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Berkeley, California

Raymond G. Lyon  
TAKING THE UNIVERSITY TO THE PEOPLE:  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Interview conducted by  
Robin Li, PhD  
August 19, 2008

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**Raymond Lyon**  
**Interviewed by Robin Li, ROHO**  
**Interview #1: 8-19-2008**

[Begin Audio File 1 lyon—raymond—1—08-19-08]

01-00:00:00

Li: Okay. We're here in Orland, California, on August 19, 2008, speaking with Raymond G. Lyon for the Agricultural and Natural Resources project, and this is Robin Li. So we're going to start with a pretty straightforward question. When and where were you born?

01-00:00:17

Lyon: I was born in Lake County on a sheep and pear ranch, in February 13, 1933.

01-00:00:29

Li: All right. And did your family have a background in agriculture?

01-00:00:33

Lyon: Yes, my mother's side did. My father's side were more in—they had ranches and stuff, but my grandfather was really a businessman.

01-00:00:41

Li: Okay. And how did they come to be in Lake County?

01-00:00:45

Lyon: They were early pioneers. My grandfather Lyon, great-grandfather, came out in the gold rush, and they had children in Sacramento, and one of them died of malaria, they called it yellow fever. And so they left the Sacramento Valley area to go over to Clear Lake.

01-00:1:05

Li: Okay. And what kind of agriculture was your mother's family in?

01-00:01:09

Lyon: Agriculture. My great-grandfather Johnson couldn't read and write, but he was the wagon-master of the train that came out in 1860. But they tell a story on him that he went to borrow money on the bank, and they loaned it to him and told him he had to sign the papers, and he said, "Well, I can't sign it." And the banker wanted to know why. And he said, "Well, I can't write my name." The banker said, "Just put an X, and we'll have witnesses." And my great-grandfather said, "Well, I can't do that either." And he said, "Why can't you put an X? Two X's?" He said, "That's my father's signature." So they came from a long line related to—we were descended from the Boones that were very uneducated. Yes.

01-00:01:56

Li: So what kind of farming did he do?

01-00:01:58  
Lyon: He had a homestead, large acreages, and mainly ran grain harvesters and raised grain and that type of thing.

01-00:02:10  
Li: So did you grow up, then, in a farming environment?

01-00:02:12  
Lyon: Yes. I grew up on some of his property, Yes.

01-00:02:15  
Li: So they were nearby when you were growing up?

01-00:02:20  
Lyon: Oh, they were all passed away by then, so the property had passed down to different descendants.

01-00:02:26  
Li: Oh, okay. And so, did you go to grade school, public schools, out in Lake County? Or—

01-00:02:29  
Lyon: Yes. I went to twelve—eleven of the twelve years there in Upper Lake, and then moved over here to Orland my senior year.

01-00:02:40  
Li: And what brought you to Orland?

01-00:02:41  
Lyon: My family bought a ranch up here. My mother told me that we had to leave Lake County because we'd been there so long that if we got married we'd be marrying relatives whether we knew it or not. So that wasn't the real reason, but that's what she told me.

01-00:02:58  
Li: So is Orland a bigger town than where you were from in Lake County?

01-00:03:01  
Lyon: Yes, that's right—there was only 500 people there, and there was probably four or five thousand here.

01-00:03:07  
Li: Okay. So you finished high school, then, in Orland?

01-00:03:11  
Lyon: In Orland, right.

01-00:03:12  
Li: And what plans did you have after high school?

01-00:03:13

Lyon:

Well, I'd always—when I was a kid, I was in 4-H. And Bill Stice was the farm adviser; there was only one in Lake County. And so I always admired him, so I either wanted to be a farm adviser or an ag teacher. And I first became an ag teacher, and then I was hired, you know, into the university extension later.

01-00:03:39

Li:

Did you keep in touch with him, then, after you moved?

01-00:03:41

Lyon:

Yes. He ended up being the kind of director in the neighboring county down there. But they've retired or died; most all of them are dead now.

01-00:03:53

Li:

And what did you do in 4-H? What was your—

01-00:03:55

Lyon:

What did I do?

01-00:03:56

Li:

Yes.

01-00:03:56

Lyon:

I had sheep. I've always had—in fact, we still own a little ranch here in Orland and run sheep. And I lived at the sheep barn at Cal Poly. I was born on a sheep ranch, so—

01-00:04:07

Li:

Oh, wow.

01-00:04:08

Lyon:

It's my hobby. I don't make any money at it.

01-00:04:13

Li:

So was 4-H a big part of your life as a kid?

01-00:04:16

Lyon:

Yes, right. Yes. That and FFA, Yes.

01-00:04:20

Li:

Yes. What's FFA? Can you tell me about that?

01-00:04:21

Lyon:

Future Farmers of America.

01-00:04:22

Li:

Okay.

01-00:04:23

Lyon:

It's through the high school ag departments—the ag departments in the high school, where 4-H is through the university extension service. I was an ag

teacher for three years—two years in Orland and one year in Yuba City before I came into the extension.

01-01-00:04:44

Li: So after you finished up at Orland High School, then you went to—

01-00:04:47

Lyon: Straight to Cal Poly.

01-00:04:48

Li: Straight to Cal Poly. And then what was your major there?

01-00:04:49

Lyon: It was animal husbandry.

01-00:04:53

Li: Okay. Because you had this idea—with the intention to teach?

01-00:04:56

Lyon: Oh, Yes. I knew exactly what I wanted to do, and I started teaching when I was twenty-one.

01-00:05:01

Li: Oh, wow.

01-00:05:04

Lyon: Yes.

01-00:05:05

Li: Where was your first teaching job?

01-00:05:06

Lyon: In Orland.

01-00:05:06

Li: In Orland?

01-00:05:07

Lyon: Yes, right back here, you know. And then in Yuba City, and—

01-00:05:11

Li: Okay.

01-00:05:16

Lyon: And then I came from there into this university.

01-00:05:19

Li: Can you tell me a little bit about college—your college experience? What Poly—Cal Poly was like at the time?

01-00:05:21

Lyon:

Well, it was great for me, because I wasn't an outstanding student. And they gave me the chance to take remedial classes, and the classes were small. And, you know, I did quite well because of that.

01-00:05:39

Li:

Yes. And what year was that that you graduated from high school and went to—?

01-00:05:43

Lyon:

In '50 I graduated from high school. The Korean War had just started, but we had student deferments. And so I went to Cal Poly in '50 and graduated in '54 and got my B.S. And then I went back and got a Master's in Education in '64.

01-00:06:04

Li:

In '64. Okay. What prompted you to go back to school? What was it?

01-00:06:07

Lyon:

Well, I wanted to get—I was only nine units short on my Master's when I started teaching.

01-00:06:12

Li:

Oh, okay.

01-00:06:13

Lyon:

So it was just natural that I wanted to go back and finish that up in Education.

01-00:06:21

Li:

Yes. Were there any mentors at Cal Poly that you remember, or people that you—

01-00:06:24

Lyon:

Mentors?

01-00:06:25

Li:

Yes.

01-00:06:25

Lyon:

Oh, yes. Darn near every teacher was a mentor. That was the great thing about it, that they were very personable and you got to know them. I used to even baby-sit for some of the—

01-00:06:37

Li:

Oh, wow.

01-00:06:37

Lyon:

—professors.

01-00:06:38

Li:

So was it were they also in the ag school, or was it—?

01-00:06:39

Lyon: They were in the—most of those were in the ag school, yes.

01-00:06:44

Li: So it was a pretty tight-knit community.

01-00:06:47

Lyon: Yes. There were three schools: ag, engineering, and liberal arts. And the ag and engineering were the two big ones, and the liberal arts was very small.

01-00:06:58

Li: What made you choose Cal Poly over things that were closer, maybe? You know, easier {overlapping dialogue; inaudible}.

01-00:07:02

Lyon: Well, they didn't have—the only other ag program at that time was Davis. And I just didn't have the grades from going to these little high schools. I had never even taken chemistry in high school.

01-00:07:14

Li: And they required that kind of thing at UC Davis?

01-00:07:15

Lyon: Right. And at Cal Poly, you could take your—you took practical things your first two years, and then your chemistry and all the other math subjects and stuff your junior and senior years.

01-00:07:28

Li: Oh, okay.

01-00:07:30

Lyon: And by then I was ready for it.

01-00:07:31

Li: Yes. So did you have to specialize within animal husbandry? Like, did you pick sheep—?

01-00:07:36

Lyon: No, you could specialize in field crops or ornamental work, or whatever you wanted. But I chose animal husbandry.

01-00:07:43

Li: Okay. And so you were working as an ag teacher with the local schools here? Or where were you—?

01-00:07:52

Lyon: I did my practice teaching for six months in San Obispo when I was twenty-one. When I was twenty-two, I came up and started teaching at the Orland high school.



- 01-00:08:02  
Li: Okay. Was there a connection with the extension at the high school? Did you guys—?
- 01-00:08:08  
Lyon: Yes. I was—I worked very closely with the extension while I was in the high school. I'd have the different farm advisers come in and put on programs and that type of thing.
- 01-00:08:19  
Li: Okay. That's interesting. And were they—were people coming from Davis, or just from the—
- 01-00:08:23  
Lyon: No, from the—
- 01-00:08:24  
Li: Local community?
- 01-00:08:25  
Lyon: Local office here. There's an extension service office in every county. And the one in Glenn County is in Orland. It's not at the county seat; it's in Orland.
- 01-00:08:37  
Li: Oh, okay. So they were right here in town.
- 01-00:08:41  
Lyon: Yes, they were right in town.
- 01-00:08:46  
Li: Did you find a lot of students interested in pursuing careers in—
- 01-00:08:47  
Lyon: Agriculture? Then? Oh, yes. I have several of them that have doctor's degrees that I had as students in high school, who didn't think they had it to even go to college. And they did, and went on, and—
- 01-00:09:04  
Li: Was that important to you? To encourage—Was it important to you to encourage these students to think about going to college in agriculture, and to—?
- 01-00:09:12  
Lyon: Oh, Yes—right, Yes.
- 01-00:09:13  
Li: Yes. Did you do any research while you were at Cal Poly? {inaudible}
- 01-00:09:21  
Lyon: No. Cal Poly was not a research—It is now; there's a lot there now. But at that time there wasn't, no.

