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University of California  
Berkeley, California

East Bay Regional Park District Oral History Project

Don Staysa:  
East Bay Regional Park District Parkland Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by  
Shanna Farrell  
in 2017

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Interview sponsored by the East Bay Regional Park District

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Don Staysa, 2017  
Photo by Shanna Farrell

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**Don Staysa** is an East Bay native who grew up in a ranching family. In this interview, he discusses his early life, family, involvement in the rodeo circuit, working with the Livermore Rodeo Association and the East Bay Regional Park District, the Hugh Walker ranch, his work for the non-profit wing of the rodeo, the evolution of the rodeo, the development of the East Bay, and importance of the rodeo.

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## **The East Bay Regional Park District Oral History Project**

The East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) is a special regional district that stretches across both Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. First established in 1934 by Alameda County voters, the EBRPD slowly expanded to Contra Costa in 1964 and has continued to grow and preserve the East Bay's most scenic and historically significant parklands. The EBRPD's core mission is to acquire, develop, and maintain diverse and interconnected parklands in order to provide the public with usable natural spaces and to preserve the region's natural and cultural resources.

This oral history project—The East Bay Regional Park District Oral History Project—records and preserves the voices and experiences of formative, retired EBRPD field staff, individuals associated with land use of EBRPD parklands prior to district acquisition, and individuals who continue to use parklands for agriculture and ranching.

The Oral History Center (OHC) of The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley first engaged in conversations with the EBRPD in the fall of 2016 about the possibility of restarting an oral history project on the parklands. The OHC, previously the Regional Oral History Office, had conducted interviews with EBRPD board members, supervisors and individuals historically associated with the parklands throughout the 1970s and early 2000s. After the completion of a successful pilot project in late 2016, the EBRPD and OHC began a more robust partnership in early 2017 that has resulted in an expansive collection of interviews.

The interviews in this collection reflect the diverse yet interconnected ecology of individuals and places that have helped shape and define the East Bay Regional Park District and East Bay local history.

## Interview 1: October 19, 2017

01-00:00:02

Farrell: Okay. This is Shanna Farrell with Don Staysa on Thursday, October 19, 2017. We're in Livermore, California, and this is an interview for the East Bay Regional Parks District oral history project. Don, can you start by telling me where and when you were born, and a little bit about your early life?

01-00:00:22

Staysa: I was born July 28, 1946 in Alameda. We were kind of gypsies in the sense that, my dad bought a house and then we'd fix the house and then sell it, and we could buy a bigger house. We moved around the Bay Area a lot then. Then we moved to Livermore when I was young and I went to school in Livermore all through high school, and on and off all through grammar school.

I never was much, as a young man, into the agriculture part that I grew into as I got older, but I always worked outside with my hands doing other things, and I always had an interest to build and to nurture. I liked animals, and so, as I got older I used to go out and pick up hay for ranchers and stuff. We'd get paid to help out and help feed and do assorted ranch chores. Nothing very glamorous; fixing fence and cleaning out stalls, but stuff that needed to be done. That's basically was my childhood. Do you want me to continue?

01-00:01:54

Farrell: Was there a big ranching community in Livermore when you were growing up?

01-00:01:59

Staysa: Livermore, at that time, was basically an agriculture town, other than the rad lab, the Lawrence Laboratory. It was all farms and ranches surrounded the city. There was the stockyards, where they used to load the cattle on the trains, were right down on Main Street now, where Safeway is. That was all stockyards. We used to play in them when we were kids. I can remember the cattle coming in and every boy in the world was sitting on fences around like blackbirds, trying to see what was going on, look at the cowboys and the ranchers, and you get to hear all kinds of good language because you've got to talk to cattle a different way than you talk to human beings. [laughs] So, it was fun.

But, we always had cowboys in town. Where now, it's come more of a—our town has become more of a bedroom community and we don't have the cowboys, except for the nucleus that's made up of the ranchers that are left. You very seldom see cowboy hats in town, and it's sad. When a rodeo comes to town, everybody's got a cowboy hat. It's kind of funny because they act like that's a big deal, but I remember as a kid that that was just a common thing.

01-00:03:40

Farrell: When did you start to see that change?

01-00:03:47

Staysa: I guess I could really say it started to change—it changed so slow that you didn't really recognize it as a big change, but the Valley started expanding, started making more housing tracts, and consequently, farm ground was lost. It took years and years. When I came home from overseas, I could really—even though I was only gone for two years—it seemed like it was a vast change in thinking, and the dynamics of this valley. It became more of a bedroom community, small industry. The agriculture that really survived this change was the vineyards, because people were interested in wine. Especially from the West Bay where San Francisco and them people, that wine stuff, and so, our wine part of agriculture expanded where the dry farming and cattle ranching and sheep ranching diminished.

01-00:05:20

Farrell: Before we kind of go further with that, can you tell me a little bit about your parents; what their names were and what they did for work?

01-00:05:29

Staysa: My mom was a housewife, my dad was a tool and die maker machinist at the lab. My dad was in World War II. He fought in Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima in the Marines. My mom was, like I say, a housewife. My mom's name was Mary, my dad's was Leroy. I got a half-brother and two sisters. Looking back, we were just a regular family in a small town. We all went to school. We didn't have any extreme brains that came from the family; we just were regular kids.

01-00:06:24

Farrell: You had mentioned off camera before that you and your family used to camp at Del Valle before it was a park. Can you tell me a little bit about your experiences camping there?

01-00:06:40

Staysa: Well, we used to go up there. The Veteran's Hospital was always up there. They used to have a TB hospital that was up there, also. We used to go up there more as older kids and hang out where the damn is now. That used to be, Royal Creek would run through there, and we'd all play in the creek and go up and have parties there. It was kind of a spot where you could go in the country where you weren't trespassing on other people's property, and hang out. Consequently, a lot of kids utilized that. We'd go fishing there and just having a good time.

