Bob Christensen

Layton, UT

An Interview by

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LAYTON HISTORY COLLECTION

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Layton City
and
Heritage Museum of Layton

GOOD MORNING, MY NAME IS TORI FAIRBANKS, AND TODAY IS FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13TH, 2024. WE ARE AT THE LAYTON HERITAGE MUSEUM, AND I AM JOINED BY BOB CHRISTENSEN AND HIS WIFE WENDY, WHO IS NOT ON CAMERA. AND I'M INTERVIEWING BOB FOR THE LAYOTN HISTORY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT. BOB IS THE AUTHOR OF *A NICE LITTLE TOWN: MEMORIES OF GROWING UP IN A SMALL TOWN*. HE WAS BORN AND RAISED IN LAYTON, AND HE STILL LIVES HERE TODAY.

TF: Bob, I just want to be sure before we start that I have your okay to record.

BC: You do.

TF: Great. Thank you so much for joining me on this very snowy Friday morning.

BC: You're very welcome.

TF: Let's start off by having you tell us when and where you were born, your parents' names, how many siblings you had, and we'll go from there.

BC: Okay. I was born in Salt Lake City at the old LDS Hospital in 1947. My father was Dr. Robert Christensen, who was one of the first dentists in Layton, and the first dentist at Tanner Clinic. At one time, he was also the mayor of East Layton, when East Layton was separate from Layton, and he was also a stake president here. And my mom was Roselyn Christensen. My mother was president of the committee of the PTA in this area at the time. A lot of people also knew her as a great organist and a very excellent speaker.

I'm the first of ten children, and although I was born in Salt Lake, we moved to Chicago when I was one, because my father was in dental school. Two of my siblings were born in Chicago. Then we moved back to Salt Lake for a year, and then we moved to Layton in about 1952. I lived here until college, then Wendy and I eventually moved to Florida for many years.

But Wendy was raised in Layton too, so twenty years ago, like a couple of homing pigeons, we just flew back, and we've been here ever since.

TF: Very good. Do you have any memories of your father being one of the first dentists in Layton, like any of the instruments he used? Here at the museum, we have an old dentist's chair, and some of the instruments on that chair look a little scary. (laughs)

BC: Yeah, I do remember. There's a picture of his very first patient sitting in his dental chair. I don't remember if I'm the one who took the picture or not, but it was Beth, the wife of Dr. Robert Kelly, one of the doctors at Tanner Clinic.

TF: Do you have any memories of going to the dentist when you were young? I'm assuming your dad was your dentist.

BC: We had no choice. (laughs) I remember going to his dental office. He had a little laboratory there, and when he wasn't looking, we would play with the chemicals, and the mercury, and try to figure out how the x-ray machine worked—things like that.

TF: Do you have any memories of Chicago?

BC: Well, we moved back to Salt Lake after my dad graduated from dental school in Chicago when I was about four years old. I do have some memories of Chicago, and I wrote about them in my book. Of course, as you can guess by the title of the book, most of it is about Layton. The initial title was *Layton: A Nice Little Town*, but the publisher said, "How about we drop 'Layton', because we want to be able to sell it outside of Layton. It might sell better if the title is more generic. People can relate to 'A Nice Little Town', because it will remind them of memories of their own towns growing up."

I kind of regret that now. I wish she hadn't talked me out of that. It has a picture on the cover of the Layton that I remember in the old days, and on the back, there are a couple of photos

of iconic places I remember in Layton: Layton Elementary, Verdeland Park, and the Layton Second Ward on West Gentile.

TF: And you're that little blonde boy.

BC: Yeah, with my arms full.

TF: I like how your dad said he was going to open up his own dental practice "in a nice little town." I didn't get a chance to read much of your book, so could you briefly tell me some of your memories of Chicago, before your family came back to Utah?

BC: Well, we lived in a pretty poor part of town. My father had been in the military, so he was able to get the GI Bill. Otherwise, he never could have afforded to go to dental school. But we lived in a house that had three levels. There was a law student on the first level, another dental student in the middle, and we were on the third level. My parents stayed in touch with those fellow students over the years, so we got to know their families much better as time went on.

But I remember living there, and I remember having a next-door neighbor named Giuseppe. We lived in an Italian neighborhood, and I remember a little store where we would go and buy groceries. Sometimes we didn't have money, so my mom would ask them to run a credit for us. And by their cash register, they kept a list of how much we owed. Well, on the last day we were there, I went in with my mom to settle the bill. The storekeeper got the sheet for Mom to see how much we owed, and where our name should have been was written "Hillbillies". (laughs)

But anyway, we paid off our grocery bill, then we left the next day.

TF: Do you remember some of the major differences between Chicago, Salt Lake, and Layton?

BC: In Chicago, we lived in a pretty dingy place. When we moved to Salt Lake City, we lived with my grandmother—my mother's mother—in a nice old house, but we just lived there until Dad could find the job he wanted. He worked for almost a year in the Medical Arts Building in Salt Lake, which at the time, was on about South Temple, around the Eagle Gate. I remember his office there. But he wanted to live in the country.

Both he and mom were raised in Salt Lake City, and they both had families in Salt Lake, but they wanted to live in a smaller town. So, my dad found an opening at Tanner Clinic. Noall Tanner and his father, who originally started Tanner Clinic, had recruited three young doctors: Dr. Bob Bittner, Dr. Bob Kelly, and Dr. De Cutler. And they were looking for a dentist. So, Dad went up on the Bamberger train, walked from the station to Tanner Clinic, and interviewed with them. Then he came back to Salt Lake and told us that we might be moving to a nice little town.

TF: And here you are.

BC: Yeah. I remember when we drove here from Salt Lake, and we found a place to live on a little street called Park Street, which was just adjacent to the Layton Elementary School grounds. It was very convenient. My dad could walk to work, and we could walk to school. And at the time, there was a sign on the highway south of Layton that said, "Welcome to Layton, population 2,900." And since we were family of five at that time, we upped the population by five. (laughs)

TF: (Gets up to close door) Did you stay on Park Street the whole time you lived in Layton?

