

Complied with the help of an AI generator from edited video – December 2023

TRANSCRIPT
Don Bansemer, edited video

So, it's August 18th, 2021, and I'm interviewing Don, and it's pronounced "BESSEMER," right?

"BESSEMER," that's a German name. Now, my dad came here in 1923 from Baldenberg, Germany.

Ok.

Him and his brother. We had a great big farm back in Baldenberg, Germany that was up towards the northern border at Poland. My dad wanted to travel. And so, he found out that we had a uncle in St. Paul, Minnesota. And you could not get into the United States without a sponsor at that time. I had an uncle and a dad. That's the only ones that left Germany. So, in 1923 they end up in St. Paul, Minneapolis. So, the uncle says you guys, you two boys can stay here on the farm as long as you like. And they had a pig farm. And so anyway I was born as far as Pennsylvania Dutch, German, and Swede.

And what year was that?

1936. 1936, I was born in Santa Monica, California.

What brought your family from the East Coast out to Santa Monica, California?

My dad left his brother, Willie. In 1926 Willie went one way and my dad went another way. My dad met a church buddy, they bought this Model T in St. Paul, Minneapolis in 1926. So, my dad says, he told his Uncle Paul there, he says I'm going to California I know there's green grass out there and I if I stay in St. Paul, Minneapolis I'm going to freeze to death. Then my dad and the church guy, they got in this Model T, and it was all dirt road then, there was no paved roads. And they're going through Montana somewhere and there wasn't a sign there saying the road to Los Angeles, there was no sign there. So, they took the wrong road. They get down on this dirt road and they run out of gas. The only thing, there was an Indian Scout, up in the plateau, and had seen the vehicle. Came down to investigate. The only thing I know that the Indian Scout knew where to get help for these guys, to get them back on the right road. Wouldn't have been for the Scout I wouldn't be here today. His friend from Minneapolis St. Paul, as soon as they got into Los Angeles, he got a telegram that my dad's friend had to take a train, go back to Minnesota, and help to run the farm because that his dad was dying. So, my dad now sitting there with nobody in the world [?], he knew nobody, and the church helped us in about 1929. So, my dad then finally met my mother at a youth group. Anyway, they got married and then...

You grew up in Southern California...

We ended up in Santa Monica, California. My dad had a..., he was a tailor by trade. That's what he brought in from Germany, a tailor. Ended up in Santa Monica, California. And it was in 1936 and in about 1946...then the war broke out, the war broke out in '41. After we were hit in Pearl Harbor, I was five in '41. When the

treaty went up in '45, Russia took over that part of Eastern Germany and that's where we had our big farm. And and so my grandparents were over there, and the Russians they had no use for the old people, so they starved them. So, all the letters my dad was writing back and forth. And then we sent care packages, we don't know if they ever got that stuff. And my dad had a brother named Abel [?] and he was a colonel in the German Army, he was a colonel fighting the US. And he never got killed. Anyway '46, he didn't have an automobile, he gets on a bus, he goes to..., he says I'm going to Oregon, I hear the there's the salmon are thick up on the Rogue [?] River. And he comes back to my mother, and he says I'm moving to Oregon. And my mother told him, she says, Art, you got an ultimatum. I was born in California; I'm going to live and die in California. So, my dad says, well I guess I have to find out some little spot I can take these three boys that'll be kind of a way to get them out of Los Angeles. So, he says well, I'll see what I can find out. So, he goes into Grass Valley, Nevada City. Hick town starved [?] to death. It was mining and logging. Goes to Grass Valley, he goes in a real estate office. He only found one place he liked. It had a spring on it, and it had a pond with water, natural. 10 acres. Oak trees and pine trees. A logging cabin that was probably built in 1880. An old miner, old gold mining cabin we lived in. I graduated in 1955, they called it Nevada Union High School back then, and then I got into a motorcycle shop with my brother in Auburn, California in 1965. I had the motorcycle with my brother from about 1965 to '71 so I got into a problem with my brother. I said, you know what, I'm getting the hell out of California. I said the drugs are coming in here and I says you know I'm going someplace else, and I told my brother I'm cutting line with you. I don't think my mother was happy when I moved. I moved in '71. I bought a place in Redmond, Oregon. Prior to 1971, I'll have to retract a little bit here Gary, sorry, prior to '71 before I went to Oregon, it was in 1961 I'm working in a little garage place in Cedar Ridge, California just above Grass Valley as a mechanic. A guy, an Indian guy, he was from Mountain Home, Idaho. And he, after World War II, he bought this gas station, little place, mechanical and he said Don, when you graduate from high school, he says I'll teach you the trade. So, in 1955 I stayed there until about 1960. And he says I got Jim coming down, my brother Jim, he lives in Boise, Idaho, and he's an excavator. And he says when Jim comes down here, I want you to talk to Jim. That would have been 1961. And so, I talked to Jim, and he said well Don, he says, I've got an airplane in Boise, and he says I hear you love the back country and you love to fish in the high lakes. He says, I'll take you in that airplane and you can fly over the Sawtooths and the White Clouds and I can show you all these lakes. So, that's how I found out Stanley. I didn't know nothing about this...