01-00:09:27

Li: Yes. Okay. So how did you get involved in extension, from the teaching?

01-00:09:33

Lyon: Well, when I was teaching, I went from Orland to Yuba City to teach at the high school, and there became a vacancy in the Orland office. And the county director here at the extension had been on the school board when I was a teacher here. So he contacted other university people, and they come and contacted me and wanted to know if I wanted this job. So I came up and interviewed.

01-00:10:02

Li: What would you want to teach from teaching to—{inaudible} extension?

01-00:10:05

Lyon: Well, I really enjoyed teaching, and I thought, well, I could try that for a couple of years, and if I didn't like it, I could always come back to teaching.

01-00:10:114

Li: Right.

01-00:10:16

Lyon: So I—

01-00:10:17

Li: Thought you'd give it a try?

01-00:10:18

Lyon: I stayed there thirty-seven years. Right.

01-00:10:21

Li: So did you meet your wife, and—

01-00:10:24

Lyon: At Cal Poly.

01-00:10:25

Li: At Cal Poly. Okay.

01-00:10:26

Lyon: Well, when I went to Cal Poly, there were no girls.

01-00:10:29

Li: Oh, really.

01-00:10:31

Lyon: No. They didn't come until three or four years later. It was an all-boys college.

01-00:10:38

Li: Oh, okay.

01-00:10:40  
Lyon: And I met her there. She was there in the high school there in San Obispo, and I met her there.

01-00:10:44  
Li: Okay. So what year did you get married?

01-00:10:47  
Lyon: '54?

01-00:10:47  
Li: '54.

01-00:10:47  
Lyon: Same year I graduated, Yes.

01-00:10:49  
Li: Okay. And so you both moved up here to—

01-00:10:53  
Lyon: Yes, right.

01-00:10:55  
Li: So what was your first position, then, with the extension?

01-00:11:06  
Lyon: I was doing 4-H, dairy, forage crops, and—I guess that was it.

01-00:11:11  
Li: Yes.

01-00:11:14  
Lyon: But we had five hundred dairies in the county, so that was—I did dairy work all day and 4-H in the evenings.

01-00:11:20  
Li: Wow. And so your position title was—?

01-00:11:25  
Lyon: I was a 4-H and Farm Adviser.

01-00:11:28  
Li: 4-H and Farm Adviser. And what year was that that you started doing that?

01-00:11:30  
Lyon: That I started?

01-00:11:31  
Li: Yes.

01-00:11:33  
Lyon: '58. 1958.

01-00:11:38

Li: And what was the county like at that time, in 1958?

01-00:11:42

Lyon: It was a lot more dry-land farming. A lot of the irrigation systems have come in. We always had irrigated areas, but there was a lot of the county that was not irrigated. Basically, dairy and rice were the two major crops at that time.

01-00:12:02

Li: Okay.

01-00:12:04

Lyon: And we grew beans, and sugar beets, and—most of those things are all gone.

01-00:12:10

Li: And about how big was the average-size farm that you were working with?

01-00:12:14

Lyon: Well, the Orland irrigation district was set up so that it was ten- and twenty-acre farms. So the north end of the county was small farms, where the rest of the county was fairly large. So we had—well, you know, I don't know what the average would have been, but we had—a majority of the farms were probably ten, twenty acres, whereas the rest of them could have been several hundred.

01-00:12:37

Li: Okay. Wow. So you were working with a lot of farmers, then.

01-00:12:40

Lyon: Oh, yes. Right. Yes. We were out in the field most of the time, Yes.

01-00:12:43

Li: So what would an average day be like for you?

01-00:12:47

Lyon: An average day—

01-00:12:48

Li: In, like, nineteen—{inaudible}.

01-00:12:49

Lyon: I've kept all my calendars—

01-00:12:50

Li: Oh, wow!

01-00:12:51

Lyon: Which is kind of interesting. In college I was student body president, and the activities officer taught me how to keep a calendar. So I did that. So I worked all day with farm visits—we went out and saw the farmers more than they'd just come into the office. And also, then the 4-H programs were in the

evenings and Saturdays, and even horse shows and stuff on Sundays. So it was a lot of hours.

01-00:13:24

Li: So a full-time job. More than full-time.

01-00:13:26

Lyon: Oh, Yes. It was a lot more. Nowadays, they wouldn't do it.

01-00:13:31

Li: So it sounds like you didn't spend much time in the office, then.

01-00:13:35

Lyon: No. Probably 25 percent of the time was in the office.

01-00:13:41

Li: And so would you travel around by yourself, or would you—?

01-00:13:43

Lyon: Yes.

01-00:13:45

Li: Yes.

01-00:13:46

Lyon: But there were six of us, I guess, at that time, in the office here.

01-00:13:54

Li: Were they all from this county and from Orland originally?

01-00:13:56

Lyon: Oh, no. I was the only one that was—no, two of them were from Colorado, Washington—no, they were—one was from Shasta County; that was the closest one. No, we were spread out.

01-00:14:18

Li: Do you think it helps, having lived in this county and lived in Orland, in terms of your work? Knowing people, or—

01-00:14:23

Lyon: Yes, it did. But, you know, you couldn't pretend you were something you weren't, because they knew who you were, you know. You couldn't act like you were an expert; you had to earn their respect.

01-00:14:38

Li: What was the most important part of your job, do you think? In terms of, like, what made you—what was an important characteristic, or a trait you had to have, to do your job well?

01-00:14:49

Lyon: A people person.

01-00:14:50

Li: A people person?

01-00:14:51

Lyon: Yes. And I was on a hiring committee for the university one time, hiring a university specialist who was going to do half-time farm adviser work out in the counties, and especially some half-time research at Davis. And I mentioned—they were listing all the traits we wanted to look for, and I says, “Well, we want to have a person who has people skills.” And one of the old professors looked at me and says, “What the hell are you talking about, people skills?”

01-00:15:15

Li:

01-00:15:16

Lyon: You know? I said, “Well, if you don’t know, I can’t explain it.” But anyway, that is the most important issue. If people don’t like you, they’re not going to call you out, you know. Because they don’t have to have you.

01-00:15:31

Li: Right.

01-00:15:32

Lyon: Yes.

01-00:15:34

Li: So would they call you if they had a problem that they wanted advising on? Is that what—

01-00:15:36

Lyon: Yes—oh, right. The way that it worked, mainly, was that the farmer would call you on a problem, whether it was an insect problem or a mastitis problem in dairy cattle or whatever. And then you would go out to that person and try to figure out what was wrong. And if you weren’t sure, then you would call in a specialist in that area, in entomology or something, and work with them. And so we took the problems of the farmers through us to the university and then back to them. Then we put on lots of training meetings, you know, for all kinds of farm problems that they had.

01-00:16:19

Li: Okay. So when the specialists would come out, did you usually feel like you needed to go with him or her to the farm to—?

01-00:16:25

Lyon: Yes. Oh, yes. Right.

01-00:16:24

Li: To translate a little bit, or kind of—

- 01-00:16:27  
Lyon: Yes. You would always go with the specialists. And that's where I got trained, really. The specialists were really great about bringing you up to date and explaining—
- 01-00:16:41  
Li: So you would get something out of their visit as well.
- 01-00:16:42  
Lyon: Oh, yes, right. Yes, right.
- 01-00:16:45  
Li: Do you remember a specific problem that was fairly common that you worked on with farmers or renters?
- 01-00:16:50  
Lyon: Well, one of the biggest ones that I had was mastitis in dairy cattle. And so we had the university veterinary extension—veterinary specialists—quite a bit in the county. I can remember one time we had a meeting, and a lot of these guys only milked ten or twenty cows at that time. Now they have hundreds, you know, on one dairy. But anyway, we had just me, and the little farmer there raised his hand, and he said “You don't have to tell me about how to not have mastitis and to take care of it, because I've been milking for forty years.” And I remember it made the veterinarian a little upset. And he looked at him and he said, “Maybe you've only had one year's experience repeated forty times.”
- 01-00:17:40  
Li:
- 01-00:17:44  
Lyon: So that was a big problem. And then a lot of insect problems on alfalfa and that type of thing.
- 01-00:17:50  
Li: Okay. And would they ever come to you with marketing problems, or concerns about marketing, or—?
- 01-00:17:54  
Lyon: No. If they did, we went through our farm management marketing specialist. Because that wasn't a major thing that farmers had concerns about, because they already belonged to a milk co-op or shipped to a certain deal, so.
- 01-00:18:19  
Li: Right. And so do you feel like—was Extension a pretty integral part of the community, then?
- 01-00:18:28  
Lyon: Oh, Yes.
- 01-00:18:30  
Li: Yes.

01-00:18:31

Lyon:

Well, what had happened in this county—the Extension came in in the late teens, when Mr. Crocheron started the Extension. And then in the twenties—'29 and in there, we had—apparently there was a farm adviser that was kind of arrogant and that type of thing. So the Board of Supervisors kicked them out. Kicked out the Extension service. And so then in the thirties—no, I guess about 1939 or '40, they voted it back in. And we were the only extension county service that was actually voted in by the people. The rest were brought in by boarding supervisors.

01-00:19:25

Li:

Right.

01-00:19:25

Lyon:

But the first time we were brought in by them; the second time, we were voted in. So when all our voting problems came during the Reagan years and in there, our Board of Supervisors would cut other departments. And we took less severe cuts. We took cuts, but we took less severe cuts, because people were really supportive.

01-00:19:51

Li:

Oh, that's great. And was 4-H an important part of that?

01-00:19:58

Lyon:

Oh, Yes. Right. Yes.

01-00:20:02

Li:

About how many—like, what percentage of the students would participate, do you think?

01-00:20:05

Lyon:

Well, about—on grammar school age, you know, fourth grade up, in this county—I also did Colusa County 4-H. But anyway, in both counties, we were very similar. About forty percent of the elementary kids—maybe more than that; maybe fifty percent of them, at some time, were in 4-H in the county.

01-00:20:30

Li:

Hmm. Wow.

01-00:20:31

Lyon:

And then the high school—probably about 30 percent were. So—And then in some areas, it was higher than that.

