

Multi-Generational African American Farmers of the Midwest
Anna-Lisa Cox
Library of Congress AFC Archie Green Fellowship

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Names of those interviewed: Jonathan Walden [JW]

Primary Interviewer: Anna-Lisa Cox (ALC)

Secondary Interviewers: Lishawna Taylor [LT]

Interview Location: Gibson County, IN

Transcriber: Mabel Scroggins

Abstract: Jonathan Walden farms on family land in Gibson County, Indiana. His main focus is cattle raising, but he also farms beans and corn. He is descended from a long line of multi-racial farmers that came out and homesteaded the Indiana frontier before the Civil War. As Stephen Vincent pointed out in his book, *Southern Seed, Northern Soil*, the Waldens were long free from North Carolina before they came to Indiana, and claim an African-descended Patriot Revolutionary War soldier as an ancestor.

Index/Log (5 Minute Time Stamped)

[0:00] Introduction to Mr. Jonathan Walden.

[2:21] Four generations of Walden family farming, details of family history in farming, Jonathan retells his father's memories of growing up.

[7:21] Introduction of family names, Jonathan's father Paul Walden raised during the Depression, role of farm horse in travel to town and school, Paul's challenges of traveling to school.

[12:21] Paul Walden wasn't allowed on trolley from Patoka to Princeton due to color, Paul's school and war involvement, Paul's work history from Emge packing company, to the Evansville Shipyard, to International Harvester, and then to Whirlpool.

[17:21] Jonathan's mom stayed home while his dad worked, importance of chores on the farm, description of family church attendance.

[22:21] Description of his mother's work on the farm, Jonathan's morning chores as a child, his mother's use of a washboard before upgrading to a Wringer-Washer, Paul's long work hours.

[27:21] Jonathan's daily routine as a child, details of building fences and buildings, description of school lunches.

[32:21] The Walden family never had air conditioning, activities the family did for fun such as swimming in the Patoka River, typical Walden family supper.

[37:21] Jonathan's older sister Paulette lived with the grandparents to take care of them, details of storing food in the cellar for months, typical Walden family food.

[42:21] Jonathan shares his most and least favorite farm jobs as a kid, summer work on the farm including wood cutting.

[47:21] Details of shoveling coal for the furnace and stoves, tractors and cattle made Jonathan want to be a farmer, the hardest part of being a farmer is losing a cow.

[52:21] Jonathan separates bulls so he doesn't have calves in the winter, he manages 60-70 acres, he doesn't castrate his own cattle.

[57:21] Jonathan worked his way up at the power plant, he focused solely on cattle farming after losing money, he wants to farm until he's at least 80.

[1:02:21] Jonathan's desires for his grandchildren to farm.

[0:00]

ALC: So you were saying that your dad was the one who started off farming? Or, how many generations were before your dad?

JW: His father also farmed down here-

ALC: So your grandfather.

JW: Yes. My grandfather farmed down here in the Patoka bottoms down here.

ALC: The bottoms, okay.

JW: And they just lived probably about two or three miles just West of Lyles Station here.

ALC: Okay, okay.

JW: And they actually farmed with a one bottom plow, with a team of horses, and he farmed I'd say around forty acres with a one bottom plow if you could imagine what that was like.

ALC: Just the one blade?

JW: Just the one blade.

ALC: I put this in my book, but according to somebody I know who has done this kind of farming, you have to walk nine miles to plow one acre of land with a single bladed plow. So if he had forty acres, that's some walking.

JW: Yeah. But him and... my dad was a twin... and him and his twin brother and their dad, of course, they farmed that ground. And they did a lot of work. It was before the levees was built so flooding came in and would flood the work a lot of times that they had done. He would, they would also saw logs to sell for a living. And he lived back in the day where it was so cold that they would saw the logs and take the team of horses and pull them over to the edge of the river. And then they would wait until the Wabash River would freeze over-

ALC: Wow.

JW: And they would take the team and pull those logs across the river on the ice-

ALC: With the team.

JW: To the Mount Carmel side. And this is my dad telling me all this about how he grew up.

ALC: Mm hmm.

[2:21] JW: But they would take them over to the other side. Well there was no road over the river.

ALC: Right.

JW: So they had a-

ALC: That's some steep banks.

JW: They had a... Yeah. They had a ferry, and they called it Cunningham Ferry. My dad, even in the last year when he was ninety five, he would always take us down there and he could take you right to where the Cunningham Ferry was. And he'd always want to show us exactly where it went.

ALC: Right, right, right.

JW: And he could walk right to it. He'd walk and he'd want to go down there and show us that.

ALC: Now your dad's name was...

JW: Paul.

ALC: Paul Walden.

JW: Paul Walden.

ALC: And his father, your grandfather...

JW: Ulysses.

ALC: Ulysses, okay.

JW: Uh huh.

ALC: He was Ulysses Grant Walden.

JW: Yes, senior.

ALC: Okay. Senior. Right, okay I got to keep these straight.

JW: Yeah. And then, so they would do that. Well, they came up, and when they would saw logs they used the old hand saws that would saw. They had no power saws or anything so you could imagine.

ALC: Right. And was that going to a law mill then?

JW: Yes.

ALC: On the other side.

JW: On the Illinois side.

ALC: Okay. So did they own wooded property?

JW: Yes.

ALC: Okay, okay. Alright. And would they run their hogs in that property as well?

JW: They had few hogs. They had some chickens, some hogs, some... maybe not a lot of cattle, but just a few at that time. But they would work hard to move those things over there to sell and make money, but of course my dad was also brought up through the Depression. In the Depression. He was born in nineteen twenty-three, and he was brought up during the Depression. Well, my grandpa would... they were so poor that he'd have to go to town and he'd ride a horse to town. He'd never know if he was going to come back with anything to eat. So he usually was able to get flour and potatoes... That was the only thing he could ever get. So when he left, he told my dad, "I don't know if we'll have anything to eat tonight, but I'll go and see if I can get something." And he always came back with flour and potatoes. That's all they lived on for years. And then he was telling me also that his dad would go into town to work, and he had a horse. This is kind of funny... He would take that horse and he would ride that horse out to where sixty four is out here, and someone would pick him up in an old truck or wagon. He'd turn the horse loose and the horse would go back home on its own.

