

Phillip Bryson

Interviewed by Makayla Bryson

October 2, 2022

Interview conducted in person

Transcribed by Makayla Bryson

[Makayla Bryson]: My name is Makayla Bryson. I am here with Phillip Bryson. The date is October 2nd [2022], Sunday at 11:34 [a.m.]. We are in Orange Grove, Texas. And do I have your permission to record?

[Phillip Bryson]: Sure.

[Makayla Bryson]: Okay. So, first off, let's start with some of your life.

[Phillip Bryson]: I was born at the Saint Mary's Hospital in Enid, Oklahoma.

[Makayla Bryson]: Okay, and then what's Enid like?

[Phillip Bryson]: Enid is probably—it's probably in the top ten of the largest towns in Oklahoma. So it's a pretty large town.

[Makayla Bryson]: So, what was going up there more so like?

[Phillip Bryson]: Well, my mom and dad worked there in Enid, Oklahoma and then he moved in a small town called Drummond, which it's real, real small outside of the outskirts of Enid Oklahoma, so when I was a baby, I lived in Enid for probably two years and then I started school in Drummond Oklahoma. And went to Drummond for, I guess Kindergarten through 6th grade.

[Makayla Bryson]: And then what was going to school there like? What did you do?

[Phillip Bryson]: Only had twelve people in my class, so it was real, real small class. But we played small eight-man football, and basketball, and baseball.

[Makayla Bryson]: And then so after that where did—

[Phillip Bryson]: So then my dad transferred to another town called Clinton, Oklahoma, which is in western part of Oklahoma. Little bit smaller than Drummond, or a little bit bigger than Drummond, Smaller than Enid. I started 7th grade and graduated from Clinton, Oklahoma. Real big football town, so it was pretty exciting. I was fairly good in football so got to move to a town that was highly recognized for football.

[Makayla Bryson]: Are they still good for football now?

[Phillip Bryson]: Yeah, I'd say they were one of the best in Oklahoma if not the best. We have seventeen state championships in the history of Clinton and I think about twenty silver runner-up balls. So they make the playoffs almost every year and usually have a very good team and make the finals more times than not here lately.

[Makayla Bryson]: And then after high school what did you go on to do?

[Phillip Bryson]: After high school I had a little scholarship went to South Western Oklahoma State which was about fifteen miles down the road at Weatherford, Oklahoma. Was going to be a coach and teacher. Went to college for about year and decided real quick that's probably not the direction I needed to go. I needed to find me a job, so that's what I did. I went out and found a job.

[Makayla Bryson]: And what was that job in?

[Phillip Bryson]: Well, in Clinton, Oklahoma, you only have a handful of really good paying jobs. And one of them is the oil field and the Western Company of Northern America has been around for thirty years in that town and they were the third, at the time, largest fracturing company in the United States so, really good company to work for. And at first, I was just going to go there for the summer, try to go back to college. But I think I made like twenty-thousand dollars in about two and a half months. And for somebody that just turned twenty-one years old, that was a lot of money so, it kind of hooked me into the oil field and I've been here ever since, going on thirty years next year.

[Makayla Bryson]: And so how did your work in oil field in Clinton lead you to come to Texas?

[Phillip Bryson]: Well, it started out I traveled a lot. We did jobs and worked in Wyoming, Utah, Mississippi, Louisiana, New Mexico, and South Texas and when I got down here to South Texas, I liked it. I visited before with my grandparents being from Aransas Pass so I've been down here before, it's really nice weather. Doesn't get cold, you don't see snow on the ground very often, that was nice. So I started working down here around 1998. At three weeks on and three weeks at home, and got the opportunity to transfer, so in 2001 wife and the oldest two kids moved to South Texas to Corpus Christi.

[Makayla Bryson]: And then so, how did you meet your wife?

[Phillip Bryson]: She was three years older than me, so I didn't really know her in high school, but my parents and her parents knew each other and were really good friends and kind of met her after high school. Started dating, shoot I was probably twenty-seven, twenty eight so it was a fairly ways after high school. Met her and we've been together ever since.

[Makayla Bryson]: What did you actually do when you were working for oil field specifically?

