

**Oral History Interview of
Kenneth “Tuggie” Tuckness**

Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez

June 29, 2017

Amarillo, Texas

Part of the:

Sports Interview Project

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Sports History Initiative

The Sports History interviews encompass interviews conducted by members of the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library staff. They hope to document the evolution of sports and the role of sports in the social fabric of this region.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Kenneth “Tuggie” Tuckness as he recounts his participation with drag racing. In this interview, Tuggie describes Amarillo as the drag racing center of West Texas, his local TV show, and Raymond Beadle.

Length of Interview: 01:11:18

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Keywords

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Daniel Sanchez (DS):

My name is Daniel Urbina Sanchez. Today's date is June the 29th, 2017, and I'm interviewing "Tuggie" Tuckness. Is that how you pronounce your last name?

Tuggie Tuckness (TT):

Tuck-ness.

DS:

Tuckness. At his home in Amarillo, Texas. This interview is part of our sport's initiative and we will be discussing Jim's career in motor sports. Jim—I mean Tuggie—

TT:

Yeah.

DS:

--Thank you so much. And—you know—when you cut and paste things that happens. [Laughter]

TT:

Yeah, let me tell you something. My pleasure. I'm just glad to be able to help you.

DS:

And let's start off with your complete legal name.

TT:

Well, my legal name is [Laughs] Kenneth Duane Tuckness. And I will say this, that only my school people and my insurance people knows that's my name. Kenneth, that's my legal name. But I have another name and that's what you just called me. That's "Tuggie"—T-u-g-g-i-e Tuckness—T-u-c-k-n-e-s-s. And that—Tuggie Tuckness—the name Tuggie was my granddad—my granddad had a nickname, Daniel, for everybody. So anyway, that's where Tuggie comes from. I have no idea except probably from baby talk like, "Doobie, boobie, toobie, doobie, little baby Tuggies—" I don't know. That's what—

DS:

But it stuck and that was your name?

TT:

You know and my bank account's, like that now, I sign everything "Tuggie Something". But that's not my legal name.

DS:
Okay.

TT:
But anyway, I've just learned to live with that. And it's I think maybe probably had a little bit of help to popularity because that's a pretty funny, fun name to say and to know. Tuggie Tuckness.

DS:
And when you say "Tuggie" people know who you're talking about because there's not a hundred thousand of those.

TT:
Exactly. And it's just like, Daniel, just like—you know, Facebook. I mean I just do that, and "Tuggie" and the people that see that pick right up on it. There's no more Tuggies that I know of. I'm sure that there's somebody. Except for one guy in Perryton. I saw him on day at Jack Sisemore Traveland, where I was working. He come in with a hat on and it says, "Tuggie." Spelt just like mine. I said, "Is that your name?" He said, "No. It's the name of a TV show I used to watch all the time and that's what they'd called me in my golf foursome, Tuggie." [Laughter]

DS:
And you told him you were the TV show?

TT:
Yeah! I said, "Well that was me." Oh and he loved it.

DS:
Wow. You know that's got to be great—when you run into somebody that, you know—

TT:
Yeah.

DS:
--that remembers it.

TT:
Yeah.

DS:
Well we mentioned your real name. Where and when were you born?

TT:

I was born, of all things, right here in Amarillo, Texas in 1938. That would be November the thirtieth. It was the old Saint Anthony's Hospital, it's down on Polk Street. That was really the only hospital in town at the time. Shortly after there was Northwest Texas. But Amarillo, Texas has been—and I've had the opportunity, Daniel, to go to live in L.A. and Charlotte, and I've spent some time in New York and Dallas. I've been able to get away. But, like they tell you, if you wear a pair of shoes here and in west Texas, you're going to be back.

DS:

Um-hm. Let's mention your folks, starting with your dad. What's his name and where was he from?

TT:

My dad was also named Kenneth, but I'm not a junior. He was Kenneth A., and he was born in Lamesa, Texas. From here on the other side of Lubbock, which you all know. And so one day we were going to some kinfolk's house in San Antonio and he said, "If we get to Lamesa," he said, "I think that the courthouse was right here on 287—" or 87, I think. I don't know. Anyway, well we pulled in the courthouse. "What are we going here for, Dad?" He said, "I'm going in here to see if they got my birth certificate." And we found it. They had it right there.

