

Nevada Test Site Oral History Project
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Interview with
Lafayette (Lafe) Dana with
Shirley Dana

June 20, 2005
Las Vegas, Nevada

Interview Conducted By
Suzanne Becker

© 2007 by UNLV Libraries

Oral history is a method of collecting historical information through recorded interviews conducted by an interviewer/researcher with an interviewee/narrator who possesses firsthand knowledge of historically significant events. The goal is to create an archive which adds relevant material to the existing historical record. Oral history recordings and transcripts are primary source material and do not represent the final, verified, or complete narrative of the events under discussion. Rather, oral history is a spoken remembrance or dialogue, reflecting the interviewee's memories, points of view and personal opinions about events in response to the interviewer's specific questions. Oral history interviews document each interviewee's personal engagement with the history in question. They are unique records, reflecting the particular meaning the interviewee draws from her/his individual life experience.

Produced by:

The Nevada Test Site Oral History Project

Departments of History and Sociology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 89154-5020

Director and Editor

Mary Palevsky

Principal Investigators

Robert Futrell, Dept. of Sociology

Andrew Kirk, Dept. of History

The material in the *Nevada Test Site Oral History Project* archive is based upon work supported by the U.S. Dept. of Energy under award number DEFG52-03NV99203 and the U.S. Dept. of Education under award number P116Z040093.

Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in these recordings and transcripts are those of project participants—oral history interviewees and/or oral history interviewers—and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Energy or the U.S. Department of Education.

Interview with Lafayette (Lafe) Dana with Shirley Dana

June 20, 2005
Conducted by Suzanne Becker

Table of Contents

Introduction: born Thayne, WY (1915), family background, work on farm, in country store, and as electrical plant operator	1
Moves to Las Vegas, NV, takes job at NTS dairy farm (1965), children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren	3
Early observations of the NTS, work with the NTS dairy cattle and beef herd, and thoughts on importance of job at NTS	7
Post-shot involvement with Baneberry (1970) and other testing	9
Day-to-day work with dairy herd at the NTS	11
Examination of NTS photographs, talks about career at NTS (ca. 1965-1980)	12
Details of post-shot work (RADSAFE suits)	13
Thoughts on testing and radiation exposure, Baneberry	15
Lafayette and Shirley Dana: meeting, marriage (1941)	17
Description of farm and details of farm work and cattle breeding at NTS	18
Travels around and sights seen at the NTS	21
Observation of Plowshare canal-building project at NTS (Buggy A-E, 1968)	22
Interview with USPHS and clearance for job at NTS	23
Reminiscences of NTS visitors, job, family, commuting to the NTS	25
Thoughts on nuclear waste storage at Yucca Mountain	28
Conclusion: recollections of strikes and protests at the NTS	28

Interview with Lafayette (Lafe) Dana with Shirley Dana

June 20, 2005 in Las Vegas, NV
Conducted by Suzanne Becker

[00:00:00] Begin Track 2, Disc 1.

Suzanne Becker: *Could you begin by stating your name and when you were born and where you were born?*

Lafe Dana: I'm Lafayette Dana. I was in born in Wyoming the 4th of November 1915 in Thayne, Wyoming, just south of Jackson.

Did you grow up there?

Yes.

Could you tell me a little bit about that? What kind of town was it?

It's a little town, farm town, and a lot of dairy cows.

Were you in a farming family?

Yes. In fact, I had a farm, and that's when I got my hay chopper, on the farm, and after that—well, during World War II, my brother and I was on the farm and we had I forget how many, fifty-five, sixty milk cows and a bunch of pigs. And he was younger than I, and he took him into service but they didn't want me. They wanted me to stay and milk the cows.

Really. So you didn't do any World War II service.

No, just worked like a trooper to do what we could do.

So is your family from there?

My dad and mother, we had six boys in the family. Two of them died when they was young. So I was the oldest. Now, why, they're all gone but me and the youngest brother, Ronald.

Did your folks start the farm out there, or had that been in your family?

It was in the family. My grandfather owned it, and he died and the two brothers took it over. We were about two-and-a-half miles from town out on the farm. I grew up with my uncle and aunt and their family right close, so we did a lot of things. Ride calves, horses. It was just an interesting family.

A lot of land out there at that time, I would imagine.

Well, it wasn't big like a lot of places. I think they had less than 200 acres, so it wasn't big like it is now.

Shirley Dana: Little towns in the valley.

That sounds beautiful, though.

Shirley Dana: It is.

Lafe Dana: You been up that way?

I've been to Jackson. I've been toward Laramie.

