



Patrick Bierschwale

Katerra Exotics - Katy, TX

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Evan Stern: So, today is Sunday, April 6th, 2025, and I'm speaking with Patrick Bierschwale at his ranch in Katy, Texas. So, Patrick, no matter whom I'm speaking with, I always like to begin by asking if you could describe for us your childhood home, and tell us about where you grew up?

Patrick Bierschwale: Ah, my childhood home, I grew up here in Katy. Both my parents lived in the home with us. I had two older sisters. My dad worked. My mom stayed at home. Then we spent most of our time here. We spent most of the summers out at the ranch in the Hill Country. I would consider it just a normal kind of suburban childhood.

Evan Stern: How is it that your dad-- I know your-- did your dad grow up in the Hill Country, and then--?

Patrick Bierschwale: No.

Evan Stern: No? Yeah.

Patrick Bierschwale: My grandfather grew up in Hill Country. [Coughs] Excuse me. He grew up in the Hill Country. Then after World War II, they moved to Houston after he was done with the service. He was a home builder, and he just always wanted to go back to his ranching kind of roots.

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So, he started buying, as soon as he could afford it, you know, bought a little property here and there, and just kind of ranched as a hobby. Ever since I knew him, when I was born, he always

had a ranch and was a rancher. But my dad grew up in Houston, and went to Memorial High School. So, we're born and bred in the Houston area.

Evan Stern: That's an interesting story, and I would love, like, just reaching back into your genealogical history, where were your people from, how did they end up in Texas, and how did they end up initially in the Hill Country in ranching?

Patrick Bierschwale: My ancestors came over as a big, German migration into Texas, and all in the western side of the Texas Hill Country. So, it was back in kind of the early 1800s is the farthest that I know back. They're in the Junction and Harper area of the Hill Country, kind of the western edge there. My grandfather had four brothers, and they grew up ranching and just working on ranches. They all went off to the Army, and, when they came back, separated, and he just always wanted to go back.

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One of his brothers was a-- he managed ranchers there kind of around Kerrville. His other brother ran like a dude ranch. So, I think he was jealous 'cause he was in the city and his brothers were kind of doing what they loved. So, as soon as he could afford it, he got himself a little ranch, and just started doing it. It was just kind of in their blood. If you still go through the Hill Country today, Bierschwale's not a common name. But if you go through Fredericksburg and Kerrville and Harper and those areas, you'll find other Bierschwales, which is pretty rare.

Evan Stern: It's beautiful country out there, and those Texas Germans are tough people. My people are Texas Germans too, but they ended up in Brenham, which is a very-- totally different experience. But growing up, did you get the chance to go visit your grandfather's ranch?

Patrick Bierschwale: Oh yeah. Some of my earliest memories are going out there. I remember one time, I was probably 4 years old.

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My grandfather, they were-- it wasn't like today. I was 4 or 5 years old, working our cows back then. He put me in a pen to go open the gate. When I was opening the gate, the bulls started fighting. They knocked me over, and they're trampling, and he had to jump off the fence. I ended up being safe. When we walked in the house, my grandma was like, "What happened? You gotta sit down." It ended up, he had a heart attack. He didn't know about it but, several years later, when he was in the hospital, like, "You know you had a heart attack?" They're thinking back, like, you know what, it was that day. I always grew up ranching. Every summer, we'd go up there and do work. A couple times a year, we'd have to go work the animals, and go up there deer hunting, just every chance I got, so I was up there. I mean, most of my great memories just come from the ranch. I was always up there.

Evan Stern: What lessons would you say you learned getting put to work at such a young age out there in that environment?

Patrick Bierschwale: Just hard work is worth it, and anything that is worth having, you gotta work for, 'cause you see the fruits of your labor when you're out there working the land.

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If you don't tend to a fence, then your property, your animals are gone. If you don't feed those animals, then the animals are not gonna have babies, and they're not gonna flourish. They're not gonna grow to their potential. So, it actually shows you hard work pays off, the fruits of your labor is real, and just what you do matters.

Evan Stern: What did you wanna be when you grew up?

Patrick Bierschwale: I wanted to be a pro wrestler [laughter] 'cause I thought wrestling was real, I wanna be a pro wrestler, and so that was what I was gonna be, that and a pro football player. But then I stopped growing in eighth grade, and I found out wrestling was fake, and I was like, I don't know. But I always wanted to be a ran...when I took the little aptitude test in junior high, it said I needed to be a business manager or a rancher. So, I'm kinda doing both, although I think I'm better at ranching than business managing 'cause I need to be more organized.

Evan Stern: Oh yeah, business is a [laughter] whole other language. But then you do kind of end up following an interesting path in that you do get into mixed martial arts.

Patrick Bierschwale: I did, I did.

Evan Stern: Can you tell us about that career?

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Patrick Bierschwale: Well, after college, I had a regular job, like anybody else, and ended up-- I was just getting into shape. Just I was fat and lazy after college, and wanted to get in shape, so I started training, and then ended up getting laid off. About the time I got laid off was when my coach had just signed me up for a fight. I came to the gym one day, he's like, "Hey, I got you a fight." I was like, "Okay." So [laughter] ended up, fought that guy, won and, like, thousands of people screaming, so I was kinda hooked. So, ended up doing that, and I was like, yeah, this is gonna be my career. Well, I was old, and my body hurt, and then I had kids, and so life got in the way, and it just didn't happen. But what did happen was, I was running the gym and coaching at the time, and I was always eating bison. So, people kept asking me, "Where do I get bison? Man, I want some bison." So, one day, it just kinda clicked. I'm like, there's a business here. So, I

started just selling to my buddies at the gym, here and there, just cuts of meat, 20 pounds of ground. Didn't make any money, but I was like, you know what, I can do this.

