



Oral History: BROOKS OHBRO02A

D. W. Brooks
by
Brian S. Wills

D. W. Brooks Collection
OH BROOKS 02A
D. W. Brooks Interviewed by Brian S. Wills
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Side One

Wills: Let's see if we can get this together. All right, once again, just to say that we're here in our second of a series of interviews with D. W. Brooks in his office, and this is June 22, 1987. Mr. Brooks, I believe when we left off we had you at the University of Georgia, and we had you in school. What I'd like to do is to see if we can pick up from that point on. I know that you mentioned that you chose to leave the university and had a run-in with the president about it. But, so we did talk about that, but what I do want to talk about is why did you decide to go to Carrollton to start the co-op there, or work on the co-op there?

Brooks: Well, Carroll County was the largest cotton producing county in the state of Georgia at that time, and it had more farmers in it. They were mostly small white farmers, not as many black farmers as other areas, but more farmers. So, it seemed to me that it was ideal to start because you had these farmers who owned their own farms, but who were about to lose them all because they were going broke. Now, there was one fundamental economic difference between agriculture then and agriculture now. Generally speaking, the average farmer had very little access to money. So consequently, he didn't owe too much money, and when he failed to make anything he

just starved to death. [Laughter] That's what happened. He and his wife and children just lived in a poverty situation.

So consequently, you didn't have quite the same economic situation that you have today by any means. In other words, when they had poor production, they just starved out. They had very little food and they had very little clothes; their clothing was very poor and their housing was terrible. I might have mentioned before, I don't think I did, but I had an economist come and look over some of our farm situations in order to see, to get his ideas on it, and it was terrible. I mean, for example, I don't think there was a single farm house as far as I could tell that was painted. I never saw a house that was painted on the farm in north Georgia, from Macon north.

So consequently, you can realize the conditions under which the living was terrible. This economist that I had that came back and said I had the greatest group of scientists in the world. He said they could just sit in the house and study geology through the floor in the daytime and astronomy through the roof at night. So it was [laughter] about that kind of housing. So, you can realize that they were really starving out. We, for example, one thing that I was trying to do, and we'll get into it, of course, was greatly increase their productivity because as you well know, and I've mentioned before, in economics one thing you certainly learn is that the

only way to have a high scale of living is high productivity per individual.

These growers were not producing much. They had one mule and one plow stock and that was about it. With the kind of fertilizer that they were using and seed and other things, they were bound to be poverty stricken. Now, we had decided to encourage our growers in every way to stimulate their desires for more, and one way was to paint their homes, and we put in a system of painting farm homes, spraying it on. We couldn't afford to actually paint it on. We sprayed it on. But I remember one old lady in her seventies, when we got through, just crying because she said it was the first time she'd ever lived in a painted house in her entire life.

Now, of course, my whole philosophy was that we had to change the whole pattern of agriculture if we were going to survive, and I might have mentioned before, but there were several reasons for this extremely low productivity and poverty. One, of course, was the kind of fertilizer that they were using because it was terrible, the quality was awful. It took twelve to fourteen hundred pounds of sand to produce a ton of fertilizer. You had to have that much sand in it to make it to make it that sorry. There's no way you could make it that sorry without that much sand. Now, I think in my first discussion I mentioned that before, but we had to go all out to change the whole pattern, not only fertilizer, but in

the case of seed, in the case of insecticides, and everything that they were doing.

Now, we also figured that we had to increase their marketing system, which was very poor. There was no scientific marketing. The cotton mills based the price on whether it had been rained on or not [laughter] and that was about the only basis. But I think in my previous discussion I mentioned how we went to mills and said to them that we'd put this cotton in even running lots as to grade and length of staple so that we could increase the productivity of the mill, and therefore we wanted a higher price for the cotton. Now, there was a great desire, of course, on the part of people to do better, but they didn't know exactly how to do better. Now, there was, of course, a terrible lack of capital, and the government finally came in and offered to make what they called seed loans to farmers. Now, they made these loans to the tenants, not to the landowners; the landowners endorsed the notes, but the tenants. . . well, the tenants used that money to hopefully to buy fertilizer and seed, and insecticide, but they were so hard-pressed that naturally all their money did not go into productivity.

But, at the same time, it was very helpful. In other words, this was beginning in the Roosevelt ages when [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt was trying to change things, and this area, the Southeast here, was known as the "economic problem number one" of the nation. It was the number one economic problem,

and, of course, there was lots of discussion, lots of terrible statements that were made by the fact that they were without clothes, and without shoes, and it was a horrible kind of situation. Now, the sad part, of course, was that the politicians were all telling the farmers that the reason why they were hungry and naked was because somebody was robbing them. Well, they of course were robbed to some extent, but that was not the answer. The whole answer was economic.