See, we're right down along the border before you get to Jackson. You go through a little valley with a big cheese factory. That's where we come from.

That's out there. That's nice.

So you know where it is.

Yeah, it's beautiful.

Yes, it's a beautiful place.

So you were on the farm till how long?

I was on the farm when my brother went in the service, and finally Dad had to come back and help. I couldn't get it all done. And when he got back, we gave him a third of it. We worked till I got in this accident out on the farm in the hay chopper.

How old were you when that happened?

Thirty-three. And how many kids [did] we have?

Shirley Dana: Two and one on the way.

Lafe Dana: Two and one on the way. Then I kind of had to change. We bought a store and I ran the store after that.

What kind of store was that?

It was a country store. It was appliances and linoleum—

Shirley Dana: Furniture.

Lafe Dana: Just kind of a furniture store.

And this is still out in Thayne?

No, it's a small place and there's three of them, and two of us finally had to quit. And after that, I [00:05:00] worked for the power and light [company]. I was a plant operator for ten years.

Roughly, about what year did you leave the farm and start the store?

I don't think I can remember the year on the farm, but then we run the store for fourteen, fifteen years. Then we moved up to a plant, was up there five years.

Still in Wyoming?

Yes, and then the giant power [company] came in, two of us [got] laid off, and I ended up in Vegas [Las Vegas, Nevada].

How did you end up in Vegas?

That's quite a story. I've got to go into [LDS] church now. We had a boy that was going on a mission, and in the ward there they'd heard that I needed a job.

And a fellow come in and says, I hear you need a job.

I said, It looks like it.

He says, There's one in Las Vegas.

And I was on this young fellow's program, and pretty soon his brother come in; he's older and I wasn't acquainted with him like it was with the other. And he come in and said, *Do you need the job?* And I had other things on my mind and I didn't say too much. The next morning I thought, well, I do need a job. Maybe I better listen. So I called his mother and he'd already come back to Vegas. And I was supposed to go over and get a thing to the Post Office to fill out and mail it down there, so I did. And I ended up in Vegas.

And that's how you ended up here.

Yes. And the funny part about it, I had drove quite a bit. I wasn't used to driving a lot. So I had four days off, Friday and Saturday and Sunday and Monday. Well, before that, Mrs. Broadhead called down here and wondered when we could come down and be interviewed. My dad had a sister in Ogden [Utah], so I took them down to Ogden, and Shirley and I got on the train, traveled all night, and ended up down there at the head of Fremont Street that morning. So we went over and [I] was interviewed. Caught a cab and went over there. And then we went to the dam. Then that night, we went back, picked them up, and went home.

So, initially, what was the job that they had for you? What were you coming out here for?

Taking care of livestock out on the [Nevada] test site. I actually was over the milk cows.

And what year was this, roughly? This was in the—

Sixty-five.

How many kids did you have at that time?

Five.

Five. What are your kids' names?

Shirley Dana: Dennis, our oldest one, he was in England on a mission when we came. Gayle was the next one; she was at Ricks College at school [Brigham Young University in

Rexburg, ID]. And then Nola who was a junior in high school, and she graduated at Western.

And then JoAnne and Lynette.

Lafe Dana: JoAnne had to go to junior high again.

Shirley Dana: And they attended Garside High and graduated at Western.

Here.

Shirley Dana: Here.

So at the time, you had all the kids or—

Shirley Dana: Mm hmm [yes].

That must've been quite a move.

Lafe Dana: A lot of people don't understand families. Some frown on too many. But I think somebody knows more than we do. We've got a daughter, one daughter that's got nine.

Five girls and four boys.

Oh, wow! So you guys have quite a brood of grandchildren.

[00:10:00] We have twenty-eight grandchildren and sixty-two great-grandchildren.

Oh, my gosh! Sixty-two great-grandchildren?

We have to be careful where we say that. Some people—

You're lucky!

Shirley Dana: Some of them came with marriage, and then four of them have died at birth.

That's quite amazing, though.

Lafe Dana: Yes, it's interesting. We were just over to a party at our daughter's yesterday, and all them great-grandkids. Get the picture and show them one family.

Shirley Dana: She's interested in you and not your grandkids.

Oh, all of it.

Lafe Dana: So that's kind of—we've got a grandson, that's him, and they lived in San Francisco.

Shirley Dana: We just got these yesterday [showing photographs].

And this is one family?

Shirley Dana: No, no, that's our—

Lafe Dana: That's our oldest granddaughter's family.