BC: No. We lived there for about five years, but Dad still wanted to live more in the country and raise chickens. His father and mother had raised chickens, and he also wanted to raise them for the eggs and the meat. So he looked around, trying to find a few acres of land for us to live on, and finally, a friendly farmer named John Adams sold him about three acres of land.

Before he went to dental school, Dad had worked for his uncle as a construction worker building homes in Salt Lake City. So, he acted as the general contractor for building our new home in East Layton, and he got a couple of his friends, as well as a couple of us kids, to help him pound the nails, and do things that kids could do. He built that house on Fairfield Road before Fairfield Road even had a name. In fact, at the time we moved there, it was just a dirt road, and our first address was Route 2, Box 410, Layton, Utah. But later, when it was named Fairfield Street, then we finally had a real address.

TF: About where would that house be located, if it was still standing today?

BC: You know the corner of Gordon and Fairfield, where there's an Arby's and a Maverick?

TF: Yes.

BC: Well, if you go south on Fairfield about half a block, that's about where the Adams' farm was.

TF: Okay. I live about two or three blocks east of there. You go south on Fairfield from Gordon, and I'm not far from Adamswood.

BC: At one time, all of that area was the John Adams farm, and those streets were built as he and his son Mike, and others in the Adams family, built homes in that area, and developed it. In fact, do you remember the red brick home on Fairfield with a sign out in front that said "Tooth Acres"?

TF: No. Is it still standing today?

BC: No. But at one time, that was considered the country. There were very few homes in that area. There used to be a large farm there, and then over the years, it turned into what you know of that area today. But we had a large, nice home with a swimming pool, and once my parents passed away, it was difficult to know what to do with the home. It didn't really fit into that

neighborhood anymore. Other homes from the same time period had been torn down, and townhomes were put up for apartment buildings. So, we had it torn down and developed into condos.

TF: I want to talk a little bit more about your childhood. When you look back at your time here, what was Layton like, as far as the sense of community, the sense of place, and the roots that it provided for you growing up?

BC: Well, going to Layton Elementary was central to my life as a child. By then, it was an old school, but it had wonderful, large school grounds with baseball diamonds and picnic areas. It was a great place to play, and it was great to have it right across the street. On school days, we could sleep in late, and our mother would wake us up in just enough time to not be late.

TF: Wouldn't that be nice!

BC: In fact, I remember walking onto the school grounds and hearing the first bell ring. My mom would wake me up in enough time that I could do that, and I would be in my seat right about the time the last bell rang.

TF: Nice! That's one advantage of living right across the street from school.

BC: Yes. But school was central to our lives, as well as church. Layton Fourth Ward was on our street—on the corner of Liberty and Park Street. And of course, Tanner Clinic was central to our lives. Even when I was in fourth or fifth grade, my dad would pay my siblings and I, like, a quarter an hour to do things like cleaning up, and folding towels the way he wanted.

And then, as time went on, things like Little League baseball came along. Our practices and many of our games were held right across the street from our home. But Layton was a wonderful place to grow up. My best friends were my neighbors and classmates, and we're all wonderful friends today.

We moved between my fifth grade and sixth-grade year to East Layton, and I attended Whiteside Elementary. Then I went to Central Davis Junior High, and Davis High School. That was before Layton High was built.

TF: Do you remember any of your teachers' names when you were in elementary school?

BC: I had Mrs. [Reems?], Mrs. Schofield, Mrs. Francis, and Mrs. Flint.

TF: Were there any differences between Layton Elementary and Whitesides?

BC: Well, Whitesides was a new school, and Layton Elementary was old. Layton Elementary did have very high ceilings, but it was just old. So, it was a very different feeling. E.M. Whitesides had just been built a couple of years before I started going there, so it still had some "newness," which was nice. We'd still walk to school at Whitesides. It was about three blocks away, so it wasn't quite as convenient as Layton Elementary had been. But when I went there, I actually had a male teacher for sixth grade—Robert Larson—and that was new. I wasn't used to that. But he was a wonderful teacher. It was nice to get to know him and learn from him. He was actually in our ward in East Layton, so we had a good relationship with him after sixth grade ended.

Then we were in the Layton Third Ward, which was in a new building. It's still there today. We were present at the very first meeting that was held there. I've looked back at the old records. The ward clerks used to take minutes of who spoke, who passed the sacrament, and who gave the closing prayer. So I've seen the minutes from the very first Layton Third Ward sacrament meeting.

TF: I haven't see pictures of that building, although of course, I've seen lots of pictures of the old White Chapel, which was by Verdeland Park.

BC: Right. You can see it in this picture here. It was on Gentile. But there's a dental office there now.

TF: Yeah, I think the office building that's there now is built on the foundation of the chapel.

BC: It is.

TF: Do you remember any differences between East Layton and West Layton? You mentioned how East Layton was, at one time, a different township.

BC: Well, West Layton was almost exclusively a farming community when I was growing up. What would be considered Layton itself had subdivisions, and Verdeland Park was probably one of the first. But there were mostly farms in West Layton, and they were largely spread out. But in East Layton, there was a bit of mixture between high-density housing and farms. It began as a farming community, but by the time we moved there, there was a little higher-density housing. There were some roads where there were many houses, then there were others, like ours, that were maybe a mile stretch from where Fairfield is now. We had, perhaps, four homes on our street. So East Layton had a different feel to it.

The type of farming and agriculture was similar, as I remember, in East Layton and West Layton, and many of the farm workers were similar. Many of the bigger farms were 100, 200, or 300 acres. They were huge. Some of the first work that I was paid for, besides working for my dad, was bucking hay bales on John Adams farm. It was hard work, but I got 35 cents an hour, so it was well worth it.

TF: Right. And was there a difference between the soil on the east, versus the west? I've heard that there was more fertile soil on the west side, and the soil on the east side was more rocky.

BC: Where we lived, it wasn't too rocky, but the further north you went north, the sandier it got. Where Hill Air Force Base sits was basically a sand dune, from where the river came and took a big bend, and washed generations of sand onto it. So, I think sandy and clay soil was more typical of East Layton, and like you said, the more rich soil was in West Layton.

TF: Do you know if farmers on the east side grew crops similar to the west side, like tomatoes, sugar beets, and onions?