Good times then were a little different than good times now. You didn't worry about your kids going up there and spending the night with a sleeping bag and stuff, like people worry now. It was a safe haven for kids and was utilized a lot. Even as you got older and you could drive up on your own, it was a spot to go to just hang out and try to get a sense of peace.

01-00:08:08

Farrell: Did you have a favorite spot there?

01-00:08:10

Staysa: The spot that I have is not there anymore. It's covered with the dam. The water has covered it. But, it was right basically at the base of the dam is where we used to always hang out, and there was a little like campground area. And that's all gone. It was a fun place because of the hospitals and stuff, that like go on Halloween? Because you could scare the heck out of each other, you know, with two hospitals and all the stuff that kids can run through their mind, and something like that. It was just a neat place.

01-00:08:53

Farrell: Did you fish there when you were a child?

01-00:08:55

Staysa: Yes, I fished there.

01-00:08:56

Farrell: What kind of fish would you catch?

01-00:08:58

Staysa: Trout. Trout and suckers and stuff like that. Trout is what we were after.

01-00:09:03

Farrell: When you were in school, did you have a favorite subject or a favorite teacher?

01-00:09:12

Staysa: History was always my most favorite subject. I believe that the world is losing their sense of history, and we would be in less messes nowadays if we paid attention to the history that's already passed, and learn from it rather than just ignoring it, and thinking it's just a subject that you can run through. I've always read a lot of books and history was the books I read. I had a real—that's one thing that my parents always said; "If nothing else, you could be a history teacher." I guess that would be the best for me.

01-00:10:02

Farrell: When you graduated, was it right after—I guess timeline wise, you probably graduated from high school and then moved into the marines?

01-00:10:11

Staysa: Yes.

01-00:10:12

Farrell: You mentioned that your dad was a marine. What went into your decision to join the marines?

01-00:10:19

Staysa: Well, Vietnam hadn't really come to full form yet, but there were guys fighting in Vietnam. This sounds silly, but you've got to remember you're

talking about an eighteen-year-old kid. I didn't want to miss out on being able to fight for my country. I thought if I was going to fight for my country, I'd fight in the best outfit for my country, so I joined the Marines. And, I had every intention of going to Vietnam. That's what was my ultimate goal. Which, it worked out I didn't need to have that as a goal; they were going to send me there anyway. But, hindsight is twenty-twenty, and I might have rethought it if I had a brain in my head then, but I doubt it. That's the reason why I joined the marines.

01-00:11:31

Farrell: You were in the marines for two years, total?

01-00:11:35

Staysa: Four years.

01-00:11:35

Farrell: Four years. Okay. One year leading up to Vietnam and one year in Vietnam. Okay. Two more years after. For your four years in the corps, what were some of the things that you learned that you brought with you through the rest of your life?

01-00:11:51

Staysa: The ability to take orders. The ability to take orders without questioning them. When you're in outfits that are in a war, questioning an order could get you and others killed. That doesn't mean that you go blindly into things, that you have it preplanned in your head. You learn obedience, you learn respect. A lot of kids nowadays, it appears to me, have lost the ability to show respect to people. You do show respect when you're in the military, or you pay the consequences. I think that's a vital lesson that everybody should have; respect for others, respect for your country. That's just the way I feel.

01-00:12:52

Farrell: When you came back, did you come back to Livermore?

01-00:12:59

Staysa: When I came back—can you pause this a second?

01-00:13:04

Farrell: Sure.

[Audio interruption]

01-00:13:06

Farrell: Okay. We're back. Can you tell me a little bit about why you left the marines and came back here?

01-00:13:18

Staysa: Well, when I left Vietnam, I left because a letter my mom had sent me while I was in Vietnam. My brother was killed in a car accident, and it's kind of sad at the same time because my brother had come over to the house to tell mom and

dad that he was shipping—my brother was in the Navy and he put in to ship to go overseas to Vietnam on an aircraft carrier, because at that time they wouldn't let two brothers in a combat zone together, and he was trying to get me out. But, I was so close to coming home anyway—I only had two more weeks in Vietnam—that his ship wouldn't even have arrived there, but that's beside the point. He was trying to do something good to get me out of there. On the way back to base that night he was killed in a car accident. My folks didn't know that if they contacted the Red Cross that it would expedite me out of there to come home for the funeral and whatnot.

My mom wrote me a letter and I got it while we were in the bush, and one of the teammates took it to the CO and the CO called in a chopper and put me on it and sent me home. I was supposed to have orders to go on embassy duty when my tour in Vietnam was over, in Naples, Italy. When I went home on emergency leave, them orders were canceled and I was stationed at Port Chicago at Concord Naval Weapon Station as a guard. That's very close to here, so I was at least grateful for that. I spent the last two years of the Marine Corps at the Naval Weapon Station as a guard. That's how I got back to my home town, which is—as it turned out—was the best thing that ever happened to me; I met my wife and we've been married fifty years, and we couldn't be happier.

01-00:16:00

Farrell: What's your wife's name?

01-00:16:01

Staysa: Lynn.

01-00:16:02

Farrell: Lynn. And how did you meet Lynn?

01-00:16:05

Staysa: Well, that's kind of a funny story, too, because I was dating Lynn's best friend in high school when I left and went in the Marine Corps, and her friend, as happens, found out that a guy away from home isn't that good a deal. She sent me a Dear John letter while I was in Vietnam, and then when I came home, she introduced me to Lynn. We just fell in love and that was it. It's gone on for a long time.

