

Multi-Generational African American Farmers of the Midwest
Anna-Lisa Cox
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Names of those interviewed: Jonathan Walden

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Secondary Interviewers: Lishawna Taylor

Interview Location: Lyles Station School Museum, Lyles Station, Gibson County, Indiana

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
Jonathan Walden Transcript 2 of 2

[0:00] Description of the farm inheritance, credit to Paul for Jonathan's work ethic, details of recent family deaths, importance of inherited family items.

[5:00] Stories are told through items left on the farm, difficulties with cattle are described, details of raising calves.

[10:00] Fluctuation in prices for selling calves.

[15:00] Details of Jonathan's son and his college experience, Jonathan and his wife suffered a loss of twins during pregnancy, details of numerous twins in the family.

[20:00] Jonathan's mother birthed eight children, details of at-home remedies including his grandma's "Hot Toddy," details of a farmer's weight and long lifespan, Paul worked until the age of 95.

[25:00] Jonathan discusses how black American farmers losing property to white farmers hurts him deeply, he wants to keep the history of black American farmers.

[30:00] Jonathan's relationship with white farmers, worries about losing his family's farm, possibilities for the future of his farm and continuing the legacy.

[35:00] The struggle of making a living as a farmer, the influence Jonathan's dad, uncle, and grandfather had on him, details of his uncle Andrew's farm in Patoka.

[40:00] Discusses his uncle Andrew's family, details of feeding cattle and chickens, Jonathan is a hard-working and ambitious farmer, the love in Jonathan's heart is more important to him than the color of a person's skin, his involvement with the church.

[45:00] Details of Paul Walden's salvation and struggles he faced, details of his mother and father's death.

[50:00] The loss of the history of black farmers in Indiana, Jonathan's concern for the future of black American farmers, Jonathan's father viewed the woman's role as taking care of a household and helping men, discussion of women having ownership of farms in the future.

[0:00]

JW: And her mom's mother and father owned the ground and then willed it to her mom. And then her mom let us get it from there, she let us get an acre to build a house on. We built our own house and you're welcome to come by and look at it sometime.

ALC: I would love to, I would be honored. You built that house with your own house? Yeah.

JW: And when I did that I was farming, I was working, and I built the house. I actually put the shingles on the house at night with lights. I strung lights up where I could see and put the shingles on the house at night.

ALC: Wow.

JW: I mean, it was work. But I contribute all that back to my dad and how he taught us to work. We remodeled his house and I worked side by side with my dad, he kind of helped me and we completely paneled it. We put drop ceilings in it 'cause it had the big ten foot ceilings and we dropped them down to eight. We did all that work ourselves, but he taught me those things.

ALC: But you ended up really enjoying it-

JW: Oh yeah, yeah. This year I'm really disappointed 'cause the rain, and of course I've had eight deaths in my family over the last year.

ALC: Oh... I am so sorry.

JW: I had my dad, Uncle Grant, I had a brother, I had a sister. I've had eight total in our family that died in the last year.

ALC: Wow. And that's really hard-

JW: Yeah. It's really hard 'cause I've had to pick up a lot of that. Like now, I'm still trying to get my dad's stuff all out and sorted, and separated.

ALC: Right. Can you tell an example of a particularly difficult birthing situation where you thought you were going to lose the calf or cow and you didn't? Can you just tell a story like that?

JW: Yeah, it actually happened about two years ago. I had a little calf that I was having trouble with it birthing, and it was so funny 'cause it always happens on Easter or a weekend on Sunday when the vets are all closed. I have two I'll tell you but this one here is kind of special. I had a calf and it was trying to be born and it wasn't going to make it and I knew it. So I called the vet and it was funny 'cause I couldn't get anybody, and finally it was a lady vet who called me back and she said, "I'll be out." And I thought, you're not going to be able to get this because it's going to be tough.

ALC: I mean, from my understanding you have to get your arm right into that cow.

JW: You have to get it... try to get the head or a lot of times they're turned around-

ALC: Was this one turned around? Could you tell?

JW: No, it wasn't. But the foot was caught inside like this, and it couldn't come any further.

ALC: Right.

JW: So anyway, I called the vet and she came out. I was with her and she actually pushed the leg back in, got it, and it was a big bull calf. And she said, "I don't know." They have pullers that they put on them and you have to manually chain and pull them to get them out-

ALC: You have to get that into the cow and around the calf to pull?

JW: You know, you're hooking the chain onto the calf, then you put this around the rear end of the cow. Then it's got a long handle and you chain and you ratchet it, and you pull it and have to go really easy because you can paralyze the cow. So you go really easy... she wasn't big enough to push it and pull it. But she had the equipment, so it took both of us to get the calf pulled out. The calf had stopped breathing and I took my foot and started pumping on its side, and it started breathing.