Can you estimate what year [you] first came to Stanley?

'62. 1962, that would have been 59 years ago.

Was that when you were living in Mountain Home?

No, I never...I was living in Grass Valley, California.

So, when you came to Stanley was that in the summer? Did you come here to go fishing or did you just do that fly over and then...?

No, came in the car. The only thing I know that I stayed in that little cabin where Dale Wells...if you go down here to hit 21, hit 21 and 75 right there on the corner, at the rafting corner, that little cabins on the corner there, I stayed in the last cabin. It's still there. That's been 59 years ago. And then we had... the cabin is still there.

So, when you first drove here, you drove up from Grass Valley then?

We drove from Grass Valley.

When did you essentially move to Idaho?

I never moved to Idaho.

Oh, you never did...

I moved to Oregon.

You lived just in the Redmond area.

Yeah, I moved to Oregon in 1971 but I still came to Stanley. I had that mountain bike, that mountain trail bike in '63 and so I was doing a lot of things before I ever got married. So, I was the first guy to get on a motorcycle on a mountain, trail mountain bike, as far as I know, to get into Casino Lakes. Then I took it, then I took it and went down to East Fork and then went up in the Livingstone [?] area. I went out in a [unintelligible], I did all that stuff in the White Clouds on that motorcycle. Back then, you could take that stuff in. Anyway, the guy that took me in 1963... I remember Phoebe, she had a motel and it's gone, it's right there on 21 and 75, there was a motel was right there, we stayed there. And I says, do you know somebody could take me into one of these high lakes here? Yes, she says I got a... she said you come up next year Don, you bring your family, your mother and your dad, up here and she says I got a guy will take you to Hanson Lakes. I came up from '63 and he said this guy's 70 years old; he's got some heart problems... the mine is still going up there, he has his pickup truck and he'll take you that morning.

Was to the Greenback mine? It was the miner from the Greenback mine?

Far as I know, it was...I don't know if it was still operating, the road was still open. So, we went up that morning, early in the morning. When we first got there and didn't see much, all of a sudden about 2 o'clock, all of a sudden, these fish come up. There was a bug hatch. I seen these bugs dropping into the lake, so put on a 12 Renegade. Kept throwing that damn thing back and forth. Finally, I, this guy hit. And you know, cutthroats, they go down, they don't come up. Took me 35 minutes to get that fish in. That's the biggest fish, the biggest fish on a fly rod or a spinner rod I ever caught in my life. I've never caught a trout family any size bigger. Even in California I never caught a fish that big. I mean, God...

You remember the name of the fellow that took you up there, the first time?

[unintelligible] Stokes. But, you know, I can't... I know the one that had the motel there, her name was Phoebe. She had a son that never married and him and I, on Friday night we'd go to the dance we had the Stanley Stomp. We'd hit every bar in town. But, as far as I know the first time I went into Hanson Lake was 1963.

So, tell us about other lakes or other places that you discovered.

I had so many that I never, records, I didn't put records on them... So, I said well there's too damn many people in Sawtooths, I'm going over the White Clouds, and then I went to the Casino Lakes, I went into Rough Lake, I went into Garland Lake.

Walked in there one day and there was nothing in it, nothing in Rough Lake...walk 12 miles one day never got nothing, there was nothing in there. Went into Garland Lakes. Then I hiked into... you know Fourth of July Lake was there, Washington Lake was there. There's another little lake over the top of Washington Lake, a guy got some big cuts out of that one. It's a little small pond. Then you can look over and look down into those... that trail goes down the hill down there, I don't know what that... I think that... is that Chamberlain Basin? Anyway, I looked down there, I said God that sure looks awful nice to me but I, on a day hike deal and it's hard for me to get in, get out. Then I decide well then I'll go back up there I'll go to Trail Creek Lakes, now I'll go into Trail Creek Lakes. I stayed... so I started hiking in there from Grandjean. 3,000 feet elevation. My God. Then I got into the Upper Trail Creek, then there was a little another little Upper Creek Trail Creek, had some big cuts in that one. I'd have to look at my map. I was up to 9,000 feet in the snowfield up there.