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So, I started buying whole animals from my dad, found a processor, got into a small farmers market, and it was kinda working. Okay. Then I was like, I gotta find a, you know, where's the biggest market in Houston? It was Urban Harvest. So, that was when I went and I found-- I went to Urban Harvest, and I walked on the market. I was like, I gotta be here. I talked to Tyler, and Tyler was like, "Dude, we're full right now. But as soon as there's an opening, I want you in. We don't have a bison guy, like, I want you in." 'Cause that's all, at that time, that's all I did was bison. It was just bison meat, I mean, that's all I raised was bison. So, it wasn't long, but I got in there, and that's when I quit the gym, retired everything, and just focused full-time on just ranching. At that time, it was just bison 'cause I was working markets every week, you know, two markets during the week, two markets every weekend, just trying to get the thing started. So, it just kinda evolved. At first, when I first started doing this, I thought I was gonna be an exotic game trader.

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So, that's kinda where the-- the name was Katerra Exotics because I was gonna trap all this wild game, and just kinda deal with live animals. Well, that quickly morphed into just the meat sales because, essentially, that's all an animal is really worth is what is its meat's value. So, that's what it turned into and that's what it's been ever since.

Evan Stern: Going back a little bit before, you were talking about bison, and I know you do have some family history with bison in that your grandfather started raising them in 1980, which

I gather was maybe a little rarer back then than it is today. Do you know anything about what inspired your grandfather to go down that route?

Patrick Bierschwale: Well, my grandfather, he was a home builder in Houston, and then he started a building materials company named Bison-- called Bison Building Materials. So, he had the bison, just he was always a rancher and always raised cattle. So, back then, he got the bison just as kind of a, you know, like mascots, just as even more of a hobby.

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I think he only had six or twelve of 'em at a time. The original lumberyard was right on Buffalo Bayou, and then he named it Bison Building Materials. So, it was just a mascot, and bison have always been kind of a big part of our family ever since. That was when we first bought the ranch in Leakey, was actually in 1978, but I think 1980 was the first time he got bison on the property. I wanna say, 'cause he had a relationship with the Weil Ranch, he was big in the Arabian Shriners Association. He was a Potentate in 1978, so he was real big with the Shriners. Weil Ranch is big with the Shriners and big with exotics. So, that was more in the beginning of the exotic industry in Texas. He got the bison. He also brought in axis and blackbuck and fallow deer. We actually have a native elk herd on the ranch out there too, which is pretty cool. There's not very many native elk left in Texas. So, it's just something that's always been there. He started it as just a hobby and then, after he passed, well, my dad got rid of all of our cows, and that's when we went straight to bison. That was back in the mid-90s.

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Mad cow disease had gotten real big, and so the price of beef just dropped to nothing, and the price of bison was sky high. So, my dad just said, "We're outta beef. We're doing straight bison."

Bought a bunch of cows from South Dakota, bison cows, and we started. We were running up to 100 animals at one point. Then a drought happened, time happened, I mean, just-- so, now we're down to about 25 bison cows right now, just because it's so dry in Leakey. But we're hoping the rain's coming.

Evan Stern: So, you're still keeping-- how does it work? You mainly keep the herd out in Leakey, and do you bring them here, or do you raise bison here? Tell us about the relationship between these two ranches that you have here.

Patrick Bierschwale: As far as the bison goes, our breeding herd is at our Leakey ranch. That's where we have our herd bulls, our breeding cows. The animals that we have here in Katy, it's mostly the offspring of the animals from the ranch.

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I do buy animals from-- I have friends that are Texas Bison Association members and stuff, so when they have calves or extra animals, they call me 'cause they know I'm always looking. So, most of the animals that are here are meat animals only. I do have a few mama cows that I really like. I like the genetics and I like the calves that they have, so I wanna keep them. But until the carrying capacity of the other ranch increases, I can't do that, so they're just kinda stuck here. If they get butchered, they get butchered [laughter]. Unfortunately, that's just a sad part of this business. But every animal has a purpose, and if you're not fulfilling that purpose, we'll find a new one for you.

Evan Stern: I know you were talking about, you know, you discover, you know, you're working at the gym. You discover that there is this demand for bison. But, still, starting a

business from scratch is an insane endeavor. First of all, I should ask, before getting into that, the name Kattera, what does it mean, and how did you choose this name for your business?

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Patrick Bierschwale: Kattera comes from when we first bought this land, we were always saying, we're gonna go out to the Katy land. So, instead of just calling it Katy land, my dad came up with it. He's one of those intellectual types, you know, he's thinking about Latin. He's like "Latin, terra, K, Katy, Kattera, Kattera, there you go." So, I have to give that credit to my dad. He's the smart one. So, it stands for Katy land, at least in our book it does, so Kattera.

Evan Stern: I'd love if you could take us through that first year. So, you get this idea, and then what all happens between the idea and, let's say, your first-- let's just go through that first year there.

Patrick Bierschwale: Idea to first sale, okay, well, we can do that. So, idea, when I started, the idea was, okay, there's a business here. So, then I had to figure out how do I take an idea to become reality? So, then I had to look at all the legalistic things. I had to form an LLC, had to form an actual company, 'cause there was nothing. That wasn't hard, but it just took time.

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I'm kind of impulsive. I wanna go, go, go. So, that was the most frustrating thing in the beginning was waiting on everything. So, once I had the business, then I had to figure out, okay, how do I get my meat legally to sell it legally? So, there's a process for that too. So, most of the processing houses in Texas are run by the USDA, which is federal. Bison are considered an exotic species because the beef-- we won't even go into that. But bison is considered an exotic species, so the USDA does not, cannot kill them under the same inspection as beef and goat and

lamb. Bison has to be done under almost like a custom-exempt inspection. That's for federal. So, state processing plants, they don't have to do that. They can kill bison, beef, goats, and sheep all under the same stamp, all under everything. It's not a problem. The problem with that is there's not very many of 'em. I got lucky, there was one 30 minutes down the road in Bellville. So, once I found them, then you have to schedule dates, which most of them are booked out for six months.