ALC: Oh, wow.

JW: And that was probably the most gratifying time that I had of one birthing.

ALC: Wow. And both the mama and the calf survived?

JW: Yeah.

ALC: Wow. That must've been hard work. How many hours were you working at it?

[5:00] JW: Mmm, it was probably about an hour and a half before it came out.

ALC: That's hard labor.

JW: Yeah, yeah. But then we had another one even years before that where we had a calf that was being born, and it was the same way. It wasn't going to make it, and it was a big calf. And I pulled, and pulled, and got it out. It came out then, too, and we got the calf out. The calf did not survive. The mother was paralyzed at the time and the vet said, "If you can get the calf, keep her watered and fed, if you can get her to stand up and get her up so that the circulation will start working through her legs..." And I said, well I don't know any way I could do that. Well then, I got to thinking and they sell these things that go around their hips. And you put them around and you can take a chain and hook onto it. And I took my front end loader and tractor and put them around her hips, and I raised her up. I got her back legs up, then I got her up on her front and she stood up on her front feet. I let her sit there for a while on that hook.

ALC: How long?

JW: Hmm, probably two or three hours. Just letting that blood circulation start. And when I took her to move she stood up, and she lived and was fine.

ALC: Wow. And she lived and had more calves after that?

JW: Yep. And the vet told me, he said, "I'd get rid of her because she probably won't have any more calves." Well, she had calves after that.

ALC: That's amazing.

JW: But it was just... I had to get her up to get the blood circulating, and you work with them and do that. But the most devastating thing to me is when you get one like that and work with them, work with them, work with them, and you lose them.

ALC: Yeah.

JW: And I've done that a few times. That's the most devastating. But it is rewarding when you can go, and those are two examples that I had that worked out well.

ALC: Wow. These are such amazing stories. So, you've got them on a pasture most of the time, right?

JW: Mm hmm.

ALC: There's starting to be a lot of interest in free range, grass fed, and all that. Do you advertise your beef like that?

JW: No, I don't advertise them.

ALC: You don't? Because I know some farmers are getting more. I mean, I know in the stores the meat that says "Grass-fed," "Pasture raised," rather than "feedlot," gets a lot more. But you're also just doing feeder calves, right? You're not raising them all the way up?

JW: Yeah, I'm not totally... my calves when I sell them are anywhere from six-fifty to seven-fifty pounds.

ALC: That sounds big to me.

JW: But when you sell them to a butcher shop after you've fed them out all the way, they want them at twelve hundred.

ALC: Okay, okay.

JW: At least. And to get them from that seven-fifty to twelve hundred takes a lot of money and grain to bring them up. That's what makes the prices of the cattle fluctuate. Feeder prices will fluctuate because if the corn prices are up, feeder calf prices are down. Because those people that are feeding them on out, it's going to cost them more so they don't want to pay as much.

ALC: Right. And the price of corn is going up.

JW: The price of corn is going up because of all the flooding and all the things that went on this year. So that's going to hurt the feeder calves in my world.

ALC: Right, right. I hear you.

JW: But when the corn's down, everybody's wanting to feed them so they'll buy them and pay more for them and the price is up.

ALC: Speaking of prices, I talked to some farmers up in Michigan who have been farming land that has been in their family for a hundred fifty years. They said back in the seventies they'd do hog farming. They would show up at the sales and they would see the color of their skin, and they'd separate out their hogs and they wouldn't get as much for their hogs. Did you ever hear that or have that happen to you?

JW: No. No, not really. I've never had any issues with that.

ALC: Okay. Okay. Do you feel like there's been any time where you've been hampered in your farming because of prejudice?

[10:00] JW: Not really, I haven't. I don't feel I have. I think the biggest thing around here is what you said, some of the farmers felt like being able to borrow the money from... I know even Stanley and some of the people had to go to Evansville because the people in Princeton were not loaning to them because of their color... the race they were. But I have not had that issue.

ALC: Would you go to Princeton? Or would you go somewhere else?

JW: Oh, I'd go to Princeton. I have no issues with banking or anything. But I'm the type where I don't like to borrow money. I'm in a little different situation than most people, I don't owe anybody anything.

ALC: Right now?

JW: Right now.

ALC: Wow, that's really unusual for a farmer.

JW: My tractor, everything's paid for. My cattle, everything's paid for.

ALC: Wow. Is that the way your dad-

JW: My house is paid for, everything.

ALC: Wow, wow. Is that the way your dad did it too?

