

Project name: Agricultural Pilots: Crop Dusters in the Rural Midwest
Field ID and name: Interview 6
Interviewee: Brad Slaughter
Interviewer/Recordist: Ellen Kendrick, Jackson Kendrick, Samuel Kendrick
Date: 4/29/21
Location: Boonville, Missouri
Others Present: N/A
Equipment used: Zoom H6 Handy Recorder
Microphone: Saramonic Wireless Lavalier Microphone
Recording Format: .WAV
Recorded Tracks in Session: 1
Duration: 00:51:22
Keywords: Safety, flying, airlines, crop dusting, work, dealing with the public,

Corresponding Materials:

Context:

Technical Considerations:

Transcription prepared by: Samuel Kendrick

Transcribing Conventions:

Use of square brackets [] indicates a note from the transcriber.

Use of parentheses () indicates a conversational aside.

Use of dash - indicates an interruption of thought or conversation.

Use of ellipses ... indicates a discontinued thought.

Use of quotations “ ” indicates reported speech.

Use of *italics* indicates emphasis.

Use of underline indicates movie, magazine, newspaper, or book titles.

Names of interviewee and interviewer are abbreviated by first and last initial letters.

Time is recorded in time elapsed by the convention [hours:minutes:seconds].

[00:00:00]

EK: 1:45 on April 29, Thursday, we are and where are we? Boonville

BS: Boonville, Missouri.

EK: Yeah. We were just in Lexington. Talking to David. And that was interesting. Got to go in his man cave. I didn't know if I would get to go in there since I was not a man. But it I've never actually been in a real man cave. So, do you have a guy that flies for you? Are you flying all the time?

BS: I fly all the time. And I have had hired pilots. I'm starting a new guy this year.

EK: Yeah. Are we keeping you from flying today?

BS: No, it's a little windy today. I do have flying to do tomorrow, but you are not keeping me from flying today.

EK: Good. I'm glad. We're always interested in like how you get you got started in the business, if you wouldn't mind sharing that.

BS: Well, my dad was an airline pilot. He was actually chief pilot of Ozark airlines. So I grew up flying. And I soloed on my 16th birthday before I went and got my driver's license. So I actually had a pilot's license before I had a driver's license. We did quite a bit of aerobatic flying and formation flying and stuff like that as a kid growing up. So it wasn't all straight and level by any means. I grew up you know, uniquely doing some aerobatics. And I kept, I stayed current over the years I flew a little bit of charter King Airs for 14 years that sort of thing back in the mid late '80s. Stayed current, flew a few of my bosses around over the years. Just always been flying and I about had all my kids raised I still had one in high school I have four children and I had everything paid for had pretty good little pile of money in the bank and '07 hit. And I was the highest paid person at the company that I worked at, which was an excavating company. And I was a project manager and estimator for 'em, ridin' boss. Being the highest paid employee I was the first to go, and I drove a dump truck did some dozer work for the railroad out in front of under cutter which was interesting job, very interesting.

EK: Did you still fly through all that?

BS: Yeah, yeah. I actually the company that I was working for that worked for Union Pacific, I flew me and two guys and we would go do a job session about two weeks long and then we'd be home for a week then we go but they they used my airplane and me to get with employees where they need to go so yeah, I was still flying. Anyway, when I hired on with them guys, I had decided that I was gonna start a crop dusting business, you know, basically had all my kids raised. Nothing holding me back anymore. So I went out and bought a Pawnee and learned how to spray and started a business and it has been very successful.

EK: Did you go to spraying school? Or did you...?

BS: No. I had thousands of hours and a lot of experience. So I got my ag endorsement from the guys that I bought the airplane from. Got some training there. Got some training from Sam Dyer over in Marshall.

EK: Yeah, he's mentioned a lot.

BS: Yeh. Dyer the flier. He'd been around forever. He gave me a little instruction and guidance. And I just started doing it. But I was, you know, I was naturally equipped with the right,

EK: Well, yeah.

BS: I grew up flying and not straight and levels. Mine is probably a little different story than most.

EK: Yeah, most people go, like go through the, you know, they just decide and,

BS: Flying Tigers, or...

