

Extension Oral History Project – Harold Kerr and Tom Zinn - Part 6

Date: February 24, 2008

Place: Tom's home in Corvallis

Time: 34:46 minutes

Interviewer: Elizabeth Uhlig, Oral Historian

Transcriber: Sue Bowman

EU: This is part 6 of the oral history with Tom Zinn and Harold Kerr

[00:10]

Do you have any travel stories you want to talk to us about?

TZ: Me?? (Laughter)

HK: As we both look at each other.

TZ: Ah, I'll throw one out just for the heck of it. When I was in Gilliam County I talked about the home economist who had been there. Great home economist, very professional. Her husband was getting a PhD and he just about finished and she announced that she wasn't going to be there much longer. So I kind of panicked thinking, "Oh boy, who am I going to get now to help me out?" And she did agree to come back a couple of times and finish some work that she had started. At one time we were travelling on a rocky road; I had a Nash Rambler which was a state car and I didn't know her all that well because she hadn't been there in the county very long. But I knew her well enough to know that she was very well respected by clientele and very good at what she did.

So we were driving down this road going to a rancher's house to meet the wife, I think, and I asked her if she ever had pheasant. She said, "No." I said, "Did you ever cook a pheasant?" She said, "No." And I said, "Alright, there's one going to run across the road and I think we can get it." And so I just centered on that pheasant and sure enough the front axle hit the pheasant right in the head and I jumped out and threw it in the trunk and she looked at me and said, "I cannot believe you; what are you going to do with that bird?" And I said, "Well, you said you'd never cooked one, you've never eaten one, so this is going to be your chance. You're a home economist, so I'm challenging you here a little bit." So we did our job and got home and so I said, well, "I'll take the pheasant to the house and pick it and then you can cook it." And so I picked it and I think my wife was gone to The Dalles or something, she had gone somewhere; she wasn't home at the time we brought the pheasant in. Anyway, cleaned the pheasant up and everything, and cut it up. So I said, well, fry it. She said, "I've never cooked a pheasant in my life." I said, "Did you ever fry a chicken?" And she said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, fry it like a chicken."

And so anyway, she cooked the pheasant and about that time, my wife came home with the kids and said, "What's going on?" And I said, "Well, we're having pheasant tonight." And the home economist said, "Your husband's crazy." She said, "He asked me if I'd ever eaten pheasant and I said no and then he ran over one and said well you're going to eat one." There's a lot of stories like that we could tell, but I'm not sure we want to. Harold, you probably have one or two.

HK: Well, I have one we haven't talked about. When I was in Prineville the home economist's name was Maude Pervine and she was in her 25th year or more of Extension work - was one of the real veterans of the home ec field. And at one point in her career she had been in Wheeler County. And there are a lot of dirt roads in Wheeler County; well anytime you left the county seat of Fossil, most of the roads were gravel and dirt. She was going south to Mitchell and passed one of the county commissioners in her state car. And as she went by him her gas tank fell out from

under the car and it tumbled down the road and the county commissioner stopped and picked it up and took off after Maude and chased her quite awhile before the state car ran out of gas. It finally started to cough and spit and died and he drove up behind and says, "Maude, are you okay?" And she says, "Yes, but my car died." And he said, "Well, I think I know why; I have the gas tank in my trunk."

Maude was quite a character and she had worked all over the state and she was a real....I always got a little upset with her because she always wanted to plan. We did a lot of our 4-H things, she was in charge of the home ec part of 4-H and we'd have these planning meetings and we would decide what everybody was going to do and then when the event would come, well Maude wouldn't be there and she had agreed to be part of the program. And then I got so frustrated with that and I'd say, "Maude, weren't you supposed to be there yesterday?" "Oh," she said, "I was busy planning that March meeting." She was a great gal, but when she agreed to do something, I'd better be prepared to do it, because she was going to be busy planning the next session."

[4:45]

Nah, the other road stories I think we will save for the centennial.