01-00:16:57

Farrell: Lynn is also part of the reason why you got involved in the rodeo. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

01-00:17:05

Staysa: Yes. Like I said before, I wasn't really raised on a ranch even though I worked on ranches as a kid. I wasn't what I would classify as a cowboy. Lynn's brother was an amateur bull rider, a very good bull rider, and he talked me into coming to some jackpot rodeos with him. I went down to a jackpot down in San Jose, Mosby's, and I rode a bull there. I don't know if it was as luck

would have it or bad luck would have it, I rode the bull and I really liked the excitement. It had flashes of the Marine Corps in it to me; the excitement, the adrenalin high. I thought, well, I'm going to take up this sport. I started riding amateur and jackpot bull riding. At that time in the Marine Corps, if you had an ID card, you could ride professional rodeos on your ID card, and I was doing pretty good in the jackpots and stuff and I thought, well, maybe I ought to try to get some big money and ride for the Marine Corps. On the weekends that I didn't have duty, I'd get permission to travel to different rodeos throughout the state.

I rode in the PRCA rodeos. That's where I got to learn about the professional rodeos. Rodeo cowboy is a way of life. Rodeo cowboy and a ranch cowboy are to different things. Now it's more prevalent, the distinction between them, than it was then because a lot of rodeo cowboys were ranch hands also. But, the rodeo has become a professional business, and now the cowboys—and I'm not saying that they're not ranch hands, some of them—but, a lot of them are just great athletes that participate in the sport, but at that time, it wasn't so much that. I had a desire to continue rodeoing after I got out of the Marine Corps. That's what I thought I might do for a living; I thought maybe I could be good enough to make a living out of that. I talked to some big name cowboys, champion cowboys, and I talked to one champion cowboy that, I asked him straight out, "Would you take a look at me? I think I can make it on this, but I need you to tell me, give me the heads up, because I'm not going to continue to break my body up and not make a living. I have to make a living for my family." He says, "Wow, that's—I've never had that asked." I says, "Well, I'm asking you, if you wouldn't mind." So, he did, and it was kind of mind opening to me, because he says, "You know, you can win some money and you'll do good around here in the smaller venue, but you can't make a living off of it." I quit riding bulls, because I didn't need it for that. I wanted to make a living.

I just stopped doing that, which is probably why I can still walk. [laughter] But, I always was interested in that. I had rode in Livermore and knew some of the board members and ranchers that were on the board at the time, and so, I became a volunteer there at the rodeo. I'd help out, you know, with getting the rodeo in shape for when it came to town. You know, it'd look good, and I'd help moving the cattle and work in the different areas where the cattle was. And then, as time went on and I got more familiar with different aspects of the rodeo and grew to love it for multiple reasons, but one was, it made so much sense to me how rodeo started was because during World War I, the Red Cross put a toll on each city that they had to pay a certain amount of money to provide the services for the boys over in France and Germany. Our town was small; a little agriculture town. They didn't have any money. They put on a rodeo to raise the money, and that's how our rodeo started. This next year will be our 100<sup>th</sup> rodeo that we've had from that, and that always meant something to me; it was that we were doing something that tied to the military and we've always tried to have a military presence at our rodeo and a military reason.

Even to this day we donate money from our rodeo to the VFWs for the veterans that have come back from assorted wars, and it's a part of history that needs not be forgotten.

I moved from a volunteer to an associate director position, which is, there's between fifteen and twenty associate directors and there's fifteen directors on our board, including officers. Associate directors don't vote on what goes on, on the board, but they have input into the board. I stayed there for a number of years and continued to work there with them. And then finally ran for director and was elected director. I spent a number of years at that. Because of my job at the fire department, I had to give up—because I had to take vacation during the meetings and stuff like that, and it got to be toll on the family, so I just dropped back down to an associate director, and finished my career at the fire department as an associate director. And then, when I got off, was asked to come back on as a director. I've been back on the board, even though I never left, as a director, and then I was elected president for two years, and after that I returned to the board as a director.

01-00:26:18

Farrell:

Before we get into some of the specifics about that, because I do want to talk about that, if we could back up a little bit. Can you tell me a little bit about what your early experiences learning to ride was like?

01-00:26:39

Staysa:

Well, yes. I didn't have any early experiences. My brother-in-law set me down on it. It was kind of like a chef's surprise. I says, "Well, it doesn't look that hard to me." It was great eye opener. [laugh] You're sitting on something that is twenty times bigger and stronger than you are. Even though it may not look like it's that big a deal, just to tie your rope, your rigging, on a bull, as tight as you tie it, our hands can still move because the hide is moving on it, and you feel the muscle that's between your legs and stuff like that. When they open the gate, that split second when that bull starts to turn, you feel this coil of muscle and mad, and yes, it's something that's almost impossible to describe. The trill, the fear, and sometimes if you're—my wife says a bonehead—the thrill and fear is an incentive to do good on and beat it.

But after the first one, then you go to practice and you go to training to do it. You put barrels up with tire chains and inner tube, and you buck barrels and try to get a rhythm of how things are going to turn and change, and you practice that until you can get most of them positions. You go back to riding bulls again. It's really a hard thing to describe, and it's obviously not for everybody. A deep thinker probably wouldn't be a good bull rider. But, you've got to be athletic, you have to have a sense of balance, and I'm six-one, which is too tall for a bull rider, but I was always a lot lighter than I am now. I mean, I was 129 pounds then, so I didn't have to fight weight trying to—and you can't muscle these animals. They're too strong. Nobody is going to be strong enough to muscle a two thousand pound bull. You have to get a rhythm, a

sense of balance. A sense of balance in a taller person is harder to gather than a sense of balance in a shorter person. You have a bigger fight. You very seldom see tall rough stock riders; their balance isn't in their buckle, their balance is somewhere up here, and that doesn't work that well.

