserve the dairy, ice cream?

VC: Right. I remember a lot of times we had still had snow on the Mountain on the Fourth of July. We would go up there and get snow to make ice cream.

MH: Did your family spend some time on family trips together, any time for that?

VC: Growing up I can't remember doing that, all I can remember is working. (Laughter)

MH: Your mom, she held down the fort, how often or long was your dad gone?

VC: Up to three days. A lot of times, most of the times he would be gone overnight.

We had a little store by our house, too, for awhile. I was too young to remember that, but I know the building that was there and my mother told me that she had a store there. My older

brothers told me about people who made moonshine. My mother told me when they couldn't get that would drink something else. She was telling one time that there was two guys come down to the store and bought a couple of bottles of vanilla, they said they was going to flavor some ice cream. She said as they rode their horses up the rode they were flavoring the ice cream. (Laughter) I have heard of people drinking aftershave.

MH: Every generation has their weird desperate things they do.

VC: My older brothers used to tell me all about this. They said there was one house over there that these guys were playing cards and making moonshine. One accused the other of cheating, so he run upstairs, run out and jumped on his horse, and it was still tied up and he couldn't get away before the other guy got out there, (laughter) One other time they told about how they were making moonshine and tasting it, they heated some way and tasted it as it was coming out, and one guy got so drunk he couldn't walk. He didn't live very far away and he crawled all the way home, told his wife there was guys poisoned him. (laughter)

This was just stories I heard from my brothers, since my brothers were older, twenty years older, I didn't experience that myself.

MH: Your mother is holding down the fort, has a big garden, doing a lot of processing and you guys were right behind her.

VC: To me then, we had a huge patch of corn and potatoes. We used to raise dry beans, take them and put them on a trap and tromp on them to thrash them, get the shell off. My mother did a lot of bottling. Deer meat, she bottled deer meat. I ate so much deer meat when I was younger, I don't care for it too much now, but I do like it bottled. It gets tender, takes the wildness out it. We all hunted. For breakfast I remember we mostly had deer meat, biscuits and gravy. I haven't

been hunting for quite a few years now. I have lost interest in it because I am not that fond of deer meat anymore. (laughter) I have an older brother who is really a hunter, in fact He is a Dedicated Hunter, in order to get more opportunities to get a permit, you can go fix places for wildlife like to water. He is in to that. He has shot buffalo, big horn sheep, everything.

MH: As a kid running around did you have favorite places that you would hang out.

VC: We had one place that was east of our house, a ledge, we called it the "little white ledge", we would go climb up on that. There is another place across the creek from that; east of Boulder, you can see it from the little store, they call it the Sadie Nipples, it has spires on it that look like nipples.

I liked to fish. I would go up to where Dell Lefevre lives, I would go up above his place, to the creek that runs down through his place that was the Lymans. I would start there and walk all the way home and fish. I better not tell how many I had when I got home.

MH: I am sure your mother loved the alternative. Would you have fish and biscuits then?

VC: Well, we did, we had fish for breakfast. When we would take our cattle on the range, I would go with Otto Haws and Neal Jepsen, I went with them a lot.

MH: Would you tell me about your permits, would you describe the rotation through the country with your herd?

VC: When I was younger, growing up, the winter range was down in Circle Cliffs. Everybody run together. I really liked that, especially in the springtime when they would gather the cows and bring them up to what we call the Government Corral, the corral off to the right in Boulder, Kelly Roundy is right there. We would bring them to that corral and sort each other cows and brand the calves. The Forest Ranger, Reed Thompson at the time who lived right over here, he would

come over and tag the cows to go on the Boulder Mountain, moving on to the forest land. After that, about the time I graduated from high school, they fenced off the allotments in the Circle Cliffs, and each person had his own allotment that was fenced off. My mother died when I was a junior in high school, I was here along with my dad, I was taking care of the place, all the cows, and that was when we got the individual allotments. That was when I went down with Neal and Otto Haws, our allotments were close together.