[Phillip Bryson]: Started out just a pump helper, just go out and rig up the frack equipment. Mainly just a labor person. As time went on, I became more of an operator then it went into supervision, then when we transferred to Corpus Christi, I was in management. So over an eight, nine year period I moved up to management.

[Makayla Bryson]: How do you think working in oil field has affected your life in economically?

[Phillip Bryson]: Economically? Well when the times are good in the oil field there's no better place to be you can make unreal amount of money. You work a lot of hours but the money is extremely profitable in the oil field. When the oil field is down, when there's a down year, it's probably the total opposite. You want to run from it, you don't want nothing to do with it cause it's usually what they call the bust, oilfield is boom and bust and it's pretty ugly time to be in. Lot of people buy the toys, motorcycles, boats, when everything booming and when the oil fields not doing great you see people selling their toys and selling their houses. It's an up and down industry.

[Makayla Bryson]: Is there any specific towns that stick out in your mind that have had seen the big boom and then the drop?

[Phillip Bryson]: Well, for instance, Clinton, Oklahoma, where I started, the Western Company they got bought out by BJ Services after I had worked there, but they had been there thirty years and the area in western Oklahoma had a lot of natural gas and a lot of oil field to be drilled. So it was a very good area to be in. And you've seen it here in the last ten years the areas in Oklahoma has shifted to a different area. The yard there in Clinton has shut down in the recent years. So you see areas move. For instance, Alice, Texas, down here in South Texas it used to be the same as Clinton, just a booming area. All kinds of oil field companies in the town and just a booming little oil field town and in the last five to ten years that town has really seen a downturn. The oil company have moved to different areas, and it's sad to see because people get used to it and you think it's never going to go away, never going to end, and it eventually does unfortunately.

[Makayla Bryson]: What's some of the worst economic low that you remember and how did it specifically affect you?

[Phillip Bryson]: Well, being in the oil and gas industry for thirty years you see a lot of ups and downs. I've seen several that—most of the down periods last about six to eight months and then you start back and it's tolerable, it's not fun to go through but it's healthy. You kind of need it to kind of flush out the industry and get prices corrected and so forth. But worst one has got to be the shutdown of the virus the pandemic. To start with the oil field price was really down at the end of 2019 first of 2020 and then you throw on shutdowns, people not driving, people not going to work and that really took a toll on the oil and gas industry. Man, it's been a tough one, it's probably been two plus years. I've seen lots and lots of businesses and people that I know and worked with have went out of business and not been able to survive it. Fortunately, we've been able to navigate and live on to hopefully better times in the future.

[Makayla Bryson]: In contrast to that, what's the best economic time you've seen?

[Phillip Bryson]: I would say probably 2014 it's been the best that I ever seen, it was a lot of natural gas. Price of natural gas was the highest it's ever been, and it was like, up to 13, 14, 15 dollars. Oil price was really, really good. We were just starting in the Eagle Ford Shale, and it was really starting to take off. The Haynesville Shale up there in Louisiana was starting to take off and everything was just busy, busy. I've never seen in my time as profitable and booming as that period. Now we've had several, that, in thirty years that I've been in it, that's been good, but nothing like the 2014, 2015 timeframe.

[Makayla Bryson]: How do you think these ups and downs affect people's lives even if they don't work in the oil and gas industry?

[Phillip Bryson]: Well, to start with, the people that do work in the oil and gas industry, it's tough because you get used to making all of this money and then you've got a downturn, so if they want to continue making that type of money, they've got to find a different avenue to work for. For instance, the people outside the oil and gas, you have a lot of hotels, and just mom and pop restaurants that thrive off of oil and gas. Everybody eats lunch, everybody eats dinner, they stay at the hotel overnight. So when the boom is going, these places are amazing also, it's a trickle-down effect. Restaurants, you see them going up. Hotels are being built everywhere. And then the downside, when oil fields not nearly as profitable and it's not going as good. You see mom-and-pops restaurants going out of business and hotels kind of starting to really look like they're not busy at all, the parking lots are empty. It just carries down. There's so many other things that plays into oil and gas.

[Makayla Bryson]: And then is there any town that sticks out in your mind that you think has done really well off of the oil and gas industry?