JW: Pretty well. He didn't totally, because he didn't have it to start with. And he had such a big family it's hard... I only have one son, and even when he went to college I steered him in a direction to not go to a big college. I said you can get the same paperwork going to BU, and then going to USI, you get the same paperwork for being an accountant as you do if you go to IU or Purdue. I said, "You don't have to go to that big school." So I paid for all of his schooling and he went to BU for two years, stayed at home and drove... then he went to USI, stayed at home and drove. I paid all of his schooling and he's debt free. He doesn't have any student loans or anything.

ALC: Wow.

JW: So then, coming on out he has bought my mother in law, my wife's mom's house right next to us.

ALC: Oh, okay.

JW: He lives there right next to us.

ALC: But you encouraged him to go to college.

JW: I encouraged him to go to college and get his degree. And now he's an accounting manager at Millennium Steel which supplies steel to Toyota.

ALC: Okay. Okay, okay. Wow.

JW: But he did that. That's just some of the things you teach, and some kids will listen and some won't. Yet he did listen to that. And he-

ALC: You had just the one child?

JW: Yeah. Yeah, we had a set of twins then we lost them. Yeah. So that was kind of a tough period of time for us.

ALC: Yeah, I imagine.

JW: My wife couldn't get a heartbeat on them. And the doctor said, "Well, we're going to have to take them." He said it's going to be devastating to you because we can't hear the heartbeat. So she wasn't very far along, but still... and then her sister had twins.

ALC: Oh, shoot.

JW: So that was kind of tough.

ALC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well that's what I'm hearing from Marva is that there are a lot of twins.

JW: A lot of twins.

ALC: In the families.

JW: Let's see. My dad was a twin, he had a set of uncles that were twins. [unintelligible] They were twins. There's lots of twins in our family.

ALC: That's got to go back. I mean, even to the midwife days before the hospitals.

JW: Yeah. But a lot of... my brothers and sisters were born at home. They were born in the home down here and-

ALC: And who helped?

JW: They had a doctor. He'd come down there and help, but most of them were born at home.

ALC: Oh wow, okay.

JW: Let's see it was me... it might've been three of us that weren't born at home.

ALC: Okay. But everybody else.

JW: Everybody else was born at home. And mom did good with them, that's for sure.

ALC: That is-

JW: I think she lost one. Early, early age.

ALC: As a baby? After it was born?

JW: No. It was before it was born. Well, I won't say... I'll say it was a miscarriage, really. I shouldn't say it was after. It was a miscarriage. But like I said, there were eight of us. There would've been nine, but-

[15:00] ALC: Because that's what I'm seeing for a lot of these families. They had huge families and oftentimes they would all survive. So that means these moms knew how to care for kids. Get them through all those ear infections, colds, flus... How did your mom deal with the ear infections?

JW: They had so many home remedies.

ALC: Tell me some, because I'm curious.

JW: I don't... I don't really know any. I don't really know what they are totally but we wouldn't go to the doctor. It was all home remedy stuff.

ALC: Yeah. I think we've lost a lot of that. I know when my daughter had an ear infection I thought there's got to be a better way.

JW: I mean I can't remember all of them because I came along a little later, but I know even I had some home remedies.

ALC: Can you describe any?

JW: We didn't go to the doctor. We just... but we also took care of ourselves. When you got a cold or something mom would grease you up with Vicks [Vicks vapor rub, a menthol-infused liniment] and put a hot cloth around your neck at night. My grandma, now, taught other things. She taught that when you get a cold you make a Hot Toddy.

ALC: Okay, and that would be... what would that be?

JW: That would be... you take lemons and boil them, you take honey and put it in there. And boil it to a boil, then you put a little bit of whiskey in there and sip it out of a spoon. Then you'd let it just go down your throat and burn your throat and you'd sweat a cold or fever out. It would be gone.

ALC: Wow, wow.

JW: And it works. It works today. And my grandma always said... this is another home remedy of a sore throat. She never had a sore throat. She said she'd lick the top of her hand and shake a little salt out of the salt shaker on it, and lick it out of her hand.

ALC: Okay. And that would do-

JW: And that works too, if you catch your sore throat when it first starts coming on and you take it and do that. That salt just kind of kills the germs in that, and it works good. Even today, I do it today.

ALC: Wow. That's wonderful. I've heard of salt gargling and stuff, so that makes a lot of sense. That makes a lot of sense.

JW: Yeah. But she did it every night. My great grandma, she did it every night. She'd lick her hand, a little salt and lick it. I don't ever remember her having a cold.

ALC: And how old did she live to be?

JW: Eighty-nine.