TZ: Is there a centennial?

HK: Could be.

TZ: You're not going to tell the waterbed story?

HK: Nah....

TZ: Oh, okay.

TZ: Just perked Sue's interest on the waterbed story.

HK: She probably knows it.

[5:05]

EU: Well Harold, could you talk a little bit about your trips to Lithuania and how that came about?

HK: Okay. I retired in 1990 and heard about, actually I was working for Stahlbush Farms which is a local vegetable grower and I'd gone to a food convention with them and had met a young man in a booth called VOCA – Volunteers for Overseas Cooperative Assistance. And I just was visiting with him about what that program was all about and he explained that it was started by the Midwest coops and they were sending agriculture people to third world countries mostly to help them get various agriculture projects started. And I said, "Well, that sounds interesting." And so I took a form and filled it out and sent it in.

Six months later, I was called by a VOCA representative saying they needed somebody to go to Lithuania. They had just gotten their independence from the Soviet Union within two weeks at that point in time and they said we have some funding from the European Economic Community and we want to start an Extension Service in Lithuania and we would like to have you go over there as our contact person. So I thought that sounded neat. So I signed up, did it, and got my tickets and took off for Vilnius, Lithuania; arrived there 30 days after they had gotten their freedom from the Soviet Union. And one of the scary parts about landing was that this runway that was in very poor condition was lined with World War II Soviet fighter planes and that was a little bit scary. Anyhow, we taxied up to this building and walked down a ramp to the sidewalk and into this building. There were no lights in the building at all. It was dark. Finally, you could figure out where you were and suitcases started tumbling out of this hole in the wall and my suitcase showed up and so I walked through this mass of people.

[7:18]

I should say that the plane from Copenhagen from Vilnius was a Lithuanian plane and it was just jammed with Lithuanians going back to their home country for the first time in 30 years since they had been able to go there. And so it was just jammed and the

conversation was all in Lithuanian and so it was like you were in a foreign country while you were still on the plane.

Anyhow, when I walked out into this larger room that had a few lights, I saw this VOCA sign this young lady was holding up and that was a big relief. Turned out she was a secretary to the local VOCA representative who was a Lithuanian and I met my counterpart who was a director of Extension that they had hired. A really neat guy – Edward Maderis – and we travelled over Lithuania and talked about Extension and how it worked in the U.S. and what his people could do and anyway we had a great time and a great relationship and so I went back twice more. Once with Bob Smith and Glenn Klein to teach their new faculty about Extension Methods and Glenn was our principle teacher, but Bob and I talked a little bit but Glenn did most of the teaching. And then Bob and I went back a third time to evaluate how they were doing. I don't think the Extension Service exists now because it only had three years funding and they just didn't have any money to fund something like that from their local government. But it was a great experience and one I will treasure for the rest of my life.

[8:50]

EU: So, when did you retire?

HK: September 30, 1990.

EU: And Tom?

TZ: October 30, 1993. Three years later.

HK: I found out after I retired that I really wasn't employed on October 1st, I was really employed on October 10 and I was ten days short of 30 years but I got credit for my unused sick leave so I was able to get my 30 years in.

EU: So when you look back on your careers and especially the last portion when you were in Corvallis, what are some of the major changes that you saw in the Extension Service?

TZ: Well, before I got to Corvallis, I would say that I was told by I don't know how many people, Elizabeth, that the best job in Extension is a county faculty member. And I was told that when I first went to work and I suppose if you are looking at Extension after you are hired, shortly after you are hired, and you look at the supervisors, associate directors, that might be something that you would aspire to and certainly that's something that occurred to both of us.

