

## Interview with Leonard Beetstra

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Interview # 1: December 4, 2007

Interviewer: Phil Pogue

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Pogue: My name is Phil Pogue. I'm doing the interview today. It's December 4, 2007, and we're in rural Harvard, Illinois, and we're interviewing Mr. Leonard Beetstra. We will be conducting this interview under the auspices of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. At this time, Leonard, would you give us a little background about your parents and how you came to Harvard?

Beetstra: My parents came to Harvard, Illinois probably in about 1920, maybe 1921, after World War I, and they were dairy farmers. Leonard's father, Jacob, came in 1912 and homesteaded in Montana. He had a one-hundred-sixty-acre claim out there before WWI. Then when he came back from WWI, he got discharged in Fort Lewis, Washington. I guess he was lonesome, and he went back to Holland and married my mother. They came here, and she decided she didn't want no part of Montana. So they had some friends in the Harvard area, and that's where they made their home.

Pogue: So what years did they start living in the Harvard area?

Beetstra: I want to say about 1921.

Pogue: Was it in the farm area?

Beetstra: About two miles from where we're sitting.

Pogue: And how many acres did they have at that time?

Beetstra: Well, they were just farmhands at first. They didn't own property at all.

Pogue: And by farm hands, what kind of activities were they doing?

Beetstra: Milking cows mostly; milking cows by hand.

Pogue: Other siblings and immediate family?

Beetstra: I have two brothers: William: he's two years older than I. I have another brother that's three or four years younger than me, and a sister that's ten years younger than me. We all live within two miles of one another to this day.

Pogue: When you grew up on the farm, what kind of chores did you have?

Beetstra: Mostly feeding cows and clean the barn, haul manure, harvesting crops and harnessing horses. Everything was all done by hand.

Pogue: And how many horses would be a typical day for you?

Beetstra: I think we had four to six horses that we used every day.

Pogue: And when you said you used them every day, what kind of work did the horses do?

Beetstra: Hauling manure, mostly, in the wintertime. In the summertime it was all plowing and disking and planting corn with them. Everything was done with horses.

Pogue: Do you remember when horses went out, and you no longer had any horses?

Beetstra: Our horses went out in about 1949.

Pogue: What replaced them?

Beetstra: Tractor, rubber-tired tractor. We had a steel-wheeler before that.

Pogue: When you think about the chores, what was the daily timeframe? Could you pick a typical day and just kind of walk through what the chores would be like, from morning until the end of the day?

Beetstra: That was a daily routine. Get up in the morning, and my dad had the fires all stoked up in the house. We had a potbelly stove in the living room, and it was my job to have a little kindling ready for him in the morning so we could start the stoves. We'd go out and milk, and when we got done milking then we'd come in the house. My mother had breakfast made for us on the old cook-stove that we started before we went off to the barn. You'd have to have a lot of wood on hand for cooking wood and so forth, wood and corncobs. Milking by hand them days was a struggle.

Pogue: And when you say struggle, could you explain that?

Beetstra: Well, I was just a little guy then. I was only about seven or eight years old. Me and Bill would always run to get the easy milkers, the ones that milk easy, and the cows that didn't kick. So we had sit by them and milk them and get all around the barn and get the easy ones; leave the hard ones for my dad to milk.

Pogue: How many cows would need to be milked?

Beetstra: I'd say twenty-six at that particular time.

Pogue: And how long a time period would it take to milk the twenty-six?

Beetstra: About an hour and a half, maybe two hours.

Pogue: And once you were done with the milking chores, then what happened?

Beetstra: We'd have to drag the cans to the milk house and put them in the tank and stir them, for the milkman lived far away, and if you didn't get up early and do the milk—he'd be ugly if we didn't get up early enough to get the milk ready for him. So we'd always hustle around to get done quick. Then my dad always said, "You guys are going too fast. You're not milking them cows right; you will create a mastitis problem. He always stripped the cows when we got done.

Pogue: Now when you said that the person coming would be ugly, what does that mean?

Beetstra: If the milk wasn't cold enough he wouldn't load it on the truck to take it to the factory. It would have to be like thirty-eight degrees.

Pogue: And the factory that he was taking it to was located where?

Beetstra: In Harvard, Bowman Dairy.