ALC: Yeah. 'Cause that's the thing, I think a lot of people think, "Oh. Farming life... People couldn't live very long." But everybody I hear about around here, they-

JW: Oh. Work, work, work. You didn't sit around. You didn't sit around to get fat or eat. I mean, you know, you just didn't sit around. Back in those days you never saw any big farmer or anything. They were all slim. I mean, you look at the Amish today. I mean the women Amish, they're in the kitchen all the time so you can tell. But the men, how many fat men do you see Amish? Very few. 'Cause they work.

ALC: Yeah. And that's what you remember as a kid, too. Very slim.

JW: Yeah, we were always slim until I got a desk job and started eating all the time. Bringing in food and all, and then I'd start picking up weight. But it was because we were working all the time, just busy all the time.

ALC: You were just moving.

JW: Yeah, yeah. I lost like thirty pounds from when I retired, just that quick 'cause I was out moving.

ALC: With your cattle and farm?

JW: With my cattle and all, outside. I'm always working on fence roasts, cleaning them, and working. And boom, it just disappeared. But it's just the type of thing we do nowadays. But it's different.

ALC: Right, right.

JW: And that's why those people lived so long. Because they didn't sit around their heart kept pumping. They kept their muscles toned because they just kept moving all the time. My dad was the same way. At ninety five he was cutting fence rolls with the weed eater, and I told him stop I'd just spray them. He said, "No, I need to exercise. I need to be moving."

ALC: Wow.

[20:00] JW: Well he'd weed from here, maybe across the haul or whatever. Then he had a chair and he'd sit in his chair for a little bit then just kept going.

ALC: He'd keep weed eating.

JW: He weeded all that fence roll.

ALC: With a weed eater? Ninety-five?

JW: With a weed eater. Ninety-five. I wanted a picture so bad of him, and I don't have my phone. I'm so sorry, I don't. But if I had my phone I could show you pictures at ninety-five-

ALC: I would love that.

JW: Where he's on his tractor.

ALC: I would love that, I can give you my cell phone number if you could send those to me.

JW: He was on his tractor, ninety-five, he's got a mask on and his boots on. And he's going across his property mowing with the bush hog. And I've got a picture of him on his lawn mower, moving his lawn. He had one of those zero-turn lawn mowers... ninety five.

ALC: Those things whip around.

JW: Yeah, he could just drive that thing. He said, "Oh I like this one a lot better, 'cause I can do it in half the time," He said.

ALC: Oh my gosh.

LT: Any pictures that you have that tell the story, even if you have time to go to that spot that your dad showed you and snap us a shot to send back. All of those. Because we don't have those stories. I mean, you guys have those. And those are precious.

ALC: 'Cause I mean, this is the history that's laid on the land. And if the stories are gone, it's like it evaporates. It's just gone, and there's no... When I was doing that book... I've been to places where before the civil war there were forty farming families. They were burned out, and now there's different people there, and those stories are gone. And the farmers were telling me they'd be farming and they'd turn up bricks from the homes. That's it. When the stories are gone, the stories are gone. It's like the history... all of that is gone. So that would be amazing.

JW: The thing that hurts me the most... it's really sad for me. Lyles Station was a community. It was a community of black farmers, mostly. They owned a lot of ground through here. They had a lot of ground and everything. As those people died off, then the white farmers came in and they've taken over everything. And it hurts me to know that this was our property and our ground, that we had, and sometimes it's slipped away. It's like Glenn. When something happens to Glenn, what's going to happen to his farm?

ALC: Right.

JW: You know, if we... as black American farmers, if we have the... we can't take it with us. If we would have the sense to say hey, we want someone else in our race to take that farm. If you give it to them or sell it to them for a smaller price, not be so greedy... yeah, this white farmer's going to give me five thousand dollars an acre, and that black farmer over here... Me and Stanley may only be able to pay two thousand dollars an acre. Why sell it to... you're not going to live, why not sell it to us and let us be able to continue that history of a black American farmer?

ALC: Yeah, yeah.

[25:00] JW: So... They've sold out because they can get more money, but then the money disappears and it's no more. And that hurts me the most. When I look around and see Gletus Hardiman's ground, white farmers are farming it. When I see Mae Hardiman's ground, white farmers are farming it. When I see Al Hardiman's ground, white farmers are farming it. I see Lyles' ground, and the white guy has got it. I mean, that's where it bothers me the most. It's because we could still be doing those things. I would not be opposed to farming the ground myself if... like I said, I don't like debt, but if I knew I could go into it and see my way out I would keep it going. Because then we still have an African American farm country... settlement here. And that's what bothers me the most. I mean, Mr. Greer over here... he's up in age. What's going to happen when Glenn Morris is gone? What's going to happen to all that ground? Then we're not going to have anything, you know? Those are the two biggest black American farmers now.