But I would say, the best job I ever had was the job as a county agent, whether it be in St. Helens needing a lot of help, Gilliam County, in the The Dalles, Wasco County, or overseas. Those were just the best times as far as personal satisfaction. Become an administrator, I remember the Director asking me what would make me happy as an administrator; how would I get my accolades? You get a lot of accolades out in the country from somebody saying, "Gee, you did a great job; you saved us eight million dollars." Or whatever the case may be. You know you did a good job; for a lot of reasons you can see what effect you have had. But it's a lot more difficult in administration as you well may know. When you have to evaluate people, etc., and so I would just say that as far as an Extension position, probably this is true anywhere in the United States, the best position, the most satisfying position would be the county position. Particularly if, you know, you have any people skills at all and you are happy in the work, why, that was the best job.

[11:45]

As far as changes

EU: Hold on just a minute. You had mentioned, at one time you said the job as a county faculty and another time you said county agent.

HK: Same thing.

EU: They are the same thing, but why are they two different...

TZ: Well, I changed those and we changed those when we started as associate directors. If we are going to call people faculty here on campus, let's call them faculty in the county. And so this is history. In the '60s they were county agents. They were still faculty members; they have always been faculty members. I think this has been one thing that's unique about Oregon State University as compared to a lot of other land grant universities that have the Extension Service. They are not recognized as "faculty members." They are classified staff or another type, but not faculty. So all of our Extension agents are faculty in the counties. And I think that was a very good thing. That surprised a number of people when I was overseas. Like the head of the Rockefeller Foundation, who I worked with over there said, "I don't understand this. How can you be a faculty member if you are just an Extension agent." I said, "Because the University recognizes us as faculty members and we have the responsibility to perform like a faculty member only in a different way. Why can't that happen?" He didn't really have a response to that because he didn't know, but that is kind of unheard of in the United States. So I think that was one of the good things we had and have going.

[13:20]

HK: Let me fill in a little bit, Elizabeth. When we were hired with Bachelor's Degrees, our title or our rating was Instructor in the university faculty system. And when we got our Master's Degrees, or actually you could get an Assistant professor without it, about the time we both got our Master's Degrees and Tom's timing might have been different than mine, but I was promoted to assistant professor while I was in graduate school. I didn't apply; it just happened to me. And then later I made associate professor and it seemed like it took a little while, but later I became a full Professor and retired as an Emeritus faculty with a full professor rating. Tommy's probably happened a little bit differently in sequence but that is unique that county agents could become full professors and recognized within the university system as full-fledged full professor faculty if they reached that status.

TZ: I think that's a very good point. And I think, as the university progressed and got to know Extension and found out we were faculty members and had been, there was criteria set up so that we had to perform if we were going to be promoted to not just tenure, but associate or assistant, associate professorship there are things you had to do – scholarly activity was one of them, teaching, research, scholarly activity which Extension does but it was set up so there was criteria that said, "This is what scholarly activity is for Extension faculty."

It's not the same as on campus. It can't be the same because you are teaching and doing research and we are teaching but not necessarily doing research in the counties. There are a lot of faculty that don't do research in the counties. In fact, few do. Well, probably more now. And then they had a requirement finally that faculty had to at least have a Master's Degree and then we put that in our plan where we didn't recruit anybody unless they had a Master's Degree. We all were grandfathered in but ultimately most of us kind of were informed that if you want to go up the promotion ladder in this organization, you'd better get your Master's Degree sometime along the way, which we did. Everybody now, I think, pretty much as them.

HK: In fact, people with doctorates get hired as county agents now.

[16:05]

TZ: Extension, you mentioned, changed. Well, I think in the '60s, '70s, '80s and the '90s – I think in the '90s Extension began to change. The university made some major changes in directing the finances for 30-40 years, maybe 50 or 100, the Legislature provided us with a budget and the federal government. It used to be that the federal government's budget was more than what the state budget was for years. And then that changed and switched. The budget, the money went into an Extension fund, a state fund for Extension, a separate fund, not within the university system. It still is, I think, a separate fund. But what a major change was that I think affects Extension is that the last ten years the funds that went for Extension went to the deans as opposed to the Extension Director. Heretofore, the director and the administrative team,

supervisors, had control of the Extension funds. They provided salaries for faculty, staff, support staff, for on-campus and off-campus positions and the county offices also provided funds for off-campus and that's still occurring.

