

10-23-2011

Interview with Kelly Brown

Kelly McPharlin

Kelly Brown

Follow this and additional works at: https://digital.kenyon.edu/ps_interviews

Recommended Citation

McPharlin, Kelly and Brown, Kelly, "Interview with Kelly Brown" (2011). *Interviews*. 35.
https://digital.kenyon.edu/ps_interviews/35

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Public Spaces at Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Interviews by an authorized administrator of Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact noltj@kenyon.edu.

Accession Number: PS-MS-TR-MCPHARLIN-103011

Interviewer: Kelly McPharlin

Interviewee: Kelly Brown, manager of Owl Creek Produce Auction

Place: Kelly Brown's house

20499 Waterford Rd.

Fredericktown, OH

Duration: 1.00.22 – 1 hour, 22 seconds.

Co-workers present: none

Kelly McPharlin: My name is Kelly McPharlin and today's date is October 30, 2011. I'm here with Kelly Brown in his home in Waterford, Ohio, is that correct? Waterford, outside of Fredericktown, and we're discussing public spaces in Knox County and Kelly runs the Owl Creek Produce Auction so we'll be talking about that and how that functions as a social space. So, first of all... And if you need to stop the interview at any time to... you know, take a break or if you're uncomfortable answering questions that's fine. Um, so first I wanted to ask you how long you've lived in Knox County for.

Kelly Brown: I'm a lifetime resident except for a few years in college and a couple years after that away from, away from here, but other than that, a long time.

KM: So were you born in the area?

KB: Yes, my family owns a fourth generation farm, so I've been here a long time.

KM: Wow. So, has your family always lived in Knox County?

KB: Yes, um the um... the original homestead that my great-grandfather came here for is still part of my family. We've owned a farm since the 1850s.

KM: Okay, so how long have you had this house for?

KB: Oh this house, this particular house, my wife and I bought it 35 years ago. And so, we were really not seated on the family farm where my parents still live along that, in that original house. So we bought this house 35 years ago and have lived here ever since. We've raised our family here.

KM: Wow, that's great. So tell me a little bit about your job. I know that you run the Owl Creek Produce Auction, so could we talk about that a little bit?

KB: Yeah, um... we started Owl Creek Produce Auction about 6 years, we finished our 6th season in 2011 and um, it all came about simply as a marketing tool for fresh and local produce in the, uh, tri-county area, where Knox, Morrow, and Ridgeland counties kinda corner up. There was a need especially in the Amish community to, uh, to provide a better marketing source than what they had had. Transportation costs for their products were becoming a big issue, to put their produce into other market areas. So the idea was

to start the produce auction here to try to develop this as an outlet for their produce and also as a place for interested buyers to come in and purchase fresh local produce.

KM: So what, what year was it started?

KB: 2005.

KM: 2005. Okay, so you helped start it?

KB: Yes, I had... early in 2002, 2003, we quit milking cows basically, and we were doing some other farm related things on the farm, but um, this opportunity to manage the produce auction came about, and they, the Amish community asked me to be the manager and to get this thing off the ground, so I took the challenge on, and have been working ever since the, uh inception of the market.

KM: Wow. So how many people work for the Owl Creek Produce Auction?

KB: I'm really the only person that works full-time. And during the auctions, during the auction process, we have two auctioneers that work, we have, uh, two clerks that do the on-floor clerking, and we have off-sale that amounts to two to three people, depending how busy we are during the season. And then there are other guys who help load and unload trucks as produce comes in and leaves the building.

KM: And how often is the auction held?

KB: During the primary produce season, we sell three days a week. Monday, Wednesday, Friday.

KM: And what is the primary produce season?

KB: That'd be late May through end of October.

KM: So are you starting to slow down?

KB: Yes, we are, we are... this past week was our last week of two day a week sales, and then, in, uh beginning of November we go to one day a week. And we sell Friday, every Friday year-round, we have an auction every Friday year-round. The bulk of that product is hay, straw, firewood, baked goods, eggs. And in season produce always, so throughout the winter we'll have apples, potatoes, onions, all kinds of winter squash, and just, uh, some produce that comes in from tunnel houses and season extension techniques that guys are just starting to experiment with and figure out how to get it done. So we should have some leaf crops and radish type crops that can be grown in greenhouses and we should be able, we're gonna have more and more of that happening. But right now it's just on a very limited basis.