ALC: That's what I thought... Yeah, I was wondering. It's Glenn Morris and-

JW: And then it drops down to Stanley, then to Travis Nolcox and me. We're the only three left after that. So those are the things that bother me about the whole situation of African American farmers. Our ancestors came from way back and did all of this to get us where we're at. And I'd like to hang onto it, to be able to do it. That's not what's happening when I see those people. Mae Hardiman's got a lot of land, she's got a daughter that rents it and she rents it to white people which, you know, why not black American farmers? Rent it to them.

ALC: Right, right, right.

JW: And then you say, "Wow, we've still got some history here." It won't just be history, it'll be history plus now. Living history. So that's what probably hurts me the most. Even if you didn't farm corn and you had a pasture, or hay... maybe not twenty five cattle but fifty like Glenn's got them. But you have to love to do it, because if you don't you won't make it as a farmer. That's like me as a farmer with cattle. A lot of people say, "Why do you do that? It's a lot of work." You have to love it. Your heart has to be in it. And my heart is in it, you know? To do that. But I do have some white people that are letting me cut all my hay on them, because they want their fields to look nice. It's kind of hilly, so they want that to look nice. They say, "Well you can cut that all you want. You're helping me and if it helps you then cut it." So I've done a hundred ninety rows this year by myself.

ALC: Yeah. Do you see anybody in the younger generation you think might come into it?

JW: That's the thing. You don't see a lot in the younger generation. Like my grandson, if I can instill... but as he gets older he'll have to see if there's a way he can make it, and he'll have to have that want to attitude.

ALC: Do you talk to the other farmers about this? 'Cause you know, it's funny. Stanley Madison says some similar things... he doesn't want to see it go. You know, he doesn't want to see this-

JW: But I'm afraid when Stanley, myself, and one or two others are gone... where's it going to go?

ALC: Yeah.

JW: That's like the school building. Where's it going to go when Stanley's gone? 'Cause he's just about the glue that holds it together.

ALC: Right, right.

JW: So it has to go into some type of historical organization to keep it going, and make it happen. And he has talked about that. He said, "Well, maybe we're going to need to turn it over to historical people and let them keep it going." But he doesn't really want to let go of that heritage.

ALC: Right, right. I hear you, I hear you. I mean it's something... I see this happening all over. I see it happening in Wisconsin and Ohio, and it's a heartbreaker.

JW: It is.

ALC: It's a heartbreaker.

JW: That's where it's a heartbreaker. Because you know, it's dwindling away. And like you say, all we have then is the stories. All we have is the stories of my grandpa, and my dad, and us... that's all that's going to be left.

ALC: I'm hoping... Well, I mean I have this-

JW: See that's why they wanted to do that thing at the Indiana State Fair on the African American farmers, is to try to entice some of the kids that you can still do this.

[30:00] ALC: Right, right. Yeah. 'Cause I see Norman's grandson, D'Anthony, he wants to be a farmer. He really wants to be a farmer. And I don't know if it's going to work out. He's trying to do his little truck farming, I guess, or vegetable farming.

JW: Yeah.

ALC: Different kind-

JW: That's totally different. Totally different.

ALC: Yeah, yeah.

JW: Yeah, that's not the same. But, if now is the time he wants to do it, now is the time my buddy can show him. When Norman can show him what to do and how to do it, he needs to be right there by his footstep every step of the way.

ALC: I think there are some in the younger generations and they're feeling this history. They're feeling it. I was talking to somebody in DC and he's descended from African American farmers from Michigan in the eighteen twenties. And he said if there were still land and he could make a living, he'd be out there doing it. He's a cattle guy. He loves working with cattle, and he'd do it in a heartbeat. And he said, "I just can't see my way forward to making a livelihood for myself and my family."

JW: It is tough to make a living. It really is. But all farming is tough to make a living, it doesn't matter if you're African American or white. I think that's the thing, it's all tough to make a living.

ALC: But there's something... I don't know. I've heard some farmers say that they like the independence.

JW: Yeah, you're your own boss. You don't have to depend on someone else to do what you want to do, and that's key. But I don't think I could be where I was at by just farming... just farming. In life.

ALC: Well you had to invest a lot to stay a farmer and keep on that land. Do you think a sense of your family's history or heritage encouraged you?

JW: Oh yeah. My dad, and my grandfather, and my Uncle Andrew Walden... they influenced me. I'll tell you this story. My Uncle Andrew, when he got married, he lived to be eighty nine as well... When he got married to his second wife, someone gave him two cows for a wedding gift. Two cows! He took those two cows and he raised them two cows until he had probably... I think Uncle Andrew had probably fifty heads of cattle.