ALC: Wow!

JW: So he'd go to town, and then he'd come back and then he'd walk from there to home.

ALC: To home. Uh huh. Wow.

JW: But he said it was amazing what that horse could do-

ALC: It would know exactly what to do.

JW: Exactly what to do, exactly where to go, and what to do.

ALC: And that was the farm horse.

JW: Uh huh. So he remembered and he told me about that. Of course, then he was telling me about when he would come to school here-

ALC: Mm hmm, at Lyles Station School.

JW: At Lyles Station School. He would ride in a wagon and he said that the water would get up to where the water would be, it would get into the wagon with the high wheels. It would even get into the wagon and their lunch buckets would be floating in the bottom of that wagon.

ALC: And that means the horse is practically swimming.

JW: Yeah.

ALC: Just to get to school.

JW: Yeah. And they would still go to school. He said, "We would not miss school, we would go to school."

ALC: Right, right. And was that... Was your father and grandfather's farmhouse on higher land? Or did they have to leave when it would get flooded?

JW: No, it was up enough that they would not flood, but it would-

ALC: But the ground would flood.

JW: Yeah, all the ground around them. My grandpa, one time, he was out in the winter time and the ice was... the river was out because it was flooded. And he was out, I don't know what he was doing... I think he was coming in from town and he was walking, and he had to walk through the water. It was cold, and he said he was climbing the fence to get home, and he got up on the fence and got stuck.

ALC: From all the water? 'Cause it was metal... barbed wire.

[7:21] JW: Barbed wire. And he got stuck and there was one little lady that lived down here, and she heard him hollering.

ALC: Yeah.

JW: And her husband went out in a boat and got him. He took him in, or he would've died on that barbed wire fence.

ALC: Wow. Oh my gosh.

JW: So, the things that they went through in their lifetime-

ALC: Yeah.

JW: And then the way he explained he had to come into town, eventually they moved of course. And then my dad, years ago he was telling me that there used to be a train or... not a train. What are they called? You see them in cities like San Francisco.

ALC: Trolleys.

JW: Trolleys! Trolleys. They had a trolley, it ran from Patoka to Princeton.

ALC: Okay, okay.

JW: And he said that he would get to ride that a lot of times. And he said that he was light complected, but a lot of times they wouldn't even let him on that trolley.

ALC: 'Cause they knew who he was?

JW: Yeah. He was light complected anyway, but when they first started it was... if he was any color, they would not even let him on there-

ALC: Not even in the back?

JW: Or put him to the back.

ALC: Oh, put him to the back. Or they wouldn't let him on at all.

JW: Yeah, yeah.

ALC: Wow!

JW: So he was telling me quite a bit about that. And of course, eventually as he grew older my grandpa and his first wife got a divorce. My dad moved to Indianapolis, and he actually graduated from Crispus Attucks High School.

ALC: Oh wow. And that's the high school whose first principle was from Lyles Station.

JW: Yes. Yes.

ALC: All these connections, oh my gosh.

JW: So he went there at Crispus Attucks, and then-

ALC: How... Who'd he live with when he was in Indianapolis?

JW: His mother moved to Indianapolis.

ALC: Okay, okay, alright. Yeah, yeah.

JW: So then that's where he lived, and he got there. Then he went to the service in the Navy, and served in the Navy.

ALC: World War Two?

JW: Yes. He went in World War Two, and he actually went to Okinawa and he was going to go into battle there, but the war ended.

ALC: Wow.

JW: So he never had to go into battle but he was actually in service during that time, and went. But he said that was something. That was an experience for him. And then he came back here-

ALC: What brought him back here, do you think? After he had been in Indianapolis and out... 'Cause a lot of people never come back, what do you think brought him back?

JW: Well, his dad was still here. And his dad had a farm here. And of course he worked on his farm all of his life with the one bottom plow and all this. He goes to his dad's farm and works on the farm, and of course he'd still work all day and all night... Of course they shucked all their corn by hand.

ALC: By hand. Did they do it by hand or did they use the shucking tool?

JW: I don't know if he had a shucking tool. I don't know if they did it... Probably so... But he told me they had to do it by hand.

ALC: Yeah, which is really hard work.

JW: Yeah, yeah. Anyway, he did that and then he says, "Well I'm tired of working on the farm."

ALC: Right.

JW: So he goes to get a job at Emge packing company, where they slaughter hogs and all.

ALC: Yeah.

JW: And he said he went there and they always gave him the worst job. Down in the pit, and it was just-

ALC: And packing is a really awful and dangerous job anyway.

JW: They'd hang those hogs up on these hooks, and my dad was down in that pit. Those hogs were over his head and all that blood he's walking in, and he asked the guy there, he says, "What happens if one of them pigs fall down on you down in here?" And he says, "Oh, we'll just pack you out." And he said, "Well I don't think I want to work here anymore."

ALC: Yeah.

JW: So he left there and he went to work at the shipyards where they build the LSTs. And he worked there-

ALC: Where was that?

JW: Evansville.

ALC: Evansville, okay.

JW: And he worked there for a while building LSTs-

ALC: Okay, okay.

[12:21] JW: He actually worked there for a good little bit, and then he went to work at International Harvester. And then International Harvester kind of moved out and Whirlpool moved in. He went to work at Whirlpool. And, of course, there was eight of us kids.

ALC: Right.

JW: I have seven siblings, brothers and sisters, and... Anyway, he had to make a living for the family.

ALC: Right.

JW: Well, he would... A lot of times they traded rides to Evansville to Whirlpool, but a lot of times he would work overtime. And when he worked overtime he would hitchhike home.

ALC: Yeah. Wow.

JW: And he did that many nights, and he'd only work overtime one or two hours. But during that time, when he was doing that, my mom was a stay at home mom.

ALC: And where were you living when that was happening? Were you living on the farm when he was working-

JW: Small farm. Just a small farm in Patoka. Just North of here.

ALC: Just North of here. Okay, so about how many acres?

JW: Oh, he didn't have much. About ten acres there. He didn't-

ALC: Well, that's not nothing. That's not nothing.