KM: So what happens at the auction? Can you tell me, like, a typical kind of day in the life of the auction?

KB: Sure, sure. Um... Produce growers simply bring their product to the sale barn. We line those products up depending on the size of the lot that those growers want to have in the sale. And that varies from a couple of quarts of something to multiple bins full of product. And um, depending on the quantity of the product, they are sold in different areas of the sale barn. What we call table lots are simply small quantities of maybe fruits, or baked goods, eggs, those kind of things. And then we have what we call cart lots, which are larger, larger quantities maybe in one or two pecks at a time of every kind of produce imaginable. And then we go to the large lots, which are, you know, boxes and boxes and bins and bins full of again, any kind of produce that might be in season, and then available at that time of year. And then when we line these things up, the auction crew goes through, and one person says how many or how much we're selling at that particular time, the auctioneer goes through his chant and determines the, uh, price and the buyer and then our clerk does the bookwork, writes it all down, and, um, then the winning bidder just simply loads up the product and takes it back to their place of business or their home, depending on the detail of the sale.

KM: How many people are usually there at a typical auction?

KB: 60 to 100.

KM: And how... what kind of people end up buying?

KB: Just all kinds, all kinds of buyers. We have homeowners that come in to buy either their weekly supply of produce, also homeowners come in to buy volumes to freeze or can or preserve in some way to keep for their families. Then we have a lot of roadside stands who maybe don't grow the full complement of vegetables, but they wanna make sure they have a lot of variety on their roadside stands. So they come in and basically fill in the blanks of the things they might grow with the things that are available at our sale. And then there's year round markets that come in to buy large quantities as their source of produce. And so there's just a, a large variety of people. More and more institutional buyers. Kenyon College is a good example of people who come in and have somewhat seasonal, but at the same time have continuous need for produce as the year goes on.

KM: So, um, what is your job like on a typical day? What do you do, what are your interactions with the farmers?

KB: My job is to make sure that everything is placed in an orderly fashion so that as the sale unfolds, uh, we do things, uh, orderly and correctly so that at the end of the day, it's very simple for someone who's a buyer to find the things that they purchased. And then as they sell it or they actually are given or they're... All the bookwork is done so that I can make sure that they're paid for the things that they put on their contract that they brought to the sale. And then at the end of the day, at the end of this auction process, then I do all the bookwork, I do all the paperwork to settle the sale so that the, the buyers get

paid for what they brought in and, um, we receive the auction as compensation, we receive our commission from the buyers, or um, from the sellers, not from the buyers, so if someone sells something, they agree to a 10% commission on everything they sell, so that's the way the money works with the auction, is I deduct that sale commission from everybody that sells items at the auction. And I write the checks to those people who sold stuff at the sale, and make sure they get paid.

KM: So before this job, you worked on the farm. Did you work on your family farm? So how was the transition from that kind of job to this kind of job?

KB: It's a huge, huge difference, because I've really developed, uh, I'm not active in the actual growing portion of this ag. business. I do more of the marketing and sales, more accounting work and paperwork instead of the day to day growing, picking, packing, and somehow selling. So it's just a big difference. And of course always before this I was involved in the livestock enterprises, and this is completely foreign from that. So, uh, I no longer work with animals, I, but I think the, uh, maybe the patience you learn from working with animals you still have to translate to these customers I have as a (laughs)... as kind of being the middle man of the auction.

KM: What kind of farm did you work on?

KB: Dairy, we had a dairy. We milked cows for 30 years. So its, it's a big change, big change from what I did before.

KM: And you don't have or own any animals anymore?

KB: No, no. We still farm, my brother and I still farm the home farm, we still make maple syrup like we always have. So we, um, yeah that's just a big difference.

KM: So, um, I guess as a farmer, your typical daily routine was very different than how it is now. Um... what is your daily routine like now?