01-00:30:17

Farrell:

Were you learning to ride bulls and horses at the same time?

01-00:30:20

Staysa:

I had rode horses—not bucking horses, other than a ranch bucking horse—and at that time, I had met a cowboy that lives farther up Mines Road that was a fireman. He says, "Well, you're just a rodeo cowboy." That kind of went up my craw the wrong way. I says, "Well, I thought I was just a cowboy. Kind of went through the whole spectrum." He says, "Well, you want to be a cowboy, you need to come out and work at the ranch with me." I says, "Okay." At that time I was getting out of the Marine Corps. I got out of the Marine Corps and then I went to work for PG&E, and then I went to work for the fire department. On the fire department, this rancher I'm talking about was a fire fighter in Fremont, and we were on the same shift schedule, so we were off the same days.

For ten years I went up and worked his ranch with him, and as we—it was kind of funny because, we went up there the first day and we bring in the horses and he says, "Well, we've got to shoe these horses." I'm thinking, well, we're going to get a horse shoer in here and get these horses shoed. That's great; I'll just stand here and finish this coffee and we'll let the horse shoer do what he's doing and we'll do what we've got to do. Out comes the tools and he say, "No, we shoe the horses. That's part of what being a cowboy is. We doctor, we shoe, we take care of our critters." I says, okay. I get it. I spent the remainder of the day shoeing one horse. [laughter] That does also look easier than it is. [laughs]

But I learned how to shoe horses and we went from there and, I don't know if you've ever been up the Mines Road or the top of Mines Road, but it's probably some of the toughest country in the United States to raise cattle on; it's steep and it's heavily brushed, and you learn to raise cattle hard there. In the ten years I spent up there with Jeff we farmed, we farmed some ground down here in the valley and over in Newark, hay for our cows and stuff, and I just learned how to be a cowboy there. All during this time, as I got more familiar with cattle and stuff, the kids that I'd gone to school with that had ranches here, I'd go help them on days off just because, if you need a hand, they help you.

At that time I started raising my own cattle up there with Jeff. I had ground up there that we rented together and we ran cattle on it, too. I'll never forget, it had been eight years that I'd been up there and we were sitting down there doing nothing I can think of, at the time, and I says, "Well, I guess I'm finally

a cowboy now. I'm not just a rodeo cowboy?" He says, "Nah. Now you're a cattleman. Cowboys are the hammerheads that don't worry about the cattle. We own these cattle, so they're ours. Cowboys just work for the cattle, work for the owner. We're not cowboys; we're cattlemen." I says, "Okay. I don't know what the differentiate that means, but I'll go along with it."

01-00:35:02

Farrell:

It's like you jumped a step?

01-00:35:04

Staysa:

Yes. It's like a promotion. [laughter] We ended up fortunately being able to buy a little piece of ground ourselves, and I put cattle on that and raised our family with the cows and the horses and whatnot, and I rented some ranches around us and basically I retired from the fire department and now I ranch. I rented a little more ground and I ranch every day. That's basically what I wanted to do with my life, retired life, and life in general; I wanted to be with the cattle and the horses and nature.

01-00:36:11

Farrell:

Were any of the ranches that you were helping out on, or later came to own or lease, were any of those plots of land connected to the East Bay Regional Parks District, or was that separate?

01-00:36:25

Staysa:

Well, in N3 Ranch is right next—if you drive through Del Valle gate and you go right into where they camp, the next gate is N3. We used to gather cattle through there. A friend of mine was the cow boss for N3. He ran all the cattle. John Ballard. They had it right next to Del Valle and up on the other side of Mines Road, they had a big—it's a gigantic ranch, and we used to gather cattle and help them brand and doctor. You got to learn habits and ways of running from a smaller ranch to a bigger ranch and how different it was. Once I retired, I started helping an older family in this valley, Murray family. They had a lot of ground up Mines Road adjacent to, in proximity with the park, and I went and helped him for years and years, and we helped each other. I learned a ton from him. You never stop learning in this business. There's always something to learn that you didn't know, and you always come across things you've never seen before. I've had that with a lot of friends.

The Christiansens, and the Christiansen ranch. I helped them. In fact, now I have part of their old ranch I rent, and I've been helping them for forty years. I learnt a little bit from each person that I worked with. A lot from some, but a little bit from everybody. I took what I thought was the best of everything and I put it into what I do with my cattle, and how I raise my cattle, how I cross them, and whatnot. I guess I could say, even though I was not born on a ranch, I was raised on plenty of ranches and learnt the business from the ground up. Literally, the ground up. Shoeing a horse, I spent more time on the ground than I did underneath it. But, it's been a good life for me.

01-00:39:29

Farrell:

Can you tell me a little bit about your philosophy with raising cattle, and what you pulled from people and how you made that your own?

01-00:39:41

Staysa:

Well, I like what they call a cross-bred cattle. I like to take the traits from the different breeds and breed them into one cow. We used to have, throughout this country, Herford cattle were the rulers. Everybody had Herford cattle. If you didn't have Herford cattle, you were just in it for sport. Then the black cattle, the Angus, came in, and I think a lot of that comes from the great marketing that Angus done, because I would defy anybody to tell me, if I cooked two steaks and one was a Herford and one was an Angus, they'd tell me which one was which. Their meat's the same. But, buyers and marketers did a very good job on getting Angus in.

Angus has a benefit that Herford doesn't; their cows give more milk. Consequently your calves are going to be bigger, which means more money for you at weaning time. I crossed my Angus with Herford and then I add what they call a short-horn cattle. Short-horns got demerits on them to a point—even though they're mostly bred out by now—but, short-horns were and are used even as a dairy cow. They have a dairy short-horn and they have a beef short-horn. Well, they have a lot more milk.