EK: Then they go through the initial 40 hours or 100 hours or whatever and then... But not everyone we've talked to went to spraying school. You know, they couple people didn't. And, but you know, some people have. So and the ones that didn't are a little hesitant to say it, but like no one official, the FFA is never gonna, like, listen to these interviews or anything,

[00:05:24]

BS: And I don't, it's not required to go to a spray school, you just have to get an ag endorsement. There's no legality saying you have to go to one of them schools, that's just a fast track for young guys who want to be spray pilots. That's how they fast track. They, rather than spend a quarter of a million dollars on a college, four-year college education, they go down right to one of the two or three schools in the country that do it and they spend 60, 70,000, six months and they're working.

EK: Yeah. I can't remember. It might have been Sam Styron, who said that he didn't have time. He didn't have you know, he wanted to do this and that he didn't have time to, like mess around with sitting in a classroom and going to school and stuff. Because it seems common that people learn from each other. Which I don't know,

BS: Oh, absolutely. We all feed off of each other. It's pretty small community.

EK: It is.

BS: And I'm sure there's competition out there. But I've never viewed any of my, quote, competitors as competitors. They're just, I've got more to do than I can get done year after year. And it's just a matter of how much I want to sell. And I just don't want to oversell to where I can't perform, you know, want to be able to keep promises. So...

EK: What I think the competition thing that crept in on one conversation was that, like, guys were coming up from the south. And under bidding, and, like taking business that had always belonged to someone else. And I mean, I guess that's, you know, fair trade, but,...

BS: Well, it isn't it isn't. ou know, I say I don't have any problem with competition, when you start talking about some of those activities. I do have an issue with it. Missouri has a reciprocity agreement with Kansas, Iowa, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Illinois, probably, probably all the bordering states, you know, Kentucky, Tennessee. And they say it's a reciprocity agreement. But it's not, it's not a fair playing field. For instance, I can't go to Iowa, and throw out my business card and start flying for, you know, say I knew a big farmer up there. Once we come up and do it. Can't do it. Iowa

protects their operators. And if I were to go to Iowa, I would have to either own property and be an Iowa resident, or I would have to be a subcontractor under an existing...

EK: Oh, OK.

BS: But the Iowa operators, the Louisiana operators, they can come right here in Missouri, Missouri doesn't protect us. And they can come and just do business. So it's not a, it's not a level playing field. So I do have a little bit of an issue with that, to be honest with you what it comes down to the competition type deals.

EK: That might be what, what they, he didn't go into like, as much detail as you just did, but I bet that's the situation.

BS: So that's a thorn in us, Missouri operators' side a little bit. We pull that out of state competition, because the state of Missouri is not protecting us, whereas some other states do protect their businesses.

EK: Who should be protecting you?

BS: I would say it would be the..., I don't know if it'd be the attorney general or I really don't know. It's, it's over my head and my pay scale because I have considered trying to get legislation. And I've got a good friend who's the attorney for a really big outfit in St. Louis. They're actually nationwide, but he's been a partner there for years. And he's like, you could do this Brad, but it's gonna cost you and I mean, big dollars to try and push that legislation.

EK: Like personally, you'd have to pay?

BS: Well, I mean, I guess I could try and get a conglomeration of people together to, to fight for it, but I'm not that much of a social activist, so I have not. I just keep chugging along.

EK: But it's possible.

BS: It would be possible. Yes.

EK: I don't have any thing to do. [Laughs.]

BS: I don't know if state treasurer, I don't know who that would fall under. But I would say start with the Attorney General was what I would think. Certainly somebody in Jeff City can tell you how to do these things. But, uh...

[00:10:19]

EK: But there's just no law on the books that protects the industry, ...

BS: No.

EK: Which is odd. You know, because it's a viable industry, and involves quite a bit of money. I'm surprised the farmers haven't like...,

BS: Yeah, that's what I was about to say. It's not just protecting the industry, as far as us ag pilots, it would be protecting the growers themselves, because these outfits and not all of them, but a lot of these guys that come up here and underbid, they don't have to walk in the restaurant and see you.

EK: No, they don't

BS: They just blow and go, do non-quality type work. Whereas when you're part of the community, you're having lunch and going to junior high band concerts with your clients.

EK: And your moms are like, calling each other on the phone.

BS: Exactly. So... You know, some growers know and understand that. And they show allegiance to the local guys. Some growers just don't get it, and they just they'll chase that, that cheap price.

EK: Right. So around us, the people who live around us have lived there for you know, they're long time farmers. And they generally go through Dusty, and even like, and then like, you know, he'll subcontract with somebody if he can't do it all. We don't see, we don't see anybody other than him, you know, flying over our house. And so I wonder who these farmers are, who are maybe they're like corporations.