DS:

Wow.

TT:

In Lamesa. So yeah, that's where my dad was born. And my mother was named Grace Marie Locke. L-o-c-k-e. She was born right here in Amarillo. Her kinfolks were from Marfa, Texas. But all from around Texas. No too much out of state stuff for us. Fact is, it's too expensive. We barely could get enough gas for our old car.

DS:

So what did your dad do for a living?

TT:

He was a paint contractor. Worked on some of the biggest and best new houses in town, and every store. He was very good at antique work and all that stuff. And fact is that's where I went to Amarillo College—right after I got out of high school in 1957—and went to Amarillo College. Took a course on architecture and drawings and stuff. I went to work for a place here called Timber Rig [?] [0:05:23.8] Builders. Well after a while I could only build about twenty buildings after I'd drawn all those pictures of those buildings. There was no more goose [?] [0:05:33.1] for me to go out on a job and cut pearl and stumps up[?]. I found out, I'd better go back to work for

my dad, because I can make more money from dad in a week than I could for that place in a month. [Laughter]

DS:
Wow.

TT:
So painting wasn't a bad—a really bad thing at all to be your vocation.

DS:
And you mentioned those technical skills. You think some of that helped you out when you started eventually racing and all that? Helping design and create your cars?

TT:
Yeah, my dad was—that was kind of a—he didn't help me much. He liked what I was doing. As far as asking Dad a question about gear ratio—he didn't know that. So that came about from growing up in east Amarillo. There was kind of a band of us back there. If it wasn't little motor scooters and whizzer motor scooters and souping them up. It finally went into cars and racing. And then, of all places, in early 1960, Ernest Walker decided to put that drag strip in. So that's kind of where our knowledge comes from. Kind of from the neighborhood, basically, is all I know it. Of course back in those days—you know, Daniel—they had shop in school. They had mechanics in school, which was a great thing. It taught a lot of people a lot of things. In fact, at Amarillo High School they offered mechanics. They'd overhaul a car in there and that sort of thing. So a lot of people learned from school, which was wonderful, I thought.

DS:
Um-hm. What's your earliest recollection of seeing anybody involved in any type of racing, and thinking, I might want to do something like that?

TT:
You know what, I would say probably my really first taste of that was Abernathy, Texas. If you can believe it. They used to run a drag race at the airport in Abernathy, Texas. They just shut the airport down, which was not that busy, and they'd have drag races there. And that was probably in 19—oh—55, '56, maybe? And then got acquainted with it right there. Then after we started doing it here with the new track here, Amarillo Dragway, well that's kind of followed from there. Really Abernathy, Texas. And that's where they used to have drag races, at airports. They had to have some near Tradewind Airport also. That kind of opened up the doors for everybody. Of course you just—it's called, "Run what you brung." [Laughs] Got's ideals [?] [00:08:17] so that's what we did. We'd show up out there. No rules. No adolescents out there. You'd to have your parents' signature to be able to compete. So that's where it all started.

DS:

What was the first car you raced out here?

TT:

You know what, I had a 1958—I mean 1957, pardon me—I ordered from Plains Chevrolet a 1958 Chevrolet Impala. It was called a “factory hotrod.” It was more before that, but that was my time to order one. It came with three two-barrel carburetors, standard shift, and it was a first year for Impalas, the solid black Impala. And probably for one year there it was the prettiest and fastest car in its town. That didn’t last long because drag racing was just getting a hold of itself. But that was me in 1958. It kind of went up through there.

DS:

You know I’m glad you mentioned that. Drag racing was just getting going. And Amarillo somehow found itself with the forefront of that. How did that happen?