And we had a president that initially said that if we don't have support – it's a three legged milk stool – we have support from the federal government, from the state and if we don't have support from the counties we don't have faculty in the counties. And that's why we established a number of taxing service districts so that we could have support; so the counties could support. We nearly pulled Extension out of some counties and I think Multnomah County is now an example. They are trying to get back in. Before I retired we had Extension staff in every county and it was supported.

But the general fund money that goes now, instead of going into the director's budget, so to speak, and then funneled out to the deans and then the deans funnel out to the various department heads. So control is by the deans, basically, and department heads and so I think you have a different kind of Extension because it's pretty easy to support programs on campus and when you are a dean and you don't get out a lot or you don't know what's going on in Oregon, of course I'll be challenged over that. I've said that at times, sometimes in budgeting the closest to reality some of the deans have is going to Safeway here in Corvallis. Yet they really don't understand what's going on in Fossil. They've heard of Fossil, but they've never been there, don't understand what it's like living there and the kind of support base that you need.

So I have seen a shift of funds from the county level to the state level and what does that do to faculty in the county? I don't know because I've been retired too long. But I see that as a shift and I believe that Extension is not the same as it used to be. I'm not saying that it isn't as good, I'm saying I don't see the support in the field, I don't hear about the support from the people that we used to have for our faculty in the field. So I think that has had an effect.

Now whether we will ultimately have deans that really recognized that the whole state is something they ought to look at a little more seriously than just on campus than say a secretary's position on campus or an FTE, I don't know. I don't know what will happen.

But having had the experience and I think we were better off having had the experience as county agents. I think anybody is. To come from county agent and then go into administration and particularly when you are working with county faculty; working with county courts. You've been there, you've done that, you are going through the throes, as opposed to hiring somebody who comes from another campus, has never been an Extension agent, has never had to work in the field to understand what it's like, I just think you can be so much more effective to the county faculty if you have had that experience. I don't think you would be as effective, if you just had county experience in working with on-campus faculty or specialists, you probably wouldn't be as effective, I mean the same scenario had you been a specialist. Originally, I think, you know our specialists were designed to support the county staff in education and help them; that was their primary responsibility. What the specialists do now, I don't know. I can't tell you and I'm not saying that in a negative way, I just don't know.

[21:50]

HK: One of the changes, I don't feel comfortable evaluating, is that those county faculty are now considered faculty members of the Horticulture Department or the Crop Science Department. How often they get on campus and how much they have to say about what goes on in that department, I'm just not qualified to judge but that is a change which could be positive. Because under our system, the county agent had tenure in Extension Service, not in a department. And that could be positive, but I just don't know whether it is or not.

TZ: I don't know if you did a survey of county faculty if they were honest, how they would feel about that. Probably some of the faculty who had experienced a different form of administration might look at it a different way than the faculty that they have hired now and haven't seen the differences between our faculty in the field in Fossil, Oregon and answering to the Crop Science Department or the Animal Sciences

Department. And being evaluated by the head of the Department of Animal Sciences. It's great if the head of the Department of Animal Sciences has been out there, has really gotten involved, knows the people, knows the area, knows what that person has to put up with but you can't compare the livestock agent and what he does in Wheeler County to the livestock agent and what they might do in Umatilla County or some of the other counties that have a lot more cattle and totally different production.

So, I don't know. Good question. We kind of walked around that one didn't we?
(Laughter).

[23:40]

HK: One of the things Tom and I both did without discussing it, was when we retired we didn't go back to Extension Hall on any kind of a regular basis. Very rarely do we go there. And we seemed to be welcome, but I think we could overstay our welcome if we stayed too long. So when we got out, we got out. We didn't try to have any influence on what was happening or on the people that replaced us. We just said, "Okay, we did our 30 years, it's somebody else's turn."