Pogue: Bowman Dairy. So after your chores finished with the milking, did you have anything else to do?

Beetstra: There was always a lot after milking. We didn't have any water in the barn. We'd have to have a tank outside, and if the tank was full of ice, we'd have to have a tank heater in there. Start the tank heating up with some wooden coals, and put the tank heater, and melt the ice. So the cows would only drink water if it would be warmer than ice water.

Pogue: Now what did the cold weather and the snow and the ice do for your chores compared with the summer milking?

Beetstra: Everything was really slow. The manure spreader would be all froze up; it sat outside all the time. You couldn't put it in the barn; you didn't have a dry space in the barn. The spreader sat outside, and you'd have to thaw it out and make everything loose. Just that cold weather was always double, double work.

Pogue: When you think back at your chores, what was the most enjoyable?

Beetstra: I don't remember any. (laughter)

Pogue: Okay, of the chores, which did you dislike the most?

Beetstra: Going in the chicken house gathering the eggs.

Pogue: Could you kind of walk us through that?

Beetstra: Well, I don't know. It seems our chicken always had lice, and you'd get lice in your hair when you come in, and you'd be itching all over. That's the part that didn't sit with me very good.

Pogue: How many chickens would be in the house?

Beetstra: About eighty or a hundred.

Pogue: About eighty to a hundred. What would you then do with these eggs?

Beetstra: We'd gather them every day and take them in the house, and then take them down to the grocery store and trade them for groceries.

Pogue: So the farm, when you were talking about the chores, what time period, year wise, was this?

Beetstra: In the forties, late thirties and forties.

Pogue: So you mentioned about the chickens, and you mentioned about the dairy and the horses. Anything else that you can remember?

Beetstra: The old tractor. You had to crank it by hand. We always had a tractor that would kick and break your arm. We had one man that that worked for us; he was cranking it one day and it backfired and broke his wrist and he was all laid up. And that put double work on us because he couldn't do nothing. He'd lay around the house for about two months before he could do anything.

Pogue: Now the farming operation that you're talking about in the thirties and the forties, how many acres were you on?

Beetstra: I think our farm was a hundred sixty acres.

Pogue: What do you remember about holidays during that time period?

Beetstra: They never amounted to much if I recall. I think my dad milked cows. I don't remember him ever missing a milking in the fifty years that we milked. Only as us kids got older, him and my mother would go away and maybe have a Sunday afternoon or something. We'd do the milking then, but that's when we got a little older. We had a milk machine. We could milk with the milk machine and not by hand.

Pogue: When did the milk machine start coming in?

Beetstra: I want to say middle forties.

Pogue: So being a dairy farmer, you were committed every day. There was no day off for a dairy farmer.

Beetstra: No, no days off.

Pogue: Why did people like to do that then?

Beetstra: I think it was their only choice of living, to get a little cash in for the milk check, but they didn't amount to much. There was only like two and a half or three bucks a hundred.

Pogue: Now the farming around Harvard, is it favorable to dairy compared to other occupations with farming?

Beetstra: It used to be. It's not anymore.

Pogue: As far as church activity goes, what can you remember about that?

Beetstra: We always went to Presbyterian Church when we were kids, where some neighbor would come into the yard and pick us up on Sunday mornings and go to church. We'd have a whole carload of kids by the time we got there. I think there were eight or ten of them in that old car he had. He would bring us back about eleven o'clock in the morning.

Pogue: And where was this church located?

Beetstra: It was right in Harvard.

Pogue: Okay, so how many miles away was this?

Beetstra: Probably about six.

Pogue: And as far as the activities of the church, what do you remember about that?

Beetstra: I don't remember much about it, only we had a Sunday school teacher that was a nice lady and I don't recall her name.

Pogue: During the time that you were in the school age, where did you attend school?

Beetstra: The White Oaks School.

Pogue: And White Oaks was located how far away from where you lived?

Beetstra: About six or eight miles from where I live now.

Pogue: And how did you get to school?

Beetstra: We walked most of the time. Only if it was raining my dad would start up the old car and bring us to school and pick us up in the afternoon. But most of the time we were walking. When we got a little bit older we had a bicycle that we rode home on.

Pogue: Now what grades attended White Oaks?

Beetstra: One through eight.