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So, find the processor, then schedule a date. So, once you have your date scheduled, so I had to wait another six months to my kill date. But in that meantime, then you have to get your labels approved by the state. Anytime you're dealing with the state, you're gonna have a headache because just nobody knows what they're doing. Luckily, I got ahold of the guy who's like the head label maker, Charlie something. I don't know. I don't remember his last name. So, I got ahold of him, thank goodness, 'cause he's the one that knows what he's doing. He's the head guy. He told me everything I needed on the label, I got it done, and sent it off to the state. Well, then I think Charlie retired [laughter], and then my label just kind of floated around for a few months. But right before the processing date, I noticed that I was missing, like, three or four important cuts on the labels. So, I just went ahead, we got those labels approved, we got it printed, and we just ran with it.

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That was 'cause I didn't know the cuts back then. I didn't know. I didn't know so much. It was crazy. It's amazing that I even was able to start this thing. So, we got the first label approved. We got the first animals in. Now, I'm like, okay, now I gotta find the market [laughter]. So, I'm

looking, I'm just kinda googling stuff, and I found there's a farmers market on Grand Parkway. It's right here on Highway 99, Church of the Holy Apostles. The guy that runs it, his name's John Carey, a wonderful, wonderful guy. I love John to death. He was my first ever market manager. I came to him one Saturday, and he had just moved from the LaCenterra over to the church, and so there's plenty of space. He's like, "You know what? We would love to have you. I would love to have a bison guy." He's like, "You know what? You went to school with my son." It turns out, me and his son ended up graduating-- we had graduated high school together. He was a friend of mine. So, it's like everything just fell into place, everything worked out, and I started there.

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It was May of 2011? '13? Somewhere back there. I remember it was like today, it was like 50–55 degrees in May. That was my first day in the market. I didn't think anyone's gonna buy my meat, I didn't think. I was like, I'm not gonna sell anything. No one's gonna want it. I'm just gonna be here, looking stupid, but, whatever, I'm here, I gotta do it. It ended up I sold a couple hundred dollars, and I was like, wow, this is awesome. Then I just, you know, now how can I make it work and grow? So, just a couple headaches and things to overcome, but we did it.

Evan Stern: You did speak about Urban Harvest earlier, too. At what point did you join Urban Harvest, and what has Urban Harvest meant for your business?

Patrick Bierschwale: Urban Harvest was-- I joined Urban Harvest, I think, in 2013, I think is when I was officially added. That was when I could quit my other job because that was a market, at that time, Urban Harvest-- there were far fewer markets back then, 12–15 years ago, far fewer markets, and Urban Harvest was the market.

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So, once I got in there, I knew I had a baseline income that would sustain me enough. I mean, it wasn't much, but it was enough just to start this, where I knew I had that every week, where I had those sales. So, it allowed me to literally become a rancher, like, it did what it's supposed to do. It was put there to design urban agriculture and small ranches like me. So, it literally served its purpose to help fulfill my career.

Evan Stern: Reflecting on your time, I know that you're rarely there at the market anymore now because you've been blessed enough to grow. But I trust you've done some sales there over the years. Are there any stories that you can share about interactions? Well, we don't just have to talk about Urban Harvest. But are there any interes...you know, meaningful interactions you can share with us that you've had with customers that just really stick out in your memory?

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Patrick Bierschwale: I can. Actually, there's a couple. I don't work markets really anymore, just because markets are on weekends, and my kids are at that age where most of their stuff's on weekends. So, I literally had to grow so I could spend more time with my kids. I think if I just fired everybody and worked markets, I'd make more money, but then I'd never see my kids. My life would be a lot less stressful and a lot easier, but it's not worth it. I don't even know where I was going. [Laughter] Where was I?

Evan Stern: No, quite all right, no, interactions that you've had--

Patrick Bierschwale: Yeah, with customers, okay. So, yes, but when I was there, my favorite part was hearing how my meat helped people, because I had this one lady, Rosie, and it's horrible. I don't even know if--

[Unrelated conversation]

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Patrick Bierschwale: So, Rosie, there was this older lady, and she had to have bones to make bone broth. She told me, she's like, "Every other person who I've bought the bones from, their bones smell bad. Yours are the only ones I can eat." She had to have it. She had some type of-- I don't know if it was lupus or rheumatoid or other something. She was like in her late 70s and just not good condition. But she's like, "The broth that I make with your bones is the only thing that makes it where I can use my hands, and where it doesn't hurt." So, there's that. There's Barbara. She's got celiac disease, so she's like, "Your bison is the only meat that I can eat that doesn't upset my stomach." She's like, "I'm allergic to everything, but I can eat your bison." She still buys from me to this day. She sends me a text, and she's like, "Hey, send me 12 pounds to Urban Harvest."

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She won't go through my person that works at Urban Harvest; she comes straight to me. So, it's the relationship that you build with these people who, like, what you do actually matters to them; it changes their lives. I have another customer that comes to the ranch door probably twice a week. She has children with some disabilities, and she has to feed them my stuff, otherwise they can't function. It's like their brain function does not work at an optimum rate, unless they feed on my stuff. This isn't, like, it's not like me trying to promote this and make this stuff up; she's telling me this. It makes me feel better about what I do. So, it really does matter to people. So, the connections that I made at the markets, especially Urban Harvest, with those two, especially. And then Vicky, she would always make lamb meatballs, 'cause she had sons. You see, always kinda tugging my heartstrings 'cause my mom always makes whatever I want when I come to hers.

