

Larry Preisser was born in Wichita, Kansas in January of 1950. Or as he tells his kids “back when men were men.” His dad loved horses, raised cattle, and showed Larry how to be a real cowboy. The family farmed around a thousand acres near Haven as he grew up. His dad still worked in town though at a meat processing plant in Wichita to keep the family afloat. As his dad was usually busy at work, Larry and his mom handled the farm. Larry has a true mechanics’ mind and grew up loving to build anything he could get his hands on. He built numerous pieces of equipment in high school, including a cab for a ’55 John Deere combine he built as a freshman. Larry had a scholarship through Hesston Corporation to go to college, but chose harvesting instead.

His senior year of high school, Larry bought a ’68 Z28 Camaro. Those of you that know Larry’s driving habits won’t be surprised to learn he wrapped it around a telephone pole. After receiving insurance money and being faced with the decision of what to do next, Larry used the money to buy a used 1963 95 John Deere combine. And so began his custom harvesting journey in 1970. The next year he bought a 105 diesel combine and went out with JW Edwards from Hutchinson, Kansas, another harvester, to learn the ropes. Larry started with a red tandem truck with a 409 engine. He also built a homemade A-frame combine trailer. After a couple of years, he decided he could tackle the harvest trail as his own boss and picked up new customers on the way.

In 1973, he married Karen, a farmer’s daughter from the Wichita area. He taught Karen to drive a truck and combine. They lived near Cheney Lake during the year as Larry worked for a concrete company building basements, then went on harvest in the summer. That year he also upgraded his equipment to a John Deere 7700 turbo combine, a new red Chevy tandem, and a ½ ton blue and white pickup. The brand new 7700 with header cost \$24,000. He and Karen then lived in a trailerhouse at Lakin, KS while Larry worked for Chuck Jaeger planting and harvesting crops.

Larry found a piece of land to call home in 1976. He bought this and a few more acres near Cunningham, KS, about an hour west of Wichita. Larry, Karen, and their son Jeff started wheat harvest in Texas every summer and returned back to the farm in August. They would travel to western Kansas and Colorado in the fall.

Larry was a prominent member of the Farm Strike in the 1970’s. He drove a tractor to Topeka and participated in protests in Washington DC, along with his friend and fellow harvester, Bob Belt. Larry’s wife, Karen, worked in the farm strike office in Kingman County, Kansas also. As we all know, if we don’t have farmers, we couldn’t have harvesters. Larry made it through the tough 80s, farming, harvesting, and raising 3 kids. Since the kids started driving at a young age, they were quite experienced by the time they were legally able to have licenses.

By the time the 90s rolled around, Jeff was in high school and helping run the crew. Larry’s next son in line, Kurt, stayed home running the farm and irrigation systems with his grandma. When it would rain on the harvest trail, Larry would drive or take a quick flight back home to check on Kurt and the crops. It eased the crew’s employee search having two boys as all their friends looked forward to working on the crew as they went through high school. But Larry and Karen’s daughter didn’t get left out either. One hot day in Conway Springs, Kansas, Larry literally sent an employee down the road and was then short a cart driver. At the age of 7, he promised his daughter Mandi a convertible if she drove the 4630 for him. Mandi still has yet to see the fruits of that promise.

When his first son Jeff turned 16 in 1993, Jeff and Larry purchased a John Deere 7720 and a legacy began. In 1995 Larry also took a chance and became the one of the first farmers in Kansas to grow cotton. He partnered with another friend and harvester, Paul Roark, on purchasing a cotton gin near Sterling, Kansas. This would later lead to Larry and his sons being the “go-to” resources if anyone in

Kansas has questions about growing and harvesting cotton. This chance also led to them custom stripping cotton around Kansas and Oklahoma.

As the 2000s rolled around, the Preisser family began farming more and leaving the state of Kansas less for harvest. Other changes happened as well. Larry and Karen parted ways. These days, the family stays within the Pratt area for summer and fall harvest. They do custom farming as well, but their biggest work is custom cotton stripping throughout southern Kansas. Larry has let go of some things as you'll hear him say quite often, "I don't know. Go ask Kurt."

Larry and his crews have harvested various crops throughout the country. He's combined barley for Coors Brewing Company in Colorado, sunflowers in North Dakota, and wheat from Henrietta, Texas, to Pine Bluffs, Wyoming. His crews have had employees from New York to Nevada, Texas to Canada, many found for him by the office of US Custom Harvesters.

His largest and most consistent job until the family started harvesting their own, was near the Oklahoma border. The family was looking to hire a harvester and Larry was in the area. On one side of the road, a harvester had all machines parked for lunch and was unloading picnic tables. On the dirt road intersection where the farmer was parked, he saw 4 combines coming up fast and a truck parked across from him. Suddenly, he sees Larry get out of the truck, each combine slows, and Larry tosses up a sandwich and bag of chips into the cabs and they continue on. That's Larry. Always one hundred miles an hour.

Throughout his 53 years of harvesting, Larry has rarely missed a custom harvester's convention. Perry Hoffman got him to join the organization around 1984. Larry's not much on public speaking, but has been there in the background all this time helping with issues that arose such as kernal bunt and CDL exemptions for custom harvesters. Some of his best friends are in this industry and he looks forward to seeing them every year.

The newspaper articles in the last tab of this book show Larry's impact on his former employees and the harvest and farming industry as a whole. The crew had a writer from the Wichita Eagle follow them in 1997. Throughout the articles, you will see quotes from Ellouise House and U.S. Custom Harvesters mentioned. Larry insisted the writer stay in touch with the USCHI office to get updates that year. Larry has also had many former employees go on to own their own businesses and come back to tell him they wouldn't be where they are today without him teaching them hard work. A 14-year old kid when he worked for Larry, his good friend now owns a large trucking company in Wichita, Kansas. Another now owns a prosperous welding fabrication business in Pratt.

Larry is asked about retirement often as he's now 73. And although he's given up SOME cab time for lake time with Tracy and Thurman, you can still find him in a truck seat in July or a cotton stripper seat in November.