BS: It's more of the co ops that go ahead and hire these outfits out of Louisiana and Arkansas and such.

EK: I guess Sam Styron was talking about how unsafe some of them are. But they're, they burn and turns.

JK: He was talking essentially doing, like, like the way they make their turns, they'll do like a hammerhead stall, basically. And he just can't, he just doesn't understand how they can continue to do that and not have a lot of accidents.

BS: I don't think they do. I think the guys that are out there doing hammerheads, instead of your standard ag turn, they wind up plowing on in the ground. And those are, you know, we lose a few pilots every year. And I would say a certain percentage for sure are, are the cowboys. You know, a lot of people think that this business, you got to be an adrenaline junkie, or crazy or something, and it's quite the opposite.

EK: Yeah.

BS: If you're an adrenaline junkie, if you're getting an adrenaline rush, when you're out there doing that, you're probably in the wrong business. You know, it's got to be a calm, cool, collected, because it is dangerous work. So you got to have your, your wits about you, and you can't be out there, thrill seeking. And it's got to be about how you apply the product to the field. And ultimately, it's if the product doesn't work, then we don't have a viable business. You know, it's got to sell itself. It's got to put money in the producers' pockets.

EK: Why, why do you think the profession has that kind of a label of like being just crazy people?

BS: It's pretty simple. You stand out there and watch somebody do what we do and standing from the ground, it looks like that guy is crazy. You know, that's what any and everybody would think is that guy's crazy. But it's not crazy. You know, we're not crazy. We're, we do something that is inherently dangerous, and it's fun to watch and all that but when you're the one sitting in that cockpit, you're not up there a-cowboyin' it. You're, it's a very professional, very thought out, well, ... It's a meticulous job, actually. There's... The crazy ones, I think, wind up in graveyards,

EK: Yeah.

JK: Yeah. Well, it's uh, yeah, I mean, it's, it's something that that I've noticed with somebody like Dusty Elkington. He was a rough stock rider and rodeo cowboy, before he became an ag pilot, and so you know, when he first started flying, everybody said, Oh, he's gonna die. No, I mean, I've flown with Dusty he's, he's calm. It's, it's all about managing risk and identifying solutions to problems before the problems

BS: Absolutely.

JK: Go up.

BSL You got to survey your fields and know everything out there that's going to try and bite you.

EK: Do you have a like a computer screen with the fields in your...? Well,

BS: Yyeah, we log everything up off of a, I use a program called Chem man (?), which so everything gets logged, you throw a thumb drive in your computer in your airplane, it'll pull up the fields, and then you're painting. What you are accomplishing, you know, when you spray the field, it paints, it'll show if you gapped a little somewhere or didn't get all the way to the end or didn't do a cleanup row. So we have electronic proof for the growers. Here's your as-applied map, we can provide as-applied maps via the technology.

EK: Right?

[00:16:04]

BS: And it wasn't always like that, you know, you just farmers had to go off results. But right now they can say can Hey, can I have the as-applied to that, and you give them the as-applied and they can see exactly how good or how bad a job you did.

EK: Is the industry doing anything you think to change this, the perspective of the people on the ground?

BS: You know, you're talking to the wrong guy on that. I don't go to the NAAA conventions. And you know, there's a lot of people that really, you know, and I'm glad they're there supporting our industry. But I'm not involved in it. I'm, I'm an older guy, I go out here, I do my business, I... But there's a lot of people that are very active in the community and in the industry that are you know, have, you know, the NAAA has lobbyists in Washington watching the laws, they want to change that would, would infringe on our business, you know, so the NAAA is a big deal. I'm not part of it. So you're kind of asking the wrong guy, if there's people out there trying to change perceptions. I try and change perceptions every day. I go out and I do my job very professionally. It's, it's about quality, not quantity. Here, you know, in my business, and anybody that flies for me, I tell them if this don't work, we don't have a job. So it's not about quantity, it's about quality, you got to get the, the product on properly. [Phone rings.] You might if I take this real quick?

[Recording paused for phone call]

[Recording continues.]

BS: It's like \$1,000 a month rent. And they had just signed a one-year lease on a \$12,000 a month apartment. And they had to get on an airplane and get the hell out of there. She lives up. She bought the family farm. And she's still so she had a second home. But they got out of New York via the pandemic. And hiding in North Missouri and paying \$12,000 a month rent on their apartment.

EK: And are hidden still.