I crossed mine three ways; with Angus, Herford and short-horn. You get the ranginess of Herford. They'll range, they'll go for water, they're heartier. You get the added milk of an Angus, plus you have less medical problems with an Angus; you don't get pinkeye as readily as you would on a Herford. When they're crossed, you get that crossed figure. They take the best of both of them. Then you add the third one in, which is the milk, and you've got mothers that can basically take two calves and wean two big calves.

You could get fifteen cattlemen in here and fifteen of them will have fifteen different ways they want to do it. But, this is what I felt was the best, and now that I'm doing it my own way, it's worked out well for me. I raise good calves, they sell good at market. I don't have a lot of sickness to deal with, and it's hard country. They need to be hearty.

01-00:43:10

Farrell:

When you were starting out, what were the years that you were at PG&E for before you transitioned to the fire department?

01-00:43:18

Staysa:

I got out of the Marine Corps fall of '68. I went to work for my uncle for a year driving truck, and I went to work for PG&E for two years, then I went in the fire department.

01-00:43:39

Farrell:

Okay, so you were, like, 1969 to 1971 at PG&E?

01-00:43:44

Staysa:

No, 1971—I went into the fire department in '70.

01-00:44:04

Farrell:

In 1970. Okay. I know that you talked about this a little bit; with somebody in your station had the same schedule so you were ranching with him. How did you balance the rodeo, the ranching, your family, and the fire department?

01-00:44:17

Staysa:

Well, first off, I had an understanding wife. Lynn worked at that time also, so it was definitely a balancing act. Obviously there's times of the year where you're needed at the ranch, and there's times of the year you're needed at the rodeo grounds, and luckily they both didn't clash, and when you needed to be there for both of them, you couldn't obviously be there. Even though the rodeo started early enough that if I had to feed I could get up early and feed in the dark, and then get to the rodeo grounds to—in fact, I still do that to this day. Every day me and another guy, Don Podesta, every Friday we work the rodeo grounds all day, all year; fifty-two weeks a year we work there keeping it clean, up, fixing things that need to be fixed. I get up early in the morning and go out and feed so I can get there. Then we spend the day there.

And then there's other days that, when you get done at the ranch early, you stop by the rodeo grounds, see if there's something that needs to be done, you just do it. The rodeo grounds is a sense it's just like your other ranch. You put so much of my life into it, that it's like it's part of me. It's part of me. Even though I own nothing there, it's part mine, and I feel a responsibility for it that sometimes borders on ridiculous. [laughs] But that's just the way I am.

01-00:46:25

Farrell:

You had also mentioned that you had traveled throughout the state competing when you were still bull riding. Where did you travel to, and maybe what were some of your favorite places to go through?

01-00:46:37

Staysa:

Well, there's all of them. I rode in Antioch, Clovis, in the Bay Area. I didn't get to ride as much as I'd have liked to because I was still in the service and I had duty a lot of times. But, I rode Hayward and—just basically rodeos I could get to and get back to base. I didn't go throughout, even though I wanted to if I could have made enough money to be good enough at it to do it for a living, I would have loved to have had the opportunity, but in reality, I just wasn't that good. I was never a threat to any big names.

01-00:47:34

Farrell:

I want to move a little bit into the rodeo association. One thing that I had read or was told was that, so the association was founded in 1917, is that correct?

01-00:47:49

Staysa:

Nineteen eighteen was the first rodeo.

01-00:47:51

Farrell:

Nineteen eighteen. Okay. All right, it was a year off. Can you tell me a little bit about Billy Ward, the association's emblem?

01-00:48:02

Staysa:

Well, Billy Ward is not only the association's masthead, the cowboy that you see bucking out? That's Billy Ward. Billy Ward was an old rancher, cowboy, and a ranch hand. He mostly was a ranch hand. He worked for ranches. He worked for the Walker ranch in this valley, right by Del Valle. He rodeoed in Marvin Gardens. He's rodeoed all over the United States, and I think he even went to Australia and rodeoed. Billy Ward personifies the old rodeo cowboy. That's what he was. I didn't know him as well as others around there, but every chance I got to talk to him, it was always an eye-opening experience. He was knowledgeable; he was just a cowboy. That's the only thing you could describe him as. And he was good at it.

01-00:49:31

Farrell:

He lived on the Hugh Walker Ranch? Can you tell me a little bit about that ranch, maybe the location and what they were known for?

01-00:49:40

Staysa:

Well, the Walker ranch is located on Mendenhall Road, the road that you take to the Del Valle. Well, if you follow it straight rather than bending to go down to the dam, that dead ends in the Walker ranch. Hugh and his brother Ward, and sisters own the ranch now. The parents have passed. But, Billy worked for the dad and he was a cattle buyer. He bought cattle and stocked cattle for this valley and assorted ranches throughout the state. He used to run cattle all over the—they had quite a bit of ground there. I couldn't even tell you how many acres they have now or then. But, there was a lot. It was a big ranch and it was a working ranch. That's where they made their living from; they didn't have any outside sources. He ran a lot of cattle, all through that hill country right where N3 is, borders N3. Hugh's a retired judge. He's got a lot of history on his family and Billy Ward, because Billy Ward's wife still lives on the ranch. If you want to contact him, he would be a valuable guy to contact on something like this.

01-00:51:30

Farrell:

Is Hugh Walker Ranch still in operation?

01-00:51:33

Staysa:

Yes.

01-00:51:35

Farrell:

Okay. Your early capacity in the rodeo association was as a volunteer. What were some of your roles as a volunteer?