MH: Who put in all that fencing? Was it the lease responsibility?

VC: The BLM hired people to go down there. One of my older brothers went down, and Heber Poulson I know that he helped on it. But I know they would hire people to go down and build the fences.

MH: But, it seems like you might never have equal allotments, quality of land.

VC: No. They have gone back, all the fences are about gone, and they have kind of gone back to the way it was at the beginning. They have re-seeded so it is a lot better that it used to be. This would be out in the flats, go out from the head of Long Canyon, out by where Lampstand is (through long Canyon and you go out another 10 miles, there is a road that takes out to the left, goes up to the north) then you keep going out and you will come out to a flat area, before you get to the Moody Road, that is what we call The Flats. The BLM reseeded that: they chained it then reseeded it, and that has been pretty good. My older brother got our ranch. I could have had it but I didn't want it at that time. I have kicked myself since.

After high school I was home alone, my mother had died and I was home alone with my dad, that is when he told me I could have the ranch. I didn't want it then. But my older brother working on a survey crew down in Arizona, he came home and took over. I went on a mission,

when I got back, I was going to be drafted since the Viet Nam War was going on. I joined the Air Force. After I left the Air Force and come home, I was trying to help my brother there that summer. My sister, that owns this hotel, was living in Anaheim, California at the time. I went down there to stay with them because there was a guy who came up from California, up to Boulder and brought a bunch of scouts with him. I had worked for Otto Haws hauling hay off and on. That summer I was hauling hay for him. I hauled hay alone a lot. This guy from California saw me hauling hay and couldn't believe I could throw bales up where I was. He taught at a college, El Cerritos College, and another guy that was with him, who brought the scouts up, his secretary, well, I had my eye on here. He was trying to get me to come to California, so I thought well, I would. I went down and stayed with my sister. That is where I met my wife, was down there. She is from Minnesota. I didn't like the city. I came home.

And there was a guy from Arizona that bought Otto Haws' place, up the Boulder Creek. When you come into Boulder you see that big red barn, another one just like it a little further up, he bought those places and he was looking for someone to run it. I came home and I worked for him. He said, "It was better than owning it; run it like it was your own and I'll pay all the bills." I was there for twenty years, then he decided he wanted to sell it, so when he sold it, Alfred Jepsen, who lives down in Lower Boulder. had a construction business in California so he had Kirk Lyman running his place. At that time Kirk was going to retire so Alfred told me, "When you leave there I want you to come down and do my place. So, I went down to Alfred's and was there for ten years. Alfred run his cows down in Moody. That was why I started talking about Moody. Where we would go with his cows was 64 miles from Boulder, down in Moody. That is some big rugged wild country. Alfred Jepsen originally came from Richfield. There was a place in Upper Boulder, above Neal's place, the Ormund's place, and there was a place there where Nels Jepsen lived, Alfred's uncle. Alfred said him and brothers would come over in the summers and

stay with Uncle Nils. That was how he got into Boulder. The place he has in Boulder used to be owned by the Bakers. The Bakers, there were two Baker brothers there. (did you milk the Baker's cows??)

I used to milk a lot of cows. When I was growing up and riding the bus to Escalant to high school I would have to get up every morning before school and milk anywhere from seven to ten cows. Everybody in Boulder had milk cows, and it got to where if somebody needed a cow milked they asked me to come milk their cows. Bernell Baker, he was one of the first ones in Boulder that had an automatic milker, for about fifteen or twenty cows. He was going somewhere on vacation one summer and wanted me to milk his cows. Two days after he left they turned off his power because he had not paid his power bill, so I had to milk all those cows by hand.

MH: Oh, my gosh...how long was he gone?

VC: About four days. I milked a lot of cows in my days. I have what they call ganglion cysts, and trouble with my wrist. They tell me that is what has caused a lot of it.

MH: Wow, interesting, so you know firsthand about many of the Boulder ranches?