BS: Well, it's over now. Yeah, the lease is gone. And I don't think they're planning on going back to New York. But anyway,

EK: I think a lot of people left. And I had read that a lot of people had gone like into New Hampshire and New Jersey and the, like the surrounding areas. I just saw a headline a little bit ago that said, the exodus of urban people to rural communities has been noticed, and they're going to take advantage of the money that people have to spend. So I don't know what we're gonna see boutiques and things I guess. I don't know.

BS: I don't know, either.

EK: I don't know.

BS: I think the whole world went crazy. I mean,

EK: Still, still crazy.

BS: The pandemic was real, I'm not a denier or anything like that. But you know, the federal government has ran in the red, me as a businessman. I can't run the red. I have to be in the black. But the federal government has run in the red, I'm 55 years old, my entire life. And they've figured out how to accrue a \$21 trillion debt.

EK: I don't understand any of that.

BS: Well, in, 55 years it came to 21. And in one year, we've taken that to 29.

EK: Right?

BS: That's scary. I don't care who you are. Inflation is gonna come. It is not sustainable. This and then you know, Biden's out here talking about another 1.2 or \$1.8 trillion, rebuild America stuff and like, people don't understand what a trillion is. The average person has no clue what a trillion is.

EK: I listened to him last night. I'm thinking, what does that just mean? Where's that money coming from?

BS: Exactly. Here's something that I throw out to people just for the fun of it while we're talking. If, at the end of each business day, I put \$275 in a non-interest bearing account, in each business day, because I want to be a millionaire in 10 years, I'm 55. At 65, I'd have a million dollars cash in that account with \$275 a day, just take 10 years for a million. I would be 65 years old. Man, that was fun, now I want to be a billionaire. Well, I'd be 1,065 years old before I hit the B. Man, that was fun. I'm going to become a trillionaire, I would be 1,000,065 years old before I ever got to a trillion. People do not understand what a trillion is.

[00:20:58]

JK: Exponential growth is a fairly complex subject for most people. Even if you show them you know, like a graph function and [undecipherable] function. It makes no sense.

BS: I think people need to grasp what it truly is.

JK: So speaking of speaking of government, how often are you forced to interact with the FSDO.

BS: They come and inspect me once a year. And other than that, I get a, an occasional call from them, because somebody has said that I was doing something inappropriate or illegal or whatever. And if they get that call, they have to follow up on it. So I've had zero problems with the FSDO. They follow up, I say, Yes, I was there. This is what I was doing. I did have a subcontractor who got some drift on to a neighbor. And the Missouri Department of Agriculture got involved. And they took samples of what the neighbor claimed got into their organic garden. And they sent the

samples off to University of Missouri and test them all stuff. And as it comes out, we, my subcontractor actually didn't get any drift on their organic stuff. So you've got the FSDO regulated under Missouri Department of Agriculture. I have no problem with the FSDO, as long as you're compliant, and keep all your equipment doing what it's supposed to be doing, and you stay on your maintenance schedules, the FSDO's easy to work with. I've had no problem with the Missouri Department of Agriculture, he was just a... Aviation in general, the FAA, I've always thought it was quite extraordinary, you know, you go up and down the highway, there's state patrolmen, drones everywhere, keeping everybody in check. Aviation is just not like that. I mean, you always stand the possibility of getting a ramp check at any time. And they're gonna make sure that your airplane's like it's supposed to be in your physical and your registration and everything, you know, that can, you can be checked for that stuff at any time. I don't think they do a lot of it. They do a little bit of it. Everybody's just compliant in the aviation world. We know what the regulations are. And you know, if you stay within those regulations, you're free to come and go. But there's no big heavy arm of the FAA the best I can tell they, they come out and do accident investigations and what have you, but... And I'm sure that they, you know, I live in a bubble. I'm a mid-Missourian, you know, Midwesterner. Probably out on the coast and such you're gonna see more ramp checks and because of the drug influx and what have you, but out here in the Midwest, I just don't see, you know, a big heavy arm so I get along fine.

JK: I was curious because when we were talking to David Edwards, he got to talking about since he's so close to Kansas City, he gets a lot more complaints called in on it. And he was also talking about, you know, these people they have their beehives, they have the organic gardens, but they don't register it with what's the...?

BA: Oh, there's a there's a state registry. Yeah.

JK: And yeah. So if they don't register it, then he can't know

BS: That would pop up in my Chem man. If they've registered, and I'm going to spray a field that's right next to a registered organic field, it'll come up right on my Chem man that, hey, this is registered organic.