KB: Well, I just, um, so much more of my time is spent on the phone, for one thing. Because I do a lotta communications with buyers and sellers about what's coming to the auction next, and for the buyers, what's gonna be available at the next auction, and then make sure all the settlements are done from previous auctions. Of course, then, those problems that come up with, um, buyers who need things, are there gonna be those things at the auction. And for sellers, you know if I bring this much stuff am I gonna be too much, not enough. And then there's always this transition from, uh, early Spring we start with flowers, vegetables, bedding plants, that kinda stuff, and so just that transition from season to season to season, that I kind of always have to be a step ahead of what's coming and how it's all gonna fall into place as the season goes on. Um... my, uh, another big part of what I do is always, I'm always out promoting the auction as a way for, um... buyers to have product available to them. And so, like, I might go to, you know, might drive around and go to stores and make appointments to talk with people about the auction, about how the auction can fit with their way of business. And uh, we

always kinda draw that circle bigger and bigger and try to find other places that might need our product. And also, buyer – or, farmers that have the product that need a place to sell it. So that's, uh, it's just a lot more salesmanship and public relations and all that kinda stuff. But I still sweep the floors and plow the snow, and you know, do all the (laughs) dirty work that has to be done at the auction.

KM: Yeah. So where is the Owl Creek Produce Auction? I noticed a sign when I was driving here, so is it close by?

KB: Yeah, we're just two miles away from it right now. I'd be glad to take you up and show you the actual barn. I know it's hard for people on your tape to see, to see it, but, uh, these are picture of the auction. I kinda had them in a little bit of an order, you know Spring to Fall. This is pretty much a mid-summer picture there, that's the sign in front of our sale barn. We started with, we started the season with lots and lots of flowers – hanging baskets, planters, um, bedding plants, vegetable plants, so we sell, on big days, we sell 6 or 800 hanging baskets in a day. And then you know there will be weeks and weeks and weeks like that where you sell flowers two and three days a week, with you know, a thousand hanging baskets a week, it's not unusual. So then as fresh produce season comes along, we transition, um, starting with strawberries in late May, that kind of begins our real busy season of spring fruit and produce, zucchini and summer squash. All that kinda stuff starts coming in soon after the strawberries. Cucumbers, um, we'd like to think tomatoes and sweet corn in June, but sometimes it gets pushed to July, like this year when we had a real, late, cold spring and planting didn't get done very well. And, you know, the summer marches on with all kinds of fruits and vegetables coming in, and um, and then a big season for us is this pumpkin, fall decorating stuff. We sell just thousands of pumpkins a day. And, uh, they come in, these large quantities. And we sell em that way. I mean, this is a whole row of just all pumpkins. And so these really big boxes or bins, and we sell, we just, go down the row, sell em, one bin at a time. And, uh, things go quickly, and that's the way we sell things. So...

KM: Mostly bulk produce, then?

KB: For the most part. But this, uh, this picture right here, yeah this picture probably gives us as good an idea of the way, see these lots are on tables here, this is table lots, and then these little gray carts here are just one or two pecks at a time. And then, after we, in the other area of the sale barn are these large, large bin lots of things that we sell, um, so it just depends on the position in the sale barn and the type of buyer you are to determine, you know, how much and when you're gonna be active in the sale. Uh, then in the fall also we sell just lots and lots of mums. This is, this is, uh, a shot of the mums that we get in. Um, there were, um, there were at least three days this year that we were over 700 mums each day. And a lot of people say, well gosh do you sell em all? Do you, do you have times when you don't sell em? Well, you know price is always one of the factors, and if there's lots and lots of stuff sometimes the price gets low, but if there's enough buyers to compete for things, well then the price stays good and we can sell lots and lots and lots of stuff. But, uh, I dragged out some other things to show you. Just some articles that have been printed about our auction. This is Dispatch, a Columbus Dispatch article

about Owl Creek Produce Auction, they were in here. And, uh, they did a nice article about produce auctions in general, but Owl Creek specifically. They came and took pictures, and uh, worked with us on this article. Farm Bureau, uh, article, Farm Bureau News Article was done about the same way, about all the auctions but then they were at our auction specifically and took pictures of some of the things going on to make the auctions work. Um, and then this other one is from Electric Co-op magazine. What's the date on this? Let's see... 2009. So that's a couple years old, but it's still a pretty good article about Owl Creek Produce Auction and auctions in general, how they work and why they work. And, um, the reasoning for people to come to auctions instead of their local supermarket, that kind of thing.