Now, as we moved along we had to start simple, of course, and the way we started simple was we started with cotton, because that was the big product at that time. So we decided, "Well, we'll improve cotton." Now how did we improve that? By using the right kind of fertilizer, the right seed, and insecticide, we moved the yield up from maybe a fourth of a bale per acre, maybe up to a bale per acre, and then we increased the quality of the cotton by putting in one-variety community. Now, we soon in time, of course, realized that we weren't going to solve it all with cotton because cotton was not really the real opportunity for the future. As I mentioned, I think, before, in the case of the government, when they came in they, of course, put acreage allotments to farmers, and they were poverty-stricken because they couldn't produce anything.

Now, we moved gradually these farmers into other things, moved them into poultry for example, and Gold Kist became the largest producers of broilers in the world. Now,

that created many opportunities, but it also created many problems because we had to put in research. We put in research on our own farms. We worked with the colleges of agriculture and the experiment stations, and the feeling, of course, back in those days, there was no realization on how much money could be made in poultry. For example, when I was a professor at the University of Georgia, I remember a new professor of poultry, the head of the poultry department, came and made a report at one of the faculty meetings. And at that time the Agronomy Division, which was the crop division, was the big division at the college of agriculture. So when this new person from poultry, who was head of the poultry division, made his report and finally said there was lots of money in poultry, well, the head of the Agronomy Division jumped up and said, "There ought to be. Nobody's ever gotten any money out of it." [Laughter]

So consequently you can realize that when we went into poultry there was not much feeling that there was much money in it, but it was fabulous what came out of it. We started off with a--it took 4 to 4½ pounds of feed to produce a pound of meat, and now, of course, we've got that down to less than 2 pounds of feed to produce a pound of meat, about 1.8. And then it took twelve to fourteen weeks to produce a three pound bird; we can produce one now in five or six. So, it's one of the great miracles that's happened in the history of agriculture, and, millions . . . and it has become the largest

income item for the state of Georgia now. It's by far the largest income item, is poultry. So

Wills: You'd think the peanuts would be [laughter].

Brooks: When you can realize that you started from scratch with nothing, and the only time you ever got any chicken was on Sunday because it was the most expensive meat that we had. We brought it from the most expensive to the cheapest meat they produce now anywhere in the world. So consequently, that's probably one of the greatest miracles that's ever happened in agriculture, in the history of all of agriculture, in the history of time. So, we started here and did the job. It was a very great thing. Very few people realize, even very few consumers realize what kind of job has been done, but we are selling broilers today cheaper than we sold them forty years ago, and that indicates the kind of development that really has taken place in research. We've had our own research farms, and we've worked with the colleges, and we've brought about entirely different breeds of chickens. They're entirely different from the early ones.

The early ones, they were slender, and [laughter] tough, and didn't grow much, and didn't produce much, but now we have a brand on the market today, *Young and Tender*. You have probably seen, maybe, the ad. I was looking at it Saturday night, I guess, or Sunday night, on television, where we had these chickens that were graduating from college and we said . . . [laughter] with the graduating cap on them, and they are

now high bred things, great chickens. They're better than any chickens you've ever heard of, and we . . . under the brand name of *Young and Tender*. So we've put this in the market, and now we're about to pass beef in consumption, per capita consumption of meat, of poultry, about to pass beef, which is unbelievable, because when we first started the consumption of poultry was practically nothing, very little.

So, that is one of the probably great histories, and Gold Kist has been right in the forefront of this all the way through, and I think we're still by far the most efficient producers of broilers. We're the most economic producers of broilers of anybody in the entire industry, but the industry has grown to be a tremendously large industry. So consequently, you get a good deal of satisfaction out of that, that you did take something there, take it from the bottom and take it to the top. Now . . .

Wills: Speaking of taking it from the bottom and taking it to the top, you started, and things didn't go real well in the early days in Carrollton. I think I read that you said something like that the period from 1925 to '33 was an excellent training period for you because it taught you everything what not to do with the co-op. Could you tell us again about the early, the earliest years? I know that the poultry came a little later from the early years. In the early years it was still just cotton.

Brooks: Yeah. Well, poultry came about 1940, so that was seven years down the road from where we started.

Wills: Right. The first co-op though, the first one that you left the University of Georgia for, that was quite a struggle.

Brooks: Well, see, I had helped organize that co-op in '21, but it was not doing well. It was--everything was going down hill.

Wills: It was quite a struggle.

Brooks: So consequently I felt that I might be able to turn it around, but unfortunately management was such that they were fine people, but they hadn't had any real economic training. So consequently everything was on the downbeat, and so it just didn't work out. I had to take it in '33 and redo everything, start completely from scratch, and redo the whole thing. So you go through a period and learn what not to do for awhile, and then you find out what to do.

That was a period when everything was headed towards the Great Depression. Agriculture started going down hill in '25 at a very rapid rate, and it continued right on through the Depression. In fact, there are lots [sic] of economic information that indicate that agriculture was probably one of the main reasons, that is, the terrible drop-off in agriculture was one of the main reasons for the great crash in '29 of the stock market, because at that time agriculture was a high percent of the economy of this country. When it went

broke, it broke everything else with it. So that might have been one reason why I mentioned before that I worked out the crash in '29. I worked it out long before it happened. So I was very familiar with the economy, of what was going on, and when I studied it and came to the conclusion that the bottom was going to go out. . . welp....