Shirley Dana: She has three daughters and this is their children. This is two of the—

Lafe Dana: Oh, and three daughters and all their kids are there. That's not bad, is it?

Not at all. Not at all.

Now, what do you need?

Well, OK, so you made it out to Las Vegas. What did you think when you got out here? Was it different than where you'd been living before?

I was very confused. I didn't know whether I was going to have to sleep in the back of my pickup or where we was going to sleep. But this older brother and his wife, very young, she was from Holland. She was part Jewish, they [the Nazis] come in and took her grandparents and they never seen them [again]. But her mother had married, he wasn't a Jew, so they didn't do anything to them. Well, I stayed with them when I come in. I came in February and my family came in June after school let out.

Right. And when you got out to the test site, what was that like? Had you heard about the Nevada Test Site before that?

Not too much, no. But I needed a job and I was out there. It was different than where I had worked before.

Yeah, very, I bet.

A lot of drillers, miners that was around.

And it's the desert.

The desert. And driving in—but we stayed out there in the barracks a lot of the time.

So you lived out there for part of the time?

Mm hmm.

So what was your job when you first got there? You said you were working with the dairy cows.

Taking care of animals.

Which animals were you taking care of?

I was taking care of milk cows. They'd went up to Idaho someplace and bought some cows. And I was in charge of them. Another fellow, he was in charge of the beef cattle. We had around 125 beef cows roaming the test site. When we rounded them up, he was quite a cowboy and I'd some experience, so the two of us rounded them up.

So you were out there on the test site rounding up the cattle?

Yes, we worked together, helped each other.

Did you literally do that on horseback?

Yes, on horseback. It was even hard on horseback because they was inbred, they was wild, they was rough to handle.

Different than what you had been used to?

Yes, and see, when they're like that, they're wild, they're mean. And so we had a canyon out there and we'd put a corral [there] and got them up the canyon and then put big long wing out. It was a job to get them in there. Those that didn't understand cattle jumped out to help us. The cattle went in every direction, and we had to start over, but we finally got them in the corral.

[00:15:00] *How long does that usually take?*

I don't remember. It was quite a few hours.

And what else were your jobs with the cattle?

Well, the milk cows, actually the farm out there and the cattle, we had a lot of visitors there from all over the world, and I used to tell them and what they told me. We have this farm so when these shots [nuclear tests] goes on and it drifts up and it lands on the grass, it's in the air, the cattle breathe it, they eat it, it's in their system, why, we're here to check what it does. And that's the reason we'd take cows out when they was having the shot, put them in a corral, face them right towards it, and then we'd have to go get them.

What did you think about that?

Well, I thought I was doing something to help things. They had me sold on it that I was actually helping. Because it was a serious thing, still is a serious thing, and we was there to find out what it did. I guess this is OK. They was going to have a shot in Montana. They sent a bunch of ranchers down, looked things over, and that didn't work. So finally the governor and them come down. So they come out on the farm and looked around. After that, they had the shot.

You remember what shot that was?

I don't know. All I know, they had one.

Shirley Dana: Was that underground? Was that when they were shooting underground, or was that when it was—

Lafe Dana: Well, when I got there, they would've been venting, but then they started underground so they didn't vent so much.

Right. Were you ever worried about going out there, being exposed?

Our crew, I had a lot of—they We wore tags [dosimeters] and all of that. We was in every so often to see how much we picked up. And I had a lot of good things. I thought we was in good hands. Now, when that one vented, I can't even remember the name, you know it.

Was it Baneberry?

I think so. See, that was supposed to have been an underground shot, but water got in there.

Is that what happened?

And you know what water does when it gets steam. It just creates so much more power that it just blew out.

Right. Were you out there when that happened?

No. They would keep us in, but we had to go out after it happened. We had to go suit up and go out. We'd suit up in coveralls. They'd put something over everything so dust couldn't get in.

We'd have gloves on. And suit up. We had the big canister hanging down here. It was supposed to clear the air. And we had to go out and take care of the stock. We did that one because it was hot for a while.

And the cattle were out there when that happened?

Yes, cattle and that was out there all the time.

So then did you work with the cattle?

We did take care of them, feed them and water them and that. And then they would—

Shirley Dana: Milk them.

Lafe Dana: And they'll milk the cows twice a day like you do on the farm. That was a little different.

Why?

On the farm, you put it in cans or send it to the creamery. Out there, we couldn't do that.

What did you do with it?

Dumped it out in the drain.

So you'd milk it and you'd just dump it down the drain?