Pogue: And how many students were in a typical grade?

Beetstra: The last years I was there it was I think only six or eight kids were there.

Pogue: Did you have one teacher per grade?

Beetstra: No, one teacher for the whole school.

Pogue: For the whole school. And could you kind of give us an idea of how the one teacher handled all these grades?

Beetstra: Well, she didn't have a problem. There would be like one first grader and two second graders and three fourth graders. She had them from the left side of the school all the way to the right side where the bigger seats, where we eighth graders sat. She had it pretty well in hand then. She took care of things pretty good.

Pogue: Now when you were an older grade student, did you help others, or did you help the lower grades, or did everybody pretty much just do their own?

Beetstra: We sat and all played together. We all got along good. I see most of the guys that still went to school. I lived right around Harvard all my life, and they did too. We got used to the noise and so on, and we all got along good while we were in school, and after school, and all through the years of our lives.

Pogue: Was White Oaks the name of the school?

Beetstra: That was the name of the school.

Pogue: And then in high school, once you left eighth grade, what happened then?

Beetstra: I only went one year of high school.

Pogue: Okay, and where was that at?

Beetstra: Harvard.

Pogue: Okay, so did all the country students come into Harvard?

Beetstra: They all went to country school for eight grades, and then all the country kids went to Harvard for high school.

Pogue: When did White Oaks close?

Beetstra: I think probably 1948 or '49; maybe it was a year or two before that.

Pogue: How about the other country schools?

Beetstra: All about the same time.

Pogue: So the Harvard area consolidated just toward the end of World War II?

Beetstra: In 1949-'50 Harvard sent the seventh and eighth grades to the high school building. Consolidation was not completed until 1953.

Pogue: And then everybody went into the town? Or did any of the rural schools still exist?

Beetstra: The buildings are still there. Most of them are single-family homes now. They sold cheap. They only brought about fifteen hundred dollars apiece when they sold them.

Pogue: Why did the Harvard area close the country schools?

Beetstra: Well, I think they had figured out it was cheaper to haul the kids to Harvard schools; consolidate all the little buildings and have the children all go to one big school.

Pogue: And the Harvard High School that you attended, is that at the same site that the current Harvard is?

Beetstra: Yes, it is.

Pogue: Does any of the current Harvard High School building still date back to the nineteen—

Beetstra: 20's. Additions in the 1950's. They all look the same to me.

Pogue: Okay. So that looks pretty familiar to you?

Beetstra: Oh yeah.

Pogue: What classes did you take at the high school?

Beetstra: Arithmetic, I guess, and English and agriculture class, FFA. [Future Farmers of America]

Pogue: Did the rural area feel bad about the closing of the rural schools?

Beetstra: No, they didn't. They were all tickled about it.

Pogue: Okay, and why were they very favorable about that?

Beetstra: I don't remember much about it. I was only about ten or twelve years old then, but I still don't remember much about it. Kindergarten: there weren't no

kindergartens. You started right in first grade. There was no kindergarten classes in the country. No sports.

Pogue: As to your interests, what kind of interests did you have when you attended school?

Beetstra: What do you mean by interest?

Pogue: Any hobbies, what you liked, subjects you liked?

Beetstra: I think most of all I waited for recess to come around. (laughter)

Pogue: And what kind of things did you do at recess time?

Beetstra: Threw the ball over the top of the building and played Annie-I-Over

Pogue: Could you say that again?

Beetstra: We called it Annie-I-Over.

Pogue: Annie-I-Over?

Beetstra: Yes. We'd divide the kids up and play. Five or six I think, one on one side of the school and we'd throw the ball, and catch it and run around the other side, and then you'd have to tag them to get the ball away from them.

Pogue: Was this a rubber ball?

Beetstra: Yes.

Pogue: Why did you, yourself, go into farming?

Beetstra: I didn't know anything else.

Pogue: Explain how your farming operations developed over time.

Beetstra: In 1943 I turned eighteen, and WWII was underway. My friends went and joined the Navy, and a lot of them guys went into the Navy; I'm going to go too. So I volunteered for the Navy. November 8, 1943 and about a week later I was on a train to Chicago for a physical, and came home that night, and about three weeks later I had my greetings to report to the Woodstock office on January second or third for induction to the service.