Did you camp out or did you only day hike?

I was mostly all my day hikes.

So, you covered a lot of ground on your day hikes.

Well. I would do...I did a 10, a 10, and a 10 in four days in a row. A 10, a 10, and a 10. And then that day I took my nephew across there was 34 miles that day.

Fished nine lakes. And it wasn't supposed to be that way, but I wanted somebody to hike to meet... I'd been to all the Baron. I fished all the Baron stuff. I fished the

lower Baron, the middle Baron, the upper Baron, went down over the top... this alpine... there's another one down there to the right, pond, small pond. And even

back in that, even back in... it'd been about 1985, I think, is when I took my nephew across you there. Alpine Lake was pretty much overrun at that time. So, that day

that I happened to went through there, I didn't have a topo map of that area and I wanted somebody to go with me so I got this 18-year-old nephew. That was that

one trip that I probably'll never forget as long as I'm alive. And so, we started off morning about probably daybreak, and we're camped at Rod

Lockett's trailhead in Grandjean. We're camped up there. And I told my... John Ansimer [?], he's my nephew, I said John we're going to leave here and we're going

to catch the boat at 8 o'clock in Redfish Lake, we're going to get that boat.

So, I says I figured it out, we probably got enough time to go to Baron Lakes, go down the other side, go down the trail. I get down the hill and I started... I missed

the sign. I cut off to the left, I didn't see the sign. I end up the Cramer Lake trail. I got up the wash that comes out of lower Cramer, I got to a wash that comes out of

lower Cramer, I met these two girls on a backpack. I yell at them, I says, what did I do wrong? I think missed the trail. She said, didn't you read the sign back there?

Now I had to backtrack, try to get back down there on top of the ridge up there, the Bench Creek Trail, look down there I seen the... it was twenty after eight, I see the

last boat going back and my brother Ken was on the boat going back. See we were camped at Glacier View. We had pulled our campground from Rod's trailhead

there in Grandjean and went over to Glacier View. So, I was going to meet them in the boat. We had shirt sleeves on and a full thing of creel [?] and my fishing poles

and I had a little tiny fish light. And I told my nephew John, he says John, I'm still, I can't move off this rock. And he says, well... I said John, I said, you got two choices. We can either go down and sleep on that boat dock and wait for the next boat to come in or we can, we got to move out of here. I always carry a little flashlight with me if I went on that day trip. So, then we...there was no moon out that day so we started down the trail, my flashlight goes bad about halfway down Bench Creek Trails. Now we got to meet everybody at Glacier View. Never got in there til about 10 o'clock. Felt my way, had to feel my way, couldn't hardly see the trail, finally got down there, got on the road, went in the bar and I had about three beers. I got in there 10:30 at my brother's, he had a motor home in there, knocked on the door and my brother let me have it. He said Don, I heard you were lost. I said nope, I never got lost, I got turned around backwards. And he said I was going to bring the sheriff party looking for you guys. So that, I documented that, was probably about maybe 30 to 34 miles that day. And that was the longest trip I ever did.

So, you spent some time working in the Stanley area, did you spend some summers?

I did. I helped build and being a painting contractor with Tom Stewart's place, Rich and Sandy Jorcey's [?], and the one across the street, the ones that had the rafting company. There's a cabin across the street, I can't remember their name, across from Jerry's Market, there's a little A-frame cabin there, new one. Then I work..., prior to that I worked with Dale Wells at the icehouse. We had the icehouse.

Talk about that a little bit. Tell us about Dale Wells and icehouse.

Okay.

When was that?

Dale Wells, he met, he... Ira Wells was the one, Ira Wells was his Dad. And Ira Wells used to run the gas station there, Dale was the son.

That's at the junction of 75 and 21?

That's in 1962, '63, '64. I didn't meet Dale until '63. The icehouse was there then.

So that would be the station on 93 and 21.

Right where you're coming into 75, hit 21. Right there on the left, right there on the left. Right now it's a rafting place. That was a..., we had the icehouse there and we had a gas station, and we had a little place where we worked on fixing the forest service trucks and greased them. I greased them and fixed the forest service flats. And then if they had any mechanical problems, Dale knew that I, because I had my internship back in Northern California, so he knew I was a good mechanic. Anyway, I worked with Dale with the icehouse, and I never stayed in here in January. I got out of here about the 20..., I went between the 20th and maybe the later, no much later than the 1st of October. I got out of here. Dale stayed in. And he went to little Redfish and about middle, when that froze up, he would go in there and cut ice out of the lake. And he had a pickup truck, and he had a little trailer and he..., I don't know if he cut it by his hand or would he cut it with a chainsaw. So, then he would bring all that stuff back, put it in the icehouse, put sawdust on it. And we had the thongs, we had these thongs,

and we had this little weigh station. It had the little bar that you put the bar up. And we could weigh it. Sold it for 3 cents a pound, 3 cents a pound.