[00:20:00] And we had a lot of people ask us, thought that was wasteful. And I would just tell them, well, if anybody got sick, the government would be in a big lawsuit, so we better dump it down the drain. Besides, the dairymen don't need the competition. And that would generally make them feel better and they'd go on their way.

Do you think the milk was contaminated?

It could've been, but it wouldn't have been good to use it anyway. It just would've been foolish.

Shirley Dana: You brought samples in every so often, too.

Lafe Dana: Yeah, we'd have to send samples in. We'd be on test. We'd have cows out there not too far from shots. One time, a fellow I worked with, they had a shot, and somebody went in and milked them. And they couldn't get around it, so they give us an hour, all suited up, to go in and load, I think it was four or five of them, load them in the truck and in the trailer, and when you're that way it scares them.

They didn't like you in the suits.

No. And when you have a hard time breathing, you sit down till you get enough oxygen, and that's what we'd have to do; just sit down and hang onto that cow like that till we can get some air. Then we got out [in] an hour.

Is it hard to breathe in those suits?

Well, you're breathing through a mask on there, and you get to going too fast, you don't get enough oxygen through, so you just sit down and relax until you get caught up again.

So you went out there and the cows didn't react well to you guys dressed up in your suits?

Well, they're kind of scared. [Speaking to Shirley Dana] Get that book you put together and I can show her the suits we wore. But they was something. We had to wear them a lot.

Did you ever find out the results of any of the tests for the samples and things that you brought in?

Well, no, they don't tell us. We just did them and sent them in to the—that we've had—well, good, they had a bell there where they checked [us] through, that if it was hot it would have rung the bell.

So that would give you an idea?

So that's when we saw the tests and all that kind of—

How long were your days? You said you lived up there. Did you work seven days a week?

No. Our pay was low, so I think they gave us two overtime hours, if I remember right. Some days, instead of eight hours, we'd work nine, a couple days.

Five days a week?

Five days, yes. We worked in pairs and there was two pairs. When one was off, the other two was working.

So it was a pretty continuous job, like a twenty-four-hour-a-day—

Somebody was there.

Somebody was always attending to them [the cows].

Well, they were there during the day from eight in the morning till in the afternoon [and] then during the night, unless they were having a shot. [Then] we had to go back at night. Sometimes things happened that we had to go back at night. Not too often.

Oh, pictures.

Just show a picture—that was the farm there.

Is this all test site, this stuff?

[00:25:00] Shirley Dana: Yes. This is all from the test site. This might be one of the—it's all just drivings there.

Lafe Dana: That's there by that Sedan crater.

[Looking through pictures]

You were out there for fifteen years, you said.

Yes.

Were you with the farm the whole time?

Yes. I was with them all the time.

OK. And why did you leave?

Well, they were going to [it was] called "rif" [reduction in force] us. They were going to bring it to a close. And so I thought, well, if they're going to do that, I'd just as well retire, and I did.

So you retired after that.

Yes, I retired.

Shirley Dana: Here's some of the people [showing photographs]. Here are some of the other tractors.

Lafe Dana: We got quite a few awards out there.

Yeah. What were some of them?

I don't remember how much but—

Shirley Dana: And here they are milking [showing more photographs]. And that's their Big Sam.

Lafe Dana: That was really popular.

Big Sam? He was, what, a giant [steer]?

You see that thing in the side of him?

Oh, that was where the window was.

That window? Then you'd take that out and clean his stomach out.

Did you work with him at all?

No. Well, some, but not too much. Another fellow, he was over beef cattle and he did it mostly.

And clean him out, take him out, let him graze so long, and then come back and take samples out of his stomach and see how much radiation he'd picked up there on the test site. We didn't know how much or anything like that.

Shirley Dana: Here [are] some more pictures. This is some at work.

Lafe Dana: Can't you find any with the suits on?

Shirley Dana: That's just what I was looking for. There's more pictures here in the back.

Well, I'll tell you what, if you'd just like to glance through it and see if there's any that interest you there—

Yes, I would, actually. I might do that when we're done with this, if that'd be OK. Because I would love to look at these.

Lafe Dana: Now, with them suits on, it was hard to work in. You sweat like mad, and it gets down, and when the water gets up here in your hand, your hands are not so you can do anything. And the only way you can get rid of it is hold your arms up like this and let it run down.

[Those] must've been some tough working conditions in the summer.

It was rough in there.

How often did you have to suit up?

Well, I can't tell you that. When we needed to. And it wasn't right often, but when the shots went we needed to suit up.

And how long were you in the suits for, generally?

Well, I don't remember that. Sometime two, three, four hours. Sometime maybe longer.