01-00:20:47

Li:

So at that time, did it seem like most of the kids around here anticipated being in agriculture when they got older?

01-00:20:51

Lyon:

No—a lot of them wanted to leave.



01-00:20:53

Li: Really?

01-00:20:55

Lyon: No. But 4-H offered leadership training.

01-00:21:00

Li: Mm. Yes.

01-00:21:01

Lyon: You know, learning how to get a demonstration, how to do public speaking; that sort of—committees, and all that sort of thing. Now that I had 4-H that were, like, two were sheriffs and four were—

01-00:21:13

Li: Oh, really?

01-00:21:14

Lyon: —4-H members. Members of the Board of Supervisors. So the ones that stay—but a lot of them left. They had to. The little farms couldn't support them.

01-00:21:25

Li: Yes. So looking back chronologically, what were some of the jobs that you held for the time that you started with Extension, three years—?

01-00:21:38

Lyon: Well, I started out doing the dairy and forage crops and 4-H, and then in about 1965, they asked me to do the 4-H also in Colusa County. And I could have stayed on with the dairy and stuff, but I enjoyed the 4-H more, so I took that. So I did that, planned the inclusive 4-H up until about 1979, and then I became the county director here, and did 4-H and county director. And then the last four years, I also became the county director in Shasta County, Trinity County, Tehama County, and Glenn County.

01-00:22:22

Li: Wow.

01-00:22:27

Lyon: So I did that full-time. I didn't do 4-H anymore. And it was— it was—I had the ability to work with {inaudible} supervisors, and most counties were trying to eliminate Extension totally from their budgets, because they were so—And I was able to keep those counties afloat, with budget support from their boards of supervisors and such.

01-00:22:51

Li: And what years were that, that they were—

01-00:22:55

Lyon: That was from about '90 to '92—the end of '94.

- 01-00:23:01  
Li: And then you retired in '94? Is that—
- 01-00:23:03  
Lyon: Yes, in December of '94. I did come back on some special projects for the University.
- 01-00:23:13  
Li: Okay. So between 1965 and 1979, the students participating in 4-H must have changed a little bit, right?
- 01-00:23:22  
Lyon: The type of students?
- 01-00:23:23  
Li: Type of students. Or were they—?
- 01-00:23:24  
Lyon: Not tremendously, really. We added new kinds of projects—for instance, years ago, when I first came in, you couldn't have a horse project, because that wasn't real agriculture.
- 01-00:23:35  
Li: Oh, really?
- 01-00:23:36  
Lyon: That changed. And then I went into a lot more activities and things for kids that live in town.
- 01-00:23:43  
Li: Okay. What kinds of things would you have for kids who live in towns?
- 01-00:23:50  
Lyon: Well, in the home economics, of course, the normal sewing and cooking and that thing. But we had electricity, woodworking—those kinds of projects for kids. But still, most kids wanted to have animals.
- 01-00:24:04  
Li: Yes.
- 01-00:24:05  
Lyon: You know? And so they'd have them at an aunt's and uncle's place, or—
- 01-00:24:07  
Li: Yes.
- 01-00:24:11  
Lyon: At the fairgrounds, or something.
- 01-00:24:13  
Li: Did the population change much in the area?

01-00:24:15

Lyon:

It didn't grow—this county is now—it's only been the last, since I retired in the last fourteen years, that the population's really started to grow. At that time it was pretty static. The growth has come from the Hispanics. Now probably in our schools—I served on probably quite a few school boards and stuff during that time. And now our schools are probably thirty—depending on the school, from thirty to forty percent Hispanic. Where it used to be that I knew every Hispanic family, because there was only five or six. But now it's a major contribution to the populations.

01-00:25:06

Li:

Was it important to be bilingual at all, for any of this work?

01-00:25:08

Lyon:

Not then.

01-00:25:09

Li:

No?

01-00:25:09

Lyon:

But it is now.

01-00:25:10

Li:

Yes.

01-00:25:11

Lyon:

Yes. Oh, Yes. It is now. But, you know, the kids can all speak English pretty well.

01-00:25:16

Li:

Right.

01-00:25:17

Li:

It's the parents that have—but now, a lot of the Mexicans in this area are second- and third-generation, too, plus the news ones that are coming in.

01-00:25:29

Li:

Right, right.

01-00:25:31

Lyon:

So a lot of the parents are graduates of the local schools.

01-00:25:35

Li:

And do you feel like people are involved in the Extension to the same extent whether they're Hispanic or non-Hispanic?

01-00:25:40

Lyon:

Do they do what, now?

01-00:25:43

Li:

Do they contact Extension and use the services in the same way?

01-00:25:46  
Lyon: No, not as much.

01-00:25:46  
Li: Yes.

01-00:25:48  
Lyon: Hispanics—it's foreign to them.

01-00:25:50  
Li: Right.

01-00:25:51  
Lyon: Especially if they've only been here, you know—The ones that are farmers and established and stuff, they do.

01-00:25:57  
Li: Did you do any outreach at all with them?

01-00:25:59  
Lyon: Oh, a lot of it.

01-00:26:00  
Li: Yes?

01-00:26:01  
Lyon: In fact, I received several affirmative action awards because of the work—I had a real active 4-H club at the Grindstone Indian Reservation, which I eventually integrated into the club that was out in the hills at that time, and did away with the Grindstone one. And the Indian kids ended up being the president and secretary of the mixed club.

01-00:26:27  
Li: Wow.

01-00:26:28  
Lyon: But, Yes—

01-00:26:29  
Li: That must have been kind of unusual at that time.

01-00:26:31  
Lyon: Oh, Yes. Yes, Yes. There were a lot of our old leaders that resented—they didn't like the idea of being told “you've got to go out and try to get minority kids in your clubs.”

01-00:26:42  
Li: Right.

01-00:26:44  
Lyon: “Well, they're welcome, but they've got to come to us,” was the attitude.

- 01-00:26:49  
Li: Right.
- 01-00:26:50  
Lyon: But the younger ones weren't—the younger parents and stuff were more open to that.
- 01-00:26:55  
Li: So was that, like, 1965? That you had to start—you were directed to—
- 01-00:27:01  
Lyon: Well, I started before that.
- 01-00:27:04  
Li: Yes.
- 01-00:27:05  
Lyon: They were all kids, and—
- 01-00:27:08  
Li: Right—you just wanted the people involved.
- 01-00:27:09  
Lyon: Yes, right. But there was a big push by the university at that time.
- 01-00:27:16  
Li: So what was your average day like as a 4-H director? What kinds of things would you be doing?
- 01-00:27:20  
Lyon: As the 4-H adviser?
- 01-00:27:21  
Li: Yes.
- 01-00:27:23  
Lyon: Well, it was working with 4-H parent committees, planning events, doing—getting ready for activities, putting on training meetings—we had— See, the training meetings mostly had to be at night, because the kids and parents were at school during the day. But during the day, you would prepare for it.
- 01-00:27:53  
Li: And have the kinds of things that kids want to do in 4-H changed? Do they change much?
- 01-00:28:03  
Lyon: I don't—I think in rural areas, I don't think it has changed much. In the urban areas, it has to be different, because they don't have the opportunities to do that. But in the rural areas, we judge—My wife and I judge at a lot of county fairs, so we go around, and the kids look exactly—not just their dress but their actions—they're exactly what they looked like thirty and forty years ago.

01-00:28:28

Li: The same things that you used to do when you were a kid.

01-00:28:30

Lyon: Yes, the same things. You can listen to them talking, and they're talking the same stuff. Now, I'm talking about rural kids. No, they haven't—It's really unusual, how it's the exact same things. You could come back after—and you'd fit right in, you know.

01-00:28:53

Li: That's amazing. So, a big phrase that you hear with Extension is "Take it to the people."

01-00:28:57

Lyon: Yes, that's right.

01-00:28:58

Li: Or taking it out?

01-00:28:59

Lyon: Yes, that's right. "See the people."

01-00:29:02

Li: Yes. So what does that mean to you? What does it—

01-00:29:05

Lyon: That means literally that. It's that you go out where they are, and when you do that, when you go out where they are, then they feel comfortable coming and calling on you. But—no. It's the way the Extension has been successful.

01-00:29:26

Li: Yes.

01-00:29:28

Lyon: And that's the big thing that I see that's different now, that there's a lot of advisers that want to sit in the office and do a research project, and the university wants them to, and the people resent that.

01-00:29:46

Li: Right. Because you were out of the office every day.

01-00:29:47

Lyon: Oh, Yes, right, right. Right. But it wasn't just me. All the advisers did that, overall. Yes, no, we were really overworked, but we enjoyed what we were doing, and we just thought that's the way life is. We didn't think about the union, or saying we needed to get a day off, or—you know.

01-00:30:13

Li: What drove you to work that hard? Like, what kinds of—

01-00:30:17

Lyon:

Because you enjoyed doing it. You enjoyed working with people. That's why I say the biggest thing you have to have is people skills. And if you don't enjoy working with people—and there were ones that didn't enjoy it, and they were miserable. I'm not just talking in my county, because we knew everybody in the whole of Northern California that's licensed. And there were a few of them that were just miserable because people didn't like them, because of their characteristics—being know-it-alls, or—

01-00:30:50

Li:

Right. Yes. So it must have been tricky, bridging that gap between the university, then, and the—

01-00:30:57

Lyon:

Right.

01-00:30:57

Li:

The farmers and the ranchers.

01-00:30:58

Lyon:

Right, right. But this—the far majority of the farm advisers were people skills. A majority of the specialists that you called out had great people skills.

01-00:31:11

Li:

Oh, they did too?

01-00:31:12

Lyon:

Oh, Yes.

01-00:31:13

Li:

Yes.

01-00:31:14

Lyon:

Because that's what they did in their full-time. Now they have to spend a lot of time on research, so you get a kind of a different kind of a person. They're very uncomfortable now with some old farmer. But in the old days, you know, the specialists fit in. They were well-trained, knowledgeable people, but they could work the language of the farmers.

01-00:31:37

Li:

So do you think the focus of Extension has changed? They're asking different things of the specialists?

01-00:31:40

Lyon:

Yes, I think it has, from the standpoint that if you want to get a raise nowadays, you have to do research. The farm adviser has to do research. And when Crocheron first set up the Extension, the farm adviser was out there to serve the people. It was to take the training and information from the university out to the people, and not let it set down there and not being used—the research information. But now they have to do that.