Pogue: And you were in the Navy.

Beetstra: Yes.

Pogue: And where were you stationed?



Beetstra: Basic training was in Great Lakes. That lasted about eight or ten weeks. From there I went to New Orleans to a little air station for about two months. Then I got called one day to report to disembark to a receiving station, and there I got put on a train that went all the way to California, and San Francisco Bay. That took about ten days to get out to California. That train that we were on, a troop train, must have had three hundred people on it. We got to San Francisco, and I was working on submarines that came in. They were demagnetizing them. From there, I got on a troop ship and went to Guam. I was in Guam for about two or three weeks. I got called to go down to the harbor and get on a destroyer that just came from Iwo Jima. I got on that, and I served the rest of my time on that ship, the USS Pritchett DD561..

Pogue: As to demagnetize, what does that mean?

Beetstra: Well, they had them magnetic mine fields. They got demagnetized, they wouldn't draw the mines.

Pogue: Okay. When you were discharged, then where did you return?

Beetstra: I returned to Harvard, Illinois.

Pogue: And that's when you—

Beetstra: I hitchhiked home from Great Lakes.

Pogue: Hitchhiked? How long did it take you hitchhiking?

Beetstra: The first car went by and seen me standing out there; everybody saw my sea bag. I put my thumb out. Some lady gave me a ride. She says, "I'm going to McHenry." She says, "I'm not going to Harvard, but I'll get you part way." I said, "I'd appreciate it." We got to McHenry, and I got out of that car there, and I put my sea bag down again and my thumb out, and the next car came by, picked me up, and took me to Woodstock. First thing I knew I was in Harvard.

Pogue: Okay, and then once you returned to Harvard, what happened?

Beetstra: I started doing a little carpenter work. There wasn't nothing much to do on the farm. Me and another guy, he was also the neighbor, and we were doing carpentry work for this guy. It was all right, but it still wasn't our cup of tea. We liked to drink a couple of beers on the way home at night, so we were in the local saloon drinking beer, and the *Shopper Guide's* laying there, and I see a cattle truck for sale. So I told Herman, "Let's buy that cattle truck and go hauling cattle around to the Chicago Stockyards and back."

So him and I bought it together, and then it wasn't long. I kind of liked it, but he didn't like it. He could make more doing carpenter work than we were from what that truck was bringing in, so we split up. I ended up with the truck, and then I kept going to farm sales and hauled cattle home for guys that bought cows and so on. I'd be hauling cattle all hours of the day and night during wintertime when

the farm sales were heavy. Load and go to Chicago the next day with a load of cows. That's the only place you had to sell the cows, was in Chicago Stockyards, and that was a four-hour trip from Harvard to there.

Pogue: Then could you explain a little bit more, then, how you went into the farming and how it developed over the next fifty years?

Beetstra: Well, I went to all these sales. I found a little barn, and I had to buy a little hay and feed and started buying heifers. I'd stockpile them all winter long, and once the sun started shining in the spring, and I'd have heifer buyers come out of Indiana and all over to buy heifers that came from Harvard, Illinois, because we were advertised as the dairy capital of the world.

So a lot of guys come to Harvard to buy heifers from all over the country. In that business I met many people from pretty near every state in the union, at one time in my life. I think I sold a family in every state in the United States—but maybe one or two of the eastern states I missed—but all the states south and west, I sold cattle, I think to every one by the truckload later on in my life. I started out with just buying them little heifers and feeding them during the winter, and they advance. You buy them in the wintertime when the snow is on the ground and sell them when the grass started to get green. They always, a lot of them, would double the money. It's a seasonal thing.

Pogue: So you were in the selling of cattle.

Beetstra: Buying and selling dairy cows. Then I started buying "springing" cows and "springing" heifers, which is one just before the calf, and that seemed to work pretty well. As time went on, we got more cows, and one day we bought a little farm. First of all we rented a farm out east of town, and that wasn't much of a place. My wife—it was a terrible house and she didn't like the house. So we saw one on US 14, and we made that our home for the last sixty years.

Pogue: What year were we talking about that you had that first house?

Beetstra: Nineteen fifty-three.

Pogue: And then how did the operations go from 1953 on?