I felt that we had to start moving everything back up again. You went through all this crash; you had to move it back up again, and that was when, of course, I did a complete new job, changed the whole pattern of agriculture and the whole pattern of the co-ops. For example, all the co-ops--and I had been to co-ops all over the world. I went to the West Coast; I went to Denmark and Sweden; I'd been all over the world studying co-ops. All of them, when they started, farmers had had to put up capital in order to get them going, or they had to agree to take just a part of the value of their crop as an advance, and then let it be marketed out, and then pay them at the end of the year. Well, I realized that when all these co-ops had gone broke, and not a single one had survived, and farmers' income was seventy-two dollars, you couldn't go out and raise any capital. The only way they could possibly go was on a competitive basis.

As I mentioned before, I put up the capital to pay the salaries, and I got a banker in Atlanta to help finance me. And fortunately--I mentioned before--he had plowed a mule 'til he was twenty-one years old, and he understood what I was

talking about. So consequently we felt like that we had to change the whole pattern of agriculture completely in order to bring it out of the Depression. We were "economic problem number one". We wanted to get away from that, and so we felt that was our job, that was our responsibility, to redo this whole thing and hopefully to do it right.

Now, of course we gradually moved from cotton into fertilizer, which I explained once before. I bought the plant for practically nothing, and fortunately made lots of money, and produced the kind of fertilizer the farmers needed, doubled their yield. Then we went then into soybeans. I might have mentioned before: when I was a professor at the university I brought soybeans over from China, fifty varieties of soybeans. And we put that in to our economic program. We had no soybeans at that time, and so it became the second largest crop in Georgia. Then, of course, corn, I mentioned corn before, the average yield [was] ten and a half bushels per acre, which it'd been for fifty years, and so all we were doing [was] producing poverty.

Now even in the case of cattle, the kind of cattle we had was terrible, and the kind of pastures that we had were worse. In other words, all they were were exercising grounds for the cattle because there was practically no grass on them. So we had to put in a whole new system of fertilizing pastures and then through the experiment stations--Glen Burton, for example, was very helpful and developed some new grasses, and

we tried to be helpful to him. He didn't have any money, for example, to do lots of things, and he had no money, for example, to run experiments on fertilizer. We furnished him the fertilizer to run the experiments, and we found, for example, in the case of these new pastures, new grasses, that if we fertilized them right with nitrogen, and we used ammonium nitrate--we donated it to the experiment station and to him--we not only greatly increased production, but we increased the protein content, so that it was a much better grass, not only more grass, but a whole lot more productive for the cattle.

So the cattle industry developed, of course, too, because when we got some pastures in and we began to get pure-bred cattle in, we developed a great cattle industry in this area. Now, we were never able to feed these cattle out like they do in the Midwest. That was one of the disappointments that we had. You don't always have success with everything you try, but we thought we might be able to feed the cattle out here and make it a profitable industry for our growers. But unfortunately we had to bring in the feed from the Midwest, the corn from the cornbelt, and when we did that the cost was too great. So we found out we could move the cattle out to the Midwest for feeding a lot cheaper than we could bring the feed over here. So consequently that was one project that we started that didn't work out, but we tried, and we ran all the experiments that you could run to be certain that that was not

an industry. In other words, we were searching for everything that a farmer could do to make money, and so we did that one.

Now another one--we fumbled some of them and we didn't do them all right. In the case of fish we decided, well, we ought to do some research on fish, and we put in some research areas on fish, catfish. Unfortunately, we were ahead of our time. We put in a plant to process these fish, and we got a number of our members to produce fish. The members did all right, but we didn't do all right because we had a problem with disease. Now, we went through that in poultry, when we first developed poultry. Whenever you put people, or animals, or birds, or anything, confine them close together, you multiply your disease problem many times over. So, in the case of fish we had the disease problem.

Now, our research showed that it was fabulous. We finally got down to producing a pound of fish with a 1.4 pounds of feed. We were almost producing a pound of fish for a pound of feed. So the conversion ratio was remarkable, just wonderful. But, on the other hand, we got into the disease problem, and it got into our breeding stock, and we finally decided, well, we didn't know enough about controlling the disease, and we felt like we're going to lose too much money before we licked that one, so we pulled out. Now actually that was a mistake because if we'd have stayed in we would have licked the problem of disease. We licked it in poultry, and we would've licked it in catfish, but we didn't stay in.

Now, we're about to go back in again. We pulled out and now we're going back in again, but we've lost several years here that we ought to have been in there. If Gold Kist had stayed in like we did in poultry, I'm confident we would've become, by far, the largest producers of fish in the world. We would've been the big producers of fish, and we desperately need fish now. We've found out that they are great to eat. They are fine from a health standpoint, and we could have probably done with fish like we did with poultry, made them a very cheap product for the consumer. But we lost several years here that we should've been in it and didn't get it done. Now we're getting back in it, and I hope that we can do it, but we've missed some years that we should have.