KM: Why do you think people go to the auctions instead of the supermarkets?

KB: Uh, there's two good reasons, there's, they're usually very economical, people can usually buy a volume of product at a reasonable cost and the other side of that coin is that it's usually cheaper than the, than the grocery store markets. Depending, you know, there's a, there's a fine line there between quality, price. And most people that come to our auction would rather spend at least the same amount of money as they would at the grocery store because the freshness and the shelf life and the atmosphere is kinda fun too, and they can kinda put it all in a, in a package and say they had a good time at the auction. So, just a variety of reasons, but I think quality and price are probably the two things that bring people to the auction.

KM: And, do, you said the auctions, they have a fun time at the auctions. What's the kind of mood or energy there like?

KB: Well, it's just an atmosphere of, uh, fun and a lotta networking goes on. We might sell fruits and vegetables, but somebody might come and say, "I'm lookin for a guy that builds furniture, I need a chair recharged, or I might need some, some sawmill to cut some wood for me. Some timber that I had cut, I need to cut that into boards. Where, where can I get all this stuff done?? And the auction provides a place for all those people to come together and talk and figure out all those things in their busy schedule besides buying zucchini. You know, they can maybe get a furniture repair, or new furniture made, or um, I really like these doughnuts where can I get a supplier other than the auction... It's just a variety of things that happen around the community that people network. There's always the conversations of, "Did you hear about this?" or "Did you realize this guy died?" or you know... And all that stuff is just part of the fabric of the auction and it's a fun place to do business but it's also a fun place to catch up on the happenings of the community, and the way this community interacts with others.

KM: So do you think it would be considered, like, a social event for people to go?

KB: Those that are there every day probably would think not, but those who just happen by or come occasionally, that's a big part of it. You know, they wanna come out and experience, uh, getting a hot dog from our vendor, sitting around talking to Amish folks. Just seeing all the, the, uh, the product, the volume of product that comes into our sale,

and watching it, watching everything unfold, and then at the end of the day, the place is empty again, you know, it's just... And it is kind of a fascinating process, when you see the, the huge amount of stuff that comes in there, and then it's just, it's gone. And you wonder how our food system can absorb all that much stuff three days a week and the buyers still keep coming the next day, and the next day, and the next day. It happens, it happens everyday and we realize that we're just a real teeny, tiny portion of the food system, and so that, you know, we never get too, um, too boastful that we're satisfying the needs of the food chain in this area, because we're just a little bitty, little tiny part of that. And, uh, I think even with our tiny part of that, we're still providing excellent quality product and also this, uh, community networking that, that's important for, not only the Amish folks in the area but also, just uh, everybody that participates any way they do.

KM: So what is the interaction like between the Amish and the non-Amish, or the English people?

KB: You know, after that initial cultural... oh you know, once the novelty wears off, I guess that's a good way to put it, once the novelty wears off of our differences, our similarities are pretty much the same. We all need food and shelter and energy of some sort, and just the fact that we, that we wear different style hats and move around in different style vehicles, we still have those same family needs, and you know, uh, needs of uh, I don't know how to put it... We're still interdependent, we're dependent on each other, I guess that's what I should say. That there's no way that these kinds of, uh, food products that we see come through the auction would be available without the types of labor dependent farmers that grow them. Meaning these, so much...so many of these fruits and vegetables are grown with high labor-intensive activity. You have to have hands on the ground in order to get this stuff done, and there's just not very many non-Amish families that are willing to do the work as full-time farmers, or they don't have the, enough hands to get it done. They, and it's hard to hire enough people to, to actually make a family living out of this without having children of your own to do it, so... But the other side of that coin is, the Amish folks need all of the non-Amish community to buy this product or they, there's no way they can provide a... uh, a way to get this stuff to market without spending a lot more money than they, than they feel they want to. And so the produce auction works for both sides of this thing. It provides a market for both the buyer and the seller, and the, I don't know that the idea of auction is it's always fair, because the market forces decide the price, and instead of buyer and seller standing here arguing over how much they're gonna give or how much they're gonna take for an item. So, I don't know it's, uh, the interaction between Amish and English is usually pretty business-like, but at the same time a certain recognition that we need each other.

KM: So do people like, directly interact with the Amish?