JW: Yeah. It wasn't a lot. It was something then-

ALC: Right. So when he was traveling off-

JW: But see, if-

ALC: And your mom had all these kids there... What was she doing? Like what would a day look like for her?

JW: Mom was, she would always be gardening.

ALC: Okay. She had a vegetable patch?

JW: Yes. And she raised her own... we raised our own chickens, we didn't buy any. We would raise our own, ring their necks, scold them with water and pluck the feathers... that's what we ate. We ate out of the garden, we ate out of the food at home, we had a cow.

ALC: I was going to ask.

JW: We milked.

ALC: What kind?

JW: It was a Hereford and angus mix.

ALC: Okay.

JW: And we would milk that cow-

ALC: What was her name?

JW: Betsy.

ALC: Betsy. And all the kids would milk?

JW: Yeah. Well, back earlier they had to all do it. But when they were all leaving, I was the one who had to do it. I can remember sitting there tied to the post and the bus would come by. And we had to walk to school, but the bus would come by picking up other kids and I'd be milking the cow when the bus would come by.

ALC: Wow. What was the bus... Was the bus for the white kids?

JW: No, it was for all. But we was close enough to school that she just had us walk because we had chores to do and we had to get them done before school.

ALC: Right.

JW: So I'd be doing that, and then hurry off to school.

ALC: Wow, wow. How did that make you feel to see that bus go by and be milking?

JW: I don't know, it was just part of my job.

ALC: Right.

JW: We all had jobs at home, and that was just part of my job to do that. But we all had to do chores, and that's one thing about my dad... He taught us to work. He always said, "I got eight kids and all of them know how to work."

ALC: Right.

JW: And that was so true, all of us knew how to work because he instilled that from what he had went through at a young age in farming.

ALC: Stanley Madison was saying your dad was known for being kind of strict.

JW: Very strict.

ALC: Would you say so?

JW: Very strict, yeah.

ALC: So what would that, like... in what ways?

JW: When he'd tell you he expected something to be done, you would have it done or... there wasn't any... he didn't abuse his children, but he would make sure that you knew that he wasn't shy about giving you a whooping. I know he had a razor belt, a razor strap... and if you got out of line, it only took a couple whacks with that and you would be in line.

ALC: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JW: And I know we would... Mom had us in church a lot.

ALC: Mm hmm. Which church?

JW: Well, we went to a little church in Patoka. It was the Church of God in Christ for many years.

ALC: Okay. Was that all people of color, or?

JW: Yes.

ALC: Okay.

JW: Well, no. It was a black church.

ALC: It was a black church. Yeah, yeah.

[17:21] JW: Yeah. And then we went to Lyles Station for a while. And then we actually went to the Church of God which I still go to today, and it's predominantly white.

ALC: Okay, okay.

JW: But they were just so loving and accepted us in that that's what kind of drew us to that church. It was just... You didn't get that always when you went to church. They were just loving, they were always willing to give to the family and help the family. They knew we had a big family and they were just always there for us, so that's kind of what drew us to that church.

ALC: Yeah, and drew your mom there too. And she was basically, if your dad was working overtime and all those long hours, she was raising those kids and doing a lot of that farm work.

JW: She did a lot. She did a lot.

ALC: Yeah.

JW: Like I said, all of our food and all that came from the garden. She canned green beans, corn, peaches, potatoes, tomatoes... She made her own relish. She did all that canning by herself.

ALC: Wow, wow. That is so much work.

JW: And raised us. And that's... Yeah. That was work.

ALC: So what would a typical day, when you were a kid... What would that look like, from sunup to sundown?

JW: Oh...

ALC: I mean, just think back. Yeah.

JW: Well as a kid, I mean, as we got older... But as a kid you would get up, and my dad would always have a list of chores for us to do.

ALC: Okay. He'd have them out. And would it be on paper or would he just tell you?

JW: He'd have it on... Sometimes he'd tell you and sometimes he'd leave it on paper.

ALC: Okay.

JW: And we would have to do those things that he had for us to do.

ALC: What would you have for breakfast?

JW: Mom normally fixed bacon and eggs, most of the time.

ALC: Okay. And the bacon was from your own hogs?

JW: Mm hmm, yes.

ALC: Okay. And eggs from your own chickens?

JW: Yes. And all of our butter came from our own cows.

ALC: So you'd churn your own butter.

JW: We'd make our own butter.

ALC: But how'd you turn it? I'm-

JW: With a butter churner.

ALC: Butter churner. Was it the crank kind?

JW: Crank kind.

ALC: Okay. Alright, okay.

JW: And we had the butter churn with the crank. We would make our own ice cream. A lot of times we would have to crank the ice cream by hand-

ALC: Right. What flavors?

JW: Well, mostly back then only vanilla.

ALC: Okay, okay.

JW: And we didn't have flavors back then. It was just vanilla.

ALC: Okay. How often would you get ice cream?

JW: Uh...

ALC: Like every Sunday? Or just special occasions?

JW: No, off and on. Mostly Sunday but sometimes we'd have it during the week, but not every

day.

ALC: Where would you get the ice? 'Cause you had to have ice to make it. I've done some hand cranking ice cream... So you've got to have the ice and the rock salt.

JW: Mom would take it and freeze the ice in milk cartons and milk jugs, then we would have to take ice picks and break it then put it in around there.

ALC: Wow. And did your folks have electricity? So you would just freeze it in a freezer?

JW: Yes, we had electricity.

ALC: Okay, okay. Alright, okay.

JW: When we first moved into our house we had no bathroom.

ALC: Wow. Outhouse, yeah?

JW: We had a two hole outhouse and we used that. And we didn't have a bathroom. We had no washing machine, she actually washed with a washboard. For eight kids she washed with a washboard. Can you imagine washing all those? Well, she finally graduated to a washing machine with the old wringer washer.

ALC: Yeah.

JW: The first wringer washer she had to turn and wring clothes through that wringer washer. Then she upgraded to an electric wringer washer. And then our stoves... we had to get our coal, and our stoves would... We had to put coal in the stoves to keep them. That was our job too-

ALC: For the kids. Was to make sure you kept coal in?