But Yes. It's changed. You just—we used to—the newspapers would be full of Extension stories. Every edition. And now I hardly ever see an article, because that isn't important. No, you get—well, not only me, but you get so well-known that—I was elected to the school board, locally, to the chairman of the county board of education, to the college board, and chairman of the fair board—because they respect you and like you. They don't care, really, how smart you are. It's whether you get them the information some way, whether you get a specialist out there or what.

01-00:33:07

Li: So do you think farmers are less likely to call Extension now when they have a problem, or if they—?

01-00:33:14

Lyon: They're less likely. Because they're bigger farms, and they have all these special—they have all these chemical dealers, pesticide dealers, all those guys bringing them information.

01-00:33:27

Li: Okay. So the commercial arena is kind of taking—

01-00:33:31

Lyon: Yes, are serving—we get some. They still call them the offices, I think, but not like they used to be.

01-00:33:41

Li: Do you think that changes the nature of farming, when it's commercial interests that are providing the education or information, versus another person?

01-00:33:50

Lyon: Yes, probably. Those guys are sharp, too.

01-00:33:56

Li: Right. Yes.

01-00:34:00

Lyon: So it really puts an onus on the farm adviser to be more active and more knowledgeable and smarter and see the people, or they won't know you.

01-00:34:16

Li: Right. So he has to make more of an effort than previously. Right.

So who did you work most closely with, then, as a 4-H adviser? Was it the parents that you were—?

01-00:34:24

Lyon: The parents.

01-00:34:25

Li: That was the most important?



01-00:34:28

Lyon: That was the parents. Yes. Parents were the most important.

01-00:34:32

Li: And what was the organizational structure like at that time? Did you report to somebody? Was it somebody else in the county?

01-00:34:37

Lyon: Well, there was the county director, and he was your boss. He was also a farm adviser of some sort; it was different. In his county. But then you had 4-H specialists, we called them. There was a county director and there was a regional director. And the regional director, in those days, just decided whether you got a raise or not. Him and the county director. And they would come around quite often. That has changed; it even changed when I was there. They now have peer review committees and all this kind of stuff. But in the old days, the old regional director did it. And you mentioned George Rendell; you had visited with him. At the time I retired, George and I were probably the top two or three in the salary schedule steps in the whole Extension service. And I never left Orland, other than taking on the other counties—you know what I mean? And George started out in 4-H. And then he became a regional director. I was acting regional director one time, but I didn't want to move, you know.

01-00:36:08

Li: Would you have had to move to Davis, or Sacramento, or—?

01-00:36:14

Lyon: Yes. Davis.

01-00:36:14

Li: So in 1979, you became county director of Orland County?

01-00:36:21

Lyon: No, just Glenn County.

01-00:36:21

Li: Just Glenn County. Okay.

01-00:36:22

Lyon: But I still continued 4-H advisory in Colusa and Glenn Counties.

01-00:36:26

Li: —and Glenn County. Both.

01-00:36:29

Lyon: Both, Yes.

01-00:36:30

Li: Both. And so how did it feel taking over as county director? Did you feel like it was a lot more responsibility? Did you feel—

- 01-00:  
Lyon: A lot more paperwork. Because you had all the reports to do, all the affirmative action reports, and the red tape was just—and I tried to do as much of this to protect the farm advisers—they must have spent a lot of time doing it. But Yes. There was—When I first came into Extension, all of us had to write weekly reports and send them to the regional director. And I mean weekly. We had to write down all the names of the farmers we'd talked to, or 4-H leaders, all the meetings we'd held. We had to do that weekly. And then every month we had to do a big report. So we sent a lot of reports in, but it was just to the regional director. But later on we had all kinds of university people needing information.
- 01-00:37:33  
Li: Was that universal across Extension, that people had to do those reports? Or was it just—
- 01-00:37:38  
Lyon: Yes.
- 01-00:37:38  
Li: Wow.
- 01-00:37:41  
Lyon: Oh, yes. Right. Yes.
- 01-00:37:44  
Li: So they kept a running tally, then, of what farmers had received services from Extension and what they could—
- 01-00:37:47  
Lyon: Yes, right. Right, Yes. And the home adviser—when I first come into the Extension, every county had a 4-H man, part-time at least, and a woman.
- 01-00:38:00  
Li: Okay.
- 01-00:38:01  
Lyon: The home adviser did part-time 4-H and part-time home economics And now there's not very many. In all of Northern California, there may be only four or five academics totally doing 4-H.
- 01-00:38:16  
Li: Wow. And so what were the responsibilities of the male 4-H adviser versus the female 4-H adviser?
- 01-00:38:25  
Lyon: Well, no female ever became a county director in those days.
- 01-00:38:27  
Li: Yes.

01-00:38:30  
Lyon: And no female ever became a farm adviser. Even if they were trained in it. I remember a couple tried to get to be farm advisers. They could be 4-H advisers or home advisers, but that was it.

01-00:38:43  
Li: Wow.

01-00:38:44  
Lyon: And there were no—in the whole state, there were no women county directors. And I remember the first few women that became county directors; the old boys would sit around, you know, [break in tape]. Well, our salaries were all paid from the university.

01-00:39:02  
Li: Right.

01-00:39:03  
Lyon: But everything else—cars, telephones, buildings, all—

01-00:39:07  
Li: Wow.

01-00:39:08  
Lyon: —gifts from the county to board supervisors.

01-00:39:14  
Li: Oh, wow. So that must have been a difficult and challenging job.

01-00:39:18  
Lyon: Especially when we had all the budget deals, you know?

01-00:39:20  
Li: When was that?

01-00:39:21  
Lyon: Well, it's still going on. It's still cutting out. But the big deal came at the time—I can't remember when Reagan became governor, but at that time, he was very anti-university and –education. So there were budget cuts, so the university took big budget cuts. But the counties were just devastated, a lot of them.

01-00:39:42  
Li: So where did they find the money to continue to support Extension?

01-00:39:50  
Lyon: Well, they just—You know, it depended. That was my job at the four counties, was working with those boards of supervisors—

01-00:40:00  
Li: Yes.

01-00:40:01

Lyon: —so they wouldn't eliminate us. And we had to use a lot of politics and a lot of threats, you know. And from the 4-H leaders and the farmers—And like one old farmer said to me, he said—he was a big farmer, he said, “Ray, how in the hell am I going to tell them they should put money in Extension when I think we also need a sheriff?”

01-00:40:25

Li: Right. Those were the kind of choices they had to make.

01-00:40:27

Lyon: Yes. He says—“But I'll tell you how I can do it.” He says, “I can be—well, I can't go out and say to the board of supervisors that they need to put money in the farm advisers, but I sure in hell can do it for 4-H, for the kids.”

01-00:40:43

Li: Right.

01-00:40:44

Lyon: And 4-H really, in this northern part of the state, really saved the budgets. Because you don't want to get mothers mad going to board meetings.

01-00:40:57

Li: Right.

01-00:40:59

Lyon: Because they stay mad, you know? Some old farmer might go in there and get mad and he'd say, “Well, that's all I can do,” and go home and forget about it. But the women don't. Yes.

01-00:41:08

Li: So 4-H was a really important part of your keeping that—

01-00:41:11

Lyon: Oh, politically it was, too. Yes.

01-00:41:12

Li: Yes. Wow. Could you do fundraisers for 4-H, or would you—?

01-00:41:17

Lyon: Yes. I started—well, for the whole Extension, I started a deal where—because we needed money, the county did have to cut it. So what we did was, we made up a list of about two hundred people in the county and sent them a letter saying, “Would you donate some money to us?”

01-00:41:41

Li: Yes.

01-00:41:43

Lyon: And it was surprising. Everybody thought it was crazy. Because they said, “If you do that, they donate money to you, then the board's going to say, ‘well,

hell, why should we do it, if you can get it?" And my theory was that the board—because I'd sat on boards. And if the board—not on board supervisors, school boards, but if people say "I'm giving money to Extension," then that same person is going to get really mad if the county cuts them, you know?

01-00:42:13

Li: Right.

01-00:42:15

Lyon: So the first year we sent it out, and we also said "If you can't donate any money, that's fine." We didn't say how much or anything. That first time, we got over twenty thousand dollars.

01-00:42:26

Li: Wow.

01-00:42:28

Lyon: And now they still do it. And then the other counties—I had to go to Trinity and those counties. They've done it now in several other counties. They did it.

01-00:42:36

Li: Right.

01-00:42:37

Lyon: But they still get quite a bit of money. Maybe a lot more than that now. But—

01-00:42:41

Li: Wow.

01-00:42:42

Lyon: It really saved them. We could—oh, I know what happened. We put that in the special account, and did supplemental deals. Like, sometimes they made the expenses for the office out of it. But now the university has taken it. And if you raise any money like that, they decide what it does.

01-00:43:02

Li: Right. Right. Are people less likely to give, then—?

01-00:43:06

Lyon: Oh, less likely to give, Yes.

01-00:43:08

Li: So it seems like you would have had to understand local politics pretty well.

01-00:43:11

Lyon: Oh—the administrator did, Yes.

01-00:43:14

Li: And as county director—?

01-00:43:13

Lyon: County director had to understand.

01-00:43:17

Li: So was it difficult when you went to go work in these other counties that you maybe weren't as familiar with? To—

01-00:43:24

Lyon: Yes. Well, no, because you use the same techniques. You know, you'd go to the board, and you don't dictate to them. And you talk to them individually, too. And what I found really helps is if you understand their problems. And I used to go to all of the Northern California Supervisors' Association meetings with them, where they'd meet for two or three days. And I would go to their meetings, and get a chance at evenings to talk with them and stuff. And I never talked about my problems; I always talked about their problems. And then they were really supportive. Because most people wanted to bitch at them. You know?

01-00:44:07

Li: Yes.

01-00:44:10

Lyon: So, Yes. It's—So I did that same technique in all the counties.

01-00:44:13

Li: Right—so you could understand better what were the challenges they were facing, and—

01-00:44:16

Lyon: That's right.

01-00:44:21

Li: So what was your relationship to the university, then, as county director?