So, I'm saying that everything we've done didn't exactly work out, but we tried, and we got in there and tried to find everything that we thought would be helpful and raise the income of farmers, because our job, as we looked at it, was to change the pattern of agriculture and change it in such a way that the farm income would double, or triple, or quadruple, and go up, because we wanted to get rid of this poverty. This poverty and hunger was killing us, and we had to get rid of it. So you might want to ask me a few more questions here.

Wills: All right, early in, when you were first working in the co-ops, were the people, were the farmers, tenant farmers, that you worked with, members largely, or were these. . . . What kind of co-ops were these?

Brooks: Well, they were both landowners and tenants. They were both back in those days, and, of course, what happened is that they delivered the products, say, to the co-op, and we settled with them on the basis of whether they were. . . . See, we had different kinds of tenants. We had sharecroppers, for example. The sharecropper only got half of the crop because he didn't furnish anything really except labor, but then a tenant maybe got three-fourths of the crop because he not only furnished the labor, but he would furnish maybe part of the fertilizer, or he'd furnish something else. So he would get three-fourths of the crop, and the landowner would get one-fourth. So it varied according to their contract, but we set that up, and when they came in and delivered the product, we, of course, divided the money according to how they had it.

Wills: But you worked with all three types?

Brooks: Worked with all three types, and then at the end of the year when we had refunds, patron refunds, to go back, and, you see, you must understand that all of our money that we made, we set it up to go back to the farmers. Those of us who worked worked at a very cheap rate. We didn't draw much out. Our whole object was to raise income of farmers, and we couldn't raise it if we ate it all up ourselves. So consequently, the sacrifice was on the part of the employees. I might have mentioned before: all that I drew was two hundred

dollars a month, which was far less than I was offered many times in many other ways.

Wills: Well, they initially offered you a lot more in the co-op itself didn't they?

Brooks: Well, what happened

Wills: And you had [laughter] to say no.

Brooks: As soon as it was apparent that I knew how to make money, everybody wanted to hire you, and I was offered all kinds of jobs you ever heard of. One of the biggest companies in the country, and I better not call the name, but they came to me and said, "You have great ability here to make money, and you are only making five thousand dollars." That's all I was [making], and they said, "We'll give you fifty thousand dollars a year, and we'll give you partnership in the company." Back in those days, there were no stock companies. They were all partnership companies. Even J. P. Morgan and Company, for example, was a partnership, and so they said, "We'll make you a partner in the company, and we're certain you'll be worth a million dollars in five years."

Well, of course, naturally that was a temptation, but it wasn't a temptation enough [laughter] because I had made up my mind this is what I wanted to do. Just like when I left the university, [it] wasn't very pleasant leaving, but it was something I made up my mind that I was going to get to do this thing if there was any way I could do it. So consequently I told them, no, I would not do it. Well, then they got very

adamant. They said I did not have the right to deny my wife and children my ability to make money that I had demonstrated. I knew how to make money, big money, and that I had no right to deny my wife and children the ability I had to make money. Well, I told them that I'd have to--"I didn't have any moral right."

I said, "I'll determine my morals; you determine yours."

Finally they threatened to call my wife and tell her what I was doing, and I told them that if they did I'd sue them [laughter] because I just wasn't going to do it. So consequently, I didn't want to sail under false colors. I'm out there trying to save farmers and then eating up all the money myself. I just felt like that I had to be what I was supposed to be, and so consequently, I turned down all these offers. That was just one of them. I turned down all sorts [laughter] of offers because once the business world finds you and figures that you know how to make money, they're on your doorstep, see, trying to grab you some way or another and entice you to get in that deal. Of course, I maybe, I think I mentioned it before: I was very tough on farmers, saying that "If you'll do what I want done, then I'm going to stay with it, and you can have the money, but if you don't"

[Cut off]

End of Side One

Side Two

Wills: All right, you had decided you were going to set up your own

Brooks: I tell you: if I did anything, I wasn't planning to do anything, but if I had done anything, I wouldn't have worked for anybody. I would've set up my own company, but I teased the farmers and told 'em that if I had to do that that I was going to ride by in a Cadillac and dust them [laughter], but I wasn't going to have any sympathy for them. So I had the heat on them in order to make them move the way I wanted them to move, but, anyway, you gradually move from one product to another. I mentioned, I think before, that I moved then from soybeans to peanuts, on which we've done real well, and we've moved continuously from one product--now we're in pork production, for example.