JW: Yep. Make sure we kept coal in there for the winter time.

ALC: Yeah. And kept the stove fed.

JW: Kept the stove fed.

ALC: Yeah, mm hmm.

JW: And keep everything. And we did that-

ALC: Oh, okay so I'm going back. I'm sorry, I keep... everything you say makes me think of other things.

JW: That's fine, that's fine.

ALC: So we started with breakfast... We haven't even gotten past breakfast. I'm sorry. So you had bacon and eggs, and you had the list. Would your dad sometimes leave early? So would he have breakfast with you or did he have to leave early for work?

JW: A lot of the times he was gone by the time we got up and going, 'cause a lot of the time he had to be in Evansville by seven o'clock. He got up early.

ALC: Right, right. So-

[22:21] JW: Until he went to the second shift, then he would leave in the afternoon and not get home until way after midnight. So then he'd sleep until about eight o'clock. And then he'd be up and giving us instructions of what he wanted us to do. And then when he left he also had the list for us to do those things when he left. So we just always had... Like I said, we just always had things to do in the morning. I mean we built a fence around our cattle, and we actually went out on the railroad tracks and hauled cross ties in.

ALC: Wow. For what?

JW: For the fence.

ALC: For fencing. The old cross ties they'd pull out?

JW: Mm hmm. And we dug all of our posts with the manual post hole diggers. We had no-

ALC: The kind that you kind of screw, right?

JW: No, we use the ones that you-

ALC: Wow. You're doing this kind of pounding action.

JW: Yeah. And then you open it, then lift the dirt out and set it to the side-

ALC: Oh my! Did that take two of you if you were little, or just one?

JW: Oh, there was three of us out there most of the time.

ALC: Having to use that post hole digger.

JW: And we'd take turns. And then you'd set the post and you'd tap the post in and then you'd stretch the fence up. But we did that all by hand, we had no post hole diggers.

ALC: And stretching out that barbed wire fence, that's hard.

JW: Yeah. Well we had actually stretched barbed wire, and we had stretched some more wire. But, yeah it's a chore.

ALC: Yeah. So you had breakfast, and if it was a school day-

JW: If it was a school day we'd have breakfast and then milk the cows.

ALC: Okay. How many cows did you have, just one?

JW: Well we had about six or eight at the time, but we only milked one.

ALC: Wow. Okay, okay. And then the others were for beef?

JW: Yes. That was our food for beef. Yeah.

ALC: Okay. Okay. So would some of you feed the cattle then?

JW: Yeah. We had the feed. And we had square bales of hay, there weren't any round bales like I use today. We used square bales.

ALC: Right.

JW: But we did all that, and we would go to school and then we'd come home. My dad built some buildings out of lumber from old houses that he tore down, we'd help tear them down. He'd stack the lumber, and then when we'd get home from school he'd say, "Well, when you get home you've got to pull nails out of all the old lumber" with-

ALC: Pliers.

JW: Pliers or pry bar or a hammer. And then, here's the kicker to it. He said, "I grew up in the Depression and we didn't have money to buy nails." So we had to straighten the nails. We straightened the nails and he reused them.

ALC: Wow. Oh my gosh. And some of those nails were rusty and old.

JW: Yeah.

ALC: They'd break sometimes?

JW: Yeah, sometimes they'd break. He didn't want you to break any, though. He was very strict on how you pulled them out. He taught us how to get them out without breaking them.

ALC: 'Cause there are times, I know I've pulled a few nails in my day, different story... But they'd often break just trying to pull 'em.

JW: Yeah. They would break sometimes. But anyway, we would have to pull those and then stack that lumber, and we'd use that lumber to build our buildings that he had put his tractor in. At that time he got a little Ford tractor and he'd put his tractor in. Things like that, his tools and

all... But we built some nice buildings. We also built a room on the back of the house, and was able to build a bathroom and got it built-

ALC: And plumbed? And he helped... Did he plumb it?

JW: Plumbing. Yeah.

ALC: Wow, wow.

JW: Mom got a kitchen with a sink in it, finally.

ALC: Mm hmm. About when? About what year, do you remember?

JW: Probably about nineteen sixty-three or four.

ALC: Okay. Okay, alright. So when you got... I'm sorry 'cause I'm thinking food, too, and all this stuff your mom was doing. When you'd get back from school would you have a snack?

JW: No, we don't get snacks. We never had snacks.

ALC: So, but you'd have a lunch packed for school.

JW: Yes. We always had us a little lunch packed to take to school-

ALC: And what was that usually?

JW: Either peanut butter and jelly most of the time, apple, and I'm thinking back... most of the time it was peanut butter jelly and an apple. Once in a while she would have something... nothing that would spoil. Nothing that would spoil.

ALC: Right. Right.

JW: But we took our lunch everyday 'cause we couldn't afford to eat-

ALC: At the school store.

[27:21] JW: Buy it at the store or anything. And most of the time, most of the kids back then, we didn't even have a cafeteria hardly. Back in that day you took your lunch.

ALC: You took your lunch.

JW: Now they had a little store not too far from the school. Some of the kids would go there and eat, but not very many 'cause they just couldn't afford it.

ALC: Sure.

JW: And then, you know, we was always working. We always had something to do. And then, we never ever had air conditioning. Ever. My dad was ninety-five years old and didn't have air conditioning.

ALC: Wow.

JW: And that house today is still there and someone was wanting to rent it, and I said, "Well you don't have any air conditioning." No air conditioning? I said, "Well, we lived here and my dad lived here all those years and never had air conditioning. My bed was upstairs-

ALC: How'd you keep cool at night?

JW: Fans. He had an attic fan and he knew how to do it. The big houses always stayed a little cooler than most other houses. And at night if the temperature would drop down a little bit, like now, he would crack the windows in the house and he had an attic fan... It wasn't in an attic but it was in my bedroom actually, and he would turn that fan where it drew the air out. Not blowing in on me, but it would draw the air out and it would blow that cold air through the windows, and draw it up through the house. It would cool the house. So, we was outside until dark, so once the sun went down and it started getting cool we started pulling that air in.

ALC: Yeah, yeah. Well there's some nights it didn't cool down, and those were hot.