JK: And then on the other hand, I mean, I just know, through my friendship with Dusty, he's had several complaints called in by he thinks the same person because the way that Nevada airport's laid out there are apartments that are about two miles south of the runway. So when he's loaded heavy, he doesn't have I mean, he's got his, his positive rate of climb, but he's not going to get... And he's always compliant. But he's low enough that he gets these complaints every single year because he's coming over these apartments.

BS: Well, I've got somebody here on the north west side of our strip, that's called a number of times on me once they find out who it was, whether I get (undecipherable) or not, I just avoid flying over this old lady's house. Calls stopped. You know, once I found out who was where she lived, you just so we... I try and fly very graciously around here and be a good neighbor to people, you know. And we've been doing it for 12 years out of this airport. And for the most part, get along

with everybody, you get the case, some people you just never gonna make happy. They just, they wake up angry in the morning and they're pissed at the world.

EK: [Laughs.] That is so true.

BS: What are you gonna do with those type of folks? I don't know.

EK: Just avoid them.

BS: Exactly.

EK: You know, you can't change them. So you just change, change your reaction.

JK: And then, I'm sure there are folks who like being buzzed.

BS: Oh, absolutely. I get probably 50 compliments to every one "I hate you guys." You know, people enjoy what we do. And it's fun to have a job. I've always thought this since I started this business and been doing it. What other, there's just not very many jobs. There are some. You got your professional athletes and what have you, that people hoard in by the 1000s and spend been all kinds of money to watch them work. But not very many average jobs will people stop what they're doing during their day to watch you work? And they do you know, when I'm out spraying cars will pull off and they'll get out of their car and they'll just sit and watch and wave and you know, and that's kind of fun. So you're kind of performing. pretty often, there's... I always fly as if somebody is watching, you know, I act like tree, the farmer's got his pick up his up on the tree line, watching every time. I act like I'm being watched every moment because most of time you are being watched by somebody.

EK: Yeah, by somebody.

BS: So you better be doing it right.

EK: We like to get our cocktails and sit on the deck. And watch Dusty.

JK: Yeah, I'll send him, I'll send him text messages radio exact turns. [Laughter.] He'll get landed and have a slew ratings on his text. And then he'll send something back and say I didn't ask your opinion.

BS: How long's Dusty been doing it?

JK: He's been flying. What? Seven years?

SK: Seven years.

JK: Yeah, seven years.

SK: I think he started with an Ag Cat.

JK: Yeah, he just got to start out with an ag cat. Well, he started out with a Pawnee.

BS: He brought his 502 down here last year. And I put him down on grass strip, one of my grass strips down here. He was going out of there to heavy and he didn't like that very well. So he went home.

JK: He likes to be heavy. He does like to be heavy.

EK: No, he said he didn't like it.

JK: No, no, he doesn't like to be heavy on soft. Soft. He likes to be heavy on his on his home airport. He was also talking about when he went to pick up his 502 I guess he flew up there with Kevin, flew him up there in a 182 and the he was flying that aircraft out of, what he said was the it was one of the busiest airports in the Midwest because it's all the oilfields is up in North Dakota. And he said there was so much traffic and it was a controlled airport. And planes come in and out a lot of helicopters. And he said I, I'm not very good on the radio. Like Yeah, I know this about you Dusty. He said so I just kind of sat there and locked up just just thinking I just want to go home. [Laughter.]

BS: Want to get this airplane out of here. I mean, is that, is that something that you do? Do you operate out of controlled areas any?

BS: Um, a little bit. I've got some clients in the St. Louis area and we'll have to get in there and I'll call the tray com let them know what I'm doing and I will talk to Spirit of St. Louis airport because I work right off their departure and approach end of runway two seven and nine there. So there are times and over here Columbia Regional I work really close proximity to Columbia Regional which is a controlled airport.

JK: And then you got Whiteman Base...

BS: Yep, I deal with Whiteman out of Sedalia. Very seldom do I have to deal with Whiteman, but I'll, I'll call Whiteman approach once in a while and let them know that I'm going to, you know, try and get permission to get into their airspace. Most of my jobs that are in Whiteman's airspace, I save for Sunday. They don't open the control tower on a Sunday so the control zone goes away Well, you're not sneaking any, just get in there and do your business and get out legally without uh... So...

[00:31:07]

JK: Yeah, that's that seems to be a pretty common thread among these ag pilots is that we're not fans of the whole controlled airspace having to you know, do the official communications with...