01-00:44:27

Lyon: Mainly reporting to, you know. They did a lot of good training meetings for administrators.

01-00:44:37

Li: What kinds of things would they train you in?

01-00:44:38

Lyon: Oh, affirmative action, anything new that was coming out, they would put on training meetings and—

01-00:44:54

Li: Would you meet regularly with the specialists and the farm advisers in your area? As a kind of—

01-00:44:58

Lyon: What?

01-00:44:59

Li: Would you meet regularly, with the specialists or—

- 01-00:45:01  
Lyon: Specialists? No.
- 01-00:45:02  
Li: No?
- 01-00:45:03  
Lyon: Only when you needed them. Because they had to cover the whole state. But they were good, boy. If I called them and I says, "We got an insect eating up the alfalfa," boy, they'd be up there the next day.
- 01-00:45:20  
Li: But the farm advisers you would meet with pretty regularly?
- 01-00:45:23  
Lyon: Oh, Yes. You held—Your own staff met once a week. But then you'd divide up into sections and regions, and we'd get together maybe twice a year with everybody.
- 01-00:45:39  
Li: Okay. What was the region around here? What was the—?
- 01-00:45:42  
Lyon: Northern. The northern region.
- 01-00:45:44  
Li: Okay. The northern region.
- 01-00:45:45  
Lyon: It was everything from Yolo County across through Lake and Mendocino County North.
- 01-00:45:55  
Li: Okay. So not Napa, Sonoma—?
- 01-00:45:57  
Lyon: No. They were central. But now it's changed. They still have the divisions, but the map's different.
- 01-00:46:10  
Li: Yes. While you were county director, was land use an important issue in this county?
- 01-00:46:14  
Lyon: Oh, Yes. Right. Not as much here as other places, because—Butte County was even more, because the city of Chico was encroaching on agricultural land. Where here, the cities were isolated boroughs surrounded by rice fields. There are some land-use deals now, but not much. There wasn't much with the extension.
- 01-00:46:43  
Li: Was water important? An important issue?

01-00:46:44

Lyon:

Water is, Yes. It's always been important. We developed several water district's irrigation systems; that's why on the whole that—you see all the almond trees—those are our some of the water district. There are several districts that have been developed. So—Yes.

01-00:47:03

Li:

And where would you get funding to develop those water districts?

01-00:47:09

Lyon:

Well, we didn't develop those. The farmers did that. We just would call in specialists, maybe, to help them design the irrigation systems, or how to best use it, what to plant, that type of thing.

01-00:47:26

Li:

Right, right. [pause] Did you have to deal much with state politics as county director? Was that an issue?

01-00:47:38

Lyon:

No.

01-00:47:39

Li:

Just local county?

01-00:47:40

Lyon:

It was mainly local. Yes, right. Yes. But I had the freedom—I had always been active in politics. And there were very few of us that would even run for school boards and stuff. But I've always been active, and I said—this county is very Republican. And I used to go to {inaudible}, and they said they were integrated because Ray was here and he was a Democrat. But as long as you don't get mad, you know, you can get by.

01-00:48:20

Li:

So that wasn't a challenge at all—being a lone Democrat in a sea of Republicans?

01-00:48:22

Lyon:

It didn't hurt us. But, you know, I just enjoyed doing that, and I enjoyed giving some of them a bad time. They gave me a bad time. But I didn't—like, I know the present county director doesn't even want anybody to know what he is. But I probably was kind of dumb in that way. But I enjoyed it, Yes.

01-00:48:51

Li:

Well, again, it seems like, being a people person—it matters more how you handle it than what you are.

01-00:48:58

Lyon:

That's right. That's right. You don't ever want to be a know-it-all, you know? Right? I remember one time I was talking to a guy when Nixon was running, and he was a Republican. And I said, "Well, why don't you and I—I'll run for President and you run for Vice-President?" And about five minutes later he



said, "Hey, Ray, you know if we got elected what I'd do?" And I said, "What?" And he said, "I'd kill you."

01-00:49:24

Li:

01-00:49:27

Lyon:

But, Yes, we had those kinds of relationships.

01-00:49:29

Li:

Yes. So some of these farmers you must have known a long time over the course of your work with Extension.

01-00:49:32

Lyon:

Yes, right.

01-00:49:34

Li:

So you had long-standing relationships with some of the farmers.

01-00:49:40

Lyon:

Right. But a lot of them that I started with now are passed away. It's their kids and grandkids—but their kids—if I look down the list of the board of directors of the Farm Bureau, 70 percent of them are kids that I had in 4-H. That are farmers now.

01-00:49:56

Li:

Wow. So is 4-H still an important part of the community here?

01-00:50:01

Lyon:

Oh, I think so. Yes.

01-00:50:09

Li:

Do you think its role has changed?

01-00:50:11

Lyon:

The role?

01-00:50:10

Li:

The role of 4-H—or is it still the same?

01-00:50:13

Lyon:

You know, we're not common. These real rural counties, it's pretty much the same. But I know that in bigger counties and more metropolitan areas, it's really changed, Yes.

01-00:50:24

Li:

And what's the most important aspect of 4-H? What do you think its most important lesson is that it teaches?

01-00:50:35

Lyon:

I think that it's learning leadership in the broad sense, whether it's learning how to talk, how to work together, how to serve on committees, community

service—it's those kinds of things. The project is just the means to get to those things, I think. Because I know that every kid that has a sheep project probably isn't going to end up being a sheep farmer.

01-00:50:57

Li: Right.

01-00:50:59

Lyon: But if he has the right tools, he could end up—and they have. Being anything. And one kid has a doctor's degree and owns his own biochemistry company in Texas. But those skills are what they really take with them.

01-00:51:26

Li: Do you think that was true for you, with 4-H?

01-00:51:29

Lyon: Yes. Yes, sure. Oh, Yes. I learned a lot of that. Yes, we had a 4-H leader that when I was a little kid, ten or eleven, she'd go to all of the meetings and sit there, but we ran it. And I was telling my wife the other day—you know, this was in the forties, during the war—we didn't have a movie theater in the county. We had one in Lakeport—in the whole county. So we would borrow a projector from school, rent movies from some company, and then sell tickets for twenty-five cents or ten cents and ride bicycles all over the area selling tickets. And sometimes 200 people would come out. Because there was nothing else—there were no televisions. So we did it all ourselves. We had to put up the chairs, clean it up.

01-00:52:20

Li: Right. And also put yourself out in the community—go out and meet people and hit the road and—

01-00:52:22

Lyon: Yes, right. That's right.

01-00:52:23

Li: Those are similar to the skills that you would then use later as farm advisers.

01-00:52:29

Lyon: Yes. Never thought about that.

01-00:52:31

Li: Yes.

01-00:52:33

Lyon: Oh, right. Right.

01-00:52:38

Li: That's amazing. And so you feel—you were saying earlier that you feel like the people who participate in 4-H, the kids, are pretty much the same?

01-00:52:48

Lyon:

Yes. I really don't think kids—kids don't change. When they get older they change, but kids don't change. I think they were probably the same in the Roman days as anybody else. Kids are kids, you know? They like to be active, like to do things. They want to have fun. The one thing that my wife and I did is that every two years we took high school kids from Orland, 4-H from Orland, and that includes the counties, on a trip across the country. And they visited—we'd be gone for months. We visited every state, you know, Mexico City—

01-00:52:53:28

Li:

Wow.

01-00:53:29

Lyon:

All of Canada, Alaska, Hawaii—

01-00:53:33

Li:

Wow. You'd take all the 4-H kids on this—?

01-00:53:37

Lyon:

Yes. We'd take 4-H kids. And each kid had to pay their own way. We didn't have any fundraising.

01-00:53:43

Li:

Oh, wow.

01-00:53:41

Lyon:

They had two years to raise the money. And we stayed in motels and then we'd visit with families at our destination, like in Illinois or Florida or something. But I see those—they've all got kids of their own now, and they say, "If you hadn't had that deal, we wouldn't have gotten anyplace." You know? But it was flattering. And what we would do is—we had five kids, and they had to be in high school, so we just borrowed money and paid it off for two years and we were ready to go again. And then the kids would pay in, like, twenty dollars a month for two years, and—

01-00:54:20

Li:

So every two years you would do this trip?

01-00:54:22

Lyon:

Every two years.

01-00:54:23

Li:

When was that, that you started doing this?

01-00:54:25

Lyon:

We started that in the late sixties. And the real thing you have over the kids in terms of their behaving—and I'm not saying that they didn't behave, but—it was that you knew their parents.

01-00:54:43

Li: Right.

01-00:54:49

Lyon: And I took vacation time to do it. And so I would tell the parents of the kids at our training, you know, "You're not going to ruin my vacation, you know? If your kid acts up or has a bad mouth, I'm putting them on a plane and flying them home and you're going to pay me for it." You know?

01-00:55:01

Li: So how many kids would you take on these trips, usually?

01-00:55:02

Lyon: We'd take forty, usually.

01-00:55:03

Li: Wow.

01-00:55:04

Lyon: A Greyhound bus would hold forty-three. It was usually three adults, my wife and I and then one other person.

01-00:55:11

Li: And you would take the Greyhound bus all over Mexico, Alaska—all over?

01-00:55:13

Lyon: Yes—no. No, we took ships to Alaska, and then went up to White Horse on that little train and all of that stuff. We'd cross Canada, Yes. And in Mexico, we were on—not Greyhound, but Mexican buses.

01-00:55:32

Li: Yes. And how would you plan your itinerary? What kinds of things were you looking to—?

01-00:55:33

Lyon: I planned it all, and I made a little book. I've got all the deals—it gave the itinerary. It even gave—I had all the motels lined up. So it even told them what room—not the number of the room, but who was rooming with whom. And then they'd just write the number of the room in when we got to that place. And—no, and then I would contact the farm advisers, the 4-H advisers, in those counties where we stayed all night. And then often they would come out and have a picnic with us, and these sorts of things. We met people all across the United States. It was great.

01-00:56:09

Li: What kinds of things would you be showing the kids? Like, what did you want to expose them to with this travel? What kinds of things were you looking for?