Beetstra: They went good. We raised our family. We had three boys and two girls. We all kind of worked together. The kids got big enough to help a little bit and so on, and they were interested in farming. I told them kids, "You guys stick with me, and if we keep doing what we're doing now, someday we'll all own a farm." They all pitched in, and we all own a farm now.

Pogue: How many acres was the farm at your highest point?

Beetstra: The one we started with was sixty-six acres.

Pogue: Sixty-six acres. And then what did it grow to?

Beetstra: I think we've probably got fifteen hundred now.

Pogue: Fifteen hundred. What was the most number of cows that you had at one time?

Beetstra: I think maybe eight hundred cows and heifers.

Pogue: And you were selling some of those, or all of them?

Beetstra: Sold all, yeah.

Pogue: Okay, so how long were you with these particular cows? How long did you keep them?

Beetstra: It would depend. Some we just kept overnight. Somebody would come the next day and buy them. A lot of times I had orders for guys in California and so on for a certain type of heifer, and "...when you get me a load put them on the truck and send them to me," or, "I'll come look at them," or however it worked.

Pogue: So how did this type of farming compare to what you grew up as a boy doing dairy work?

Beetstra: It was altogether different than the way my father operated.

Pogue: Okay, could you kind of explain to us a little bit the differences?

Beetstra: First of all, we had silos and silo unloaders, which my dad never had. My dad was farming, and we'd have to go climb the silos and throw the silage down by hand. When I was farming, we had silo loaders and barn cleaners and power take-off manure spreaders that you'd keep in the barn that wouldn't freeze up. Altogether different.

Pogue: Now, did you have a group of farmers that worked together in any kind of organization?

Beetstra: Not really.

Pogue: So everybody was somewhat as an independent?

Beetstra: Yeah. We were all neighbors, and we all got along and never had problems with any neighbors. We all worked good.

Pogue: How did you meet your spouse?

Beetstra: She wrote me a couple letters while I was on the ship in the Navy, and I said, "Well, I'll look that one up when I got back," and that was the start of it.

Pogue: And you mentioned that you had five children.

Beetstra: Yes.

Pogue: And what are their names?

Beetstra: John, Tom, Bob were the boys, and Melinda and Karen—you just met Karen.

Pogue: And you mentioned that you talked about each having a farm. Where are they located now?

Beetstra: Oh, within about three miles from where we're sitting.

Pogue: Now how are their operations different from what you did, or is it the same?

Beetstra: They're doing the same as I did and the way they were brought up and the way I taught 'em.

Pogue: So they're buying and selling cattle?

Beetstra: Somewhat, yes. One of them—Bob's an electrician. He's got a good business. He does all our electrical work besides for many other people.

Pogue: How has farming changed in the Harvard area in the last twenty years?

Beetstra: It changed. You can't believe how it's changed: from horses to steel-wheel tractors to rubber-tired tractors and then to PTO.

Pogue: PTO?

Beetstra: Power take-off. Then from power take-off to hydraulics, and then the size of the tractors tripled. You've got eight to ten plow tractors. I used to have a tractor that, when I was a kid, that little tractor we had to pull a two bottom plow. Ones we got now pull a ten bottom plow.

Pogue: How is the cost of operating different?

Beetstra: You can't believe the cost now. It's tripled; more than that. It didn't cost much for the horses.

Pogue: Could you explain to me a little bit about the history of the dairies in this area, and your involvement with it, and in particular Dean's Dairy?

Beetstra: Well, when we were kids, all our milk went to Bowman Dairy. There was only two dairies. Borden's and Bowman's. They bought all the milk around Harvard. Then Dean's came up, and half the guys were going to Dean's. Part of them was going to Dean's and part of them was going to Bowman's. Anyway, it wasn't long that Bowman's—Borden's I think first quit—and then Bowman's quit later on, and then Dean's bought all their plants. All the milk around here goes to Dean Milk Company now.

Pogue: How did the milk get to Dean's?

Beetstra: In trucks.

Pogue: And how often did they come out to your farm?

Beetstra: Every day. We were making a lot of milk. They came every day.

Pogue: Were these the cattle that you were selling?

Beetstra: No, these were the ones we were milking.

Pogue: How many cows did you milk?

Beetstra: We were milking—toward the last—we were milking on two farms, and we were milking over two hundred, maybe two hundred twenty cows at our high time.