BS: It doesn't matter to me. I was a corporate pilot and I'm not scared of radios. A lot of these guys have limited commercial licenses too you know, and I'm, I'm an instrument pilot and full commercial and all that. So the radios not a big deal. Talking, talking to tower ATC is just not a big deal.

JK: Aside from you, the only other person to talk to who's instrument rated is Kevin. And all the rest of them, they don't. They say I don't need it. I mean, I'm not interested in it.

EK: So you've flown, like lots of different kinds of airplanes. When you say corporate I have this like, jet in my head.

BS: Yeah, I flew. It wasn't corporate. It was charter back out for a company called Jet Corps. Years ago. I flew 414s and King Airs for them is all. They had Lear jets, but I didn't stick around long enough to get up into the Lear jets. So the only turbine aircraft I've ever flown are the King Airs and the Air Tractors. Everything else was piston driven.

EK: What about, I'm like, pretty interested in like, the aerobatics you mentioned you kind of like, threw that out and then walked on.

BS 32:42

Well, we just did basic aero, you know, aerobatics, we didn't do any uh... We didn't have any expensive fancy airplanes and they didn't even make them back there. You know, like the Excels and stuff that are out there now, you know, there was no Red Bull stuff that you know, the world's changed a lot since you know I got my license nearly 40 years ago. Thirty-nine years ago was when I soloed and the world's changed a lot since then.

EK: So did you go to air shows and...?

BS: That picture on the wall right there that bottom one. That's me and my middle son sitting next to a Satabria which is a pretty aerobatic little airplane that was one of my dad's airplanes, and I'd go up and I do loops and rolls and spins and basic maneuvers. We weren't doing the crazy stuff they do today. And none of the airplanes I ever did aerobatics in had fuel systems where you can have inverted flight for an extended period of time they were if you flew anything I've ever done aerobatic aerobatics in, if you flew it upside down for a long you'd either rip the wings off of it or wouldn't get any gas and the engine would die. So we're just doing loops mainly all positive g maneuvers just standard aerobatic type stuff, you know, loops, spins, rolls you know snap rolls,

EK: So did you go to air shows and things like that?h

BS: Yeah, me my dad would go to air shows a lot. He liked them. And we used to do Oshkosh different. We'd always catch the Thunderbirds or the Blue Angels if they were anywhere close.

And it was an excuse, you know, pilots like excuses to fly their airplane someplace. Dad always had private airplanes. So let's hop in the 182 and let's run up to there's an air show in Iowa this weekend. Let's go up there and go there so so we did that kind of stuff.

EK: Do you still have your dad.

BS: No, [undecipherable] a couple years ago?

EK: Yeah. But, but he was around when you started this business.

BS: Yeah, he was he actually drove loader trucks and stuff for me in the beginning you know here and there. Not, not full time but he would come out and help and he liked being around it. Absolutely.

EK: Was he proud of you?

BS: I don't know.

EK: He probably was if he helped you.

BS: I don't know.

EK: I lost my dad a few years ago to. I don't know if he was proud of me either. [Laughs.]

[00:35:18]

BS: There's my world record up there on the wall. I think that's the one that's from France.

EK: What's that?

BS: Well, I was telling Jack that I was a world record holder. I established a speed record from Spirit of St. Louis, to Dayton, Ohio, when I was 17 years old, in a Cessna 182. And that's the placard I got from France. And then I have the one I got from the Secretary of Transportation. I went to DC and went to one of these fancy banquets where they handed out the awards. You know, the Secretary of Transportation gave me my award. And I don't know, I don't think I have any. I have some pictures, but I don't think I have any in my office of that. No, I don't guess I do.

EK: So this is your middle son?

BS: Yeah, when he was little, he's 31 years old now.

EK: You have how many? You have three sons?

BS: Three sons and a daughter?

EK: Yeah. Do they fly?

BS: No. My youngest son and my oldest son know how to fly and my oldest son soloed. And he passed his private written but he never went and took the private test. So he never did become actually a private pilot. Here's my daughter. She's a really pretty girl.

EK: Oh my god she's beautiful.

BS: Here's all four of my kids. There's my buddy who does the dirt track racing.

EK: Yeah. She's... Samuel. He's class of, that's quite, well, but your...

SK: I was class of 2012

EK: Oh, yeah, that's right.

BS: Yeah. What year was her?

EK: Eleven it says what it says.