Sometimes for just a little while.

So it really depended. Now, when the incident with Baneberry happened, the one that vented and really contaminated things, were you worried about that at all?

No, I had a lot of confidence in the ones that was testing us. After we suited up, it seemed to be all right. We would suit up and be on quite a few. Then we'd be called in, and I forget, I think it's gammas they call it to see how much radiation we picked up, and we was still OK. I wasn't as scared out there as I was in Wyoming. The ones up there had us so nervous.

Do you remember the atmospheric tests, hearing about the above ground tests when they were happening?

[00:30:00] I came right after they started that, shooting underground.

Did you hear about it at all in Wyoming?

Well, [I] did, but I forget even what it was they was telling us in Wyoming. Everybody was worrying.

Shirley Dana: It probably didn't get as much advertising up there as they did in the Idaho area where supposedly it [the radioactive cloud] was.

Right. So it didn't really come toward you guys at all.

Shirley Dana: I don't believe so.

Lafe Dana: No, I felt comfortable. When they said suit up, we'd suit up.

Have your thoughts on that changed at all over the years since you left?

No. No. And I don't know. Maybe it does cause cancer in some people. I wonder, wonder if I'm wrong, because I seen a lot of people out there and know some that was in so hot that they couldn't even go back to work. But they're still healthy.

So we don't really know.

So maybe I should be a little more worried, but I'm not.

Were you ever worried about him going out there?

Shirley Dana: No, I haven't been.

Lafe Dana: There was about 12,000 of us out there.

I know. You were out there when it was quite huge, one of the biggest employers.

You been out that way?

Yes, I have. Of course, not as many people work out there now.

Yeah. When we started coming home, it'd just be a big string of cars, one right after another.

Through that big swell, you'd look back, lights way back there, all doing about seventy miles an hour.

I bet that highway, that whole area, has changed a lot. Well, I guess all of Las Vegas has changed since you guys have been out here.

So when the Baneberry incident happened, did they explain it to you?

They don't tell you too much. You just know that water seeped in and that gets out and it vented. And friends that I knew that were working at another part of it [the test site] was up north, they says it was just like fog up there. But it says it wasn't that hot. They was checking to see how hot it was. It says it wasn't that bad.

Right. So they didn't really make a big deal of it?

Yeah. Like at Three Mile Island back East. Some of my friends went back there, checking it. They'd come back to laughing. It didn't amount to anything.

So we make a bigger deal out of things than maybe they are.

Shirley Dana: I guess the final vote isn't in yet.

Yeah, we'll know in a generation.

Like—oh, maybe I better not put that on. What's going to happen to them out there now? To me, politics.

Well, politics does seep into a lot of things these days. So did you ever have any military experience?

Military? No.

You weren't in Korea—

Like I said at first there, my brother and I was running the farm. We had a big herd of cows.

They was concerned about eating—

"They" being your family? Your family or the—

My brother and I, I think it was between—

Shirley Dana: They needed people to stay on the farm.

Was that the government or the family that [wanted you to stay]?

Shirley Dana: I think it was the government. We were married at that time.

Lafe Dana: And I didn't try to stay out. They sent letters. If you don't answer them, why, you're in. I don't know whether she did or my folks sent them back or any—I didn't. But [00:35:00] they didn't take me, because we'd have had to get rid of them because they—it was important there. We had about nearly 100 pigs, too, so we had them and it was a lot of work doing that.

How long have you guys been married, or when did you get married?

I was afraid you was going to ask that.

Shirley Dana: Forty-one.

You got married in 1941? Wow.

Shirley Dana: Sixty-three years ago. Sixty-four this month.

That's amazing.

Lafe Dana: On the 30th. So that's why we're old. [Laughing]

How did you meet?

Shirley Dana: Well, let's see—

Lafe Dana: Went out with a girlfriend and took her home and met her. Well, she was working at [the] cafe. Are you married?

No, I'm not.

You're young yet.

And so you were living in the same area?

We was living in Star Valley. I was living at one end of it and she was living in the other. So that's how we met. Actually, I was twenty-five, nearly twenty-six, and I wasn't going to get married. She come along and changed my mind. I'm glad she did.

Yeah, it seems like you guys have had quite the adventure.

So have you been back out to the test site at all since you left?

No, I haven't. I've heard they're taking the bus out. My granddaughter's husband wanted to go, but so far we haven't got together to do it. Then I have been told, we had a farm out there where we raised hay, and I've been told that it's all been taken out. The barn's been removed, the whole thing, there's just nothing there.