Pogue: Now when you talked as a young boy, twenty-six as I remember, you were talking about taking all day, and now you're talking about two hundred. How could you handle two hundred compared to the twenty-six?

Beetstra: Well, my kids got a little older, and we had some hired help and pipeline milking.

Pogue: What's pipeline milking?

Beetstra: The milk goes right from the cow to the tank. When we were kids and milked, we had to put it in milk cans and then lug them up to the milk house and put them in water to cool them.

Pogue: Could you explain the process of milking two hundred on a daily basis? When did all this start?

Beetstra: I want to say it started in about '65 or '67.

Pogue: And a typical day, you would start milking at what time?

Beetstra: We usually started about four in the morning.

Pogue: And that would go until what time?

Beetstra: Until we got done. We'd be done milking by eight o' clock..

Pogue: Now when you talked about before, as a young boy you would take the easy cows and leave the harder ones for your dad. Is that the same process now?

Beetstra: No. Milk machines are different.

Pogue: So it didn't make any difference?

Beetstra: No. You just went right to the next cow.

Pogue: How long does it take to milk a cow?

Beetstra: About three minutes.

Pogue: Three minutes; how long did it do when you were a boy?

Beetstra: It depends on how ambitious you were mostly. Milking that cow by hand was a job by itself.

Pogue: When you talk about Dean's Dairy...

Beetstra: Depends how quick we wanted to get done milking and go to town that night.

Pogue: (chuckles) Okay. Dean's Dairy then took over for the other two: Bowman's and Borden's. How did Dean's Dairy work with the local farmers?

Beetstra: Real good. They hired all local people to run that. Our milk inspector, he was a local guy, and the field man was a local guy, and everybody got along pretty good with them.

Pogue: How was milk pricing during the time that you were?

Beetstra: It kept working its way up a little bit. Back in '39 it was like three dollars a hundred, maybe \$2.80 a hundred, and then it got up toward five and six dollars a hundred later on. Got a few more cows and got a milk machine, then it wasn't so bad.

Pogue: You also served on the board of the Harvard State Bank. Could you explain a little bit about your duties as a Director?

Beetstra: You'd go to these bank board meetings, and the bank has a board meeting once a month. They talk about all the newer homes and what's new in the neighborhood and so on, and kinda keep the bank informed of what's going on in the neighborhood. Keep him briefed on things that he don't know anything about, and so forth.

Pogue: What would be the main responsibilities that you would have on a month-to-month basis as a Director?

Beetstra: Attend all the meetings, and keep the banker informed on anybody that you don't think is going to make it, or if somebody has some trouble, or how you feel about the situation and what kind of farmer he is and so on.

Pogue: And you say if he was going to make it, then you're talking about the financial stability of that individual?

Beetstra: If they should increase his loan or decrease it or whatever.

Pogue: How many Directors were on the board?

Beetstra: Six.

Pogue: How long did they serve?

Beetstra: Jerry Powers must have been on for forty years. He died when he was ninety-two or ninety-three; he was still on the board.

Pogue: Did you have a term, and then you were reappointed?

Beetstra: No, just continuous. Election was every year at the annual stockholders' meeting.

Pogue: And who selected the board members?

Beetstra: I don't know how I got on. Jerry Powers told me one day, "Leonard, go and see that guy at the bank. He wants to put you on the board." So I didn't go, and the next day he called again, and a week later he called me, "Hey, you never got down to the bank. Get your butt down there and see that guy. He wants to put you on the board, and it would be worthwhile to you." So I went down, and he said, "We want to put you on the board." I said, "That's fine with me." I've been on ever since and that's, I think, about twenty-five years ago.

Pogue: Twenty-five years. Could you tell us a little bit about Harvard State Bank?

Beetstra: Well, it was just a little bank, like a thirty million dollar bank, and now I think it's a one hundred sixty million dollar bank. I started with them, and it was going real well, and we've had two or three presidents while I've been there. Roger Lehman is our bank president now, and when I started Cliff Maddox was on the bank board as president of the bank. You might have known him.

Pogue: The role of the bank to the local farmer: how important was having a local bank to a local farmer?