EU: Do you keep in touch with Alberta and some of the other folks?

TZ: Yeah, I see Alberta a little bit. Harold plays Bridge with her a lot. I get on campus once or twice a year maybe is about all. If that, really. When I retired, I can remember the first day, it was in November and fortunately there was hunting season so that kept me occupied, but after that for about two weeks I wondered what I was going to do, because I wasn't getting up and charging over the mountain and solving some big personnel issue or doing this or doing that. So I thought, "My Gosh, I've probably got to start taking up golf or doing something." And then in about two weeks, I got over that. I did go down to campus two or three times and then after I got over that and got to puttering around and found stuff to do there was about three or four years I hadn't been on campus period. But like Harold, we just kind of agreed that you know, we had met a lot of people who had retired and they would come in and visit with you and just want to

talk about old times and you felt pressed for time and I said, I'm not going to do that to any faculty. They've got their jobs to do and you know retirement is for a purpose.

[25:40]

HK: Elizabeth, one point I was going to mention and I forgot it. One other thing that Frank Ballard said to me early in my career was, "Harold if you ever get confused, your work week starts every Monday morning at 8:00." I didn't really know what that meant till after about six months in Prineville and I realized that if you worked Saturday and Sunday, yeah, Monday morning at 8:00 was a new week and so he didn't say you had to work seven days a week, but he implied it might happen. In those days, Saturday morning was part of the work week.

TZ: You were expected to work until noon on Saturday.

HK: And as a 4-H agent I didn't have very many things scheduled Saturday morning, but Saturday afternoon we might have a 4-H activity and my staff chairman let me know that I needed to be in the office on Saturday morning and then I could go out to my 4-H function Saturday afternoon and a Sunday night meeting might happen too and I just accepted that as a fact.

Well, as supervisors, we ran into the new faculty that we are hiring and they had a little different concept of what a work week was and I had a little problem with that through the years because I really couldn't say to them, "Your work week starts Monday morning at 8:00." I also didn't go along with the idea that if he had a four hour meeting Wednesday night you didn't have to come in until noon on Thursday morning. I never would accept that. But some people saw that as appropriate work if you worked overtime Wednesday night you didn't have to be there Thursday morning but that was always a little bit of a controversy for me and some of my faculty that I supervised.

[27:20]

Well, my approach was that you are on a monthly salary and you do the job. You have the job to do; you get the job done; get 'er done - if it takes Monday, Wednesday, Friday, we've all done that, take Saturday and Sunday. If you and your wife have to go

to town, you have to go to the doctor, go to the doctor. If you don't have a meeting or something, go to the doctor. But you get your job done, whatever that takes and don't worry about whether you need to take four hours off because you worked four hours. You used to get the job done and whatever else you've got to do. You've got 30 days of vacation and if you want to take off and go fishin'; you want to take off on Friday afternoon or Friday morning and you've got your work done, get out of here. And that seemed to appease most people.

You know, 4-H agents, I think, probably were the hardest hit of our faculty because when you had fairs and 4-H meetings they were in the evenings. You had fair board meetings that they had to go to, and then the fair was a grueling 24/7 all the time. And right after the fair you had all these people that were angry because their kid didn't win the prize and so you had to solve all these issues with the 4-H leaders, so you were going to meetings on Wednesday and Thursday and you tell you wife, "I've got a fair board meeting; oh, I've got a 4-H leaders meeting; well, something came up and we've got a club over hear that's very unhappy." So they had a lot of night meetings, a lot of Saturday meetings and Sunday meetings. I found that out when I was in Condon, how many weekends and hours that the 4-H faculty worked and you know there weren't a lot of complaints. My attitude was when they said, "Gee, I haven't had some time." I'd say, "Heh, you've got your job done; get out of here – get her done and get out of here; don't worry about that."