Oh, really. What was all out there?

Well, we had the barn where we milked the cows in, and we had I forget how many, eight or nine, ten acres of grass out there, and they had a big place where they stored water, and we'd have a pump. We'd go out there and pump it out and water the alfalfa. And hay would grow.

Really.

It would really grow.

And so there was an actual farm set up out there with the barn and the silo.

Yes.

Shirley Dana: You had a lot of twin calves, too, didn't you?

You had twin calves?

Lafe Dana: That's another thing. When I was up on the farm in Wyoming, we had twins. That wasn't very often. But out there [at the test site], we had quite a few twins. Whether that was radiation or what—

Shirley Dana: Good genes.

Now, did you breed the cattle out there?

Lafe Dana: Yeah. We had bulls sometimes, but artificial was better. And we had one guy go up there and he wasn't sold on it, so they finally sent me up there, and I went to school, and I did after that.

And so you were the cattle breeder?

Yes. You familiar with that?

Slightly.

It's quite a thing. It's quite a thing.

Tell me about that.

What the deal [is], if you're out on a farm, if you have a bull and he's not a good one, which we've had them before on our farm, you have a lot of heifers. When they have calves, they don't give very much milk. So it takes quite a while to get—well, with artificial, they test those bulls and you have a lot better chance of all of them being good. And they collect that, put them in the liquid nitrogen, freeze them, you thaw them out, and use them.

[00:40:00] Shirley Dana: Where did you get the semen from?

Lafe Dana: Up in Utah.

Shirley Dana: And that's where you went for your schooling?

Lafe Dana: Yes, that's where I went to school, up around Logan.

And they sent you to school for that.

Yes. I went up. So I was—it's interesting.

Yes, it's very interesting. So that was part of what you did with the cows on the test site.

That was a part of my job. Yeah. That was my job.

OK. And did you have to maintain a certain number in the herd? How often did you breed them?

How often? Well, they tell you when they want—Nature tells you when they want—

Shirley Dana: Well, every year, would you do it every year for the herd?

Lafe Dana: Well, cows are a little different than what she was telling us about dogs the other day. Cows, when Nature kicks in and you wait and do it at a certain time, and you put a glove on, big glove, and go up the rectum and find the cervix, and your fingers get so you're pretty—and you put it over the cervix and shoot it in there.

That's quite a job.

It was interesting.

Yes. So you basically kept the herd going.

Yes.

OK. And did you ever notice any effects? I mean you worked with cattle your whole life. Were these cattle different, or the same?

The only difference that I see, for some reason we had more twins. We did have more twins out there, and what else? One time we had some cows out there in stalls out next to a shot. And they was facing the shot. And when we got them back in, the hair on their head kind of went out—lost it, then it come back in just a little gray. But it come back in, and those cows seemed normal after that.

So they all just lost a little patch of hair on one side of their head.

They just kind of went bald.

What other kind of animals did you have out there?

We had Holstein cows and Hereford beef cattle. And those, all the inbred ones, the horns, they'd come up and they're just as sharp on the end as a needle.

Were there ever any injuries or accidents with them or because of them or that they caused?

They was—I'll tell you what, get off of this, but anyway there could've been some accidents, but for some reason, good luck. We had a bull out there they decided to keep, and that thing was mean. This one guy, he didn't understand cattle, and he'd [the bull] be a-pawing out there and he'd [the guy] walk out there. I'd just look for him to take him, but for some reason he didn't. He says, He won't hurt me. And he didn't. All I know, I told him, If he comes after you, I'm not going to get out there. Been around them too long. Up home there, I've had them get after me, and I've known some people that got killed with them. So they're not something to fool with.

No, and they're huge.

But some of them, they don't know.

[00:45:00] *In the fifteen years that you were out there, did you get to go into other parts of the test site, as well?*

We was all over the test site. Some places we shouldn't be. But Wackenhut [Security] finally gave up [laughing]. We'd go out there, looking for cattle.

So basically, you had to go hunting down the cattle all over the test site. That's a huge piece of land out there.

Yes. We had an excuse. We was looking for cattle, and they finally got so they'd just leave us alone.

So you got to see all sorts of stuff that was going on out there, with the different holes that they were drilling and the set-up for the tests.

Yes. See, after they quit venting, it was amazing. When they'd go off, they'd just sink, and you've seen, oh, where they build roads, those big places, that's what they'd look like. And them danged engineers could put a rope around there. Once in a while, one of them would fall in, but they knew about where it would go. And there's a lot of them out there. Gravel pits.