I don't think I've mentioned pork before, but we now have developed a pattern of pork production, and we figure that we can produce pork a whole lot cheaper than it's ever been produced before and probably far more profitable to farmers. We've worked out a system of breeding, a system of feeding and disease control, and we're now doing real well in pork, and we're scattering that all over now. We're scattering that over the area in which we operate. So we think that pork will about hold its own. We don't think its got the great expansion like chickens, for example, but we think it will about hold its own in the marketplace. And if we can do it a

whole lot cheaper and better than it's ever been done before, then it'll be a lot more profit for this farmer. He'll come out and make a lot more money, and that's what our job is to do, is see he makes more money all the time.

Now, in the case of beef, it's somewhat on the downbeat because there was a good deal of discussion, of course, of the question of health and beef, and it's a real problem. So, although we are still doing some research in beef, we're not pushing it very hard at the present time. But I think now that we need to keep scattering our pork operation because it's better than any that's ever been developed. But our main thing is to keep our chicken operation going and also to keep the fish now; that's the new one.

Now, I'm sure there are some other things that are on the calendar here, that we need to do in Gold Kist. We need to find some new crops to bring into this area, and we're researching that all the time. I don't have any particular announcement right at the present time because [laughter] you don't want to disclose some of the things you're working on, but we're working on a number of other crops now, just like we brought soybeans largely in. Gold Kist was the one that brought soybeans into this area of the world. We certainly brought chickens in, and now we figure that there are some other things that need to be brought in here because we've got some bad economic situations now, and we desperately need to come up with some new ideas. We feel that we ought to be out

in the cutting edge of this deal and bring them in. Now, what other ideas do you have now?

Wills: I was just wondering, you know, I know you went and you talked in the early days of the cooperative. You had to talk with farmers and try to convince them, and I know that it took a lot of convincing and a lot of lobbying. How long did it take these farmers to accept that Cotton Producers could do what no other cooperative had done?

Brooks: Well, I don't think they realized in the beginning, but, you see, we put in a whole new system. For example, we said to growers, and this was the first time that I have ever known this to happen in a co-op anywhere in the world, and I've been all over, we said to them, "Now you can't lose in this deal; you might win. We're going to pay the top price for every product we market for you, and we're going to pay you the day you bring it in. We're not going to bring it six months, or twelve months, or two years down the road. We're going to pay you that day, the highest price that's paid for that product on that day."

"Now, if you don't want to sell that day, we'll store it for you, and we'll store it for you at cost and let you decide when you want to sell it, see. And the minute you want to sell it, we'll pay the highest price that the market affords on that day, and so consequently you have no risk in marketing your product through Gold Kist. You got the top market, already money in your pocket that day, and then, if we make

any profit out of it, you get that too at the end of the year." So, it's a no lose deal, which sounds crazy, and I'll have to admit I had a hard time explaining that one and justifying it.

I remember one time, for example, when I went to LaGrange [Georgia] and I set up the deal there, the fellow said to me, a manager's the guy that said it, "Now, y'all gonna put up the money?" "Yeah." "You gonna buy the warehouse?" "Yeah." "And then you gonna make money?" "Yeah." "And you gonna give it all to farmers, huh?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "What's the catch?" [Laughter] Well, I said, "There's no catch." He said, "It's crazy." I said, "I understand it's crazy. It makes no economic sense, but on the other hand, there's no way we can get farmers back into a co-op again when they've lost every dime they've ever put in a co-op, and all of them have gone broke."

So I decided that I ought to take a risk of all, whatever resources I have. I'll put them all on the line, and I borrowed the rest from the bank, and they're taking a risk and they understand the risk. So, if there's any loss, it'll be our loss. It won't be the farmers', and I can say to a farmer, "Never again in your lifetime will you ever lose a dime as a member of Gold Kist." Now, I said, "As far as I know no co-op ever guaranteed that before to its members, that you cannot lose but you might win." We did the same thing in the case of farm supplies. For example, we bought these

fertilizer plants at practically nothing, and we manufactured fertilizer that was twice as good as anything they'd ever had. We doubled the plant food in there, and we sold that at fully competitive prices. We said we'll sell it at as cheap a price as anybody can do it.

We'll have it, all of it, tested. We have our own chemist. We'll test all this fertilizer, and you can have it tested by the State Department of Agriculture. You test all you want to test. It'll be the finest that you've ever bought, and it'll be at the cheapest price that you've ever paid, and so, in addition to that, at the end of the year, if any money is made, you get it back." So, I said, "You can't make it any better than that," and it sounds crazy [laughter]. I didn't blame the man for asking me what the catch was because it was crazy. But, on the other hand, fortunately we made it work. We made money. We paid refunds, and, as I mentioned, I think in my first conversation, the plant at Carrollton, that I bought for thirty-five hundred dollars, I made fifty thousand dollars the first year. Well consequently, I had lots of money to go back to growers, and so consequently our business principles were right. We were not only competitive, but we were so efficient in our operations that we had money to go back.

Many of our competitors said to us that the worst thing that happened was our efficiency. They said, "You're the most efficient operation we've ever. . . . We've never had to

compete with anything like this before." So they would fuss about your efficiency and your economy, but, of course, it was because we're using right principles and we weren't spending all the money. We weren't eating it all up in salaries and expenses. We were saving it, and having it go back to the growers.