3 cents a pound. So, is there any other folks that you got to know in the Stanley area in that era?

Well, the guy, the ones that had the logging company here, they cut logs, they made jackpine [?] and made logs for cabins. I'm trying to think of the... Gerbox?, but it's kind of a German name, but I...

Achenbachs.

Achenbach, I knew them, Achenbach. Now I don't know, do you have any idea how long ago that was?

Well, that would have been in late '60s and early 70s. Okay, tell me about the Achenbachs.

The Achenbachs were back in the 60s, they were here in the 60s. And the Wells family were here then.

Where did the Wells family live, do you remember?

I think they..., I know that Dale stayed in here to cut the ice.

Did they live at the service station, or did they have a home?

They stayed in those cabins that are still there. You know where those cabins are still there? I think that's where Dale stayed.

Okay, so you came into the area when the Rod and Gun Club and the other bars...

Rod and Gun Club was 1931.

So, tell us about the Stanley Stomp. Any stories about going to the Stanley Stomp?

Well, I can tell you one thing about it. Whenever the bar closed, and those guys couldn't get out in... couldn't get out of the bar... if they could get out the bar and get on the street they fell over backwards and slept on the dirt until sun came up on that next day, then they got up and got on their motorcycles or got on the car and took off. Every casino in here, the Casino Club, the Rod and Gun Club, and then the one across the... the Sawtooth, I think the Sawtooth Hotel was still in existence back then. That's why... and they had the dance floor. The Sawtooth Hotel was across..., they had to rebuild it. But it finally burnt down. But those three things, those three things were going at that time. And the Stanley Stomp was on Friday night and Saturday night. So, at that time probably Boise, Idaho only had a population of maybe 35,000 people, back then. This has always been a party town. This has been a part of it... all those kids from Boise came up here to party on a Friday, Saturday night. And then Jack C that had the, in 1965, had the Redfish Lake Lodge. I think he had that for 35 years. But what they did back in the late '60s, middle '60s on a Friday night stomp they would have all those young kids jump in those vans, they would bring them down to Stanley and go to the party. And then what they did, they would come and pick them up and take them back to lodge. See those kids, they used to work them five, six days a week and so these kids wanted to get away from, go someplace have some fun. So, they would bring them down. So, the sheriff wouldn't bother them at that time.

So, things were pretty rowdy in Stanley on Friday and Saturday nights.

I never walked around Stanley without a gun on my side. Now, that's the way it was that I did in the '60s. So, it's kind of an old western, rough town, drinking town. Rough party, Stanley Stomp. Said everybody, go to Stanley. My God, you know, young guys and you kick your heels up. Don't ever get into a fight up there.

Well, there were fights once in a while I suppose.

I was there, I was there that night the fight broke out, but it never materialized. I came out of, we were on that dance floor at Sawtooth Lodge, on that dance floor and that maybe 1968, '65, '68 somewhere in that period. And that was been the night that I was probably dancing with the McCoy girl, Jane. And so, then the bar was loaded, the dance floor was loaded, and there, where these three guys came from, I don't know but they had all their hardware on their hip. I had my hardware, everybody in that dance floor, as far as I know, had hardware on. Most everybody. Anyway, that was, that was continued to get cut pretty sour in there. So, all of a sudden, these three guys were starting to cut in on those guys. They got so rough in Stanley, they had to deputize somebody. And that was that night that that incident happened. Those three guys didn't take his message and so he finally told 'em to step outside. So, that's when all of us went outside because we figure something is going to break loose. Only thing I know, only thing I know, he did this, or he did this. And I think... nobody drew. He was waiting for them to draw first. Nobody drew. So, I think he dropped his gun belt first and they dropped their gun belt, the three guys dropped theirs.

Do you remember the Ace of Diamonds Club? That was on the corner where the post office parking lot is now. It burnt down.

Do you know when it burnt down?

Around '72 and it had a dance hall. Cuz there was the Rod and Gun Club and the Ace of Diamonds Club, and the Casino Club. All three in a row there. I just wondered if you remember the Ace of Diamonds Club and also, I was curious, did you hear about any gambling, were people gambling? Cuz, they had the Casino Club...?