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So, she would always buy my lamb, like, 15 pounds at a time, and make all these lamb meatballs whenever her sons would come into town, you know, like, "Oh, my sons' are coming to town. They're texting, 'Mama, can I have my meatballs?'" So, just things like that, where my stuff has been able to not only help people but help build memories, like, people building memories around my meat. Whether they know it's mine or not, I don't care. But the fact that that's happening, I don't need any recognition, whatever, like, that's happening because of my meat, cool, you know, that's cool.

Evan Stern: I know you're talking about the flavor of the meat, you know, the bones don't smell bad. I know you've said that you work very hard to make certain that your animals have a stress-free environment. Obviously that's terrific from a humane perspective, but you also argued that it really does inform the flavor of the meat. Could you tell us about that and why?

Patrick Bierschwale: Yes, absolutely. Anytime an animal is under stress, it releases hormones, and these hormones have a very strong flavor. It's a very musky kind of flavor, almost like an ammonia.

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So, especially when you go to harvest the animal, all the processors that we use, they're animal-welfare approved. So, these animals are like my pets. I love them, I want them taken care of, but also they taste good, so I wanna eat them, and I want to share them with other people. But I want them to have the very best life from when they're born under my care all the way until they die under my care. Even though I'm not the one pulling the trigger or stunning 'em, like, that's still under my care, I gotta make sure they get there. So, when I'm loading the animals, I

don't try to pressure 'em and push 'em. There's not a lot of whooping and hollering. It's usually just me. So, I try to walk 'em real slow, walk 'em through each cut gate. Like, the bison, if you walk 'em too fast, they're liable to run into a corner of the gate and break their neck. You have to let them walk at their own pace. If you try to force a bison, it's just gonna be a bad day. So, not only just out here being able to have free range, out in the pasture, out on grass all the time, to their last day, where I gotta load 'em in the trailer to take 'em to freezer camp, we call it, we wanna make sure that they're happy and living the best life they can.

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Evan Stern: I know you just said that you do love these animals like pets, and I know that the relationship between-- that ranchers have with their animals is complex because you are breeding them for meat. So, how do you navigate the emotions of this relationship? Do you still bond with your animals?

Patrick Bierschwale: Absolutely, you bond with every animal that you take care of, because I was put on here to take care of that animal. We have a purpose. My purpose in this relationship is for me to take care of that animal and do the best I can until they can take care of someone else's family. So, its purpose is to grow and then to sustain life for someone, me or my or someone else's family. So, you just gotta come to grips with that. I remember the very first time I dropped off my first bison, and I heard the gunshot 'cause they shot-- they shoot the bison with a .308, or they did at this plant. I heard the gunshot, and that's when I was like, oh, this is real.

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So, that one got to me, and I remember it. But it's just you have to know you're doing this for a reason, and that animal's, I mean, it's doing it for a reason, too. It's living its life as a purpose, and

so it's not, you know, it's the circle of life. It does get hard. Sometimes I've had to butcher a couple animals. I had one bull, my Longhorn bull, my first Longhorn bull, Earl, named after Earl Campbell. Earl was a great bull. He did not miss a cow in heat. That was also his problem because Earl would not stop jumping fences. So, I'd switch pastures with Earl. I tried moving cows from Earl. The last time, he had already jumped fences twice that week, and I moved him over here and locked all the gates, and he jumped three fences. When I say jump fences, he throws his legs over the top, and belly flops them down.

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So, it's not jumps fences; he creates more work for me. We have to fix that fence. So, it's not just that he's getting over the fence; it's that he's destroying the fence in the process. So, I hated to do it, and my kid hated me for a week and cried every day, but I had to put Earl-- I had to process Earl, and he made a lot of money. We sold a lot of beef, a lot of ground beef because he was a Longhorn bull, so it was some good lean ground beef. That's the part that's still hard, like, I don't enjoy it, but I understand it goes back to, like, his purpose was to breed, just to breed the Longhorn cows and only the Longhorn cows. I mean, he's trying to go in and breed with my Angus cows. That's not what you're here for. I went to the extra measures to try to give him extra chances and make it even harder for him to break the rules. So, if you can't be safe for everybody, especially when you start going over fences and jumping cattle guards, that's when I have to make that difficult decision.

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Evan Stern: Have there been difficult moments? I mean, how have you helped your kids process this and teach them about what happens here?

Patrick Bierschwale: Yeah, absolutely. My youngest, he's the one that helps me the most or wants to help me the most; tries to, anyways. But he gets-- he doesn't want to butcher a single animal. So, every single time I'm loading a trailer, "Dad, why? Can't we keep him? Can't we keep him?" I'm like, "No. He's a meat cow. It's a meat cow." So, he wants to keep 'em all, but I just have to tell him every time. I know he's gonna put up the fight to try to keep him, and once I tell him, "We have to process him. He's a meat cow," he's like, "Okay, I know." But he wants to keep 'em all because he wants-- he comes up and plays with the chickens every day. He wants to ride horses. He always wants to be all about the outdoor life, you know, he's like me.

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So, I get it 'cause he has that love and compassion for animals, which is gonna be good, 'cause if he wants to do what I do, you have to have that as a base. 'Cause if you don't, if you don't love what you do, and love the animals, then you wouldn't do it 'cause it's not-- it's a rough life. It's rough. It's hard to make a living, and you're gonna be up early. You're working late. Everything's gonna hurt 'cause you're gonna get kicked and bit, I mean, it's-- so, if you don't love it, it isn't worth it.

Evan Stern: I know you were just talking about work, and I know there is no such thing as a typical day in ranching. But let's say tomorrow, like, what's your agenda? What's your schedule gonna look like from start to finish?