BC: The crops growing around us varied a little bit. I remember huge fields of tomatoes one year, then another year, there was corn, but mostly field corn to feed the animals. I also remember that there was wheat and sometimes barley. I don't remember sugar beets in that part of town, whereas in West Layton, many of the farmers grew sugar beets, because the sugar factory was in West Layton, and sugar beets were easy to transport there. But I don't remember sugar beets ever being in East Layton.

TF: And what do you remember about the orchards on the east side?

BC: There were orchards on the east side, particularly as you went up to the Mountain Road, which is now Highway 89. But it was just like how Perry, UT, is now. The fruit trees grow very well close to the mountains there, and I think the same was true in East Layton. The Waltons had a big cherry farm in East Layton; I remember that orchard well; but I don't remember as many orchards in West Layton.

TF: Do you remember if any migrant workers came to work at the orchards on the east side? I know there were quite a few who worked the farms on the west side.

BC: There were definitely more on the west side than the east. It seems like the workers on the east side would work for a family, and they didn't travel from one farm to the next. And they

had little places, like small homes, on the farms to live on, with outdoor toilets. There was no indoor plumbing, but as far as I know, they lived and worked on the same farm.

TF: When you went to Layton Elementary, did you have many Japanese classmates?

BC: I had a few, but not very many. I remember Jan Horiuchi. Her family lived on Liberty, and she went to Layton Elementary.

TF: When you were growing up, do you remember any major differences between Layton and Kaysville?

BC: Well, at that time, Davis High was the only high school that serviced that entire portion of the county. So, we were kind of one when it came to high school—we were all part of Davis High. But in the ninth grade, they built Kaysville Junior High. So, there was a little bit of rivalry between Central Davis and Kaysville Junior. I remember playing them in football, basketball, baseball, and track. And I remember feeling like Kaysville was not the best—that Layton was the best. But it was totally different in high school. We were all one.

TF: Right. I find it interesting how your parents viewed Layton as a small town, and it was, but it still experienced so much growth and change as a result of Hill Air Force Base. What do you remember about how having Hill Air Force Base so close to Layton affected the town itself?

BC: Well, most of my friends' parents were either farmers, or they worked on Base. There wasn't a lot of diversity. in terms of what your occupation was. There were a handful of what you'd call professionals, like doctors and lawyers. Obviously, there were school teachers, and there were a few merchants in the stores on Main Street and Gentile. But the rest were either farmers, or they worked at Hill Air Force Base.

In my memory, about half of my friends' dads were farmers, and the other half worked on Base. I remember hearing the terms "swing shift" and graveyard when people talked about

working on Base. I learned that if you worked the swing shift, you didn't work graveyards, and if you worked graveyards, you worked at night. So although we didn't really travel to the base very much, it was very much a part of our daily lives, because many fathers and mothers we knew worked there.

TF: Did you find any difference between the kids whose parents were farmers versus the kids whose parents worked on Base?

BC: No, I don't think I differentiated between them very much. When I was in first, second, and third grade, I only knew my friends on Park Street. I didn't know where everyone else lived—like if they lived in East or West Layton—because they were bused in to Layton Elementary. We didn't have other schools at the time. Well, Verland Park had a school, but I didn't really know many kids from Verdeland at the time.

So, my close friends at the time lived on Park Street, and I didn't know really where everyone else lived. But then, as I got older and went to other kids' homes, I went to West Layton with the farmer's kids, then with other kids who lived more in the "downtown" area of Layton, many of whose parents worked on Base. And then I'd go to East Layton with kids whose parents did a mixture of different things.

TF: Yeah. It's really interesting for me, looking at the different background you have. I've mostly interviewed people whose families were farmers, or whose parents worked on Base. So it's really neat for me to interview somebody whose father worked as a professional dentist, because we really haven't gotten that perspective yet. How do you think that perspective was different than what other kids experienced?

BC: The one thing I can think of is how, when we moved to Layton and lived on Park Street, Dr. Bitner lived across the street from us, and Dr. Kelly lived around the corner. And a few years

later, those families moved to bigger homes in East Layton. Everybody else pretty much stayed. So, I guess that made an early impression on me and made me think that maybe I wanted to be a doctor. As I was growing up, I saw doctor's kids move to big homes with nice yards, so I thought maybe there would be an advantage to being a professional when I grew up.

TF: Right. Well, turning to your book, I wanted to talk about some of your early memories of living on Park Street. You talked about "The Little Store." Tell me about that.

BC: I referred to it as The Little Store, but it was actually Staley's Market, and it was on West Gentile. By Little Store, it was "big in the newsroom", but not "a box ticket". They expanded after they'd been in business for a few years, but we still called it "The Little Store" because that's really what it was. It was a little too far for us to walk to, so our friends would occasionally drive us there, and we'd get a few cents worth of candy.

The cold storage place also had a little store, and that was right next to St. Rosa of Lima Church. But the cold storage was where a lot of families had meat lockers. You could rent a meat locker and maybe split half a cow between neighbors and keep it in your meat locker there. But they also had a little candy shop there.

TF: What other stores do you remember on Main Street?

BC: There was JC Penney's, Family Furniture—I think that's what Haven Barlow's furniture store was called—Kowley Drug, Terry's Barber Shop, and the old Layton Theater. And there was Adams Grocery Store on the east side of Main Street, going north from Gentile.

TF: Tell me about some of your memories of buying BB guns. In your book, you mention how *The Christmas Story* is a very accurate portrayal of buying and selling BB guns.

BC: Well, BB guns were a big deal when I was growing up, but more than the BB guns were Davy Crockett coonskin hats. We were all about Davy Crockett. Davy Crockett was a three-part

serial that came out as part of the Walt Disney Series, and it showed every Saturday. The first one was *Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier*, the second was *Davy Crockett Goes to Congress*, and the third was *Davy Crockett in the Alamo*. But we really looked forward to those, because he was our idol. He had a gun, of course, and a coonskin hat.

Well, I remember the Christmas that we begged and begged our grandma, our mother, our dad, and Santa for a coonskin hat. And I remember traveling with my mom to the various stores in Layton looking for one. The first store we went to was JC Penney's. Mom went up to the sales lady and asked, "Do you have any raccoon hats for boys?" The lady looked at her like, "What? No, we don't have anything like that here." (laughs) And I was so disappointed, and I vowed to never go there again, because they didn't have coonskin hats.