JW: Well yeah, there were some. But we just... we never thought anything about it then. I couldn't do it today, probably. But we didn't think anything about it then. Kids especially, because you just don't think about it. But we were so acclimated to it that we didn't think about it.

ALC: Right.

JW: And we never, hardly, we never got to go on vacation or anything. So what people call vacation, we didn't...

ALC: What would you do for fun? I mean, would you swim...

JW: Yeah. We'd swim in the Patoka River.

ALC: You did. And you knew how to swim?

JW: We learned how to swim. [laughter]

ALC: Yeah, did anybody teach you?

JW: We learned on our own.

ALC: Wow!

JW: We learned on our own.

ALC: You were right there by the Patoka 'cause the land was right up against it.

JW: Right by the river.

ALC: Okay so you just taught yourselves.

JW: Yeah. We used to go down there and we'd take shovels and we'd dig steps into the banks to get down to the river. And, but we would, that was one of our enjoyments. We made our own games.

ALC: Right.

JW: We had different things that we would kind of do as a family, like most kids do.

ALC: Like what?

JW: Well, we'd play hide and seek. We had a little wagon we'd make up, and we had to make them ourselves out of little lawnmower wheels or something like that. But we did have the... years ago we had the old reel type lawn mowers that you'd push and we all took turns pushing to mow the yard.

ALC: So what would a typical supper be? And about what time would you eat?

JW: We usually ate around four-thirty, five o'clock in the evening. After school... it wouldn't be too long after school. But typical food would always be beef out of the cattle, or salad... we would eat a lot of salads. A lot of beef, a lot of potatoes.

ALC: Mm hmm. Now when you say salad, what would the salad be made out of?

JW: Out of the garden... Lettuce, cabbage, radishes, she'd always mix that up and then she would put-

ALC: Any tomatoes?

JW: Yes, tomatoes.

ALC: Onions?

JW: She wouldn't put onions in the salad. But we had onions. My dad loved onions, oh man.

ALC: How would he eat them?

JW: Raw.

ALC: Raw. Just like an apple?

JW: Well, he grew the long stem onions. He wouldn't let them get very big, they'd be about that big around.

ALC: About the size of a quarter. Yeah, maybe a little bigger.

JW: Maybe a little smaller.

ALC: Oh okay, yeah.

JW: A quarter, nickel, he'd just eat the onion... just eat it. That's the way he ate them. And radishes, carrots... mom put carrots in the salad and she'd mix it up. It was good.

ALC: Did she put a dressing on it?

JW: Yes.

ALC: What kind? What was it made out of?

[32:21] JW: Most of the time French.

ALC: Okay, okay.

JW: If she could get that. If not, mayonnaise.

ALC: Okay, she'd put mayonnaise on there.

JW: Yeah.

ALC: That sounds so good, I have to say.

JW: Oh, she was one of the best cooks. Made all the cobblers, she made cobblers out of apples from the orchard or... we had apples too. And my great grandma lived next to us and she had cherry trees. We had to pick cherries when she-

ALC: Sour or sweet?

JW: Sweet.

ALC: Mm hmm.

JW: And we'd pick them when she'd let us pick them. 'Cause we used to sneak over and climb up in her trees. She was a little bitty old lady, and she could see you in the dark of night. You'd be out there trying to sneak in there, "Get out of those cherry trees!" She'd holler out. And one of my sisters even had to stay with her, because her husband was ill. That would be my great grandpa, Andrew Walden. My great grandpa.

ALC: Yeah. Okay.

JW: And her name was-

ALC: And your... And your grandma was-

JW: Liza Walden.

ALC: Okay.

JW: And they, she...

ALC: So this was one of your older sisters?

JW: Yes.

ALC: And what was her name?

JW: Paulette.

ALC: Paulette would stay with them? Okay. And help care?

JW: Mm hmm. She was actually made by my dad to stay with her. And she always kind of resented that. She resented not being a part of the family for a long time 'cause she wanted-

ALC: How old was she when she went?

JW: Probably twelve.

ALC: Oh, that is young. Wow.

JW: Yeah, and stayed until she was... Well, until she left home. Or until my grandma passed, actually. Yeah, I have to say that. But she had to stay there and care for my grandma, but she lived right next door to my mom and dad for a long time.

ALC: So would your grandma cook, or would your mom cook for all of them?

JW: Oh no, my grandma had a little stove that you had to put coal and wood in and she'd cook all of her own food, and she had a smokehouse out where she smoked and hung her meat. She smoked her own meat up.

ALC: Mm hmm. Did you use her smokehouse too, or did you have your own?

JW: We had our own. Yeah, we didn't use hers very often.

ALC: Did you have hogs? Oh, go ahead-

JW: And we would pick our own potatoes and sweet potatoes and all, and put them in the basement cellar where it's cool and they'd last all winter.

ALC: Mm hmm. Did you have to bury them or just keep them out?

JW: No. My dad would lay boards down and we'd lay them all down on paper and boards down there. They'd keep pretty well all winter.

ALC: Okay. Was the cellar under the house, or separate?

JW: Under the house.

ALC: Under the house, okay. Okay. But would it flood, or were you up high enough that it wouldn't flood the cellar?

JW: It was up high enough, it wouldn't flood.

ALC: Yeah, yeah. How would you keep the apples? How would you keep the apples fresh?

JW: She just put them down there, I mean, you know... back then you weren't really particular like we are today about apples. We'd have to eat them however, but most of the time she would can apples. We would eat them until they started going a little bad, but she would can them.

ALC: What kind of apples? 'Cause there're some apples that'll keep longer than others.

JW: I don't know what brand name they were, she just had some apple trees out there and she-

ALC: 'Cause I know some of the younger farmers are starting to get interested in those old apples. 'Cause they're like, there might've been breeds that were better than what they have today. 'Cause if they could keep for months, you're telling me they're keeping for months... Right?

JW: Yeah, they would keep for a good while until... they would keep until Christmas probably. And then after that they wouldn't be any good, but they would probably be gone by then anyway. Eight kids, and mom and dad, and grandma, and all of us... we'd all eat off of those.

ALC: So after Christmas would've been a harder time for food because you're running a little low?