Patrick Bierschwale: Tomorrow, Monday, well, first, I get up, get my kids off to school, just kinda starting my day off with the family. Then Monday, I have to actually go to Navasota 'cause I have to get feed, so that'll take up most of my morning. Then I'll come back. Our store is not open on Mondays, but I do have an employee here.

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So, we'll go through inventory, plug any inventory that needs to be repacked, talk about any orders we have. I'll check the kill dates in the afternoon, and do the-- then I'll go out and feed. Then you gotta go pick up kids. Then just kinda something will come up, you know, it always does. So, that's just kinda how my day-- I usually start off with things planned. I got a water trough I gotta fix the pump or the float on over here. I got a fence that's coming up. I mean, there's always fences that need to be fixed. So, it's usually like, okay, I got an hour before I gotta do something else. Let me hurry up and do this project. There's always a-- there's a list, and people make fun of me 'cause I'm like, "Yeah, I'll put it on the list." But if it's on the list, it's gonna get done. It may be three years from now, but it's gonna get done.

Evan Stern: Reflecting on your time here, what's the hardest year that you can remember?

Patrick Bierschwale: Oh, the hardest year was Harvey. What year was that, 2017? Oh, that was awful, because not only did-- okay.

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So, Harvey hit, and I got lucky, I didn't lose-- I lost like two chickens. All my animals were good. I had a store at that time in Old Katy, Downtown Old Katy. All of Katy flooded. It was awful. So, that was about it. I didn't lose anything in the store, like, I didn't lose power. But everything else was just shut down, down there, so that took the store out of commission for like a couple weeks. No one could get to it for a couple weeks. Then all of our farmers markets in Houston, I think it was six weeks before they came back on. So, it was just trying to get through that, and I was trying to keep paying my employees at the time, too. So, that was so rough 'cause I had no way to make money, no way to make real money through the markets, like I would have, or my

store. I had some wholesale customers at the time, but then, as soon as the market started ramping back up, I was only using one processor.

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The processor I was using, the state inspectors came in and shut 'em down. They stayed shut down for four months, and so I had no way-- and I was one of the lucky ones 'cause there was several other, including vendors there at ranchers, at Urban Harvest that they had nothing, they had nothing, 'cause they couldn't get their animals butchered. I had just taken a whole load of, like, two beef, two bison, some sheep, like, whole loads in, right before they got shut down. So, I had stuff hanging, and they just couldn't kill but they could cut. So, I had a little bit, but no one else. There was Liberty, Ray Law, a couple others. I could almost put 'em all outta business. So, that's when me and a couple of the other guys were like, "We gotta find every processor within 200 miles." It was dumb of us. We put all of our eggs in one basket. If we don't have a processor, we have no business. So, we were all using [laughter] one processor, and we just kinda go, like, this is our fault.

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So, now I have five that I use. I have two primary ones, two that I use regularly, and then one kinda backup, backup, backup. So, hopefully that will never happen again. That was rough. That was really, really rough.

Evan Stern: I think you said that you have like 25 bison right now. Is that correct? How many do you have, total?

Patrick Bierschwale: Yeah, 25 cows, breeding bison cows at our ranch in Leakey, four bulls, and then I'll have 25 two-year-olds, 25 yearlings, and then 25 calves. So, we have-- there's 100 or so animals out there. But when I say my herd is small, it's 25 'cause I only have 25 breeders.

Evan Stern: I was wondering, I mean, you were just talking about processing, and I believe you said that you process at the ages of 2 to 3.

Patrick Bierschwale: Ideally.

Evan Stern: Sorry?

Patrick Bierschwale: Ideally.

Evan Stern: Ideally.

Patrick Bierschwale: Sometimes, if I have a 2- or 3-year old on site, and I really need it, I might have to harvest one younger.

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If I have-- if I can get an older one from the ranch, or if I find one from a friend and buy an older one, I will too. I don't like to butcher 'em if they're over 5 though. But the prime is right at about 3, 'cause that's when they're kinda hitting that adult size, full adult-- not full adult but adult size. But at 2, they're still really, really tender from 2 to 3.

Evan Stern: How often per year do you try to-- in order to maintain profitability, how does that cycle work for you?

Patrick Bierschwale: Well, the biggest thing is you want to have your herd at 100% calving rate, so whatever that means on the land that you're running. Luckily that we do right now. So, basically, twice a year, I bring home half the animals that are available. I try to go when-- we

work them twice a year, which is we give a dewormer, vaccinating any of the cows. We've got new cows that we're keeping. We only vaccinate brucellosis with our breeding cows. That's the only vaccine to give any animals that we have.

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But we do use dewormer. Usually it's Ivomec Plus, or we use LongRange or Valbazen Drench. We do that twice a year, so we actually put our hands on every animal, check the health of the whole herd. When we do that, we separate half of that year's-- actually, it will be three years of those calves. So, I'll bring them back once around like July, and then once around like December.

Evan Stern: But I know, you know, what you've just-- the cycle of what you've just mentioned is incredible. Just say someone just casually buys a piece of your meat at the market here or someplace else, I mean, what would you like for them to know about everything that went behind that cut of meat that they just bought?

Patrick Bierschwale: That represents not only my entire family and what we do and what we've been doing, but just the people that work for me, and all the effort that's put into that animal. That animal's been loved and taken care of, and it's lived a good life.

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It helps survive for not only me, but I have multiple employees and, you know, their families and the families of the people that are gonna eat it. I mean, it's more than just you're eating a piece of meat. You can go get that from the grocery store. But that animal, it's been taken care of, and there's something to that. The people that eat my stuff can tell me that it makes a difference. They can tell. I don't know if it's a placebo effect or not, but I can tell the difference.

Evan Stern: What are your views on this mass-scale commercial ranching that exists and happen?