01-00:51:50

Staysa:

Well, I mostly stayed in maintenance because that was these stuff that I could do good. I was never much on public speaking, even though I'm here now. I worked the cattle, the rigging chutes where they take the saddles, the bull

ropes and stuff off of the animals after they're done, sorting the cattle, feeding them. General maintenance of keeping the place looking neat; spraying weeds when it needs it. I painted the arenas. I painted the arena up until last year, every time it's ever been painted ever. I painted it every year. I painted the rodeo grounds. Now it's gotten so big that we have to paint it in fourths because there's too much to get done in a year. So, just general, whatever needed to get done, we'd try to do at the time. You did that all the way up; as an associate, I did the same thing I worked the cattle in release pens, you know, where they release them out for the ropers and whatnot. And then I ended up—holy cow—forty years ago, going down to the catch pen, and that's where I stayed ever since. I still run the catch pen.

01-00:53:38

Farrell:

Can you just explain what the catch pen is?

01-00:53:40

Staysa:

Okay. Rodeo is divided into two segments; they have the rough stock, the bucking events, and they have the timed events. Well, the timed events are all dealing with cattle, so what we do at the catch pen is catch the cattle that are released, take the ropes off of them. If they're calves, get the cattle back to their moms; if they're not, put the cows, steers or whatever, in the assorted pens that they're used at. Like I kid everybody at the place, they all think their job is the most important. I says, any idiot can release cattle, but real cowboys catch them. It's kind of poking fun at each other because everybody thinks their job is the most important, but I clear it up for them. [laughter]

01-00:54:39

Farrell:

Was that your preferred role, was working in the catch pen?

01-00:54:45

Staysa:

Yes, for reasons. We've got a lot of people that come in to volunteer, and all of them want to be cowboys. Well, whether they've even touched a cow, they just want to be where the action is, the cattle. They don't want to do stuff that isn't with the cattle. It's dangerous. It's extremely dangerous. People don't realize that. Them cattle come in there, they want to not be fussed with, and you've got to know what you're doing and not stir them up. It's just like in the rigging chutes; you've got these 2,000 pound bulls and 1,400 pound horses come in, and you've got to make sure that they're not going to get hurt. When you've got a bunch of them in there together and you're not handling it correctly, they can get hurt. God forbid that ever happens.

I felt that, if I could take over the catch pen and get a crew of, not necessarily cowboys but people that were willing to learn and care about the animals, then I could make a nucleus out of this that could expand to the other parts. And, we've done that. We've taken kids from the catch pen and now they're working the rigging, and they're working pulling gates, and it's great. It's a great feeling. My son was so little that he couldn't be down there because he'd get hurt. I used to set him on the fence right behind me, and there was a little gate

where you'd let the horses out that are roped, and he'd work that gate. I mean, ever since he was a little, bitty kid, he was always there in the rodeo and learnt from the ground up how to do that stuff. And now, now I'm getting older and some of the events I'm not quick on my feet as I used to be, Colby takes over running the gate. There's kids that were with him that we've done that for that have went out and became viable part of our organization.

01-00:57:29

Farrell:

Is there a structure or a system that the association uses to bring kids in and get them involved?

01-00:57:41

Staysa:

We also support the junior rodeo here, and we get a lot of kids that are coming from the junior rodeo now. We also have an organization in our foundation that brings young kids from fifteen to twenty-three, I think it is, that come to help at the rodeo, and they slowly become—instead of just starting them out there working with the cattle, we start them at the beginning; learn the business. Because, the business is the most important thing. That's what's going to keep us able to continue to put rodeos on.

They need to know from the ground up. We're teaching kids that and they're helping at the same time, and they're working their way into the chutes and stuff like that, and learning it the correct way rather than just being a cowboy. You've got to be a businessman and a cowboy. And yes, so we have a little thing we call a little princess program where we go to the schools and advertise and young girls from eight to thirteen, they run for Livermore Princess. We pick six little girls each year and they go to meetings and stuff, and they represent our rodeo. That's bringing not only the little girls, but their families. These are not rodeo kids; these aren't coming from ranches. These are coming from schools, and some of them have never seen a horse up close, other than on TV, and they're getting a chance to see them. It has been such a success. Families that are computer operators and stuff like that are in the rodeo now and they're anxious to help.

You're broadening the sphere of what—and that's what we need to survive, because it can't be all work. It's fun for them and it's fun for us, but if it was all work, nobody'd be a volunteer. You know, I mean, you've got to have fun in it and we do, do that. We make it fun for the little girls and that's one of my most fun part of my job, is when we ride in the parade they always get me and Don to ride in the parade with the little princesses, like, put two old geezers in there with the kids. It's so much fun to listen to them gals carry on and cheer for the rodeo and each other. It's good.

01-01:00:52

Farrell:

Your own son, Colby, is involved in the rodeo association. Can you tell me about getting him involved when he was a kid? Or, I don't know if you have other children as well.

01-01:01:01

Staysa:

No. We lost our daughter when she was young. Colby grew up working on the ranch, and he was good at it, but he didn't want to be a cowboy. That's right when the time I was telling you, everything was changing, and it was changing more rapidly then. So, being a cowboy where when I was a kid was an okay thing, being a cowboy then was a kind of not a good thing, it wasn't looked up to or admired. But he loved to work. He just didn't want to dress like a cowboy, didn't wear cowboy hats. But he loved the rodeo. He loved to come to the rodeo and work, and he loved to come to the ranch and work. He was fighting his own idea of what he really wanted. Like I said, he helped since he was a little squirt, and he learnt from the different cowboys how to do things, and he's always had a "if you show me how, I can do it," type of a personality. If you showed him something, he'd bail in there and get it done. He just matriculated into that, because I never left it, he never left it. And now, we're partners on the ranch. Even though he still don't rum around in cowboy clothes, he is definitely a cattleman.