So then, my mom took us down the street to B&B. Have you heard of that store?

TF: A little bit. Was it a general store, or more of a clothing store?

BC: It was more of a clothing store. B&B stood for Brailsford and Biggs. They were brothers-in-law—Ken Brailsford and Jim Biggs. Their families both lived on Park Street too. But B&B was a really good store. Well, Mom originally thought that JC Penney's would have those hats, but they didn't, so we went to B&B looking for them. Mom asked the salesperson, "Do you have raccoon hats?" And she said, "Yeah." So, she showed us the raccoon hats, and they looked ridiculous. They didn't look like Davy Crockett hats at all. The tail wasn't a real raccoon tail; it was plastic. And the top of the hat was flat and made out of plastic—it should have been fur all the way around. And it said "Davy Crockett" on it. It was hard to imagine Davy Crockett wearing a hat with his name on top, and it was ridiculous for *me* to think of wearing something like that. (laughs)

So on Christmas morning, we were all prepared to be disappointed; but when we got up, there were four *real* Davy Crockett hats for us four little boys. I couldn't believe it! They were all fur with real raccoon tails. They didn't have any plastic on them, and they didn't say "Davy Crockett. And I think those hats, more than anything else in my youth, elevated the popularity of the Christensen boys on Park Street. (laughs) We had the real deal. Some of the other kids who begged for Davy Crockett hats were wearing those hats from B&B with the plastic tails, and those were definitely second class. (laughs)

It wasn't until years later that I found out how those hats came into being. When I was a junior in high school, we were putting on the junior class assembly, and somebody wanted to do a skit that involved something from the Roaring '20s. Well, fur coats were an important part of those outfits, so I asked my mom, "Does Grandma still have her old raccoon fur coat? I want to borrow it." My mom just looked at me strangely and said, "Grandma doesn't have that coat anymore. She hasn't had it for years." And I said, "Oh no. Did she give it away? Do we know who she gave it to, so I can borrow it?" And she said, "Remember those Davy Crockett hats?" And that's when I realized that my grandma's raccoon fur coat was the source of our Davy Crockett hats. (laughs)

TF: Where did the tails come from?

BC: My mom bought them from somewhere. I think some of the fur coats from that time period did have tails, but my mom told me later she actually found a place to buy them. But she and grandma changed that coat into four hats, sewed the tails on them, and made us the most popular kids on Park Street. (laughs)

TF: You talked highly of your mom in your book. Can you tell me some of the characteristics that made her a great mom?

BC: Well, she liked to perform, and she was a little bit of a stage mom. She was an excellent pianist and organist, and she had a good singing voice as well. So, she naturally wanted us to be involved with music, and she forced us to learn to play the piano, as well as other instruments. She also forced us to put on programs, like at school, or church, or Tanner Clinic Christmas parties. And our family band was always performing. As we got older, each of us had an instrument we liked the best, and we'd play in the Christensen family band. Mom was really central to that.

Dad was a good singer too, though not a musician so much, He did sing in a quartet with the other doctors from the Tanner Clinic—The Doctor's Quartet, barbershop style—and they were really quite good. They would sing at community and church events, at weddings, and all kinds of things. And three of them were named Bob: Bob Kelly, Bob Bittner, and Bob Christensen. And then there was De Cutler. So, they called themselves The Bob, Bob, De Bob Quartet; but someone came up with a different name: Three Cut-ups and A Jerk, in reference to their professions. (laughs)

WC: You should mention how your mom would play the organ at different events.

BC: Yeah, Mom played the organ for a lot of funerals, and other events as well.

WC: And she was a substitute drama teacher.

BC: Really? I didn't know that.

WC: She substituted for [unclear] Peterson, and she changed the script. It had swear words in it, and she took those out.

BC: That sounds like something she would do.

TF: Tell me a little bit about your dad.

BC: Dad was a pretty mild-mannered person. He was younger, and he was a fast runner. Mom was a fast runner as well. They were both pretty athletic. Mom was an amazing athlete, and she could run faster than I could all through elementary school. And it wasn't until I was a junior in high school that I could beat her in arm wrestling.

Her and Dad would play this game they called "Pushing," and it was a little bit like wrestling. Dad was four inches taller than my mom and probably weighed 40 pounds more; but I remember one of the first times I saw them play this game, and I was a little bit afraid of being an orphan. They started by moving the furniture out of the way—you don't want to see your parents play a game that requires moving furniture out of the way—and they met in the center of the room and grabbed a hold of each other. Then they said, "One, two, three, push!" And they tried to push the other person back and pin them up against the opposite wall.

That was one of their favorite games, and my mom was so good at it. I never saw my dad win. Mom won every time. (laughs) I think she did it almost unfairly, because she would start pushing before my dad would say "go." And the other thing she would do is get him laughing. I learned that in any sport, if you can get your opponent laughing, then you're going to win, because you have the advantage over them. So, my mom would get him laughing, and then she would pin him, and she would win.

WC: Tell her about the time your mom moved furniture while your dad was gone.

BC: Oh yeah. There was one time—and this is an illustration of my dad's good temperament, because he really never get mad, even though sometimes, my mom would do things that would cause a normal husband to get a little bit upset, like spend all her money on one outfit, or something like that—she wanted to move some furniture from one side to the other, but it seemed unusually difficult to push. So, she had to get several kids to help her move it. Well, they

found out after they pushed this furniture across that there was, like, a nail in it that had scratched the carpet and tore it from one side to the other as they tried to move it. That's why it was so difficult for them to push it. So when Dad got home, Mom showed him that, and he said, "Roselyn, next time you and the kids move furniture, make sure you clip your nails first." (laughs) That's just one example of how he would handle things like that.

TF: What was it like to be the oldest of ten kids?

BC: Well, my next oldest brother, Dan, was almost always my same size, so he and I wore the same clothes. I was a year and a half older, but I guess he grew a little faster than I did. In fact, until we got to high school, people would ask us if we were twins, because we looked a lot alike and wore the same clothes. But because he and I were the oldest, we did our share of babysitting, although not a lot.