Patrick Bierschwale: The biggest problem right now is there is so much beef that's coming in from Argentina and Brazil. So, when you're buying stuff from the grocery stores-- I'm not gonna mention names. I don't wanna get in trouble. But all they ha...like, they're bringing sides of beef in that was raised and actually slaughtered in South America. If they bring it into their San Antonio plant as a side, and it's cut up and packaged there, and stamped by the inspector, it can be sold as Texas beef.

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I take a lot of animals to auctions, to the sale barn, and the price that we're getting for animals right now is so incredibly high, I'm not gonna-- it's awesome. There is no way that the meat that you're buying in these major retail and, like, membership wholesale clubs is American beef. So, the people that are buying the American beef must be requesting it, even from the commercial packer houses here in America, which is still commercial meat, but at least it's American beef, and they're still getting top-dollar too. So, it just doesn't make sense to me how we're able to sell our beef so high at the sale barns, and then the grocery store sells it so low. It's because our market-- right now, ranches, there are fewer cattle being raised in America today than there were since the 1950s.

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So, the price of American beef is going up and up and up, and it's kinda catching up with inflation, too; that's part of it. But 'cause there's so much South American beef that's flooding the market, and it's keeping commercial prices low 'cause that's what they're buying retail. So, any of

these restaurants and places that want actual American beef, they're paying for it, which is good for the American rancher 'cause the price of beef has been up for three years. But it makes me [laughter] wanna just take all my calves and go sell, take 'em to Navasota to the sale barn, instead of having to go [laughter] to all these farmers markets, and do all this extra work 'cause it's-- that's the reason why people like me sell retails 'cause, that way, that's the only way to be profitable, in my book, unless you have some huge-- have tens of thousands acres, and crazy money to back it. But you have to go retail. It's the only way. That way, you control the end price and you control your product. You control how much money you make.

Evan Stern: Speaking of profits, you've mentioned so many expenses. You've talked about deworming.

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You've talked about feeds. Obviously you have incredible water bills and utilities that you have to maintain here on the ranch. How much would you say it costs to raise a single cow or a bison to the age of 2 to 3 years?

Patrick Bierschwale: That's a good question. Obviously it depends on your range. It is cheaper to raise one animal in Katy than it is to raise one animal in Leakey, basically, anything other than deer goats, just based on what they eat. So, if I'm going to-- let's just say Katy, 'cause it's Katy Prairie Houston area, the Gulf Coast. It probably costs me just to raise one cow-- well, let's go bison. Bison's going to be actually a little cheaper. They just don't grow as fast. It probably takes me-- I don't even know-- three years, I would say, \$2,000.

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Evan Stern: But you can make a profit off of selling the-- you'll sell meat for more than \$2,000? I mean, say--

Patrick Bierschwale: That carcass, in theory, should sell for substantially more than 2,000 going retail, but you also have to add in processing costs. So, that's automatically you're throwing about \$2 a pound on the hanging weight. So, when people-- I'll see people on social media now that are selling. There'll be an ad, like, I sell sides of beef on social media, and people will be complaining, "That's \$6.50 a pound. It should be \$2." I'm like, "Sir, you have no idea. It's \$2 just to butcher it. How can you sell meat for \$2 if it costs me \$2 just to have it butchered?" So, they just don't-- people don't understand. They still think you can get \$1.99 ground beef. It doesn't work that way. If someone is selling \$1.99 ground beef, I wouldn't want to eat it, just 'cause I know too much about [laughter] the commercial meat industry, and what my meat is and what my meat isn't.

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Evan Stern: But say someone buys a \$40 cut of meat off of you, what is the profit margin you can expect to take home, just knowing everything that went into it?

Patrick Bierschwale: In order, let's just say, leaving certain costs out of it, in order for me to be profitable, I have to make sure that my profit margin is at least, I would say, 50. Like, say if something's \$10, I gotta sell it for at least 15, or I'm not making a cent.

Evan Stern: But I know it is an insa...you know, you've spoken about how much you love this work. I mean, it's an insane amount. The margins are slim, as we just discussed. But what is it about this work that just fuels you the most?

Patrick Bierschwale: It's because I gotta be outside, doing. I can't be-- I've worked inside, and if I'm inside, then I need to be, like, it was when I was running the gym. So, I was coaching, and I was training, and I was doing stuff. Then I had like a normal day job, I didn't like it.

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I went to college. My degree's in kinesiology, and my minor's in business. I wanted movement in the body. I gotta be doing things. I grew up, I wasn't even an athlete, and I was always outdoors, hunting, fishing, riding horses, doing whatever. So, it's being able to incorporate this kinda who I am in what I do. I tell people I'm gonna work till the day I die, not just 'cause I'm broke; it's because I love what I do [laughter], you know, and I'm broke.

Evan Stern: Speaking of being outside, how do you manage the Texas summers out here?

Patrick Bierschwale: I get used to it. I sweat a lot, first of all, I sweat a lot, and I stay hydrated. I try to stay covered. I wear long sleeves. I wear fishing gear, basically, when I'm out. I wear long sleeves. I put my hood on. I try to stay covered. But I get used to it. I think, was it two summers ago where we had like 30 days over 100? I was out, I was in my back pasture, and I'm sitting there, working on a fence, just like, man, it's not too bad. It's kinda nice out. I looked [laughter], at the time, the temperature was 98.

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So, I was used to like 106 and, all of a sudden, it's 98. I'm like, man, it's kinda nice out. So, you just get used to it. It's like anything else. I do better in the heat than I do in the cold 'cause my body's so beat up, when it gets cold, my hands don't work so well and my back's stiff. It's bad. I dealt with the cold better when I was young, but now it's like give me the heat. I'm all right.

Evan Stern: I should ask, speaking about having a beat-up body, in what ways would you say mixed martial arts prepared you for ranching?