Wills: You talk about changing patterns in agriculture, you really changed one in that sense, too, because this wasn't based on credit either, was it?

Brooks: Oh no.

Wills: No. This was based on "you come with the cash."

Brooks: Yeah.

Wills: All right.

Brooks: You see, we gave them all the money, and we did not risk. I said, "Never will I sit in my office and have a member of Gold Kist come into my office and say he lost money as a member of Gold Kist." I said, "Now, if that day ever comes, we'll close Gold Kist. We might go broke, and we might close it, but no member is going to ever lose money." Well, as far as I know, no co-op ever guaranteed that before in the history of the co-op world, but I decided that was what we had to do. So, it was a very efficient operation.

Wills: At Carrollton, also, you met your wife. That's where you met her, wasn't it?

Brooks: Yes [laughter], I met my wife there, and she, of course, was a very attractive person, and she, I'm sure, did

not fully understand all the things that were going on [laughter]. So I told her, of course, how I was going to do this thing, and that I was going to operate this thing on a tight basis, and that we weren't going to draw any money out, we were going to live hard and tough. She said, "well, she hoped that I knew what I was doing [laughter]. And if that was what I wanted to do she try it to," but she said, "It does look a little stupid." She knew in a way that I'd been off in all sorts of things, and she said, "It does seem a little stupid to do what you're doing, but if that's the dedication that you want to make to this cause, and you want to do this, then I'm in the deal. I'm part of it, and I'll do it."

Well, of course, fortunately she was a very economical person. Now, you do many things wrong in life, but every once in a while you do something right. Now I'd watched these married couples, and it seemed to me that about ninety percent of their fussing was over money. So I said to her, "In order to, we gotta live a tight life, but to work it out, let's divide the money, and you run the house and look after all the costs of the house, and the home, and the food, and everything, and let me run the business. Then let me give you an allowance, and that's yours, and you manage it, and then I'll take what I have and manage it." And she said that suited her fine. She'd been a school teacher. She'd taught voice and was a graduate of a. . . . She'd gone to Agnes Scott College originally, and then she'd gone to Brenau, and

then she'd gone to Columbia University in New York. So she was a well-educated [person], but she was a very efficient operator.

So she managed her end of the business just as well as I managed mine, probably better, and I used to tease her, but, of course, the minute that I got this going and had to market products overseas, then nearly every summer I had to go overseas, putting in offices all around the world. And finally Gold Kist was operating in ninety-two countries of the world, and so consequently, I would like for her to go with me because I desperately needed her lots of times in the entertaining. I mean, in some of these countries they want to entertain you, and they have their wives and you'd like to have your wife along. Well, I used to tease her and say that. . . . When I tell her we're going to go overseas this summer, well, I noticed the food got awful scarce at the house because she was saving up money to have something left when she went overseas. She might find something that she wanted to buy.

Well, sometimes we'd have a couple with us and she'd find something she liked, and I would encourage her to buy it. I'd just say, "Now that's beautiful. You ought to buy it." The couple would say, "We never saw such a generous husband." Well, she'd turn to them and say, "Well, you don't understand the deal." [Laughter] She said, "He's trying to get me to spend my money. He's not spending a dime of his." So consequently, she was very conservative, and she would pinch

every penny. I told them I had salmon cakes, which was the cheapest back then you could buy, pink salmon in a can you know, and you get by for two or three meals for practically nothing. But she kept her end of the bargain in good shape. So I was very fortunate in that respect because you can realize that many wives would not understand that, and they would be very vindictive of the fact that your husband could make ten times what he was making and he would refuse to do it. Well then, she would be violent, but I had no problem with that, thank goodness. It was very fortunate. She didn't even threaten me with divorce [laughter].

Wills: She understood what you were doing.

Brooks: That's right. She got an interest in it. She became interested and she said, "Well, it's like a missionary." Said, "You're a missionary to farmers, and I want to be a part of it." So she had the mission spirit. Of course, later on I was on the board of missions of the Methodist Church. I don't know whether I've gone into that yet or not, but I was on the board of missions, and they made me vice chairman of the board of missions in the Methodist Church. I used to tease them and said, "The only reason why they made me vice chairman, I was going around the world anyway and they could use me free. It didn't cost the church anything." But it gave me the chance to meet lots of wonderful people and do lots of things that otherwise I would not have had a privilege of doing. So she was extremely

helpful to me. And now . . . we were married in 1930; this is '57--I mean '87, so that's a long time, fifty-seven years, you know. That's a long time.

Wills: Quite some years. You also had a son very early.

Brooks: Yeah, I fortunately had a son [David Williams Brooks, Jr., "Bill"]. My son is, fortunately was, a very brilliant scholar. I mean, he went through high school--back in those days we did not have Westminster here. We just had regular school, and lots of people felt that I should have sent him off to school up in Virginia, where they had had a great high school up there. And generally, if you went to that high school, which was a private high school, you could get in to any college you wanted if you were a brilliant student. But I didn't want him away from me during the formative years of his high school, and I felt that he needed to be with me and his mother both, and so consequently, I would not, did not send him off to school. He just went to high school here in Atlanta, just an ordinary high school, but he was a good scholar.