01-01:02:55

Farrell:

He's also now part of the association as well. Is he the associate director right now?

01-01:03:00

Staysa:

No, he's a vice president.

01-01:03:04

Farrell:

Vice president. Okay. That's right.

01-01:03:08

Staysa:

See, Colby brings a lot more broader abilities to the rodeo than I did because, with his job as a commander in the Sheriff's Department, he has to be a good public speaker. He has to be more personable to the public. Sometimes I get a little flustered dealing with people that don't seem to want to pay attention. He knows how to not do that. He brings a different—and he's got to have business sense because he's writing requests for grants from the government stuff for the sheriff's department. He's got more of a business and agriculture sense than I do, and it's invaluable to the rodeo to have people like that. You can't just have ranchers and cowboys, even though a lot of people think that. That's not the case; it's a business.

01-01:04:34

Farrell:

And, speaking of that, can you tell me a little bit about what some of the differences were in your different roles as associate director, director and then president. Like, what's the differentiation there?

01-01:04:47

Staysa:

Okay. Well, an associate director, like I says, he's on what we call the outside. We have a table with fifteen directors sit at inside the office. The associate directors sit on the outside. Now, associate directors generally work on a committee that is ran by a director. The director gives the associates, okay,

this is what we want to do, this is what we need to work on. They as a group do, and then they bring back suggestions to the board. The board has to vote yeah or nay on these, because obviously anything you do costs money.

They have to present it to the board and then the board votes on it, and if it's approved, we go ahead with it. If not, we try to figure out maybe another way of doing it. And basically that's what you do. Associates are the nucleus of our rodeo, because then again, our associates will work with our volunteers more closely than—kind of like a chain of command. They work with their associates and our volunteers. The rodeo cannot function, because nobody gets paid; it's all free labor. Consequently, if you don't make it enjoyable and it's not a learning experience, you're not going to get them.

You've also got to separate those that are there just to look flashy. They're of no help to you, so you've got to weed them out. Each phase of it is very important. Now, when you become president, it's always been my thoughts prior to being president, that there's fifteen presidents, basically, because each guy's got his own agenda that he's got to get done. I guess what the president is, is kind of a mediator. If you've got two guys that projects are connected in some way and they can't seem to get along—or gals—you've got to mediate this. You can't have it. That's a big job of the president. He's got to do that, he's got to be the overall final word, any ties he's got to break them. He's got to also be the person to keep meetings going along a focus line. I don't know if in your business you have this or not, but there's a lot of people just like to talk. Sometimes you've got to bring it back into focus, so you could be off somewhere else in Disneyland listening to stuff. He's got to control the meeting. He has no more basically responsibility as far as what the rodeo is going to do or how they do it, than any of the other fifteen directors, but he's just a guy that keeps things in order. I'm sure there's a better way to express it, but that's basically what it is.

01-01:08:50

Farrell:

You also are on the board of directors for the rodeo foundation, which is the non-profit wing, and that was founded in 2008. Can you tell me a little bit about your work on that board?

01-01:09:05

Staysa:

Yes. Me and Don Podesta started the rodeo foundation, and the purpose of that was, there's a lot of people that would like to donate money to the rodeo, but because we were in non-profit status, even though we have no profits, there's no money that goes out, government doesn't look at it that way. We had to form a leg of our rodeo, so we formed a rodeo foundation. This way, people that want to donate to the rodeo for specific things—like, we put on a rodeo for our special needs children and stuff like that. People donate to us but they would never been able to get a tax write-off from it because it was—so we opened that door where, people that donate for the rodeo for stuff like the

veterans and stuff like that, they can deduct this from their taxes. It's basically to protect the public so that they can donate to us.

We've expanded it. They run the young kids and they run the princesses, and they do assorted fundraisers for, like we give money each year to breast cancer, but breast cancer from this valley. It stays in our valley rather than going to a big breast cancer organization where money gets lost in the shuffle, significantly. Nobody gets paid. All the money goes to them. That's the same way with the veterans; we used to do Wounded Warrior, and I think it's a great organization and stuff, but I think that, once again—and maybe this has a lot to do with spending my time in Vietnam and how we were treated when we came home—but, I always felt it was bad to pick out, okay, we're just going to do these guys wounded warriors. What about the WWII and Korea and Vietnam, and the other veterans that need the same amount of help? We changed from Wounded Warriors to the VFW. Every penny that we give to the VFW goes to the veterans. It doesn't go to an organization. It's meted out to the veterans that need it. I was influential on that because I wanted to get to the people that need it. If the cancer people have people with breast cancer in our valley, we should be able to help them. Not that I'm against the big organizations, but a lot of money gets spent before it gets to people.

01-01:12:21

Farrell:

You have more community impact this way, when it stays local.

01-01:12:24

Staysa:

Exactly. Exactly. You can see where you're helping and that's more gratifying in itself.

01-01:12:32

Farrell:

Yes, and also probably leads to more donations and support because people can see their dollars at work.

01-01:12:38

Staysa:

Exactly.

01-01:12:39

Farrell:

Yeah. That's a pretty brilliant idea.

01-01:12:41

Staysa:

That's why the foundation was—and then the last few years we've donated over \$120,000 to this valley.

01-01:12:52

Farrell:

That's incredible.

01-01:12:53

Staysa:

From a little, bitty thing. We're carrying on the tradition of what the rodeo was started for, and that's important to me and important to our board. We're also providing history. We're giving little kids a chance to see what the West was a little like, you know? They get around the animals, and we have our rodeo set

up that there's petting zoos, there's contact with the cowboys and cowgirls, and it just—it's a good way to give kids a different aspect of what life is, and I think it's important to continue, especially when you're getting into a bedroom community where you don't get out, you don't get to do this stuff. We give them a chance.