BS: She graduated in 11? That's 10 years ago. That sounds about right. She's a pretty girl though.

EK: She's beautiful. Is she flying?

BS: No, just on airliners. She does love traveling. She's kind of a jet setter, actually. She went to school out in Denver University, stayed out there and works for a worldwide and national company called the or actually an international company called Insight Global. So she does a lot of work. A lot of traveling with her work. And then she likes tropical localities for her recreation. [Laughter.]

EK: The mountains in the in the winter and then beaches in the, or maybe it's the other way around.

BS: She loves to ski so she, she don't get too far from Denver. During ski season.

EK: I went to Colorado State in Fort Collins many years ago.

BS: Yeah, I went to MU.

EK: So one of the things I always ask about is, because I'm interested in, in like, the image, which isn't always accurate. But we've only had one pilot in our, that we've interviewed who has had a

bad wreck. And he said it was his own stupid fault. And I just wondered if you had had like, like, what are the situations that you actively avoid in order to stay alive?

BS: Easy answer, the number one rule to stay alive is don't fly broke airplanes. If you've got an issue with your airplane, it don't matter how much work and how far you are behind and whatever. That airplane cannot get in the air unless it's air worthy. And that'll keep you alive. The forced landings and things I had were early in my career. And I was learning as much how to maintain an airplane that's being worked like this. I've been around little airplanes all my life. Did not understand what it took to keep an O 540 in the air under these conditions all the time. Once I got ahead of the curve on airplanes, no more forced landings, no more things that you feel lucky that you walked away from. But in the beginning, just the pressures of business, the pressures of learning, would force you to take an airplane in the air that should not normally, normally be taken in the air. You know, this mags not checking out quite right. Well, I think that it ain't that rough, let's go. That'll get you in trouble. So the key to avoiding those situations is don't fly broke airplanes.

JK: In this situation, the pilot said he, he, it was his last turn of the day, you know, ten gallons left in the hopper. And he just thought, I just need to spray it on there. Do you ever succumb to that sort of pressure that I got to get it done today? Sort of pressure?

BS: Well, I mean, there's business pressures and what have you, but you do, you've... Safety has to be first. And once again, quality of your job. If you're after quality, not quantity, you're not going to fly when it's too windy, or too late in the day, you know, these plants stop photosynthesizing, everything we do is about almost immediate uptake. It's not a root, we're not feeding anything via the roots. It's all foliar feed. So it's, it's the plants got to uptake it. Well, if you're out there spraying at 730 in the afternoon, because you're behind, well the plants are shutting down, or if you're out there at one o'clock, on a 97 degree day when the corns all curled up hiding from the sun. And you're out there applying... it's about uptake is just going to it's not going to work. So if you're putting the quality of application as your number one, you're probably not going to be out there in dangerous-type situations. Too windy, too late in the day, too early in the morning, or you know, all these things. So if, if your number one priority is quality, that eliminates a lot of the dangers.

JK: Yeah. Yeah. And, and it, it sort of forces you to slow down and think about it. And I think this was this pilot's problem. He, he just wanted to get it all done. And he got, and he was tired. You know, one thing Dusty has is he never flies mad. And so if something's stressing him out on the ground, he'll just sit there on the run up area for a few minutes and,

[00:42:42]

EK: Or however long it takes

JK: Or however long it takes. And he centers himself. So it's...

BS: Well, I've been through some PASS programs and what have you safety programs and stuff. And one of the big things that tell any ag pilot is you got to have your personal life in control, if you're fighting with your wife or something. And you've got that type of mental distraction going on. You don't have any business in a cockpit so you do have to keep that in check.

JK: I think that would be true of any pilot, even a private I mean, if you've got outside stressors, you don't need to fly because it's not it's not like driving a car. If you have a problem if you're on the road, you can always pull over. Here you don't have that option. What's the saying, takeoffs are optional landings are mandatory.

BS: Yeah, there's truth to that.

EK: Anything I haven't asked you that you want to share?

BS: You know, I, I'm just here to answer questions. I hope I've answered things, been a little insightful, somewhere along the line.

EK: Well, it's interesting, I think for us, because, it's interesting for me, because, like I just like meeting new people. And new people who do such a neat job that's even you know, that's even better. But I you know, I think the I think the, ... I'm looking for, like what connects all of you, you know, like, what personality traits connect? And I guess there's some sort of a questionnaire What was that? Quit that 20...