VC: Oh, yeah, then Burns Ormund, where the Ormund place is I was talking about, I baled hay for them. They had a hay baler that was a wire tie: you had to hand tie it. There was a seat on each side of the bale chamber; two guys would sit to ties the bale as they come out. Burns would hire me; I was still in high school. I would drive the tractor and him and Cecil Alvey would sit there and tie the bales.

MH: I am thinking it wasn't that long ago; you graduated in the 60s?

VC: I graduated in 1960.

MH: The 60s were a wild time in the world. What was going on for you? Did you have an inkling of all that was going on then? How would you find out; radio, television, newspaper, word of mouth?

VC: Radio, we never had a television. We had a radio but we could only get stations at night because of too much static in the day time. We had good reception at night. One of the best stations that we could get the clearest was one from Oklahoma City. There were stations in Richfield, full of static, but we could get this Oklahoma station as clear as can be.

MH: Did you know there was a revolution going on?

VC: No, no, I didn't. Even after I got married and come back and started to have my own family, we never had television for quite awhile because we could only get one or two channels with the reception so bad. It wasn't worth it.

MH: Every parent has philosophies they try to impart upon their children. What were some of the things your parents made sure that your big family understood before they left?

VC: One thing is, and I will always be grateful to them for, all I can remember is work. I think that is the best thing that I ever learned how to do. After my mother died, it used to be if I wanted something I would go to my mother because, my mom was, well my dad was pretty strict. After my mother died, my dad mellowed a little bit, but yet, as an example, I had a car before I was a licensed driver. I would drive the car over here to basketball practice. I would go places after I had a driver's license like Richfield, and I could go most places without him saying too much. I knew one thing; no matter where I was I had better be home in time to milk the cows. That has been my philosophy with my kids, if I could teach them one thing; it would be to teach them how to work. Like the ranches I have been on, they have been right there working with me. I have six boys and two girls, and now all of my boys know how to work and all independent.

MH: It is important to teach a work ethic. We have a business and the kids I tend to hire come from farms, they have a good work ethic.

VC: That's right.

MH: Let's talk a little bit about your family then. What is your wife's name?

VC: Mary Jane. She came from a big family too, fourteen in her family. She is from Minnesota. She had a brother who was in the Navy stationed in California. She went out there to stay with him. That is how I met her.

MH: Yes, a lot of those young ladies went from Tropic to California to work in the shipyards.

VC: I have to tell you, my wife she was not happy at all when we moved to Boulder. Boulder is a hard place for women, especially if they have not been raised there. It was hard, and she has been there for forty years and she still not used to it.

MH: And what do you think are her major challenges living in Boulder?

VC: I told her before we got married that I was going to go back to school, when I got the opportunity to come back I ...farming and ranching are in my blood. I couldn't do it. She was really upset about that. Then being so far away from doctors and things like that. She is not so interested in the shopping, it doesn't bother her that much, but the doctors and things like that and being away from universities and other opportunities. It is hard, I have seen a lot of women come and go because they could not handle it. I am not sure you could pry her away now, still things like going back and taking some college classes, things like that...she is pretty well happy.

MH: And your permits?

VC: well, those were my dad's permits I was running then my brothers. When I was running for Charles Flake, he had no permit with his operation. What was interesting, the place where the red barn is, it was separate from Otto Haws place up the creek. The price he got out of his place when he sold it would boggle your mind. The place right by the road, my dad had it leased for a long time before it was sold. Charles Flake, the guy from Arizona, bought it for three thousand dollars. I think he got Otto Haws place for sixty thousand and I think he sold both for about a million. Anyway, Alfred Jepson had his own permit. I was there for about ten years, then he sold his place because he was frustrated with the way the permits were being handled because it was at that time Clinton made the Grand Staircase Monument. And really Moody was a very poor permit; I would only take half the cows allotted down there. He had a permit for three hundred and sixty; I never took over a hundred cows down there. They would come back so poor it just wasn't worth it to take them down there.