KB: Oh sure. Yeah. And um.... It's... a lot of friendships between Amish and non-Amish, that's not unusual, and uh, and you know the, we get, we get it, we get used to each other and we get.... close to each other, I guess you'd say. There's a real feel for, uh, deep friendships even though we're culturally a long ways apart.

KM: Are there other places or events where Amish and English citizens interact?

KB: Not many.

KM: Oh, okay.

KB: No, not many, because their Amish church lives are so different than, uh, even anything we're used to at all in the non-Amish community. And, so many of the customs and practices that the Amish are very familiar with, they're not part of what we're a part of. Even their customs that, common holidays are different. Uh, Christmas is... not nearly the commercial deal with the Amish folks as it is with us. But yet, weddings and funerals, and, um, family highlight kinda things, they're big deals with the Amish communities. There'll be hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people at weddings and funerals and some of those kind things, where with many of us it's a simple civil ceremonies, and you go on about life. There's a different, uh, a different idea of customs and practices, and it's easy to see from where I sit that, uh, we can all have our little place and be able to do those things differently and still get along quite well, and do our thing business-wise, and do our thing friendship-wise. There's just parts of our lives that don't overlap. And parts of our lives do.

KM: Do you think the auction has changed the way the Amish and English see each other? Because, I mean, there are no other ways or places where they interact. How has the invention of the auction changed things?

KB: Um... Probably not a great deal other than a more, probably more openness in the Amish community, just because they have created this exposure to their way of life that probably wasn't there before the auction started. Now it's just simply because there's more of an opportunity for the English and Amish ways of life to be seen by each other. And that's probably the only reason that it's changed. But, I think it has changed, I think there's probably a greater acceptance of the Amish folks by English folks, and there's probably the same thing on the Amish way too, because this recognition that we're kinda in this boat together, so we better make the best of it we can. And I know as, from, just from the dealings that I have to have with a group of the guys at the auction, as the, uh, they have a sale committee, it's just basically a group of elected guys from the stockholders of the auction. They work directly with me to kinda set the policies of the auction and the way we're gonna do things, and that kinda thing. Just from working with this auction sale committee, you know, we do have to face some of the realities of, if we do things a certain way, is that gonna be outside the limits of the things that Amish folks want to be put on themselves? For example, the group that I work with as the sale committee, they don't want Owl Creek Auction to use any internet type communications in terms of advertising for the auction. So, you know, web pages are out, email correspondence, that's okay, but, uh, and I do use a fax machine to fax information to people, but as far as interactive web pages of some kind, right now, right now that's off limits.

KM: Do the Amish still maintain some control over...?

KB: Oh yes, they own the business, I'm just the manager. And they, they just have some fears, misgivings, mistrust of the, some of these more open ways of communications. And I try to honor that. I told them right off the bat that I wasn't interested in making some kind of a, um, a showplace of this to make a big deal out of, or make it a tourist destination, that's not what I'm really interested with this auction. And so that if, we're trying to keep that that way, this is, we would rather have this be simply a place where buyers and sellers meet to provide high-quality produce and product to folks in central Ohio. Nothing more, nothing less, and so... We don't necessarily run a sideshow for non-Amish folks to come in and see how the Amish work, you know, that's just not what we're about.

KM: So are there Amish that live close to you in Waterford?

KB: Uh, yeah... there's actually one, two... there's two homes on this end of town that are Amish, and then there's two in this end, the other end of town here, that are just real close here. And just drive up across the way, there's an Amish family that's moved into a farm back here. Then you notice... There's over 200 families, Amish families in this community, and uh, so, by being in a three county area, we border, we kind corner up here into three counties: Morrow, Knox, and Ridgeland counties, and so it sometimes seems like there's really not a big Knox County Amish community in this area, but yet when you forget about the boundary lines of counties, this community has a lot of families in it.

KM: So what, um... what is your interaction with them like? Do you see them? Or, how do you see them? When do you see them?