I can believe there was gambling here. I can believe that because when that guy from Bakersfield, John, I call him John, I don't know his name. And so, I remember John, I know he was from Bakerfield, and he was about 85, 86 years old. And I know this for a fact that I asked him. I get talking about any card players here, you know. And so, what he did, I know for a fact, actual fact, 100% fact, he took me into a card room and showed me the bullet holes in the card room. I do know that for fact, there was illegal gambling here. And Cecil Andrus, see when that Bill Harrah came in here in '76, '77, he wanted to bring gambling, gaming, gambling in here and Cecil Andrus wouldn't give him a license.

All those years that you were hanging out by those bars and stuff, did they have live music, was there live music? Do you remember who any of the performers were?

They had all live music in here with bands.

What kind of music? Was it Country Western or Rock?

It was Country Western. There was none of that new stuff in here. They could have even been playing stuff back in the '50s. In the '50s, early '60s. But most everything I know was Country Western.

So, who was the owners of the Rod and Gun Club that you knew?

It would have been the Brewer family, when I came in here.

Is that Glen Brewer?

Glen Brewer. And his mother had it. And so, if I came in here in '63, '64, went in there, far as I know that she had it, Brewers had it. The old-timers named me a mountain goat, that's all I know. I didn't have anything to do with that. They told me, see back then they wanted me, cuz my agenda was to try to get into every high lake with my short period of time in the summer, to try to get in every higher lake that I could hike, walk into in the Sawtooth and the White Clouds. Now, I, then I finally went into the Boulders. Then I went into that, then I went over the top into the Snake River drainage, some of that stuff. And my agenda was try to get into all these lakes and see what was going on.

So, you weren't backpacking, you were just day hiking, is that right? You didn't backpack.

I did a couple times, not very often cuz I knew I could move quick; I could move fast. See, I could do I could do 4 miles an hour, up or down, it didn't make any difference. I was the first guy to have a bicycle, a mountain bike, in there. I was, I bought, I fixed this mountain bike up in Redmond, Oregon. I said God there's no mountain bikes in Stanley. I had this little Honda 50 trail bike in the back of my truck. I had this, I took a little Schwinn bike a little..., about 1985, '84, '85. I found the Schwinn girl's bike. I said, God I think I can make a mountain bike out of the thing. I could step in and step through it, but I couldn't figure out how to change the gears back and forth. See, the mountain bikes probably didn't come in until about '86, '87, then the Treks and Specialized came in. So, I said I'll make this mountain bike. So, I made one big sprocket, one little sprocket on the front, one big one on the back, and so that gave me easy pedaling. I couldn't get the gears to move back and forth. So, I had the mountain bike on the front of the Dodge pickup, and I had the little 50 trail bike, Honda trail bike, in the back of the camper. So anyway, we got in a hell of a lightning storm going into Langer Lakes. We're right up on top going up there, just before I got to the lake. Got off down there and I said well, what I going to do with to kill the rest of the day. Coming down that road not far I run into this Basque guy, has a little camp with his little trailer with a little stove pipe. And all the sheep was out, his sheep were out in a big pasture out there, he had all these sheep out there. Stopped in there, I said yeah, I think I'll go talk to this guy. They couldn't understand English, see. Spanish. So, he waves me into his tent or his little cabin. Anyway, at that time there was a mine going on up there behind Livingston, behind the lake up there.

Langer?

There was a miner, there was a guy up there, there was a mine going on. And anyway, as I was, I had that coffee with this guy, talked to the guy and he spotted my bicycle, this Basque guy spotted the bicycle on the front of my pickup truck. And this old miner happened to come down where I was, I was kind of getting ready to go, the miner comes down and then the Basque guy points at my bicycle. I said no, and then the miner never, the miner never said a word to me, never said a

word. I don't know, at that time you would have been here. I don't know that miner's name.

That miner up there is also Elmer.

Elmer?

He's also an Elmer. There was three Elmers in the Valley.

Three Elmers in the Valley?

Yeah, one was at Livingston, one was at Fourth of July, and the other one was over at Seafoam.

I'm ready to get, ready to go, and the miner's sitting there, and the Basque guy grabs my shoulder. He walks over to the bicycle, he wants me to pull it up, he wants to try it. And he pulls his wallet out. So, he pulls his money out, he shows a whole stack of bills in there, a whole stack of bills. I took the bike off, he got on, he pedaled around. He seen that he could round up his sheep with that bicycle. He could go around them and round them up on that bicycle. And this is, I never took any film of that. So, anyway, he brings it back and he says, he pointed, he wants that bike. I say it's not for sale. I had \$42 in it, that's all I had in it. Then he pulls out his wallet like I said and showed me all that money. I told him 42 bucks I could have told him 100 he would've bought it. I told him 42 bucks for the bicycle. I sold it to him.

You sold it to him?

For 42 bucks.

Oh, I'll be darned.

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