MH: Boulder is just so lush, a paradise for cows. Is that a correct perception?

VC: Well, it is, as compared to Escalant. They have a problem here with water in the summertime, which is why they are building a bigger reservoir. We always seemed to have water in the Boulder Creek. I don't know where it comes from but it is always full. One thing that really amazes me is no matter if it is drought or not, Calf Creek never fluctuates, it always runs the same. When I was home alone with my dada, taking care of our place, he also had a Petersen place in Upper Boulder leased, near Leo Gardner, just below Neal Jepson's place. Some Petersons' owned that, Burt Petersen died some time ago and his wife stayed there and taught school. She taught me in the first thru the third grade. When she left, they had about five boys and the boys all left and went to Salt Lake to work. When they left, they leased it to my dad, when had it leased for twenty years. The permit that it had, the winter permit, was down in the

head of Calf Creek where Calk Creek Springs ups, then out to what they call Boynton Bench, on the west side of Calf Creek. That is a rugged interesting area there. Now west of there, of Calf Creek, you get over in there you get over into Death Hollow, the Mail Trail. The old phone line, in fact Randall Lyman that owned this place, he owned the telephone company, when the old telephone line went across Death Hollow. Have you seen one of the old phones?

MH: No, I haven't. (photo appendix)

VC: There is one out here, I can show you.

They had this telephone line that went across Death Hollow, it followed the trail. I have only been over there once when I was in high school, in Boy Scouts we hiked over it. When you get down in the bottom of Death Hollow, the walls are so steep you practically have to lie on your back to see the top of them.

They tell the story of John King, one of the earlier settlers of Boulder, they would come over here to dances a lot and they used to go on that route. They said he was going up the other side, which is really steep, leading his horse, and he slipped and fell. He hung onto the bridal reins and the horse pulled him back up on the trail.

MH: Now can we talk about how you, well, really followed in your father's footsteps with the bus route.

VC: I was working for Charles Flake at the time...

MH: Concurrently, wasn't it?

VC: I was starting to have a family and I wasn't really making that much, so I started to drive the bus. I would bring the bus over and then go back and work during the day, go back and take the bus again. So, I have been at it ever since.

I had quite an experience in 1988. A bull, out of a milk cow, that actually belonged to my brother was pasturing down there. All during the summer this bull would come out when you would change sprinklers, it would be pawing the dirt and bowing. I told my boys no to be teasing it or they would be in trouble. Little did I know that they did not follow my advice.

The fall of '88, the first day of school I brought the bus over and went back to change the sprinklers that my boys had been changing all summer. Here is this bull following me around, bellowing. I didn't pay any attention to it. I was leaning over, turning a valve off on one sprinkler line, when I raised up this bull was about ten feet away, and he was coming at me. I knew I couldn't get away from him but I turned and ran anyway. He had big long horns, like a longhorn. Next thing I knew, when I woke up I was laying by a barbed wire fence right close to there, the bull was standing there about three feet away from me pawing the dirt and snorting. I knew I had to somehow get away from him, or he would kill me, I was on my back and I just kept sliding a little bit at a time until I got under the fence. I had to wait there until he left, because my pick-up was on the same side of the fence he was on. I laid there until he left then I got in the pick-up and had about a mile to go home, the only thing I could feel was my right shoulder which hurt like crazy. It was the only thing I could feel at the time. My hands were all bloody. When I got home and out of the pick-up I could see blood on the seat, and felt air on my back side. I went into the house, told my wife that the bull had ripped my pants, she took one look and almost fainted. He had run one of his horns just above my rectum and run it in about that far. She called the ambulance and took me to Panguitch. My shoulder was dislocated, they got it

back in. They were going to put me on life flight, but for some reason, they couldn't get it down there, so they put me on an ambulance and two good women from Hatch were there on the ambulance and took me up to the hospital in Salt Lake. I just knew on the way to Salt Lake I wasn't going to make it and I kept asking this one nurse if I was dead yet. (Laughter)