Beetstra: It was real good. That's why they wanted a farmer on the bank board. I was the only farmer on it. Well no, there was another guy, he farms. He's on the bank board; in fact two other guys were. They only had one on it before I got on the board, for a while. Mr. Lehman wanted somebody on the bank board that would run up and down the road and see what was going on and keep close to those things a little bit.

Pogue: Harvard is known for a Milk Days activity that I think takes place the first weekend in June. Could you explain a little bit about the history of Milk Days?

Beetstra: Well, the history that I know the best is the first one I went to they had down at Mary's Park on the south side. That was one of the first ones, and I don't think I've ever missed a Milk Day in Harvard since.

Pogue: What activities take place during Milk Days?

Beetstra: They have the Milk Queen and all the bands from every town around you going through the parade. They have a parade that lasts about two or three hours: bands and horses, fire trucks, rescue squads, everything.

Pogue: From the beginning, what was the purpose of the Milk Days?

Beetstra: I really don't know how it got started, and I don't know who started it, but it was in progress when I came back from the Navy; that's the first one I went to. I think they had one or two before I got home from service. Then they selected a Milk Queen, and the first one I remember was Norma Witmus.

Pogue: The town also has a cow called Harmilda?

Beetstra: That's it.

Pogue: Okay, and how did that come about?

Beetstra: Well, some of the gals around that time—and I think Dorothy Matthews played a big part in that. We had a contest to name that cow. Somebody came up with that name, and I think Dorothy Matthews was a big promoter of that and how she arrived at the name "Harmilda". It fits the cow pretty good.

Pogue: (chuckles) And that cow had been put at the intersection of 173 and 14 in the downtown area.

Beetstra: I think she's standing there every day, in fact.

Pogue: Has Milk Days changed in the last ten or fifteen years?

Beetstra: It's gotten bigger.

Pogue: And by bigger you're referring to more...?

Beetstra: Probably a hundred thousand people line the streets, maybe more.

Pogue: And they come from all over?

Beetstra: Yes.

Pogue: You talked a little bit about your involvement in World War II, and then your hitchhiking home from Great Lakes and your return to Harvard. Could you explain that a little bit more, why you wanted to return to the area, and why you were interested in doing what you ended up doing?

Beetstra: I was on a ship for the Navy for maybe over a year and saw a lot of action out there in Okinawa. I told myself, If I ever get off this damn thing and get home, I ain't never going to get on this ocean again. Then we had a typhoon out there that I didn't think we'd ever pull through that one, but we made it. Then when I got to Great Lakes and got home and got discharged, I couldn't get home quick enough.



Pogue: What ship were you on?

Beetstra: The DD-561, a destroyer.

Pogue: What was that called again?

Beetstra: The USS Prichett.

Pogue: Pricher?

Beetstra: P-r-i-c-h-e-t-t.

Pogue: P-r-i-c-h-e-t-t. And that was what type of ship?

Beetstra: Destroyer. DD-561.

Pogue: And you were on that ship how long?

Beetstra: Probably fourteen months, fifteen months.

Pogue: Fourteen, fifteen months. When you talked about that typhoon, what do you remember about that?

Beetstra: Well, that's a nightmare of your life, when you see waves coming at you as high as a mountain, and that ship goes up that thing and hits the peak, and then the bow comes out of the water, and then that wave goes under you, and the fantail comes up, and the screws are out of the water. They're clunking and clinking, and you're thinking, This ship's going to fall apart.

Pogue: Now did this hit the whole fleet at one time?

Beetstra: Yeah..

Pogue: And what was your assignment during that typhoon?

Beetstra: You still had to go up the flying bridge and be a look-out, no matter how rough it was; but you have to be up there. Of course it's raining and blowing so god darn hard you can't hardly see nothing, and there would be no enemy activity out there anyway, but you still have to be on the lookout for another ship or whatever's out there.

Pogue: Harvard's location is right near Wisconsin. Do you, as a farmer, have any contacts with the Wisconsin farmers?

Beetstra: Oh, sure.

Pogue: What kind of activities?

Beetstra: More guys milking cows in Wisconsin now than there is Illinois, and a lot of the heifers that we raise go to Wisconsin. All my slaughter cattle go to Wisconsin.

Pogue: Do you have some main buyers that are always buying?