01-00:56:17

Lyon:

Just the world out there. The deal of being in all parts of North America. These were rural kids, you know? We went to—two or three times we were in Washington, D.C. during the Fourth of July, with some fireworks and all that stuff. We visited Williamsburg, Mount Vernon, and then in Canada—they went for hay rides in Vermont.

01-00:56:48

Li:

Oh, wow.

01-00:56:47

Lyon:

Yes. Yes, we had a lot. And we had specific rules: one is a boy is never to go in a girl's room or vice versa. Even if the girl's washed your shirt for you, you don't—you've got no excuse.

01-00:57:02

Li:

Yes.

01-00:57:05

Lyon:

You get caught, you go home. It was black and white. I didn't want to spend any time arguing with them.

01-00:57:09

Li:

Yes, it seems like you'd have to be that way with forty kids. You're outnumbered.

01-00:57:14

Lyon:

Yes, right. But again, I knew all their parents. And we had poor kids—a lot of poor kids that went. And I would tell their parents—these were high school kids—"You need to decide whether you're going to help them buy a car. Well, is a car more important than going on a trip like this? So you've got to decide what—" And those kids—we had Mexican kids, little Mexican kids; one of them really helped us out. Now she's a big deal in Colusa County. With—the bus driver didn't speak English.

01-00:57:49

Li:

Oh, really?

01-00:57:51

Lyon:

So when we went to Mexico City, she was our interpreter. Plus, a kid from Grimes who also spoke Spanish—a white kid. He spoke it really great. So afterwards, I said, "How did you ever learn it? I never knew anybody in high school that learned Spanish." And he said, "Well, my mother worked, and a Spanish lady babysat us."

01-00:58:15

Li:

He learned at home.

01-00:58:16

Lyon:

Yes.

01-00:58:17

Li: You know what, let me just pause it for a minute.

[End Audio File 1]

[Begin Audio File 2 lyon—Raymond—2—08-18-08]

02-00:00:00

Li: This is Robin Li speaking with Raymond G. Lyon, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008, in—I forgot where we are.

02-00:00:11

Lyon: Orland.

02-00:00:13

Li: In Orland, California. This is tape number two. So how long would you travel for with the kids? How long would these trips—?

02-00:00:19

Lyon: It was usually done in a month. Four weeks.

02-00:00:25

Li: Wow. And so for a lot of these kids, it sounds like this was maybe their one opportunity to travel.

02-00:00:31

Lyon: Oh, right. That's what they tell me now. They've got kids in high school now, a lot of them. But no matter where I go, someone in this area comes up and says, "God, Ray, if you hadn't taken us on those trips—"

02-00:00:49

Li: What gave you the idea to do this?

02-00:00:51

Lyon: Well, in 4-H, they have an awards program. And if you're a state winner, you get a trip to Chicago—the convention. Well, we never had very many—we had two or three state winners, but that's pretty limiting. So I said, "Why don't we just do our own deal?" Why do you have to be a state winner to go? So that was—the idea came from that.

02-00:01:17

Li: So you would take a month of your own vacation to take the kids—

02-00:01:20

Lyon: I'd take my vacation, and—

02-00:01:20

Li: And how many years did you do this for?

02-00:01:25

Lyon: Oh, gosh. We must have made—Well, up through—from about, say, '70 through '88, so sixteen to eighteen trips.

- 02-00:01:39  
Li: Wow. So did you make friends that you would go back and visit again in different places?
- 02-00:01:42  
Lyon: No, we never went the same place, but we made friends and had contacts and stuff.
- 02-00:01:48  
Li: Yes. And what made you want to bring the kids to Mexico?
- 02-00:01:53  
Lyon: I just wanted them to see the other culture. My own son was going into the high school—he was going to be an eighth grader. And he comes to me one night and he says, “Dad, what if we get sick in Mexico?” I said, “Well, they have doctors.” He says, “There are Mexican doctors?” He just saw all field workers and stuff.
- 02-00:02:16  
Li: Right.
- 02-00:02:20  
Lyon: So it changed his whole concept.
- 02-00:02:21  
Li: Yes.
- 02-00:02:22  
Lyon: And I had a girl in Mexico City that had a bad tooth, and I had Montezuma’s Revenge; I was sick in the bed, and I said, “Well, you two girls who are partners with her, you take her to a dentist. You go down to the clerk {inaudible}.” “Well, I don’t know if we want to go to a Mexican dentist—” Well, anyway, I’ve seen her thirty years later, and she says, “Still got that tooth—”
- 02-00:02:48  
Li: Oh, that’s funny.
- 02-00:02:49  
Lyon: It was really important that—
- 02-00:02:53  
Li: Right. Well, for them to see that not every Mexican person works in a field.
- 02-00:02:57  
Lyon: And as soon as you get a hundred miles below the border, even the poor people who live in shacks sweep in front of their—Everything’s neat—there’s no trash along the roads. And they just—
- 02-00:03:09  
Li: So from between that to Washington D.C.—

02-00:03:11

Lyon: Yes.

02-00:03:12

Li: They saw a lot of different things than they see in this county.

02-00:03:14

Lyon: Oh, Yes. Right. Yes. Plus, Canada was—a couple of times we went clear across Canada. You know, we'd been on ferry boats out to Galveston and through locks and—They were things that they'd heard about and knew about, but they'd never experienced them. So they got to experience. And another thing that they tell me is when we watch the news at night, we watch the weather reports, and we'd been there and there, and it's—I never thought about that at the time, but it really opened up—they know there's a whole country out there.

02-00:04:01

Li: Yes—it brings a whole new meaning to the word “extension.”

02-00:04:03

Lyon: Yes, right. That's right.

02-00:04:05

Li: You brought the whole world. The whole country to these kids.

02-00:04:11

Lyon: Yes. We just never got to any other countries besides Mexico and Canada. But—And then another time we took and camped out was '80, parents and kids, in Yellowstone National Park.

02-00:04:24

Li: Oh, wow.

02-00:04:25

Lyon: And camped out. And we had gals—ladies who went and did the cooking, and—

02-00:04:29

Li: As part of a 4-H project? This was—

02-00:04:32

Lyon: Yes, it was a summer project. It was high school kids. That's why we had such a high percentage of high school kids in 4-H that stayed in.

02-00:04:04:43

Li: Because you had these kind of activities?

02-00:04:42

Lyon: We were doing things they liked to do, you know?



02-00:04:46

Li: Did you have to turn people away from the trip? I mean, it seems like it would be pretty popular.

02-00:04:50

Lyon: Yes—there was usually a waiting list, Yes. Oh, and a few had been turned away because they misbehaved here before we went. You know, have a party, get drunk someplace or something, and I hear about it, and—.

02-00:05:08

Li: Did any other counties do the same thing? Is—?

02-00:05:10

Lyon: Tehama County did once, I think. There were some counties that did it one or two times, I think. But I don't know if I'd do it now. You know, just thinking about the chance of a kid getting run over crossing the street, or hitting his head on the swimming pool, or—Yes. I could remember that on one trip, we were going down to—actually, we were going down to Mexico. And we stopped in Bakersfield at a motel, and it was really hot, and the swimming pool was there. And this old guy who always went with us, Tam Hull. He was an old dairyman, and he had—all his teeth were—He had no teeth. But he was great with kids. He was tough, you know. And so we got off, got a room, and was going to eat in the swimming pool—at the restaurant in the swimming pool. And Tam was sitting out there with—there was two black kids in the swimming pool, and their parents sitting alongside. And Tam was sitting out there with them. And then here comes our kids, about eight of them, in swimming suits, and they're just standing around the pool, and they're not getting in. And I remember Tam hollered at those kids, and he said "Get in that pool! That black doesn't come off." I got the heck out of there, you know? Because the parents are sitting there and everything. I came back out after we ate lunch, and oh, Tam and the parents were having a good time, and all the kids were swimming. Because they hadn't seen black kids. There were no black kids in the county.

02-00:06:43

Li: What year was this?

02-00:06:44

Lyon: Huh?

02-00:06:45

Li: What year was this?

02-00:06:48

Lyon: It was probably about '82.

02-00:06:51

Li: Wow.

02-00:06:52  
Lyon: Yes.

02-00:06:52  
Li: And they'd never seen black kids before.

02-00:06:56  
Lyon: Well, they'd seen them—

02-00:06:57  
Li: But not—

02-00:06:57  
Lyon: But none lived—they didn't live with them. No, but I couldn't believe that Tam would say that, but that's what he did. He was in New Orleans with us. We spent a couple, three days in New Orleans. He had a way with kids. They liked him, but boy, he told them. "Get in your room, get into bed," and they went. Yes.

02-00:07:26  
Li: That's amazing.

02-00:07:28  
Lyon: Yes. And he was like seventy-five then.

02-00:07:33  
Li: Wow. So it was pretty unusual for him to have that kind of attitude.

02-00:07:37  
Lyon: Oh, Yes, right. He was a very unusual person.

02-00:07:41  
Li: So it sounds like it was an important trip, you know, socially and culturally for these kids.

02-00:07:48  
Lyon: That—oh, yes. Because they they'd never seen—You know, they'd seen, but they'd never lived with—

02-00:07:57  
Li: In a diverse environment like that.

02-00:8:00  
Lyon: That's right.

02-00:08:01  
Li: Wow. That's amazing.

02-00:08:07  
Lyon: There's a million stories, but I won't—

- 02-00:08:08  
Li: Well, so, you say you didn't have any funding. So Extension didn't fund this trip at all?
- 02-00:08:12  
Lyon: Oh, no, no. I've thought about doing some stories like—in fact, I wrote one recently, but I haven't done anything with it. But to show what the costs were—like, so cheap now.
- 02-00:08:31  
Li: Really? Yes.
- 02-00:08:31  
Lyon: Like, a month's trip, staying in hotels, everything would be, like, \$600.
- 02-00:08:37  
Li: Really?
- 02-00:08:38  
Lyon: Yes.
- 02-00:08:39  
Li: Wow.
- 02-00:08:40  
Lyon: And the kids—their spending money—we estimated it to buy them food and stuff. We estimated how much it was, and then they'd pay in half of that—they'd give it to me, and then I would make traveler's checks out to them, and then when we got halfway through the trip, I would give them—
- 02-00:09:02  
Li: —the rest of their money.
- 02-00:09:05  
Lyon: —the other half. So the first time we went, some of them spent all their money in the first few days.
- 02-00:09:08  
Li: That must have been a lesson too, because they probably had never had that kind of money in their own pocket to—
- 02-00:09:14  
Lyon: No, and they had to learn to live on it, you know.
- 02-00:09:18  
Li: And you said it was arranged {inaudible} to participate kids who had low incomes, kids who weren't—
- 02-00:09:20  
Lyon: Oh, Yes, right, right. In fact, there's very few rich people in this county. And then, especially, it was true. So it was medium to low, really, most of them. And we didn't have any car washes, nothing like that. Because I didn't think

that was fair—if we tried to raise this money from our little communities, and when the other kids couldn't go, you know?