So he decided he wanted to go to Harvard, which was the top. I mean, you couldn't get--it was the hardest school to get into of any school in the nation because they only took one thousand or eleven hundred freshmen every year. Now, their graduate school was very large, but the undergraduate school at Harvard was not that large, and so consequently, when he wrote Harvard, they told him they doubt he could

qualify unless he'd gone to a private school, that regular school would not qualify him, but if he'd send the grades up, they'd take a look.

So he sent his grades up, and they said they looked good, and they believed they would send the exam down for him to take. They sent an exam down to Emory [University], and he went out there. An eight hour exam, he took that, and he sent it up, and they wrote him and told him that he did quite well on that. They were sending a person to interview him, and so they sent a person to interview him. After that they finally took him. Well, he said when he got to Harvard he found out why all of this was all about. He said he thought it was an awful lot of rigamarole to get into Harvard, but he said what had happened, they'd just skimmed off the A+ students from all over the country, and consequently he said a poor B student didn't have a prayer. He was dead. In ninety days he was out of business.

He said the tempo at which you were going was unbelievable. For example, he said in his first science course--I've forgotten what it was, chemistry or something--he said they had twenty-four chapters and twenty-four professors. Had one for each chapter, and he said that was his specialty, and he said three of them were Nobel Prize winners. So, he said, you can realize the speed at which things were going, and he said consequently just an ordinary B student was dead. I mean, he didn't have a prayer in that kind of a race. But

he did wonderfully well at Harvard. Got along fine. Graduated in great shape, and he decided he wanted to go into medicine.

So he had heard all this racket that you couldn't get in a med [medical] school [laughter], and so he applied to five med schools, I think, and all of them took him. I had remembered one time, coming out of New York, I was sitting by a fellow who was a professor at Hopkins [John Hopkins University], in the medical school at Hopkins. And just to make conversation, I asked him, I said, "Where do you get your best medical students?" I thought, Hopkins has a great school. "Oh," he said, "from Harvard." Said, "If you ever get one out of Harvard, you can shut your eyes. If he survives up there, you can depend on him making it in med school."

So anyway, Bill, my son, applied to Hopkins, and also to Duke, and maybe two or three more, and they immediately took him. Hopkins put lots of pressure on him to come to Hopkins, and it was a great school. But he went to Hopkins, and looked it over, and stayed there maybe a day or so, but he went on to Duke. He found out that Duke had lots of money and had bought lots of the professors out of Hopkins and moved them to Duke. So he decided that Duke was better than Hopkins, and so he went to Duke instead of to Hopkins. Got along fine and has done a remarkable job. He finished. He got every degree he could dream of in his field. He's in radiology diagnosis.

[Bill] went down to Florida. . . well, first he was on the staff up at Duke for a while. He used to tease me, and he said that if I had somebody in Gold Kist that nobody could cure, "just send them up to Duke and we'll cure him." And he said, "Now don't send a man up with a cold. Let him die." Said, "We want these tough cases." So there were nine of them apparently in diagnosis up there, and he said that one or two nights a week they would all nine meet to judge a case. And he said, "In that way we just don't miss a case, we don't think."

He was telling me about one case that there had only been two cases in the history of the world, but he said, "In several hours we diagnosed that one," the third diagnosis in the history of the world. But anyway, then he and two other young doctors started a clinic in Jacksonville [Florida], and he did a great job down there and built it into a tremendously large clinic. He had last year two hundred and fifty thousand cases. So he's got, I think, fifteen or sixteen doctors and everything, and did a great job.

See, all his cases have to come from other doctors because he's in diagnosis, and so consequently it's a great reflection on the fact that they're doing a great job, or they wouldn't have two hundred and fifty thousand patients. He said to me that when he had twelve doctors in his set-up down there, he said, "We're doing as much as Hopkins is doing now with sixty doctors in the same field." And I said, "Well, how

do you do it?" He said, "Training technicians." He said that, "It's no excuse for a doctor to take his time to do something that you can train a girl technician who can do just as good or better than you can." He said, "I've been training technicians to do this thing."

I was down there visiting and found out that about every three years or something they send their technicians to the state, and they have a contest, all of the technicians. His technicians had won the Florida contest, and then he sent them to the national contest somewhere up in the Midwest or somewhere. And they'd won that as the best trained technicians in the United States, and I was down there when they came back. We went out to the airport, and these girls [laughter], attractive, beautiful, pretty, falling off--coming off those planes all running over, grabbing, and hugging, and kissing Bill [laughter]. His wife said she wasn't so sure about all that [laughter].