Yes, there are. So you must've been out there for a lot of the shots. Are there any that stand out, in particular?

I've got one, but I don't know about putting it on here or not.

Which one was it, do you remember?

I don't. They built a canal.

OK. Do you remember roughly about what year that that was around?

It was right after we came.

So mid-to-late-sixties?

Sixty-five, sixty-six, sixty-seven. Some of the guys come out and—I guess I will tell you—and here they was out there and we'd just got through milking, and them guys from town don't come out that early, but they was out there.

And I said, What are you guys doing out here?

And they says, We come out for a shot.

And I says, Well, boy, some people's lucky.

So they says, Do you want to go?

I said, Sure!

So we was five miles away here and the shot was over here [indicating direction]. I don't remember how many of them, five shots or something, when that went off and up, pretty big mushroom cloud, and we couldn't get in there for quite some time. Finally, the fellow I was working with got over there and the barricades were taken down, so we went up and walked there to the side of it. I think it was around seventy-five or so feet across, 900 feet long [Buggy, A-E conducted in Area 30, 3/12/1968].

It wasn't Sedan, was it?

No, it was another one. Sedan happened before I got there. And [I] looked down, and I think it was how deep? But it was just as pretty as if you'd done it with machinery. See, they had us primed up that they was going to build another Panama Canal. If they did that, we was going down on it and take animals and test to see what happened. But it didn't happen.

Right. The Plowshare program.

And I think they could've done it, if they'd have let them do it. They had them things figured out so it would've lifted it out.

Yes, it's a pretty big power.

Yes, and we had a trailer all fixed to go down and do the testing.

But it never [happened].

No, it didn't happen. So I don't know what to tell you anymore.

Well, when you first got out there and you were interviewing for the job or talking to somebody about the job, what did they tell you about it? Did they tell you anything about it?

See, I wasn't interviewing [for] the job there. When I came down before I started to work, I went over and was interviewed.

Downtown?

[00:50:00] And finally they called and says come and do it. They was going to see if I could do it.

Because of your hand?

Yes. And I think it was about three or four days after I started working, they says go ahead, you're all right.

Who interviewed you initially?

Well, I better not name names.

OK. It was here in Las Vegas?

We worked under some hats. And they was the one that interviewed us.

Was it the DOE [Department of Energy]? Was it the Atomic Energy Commission [AEC] or the Department of Energy?

They worked for the same—who'd I work for when I first got there? U.S. [Public Health Service]—but then it changed. We was working for the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] before we quit the. U.S. [Public Health Service].

So you didn't actually go out to the test site for your interview?

No, I went down here to the university—

Shirley Dana: It's on Highland.

Lafe Dana: They had the—I think they still—do they still got an office down there [at the university]?

Yeah, they have an EPA [building]. I don't know if it's the same office, though. So you hadn't been out to the test site. Did they tell you that this was a job that was out at the test site?

Yes, they told me it'd be out at the test site.

And what did they tell you about it?

I'd be taking care of animals.

Did you have to get a clearance, a special clearance?

Well, I had to have clearance. You have to be—they was up in Wyoming, all over, checking me out. And I had to have clearance, but I passed that.

Did they stress the secretive nature of it or that—

They just send you out with somebody that's working out there and you help them and learn what to do.

So you interviewed down here in Las Vegas and then you went up to the test site.

Shirley Dana: OK, it was the U.S. Public Health Service. Livestock research.

Lafe Dana: It's what I started with.

Great. You have any stories or any things that really stand out in your mind about the job or incidences that you remember?

Well, not about me. I thought we was, like I said, really doing something, a service that was going to help people later on. We had a lot of visitors there, from all over the world. When they'd have a shot, they'd come in there, and generally they'd come up to the farm. One day, I

had three or four scientists from England, and I don't know where the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] was. A group of them came to show them what we was doing. And then there was another, and it's three, one right after the other, after a shot.

So you had all sorts of visitors.

All sorts. They'd come up and say here's what we're doing and show them the animals. I've heard so many times, "it don't look like it hurt them any," and that'd be their comments.

Shirley Dana: You were a livestock research helper for the dairy.

Lafe Dana: I was a livestock research helper. That was my title.

Shirley Dana: Did you want [to tell] who was over the department?

Lafe Dana: No, I better not mention any names, because I don't know whether they want their name on there or not.

Yeah, that's fine.

So I hope this has helped you.

Oh, absolutely. I definitely appreciate you talking about it.