JW: Yeah, we run... most of the canned food we didn't. She knew how much to can to get us through. The potatoes would last, and that sort of thing.

ALC: So I interrupted you in the middle of supper and I'm so sorry.

JW: That's okay.

ALC: So you said you had beef, and you'd have a salad. And what else?

JW: A lot of times chicken... a lot of chicken, we had a lot of chicken.

ALC: What kinds of sides? Would you have potatoes?

[37:21] JW: Yes. Potatoes, green beans, peas, corn... mom would, most of the time she wouldn't freeze corn on the cob like we do today. But she would cut it off the cob and we'd have it. And she would have enough for all winter. That was another one of our chores during the summer, especially. We had to work the garden. We had to weed the garden, had to keep everything going in the garden. That was on his list a lot of times, what we had to do.

ALC: Weed the garden, uh huh. What would you say was your most favorite job on the farm? And what was your least favorite as a kid?

JW: I don't know. My most favorite was after we got older he had that little Ford tractor, so probably putting up hay and driving the tractor. 'Cause I was the youngest of the eight and I got to drive the tractor when the other ones picked up the hay and all. So that was probably my favorite part of it.

ALC: Yeah. How old were you when you were driving that tractor?

JW: Probably six, probably five or six when I started.

ALC: How did you reach the clutch? Did he have to put a piece of wood on there or something?

JW: I'd stand up.

ALC: You'd stand up?

JW: I'd stand up and the clutch would go down, I'd stand up on the clutch.

ALC: Uh huh. That's not power steering.

JW: No, no.

ALC: And you're itty bitty.

JW: But if you're moving it wasn't too bad to turn. It's when you stop, that's when it was hard to turn.

ALC: Yeah.

JW: And most of the time the other brothers and sisters would help me if I got to the end row or something, or if I had to stop.

ALC: Right.

JW: But to start, no. I was able to keep it going, yeah.

ALC: You liked that.

JW: Oh yeah, that was my favorite. And I got to do it until I was about ten, then I got put back on the wagon and had to stack. I never had to lift up on the wagon, but I had to stack it or pull it back to someone who was stacking.

ALC: The bales?

JW: Mm hmm.

ALC: Wow.

JW: I'd drag them back, 'cause I couldn't lift them even at ten.

ALC: Right, right. Those are actually pretty heavy.

JW: Yeah, some of them were. And back then they were heavier than today even.

ALC: Why do you think?

JW: They just packed them in tighter.

ALC: Yeah, yeah.

JW: They just packed them in tighter so they get more in a bale, rather than having so many bales. Today I'd have trouble lifting those bales 'cause they were so heavy.

ALC: Wow. And all of you brothers and sisters were out there doing this.

JW: Yeah, we all put up... That was one thing as I grew older and I did work away from home, I was always working in farm ground. My summer work would be putting up hay, planting watermelons, picking watermelons...

ALC: Mmm. That's what you'd choose to do?

JW: Well, yeah it was. Because we got paid for it.

ALC: Yeah, yeah. What would you say was your least favorite? I mean I've talked to some folks who said they didn't like slaughtering chickens, or I don't know. Do you have a least favorite?

JW: Probably shoveling coal. I mean we had to shovel a lot of coal. Once we got out of the coal stoves in each room, we graduated to a... before we got to the coal furnace we had wood. And we had a wood furnace, it was a big furnace and you filled it up with wood.

ALC: In the basement?

JW: In the basement. And you'd have to keep it full of wood to keep the heat. Well my dad had this saw... you'd run a belt from the tractor back to the saw. You've probably seen those.

ALC: Yeah.

JW: I've got one, matter of fact, I got my dad's.

ALC: Wow, you kept that?

JW: Yeah.

ALC: Oh my gosh. Would you mind taking a picture of that and sending it? I don't know... do you do cell phone photos?

JW: Yeah.

ALC: Would you be able to send that to my cell phone?

JW: Probably.

ALC: I would love a photo of that. That would be amazing, that would be amazing.

JW: Yeah, I can get it.

ALC: Otherwise I'm coming back at the end of August, I can get it then. I'd love to come out to your place and get some pictures because that would be awesome, but it's up to you. It's up to you.

JW: Yeah.

ALC: So that's how you'd cut up the fire wood?

JW: Yes. We actually went to the saw mill and got some slabs when they'd cut the fire wood up, and they'd have to take the side off and cut it long ways. And it's probably about that thick.

ALC: About three or four inches thick?

JW: A couple, three inches thick. Not over three.

ALC: Right.

JW: But we'd take those pieces and my dad would haul them home on a wagon.

ALC: Scrap?

[42:21] JW: Scrap. They'd haul them home on the wagon 'cause there was a saw mill up in Patoka. And we'd haul them home on a wagon and we'd have to work and cut that wood all day long a lot of the time. And we had a stack, it was bigger than three or four of these rooms, and it was really high. Well, as kids we didn't know any better back then. We'd dig and make piles back there through that wood because the piles were so big. And mom always said, "That's going to fall in on you!"

ALC: Right.

JW: And the Lord watched over us 'cause it never fell in. But we had tunnels through that wood. But that's how we burnt the wood. And then when we graduated to Stoker coal furnace and we had to shovel coal. Oh, we shoveled so much coal.

ALC: And you hated that the most.

JW: Yeah. I just hated shoveling coal all the time.

ALC: Was it dusty?

JW: Yeah, yeah. Real dusty.

ALC: And that stuff smells, it has a smell to it, too.

JW: Yeah it's got that sulfur in it and all. We did a lot of that.

ALC: And you were saying originally, before the furnace, you would have a little stove in each room? To heat it up?

JW: Mm hmm. And we had coal buckets with lump coal, and we'd take... Each stove had a bucket and we would have to get that bucket, fill it up, take it in, and keep each one of those stoves going.

ALC: Wow, wow.

JW: And we'd have to get that in... I didn't like all that there. That was work, packing those buckets of coal.

ALC: Yeah, yeah. And hauling them up to each room. Yeah, yeah.

JW: But that was part of the work ethic that we got taught as we grew up.