ALC: Wow!

JW: Him and his wife saved their money, and saved their money, and saved their money. And he had so much money that one bank turned him away and said, "You can't put any more money in here. You've got to go to another bank." Of course this was back a few years ago. Nowadays you can put lots of money in, but I think they had like a twenty-five thousand dollar limit that they would ensure.

ALC: Back in what day would you say this is?

JW: Probably late sixties.

ALC: Okay. Yeah, yeah.

JW: He was the one that actually, when my dad bought his place in Patoka, my dad got it and my Uncle Andrew loaned him the money to get it. And my dad paid him back the money before he got the house and property. But my Uncle Andrew, that just goes to show you what you can do with little. And you can work hard and make it.

ALC: Right.

[35:00] JW: And, you know, it's sad to say that they couldn't have kids. They adopted three boys and a girl. And two of the boys left, one went to California and one went to New Jersey. And the girl, I'm not sure where she's at. I think California now. And then the one son is here, and he was a big hog farmer. And when my uncle died... Well, I'll take this back. Before my uncle died this one boy, his name's Walter, he had this big hog farm out here. He got married, got a divorce, the woman he divorced took almost everything he had, and my uncle left him almost all the money.

ALC: Oh, wow.

JW: And the farm. And he took it and he went driving a semi. And he drives a semi today. But he squandered that money and that place. The place, he sold it to a white farmer. They tore the house down. We had a nice big pond we used to go fish in all the time and we used to swim in it all the time, and they've filled that all in and farmed across it. And it just makes me sick. It makes me sick. But just to know what he went through and how him and his wife started with two cows.

ALC: And came all the way up there.

JW: And came all the way up, and they were so happy. If you'd go up there you could hear them laughing... they were happy all the time. Now that's where I'd put up a lot of hay... it was for him. And we gleaned a lot of corn. We gleaned it by hand out in the field where the combine didn't pick it up. We'd throw it up in the wagon and my dad made us do that, too.

ALC: For gleaning? You'd glean.

JW: For gleaning. That's how we fed our cattle.

ALC: Wow. That's like biblical. Gleaning, you know.

JW: Yeah. Gleaning your corn. We'd take wagons and we'd go down the rows where the combines had knocked it off the stock and it fell onto the ground. They weren't as good of combines as now. They had pickers, really.

ALC: Mm hmm.

JW: And we would go down those rows and we'd have wagons full of corn. And we'd store it in cribs, and we'd put it in those cribs and that's how we fed our cattle all year long. Our chickens, we'd take old corn shellers and put the ears of corn in there. We'd shell it off and then we'd feed that to the chickens.

ALC: Wow. Oh my gosh.

JW: And that's how we fed our chickens.

ALC: So I keep forgetting to ask you this question. I ask everybody I interview. How would you describe... How would you prefer to be known or described racially? I'm not talking about how other people see you. How would you like to be described yourself? Just your identity.

JW: Probably as a hardworking, ambitious person. I mean, I'm ambitious. I like to work hard, and I like to see accomplishments.

ALC: Okay, okay.

JW: If I don't see accomplishments, then what are you doing it for?

ALC: Right, right. And in terms of racial identity?

JW: I don't... I guess probably... as far as racial identity I'm probably one of the people, if I was thinking, to get along with everyone. To love everyone, to get along with everyone. It doesn't matter to me what color you are. You know?

ALC: That's fair.

JW: I mean I'm the type to... it doesn't matter, it's the love in my heart for people that I care for. I mean, mom and our church is really instilled in us, we have a very high religious background. And I'm very involved in church and the people that get into nursing homes and hospitals, I go visit them and pray with them and do those things for them. And I don't, you know... and that's the thing I care about is the people.

ALC: Everybody's different. Everybody I've interviewed is different, but what would you say... It sounds like church and faith have played a pretty good role in your life.

JW: Yes, very much so.

ALC: Mm hmm, mm hmm.

JW: See my dad never... he was not saved until nineteen sixty-four. And his brother got killed in a semi accident. His brother drove a semi and he got killed in that semi accident. And my dad just couldn't get over it, and when he got saved... My dad was a heavy drinker. He was an alcoholic up through nineteen sixty-four. And he threw all his whiskey down the toilet, all his stuff, and he never touched it again. When he got saved he was very much a... His name was Paul and I always told him he was like Paul in the Bible.

ALC: Yeah.