But anyway, he apparently was real tough because one of his partners said to me, said, "Some of the doctors were surprised that Bill won the national championship. But they said, 'We'd been shocked if he hadn't won it.'" He said, "You don't realize what a tough son you have." Said, "He's the toughest doctor we've ever heard of." He said, "For example, he'll take these technicians, he'll get them bright, and then tell them, 'I'm going to train you, but if you make one mistake, you're through. Not two, but one. You're through."

Now, I don't want any crying or screaming or hollering, and it's a chance you're taking. Now, if you're not willing to take that risk, don't get in the program. But if you're willing to take the risk, then I'll train you, but after I train you, if you ever make a mistake, you're through."

Well, I said to him, one day, I said, "Aren't you pretty tough on these. . . ." He said, "Oh, no." Said, "If they make a mistake, they're either mistake-prone or they're careless, and you can't stand either one." Said, "You just can't take a chance with a person's life. You just don't take that chance." And he said, "Consequently, they understand that." Well now, I asked him, I said, "What about your doctors?" He said, "Well, I pick them with just as great a care." And I said, "You had any trouble?" He said, "Yeah. I got one out of Mayo." He said, "I went up there and checked him. Checked okay; looked all right."

But he said, "He was down here about three months, and one Monday morning he didn't show up, and I got to checking and the fellow'd been drinking over the weekend. So," he [Bill] said, "When he came in I brought him in, and I said, 'Now, we don't have that. You can't diagnose anybody's illness when you're coming off of a drunk, and we just don't permit that, and we're not going to stand for it. And if you ever happen again, you're through. Out.'" He said, "About three more months," said, "One Monday morning he didn't show up, and he checked out, and he'd been drinking again." And he

said he called him up, said, "Now, don't come. No use. We'll send your stuff to you. We don't want you in the clinic anymore. Don't want you here. You're through."

So apparently, he is real tough. He has been awful tough, but he has built a great clinic. He's very much upset now over this . . . all this suing of the doctors over malpractice. He's just having hemorrhages about it because he says that you just don't have a prayer in a case like that. He said, "Even as tight as we run with two hundred and fifty thousand patients, if a crooked doctor gets a hold of one of them, you can be sued." And so he says, "Consequently, it's a risk. It's not fair and just," and he said, "It's a question whether we're going to keep taking it or not." So it's a pitiful thing there. He's tops in his field, apparently, and yet, at the same time, threatening to walk out because of this terrible situation. In Florida apparently it's lots worse than it is here in Georgia, terrible.

Wills: It sounds very familiar when you say he ran a tight ship and he's very efficient because that's the way I see Gold Kist being, very tightly run, and you've had basically the same policy on alcohol and that sort of thing. If a person was caught with alcohol, you didn't like that, and you didn't tolerate it.

Brooks: Well, I not only didn't like it, I wouldn't permit it.

Wills: Right.

Brooks: I mean, of course, he [Bill] knew that from the time he was a youngster. Maybe they thought I was tough, but I just didn't permit that kind of foolishness. I mean, the rule in Gold Kist was if anybody drank during working hours, they were through. They had it because I didn't want them handling Gold Kist money when they were drinking. So consequently, I had a very tight policy, and, of course, I guess he figured he had to put in a tight policy, which, of course, was even more important, because life is a lot more valuable than money, and so he put in a very tight policy in his set-up down there.

Now my daughter [Nancy Ruth Brooks Jones], I have also a daughter, and my daughter has done wonderfully well. I tell them that if you're now a parent, and your children are out of jail, you're in good shape." But she fortunately was a brilliant scholar, too, and by the time she came along Westminster was open, and she went to Westminster, the private school here in Atlanta, great school. So they had just started this program, you know, to test all the students all over the United States, you know, and they could get scholarships, you know. And merit--this merit scholars program, you know? So she came to me and said she'd like to take it. I said, "Well, I can't let you take a scholarship. I'm financially able to send you to college."

She said she didn't care. She said, "We at Westminster think we're pretty sharp, and we want to take it." I said,

"Okay, take it." Well, fortunately, she got into that and into a merit scholarship. Well, they offered her lots of scholarships, but I never would let her take any, don't you see. But she went to Randolph-Macon originally, and then from there to Duke. Then she wanted to do religious work on the campus, so she went to Union Theological Seminary in New York to take a Bachelor of Divinity, and met a minister up there and they married. So she has done wonderfully well. She has three children. My son has four.

She said to me that her husband was a minister, and he'd never have a dime because no preacher ever made anything, and if anybody made any, she'd have to make it. So she went to work on investments, and she didn't have any resources, practically none, but she had done unbelievable investment programs. She's worth unbelievable amounts of money as a minister's wife. She's actually quite wealthy and made it all on investments. But she takes the *Wall Street Journal*, studies everything all the time, and has been tremendously successful. I thought at the first that Bill, my son, was a lot smarter than she was, but she's just as smart as he is and has done wonderfully well. Now, Bill, of course, being a doctor [Cut off]

End of Side Two

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* = unsubstantiated spelling or incomplete name

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