Patrick Bierschwale: I mean, just 'cause you're taking a beating every day, and you gotta get-- if you're doing MMA, and you have any aspirations of doing anything, you have to get used to getting beat up. For your first few years, you're gonna get beat up every day by everybody in that gym before you start ever being the hammer. So, you get used to it 'cause you're never gonna win if you go head-to-head with one of these big animals. They outweigh you by 800,000 pounds.

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So, you kinda gotta use your martial arts to out-think 'em, you know, use technique and stuff like that. Really, martial arts has affect...it's helped me in so many different ways because just when-- it changes the way you think about things. It changes the way you look at a problem. Just to give an example, my daughter does color guard. So, she's throwing her flag up, and she kept dropping it or missing the stick, but she could grab the flag. I'm like, "Sweetie, okay, well, you gotta have a counter to that, like, you're dropping it every time. So, when you feel the drop, you gotta automatically go into your counter, so when you grab that silk, is what they call it, you go into your next move like your recovery move, and that hides that mistake." She's like, "I never thought about that." I was like, "Yeah, it's like jujitsu, man, when your opponent does this, you do that. You just gotta have your counter." So, it kinda changes your mindset, just how you think about not only just I'm out there ranching, but just life.

Evan Stern: Speaking of, you know, you just talked about your daughter there. What is it like-- what does your wife do here? Then I'll ask, what is it like to work with family?

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Patrick Bierschwale: Well, she doesn't do anything here. My wife's a teacher. [Laughter] By the time she gets done teaching sec...she teaches second grade-- she's done. Before she taught-- back before we-- I have five kids, so life used to be a lot cheaper when they were younger, before we had so many. So, when she used to not work, she handled most of my social media stuff. She did all the things that need to look good or sound good, 'cause I'm just an idiot with a phone when I go to post to social media, so that's fine. I just know how to put it on CapCut, boop, boop, boop. I don't know what I'm doing. So, she handled all that for me. But then, when she had to go back to teaching, it was like [laughter] dealing with-- and she was at public school, teaching. I don't know. It was never the legal limit. It was always over. That was crazy.

Evan Stern: I may have already asked this before, so forgive me if I'm asking twice. What lessons do you hope you're teaching your kids here?

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Patrick Bierschwale: Mainly just responsibility for animals, and for the Earth, and for the outdoors, and for like mainly ranching and hunting. Just the responsibility to maintain the ethical side of ranching and hunting, it's so big for me because that was just important in my life because, growing up with my grandfathers and my dad and everything, that's what we did. We'd go hunting. We'd go fishing. We'd go ranching, whatever. So, it was just a way to bond with each other, with other men, with my kid, with my grandfather and my father with my kids, a way for me to bond with them, and just love being with the animals and seeing, like, if you just take care of something, you can watch it flourish, whether that's-- that can be anything in life. That can be a hobby. That can be your school work. That can be your job. That can be friendships, relationships, I mean, anything is you get out what you put into it.

Evan Stern: Speaking of bonds, if you were to have a conversation with your grandfather today, what would you like to talk about?

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What would you like him to know?

Patrick Bierschwale: Oh, man. Well, I couldn't mention just one, 'cause both my grandfathers had huge impacts on me, mainly 'cause I got shipped off to 'em a lot when I was a kid 'cause my sisters were busy. So, my parents just dropped me off, like, "Hey, you go to the ranch for a couple weeks," or, "Hey, you take him hunting this week." So, my dad's dad, he's the one who got me into ranching and just, man, thank you, you know? 'Cause if he didn't do what he did, I wouldn't be able to do what I do. He's the reason, like, he started everything. He's the reason I even exist. So, it's just awesome. I just, like, thank you man, and just for raising my dad, like, having to just-- yeah.

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Then my mom's dad, he was more-- he's the one who taught me everything I know about hunting, about shooting, about fishing, like, fixing things, things like that, which I'm not really good at fixing things. I can do it my way, but it doesn't look pretty. But just he taught me so much, like, if I had to go off-grid, I'd be fine. If I needed to live, I know how to do it 'cause he taught me. He taught me how to grow food, he taught me to hunt, like, everything. He taught me how to you clean a deer. So, just again, just thank you, man, 'cause just pouring into the next generation, like, this is big.

Evan Stern: If you were to go back in time, and tell that version, that kid who wanted to grow up to be a wrestler that, at this stage in your life, this is what you're doing, how do you think that kid-- what do you think that kid would think?

Patrick Bierschwale: Well, I would tell him I did it because I wanted to be a wrestler 'cause I thought it was real, so I was like, what's real wrestling? It's MMA. So, it's like I wanna be world champ. Like I said, I never wanted to be world champ. I was too old. I knew that wasn't gonna happen. But that's what I was saying, I'm gonna be world champ of the world.

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That's some baseball quote. But I'd always say, I'm like, you know what, I wanna be, you know, stand up there with the belt. I wanna raise it up, and have people scream. I was like, I wanna be Hulk Hogan. So, I did it. I was like, look, you're doing both things. It's not the way you wanted it. You didn't take the route that you wanted to take. Bad things are gonna happen, but you're gonna get there. It's all gonna be worth it, and you still got a long way to go. It didn't really click. I was thinking about that one time, about wanting to be a pro wrestler, and I was like, man, that's dumb. Why'd I wanna do that? I was like, it's because I thought it was real. It's because I wanted to be the real American hero, like, Hulk Hogan walking out. It turns out he's kind of a scumbag.

Evan Stern: [Laughter]

Patrick Bierschwale: But, anyways, I didn't know that back then.

Evan Stern: Well, what you're doing now is very real, and there's incredible pride in that.

Before we move to the end here, I should ask, you know, we have spoken a lot about bison, but you now do so much more than that.