[40:00] JW: Because when he turned around and turned from Saul to Paul, he turned as much for the Lord as he did for the Devil. And that got instilled in me, I know, most of our family... But me for sure, I see that. And that's what I care about. I give all the credit to that for me being successful.

ALC: Mmm. 'Cause that must've made a huge difference when he stopped drinking.

JW: Oh, yeah. He wasn't always a really kind person when he was younger. But as he changed, that changed a lot.

ALC: Wow, yeah I hear you.

JW: And my mom put up with a lot during that time even though she was taking care of us kids. And he gave her all the credit for it, too. He would tell you if he was sitting here today, he'd say, "I taught the kids to work and their mother taught them the spiritual side and the loving side of it." Yeah.

ALC: Mmm. How long did she live?

JW: She lived to eighty-four. And she'd been... she had passed away, I guess he lived eleven years longer than she did. Because he died at ninety-five, just in November of last year.

ALC: That's a loss, that's a loss. I wish I could've talked to him, but-

JW: Oh yeah. I've got an article, I should've brought it with me. It tells about a lot of the things I told you. If you want a copy I could give it to you.

ALC: I would love that. I know Stanley would photocopy it for you here, or wherever. Yeah.

JW: How long are you going to be here?

ALC: I'm leaving tomorrow morning, but I'm coming back at the end of August for a week.

JW: Are you going to be here today most of the day?

ALC: Most of the day, yes sir.

JW: Are you going to be talking to other people today?

ALC: Yeah, yeah. In fact, I'm talking-

JW: I don't want to interrupt you talking to some other people today, then.

ALC: I've got a little... I've got-

LT: I can shift out.

ALC: Yeah. She can meet you any time you thought you could come back. Even if I'm talking.

LT: Yeah, I can shift out.

JW: Okay.

ALC: That would be wonderful.

LT: And any of the stuff you can gather or pull together by August-

JW: Yeah, I got to see if I can...

ALC: And even some of that old stuff from your dads. I'm not taking it, but it could go to a museum or something.

LT: Yeah. Pictures or stuff. Or just any of that stuff you can do. Because I love what you said. You get that feel of the story that's just a mist about to go. But if we can find any way to put those stories down and continue, who knows what may happen.

ALC: In a couple years, who knows who might listen to this?

JW: And that was another thing I had a question about. You talk about the Congress being able to do... when you put all of this together and all, who actually is ever going to see this? I mean are there people that actually go in and read this stuff?

ALC: Here's the deal. It's going to go as the recording, and it's going to get transcribed so it's going to be written. It's going to go in the collection of the Library of Congress but then they're putting it up online on their website. Anybody on the planet who has access to the internet... researchers, young farmers somewhere, they can go on this website and listen to these stories. They don't have to go to DC. They don't have to go to Washington DC.

LT: By having it in DC, what helps is that it gives the story a marker from the broader sense. Because you guys have been on the land doing this from before sunrise to after sunset for generations. But somewhere these stories haven't gotten outside of here.

ALC: I think a lot of people want to listen.

LT: Yeah. So when other people start to realize that you're doing what you're doing, but you're not just doing it... you're doing it all this time frame back. It gives them more beyond this piece. It lets people know this stuff has been going on for generations. Whoever blocked the stories, these stories should've never been blocked. The numbers that have been through Lyles Station, all of that... but whoever blocked if it was on the Indiana level, wherever. Whoever decided that we're not going to let anyone know we've got all these farmers in Indiana.

[45:00] ALC: Did you ever hear Stanley Madison tell that story? He went up to DC about twenty years ago and talked to somebody at USDA and she said, “There are no black farmers in Southwestern Indiana.” And he said, “What do you think I am?” Just sat there...

LT: Yeah. So it's getting that story broader, and bigger, and out there. We've got the book, we've got the museum, you know... And these stories will add.

ALC: And I think it's like, whenever I get discouraged Lishawna says to me, “Remember the pioneers?” It took a lot of time and a lot of work, and it was harder for them than anyone.

LT: And you understand that. I read the stories, you know, I'm a map person, I map. But you know what it took because you were watching while your dad showed you step by step, piece by piece. Your mom was doing it, you know. The cattle pieces. All of that you got to watch and see. I can imagine you on that truck and stuff as a kid. Those are precious. What I would love to do is go back and see how much of that is stuff you guys just culturally learned. I'd love to take what you guys did and compare it to other farmers in other areas, and see if there aren't some unique pieces that you guys learned just by being in this area.

ALC: Mm hmm. Because I know there's a... In fact, I feel terrible because we're running low on time and I wanted to ask this last question. I always try to ask this as my last question. Because I don't... yeah, I was raised in the country and did a little bit of farming. Not real farming. So I know there are some questions I should be asking but I'm not asking. Is there a question you wished I had asked that I didn't ask? If you're like, “I just wish she'd ask this 'cause I'd like to tell her this.”