JK: Oh, it was the 20... So I think it AOPA did a survey and they were like 20 shared traits of pilot.

EK: Okay. Anyway, that's, but, but like what I what I look for is something more, I guess, nebulous than, you know, not like oh we're independent, or we're this, but just like, I don't know, the thread, I guess, you know. And, and...

BS: You know, I don't know that I could put my finger on that you just come from Dave Edwards Oh, I've only met Dave one time. But I know a little bit about him. He does some of the same things offseason I do. We're heavy equipment operators, we'll move dirt we, you know, we're operators. So you're whether you're operating an airplane or a dozer or trackhoe I would say the one common thread is different as all the spray pods across the spectrum probably are, is the one common thread that has to be there is some people are born with really, you know, above average intelligence and the sort of thing. The one common thread you're gonna find with ag pilots, they were born with good hand-eye coordination. That's got to be the, that's got to be the one common thread that there has to be is the God given gift of good hand-eye coordination. You don't have to be the smartest guy in the world to be an egg pilot. I mean, you got to have average intelligence just to pass the test to be any type of pilot. So you know, there's not dummies out there doing it, you know, you got to be at least average intelligence. But you don't have to be a rocket scientist to do any of this. But you do have to have good hand and eye coordination. So that would be one thread that would link us all. There's, there's no klutzes out there.

EK: Yeah, there's not. Another thing that I've noticed is that everyone when they talk about flying, there's this like little ding, you know, this little spark.

BS: Little twinkle in their eye?

EK: Like, it's like, I fly.

BS: Yeah. Well, I grew up flying. And I was the youngest of four kids. So dad was teaching us all to fly, you know, if we went to on a family vacation, or a little weekend trip in the airplane or whatever. Everybody got to fly a little bit. And it didn't matter how young I was, I was gonna get my turn at the stick. And I was chomping at the bit all the time. I could not wait to fly that airplane, for whatever reason. But I love minibikes, and I love trackyors and jeeps and go karts and everything. But I just like to operate and stuff. I was the most overanxious out of all of my siblings. I wanted it. And I was the only one out of four that... they all learned to fly. Two, I'm one of four, three of us soloed. And I'm the only one that even got a private pilot's license. And I had my private commercial multi engine instrument by the time I was 18. You know, I was just getting right after it. I had a heavy desire. I was around it all my life. Do I eat and breathe airplanes like Kevin Kingsley. No, Kevin's one the most, airplaniest nerds. I love Kevin and he... I've gone down there and worked for him and stayed with him and Lisa, in their house and such, you know, and Kevin eats, breathes and sleeps airplanes.

JK: I've noticed that.

BS: And I love that about him. But I'm not that guy. I've been around at all my life. I like tractors and motorcycles and boats, you know.

JK: If it doesn't have to do with an airplane he's not interested in it.

BS: He's not. He's not very interested in it at all. He is all airplane. But I think all pilots get a little twinkle in their eye when it comes around to airplanes, you. It's not something that's easily attained. So if you don't have that desire, you're not ever going to attain the licensing to do the things you want to do.. You got to have that drive.

EK: Yep.

JK: I'd say yeah, the, the drive is interesting. I, in my, you know, little journey learning to fly. I don't know that I have the absolute drive to be a professional. I like the machine more than I like to fly in itself. I like to operate things but I also just really like machines. And so that there is that common thread with all pilots. Regardless, there's like that, you know, drive to want to master this challenge. You know, maybe it's naturally a challenge. Maybe it's just something intangible. I don't know.

EK: Maybe it's just flying, just being up above the earth.

BS: Well, I can tell you. I like the performance aspect of my job. I like that people will stop what they're doing to watch me work. That's one of the things I like about my job. And the other is I never get tired of the scenery. When I'm ferrying to and from a job when I'm in the field, it's just all business I'm, my focus is strictly on spraying that field. But on the way there, and on the way back, I'm absorbing the beauty of our beautiful state. Without fail every time I'm looking at people's ponds and their barns and their horses, and you know, just, I just absorb the beauty of it all. And I really enjoy the view, you know, you got a bird's eye view that makes you feel a little special, and I soak up the, the beauty of it. So that's me personally,

JK: I hate landing. Like, I don't hate the act of laughing. I think it's, I think that technical process is engaging. Obviously, it has to be but there's this emotional sort of, you know, let down when you land you're like, on the ground again.

BS: Not me. I'm ready for a beer. [Laughter.]

EK: And with that, I think we're good.

BS: All righty.