Mom enjoyed the family and stayed home. She didn't work outside the home very much. But as the kids all got older, she helped my dad in the dental office. She would talk to the patients and try to comfort them as my dad would drill their teeth. She was a good assistant to him. But when I was a child, she was always in the home.

It was fun having a lot of younger siblings. It was fun helping them with sports, teaching them how to bat, how to throw, how to catch, and how to play musical instruments. So that part was fun. And in fact, when I first went to medical school, I thought I would go into surgery, because it was a very interesting field. But when I started pediatric rotations, I thought, "Man, this is what I've been doing my whole life—working with children." It was more natural for me to do that. So, I did my training in pediatrics, and I specialized in the blood problems of tiny babies. But I think that all derived from being the oldest of a large family.

TF: Are there any other memories from your childhood that you would like to share? You've included some great ones in your book.

BC: Well the 4th of July in Layton was quite an occasion. I remember being awakened every Fourth of July morning by the sound of cannons. The whole town would wake up to cannon fire, and that was fun. And the festivities would begin with a chuck wagon breakfast at Layton Elementary, then there was always a parade, usually down Gentile. Then there was a carnival on the school grounds at Layton Elementary. And they would end the day with fireworks. It was a wonderful day, and the great thing about living in a small town is you can have a 4th of July that's meaningful and involves all your friends, and the whole community, because you're all there together from morning till night.

I did a chapter about that in my book, just trying to describe my memories of how great it was.

TF: So when you talk about Layton Elementary really being central to the community, it wasn't just the school itself, but all the activities that took place there, like baseball, and the 4th of July, things like that.

BC: That's where the fireworks were shot off too.

TF: In your book, I read briefly about your pet turtles …

BC: Yeah, they didn't last very long. We didn't grow up having a lot of pets. Once we moved to more of a farming community and had some land, we had chickens, and turkeys, and sheep, and sometimes cows. But on Park Street, some of the first pets we had were little turtles. We bought them at a pet store, and they didn't last very long. My brothers and I were small at the time, and we were curious about how to take their shells off—to see what was under them, and

what would happen if we stuck a pen in there. So, I don't think any of those turtles lasted for more than a few experiments like that. (laughs)

TF: Were there any other memorable pets that you had after you moved from Park Street?

BC: Well, maybe not pets, but one memorable incident is when my brother Dan and I got the idea to mount a cat's skeleton as a science project. Doesn't that sound like a good idea for kids? (laughs) Well, if you're going to do that, the first rule is don't tell your parents what you're doing; so we followed that rule. And next we got a cat. But once the cat dies, how do you get the bones out? That's kind of a problem, which we thought could be solved by boiling it for a long, long time. (laughs)

But the problem with boiling a cat to get the bones out is once you get it boiled down to the bones, how do you get the bones back together? It's not like unearthing a dinosaur skeleton that's still intact; they're all over in the bottom of the pan. So, cleaning up those bones was part of it, but then assembling them back into something that looked like a cat was actually quite instructive. So, we wired it together, and we put it on a board, and it actually looked like a cat skeleton. So, that was our science project.

TF: How did the cat die?

BC: Dad had some ether in his dental office, so it was rather a painless death for the cat. Although it was a bit of a struggle to get the cat to hold still while getting the ether up its nose. (laughs)

TF: How did you keep this from your parents, especially your mom? Boiling the cat and all …

BC: We did that outdoors. We had a big back yard. We also cooked a pigeon once. We had a neighbor, Lamar Love, who raised pigeons, and he would brag about how delicious pigeon heart

was. And we believed him. So, my brother Dan and I decided we needed to taste pigeon heart, because Lamar said it delicious. We were in elementary school at the time. So, we bought a pigeon from Lamar, cut off its head, and got the heart out. First, we took it into the kitchen and started sauteing it. Then Mom came in and said, "What are you guys doing in my kitchen? What is that smell?" Well, we couldn't lie to her, so we said, "Well, we're cooking pigeon heart." (laughs) She said, "Get that thing out of my kitchen!"

So, we went outside and finished cooking it over a fire, and we ate it. Well, Lamar was wrong. It did not taste good. We learned that we could not trust Lamar's culinary taste. (laughs) Pigeon heart is rotten, even when you cook it in butter. It's not good. I do not recommend eating it.

TF: No, I don't think I'll be testing that out any time soon. (laughs) I read that you also had sheep.

BC: We did have sheep, and as I got older, we had a swimming pool. It had a cover on it, and the sheep would get out and run on the cover, cut it up, and break it through from the edges. Well, as young boys, we learned the fundamentals of football in the sheep field by playing sheep football. Basically, it was just tackling sheep, and that's hard to do, because they don't like to be tackled. But you do develop skills by chasing them down and tackling them. They didn't like it, but we liked it.

TF: (laughs) Was this before or after they were sheared?

BC: Before, during, and after.

TF: You must have been quite skillful in football.

BC: Yeah, because sheep football taught us how to tackle, how to run defense, how to jump, how to tackle in the air …

TF: That reminds me, during the Fourth of July, do you remember the greased pig competition?

BC: I sure do.

TF: Tell me about that. I've seen pictures.

BC: If you have color pictures of that, I would love to see them. But the boys in the competition would get completely covered with grease, because the pig—and unfortunately, these were little pigs—would get blackened with grease by some guy, then hit with a stick so it would run away from the boys. And whoever caught the pig got to keep it. That was their prize. But they were difficult to catch, because you'd grab the pig and it would leave grease on you, but then would slip away. It's really, really difficult to catch a greased pig. I never caught one. I got grease on me, but I never caught one.

I don't know what the winners did with the pigs, because it was mostly non-farmers who caught them. Some of the kids who caught them were Park Street kids. I'm hoping they sold them. But we don't have those competitions anymore, do we?

TF: No, not that I know of.

BC: Thank goodness.

TF: It seems like when I was really young—and I was born in '80—I heard stories about greased pigs, but I think by the time I was in elementary school, they had done away with that.

BC: It really wasn't a very good idea, although it was entertaining to some of the adults, watching those kids get out there and get greasy, and injure themselves in the process.