02-00:09:49

Li: Right. So these kids would have to get jobs and earn money on their own.

02-00:09:52

Lyon: They'd have to do their own, Yes.

02-00:09:55

Li: Wow. So when you started, were most of the kids' parents farmers with the 4-H? Were they—did they come from agriculture families?

02-00:10:03

Lyon: They come from small—I would say sixty percent of them probably lived on the farms. But the other forty percent lived in the towns.

02-00:10:17

Li: Okay. And was that ratio true when you started with 4-H and also when you ended? Was it about the same?

02-00:10:22

Lyon: Yes, probably the same.

02-00:10:23

Li: Probably about the same. So the farmers—did they stay about the same size, then?

02-00:10:29

Lyon: No, they were getting bigger and smaller.

02-00:10:30

Li: They're not staying the same. They're going one way or the other.

02-00:10:35

Lyon: Right. The twenty-acre guys sold ten acres off, and now there's two ten acres there or two fives and—Yes. And then the bigger places have bought land around them and gotten bigger.

02-00:10:50

Li: But the net amount of farmers—the number of farmers has stayed about the same? Just—

02-00:10:54

Lyon: No, it's probably way down.

02-00:10:57

Li: Way down?

- 02-00:10:59  
Lyon: Because these little—you don't call what we own—my wife and I own five acres, and I run a few sheep, and my daughter is a schoolteacher and she has another five. So that isn't a farm, you know?
- 02-00:11:16  
Li: Yes. What would you call that?
- 02-00:11:19  
Lyon: A hobby. Yes, no. You don't make enough money to pay the irrigation and buy the feed.
- 02-00:11:32  
Li: Yes. Do you think land use has become a bigger issue around here, then, in recent years?
- 02-00:11:36  
Lyon: It does once in awhile. It's because they've brought in a lot—in fact, I worked on that, economic development, at one time. At bringing in bigger dairies.
- 02-00:11:45  
Li: Oh, really?
- 02-00:11:47  
Lyon: Because they were getting run out of the metropolitan areas because of odors and whatnot. So now there's several—probably over a thousand cows.
- 02-00:11:58  
Li: Wow.
- 02-00:12:00  
Lyon: And so they have to have their sewer systems and manures management. So there are problems, but most farmers don't like it if somebody builds four, five houses out in the middle of some farm area. Because then when they spray their orchards or something with an airplane, they're going to think they're being poisoned, you know?
- 02-00:12:25  
Li: Right.
- 02-00:12:26  
Lyon: So there are those issues.
- 02-00:12:27  
Li: Those challenges. Yes. Well, and cows take a lot of water, right? Is that true?
- 02-00:12:32  
Lyon: Cows?
- 02-00:12:33  
Li: Like, having dairy ranches—?

- 02-00:12:35  
Lyon: They're all dry lot, mostly.
- 02-00:12:38  
Li: They're all dry lot? Okay.
- 02-00:12:39  
Lyon: Not all of them, but most of them are dry lots. Originally they were all un-irrigated pastures, but the big guys don't do that. They have their feed held in the green shop and—Yes, no, I don't think they take—We've got plenty—compared to other places, we have a lot of cheap water in this county, because of the dam.
- 02-00:13:03  
Li: Oh, right. Okay.
- 02-00:13:05  
Lyon: And the water, see? Okay, because we irrigate ten acres, and every two weeks, we put that much water on the ten acres. I mean, it's flooded. And it costs us less than six hundred dollars a year.
- 02-00:13:17  
Li: Oh, wow.
- 02-00:13:19  
Lyon: You know, so the water in the Orland irrigation district. Now, if you're pumping it, then it's—
- 02-00:13:25  
Li: {inaudible}?
- 02-00:13:24  
Lyon: But there's a lot of water under the ground here in this area.
- 02-00:13:33  
Li: So how would you define the role of Extension? What's its prime objective?
- 02-00:13:39  
Lyon: Well, the role of Extension was—and the purpose of Crocheron, the guy who started it all, was—at that time they had agricultural departments at Berkeley, right? And there they did all kinds of agricultural research and all this type of thing. But there was no method to getting it out to the farmers. So he decided that we'd have a staff in each county, and they would bring the problems to the university and the answers back to the people through the Extension service. And then they had the specialists in there, too, that could come out. So the purpose was to get research and solve agricultural problems—that was the purpose of the extension.
- 02-00:14:27  
Li: And do you feel like it was fairly successful, in that—?

02-00:14:28

Lyon: Oh, tremendously. California, you know, produces agriculturally [more] than most countries.

02-00:14:40

Li: And you think Extension has a role in that?

02-00:14:43

Lyon: Oh, Yes. And other states have Extension too. But yes. Oh, Yes. Yes. Right. For instance, on sunflowers—I didn't do the sunflower work, but originally, when Sailsbery did our sunflower work, it was new as a crop. But sunflowers get eight feet high. Well, how do you harvest them? You've got all this stalk and that little head up there. And the harvesters we had for grain and stuff were—So the university bred sunflowers that were only this high.

02-00:15:13

Li: Oh, wow.

02-00:15:14

Lyon: See? Genetically. And there are just hundreds of stories like that. For rice: they cut down on rice straw, so you don't have so much to burn or do away with. And tonnage: this was all dry land grain. And if they got nine sacks to the acre, they thought they were doing good. And now they get, like, forty.

02-00:15:39

Li: Wow.

02-00:15:40

Lyon: Or more per acre.

02-00:15:42

Li: Wow.

02-00:15:42

Lyon: Because of varieties.

02-00:15:43

Li: Wow.

02-00:15:44

Lyon: And management.

02-00:15:45

Li: Do you think there have been any down sides to Extension?

02-00:15:52

Lyon: The only downside I can see is if they move away from seeing the people. That's been—and the farm advisers are now having to do so much research, when before that was all done on the university. And their purpose wasn't that. So that—But that's the way it is.

- 02-00:16:17  
Li: So has the actual physical building of the Extension out here changed, because advisers are spending more time in the office?
- 02-00:16:27  
Lyon: No, the buildings haven't changed, but staff have. See, there isn't half the staff there were in all the counties. When we had six, and I think there's just two, maybe, academics, and one non-academic at the office here. When we had six or seven, even. And that just goes through the counties in that all have reduced staff.
- 02-00:16:53  
Li: So there's only one or two people who are actually driving around and visiting farms and—
- 02-00:16:58  
Lyon: Yes, see—one or two, and then they've got to spend so much time on research.
- 02-00:17:10  
Li: Wow.
- 02-00:17:11  
Lyon: But the slack has been taken up by the commercial.
- 02-00:17:13  
Li: Right. So did you have to work with commercial interests when you were adviser?
- 02-00:17:20  
Lyon: Oh, Yes, right. But they weren't that well educated. The fertilizer salesman was often a guy that had another job and quit it and became a fertilizer salesman. The bad part, or the downside to that, is they're selling stuff. So let's say he's saying to put a lot of nitrogen on alfalfa. Well, alfalfa doesn't need much nitrogen. It may need some phosphorus, and it doesn't move much. But they're selling stuff, where the farm adviser hasn't got anything to sell.
- 02-00:18:00  
Li: Right, so he would just say, "You don't need much nitrogen—don't worry about it."
- 02-00:18:04  
Lyon: Right. Right. That's a poor example, probably, but there's a lot of those.
- 02-00:18:10  
Li: Right. So the farmer probably has to be more wary of the advice that he's getting.
- 02-00:18:14  
Lyon: Yes. But the farmers are more educated. We've got a lot of farmers that are college graduates.



02-00:18:17

Li: And is that a change from when—?

02-00:18:20

Lyon: Oh, Yes—there were none, hardly, when I first come to Extension. But now the—a lot of them have kids that have gone to college and gone back. I'm going to have to break for a minute.

02-00:18:34

Li: Okay. [pause in tape]

So one of the questions I had was about how well you thought public and private interests interacted in Extension, in terms of kind of the greater good of the county versus the interests of maybe a growers' association or a dairy group.

02-00:18:55

Lyon: How they worked together?

02-00:18:58

Li: Yes. Did you—?

02-00:18:59

Lyon: Yes. I can't talk about nowadays. When I quit Extension, retired, I decided I had seen too many people retire and then go back to the office once a week and tell them, "Well, why aren't you—we used to do it—?" So I just don't go. I never interfere. So I don't know what's going on, either, and there's not much in the newspapers. But I can talk about, you know, up until I retired. And it was probably true in all the counties. Yes.

The agricultural groups worked very closely with the Extension, whether it was the cattlemen's association or the woolgrowers or the dairy producers or whatever. They worked very closely with the Extension. We went to the Farm Bureau's—we went to their meetings. Together we'd put on meetings. I mean, they would have people from their associations present. Maybe putting on some training, Extension would have—putting on training. No, it was a very—in this county, our staff was really well accepted. They were all very competent. And we really had probably five of the best: not only from their knowledge, but from their people skills and seeing the people, they were probably five of the best in the state. And I think other counties would have said the same thing about our guys.

So they worked with their commodity groups tremendously. It was a tremendous interaction. Yes.

02-00:20:40

Li: So that was fairly successful, then—the cooperation between the commodity groups and the Extension?

02-00:20:45

Lyon: That's right, Yes. It was very—and, you know, the prune/growers, whatever, they would work with our orchard man and they would decide what kind of a program they needed and what kind of training. No, there was a real close—

02-00:21:03

Li: Do you feel like the university understood the needs of the community?

02-00:21:10

Lyon: I think they used to, because the specialists come out all the time. The regional directors come around once every two months, at least, and spend a half a day in their office.