KB: Well, just daily comings and goings. My truck passes their buggy, and I wave (laughs). And I stop and talk with people that I need to about the auction, and it's just, um, we basically, for the most part, we talk business. You know, we're business associates, and not too much more. You know, I don't, I don't chit chat too much about their customs or what's, or who's getting married this Thursday, cause there's almost always a wedding on Thursday (laughs). But, uh, you know we always go back and forth, but especially in the office at the auction before the sale starts, the, uh, folks that work in the office wanna know what the weather might be coming. Cause you know, they don't really have any way of knowing what the weather report is. So the weather report's big deal for em. And then for me sometimes, it's well, what's gonna happen at the end of this week, is there a wedding in Southern Ohio that busloads of guys are going to so we're not gonna get quite as much product into the sale or.... You just never know, you just never know what to expect, and a lot of it is because of restrictions in communication. They have, Amish folks have phone sheds in a variety of locations around the community so they'll have access to the telephone to call me, but you know, it doesn't happen very often. And that's, there's no way for me to contact them, except get in my truck and go see em, and hope they're home. You know, so. That's okay.

KM: So what is the rest of the, um, Waterford community like? The English-folk, where do you interact with them?

KB: Not a lot. Not a great deal. You know, there's just, just around you know when I'm mowing the grass, or I need to talk to my neighbor about whatever. We just go to the edge of the yard and talk, but... (laughs) But there's really, there are two churches in town, that I'm, in, in this Waterford area that I'm not a member of, so I don't, don't have that connection necessarily. I go to a church in town, and so, uh, in Fredericktown, so you know, I don't have that connection with people. And there probably would be or are some people that, uh, that, you know if you talk to them they'd say well yeah, our connection to the rest of the people in the community are the churches here. But that's not the case with me.

KM: Do you know your neighbors well?

KB: Pretty well, pretty well. Yeah. And feel good about saying to one or all of them hey, I'm gonna be gone for a few days, kinda keep an eye on things. We kinda have informal agreements like that, or discussions like that.

KM: Do you think most of your friends are work friends, or friends from Fredericktown, or Waterford? What people do you see the most or spend the most time with other than your family?

KB: I have a core group of friends that get together regularly. And so, but not here, not Waterford. So it's kinda away from all of this. I have a group of friends that, uh, not even farm related people, that I just have known forever and we get together as families, and it's... basically some old high school buddies, is basically what it is. We've grown up together, all stayed in this community and we've kept in touch and our families have been raised together, and so it's... Just a big core group of friends.

KM: What do you like to do with them? Or where do you go?

KB: Um... We do, we like to go out to dinner. And we like to, now that our kids are grown, I guess, but... because school activities were always, you know, big when the kids were all in school. We would always be together at school functions, our kids were in athletics together, and all kinds of school functions together. My wife is a retired school teacher, so that, that all kinda made the connection different too. But, uh... Two weeks ago, three weeks, three weeks ago now, we all, all that group of friends got on a pontoon boat out on Knox Lake, and we putted around on the lake on my friend's pontoon boat. So we'll do stuff like that. Fourth of July we all get together, throw some money in and have fireworks. Just fun stuff, fun stuff to us, I guess.

KM: So how many children do you have? I forgot to ask.

KB: Four.

KM: Oh four? And how old are they?

KB: Um... my youngest daughter, she's 20 at Finley College. And then my youngest son is at Otterbein college in Westerville. He's a junior there. I have one son that's, um, 26... 26 or 7... let me think, let me think... How old will Ross be? January... Ross might be 30 comin in January (laughs) I think. Is that right? That can't be right, he can't be that old. Anyway, he lives in Fredericktown now, and he's just moved back into this area this past summer. He's... we're in the process of building a tomato greenhouse on the main farm for him to be a tomato raiser. He's kinda gonna...

KM: Help with the Tomato Festival?

KB: Well yeah, that too. Yeah but then... No, this'll be a year round tomato operation, and I think it'll work out with all the other things we've seen in fresh fruits and vegetables. I think a hydroponic tomato place, hydroponic tomato business will be successful for him. And my oldest son passed away almost 10 years ago now. And so, we miss him, but that's the way life is.

KM: I'm sorry to hear that. Do you have other family members that are in the area?

KB: My parents are still here, my brother and his wife, they live on one corner of the farm, our main, our family farm. And, let me think... I have a sister between here and Mount Vernon. I have a brother in North Dakota, I have a brother in Eastern Pennsylvania, and a sister in Cincinnati.

KM: Do you see your siblings?