When we get up to the LDS Hospital up there, they had gotten on the radio ahead and there were all these people lined up and they packed me in there and into the emergency room. After a little while, this doctor come in and says, "I don't I have very good news for you, you are going to have to have a colostomy, you will have to carry a bog the rest of your life." They took me in to clean up the wound and then to operate and the next morning is when I could remember anything again. The next morning the doctor came in and stood by my bed quite a while, not saying anything, then he was kind of choked up and said, "I don't know how you did it or what happened, but you will not have to have that bag. Did you know you came that close, (he held up his fingers to indicate less than an inch) to being paralyzed?" From then on when he would come in he would tell everyone that I was the "miracle bull fighter". A few years later he came down to Richfield, like some of the doctors do, to do surgery. I was at the Richfield Hospital one day to do something and the nurse was looking at my name and she says, "Are you by chance the Miracle Bull Fighter?" (Laughter) I said, "What do you mean?" And she said, "Well, the doctor had told them about me." They would take me down in to the basement everyday and put me in this whirlpool bath to clean out the wound, it was a deep wound. It took me over a year for that to heal up. I also had to have thirty-two stitches on my left hand because the bull had thrown me into barbed wire fence. The doctor told me if my hands hadn't been callused I would have lost some fingers.

MH: All that hard work paid off.

VC: Yes.

MH: That is an amazing story of survival. And who came to pick-up the kids. That is part of the deal right, if you go away you have to make it back, and be on time.

VC: Yeah. My brother did that.

MH: Honestly, you go out everyday expecting the best. Who would even know you were out there? Would your wife have eventually come and looked for you?

VC: Yes, well, she probably wouldn't have done it right away...since I first got home at 9:30, she would not have come to look for me until it was time for me to go back at 3 o'clock. The thing is, I had told my boys not to tease the bull, and I found out later on when my oldest boy pulled his shirt up and showed me on his back a scar he had there where this bull had him pinned on the ground with his horns. He had a scar on his back. They were messing with him. If I had known that they were, then I would have been more watchful, careful.

MH: Did you get rid of the bull?

VC: Ah, yes. He was butchered. (Laughter)

MH: Let's talk about driving that route. But first I have to tell you a little story. When we were visiting here, wanting to resettle in Southern Utah, we went to Boulder in April, traveling around in a family van. It snowed that night, so the next day we took off heading for Panguitch, poking along the Backbone. I kept thinking it felt a little dangerous to me. Then I realized there was a school bus in front of us. (it must have been you) I put it all together very quickly that the kids are bused to Escalante for high school...and immediately said there is no way I will live in Boulder and have the children bused to Escalante on this road in the winter time. (Laughter) I thought the Boulder-Escalante route was dangerous to navigate with a school bus.

VC: It is. I am not trying to toot my own horn, but I feel comfortable with the road. I have been driving it since I was fifteen. I know the ends and outs of it. There has been a little time...usually the snow plows have it plowed off before I leave in the morning. Sometimes they don't. And usually it is warm enough that by the time I go back in the afternoon the hills on Calk Creek are melted off, with the slat and everything. There have been times, like in '76, one of the colder winters I know of around here, and the longest I have ever seen snow lay on the road. In fact, that year, the snow was so deep down on the Circle Cliff area that they sent the National Guard down there to clear it off. We had to go get the cows because the snow was so deep they wouldn't move, they would get under a tree and just stay there, and peel the bark off to stay alive. You had to ride up on them to find them, the snow was clear up to your stirrups.

To me the Boulder Mountain Road has always bothered me more than the road between Boulder and Escalant. One night I was coming over to Escalant when I was a junior or senior, to a dance and I got down the Hogsback and this car was pulled off the side of the road. A woman flagged me down and said, "Would you drive my car across here?" I said, "You have got to be kidding, you drove across the Boulder Mountain Road and this bothers you more than that?" There were three women in the car, so I got in and drove the car across and one got right on the floor in back and wouldn't look out the window.