Beetstra: Yeah. Not all the same ones, but different ones stop by.

Pogue: Do you need a break or anything?

Beetstra: No.

Pogue: Okay, what do you see as the biggest change in farming? You kind of talked about some of the key points that changed in your lifetime. What do you think is the biggest change that you've seen over a period of time?

Beetstra: All these big combines we've got nowadays, and the corn yields that we've been getting. If my dad had hundred-bushel corn, he'd probably set the world on fire. Now the corn growers double that. The big combines that we've got now, eight- and twelve-row combines go down the field, and five hundred feet, and you've got a hopper full of corn. It's unbelievable.

Pogue: When you talk about your operation, being mainly selling cattle and then doing dairy work, do you have, in your acreage, grain?

Beetstra: Yes.

Pogue: How many acres?

Beetstra: Well, we have twelve or fourteen hundred acres of corn and five or six hundred acres of soybeans. Besides, we have a hay crop that we harvest in the summer. Hay is fading out, and right now, with the price of corn, everybody wants to raise corn. That seems to be the best thing we've got going right now. Corn and soybeans both.

Pogue: What advice would you give someone pursuing a career in agriculture?

Beetstra: Go right at it. It's a good life, and you can be successful if you do all right. It's a good, healthy life, and I recommend it to anybody.

Pogue: Is there any difference in starting a farm operation: what you need to have, compared to when you started it?

Beetstra: Yeah, you need a lot of money.

Pogue: (chuckles) How much money does a young person need to have to get into farming?

Beetstra: Well, the young guys, they've got to start like I did. The only money I had was my mustering off pay, and that was \$250 when I got out of the service. When I

got home, I don't think I had any more besides that. I had an old rattle trap car that didn't hardly run, and I just worked every day. You can't take no days off.

Pogue: What would you like to be remembered for?

Beetstra: Mostly dealing in dairy heifers. I know a lot of people out in California that I sold many, many loads to. And there was a Frenchman down in Louisiana: I sold him fifty-seven loads, and that was one year. That was a load a week. It was easy. Those days your neighbors all had heifers to sell, and the guy ordered one load of heifers, you just start going in and out this yard and that yard and pretty soon you'd have a load of heifers bought for him.

Pogue: To buy and sell heifers, what do you have to do to get them ready to sell?

Beetstra: You have to draw blood on them and take the blood -either you send the blood to Springfield or we used to take it to Aurora all the time. They had a state lab there that they were testing for you. You'd go down there and drop the blood off and wait for the results, and then take it back to the vet when they got your interstate papers at the vet's office from the lab..

Pogue: Do you work with the local veterinarians in this process?

Beetstra: Yes.

Pogue: How is Harvard with the number of veterinarians for the number of animals that are in existence in this region?

Beetstra: There would be a lot of veterinarians. I used Dr. Buehler from Marengo, or Dr. Iverson from Harvard, or Dr. Bohler. You might have remembered him. I used him. Now it's Doc Iverson and Doc Svoboda There's plenty of veterinarians around. They all know how to draw blood on cattle.

Pogue: The family gatherings that take place—because you mentioned everybody is close by —what kind of things do you do together now?

Beetstra: Mostly birthday parties, and Christmas and Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving, all my kids were here for Thanksgiving dinner, and Christmas they're coming back. They all like to come to our house for some reason or another, and we always have a big time and all the grandchildren and the whole works now. They come over and spend the day with us.

Pogue: When you talk about grandchildren, how many do you have?

Beetstra: Fifteen.

Pogue: Fifteen.

Beetstra: I've got a couple of great-grandchildren.

Pogue: Wow, and they're all in this immediate area?

Beetstra: They're not far away. My daughter lives in Delafield, Wisconsin. That's fifty miles away. The farthest from me.

Pogue: Well, the final question I will ask is, when you talked about returning to Harvard, thinking about it on the ship, what have you felt about returning to Harvard to farm and raise a family?

Beetstra: The greatest place in the world.

Pogue: Well, I appreciate you taking the time and telling us a little bit about the operation and how that changed, as well as information tied to the dairies and the Harvard State Bank and the Milk Days and the school consolidation that took place in the 1940s. We certainly appreciate it. Thank you very much.

Beetstra: Well, I hope this is beneficial to you.

(end of interview)