[Phillip Bryson]: Just being down here in Corpus Christi, in the last ten years the Eagle Ford Shale has been huge. So you see towns like Karnes City and Kennedy who were just little drive by and if you blink you miss it and in the last few years it's just exploded and grown in population, you figure at one time Karnes County and the surrounding counties around it was probably 70 percent of the oil field down here in South Texas, so you can imagine, you need hotels you need restaurants you need everything to function when you have that many people and that much going on and so it's just amazing you drive through Karnes City now and how much they've grown up. You see them go from a small school to, they'll jump from 2A to 4A. it's crazy to see what oil field has done to that town.

[Makayla Bryson]: How do you think the oil field is going to develop over the next couple of coming years?

[Phillip Bryson]: Well, for the next two to three years, I'm very bullish on the oil field. I think a lot of that's due to our current administration, they're for one right now, the president is

pulling oil out of our strategic reserves. That has dropped fuel prices quite a bit here in the last few months but I think that's a political move for him for the midterm elections. So after that is over, I think he has no other option unless he wants to drain all our strategic reserves which is at the lowest in fifty years already. But unless he wants to drain it all, he's going to have to quit doing that and once he does the price of oil is unfortunately going to skyrocket here in the next year to three years. and there's nothing I don't think they can do about it. and then you go on, if two years from now, uh, if this current administration, Democrat, stays in power their wanting to throw in green agenda, the windmills, the electric vehicles, they're trying to go away from fossil fuels. If you reach out to ten years from now, I'm a little nervous what can happen to our industry. you're still going to need oil for everything that we use its in cups and everything is oil base, so it's still going to be around, but it's going to be very, very expensive I'm afraid. And I think that's going to be their way to play the green agenda into it is the oil price will be so expensive that we're going to have a hard time affording it, so the other alternatives will be green energy, windmills, solar power, that kind of direction.

[Makayla Bryson]: And then so, going back into your family history, where are your parents from?

[Phillip Bryson]: My mom was raised in a small town in Kansas called Ark (Arkansas) City, Kansas. She was born and raised there, graduated from Ark City. My dad was from right across the state line south of Ark City, Kansas. He was from a small town called Newkirk and his whole family had been in that area for many, many years. You can look back on our members of the family and, shoot it runs back to almost fifty to 100 years. So we had property, they had, I think started out with the land run 320 acres and it's all been broke down into family members and, Dad had eighty acres from that still and it split it with his three sisters. So, he's been from Newkirk and the whole family has been there for many, many years, they never move from Newkirk.

[Makayla Bryson]: And then so what did they do for work?

[Phillip Bryson]: My mom, she worked for accounting, she had an accounting degree and she worked for several different CPAs [Certified Public Accountants] in her younger years and then even later in years my oldest brother is a CPA and she worked for him. My dad, he's always been in the oilfield also he started out, actually, in Odessa, Texas, working for the Western Company, surprisingly. He worked there as a mechanic and then they moved to Oklahoma. Started working for Oklahoma Natural Gas, and he actually had forty something years with Oklahoma Natural Gas, ONG, and retired from them.

[Makayla Bryson]: Do you think that your dad working in oilfield had anything with you working in oilfield of was it just more, that's here I'll take that?

[Phillip Bryson]: No, it did. I remember as a kid, if there wasn't any school Dad would, he was a weld pumper also, on weekends and there wasn't any school in the summer, I'd go with Dad. I was pretty young probably, between my eight-to-twelve-year ages, and I would ride around

with him all day long and go from well to well, see what he does and kind of learned a little bit of what goes on in the oil field, it wasn't maybe the cleanest job, but it was fun to do. It helped knowing the industry before I got into it, what I was getting into.

[Makayla Bryson]: And then, your grandparents, what did they do when they were working?

[Phillip Bryson]: On Mom's side, he was in the Navy, and he was a cook on a naval ship. Turned out to be a great cook, amazing the way he could cook things, but he did that and then when he got out of the armed forces, he became an inspector at a meat market. He retired from being an inspector in his later years. Then, I didn't get to meet—my Dad's dad died before I was born so I didn't know anything about him. He died fairly young, in his fifties, I was the third child from Mom and Dad and they were in their thirties when they had me, there was quite a few years there, so I didn't get to meet my Dad's dad, and didn't know anything about him.