02-00:21:20

Li: Oh, wow. Yes.

02-00:21:24

Lyon: And then they also—the regional directors and stuff would meet at the state level with key leaders in agriculture and stuff. So, Yes. But I don't know now—I don't think the university feels the need for it. The university itself doesn't feel they need to cater to the people out in the country. They probably cater to the statewide people, at that level. And I get some of this feedback from—I still have friends that are farmers and stuff. You know, their deal is, “The university isn't like it used to be.”

02-00:22:10

Li: Yes. Do other—like, do some of the state schools, have they increased participation? Like, does Chico State have—?

02-00:22:15

Lyon: Yes. Chico State has—they didn't—I remember when they started the department. In fact, a guy that went to the same high school in Upper Lake that I did, Dr. Phelps, started the Extension service—the department, the ag department, at Chico State. And of course, Cal Poly has really expanded in the research and stuff. And I know Fresno State has. And even some of the community colleges—I was on the board of trustees at Butte Community College—Butte-Glenn Community College. And even community colleges are providing services. For instance, for Hispanics or anybody who wants to learn how to drive tractors or run machinery and stuff. So a lot of the others—if there's a slack, and there's a need, somebody's going to pick it up.

02-00:23:08

Li: Right. So some of these other institutions have stepped up a little bit?

02-00:23:12

Lyon: Yes, and I think the university has—it's my impression that they're more worried about things at their level.

02-00:23:19

Li: Right. Like, abstract research? Basic research, or—?

02-00:23:24

Lyon:

Right, right. And that's important. But they just don't—I don't think they see the need. The university used to, when they had a budget crisis or something—would contact county direct farm advisers' officers. "Can you get ten farmers to help us send funds to this project?" or something. You know, and we would. But now, I don't think that the farm adviser could get the ten people to do it, because they don't see the benefit.

02-00:24:02

Li:

When do you think that this change happened? Do you remember when—?

02-00:24:10

Lyon:

I can't think of years, but I know administrations. [pause] We had a vice-president of the university for agriculture one time that gave a speech at one of the Extension meetings. There had been conferences, state conferences. And his whole deal was—fear and greed: that's how you operate. And they damn near booed him off—the Extension people damn near booed him off the stage. And during his reign, probably in the eighties, late seventies and eighties, it began to change.

02-00:24:51

Li:

Yes. Fear and greed? Like, that was the—?

02-00:24:55

Lyon:

That's the way you motivate people. That was his point. You know? For an educated man to get up and—I could see somebody smoking a cigar and talking to another guy and saying something like that, but not up as a major speech at a—

02-00:25:13

Li:

Well, and it seems a little antithetical to the whole idea behind Extension, in terms of—

02-00:25:15

Lyon:

Right. That's right. And he was the head of the Extension. When your boss says stuff like that—

02-00:25:23

Li:

Yes. So things really started changing late seventies to eighties, and—

02-00:25:25

Lyon:

Right.

02-00:25:27

Li:

Yes. [pause] Did you ever have interactions with county directors from other states? Other county directors?

02-00:25:40

Lyon:

Yes, I'm sure there were some—especially border counties, like the border counties of California with Oregon or Nevada over here. I did because of these trips.

02-00:25:47

Li: Oh, right. Okay.

02-00:25:49

Lyon: When I scheduled night stays, I also contacted—No, but I don't think there was a lot.

02-00:26:01

Li: No. Did you maybe—like, through these trips and through your travel, were you able to kind of see how California Extension compared to the Extension in other states?

02-00:26:09

Lyon: That's right. Oh, yes, right.

02-00:26:10

Li: What were your thoughts on that?

02-00:26;12

Lyon: The main difference was that California farm advisers—they call them county agents. Pennsylvania calls them farm advisers. The rest of the states' county agents are not as respected—

02-00:26:25

Li: Really?

02-00:26:25

Lyon: —by agricultural, you know, farming, as in California. At least at that time. They were, you know—they just didn't have the respect. And I had a lot of them tell me that. You know, the farm advisers and the county agents in other states. And they weren't paid as well. And the board of supervisors in some states would pay half their salaries. So if they didn't like a guy, they just cut their half out. You know, there's a lot more local politics and stuff.

02-00:27:04

Li: Why do you think they weren't as respected?

02-00:27;08

Lyon: Oh, I don't know. Competency might have been part of it.

02-00:27:12

Li: Were they seen as being—

02-00:27:16

Lyon: And I don't think the kind of caliber of agriculturally educated went into the—in those states, they didn't go into being a county agent. It wasn't—They went into industry and other things, I guess. You know, one time when I went back chaperoning a 4-H trip to Chicago, Al Voltz, who was the assistant vice president, told me he wanted me to find him two or three young farm advisers or home advisers to try to get him to move to California. You know? And I talked to a couple, but there were none of them that had that drive that the

California guys did; I didn't feel comfortable recommending that they contact them, you know? They're nice people, but they wanted to know about working hours and all this kind of stuff.

02-00:28:19

Li: You're thinking, "You don't want to know the working hours."

02-00:28:23

Lyon: Yes, right. You don't want to know that. But—the pace could—When I first come into Extension, I got six thousand dollars.

02-00:28:37

Li: A year?

02-00:28:37

Lyon: I was making six thousand, six hundred as an ag teacher in Yuba City. So I took a pay cut. But right after that, Governor Brown—Pat Brown, this guy now, his dad was governor—and he was really pro-education. God, our salaries just went up.

02-00:29:01

Li: Yes. So it was a good job.

02-00:29:03

Lyon: Huh?

02-00:29:04

Li: It was a good job to have then?

02-00:29:08

Lyon: Yes. And it was—Yes. It's a good job to have now. My retirement now is more than I was making when I was working. You know? Because they don't take out retirement and stuff. But we get a two percent raise every year. My kids will never—well, my one daughter's in business—she probably will. But they won't—you know, you just—And if I'd have stayed teaching school, I'd have been making half of what I'm making, you know?

02-00:29:42

Li: So you felt really valued, then, as a—?

02-00:29:46

Lyon: Oh, Yes. Plus, we had regional directors, and you get a raise every two years—steps, you know. And you get a raise every two years—you're up for a raise every two years. You may not get it.

02-00:30:02

Li: Right.

02-00:30:03

Lyon: And then after you get in so long, then it's every three years. Well, they used to be able to give what they call jump raises. So after one year they could

give—and the old regional director could do that on his own. And boy, we just went through—the whole staff went. And that’s why I said in the end, George Rendell and I were in that very top group. We were making—I was offered the training—I was acting regional director, and I was encouraged to apply for regional director. Well, the guy that they did hire—I didn’t want it. You know, I just absolutely didn’t want it. And after they hired the person that took that job, he asked me, “Why didn’t you take it?” I said, “What salary are you making?” I knew, because they’d printed it out. He was making, like, \$25,000 less than I was making.

02-00:31:06

Li: As regional director, he was—?

02-00:31:08

Lyon: As the county director. So why would you?

02-00:31:12

Li: Why would you move to take the pay cut?

02-00:31:15

Lyon: I’d take that other position—well, I wouldn’t have taken a pay cut, because they don’t—

02-00:31:17

Li: They wouldn’t do that?

02-00:31:20

Lyon: No, no. But I wouldn’t—Yes. And I could see, because he was going up, and that was—but he finally quit. He’s the director in San Diego County now, I think.

02-00:31:32

Li: So do you have any regrets about not going back to teaching, or are you pretty happy with—?

02-00:31:35

Lyon: No, no, no. I would have—I loved teaching, but I—no. Financially, and I also—at the time, one of the reasons I quit teaching was I saw these older teachers that got negative and high school teachers bitter, and they couldn’t take the kids anymore, and I thought, “You know, someday I’ll end up like that.” And so that was another factor that I— I had no regrets. I had a great career in Extension. And there were times when we had budget problems and that, but you have problems in life anyway, so—

02-00:32:16

Li: Well, it sounds like you made the most of it with these trips and bringing—

02-00:32:20

Lyon: Oh, Yes, right, right. And then by serving on school boards and that kind of thing, they still kept and had a lot of influence on the local schools. In a better

position, I might have been teaching. Because I could get away with getting teachers' salaries raised and stuff, being on the outside. Whereas on the inside, I couldn't. I remember that I was the chairman of the county board on education, and the county superintendent of schools was the lowest-paid administrator of any school in the county. And all the other guys on the board were all farmers. And, boy, it took me about four years, but I finally got him up. But I had to use techniques of joking about, "How do you like it when our administrator that we run is the poorest-paid guy in the county?" I said, "Does that make you feel good?"

02-00:33:24

Li: Yes.

02-00:33:25

Lyon: You know, that type of thing. So—you can have a lot of influence in other ways.

02-00:33:31

Li: What would be your hope for Extension in the future, in terms of its role in Glenn County, or—?

02-00:33:40

Lyon: Well, I would hope that it continues. I think that its chances are that it may fade away. So I would hope it would continue. But I don't think my hopes have much to do with it. You know? It'll be kind of a sad day. In fact, it's already changed so much that—where you just—if you stop people on the street in Orland and ask them what Extension was, Ag Extension or Cooperation—nine out of ten wouldn't know. In Orland.

02-00:34:22

Li: Really?

02-00:34:22

Lyon: Yes. Of the ten people in town. Out in the country they might.

02-00:34:26

Li: And twenty-five years ago, would that have been different?

02-00:34:27

Lyon: Oh, Yes. It would be just—if the board of supervisors would do this, whoever had a vote, we would get eighty or ninety percent of the vote. Where now no one knows who we are, hardly.

02-00:34:45

Li: Wow.

02-00:34:46

Lyon: So I don't know. I think there's still a need, a real need for it, but—

02-00:34:53

Li: Right. We'll see what happens.

02-00:34:57

Lyon: Yes, Yes. But it was great. We lived in what we as the staff called the golden years of the Extension.

02-00:35:08

Li: Right. Is there anything that I didn't ask about that you—?

02-00:35:12

Lyon: No.

02-00:35:13

Li: No? That it?

02-00:35:14

Lyon: Some things I hadn't thought about in a long time. Yes. No.

02-00:35:19

Li: Thank you.

[End of Interview]



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