MH: You have this relationship with the Road, and you know its nooks and crannies, the places you always need to be alert. You also have these kids onboard; it is a huge responsibility.

VC: It is. It is worrisome. I am not infallible. I feel comfortable with it, but it is a worry. There is some times that the snow ploughs haven't made it and I have started out, knowing I would meet them. One time I was almost, starting down into Calf Creek above the park, the snowplow still hadn't come, and probably five or six inches of snow on the ground. I got out and walked down

till I got to where I could see the park, test it, take a look. There are two kinds of snow; if it is powdery you are pretty safe, but it is heavier and packed down, you will probably be in trouble. So, the snow didn't seem that bad, so I crept down and made it alright.

MH: I suppose most days are not that bad, but you have the depths of winter, when you have short days. What does that run usually take, an hour?

VC: Well, from the time I leave the High School until the time I get right to Boulder is usually forty minutes on dry road.

MH: And do you stay later for the students who are in sports and activities?

VC: We used to but now, especially since last year, their troubles and everything. At first when I went to high school the bus used to stay over for dances and sports, afterschool we would just stay here. And the bus would stay and take us home. When I started driving, for a while they had me, I took kids home that wanted to go home, then I would come back and get the ones from sports. I did that for years, then they didn't like that, so they have changed things so much now, they don't do any of that anymore, the kids staying for sports have to have their own transportation.

MH: What is the average number of riders for you?

VC: Right now I got fifteen, last year I had twenty-six, but now there are a lot of kids in Boulder who are doing 'Home School'. Boulder is getting down now where, the elementary school has eleven this year. I thought they would close it last year, but they gave it a reprieve. I don't know if they will close it next year. There are not any young families to speak of, unless somebody moves in now, mostly retired.

MH: If they close the Boulder School, there will still be kids who will have to commute.

MH: After spending year with the kids, watching them grow up, you must have some friends.

VC: Yes. You think of what people might a little hick town, there have been veterinarians, dentists.

MH: That brings to mind Lars Petersen.

VC: Yes, he was a lot older than me but Lars was a dentist. Lars married a woman that already had kids. One of her kids, Monty Bateman, who has part of the Petersen place up there, is an internal medicine doctor up in Provo. Monty was taken with Lars and the cattle business. They used to go down to a place called Iron Top, there used to be a lot of wild cows down there. Lars, Mac LeFevre and all of them would all go down there and catch these wild cows.

MH: And horses.

VC: That is another thing. When I worked for Alfred Jepsen there were still wild horses down in Moody, but then about ten. Eventually BLM killed all of them except one. One stayed there for quite awhile. I would go down there to look after the cows and that horse would be out with the cattle. My horse would keep whinnying when it would see it. The horse wouldn't whinny back or leave the cows. Except one time I was going down a place called Silver Falls, this horse was with some cows. My horse kept whinnying' and pretty soon it just left the cows and took off down the canyon. I was going down the canyon, so I just kept on going. In another half mile here comes that horse around the turn; it was moving fast and almost knocked me off my horse. It was coming back up the canyon, it didn't know I was coming and when it made the turn it about knocked me off my horse.

MH: What kind of horse do you think it was?

VC: It was a light sorrel horse with four stocking legs. A lot of those horses that were down there, were horses that people had taken down there. Some of them were quite small to start with ,

then some of the ranchers in Boulder had taken larger stallions down there and left them to breed. And there were some pretty nice horses down there.

MH: So, is this right thinking, the wild Mustangs even of long ago were horses let go , and there was the hope that breeding would create another herd of horses, horses to choose from?

VC: I think that around here the horses were just ones that people turned loose. There used to be wild horses on the BIG Flat, there were horses out there I would see when we would come on the bus, see them out there all the time.

MH: Now the Big Flat was the route out of town to the south, to get to Boulder.

What about sheep, sheep herding?