ALC: So I'm going to ask the strangers questions, and I'm just interested to know how you're going to... how you'd answer it. So you had this life growing up on the farm, you heard all of your dad's stories, and your grandfather's stories. What made you want to farm? 'Cause most people hearing you talk would be like, "I'd be running away from that as fast as I could." Right?

JW: Well-

ALC: So I mean, what... You obviously-

JW: I was always around cattle and I always liked driving the tractor. I worked for my grandpa as I got older, I worked for my grandpa Ulysses. And I worked for my uncle, Andrew Walden, which you might've heard about. He owned some land back in here and they always had cattle, and I always drove the tractor. And that was two of my loves that I loved about farming.

ALC: Was the cattle and the tractor.

JW: I love to drive a tractor, and I love cattle. And that's what I do today, is cattle farm. And when I do the hay I do it all by myself with no help, and I cut it, I rake it, I bale it, I haul it. I do it all myself. And I do the round rolls, the big round rolls. But I just kind of like being out and doing, driving the tractor and doing that. And then my cows, when you have the little calves running around, you just get attached to just loving to be around them. I don't get attached to them so much that I don't want to sell them or nothing like that-

ALC: Right.

JW: But I get attached to them enough that I like to watch them.

ALC: You care, and you care for them.

JW: Yeah.

ALC: And you're having to... Do you have help at calving time? Or is that just you?

JW: Oh no. Most of my cows calve on their own pretty well. I'll lose one every now and then.

ALC: Yeah, yeah.

JW: To me, that's the hardest part. When I lost a cow or calf. And I talked to the vets in this area, and they even got cows. They said, "It's going to happen." They're just like human beings, you're going to have some that aren't going to make it sometimes. There's nothing you can do about it. And that's the hardest part for me, but I love the farm. I love to do that sort of thing. I try to keep my fence rolls all over but with the weather this year it's been tough. I try to keep them all clean and keep everything looking nice.

ALC: Yeah. What happens... I just have to ask this 'cause I have an uncle who had cattle. What happens when they get out?

JW: You get 'em in. I had some out this summer on the highway.

ALC: Ooh! My.

[47:21] JW: And they didn't get on the highway, but they was along the edge eating grass. 'Cause the grass had just started greening up, and I couldn't figure out where they was getting out at. 'Cause I got an electric fence and I thought, "My electric's not working." Well, it was. And I said, "Where are those calves getting out?" Well I had a woven wire fence around some of it, and they was reaching under the woven wire, cause the grass is always greener on the other side. Reaching under the fence, onto the other side of the fence, and the ground was so wet and soft that they got their head under the fence and lifted the post up out of the ground.

ALC: Oh, my gosh.

JW: They went underneath it! Now I said, "What's the chances of that happening?"

ALC: Right. Pulling an entire fence post out of the ground?

JW: Yeah. It's the iron post, it wasn't the wood post.

ALC: Still.

JW: But they did. They lifted it up and got out. And that's where I found out, so I put an electric fence down at the bottom of it.

ALC: Mm hmm.

JW: So they didn't get out no more. But I had three bulls. I kind of separate my bulls so I don't have calves in the winter time.

ALC: Okay. Right.

JW: I want my calves in the spring so I don't have them in the winter and have to mess with them in the winter. One time I had a calf that was born in the winter and we had this big ditch, and I made a pawn out of it now, but it was a ravine that went way down. And the cow had the

calf, and they was up on that side and it slipped. It went down into that big ravine and the cow was standing up there bawling for the calf. And I had to pack that calf out.

ALC: Oh, my gosh. In the mud.

JW: Yep. And I said, "I don't want winter calves anymore."

ALC: Yeah, that would do it for me, too.

JW: It's cold, and... you know. And I said I don't want winter calves anymore. So I separate my bulls but here's the funny thing. I had two pretty good sized bulls and then I had a younger... it wasn't a bull it was a little steer. And I had them down here on the highway, well so and behold I just rented this property from this lady. And I checked all my fences, I put electric fences around the top... Well there was one place behind the barn I didn't put an electric fence. Well, so and behold, those bulls went around that fence.

ALC: Oh no... All three of them?

JW: And they were down the highway. Sheriff called me up and said, "You've got some cattle out down here on the highway." And I said, "Is it three of them?" And he said, "Yes." Well I said, "Don't do anything, I'll be right there." Well he was trying to get them back in and that's the worst thing you can do. So I just took a bucket of feed and I went down there and shook it, and I started walking and the bulls just followed me right back into the lot. I fed them, and...

ALC: None of them got hit?

JW: No.

ALC: Oh, that's a miracle. Oh my gosh.

JW: I try to feed all my calves with a bucket. All my cows, I try to feed them with a bucket all the time. That way if they ever get out I can take the bucket and go get them, and they'll follow me in.

ALC: Wow, that is some thinking. Oh my gosh, that is so smart.

JW: Yeah.

ALC: Holy cow. So what do you... Do you feed them what you grow on your farm?

JW: No. I don't grow any corn or... I actually go and buy it.

ALC: What about the hay? You feed them hay, though... Right?

JW: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I do all the feeding of my hay, but my grain I go buy.

ALC: Okay, okay. Right.

JW: I don't give them a lot, I just give them enough that they want to follow me around.

ALC: Okay. So it's mainly hay, and what they're eating in the fields. How many... because you rent and you own, how many acres are you managing? Or... farming at the moment?

JW: About... I'd say about sixty some, seventy acres.

ALC: And how many cattle?

JW: I've got sixty heads of cattle right now.

ALC: Okay.

JW: But that's my calves, too. I've got twenty five mama cows, and I've got some calves that are ready to go to market now. I'm trying to wait until the price comes up a little bit, but they're ready to go to market. They're feeder calves, so I take them. I don't feed them all the way out, I take them and someone else buys them then they feed them out.

ALC: So how old is a feeder cow?

JW: About a year old.

ALC: About a year old. And are you the one... there's no delicate way of saying this. Are you the one that castrates them, then?

JW: Yes.

ALC: You do?

JW: Yeah, I actually band them. I get them down when they're babies. I don't like to castrate. If I get them castrated I bring a vet out and help. But when they're little baby calves, you've got to do it before three days old. 'Cause if you don't you can't hardly catch them after three days old.