KB: Oh yeah. I see my parents almost daily.

KM: Oh great.

KB: They're in their 80s, and some health concerns. But they're still, they still live in the same old family farm house and get along pretty well.

KM: So you mentioned that you go to church in Fredericktown, is that right? So what kind of events take place at your church or are you active in?

KB: The biggest activity is just our Sunday school class stuff that we do. That's just a good group of people that have similar, again, similar ages and a lot of older kids who grew up together, and those kind of things. And so we do, the big thing that our church does, this time of year, we cut firewood and then sell it, uh, to folks in the church or it doesn't even matter too much who buys it, but then that money goes into the local interchurch social services and Salvation Army funds that keeps them going pretty much for the year. Big fundraiser for them. And it provides wood heat sources for a lot of people in the community that otherwise would have a tough time sometimes heating their house.

KM: Are there like, social gatherings at your church?

KB: Sure, oh yeah, sure. There's a variety of family events and just covered dish dinners and all that business that goes along with the kinda fellowship.

KM: Do you think you participate in a social event there on a weekly basis?

KB: We don't, we don't. No, we don't. But there's probably something for...something for everybody all the time. We're probably less active now than we were when the kids were in high school and junior high.

KM: How has that changed since your children have gone off to college? How has your social life or activism in the community changed?

KB: It's... it's changed a lot. I was on the school board for 16 years. And so, that was when the kids were all through school. I think I was off when my daughter was a junior, I guess, was when I went off the school board. So there were just a couple years when we had kids in school that we, that I wasn't serving on the school board and my wife, and my wife wasn't teaching. So, uh, but Marcia was teaching right till, yeah... Maggie was a senior and Marcia was teaching, so, you know, the whole time our kids were in school she was teaching. But anyway... That's changed a lot since, because the school board work doesn't happen anymore for me, and that's okay (laughs).

KM: What was it like being part of the school board?

KB: It's a lot of thankless work that has to be done, and I think we made a lot of positive impact while I was on the school board, worked with a lot of good people. We've built a new school facility here in Fredericktown while I was on the school board. And I feel real proud about that, and especially the way it turned out, because it was a partnership between the state funding and local funding where the local funding was only about 19% of the total cost of the facility. And so it was a good deal for the community even though they don't realize it right now. And that's okay.

KM: So now what kinds of places do you frequent most often? Or, like, where do you...?

KB: This house, this house (laughs). That's where I frequent the most (laughs). I don't know... you know between the auction and the work, the farm work I do, it's not a lot of time for a lot of social stuff besides this close group of friends and some of that kinda stuff. We still chase our kids around some, and my wife's mother is still living down in southwest Ohio so we go see her some, but it's... we don't have a lot of other community tied things that we do right now. Maybe it's because we did em for so long it's time to have a time out for a few years before we get into other things. But it doesn't seem to be a lot of, uh, downtime or time to just sit and read a book. That doesn't happen... It happens, but not... and it happens a lot more in the wintertime than it does in the springtime.

KM: So do you think it's easy to meet new people in this area?

KB: Sure, because there aren't any (laughs). Um... it's not easy. It isn't easy. I think it's different when... if a couple our age moved in next door or something, then I think there would be a lot more reasons to interact. When a young family moves down the road here, or they move in with a couple kids, the kids are in school, they're busy with jobs and tryin to make a living and raise a family, it's really hard to find those kinds of places or opportunities to interact. We usually know those people, and kinda have some, at least a way to know who they are, but other than that, they might as well live 10 miles away as right down the street.

KM: So since you've lived in the Knox County area for such a long time, what are the main changes that you've seen in the community?