No, we had a family, pretty good-sized family. They were going to school and that, and we come down poor, and we was paid till we could start living better. I needed a job. We was doing all right up there when I was plant operator and running the farm when I could, making a little bit on [00:55:00] the farm. But it came to an end and I came to Vegas. And a lot of times, thank somebody that I did come. I don't have to fight the snow up there.

No kidding. And it was a pretty decent job to have?

It was a good job. We had to drive. They wouldn't let us ride the bus.

How come?

Well, they said if we had a sick animal, we would catch the bus instead of doctoring the animal.

That's the excuse, but it wasn't a good excuse.

No. Why do you think?

That's what I'd tell them. If we have a sick animal, we'll stay and doctor it. We'll drive the truck in to get home. But they wouldn't listen.

Why do you think that they—do you think that was really the reason?

Well, it seemed behind that it would've been a lot cheaper for me to ride the bus than drive a car every day. We went out there one day and a fellow that had a Pinto, they come and let the guy come in. When he went out there, we'd just come in the barn, and he says, *Boy, that's a long ways out there, and I don't know who said, Yes, it's a long ways, and you have to pack gas in your trunk. And boy, things hit the ceiling. He didn't go along with packing gas in the trunk.*

He didn't want to drive that far.

And so it wasn't too long, they had to change their duty station. They changed it back to Mercury. It was forty-some-odd miles. We didn't have to get up quite that early, which was very good.

That's nice. So how far in was the farm?

From here, it was about 107.5 miles. So when I'd get up and go out there and work and drive back in, I did about 215 miles.

A day. And that must've made for some long days.

Pretty long day, but you get used to it. I was young then. Hate to have to do it now. And it was expensive, but one person would take one day and one the next, trade off, so that helped.

Yes. A little carpooling.

Yes. Well, there was only two of us that worked together, so one would drive. But it was a good job. The more you worked, it was pretty good. But they didn't understand on the bus deal, because it would've been a lot better to relax and have a snooze on the bus going out. They did the driving. That road was wild. We come in '65, and just before that, it was one lane going to the test site.

The highway out there.

They called it the Widowmaker. A lot of people were killed on that road. And even when they got the double one, there was still people killed. They drove fast. One day we was going out there and it was, oh, what, way early in the morning. Here were some car parts and here were some car parts and pretty soon we got up there, there he was a-laying out in the road.

So you found him.

And when we got to the cafeteria to get breakfast, why, one of their cooks hadn't made it. One of them, he'd got to fighting with his wife, I guess, and mad, and he didn't make it that day, what I heard. A lot of them got killed.

On that highway.

Which was worse before they got it two lanes on each side. But it was a good experience.

[Do] you look back on it as something that you're glad that you did?

[01:00:00] Yes. I don't think we done as much good as I thought we did, but I was glad to do it.

Knowing now what you know about it all, has your opinion changed? Well, now being so far removed from it and we haven't had nuclear—I guess the test site hasn't been open in almost thirteen or fourteen years now for testing.

Well, I don't know if I ought to put this on or not, I think Nevada owes the government to store waste out there. I do. They're careful. And the reason they're afraid it's going to get in the water,

how many live bombs have they done out there? Put down and shot off and, as far as I know, nothing happened. They have accidents once in a while, but we all do. They can pick up little things. And when I've been around it, the way they're going to seal them up, they say they can drop them quite a ways and won't break them. With all that that's already out there from live bombs, why not put them [in something] that's sealed? That just, to me, is common sense.

So you think that we should go ahead and Yucca Mountain is a good idea.

I do.

Because we've got to do something with it.

A lot of these that's talking about it has never been out there. We'd better turn that off before I say something I shouldn't do. But that's my opinion.

So that leads me to a question. There was a lot of protests that happened out at the test site by people that were against it. Do you remember any of those?

Yes. Strikes. We had to drive through them. They'd call us names. Shake their fists at us. I didn't like it. Wackenhut, the security, they had the big one, and it was a bad one. Pretty soon, they had out there, please take us back, our kids needs to eat. And then these engineers and some of them were worse than the security, because they was—they did things that wasn't good.

The engineers did? What types of—

I better not mention all that here. But they was fierce. But anyway. I think we better turn it off.

OK. All right. Well, I certainly appreciate you taking the time to talk to me.

I actually enjoyed talking about it.

Good! It sounds like a really interesting—

It isn't very often somebody wants to talk about the test site.

Well, that's part of why we want to talk about it, because for so long people weren't really able to talk about it, and now we can.

Like I say, my age, kind of brings back memories.

I hope good memories. Thank you. I appreciate it.

[01:04:36] End Track 2, Disc 1.

[End of interview]