We've had some really, really good experiences from that. That Little Spurs organization? That young adult group I was talking about? We've had two of the kids that went on to college from that went into agriculture to become a vet. They were just city kids, so they've come to like the agriculture life and like the idea of that, and it's worked out well. That's gratifying to see. You see these little kids, sometimes you forget—you get older and you forget little faces because they grow bigger faces, and they'll come up and say, "Hi, how you doing?" You take a second and, "Oh, hi honey. How are you?" It's neat. It's really neat. You've got the younger boys that come up and they just kind of hang around on the outskirts because they don't know if they're welcome, and you make them feel welcome. Pretty soon they're in there with both hands, helping out as best they can. It's good. It's all good.

01-01:15:18

Farrell:

On that note, what are some of the things that you're most proud of your time working with the rodeo association?

01-01:15:31

Staysa:

I'm most proud, I think, of what we as an organization has been able to give back to the community that we live in. The memories, the happy memories. I'm proud of the work we do with the children, especially now when we're getting able to associate more with younger kids that are interested in this stuff. You've got to feel proud of the help that we give to our special rodeo, those little kids out there that'll rip your heart out for the kids and their families, and to know that you're doing something that's brightening their day. You don't really need to search for what gratifies you there; the whole thing does.

I like the idea that we're slowly but surely, even though you'd never know it by listening to the news, we're slowly but surely changing peoples' outlooks on rodeos, not hurting the animals. These animals are taken care of beyond belief. You spend \$200,000 on a bucking horse, do you think it's going to be mistreated? Same thing with the bulls and stuff like that. There's accidents in any sport, but we work every day to stop preventable accidents. Accidents happen on the ranch. I don't know how many times—I lost a cow this year. She calved. I wasn't there, but it was an older mother, so she should have caved fine, but she hipped herself. The calf was having a hard time. You cannot be with your cows twenty-four/seven. There's just no way. I don't care if you go five minutes; that's when the problems going to happen.

I ended up losing the cow over it, and it's like part of your life died there. It sounds stupid and melodramatic, but I love my cattle and I want them to be good, and I feel bad when I think, well maybe there's something I could have done and didn't do. But you know, you've got to be rational at the same time. I like people to see the rodeo and see that we're not mistreating our animals. You're not going to mistreat something you pay \$200,000 for.

01-01:18:30

Farrell:

My next question for you was going to be, what you want people to know about the rodeo, but I think that you—if you want to expand on that anymore?

01-01:18:38

Staysa:

Yes. I'd like people to know that—there's a number of things. Generally, rodeo is ran by the town's people, whether ranchers—and it's usually made up of a segment of every aspect of the community; ranchers, businessmen, law enforcement. It's just an outreach from a community that lets you get in touch with the past. A lot of it is fantasy in your own mind, you know, "I could be that, I could do that." Well, I'm speaking from experience; it's not that easy. It teaches you, if you look deep enough rather than just glazing over it, it teaches you how much love there is for their animals out there, how much care is given. Look at these animals; you don't see sickly animals, you don't see banged up critters being utilized in rodeos. They're just not done. I'd like them to realize that we're not some villains, that we're really people that care about animals as much if not more than the public does.

01-01:20:18

Farrell:

What has it meant for you to be involved with the Livermore Rodeo Association, and be a part of that community?

01-01:20:28

Staysa:

Well, it means obviously if I've done it for fifty years, it means everything to me or I wouldn't continue to do it. If I thought for a moment that—and I did for a couple of moments, but I worked to change it—but, if I thought for a moment that the rodeo was going down a different path that I couldn't live with, I wouldn't be associated with it anymore. I wouldn't bad mouth it, but I wouldn't be associated with it because it wouldn't be something I was proud of, and I'm very, very proud of the years I put in through this rodeo. I may have done some things wrong, but if it was it was unintentional, and it was fixed, but I can't recall anything. I've never done anything that I wasn't proud of. And that's about it on that.

01-01:21:26

Farrell:

What do you think the importance of the rodeo in the East Bay community is?

01-01:21:33

Staysa:

Well, I keep dwelling on this, but I think it's the history. It's a history lesson, not only on history of cowboys, but history of your past. It's kind of by Hollywood and whatnot. It's kind of a glorified history of the past, but if you

look deep enough, it is a history and in some cases, a better time in history than we deal with every day, you know?

01-01:22:22

Farrell:

My last question for you is, what are your hopes for the rodeo associations' future?

01-01:22:31

Staysa:

Well, everybody for the last twenty-five years have been working towards the 100<sup>th</sup> rodeo. I, on the other hand, have been working for the 101<sup>st</sup> rodeo, because the 100<sup>th</sup> is important, but only to a very few people that have worked there for a long time and realize that that's a long time. And, other people get on the bandwagon and jump on that and stuff like that, because they want the prestige of, oh, it's 100 years. What's more important is that there's a 200 year rodeo. I won't be around, but I'll be observing it, and I'm hoping that that's what we do. That's what we've worked for. There's a nucleus of guys in our rodeo that the primary goal is to see this thing continue beyond their lives, and I'm one of them. I want my great grandsons and granddaughters to someday sit there on the rodeo grounds and say, "My papa used to be in this." That would be worth every minute of the work I ever did. That's what I'm hoping for.

01-01:23:49

Farrell:

Is there anything else you want to add?

01-01:23:53

Staysa:

No, I don't have anything. I think you've got a lot of my life. [laughter]

01-01:24:00

Farrell:

Well, thank you, so much. This has been great.

[End of Interview]