KB: Well I think the... I think there are fewer opportunities for young people to come back and work in Knox County in this area, not just Knox County but this part of the state. Manufacturing's not a big deal as it was, it used to be you get outta high school, get a job in the factory, and the American dream was yours, you know. But that's changed a lot. I think that, uh, we export way too many of our, of our high school and college graduates out of the community because of the lack of opportunities for professional people, especially. And, um... I guess I'm optimistic that some of the things happening in agriculture are gonna provide some opportunities for folks and this kind of thing that I work on everyday is starting to make an impact with niche marketing of specific products and having a way for families to actually make a living on a piece of land and rekindle that old pioneer spirit that farmers have had forever. But it's been kinda tough the last ten years for them to figure out a way to do it, so I'm kinda optimistic about the future of the agricultural opportunities. Other opportunities, it's still kinda tough because there seems to be this huge polarization among people in our communities that um... one group is always sayin, we need more money to provide opportunities, and it seems like the only way to get that money is to raise taxes. And then there's the other side of the coin that says if it has anything to do with raising taxes, we're opposed to it, and so we're not gonna provide anything else for, especially for educational opportunities. And so it creates a big divide in that, that I'm not sure it's gonna be closed very quickly until people realize that those same people that are running out of town because of the lack of opportunities are the same ones we need here to transfer our good things in the community to the next generation, if that makes any sense. There's no, there's no legacy of anything that's been handed to the next generation, cause the next generation has left town. And the ones that have stayed just don't have that, uh, educational background or the, maybe the desire, to be the, to be those foundation people of a community. I just see, uh, some of the, some of the, uh, real creative stuff that gets done in our communities all get done by a handful of people, so that many people don't wanna get involved in something, or against being involved in something. It's changed a lot.

KM: Why do you think you decided to stay in the community?

KB: Well, I had already been here. And I have taken, and will probably continue to take some leadership roles and do those necessary evils that have to happen so things do move forward. And I, you know, I feel like the job at this produce auction thing, it's, uh, one of the showcase places of these kind of startup things can work and can make a difference. And if everybody made a little bit of difference, well then the complete difference that got made would be big. So, um... I just try to do my own little part of it, and um, I know in the past I've been involved in too many things at one time, and it, it really gets demanding from a time management aspect, and just all those kind of things. You don't realize how much time you spend away from family and that kinda thing. So I try, as I get older, to do a few less things, but maybe concentrate on one or two.

KM: What do you hope... What kind of changes do you hope come out of the Owl Creek Produce Auction?

KB: Well, there's a couple things. First off is that the things that we do to talk about the Owl Creek Auction give people a sense that there are alternatives to supermarket groceries or supermarket product. And, um, and the other side of that is the produce auction can provide local farmers with an opportunity in the market place to make a family living for themselves and for the next generation or two. And that's really, that's really what the philosophical ideas were at the beginning of this with the Amish folks. That's how it all started, was a few of the Amish guys that were in the produce growing business were seeing so many of the young folks in the Amish community learning everyday to be carpenters or roofers and siding people, and doing a lot of you know, contractor, construction work, and they know that some of that's okay just to make a dollar or two to survive. But it doesn't really go with their lifestyle. You know, they're, Amish folks are basically simple people that would rather have their kids stay at home and stay simple and do simple things and, um, and they'd rather see them workin on the farm than workin for other people away from the community. So anyway, I think that, at least I hope that as things progress that some of those guys that strap on a toolbelt will decide to grow produce instead. And be able to still, still be able to make a good living. Cause that's what, it doesn't matter what color hat you wear, if you can't make a living, it's tough. That's what we try to do.

KM: So definitely a vision for sustainable family farms.

KB: Sure. Yep, that's very important.

KM: And how do you think that, um, sustaining that will affect the community and the interactions between people here?

KB: Well, the... regardless of all that philosophical jazz, when you put money in people's pockets, they are happier than when they don't have any money in their pockets. And so this business, this little old Owl Creek Produce Auction, is destined to put good family income money into people's pockets. And then the other stuff will all come along. It will all... if they all have a better appreciation for, for community stuff that needs done, just because they can stay in the community and get these things done, instead of having

to go outside the community for all these resources that they're after. That's what makes for communities to be stronger, I think. And, uh, hopefully all of the things that go along in our auction are just a piece of that puzzle. But it's an important piece because without that little produce auction thing going on, the place for some of that interaction to happen wouldn't be there.

KM: So do you have anything else to add that I haven't asked you about?

KB: Well, I don't know, you've been really thorough.

KM: Oh, thank you.

KB: (laughs)

KM: You've given me great answers so I didn't have to ask many questions.

KB: No, I... I think if you're, if you're after the impact of the auction on a community life, I've pretty well outlined it as well as I can, I think.

KM: Yeah, definitely. And we'll stop there.