[29:20]

EU: So before we finish here, could you talk a little bit about your retirement. What have you been doing in the last ten, fifteen years?

TZ: You know, one of the favorite things I have to say when somebody says, "Well, what have you been doing in retirement?" I just look right at them and say, "Nothin'." Now, Harold's a little different that I do. I don't have a schedule, I don't have a calendar. My wife gets on me because she says, "You know, we have to go to the doctor. You have a doctor...oh do I?" I used to have a calendar where I knew what I had to do. But we travelled quite a little bit overseas and then we travelled some right after I retired.

My son went to school in France and we went over there and spent some time there. And since that time I like to hunt and fish so I've done that. And other than that, I just have fun puttering around. I don't have anything specific. Spend a little time at the Coast from time to time but don't have anything specific that I do every day. I wake up in the morning and if my wife tells me to do something I do it. (Laughter). Either that or I leave for coffee with Harold.

HK: Mine's a little bit different, Elizabeth.

TZ: He has a calendar.

HK: I still have a calendar. I retired Friday night at 5:00 and went to work Saturday morning at 4:00 a.m. at Stahlbush Island Farms as a shift supervisor in the plant where they process pumpkins and make frozen pumpkin pie puree. I did that from October, November, and mid-December for 12 hour shifts, six days a week and it nearly killed me because our other job was mostly driving or sitting at a desk and this one was on your feet all the time on concrete. But I finally got conditioned to that and worked then part-time for Stahlbush Island Farm through the next 17 years, so I actually have 17 years of employment at the Stahlbush Island Farms. Not full time all year, but periodically. And now, the last job I had was security guard at the farm since 9/11 and I've worked the last three or four years on a four-hour shift.

I'm also a volunteer 4-H leader. I was a 4-H member, and a 4-H Agent, but I never got to be a 4-H Leader, so I've completed ten years now as a 4-H Leader of a local 4-H Livestock Club - sheep and beef.

Carol and I travelled quite a bit. Did six or seven cruises through those last 17 years. And I'm active in our Kiwanis Club now along with a lot of other retired Extension people, so I'm seriously considering cutting back some of that as I've had some health issues these last four months and I haven't made any commitments for 2008. I may quit

working. I think I'll hang on as a 4-H leader because that's a special kind of thing working with those kids but I've kept pretty busy through the years.

[32:40]

EU: And you guys live, what a mile or two from each other?

TZ: A mile or two apart and usually have coffee once a day when we are around.

EU: So you see each other often?

HK: Yeah. Almost daily.

TZ: Yup. And both of our wives, I think, kind of enjoy that because we get out of their hair at least for a period of time. And when they don't enjoy it, they let us know. I think with the women, it's kind of, you know...they are really glad to see us go and when we go sometimes if they just want to grouse on us, then we go too much. I've never learned over nearly 50 years, what is right.

HK: I haven't either. I had coffee with Tommy yesterday morning and then played golf in the afternoon and Tommy came by to visit me and I wasn't there and he and Carol talked about a lot of things and I really don't want to know very much what they talked about (Laughter). He may have helped and he may not have, Elizabeth.

TZ: Yeah, he called me this morning and said, "I hear you visited with my wife quite a bit." I said, "Yeah, boy, you got your work cut out for you." (Laughter)

EU: Well, are there any things I didn't ask you about or anything you would like to ask before...

TZ: Good Lord, I don't think so.

HK: I think we've covered the waterfront.

TZ: There's a lot of things we didn't tell you, but they're better unasked.

EU: Well, if you think of more, let me know; I'll come back.

TZ: Well, I'm sure Sue won't want to know. (Laughter) Anyway, thank you very much for the opportunity; it's been a pleasure, Elizabeth, and certainly a privilege to be asked to provide some input at least for an organization that we spent a lot of time at and love very much.

HK: I'd second that.

EU: Well, I've enjoyed it. Thank you very much.

[34:45]