[Makayla Bryson]: And then what about your siblings, who are your siblings what do they do?

[Phillip Bryson]: My oldest brother is Allen Bryson, he's been a CPA for many years. I think he grew the largest accounting office in Western Oklahoma. He was there for probably 20 twenty years. He went from nothing to the largest in western Oklahoma, so that's pretty impressive. We started Circle 8 Crane Services, in 2009, in about 2010 he became our CFO. And somewhere around 2015 he quit his CPA office and went full time with Circle 8, and has been our CFO ever since. He's thirteen years older than I am. And then I have another brother, Kelly Bryson, he's ten years older I am. He's worked several jobs in Oklahoma, he worked with me at Western Company and BJ, he actually worked for Circle 8 Crane Services for a while at Oklahoma as a salesman and he's now selling for another company in Oklahoma currently.

[Makayla Bryson]: Okay, and then what is Circle 8?

[Phillip Bryson]: Circle 8 is a crane company, we provide large cranes for the oilfield, for refinery, commercial. If you want you AC set on top of a building, we can do that, all the way to oil and gas, which is our biggest percentage of the company.

[Makayla Bryson]: And then so did you make that? No just in general is that yours?

[Phillip Bryson]: Yes, myself and my oldest brother Allen, started Circle 8. We started out as a chemical company, selling downhole chemicals for about two years and it was really profitable. And got enough money in the bank to go out and buy a crane, which at the time, we were short on cranes, so it was a good idea. It was in 2008–2009 time period. Right then there was a little downturn in the oilfield for about six to eight months. So, it was bad timing, but we worked our way through it and survived and grew the company from there.

[Makayla Bryson]: How does chemicals play into the oilfield?

[Phillip Bryson]: When they do fracturing, they pump water with a mixture of gel and downhole chemicals in with sand, and that goes down into the perms [perforation] and it suspends and keeps the perms spread open to where that natural gas or oil can flow. What we did was we provided the chemicals, to pump downhole. With all the work that was going on at that time it was very profitable to be in.

[Makayla Bryson]: And then cranes how do cranes play into—

[Phillip Bryson]: Well, when they do the fracturing, they have lubricators and its anywhere from sixty to 120 foot in the air and you've got to have something with a long enough boom to hold the lubricator and then once they move the frac out of the way they bring in coil tubing and its very heavy. So, the cranes are used for moving things around on location and doing the production work.

[Makayla Bryson]: And then owning a company gone for you, especially in oilfield? With oilfield being up and down?

[Phillip Bryson]: How's the company gone? When it's up, everything great, you're extremely busy, but when its down you've got to watch your money. Fortunately, in fifteen years we've only had one layoff and that was during the pandemic shutdown, we had to lay off some of our workforce. But we've been pretty lucky that we haven't had to do layoffs. We've slowed down and struggled through, brought in investors one time and we bought them out. So, you just have to watch your money and spend correctly, or you'll get in a bind real quick.

[Makayla Bryson]: And then what current areas do you think, like regions, do you think are having the best time with oilfield?

[Phillip Bryson]: Well, of course, everybody knows about Odessa, the Permian Basin. That's been around for years and there's just so much oil out there. There could be, they say, as much as what's overseas in Saudi Arabia, it's just unimaginable how much oil's downhole in that area. So, between the Permian Basin, the Eagle Ford, which has started here in the last ten to twelve years really just exploding, those are two big ones oil fields. Then you have the Haynesville Shale in, East Texas, Louisiana, Northern Louisiana, it's big on natural gas. Right now, the future looks very bright on it because it's cleaner than oil, so with this administration kind of wanting to do away with fossil fuels, that's a positive for natural gas. And then everything overseas you're seeing Russia cutting back on shipping natural gas to other countries, so we could fill that void if we wanted too, it's there to be had. And then you have other areas, Oklahoma has a lot of natural gas and oil mix. There's probably six regions in the United States that are really, really good, you have South Dakota, North Dakota areas, and then you have in the Eastern parts of the States in Pennsylvania and that area, New York, there's an oil and gas up there also but we work in four of the six big oil and gas areas in the United States.

[Makayla Bryson]: All right well, I think that's it. Thank you.