TF: Right. (laughs) You mentioned polio in your book. I interviewed a couple people who grew up in Verdeland Park, and they remember living during the polio epidemic. And they remember getting their little certificates saying they got the polio vaccine.

BC: Yeah, the Polio Pioneers. I still have mine. I published it in a paper once, because my work is medical research. Well, medical care, but medical research also. But I did a paper once where we published my Polio Pioneer card as part of the paper. My parents volunteered me to be a Polio Pioneer. Most of the kids' parents did, actually.

TF: What did it mean to be a Polio Pioneer?

BC: Those were the kids who got the first vaccine, when it wasn't clear if it was going to be effective or harmful. They hoped it wouldn't be harmful; but the first kids to receive the vaccine were rewarded for their volunteerism with a little card that said they were a Polio Pioneer. Some of the doctors and nurses from Tanner Clinic gave the vaccines at Layton Elementary School, and there was a line of kids going into the cafeteria. You just stood in line until it was your turn to get the shot.

But it was a good thing for the community to do, because polio was such a devastating problem. I had friends who developed polio and had things like a chronic limp, a shortened leg, or a withered extremity. In fact, if you were driving through a city and there were cases of polio there, your parents would have your roll your windows up, because they didn't want any polio virus coming into the car. People were afraid to death of it. So, to have a vaccine that was efficacious was a miracle, and it was good to be a Polio Pioneer. Retrospectively, it was just a shot that only hurt for a little bit.

TF: How old were you when you got the shot?

BC: I think I was in third grade.

TF: How was polio caught? Was it like a cold or the flu?

BC: Yeah, it was a virus, so it was airborne.

TF: Knowing the devastating things it did to the body, it must have been terrifying.

BC: It was mostly a disorder in children, but FDR also got it as an adult. He just woke up one morning and was unable to walk. And that's the way it was for kids too. When you got it as a small child, generally it would focus on one leg or another, then sometimes higher and higher. And for those who got it worse, it would involve the diaphragm, and their ability to breathe. And that's why those iron lungs were developed. Have you ever seen one?

TF: I've seen pictures.

BC: In medical school, they had some of those, and we could get in them if we wanted. They were called "Drinkers" after Philip Drinker who invented them. The iron lung was basically a huge vacuum tube. It saved some lives, because it would constrict around your neck, and then it would create a negative pressure and pull your diaphragm down. So, you'd suck air in. But being in one as a medical student, it was frightening, because it just takes over your breathing. You would breathe not when *you* wanted to, but when the machine basically told you to. It would just force air in, and then it would put positive pressure in and force air out. But there were kids who lived in those, and that was just part of polio that we don't have now, because of the vaccine.

TF: It's pretty amazing that your parents volunteered you, not knowing if the vaccine would work. I wonder if it was scary for your mom to say, "Sure, go ahead and do it," crossing her fingers that it would work. And then it did.

BC: Yeah. I don't remember thinking that it might not work; I just remember knowing what polio was. I think every kid knew what polio was, because there were kids in school who had polio, and that this was supposed to help prevent it. I didn't really understand how early it was in the testing phase of the vaccine at that time, and how it could have been helpful, or it may not be. But parents knew, and they made a good decision.

TF: The reason I bring that up is because when the COVID vaccine came out, I was pregnant, and I was among the first wave of pregnant women who got the vaccine, not knowing how it would affect the baby, and just hoping it would work. You think, "I really *hope* this will work, and the science behind it is great, so I'll go ahead and do it." And it ended up being effective, like the polio vaccine was. So, it must have been kind of a relief for your mom, hoping it would work, and then finding that it did.

BC: Well, I admire parents who will examine a clinical trial and think about it—particularly trials that involve a placebo—because there's a 50/50 chance that you'll get a helpful treatment, or a 50/50 chance that you'll get a placebo. It takes a special parent; not every parent can subject their child to that. But I think it's good, as long as there's not really a downside. It's not like there's something that's going to help and something that's going to hurt; the question is, "How *much* is this going to help?" And you don't know unless you compare it to a placebo and allow a child to try that for the good of others. Not every parent can do that. I'm glad so many people were able to do that, and I'm glad my parents were able to. I'm glad there are parents who still do, because I do clinical research. I've done it all of my adult life, and I'm grateful for parents who can see it that way.

TF: Right, especially for the good of so many others. That's quite a selfless act.

Well, changing gears a little bit, you talked in your book about the Frost Top, as well as Dairy Queen. Tell me about the Frost Top, and maybe some of your memories of ice cream in general.

BC: I think the first ice cream place in Layton that I was aware of was The Dipper, and that was on North Main. Then the Dairy Queen went in on the highway between Layton and Kaysville, and then the Frost Top went in a few years later, north of The Dipper, on the west side

of Main Street. Those were our ice cream places, and it was fun to have those. We wouldn't get ice cream every day, or every week, but every now and then, our family would get in the car and go get a Dilly Bar from Dairy Queen, or something from the Dipper, or from the Frost Top.

The Frost Top was great because they had root beer, and they served it in glass mugs that were kept in the freezer. So when they poured root beer in those, there was kind of a coating of iced root beer inside. It was really unique and very, very good.

TF: If I remember correctly, looking at pictures we have here at the museum, wasn't the Frost Top itself shaped like a mug with froth on top?

BC: Yeah, with foam coming out.

TF: Growing up in Logan, we had an old-fashioned A&W restaurant, and I remember they did something similar. They put glass mungs in the freezer, and when you'd get your root beer float, it would have that frosty layer of root beer around it. Those were so good.

You also mentioned King Maul in your book. Tell me about him

BC: He was our neighbor. He was four years older than me, and he was the biggest kid in the neighborhood. He was tall, and he was as big around as he was tall. And he was very, very athletic. He could hit a home run every time he came up to bat. He was well coordinated and very strong. And he had a car four years before any of the rest of us did. So, he became kind of a folk hero in the neighborhood, because he was willing to take kids to the Frost Top and Dairy Queen in his old car.