ALC: Right, right.

JW: I went five, but you have trouble catching them.

ALC: Five days.

[52:21] JW: But when they're first born, if you can keep the mama away from you or get them in a pen, I usually just turn them over, set them on their belly, just put a band around them and that's it.

ALC: Okay. That's it. Do you do it at a particular time? I was talking to some of the old, like, ninety-four year old farmers up in Lawrence County. And they said when they were castrating their hogs they'd do it by the almanac.

JW: Yeah, so a lot of people do. I really haven't done that, but a lot of people do. They say it's better on them.

ALC: Okay, right.

JW: It's easier on them. My dad lived by the almanac.

ALC: He did?

JW: Oh yeah. Planted gardens by the almanac, pulled a tooth by the almanac, anything by the almanac. That's what he did. Mom and dad both lived off of that almanac.

ALC: Wow, wow. So what breed are you raising? And you've got your own breeder stock, I mean you've got your own bulls.

JW: I have my own bulls.

ALC: So you're not getting semen from other farmers, you're just doing it yourself.

JW: I do it myself.

ALC: That takes a lot of expertise when you're doing it by yourself.

JW: Angus cattle.

ALC: Angus, okay.

JW: Angus is just a... you know, everything's angus when you go to a... when you eat out.

ALC: That's all angus?

JW: Everybody wants to portray or advertise angus, that they have angus beef. So that brings the price up of angus cattle a little more than other cattle.

ALC: It's a little more fashionable?

JW: Mm hmm.

ALC: Okay, I hear you. I hear you. Do you ever work with Glenn Morris? 'Cause he's doing cattle-

JW: Oh yeah, oh yeah. We talk, we don't work together too much but we talk a lot. And actually, he's kind of in relation to my wife's side of the family.

ALC: Okay, okay.

JW: He's in relation to their side of the family.

ALC: Okay. 'Cause he does it the same way, he's got his own breeder bulls.

JW: Yeah.

ALC: That really surprised me. So I-

JW: I'll tell you what, at his age I don't see how he does all he does.

ALC: Wow, yeah.

JW: I really don't.

ALC: Well, if you don't mind me asking, how old are you?

JW: I'm sixty two. I just turned sixty two.

ALC: Okay.

JW: I actually farmed and worked at the power plant, the generating station down here, I worked there for thirty seven years.

ALC: Wow, and farmed at the same time.

JW: And did farming.

ALC: And now you're just farming.

JW: Now I'm just farming.

ALC: What do you prefer?

JW: Well, to make the big money you almost have to have the job at the powerplant. Of course I worked my way up, I started at the very bottom and I was a superintendent of maintenance when I left. But I worked there for a lot of long hours. And I actually did some grain farming when I was doing that, and I had my own combine and I had the cattle-

ALC: When you say grain do you mean corn or wheat?

JW: Beans and corn.

ALC: Beans and corn, okay.

JW: But the problem was I would work like twelve to sixteen hours at the powerplant, and then I was trying to do this too. Of course I was young and thought I could do it, but I was finding myself... I didn't have really good equipment because I couldn't afford it. And I was finding myself working on the equipment. When I got home from work I'd be working on the equipment for long hours to get it going.

ALC: Right.

JW: Then I'd go back to work, then I'd come back. And one year I lost a crop of beans. And it just hurt because it got wet, and I had been working on the combine and I wasn't able to get in and get them out. And it got really wet, and I said I'll get them out in the Spring then. It was all flat on the ground.

ALC: You lost it?

JW: I lost my whole twenty acres. And that kind of changed my mind. I said, I don't think I better do this 'cause I lost a lot of money like that. I said, what I think I'll do is just go into cattle farming and just do the cattle.

ALC: So this is something that Stanley Madison talked to me a little bit about. Did you wish you had better equipment? Were there issues getting loans from the local bank? I know sometimes race played a role in that. Did you find that for you?

JW: No. In the older generation they had a lot of trouble. There were probably some in the younger, but most of the older generation did have trouble getting the money. And they-

ALC: And you didn't have... Did you just decide not to ask for loans? Or... Did you ever wish for new equipment?

JW: Oh, I wished for new equipment. Matter of fact, I finally got a new tractor last year. After I retired they called me back to work down there as a contractor, and I went back just so I could get a new tractor.

ALC: Was it a Deere?

JW: Yes.

ALC: I'm looking at your cap. Congratulations. Those big tractors are expensive.

[57:21] JW: But it's not a big tractor, Stanley and I have the same size tractor and-

ALC: Well you say that, but I look at those tractors and they look big to me.

JW: It was just so much of a relief, like I said, for me as I get older I'm trying to set myself up so that I can keep doing it for a while. My goal is to go at least until I'm eighty. My wife says, "You got to quit. If you live to be eighty you got to quit at eighty." And she says you're just going to wear yourself down.

ALC: Yeah.

JW: Well when I saw my Uncle Grant pass away at eighty two, I thought... "Maybe that is a good age." At eighty, to start stepping out of it. And then hopefully my grandkids will pick it up.

ALC: Is that what you're hoping?

JW: My son has no... he has no interest in farming. But maybe his... I've got a little grandson and he always wants to be with me.

ALC: Okay, yeah.

JW: He always wants to be with me. So if I can instill some of that into him and he wants to keep it going, I'll let him keep it going. And that's what I'm hoping. I'm hoping that he'll want to do some of that.

ALC: 'Cause some of the land you're on... Are you on some of the land your dad farmed?

JW: No, not anymore.

ALC: Okay.

JW: We don't have any of that land that he farmed. This is all what my father in law, my wife's dad, had farmed.

ALC: Okay, okay.

JW: And he farmed it with one of those two cylinder John Deere's, and I still have that John Deere.

ALC: What's her family? If you don't mind me asking. What is a family name I'd recognize?

JW: Goins.

ALC: Goins. She's a Goins, okay.

JW: Her dad was Aunt Sallee's brother [Carolyn Sallee Walden, also interviewed for this collection].

ALC: Gotcha, gotcha. So that's Goins land you're on then?

JW: It's actually Jones.

ALC: Okay, okay.

JW: Because her mom was a Jones, and-