VC: There used to be a lot of sheep on the Boulder Mountain, owned by the Kings from Teasdale, Wayne County. They would take them down into the Circle Cliffs area in the winter time then up on the Mountain in the summer time. Glen Ormond, Burns Ormond's brother, used to herd sheep a lot for the Kings. Do you know where the Gulch is, if you go up The Gulch, clear up to the head of The Gulch, there is a trail called Indian Trail that goes up out of The Gulch, which is how they would take the sheep in the spring, from the Circle Cliffs, up that trail up to the Mountain. Glen, from Boulder, I remember seeing his shop wagon all the time when he came through Boulder when they were bringing the sheep up. There wasn't anybody in Boulder that had sheep to that extent, that they would put them on the range and hire herders. Everybody in Boulder had a little herd of sheep. That was one thing that griped me to no end, was to have to herd sheep. We had a little herd of sheep when I was younger and that was one of my responsibilities to herd those sheep, keep them out of the alfalfa. That was a never ending battle. IF you open a gate and want to drive sheep through it, they can't see it, but if your shut

the gate and don't want them to go through they will find it. (Laughter) They tell a story, I heard this story about the Burr Trail, the switchbacks, they say that the trail got its name from John Atlantic Burr who used to have a herd of sheep and he wanted to get them up in to the Circle Cliff area, above the switchbacks. So he made the switchbacks, the Burr Trail to get his sheep up to better feed. They said the problem was when he tried to bring his sheep up the Burr Trail, they would be coming up the switchbacks, the top sheep would be going one way, and others would be going the other way on the switchbacks, so these up here would see these down here going this way, so they would turn around and want to go that way too. That sounds just like a sheep. (Laughter) I am not a sheep man.

MH: I have heard that some sheep herders would have a goat to lead the sheep the way they were supposed to go.

VC: I didn't know a goat had any brains either. Maybe that is so.

MH: Interesting about the Burr Tail, an old sheep trail.

VC: Really just the switchbacks, not the whole road, is the Burr Trail. Really it is just the switchbacks. Road to the switchbacks from here was called the circle cliffs, it never really had a name.

MH: Moody and Silver Falls, then you mentioned a trail that went north of there?

VC: One goes up to what they call Lamp Stand, Those roads are not maintained too well anymore. One goes out by the Lamp Stand and then it goes over to the Head of the Gulch. That is where our allotment, when I was going along with my dad, our allotment was up at the head of the gulch and out and around the Lamp Stand. We would take out cows down; we would drive them up through the Gulch. One time, my brother was with me and we took the cows up through The

Gulch, and knew we wouldn't be able to get home that night, so we took the pick-up down and left it down where the road was. By the time we had gotten up through The Gulch, it started to snow. On the way back, I was riding a horse that I was just breaking to ride and he give-out on me half way down. I walked some, and I got on the back with my brother and walked some. We left our camping stuff in the pick-up and we didn't have a tarp over it, so when we got down there our sleeping bags were wet. We built a fire and crawled in our sleeping bag right by the fire and where we could reach the wood, so we could just sit by the fire all night.

MH: That is out where the Long Valley hits The Gulch? Our family went hiking up there once and it snowed on us as well, we had to build a fire, get warmed up and hike out.

VC: It was cold that year, it was '76, and we had a lot of snow down there e and we were driving cows, down through Long Canyon, it was below zero down there a lot of the time and you would get so cold. And some of these county road guys gave me these things, looked like those mint lozenges, you could put them down in the wood, and strike a match to them and they would flare right up.

MH: I like camping there. So, we talked about the Lamp Post.

VC: The Lamp Stand because of it shape.

MH: If you are at the top of The Gulch

VC: You would go up through the head of The Gulch and way up to the head there, there is a trail up on the Mountain they call the Indian Trail.

MH: Have you spent much time in Death Hollow?