He had a Woody with wood panels on the sides that were actually part of the car. I think it was, like, a 1948 Pontiac Station Wagon Woody; but I don't know if maybe the wood paneling on Woodies were a cost reduction thing …? I believe they started making Woodies during World War II, and maybe the wood paneling was put in to save metal; I'm not sure. But the problem

with Big Maul's Woody was termites. They ate a big hole in his Woody. Well, he was also a bit of an artist, so he very artistically drew the words "The Big Hurt" around that hole. (laughs) That was a famous song of the time: *The Big Hurt.* So, The Big Hurt became the name of his car, and he would drive us around in it. But that was part of my Layton culture.

WC: Tell her about the social scene at some of the ice cream places.

TF: Yes. We have pictures of kids from Davis High hanging out at the Frost Top, as well as some families. Was it like Happy Days?

BC: Yeah, I guess it was kind of like Happy Days. There were car hops there, although to my memory, The Dipper and Dairy Queen didn't have them. You had to go order the stuff yourself. But at the Frost Top, they would come to your car, you'd roll your window down, and they had a tray-type thing that they would put on your window with a little arm that went down, so that it balanced on the side of your car. And that's where they would put your drinks.

The car hops were great. They were generally pretty high school girls, so it was fun just to go there and get a quart drink. And those drinks were in sort of a cylindrical, plastic container. It wasn't one of their glass mugs—it was disposable, so it was more or less made out of cardboard, with a plastic coating on it. And it held a quart of root beer. And you should have seen how fast King Maul could drink a quart of root beer at the Frost Top. He could drink it as fast as they could pour it from the bottle. (laughs)

But that wasn't his greatest feat; his greatest feat was drinking a gallon of root beer. He did that once in our kitchen—I witnessed it. I just asked him once, "How much root beer do you think you can drink?" And he thought about it for a minute. We all knew he could drink a quart in ten seconds; but he said, "I could probably drink a gallon." Well, at that time, you could take your own gallon bottle to the Frost Top, and they would fill it up for you. which we did in The

Big Hurt. We brought it back to our home on Park Street and said, "Okay, let's see if you can drink this whole thing." And standing in our kitchen, King Maul took that gallon of root beer, put it over his shoulder like this, and drank it as fast as it would pour out—a whole gallon of highly carbonated root beer. (laughs) He did it.

BC: (to Wendy) Is it *Badlands* that does that kind of thing?

WC: Yeah, *Badlands Chugs*.

BC: (to Tori) Have you ever seen that show on YouTube?

TF: No.

BC: Well, that person has nothing on King Maul. He drank a gallon of Frost Top root beer without even taking a breath.

TF: How is that even humanly possible? (laughs)

BC: He might not have been human. That's my conclusion.

TF: That sounds like a valid conclusion. Is he still around?

BC: No. He passed away when he was 50.

TF: That's too bad. Well, tell me about some of your memories of Verland Park.

BC: Sure. Can I just read the last chapter in my book called *Verdeland Park?*

TF: Yes.

BC: When I wrote my book, I knew I wanted to write about Verdeland Park, but I saved it for the last chapter. Let me just read a paragraph or two about my memories of Verdeland Park. This is chapter 33.

"Just after World War II, the city of Layton had a growth spurt. Some of this was due to a large government housing project called Verdeland Park, which was constructed about a mile east of Main Street. Verdeland Park was created to accommodate the civilians working on the

new Hill Air Force Base, which was built on the hill over the sand dunes north of town. The pre-war census in 1940 lists Layton as having 646 residents. But ten years later, it was five-fold higher, due in part to Verdeland Park. At its peak occupancy, Verdeland Park housed over 200 families and nearly 1,000 residents, all in an area of a one-half square mile." That was high-density housing for those days.

Then I have to read this part: "In the 1950s, Verdeland Park was the closest thing Layton had to a trailer court. The homes in Verdeland Park were small, wooden duplexes. Trying to mentally reconstruct the units, I would guess that each family had about 350 square feet. The two families in each unit had their front porches on opposite ends of the structure, so that one wall was shared. Any families that could do so would move from Verdeland Park after a few years to find larger homes, perhaps averaging 900 square feet, in the new neighborhood subdivisions going in to the west of Main Street, or to the east of Verdeland.

"Verdeland Park lasted less than 20 years. It was demolished in the mid-1960s to make way for Layton High School, the Layton City offices, and the Layton Heritage Museum. As I recall, it took several years to relocate all the residents before the bulldozers came."

Let me skip down to this part" "Our Little League baseball coach, Pepe Garcia, lived in Verdeland Park for several years before moving his family to a very nice home near Central Davis Junior High. I was glad for Pepe and his family when they moved. My friends and my teammates, Bobby Romero and Eddie Spinks, also lived in Verdeland Park. It won't be too many years hence when no one who lived in Verdeland Park will still be alive to give first-hand accounts. Surely no one who ever lived there or visited there would refer to Verdeland Park as a nice place; however, it served a good and useful purpose in Layton's history for the thousands

who came to Layton, following the war. Verdeland permitted them to have their first house, and affordable housing.

"On the courts of Verdeland Park is what enabled many of the families to get started. Moreover, its existence markedly shortened the commute for those working at the Air Force Base who otherwise might have had to drive fifteen or twenty miles from larger cities to the north or the south. Yes, we're glad Verdeland Park is gone, but we're also glad that it once existed as an instrument to bring progress, diversity, and many good families."

TF: That's what a lot of people who grew up there have told me. It brought in diversity, which they really liked, and everybody was on the same level, economically and socially. I've interviewed people of different races who grew up there who said that of course they recognized the different races, but it didn't matter, because it was just kind of a bubble. There was a strong sense of community there.

BC: It was nice for me to see that everyone was the same. There weren't big, rich homes and poor, small homes. There weren't red or blue ones—they were all the same, and every*one* was the same. And I think that helped people perceive that we're all the same.

TF: Right. I interviewed somebody who said almost exactly what you said in your book. She said that many people got their start in Verdeland Park, and it really enabled a lot of families moving in from out of state to work on Base to get their start here. And then, many of those families decided to continue living here to raise their families.

BC: Yeah, I think very few saw that as their final home; they saw it more as a starter home. And Verdeland Park was an affordable place to start a family, in a neighborhood that was welcoming. There were things to do there. There was a school there, there was a playground, it was close to shopping, and it was close to other schools. But I think that people who moved to

Verdeland all looked forward to moving out. Many of my friends on Park Street and in East Layton actually started in out Verdeland Park. In fact, they assumed that everyone did. (laughs) It was so common that I remember being asked, "Where in Verdeland Park did you live?" Because it seems like so many of them did start out there.