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Tell us about what all you sell, and are raising, and are involved in now.

Patrick Bierschwale: Geez. I'm involved in just about everything. It all started with just people who got my bison, saying, "Man, I wish you had this. I wish you had that." So, I was like, you know what, I can do-- if bison is good, let me start doing this. So, the first thing I actually started next with was goat, and I had never eaten goat before that in my life. So, I started raising 'em, and I was like, you know, let me try this. The first time I ate goat, I said, "This is the best thing I've ever had in my life." I love goat now. So, that kinda turned me around to eating goat meat. Then, after that, I think it was sheep and then pig. Then I started trapping wild hogs, and then we got into trapping, and it just kinda blew up from there. Now, I raise beef, bison, goats, lambs, pigs, chickens on this ranch right here in Katy.

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I think that's all I'm gonna to raise [laughter] here, although I might add quail here 'cause, right now, I've got a guy over in Pattison that does quail. So, when I need quail, I buy from him. So, I might start doing quail but, other than that, it's too much [laughter].

Evan Stern: How does your venison and elk work?

Patrick Bierschwale: Well, okay, well, so that com...there's a company called Broken Arrow. So, they will come out to your ranch or other ranches, wherever, and they will literally harvest your animals. Like, the elk and nilgai– the larger animals, they do from a helicopter. Then the axis and red deer and the smaller cervids, the other deer, they just trap 'em, and it's like a drop trap with eight-foot walls and a black tarp. So, they're harvested on site at the ranch, at our ranch or other ranches that we work with. It's pretty cool. You can find some videos of it.

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It's not the most kinda-- some people would get offended with watching it, but it's the most ethical, cleanest harvest. I mean, they're out in the wild, and it's just over. Like, it's the way it's meant to be, and I wish people would understand that more.

Evan Stern: Let me just-- I'm gonna, you know, I had a ton of questions. I think that we covered all of our bases. I just wanna double-check before we wrap things up here.

Patrick Bierschwale: I don't even remember what we talked about, honestly [laughter], 'cause I just get to talking, and it just goes, man.

Evan Stern: Oh, that's how we like it.

Patrick Bierschwale: Like, my brain, I can't keep up. I don't even know what I said.

Evan Stern: Believe me, you're my favorite kind of person to talk to, exactly [laughter] for that reason. Actually, I should ask, I mean, how did you find and select this land here where we are right now?

Patrick Bierschwale: We just got lucky. My dad's, I guess, cousin, so to speak, is a realtor in the area, and he knew that we were looking. He's like, "I know it's not on the market yet, but we know a guy." So, it just kinda happened. It was like in 2004.

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They were just looking to get out. I don't even think they lived here. I don't think they lived in this house. But none of these houses were here. None of these neighborhoods were here. It was nothing.

Evan Stern: What are the advantages of grazing a herd in this region versus the Hill Country?

Patrick Bierschwale: Number one, rain. We get plenty of rain or we're supposed to get plenty of rain here. The past two summers have been severe droughts, which is very, very hard, especially down here, where [laughter] I'm not supposed to have to buy hay in the summers. But down here, with all just range conditions, you have more fertile soil, more actual soil. Because in Leakey, it's 75% rock with about 30% soil mixed in, most of it. So, just the amount of grass that can grow on 2,000 acres there versus what can grow on 100 acres here is-- there's probably still more-- you can probably still grow more grass on 100 acres here.

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We limit the carrying capacity of this ranch because-- we call it the house pasture in the middle, you know, that's 35 acres that we don't-- no animals go in there, just 'cause we don't wanna deal with manure everywhere, and cows in your front yard, and goats will eat everything. So, we keep 'em out of there. But, still, just as long as you have, basically, open country, open prairie, like this, and rain, you can just-- you can probably-- I can handle about one cow per two acres here, where it's about one cow [unrelated conversation] for 50 acres up there.

[Unrelated conversation]

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Evan Stern: But I guess I should ask too, I mean, what do you love or what do you think is special about, you know, Texas is a big state. What do you love or what do you think is special about this region where we are now?

Patrick Bierschwale: Houston, oh, Houston, man, I love the diversity of Houston. I love the food. I love the culinary experience. That's what I do when I go to Houston, 'cause when we go into Houston, it's like an event 'cause, it's Katy, we say it's part of Houston and everything but,

still, we go into Houston, it's exciting. I just love the people. I love the excitement around the city. For the most part, it's a very friendly city. I mean, just the food, it's the food for me. I love going to restaurants. I've always been a big fan of Chris Shepherd, so we follow his TV show, and we try out all the places he talks about. He actually bought a half a bison from me way back in the day at Underbelly, and put it back in their charcuterie room or something, and did something cool with it.

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I don't remember. But that kinda turned me, I mean, way back, like, 2015. I don't know. That is what really turned me onto the Houston food scene, man, that night. My buddy Kevin, he had a restaurant called Gratifi. He had to shut it down. But, man, he had the coolest little restaurant there, right on Upper Kirby or something. He was a cool guy. Just the people in Houston is just awesome. This area, it's the people that make it, man. That's what it is.

Evan Stern: We got family that's arrived here, and I know we've spent a long time talking. But before we go, do you have any final thoughts that you'd care to share?

Patrick Bierschwale: I just appreciate you coming out and just spreading the message of Urban Harvest and what they've done for people like me, and helping me get my message out there, what we do for people, and just letting people know that you can do it. There's a way. You can still become a rancher, still become a cowboy, even in this day and age. It's just it might take you a while, might have to start off small, might have to go a different route, but it can be done.

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That can definitely be done.

Evan Stern: All right. Well, Patrick, I thank you so much for speaking and sharing with us. It's been a great pleasure.

Patrick Bierschwale: Thank you, man. Appreciate it.

[End]