VC: Well, there are actually two Death Hollows, one down in the Circle Cliffs below Horse Canyon, there is a place down there they call Death Hollow. I don't know why they call it that; it is nothing like the one over here. The only time I have been in Death Hollow here is when we hiked over that time, and then I have been across Hell's Backbone, the upper part of Death Hollow. Hell's Backbone is nothing compared to how deep the canyon is down where the trail goes across. I still can't believe that people rode horses over that trail. Maybe it was better then; it has probably sloughed off since then for lack of use. Another thing, when you get down the bottom of Death Hollow, there is a stream down there. That is where they drilled and found some natural gas a while back. The water down in the bottom of Death Hollow, you can see the oil on top of it.

MC: Have you had any experience in Deer Creek?

VC: The Deer Creek going down into Circle Cliffs? The Hanson's in Boulder had permit down in what we called "Brigham Tea", it is down where the road crosses Deer Creek, down the creek, that is where their permit was in an area called Brigham Tea. Deer Creek really starts up north of our old home place, where the rodeo ground is in Boulder, all of that you can see east of there is where I grew up, that was our place. Deer Creek starts up there and goes down around what I call The Sadie Nipples, which start just down from the rodeo grounds. We used to put horses in that part of Deer Creek when I was younger. Then we had quite a few of them killed by cougars. There are a lot of cats over there. My brother had a sprinkler pond below the rodeo ground. A few years ago he put a bunch of goats in there to keep the Russian olive down, the cougars killed so many of them he had to take them out. I have seen a lot of cougars cross the road up there.

MH: It is the high country. This has been an interesting year. Maybe a dream year for a bus driver?

30 Vard Coombs

VC: Well, ya, it is. (Chuckles) This has been a good year.

MH: I have kept you a long long time

End of first tape 1:35:21

Begin Second tape

VC: Before I was working for Alfred Jepsen, I was working at the Charles Flake place. One day I was right there by the road working on a tractor. A van pulled up and these two guys got out and was looking at the barn. They come over and says, "Do you suppose we could use this barn for television commercial?" I said, "I don't know, I don't own the place, you can call the owner and find out." They kept looking around, went to their van and was talking, pretty soon they came over and asked, "Would you like to be in the commercial?" (Laughter) I said, "What is it about?" And he said, "Marlboros. Now before you say anything, we know you are probably a Mormon, you wouldn't have to smoke a cigarette, you wouldn't even have to hold one." I said, "That is not the thing, it is the principle of the thing." He said to think it over and call the owner and see if we could use the barn. He said, "We'll probably be back in not too long. Another thing is that now we can't put cigarette commercials on television anymore, but we can put them in magazines. We are going to shoot these commercials and send them to Europe and nobody would know who you were." But I said, "I would know who I was." They talked more and came back and said, "I don't know what you make on this place but maybe what I have to tell you would change your mind." (WHAT DID HE SAY???) I thought I was going to keel over, my legs felt like water. I told him no, I couldn't do it. Finally they left, and as they left this guy said, "One of these days you will regret this for the money." And there have been times since then I have thought , well, like somebody said one time, your greed gland gets stuck. I have to pull out the WD40; I get to thinking about that. After that, two or three years later I was up to what I call the

government corral. Alfred Jepsen was working some cows there, this van pulled up and here comes these two guys. I immediately recognized that had been doing all the talking, he had another guy with him who had not been with him before. But I had seen him on the back of a TIME magazine for Marlboro. When he seen me he looked real surprised and said, "Have you changed your mind yet?" Alfred spoke up and said, "You know, all the old Marlboro men around here have died of emphysema." He never said anymore. I thought it was interesting, when I was gored by that bull and I was in the hospital, I was in the hospital for a month up in Salt Lake, I saw a documentary on the television while I was there. It showed all these Marlboro men who had these oxygen tanks strapped on to their saddles.

MH: One of the things I have felt is unique about this region, is that most have a good lifestyle, and their brains are still working pretty well, so we can still learn so much about the hsiotry around here. I wanted to say thank you for spending so much time with me. It has really been a pleasure to meet you.

Begin second tape