JW: No, the one I expanded on about the land leaving, that would probably be... that's probably the biggest thing that I see. When people don't pass on and they can. I mean, that would've probably been the question I would've wanted you to ask.

ALC: Okay.

JW: Because, I mean, when I look at Gletus Hardiman over here, yeah he's got some kids but none of them are interested in farming. What would it have taken for them to come to a black farmer as myself, me and Stanley [Stanley Madison, also interviewed for this collection], to say, “Hey we want to keep the black American farmer, African American farmer going, so we would be willing to let you do the farming than go on over here and take the other road.”

ALC: Yeah, I hear you.

JW: And then that would've kept that all going. Whether Stanley would've done all of it, whether I would've done all of it, or we would've pieced it out. What that would have meant to keep. This is a man that was very wealthy... a very wealthy farmer.

ALC: I've heard a lot of people talk about Gletus, yeah. Gletus Hardiman.

JW: Mae Hardiman was the other lady. Her husband and her were very wealthy. But I'm not taking anything away from them because they had to work for it. My Uncle Andrew-

ALC: Mm hmm. He had to work for it.

JW: He worked for it. He started with two cows. He told me those things, he started with two cows. You know, I get excited when I talk about that because of the two cows he started with.

ALC: I mean, people don't think that's possible and they did it.

JW: And they had more money in one bank that they wouldn't even let them put more in there, and he started with two cows. Wedding present.

ALC: It's incredible. I sometimes think as I was reading or researching some of these families for my book, they're like superheroes. I know people talk about superman, but oh my gosh.

JW: Yeah.

ALC: I know this sounds like an odd question, but times change. Do you think any of these farms would ever consider training up or passing their land to a woman? Or a young woman who's interested in doing it?

JW: Yeah, probably so. Nowadays. My dad would never.

ALC: Yeah.

JW: My dad would never 'cause my dad is totally against women [unintelligible], that sort of thing. 'Cause he, when you talk to him everybody says, "Well he always thinks women should be barefoot and pregnant." You know. But that was... that's how he grew up. The woman took care of things in the house, the man was supposed to get out and work.

ALC: Right, right.

JW: And he thought that until the day he died. He said, well, when Hillary... might be racist.

ALC: That's okay.

[50:00] JW: But he said that's the reason Hillary Clinton didn't get in for the presidency... because God had his hand on it. And a woman was made from a man, she's supposed to be his helpmate.

ALC: Okay, gotcha. Gotcha. So he wouldn't-

JW: And so she's not supposed to be the leader, she's supposed to be the helper.

ALC: So he would've never considered passing on his farm to any of his daughters?

JW: No. Not to be the leadership of it... the head of it. He wanted men.

ALC: Do you think that might change?

JW: Oh, it will change in time. It will change in time. I just hope that we don't get to the point that we get too outrageous with it and it ends up in another country owning it. I mean, you know... it's just like Japan. I mean, Toyota has made the Princeton area. Don't get me wrong, Toyota has made the Princeton area. But it's really for the Japanese. It's not for the American people. It's helping the American people, but the Japanese is the one's coming out. You know every car that's made in Toyota is sold before it's made?

ALC: No, I didn't know that.

JW: Yes. Every car that is made, they're making... they make like fifty a minute. And every car is sold. So who's taking the hit on that? It's not the Japanese. The Japanese own the plant so they're making the money off of those cars they already sold. The people that are losing are the people that are dealers, which are mostly American people. If they don't sell them, they're going to make the loss.

ALC: Right, I hear you. I hear you.

JW: So how smart is that? I mean, and they're taking over our land. Of course they said they would. They said they'd take America over without firing a shot. That's one of the big things they said, and they are. But the thing is, I don't understand why we... just like taxes, as long as they're here and they're building something new or whatever... they don't pay any taxes.

ALC: Mmm.

JW: And, if you're working... when I worked at the powerplant they took so much taxes out of my check to give to Toyota for being here. That ain't right.

ALC: Yeah. I hear you. I hear you, yeah.

JW: It's all about money, it's all about greed. That's what it's about. And don't get me wrong, they've helped us. But still, why couldn't we have done that with American made vehicles as well? The same thing, the same principle.

ALC: Right. I hear you, I hear you.

JW: So, and that kind of goes right back to farming. We needed to do that with our farms as well, instead of...

ALC: Well, I've got someone waiting out there for this next interview and I am so sorry. I wish I could talk another hour, I seriously do. And I hope that we can follow up. I really hope.