TF: That's interesting. A lot of people I interview who grew up in Verdeland Park start out by telling me what unit they lived in. Like, "B-Court, or B-15," or whatever.

BC: Did you ever find out where the name Verdeland Park came from?

TF: I've heard different stories, like it was named after Vird Cook, and that's a possibility. I've also heard that it was given the name "Verde-land" because "verde" in Spanish means green. But there isn't anything actually documented.

BC: I couldn't find anything either.

TF: One of the guys I interviewed who was in Verdeland Park there almost from the beginning—he's about 93 now—said he was pretty sure it was named after Vird Cook, who was quite a prominent figure in Layton.

BC: Would he have been a contractor or something?

TF: I don't know. I don't think it was even his land that was sold to build the park. I think it was mostly the Craig family who sold their land—or had to give it away, I guess, to the government. But I don't know what he would have had to do with Verdeland Park otherwise.

BC: It would be nice to find out the truth, wouldn't it? I'd like to know.

TF: I would too.

BC: A lot of people would love to know where that name came from.

TF: Right. There's a lot of speculation, but that's the closest I've come of somebody who thought they knew where the name came from.

Well, you got emotional when you said that Verdeland Park added a lot to the community, and when you said that a lot of really good families lived there. What did Verdeland Park mean to you, as far as the families you knew who lived there, and what the Park added to the community?

BC: Well, the families I knew there were poor of course, but there were some good athletes who lived there. My teammates lived there, coaches lived there, and some of my finest friends lived there. Pepe Garcia, who I mentioned earlier, also lived there. It wasn't a scary place to me. Sometimes a poorer part of town is a frightening for some kids, but Verdeland Park didn't strike me that way. Maybe it's because I knew good people there, and maybe none of those people carried a negative connotation. Poor, yes, but not bad.

WC: And there were trees and flowers there.

BC: Right.

TF: Steve Ronenkamp's mom, I believe, belonged to the Craig family. Steve grew up on the farm that belonged to his grandparents, and a lot of that land had to be sold to the government so that Verdeland Park could be built. But he was saying that when they built Verdeland Park, the trees they planted eventually grew into the giant trees you see in Layton Commons Park now. And as you walk through Commons Park now, you can follow where the trees are planted and visualize where the different Verdeland Park courts once were, because of where they planted the trees.

How was Verdeland Park different from the other government housing projects in the area, like Sahara Village, and the Anchorage?

BC: I didn't know those other ones very well. I knew about Anchorage a little bit. We had a lady that would help my mother clean when we had a whole house full of kids, and she needed

somebody to come in once a week to help. She lived in Anchorage, and I would take her home sometimes. But that was my only contact with Anchorage. It seemed like Verdeland Park was a lot bigger, and I just knew it better.

TF: I loved what you said about how people would ask you where in Verdeland Park you grew up, because as I've done these interviews, Verdeland Park has come to encapsulate, for lack of better word, just how much Hill Air Force Base really shaped the area. So many workers came into the area during World War II, and there just wasn't any place to put them. So they had to put up housing very quickly. And it's interesting how it grew and flourished as a community.

It seems like almost everybody I've interviewed has said it was just a wonderful place to grow up, and that they couldn't imagine growing up anywhere else. I find that strong sense of community very striking.

Well, after you and your wife had your family and moved away, what eventually brought you back to Layton?

BC: Both of our families were from Layton, and our parents lived about three blocks away from each other. Well, while we living in Florida, Wendy's father and my father both passed away within a year of each other. And we thought, "How can we keep raising our family across the country, when both of our mothers are now alone?" So, we decided to move back. The job I had in Florida was really great, and there wasn't one as good in Utah. And our home in Florida was really tremendous. So we moved back not because of my job, or a better life, but because of family.

TF: Well, one of the last questions I have: how do you think growing up in Layton shaped you as a person?

BC: Well, I think there's something about living in a small town that stays with you. I've lived in New York City, and I loved that too, but I'm glad I didn't actually grow up there. I think the people who have that experience get a little harder, and they tend to be maybe a little more driven, or a little more focused; but I think people from small towns tend to be a little bit softer, and maybe a little more tolerant. They tend to want to go at a little slower pace.

So, I think it's all of those things. I think that even had I lived in Salt Lake my entire childhood, I might have been a somewhat different person than I was growing up in Layton.

TF: Well, is there anything we haven't included in this interview that you would like to add before we close?

BC: I can't think of anything else, other than I'm going to leave you with some books. [But] I think people who read the book might have similar memories as me, whether they grew up in Layton, or any other small town. Whether it's the 4th of July, or parades, or going to church or school, their friendships, the sports they played, or their memories of junior high and high school. There are just things that people who grow up in small towns have in common.

But my experience was probably very different than what kids growing up in Layton experience today. It's not the same. When there were only a few thousand people, we knew mostly everyone. But now we don't. We knew most of our neighbors then, but now we don't.

TF: It's funny, because I have an 18-year-old who's now going to the University of Washington, but I also have a toddler, and he knows all of our neighbors by what cars they drive. He loves classic cars, and my husband loves to fix cars. So, he knows all of our neighbors who have "cool cars," because he and my husband always stop by to see their cars, and to say "hi" to them.

BC: How old is he?

TF: Three. (laughs) There's a '69 Mustang in our neighborhood, some '70s Darts, some Chargers, and a little military Jeep. But he knows all of those, and he knows the neighbors who own them.

But it's different for kids growing up in Layton now, because kids in your time had The Hollow right there, and my son doesn't have that. We go every weekend to the Kaysville Wilderness Area, because he loves the trails up there, and he has to be outside. That's just who he is. We have two border collies as well, so we just pack up the dogs and our son, and off we go. But he just loves having the outdoors, and I grew up with that so close. You did as well—just having that playtime outside to run free.

BC: Well, it will be wonderful to see what product comes about as this oral history project happens. (Tori describes briefly what they hope to accomplish once the project is finished, recording stops)