TT:

Well I think it happened because of this exact thing. Dale Ham—it started with street rods. With people building garages, and in their garage—building in their garage a hotrod and maybe souping up a family car with some help from somebody they knew. But Dale Ham is the name I’m using, because Dale was real active with streets cars. We had to have lots of car clubs here. We had the dads and we had the—just the hotrod bunch and everything like that. And then Dale, somehow, he would go to some kind of those car shows and hotrod shows in Albuquerque. Ended up going to one at L.A. Well that’s where he met Wally Parks, who was the man for NHRA [**National Hot Rod Association**], which he took over in—I believe—right around 1955, or ’56. Wally became in charge of an actual hotrod association. So in doing that Dale got hooked up with that and then through the fact that he got Ernest Walker hooked up and interested in it, and Ernest had the land and the facilities to build a dragstrip. So that’s kind of how that started. And then, to top all this off and you’ve heard it all your life, there’s a lot of traffic here. There’s a crossroad. You’ve got I-27 and you’ve got I-40, I-40 from L.A. to all-points west and east. It was a good place to have. And that’s why we—at an early time—got the national finals here. For two years in a row. So that alone kicked it off big-time for Amarillo. The city got behind it. Big time. They’d come in and they’d have a big parade. At a park downtown they’d have a dinner and a barbeque. And it just grew from there. And the city accepted the NHRA and the dragstrip in a big way. The city fathers endorsed it. And from that point on it was not an outlaw thing, it wasn’t kids driving on the street. Which, too bad they still did, some of them. But that was the purpose of drag racing and the drag strip, and the city getting behind it. And the police department. Everybody involved in safety brought drag racing to Amarillo. And so whenever we’d have a race, the city would expect it to be top-notch, and it was.

DS:

What was your role, back then in those early days?

TT:

You know what, I got started with Ernest. In fact, in the paint contracting business. You know my dad got the business out there painting a place, and me, and we painted all the bleachers when they were new and the tower. Which, the little tower was kind of a smaller thing. In several years they thought, Wait this tower is not big enough. So Ernest built a tower three times that big. So, but that got started out there in construction, plus I was already—that's how I got the knowledge for drag racing, being into construction and being at the drag strip, and got to know Ernest and all of the people that was involved in it. And so that was how I got started in it. Then, at race day, I worked on the crew. I worked on the tech crew. My particular job then was working down, they called it the "far end." I worked on the far end. That's when the cars would come in and to check in and get their classification and all, and I worked on the scales. We had scales, and every car had that for its class. It was a weight and horsepower. That's how they figured what class you was going to run in. So I worked on the scales, weighing cars. And then, still at the far end, at the end of the day—or not the end of the day, but the end of a race—we'd start checking fuel. So I also was on fuel check. We'd have a—I'd have a vial and we'd have a way to check and make sure it was street gasoline, because that's all they were allowed to burn, was street gasoline. And I worked there in that. Then later on, as needed, I would work up in the tower to learn the—when we first started, Daniel, there was no Christmas tree. It was a flagger. And that was lots of fun, because the flagger to get out there. He was the big boy in town, you know. He had a funny hat on, always. He had his flag in his hands and he knew how to point at this guy and see if he was ready and shake his hand. He'd point at the right lane and see if they were ready and shake his hand. He'd raise that flag and off they'd go. So they'd always have to be two people on each end of the starting line to kind of acknowledge if that was a good start or not, and normally it was. Then, after that, two or three years for a flagman, and then they came up with the Christmas tree, which is all electronic and no room for failure. Everybody started at the same time exactly, so then the Christmas tree came along and really made things a lot bigger and a lot more professional. It was for a professional sport. Right there after the Christmas tree came in they—not a lot of people knew about them. Dale Ham was one of the people that knew about them, because he was hooked up with NHRA. So we'd have a race of magnitude. They'd bring in the clock and all of the stuff to run the Christmas tree with. So I kind of learned about that, and learned how to do the clock, the Christmas tree. All of the clock stuff was up in the tower, and you'd read the clocks and give—on the microphone or on the headset—you'd give the guy at the far end how fast the guy run, what his elapsed time was. So they'd tell the other end man, so when the guy is coming back down the return strip he would give his tag—a little piece of paper—that was his, you know—had his time and his performance on there. So that was that. Then, after that, knowing that, then I got—there was seven divisions in NHRA. First through the seventh. We were the fourth division, Division IV. So I went with Dale Ham and

about four or five other guys to different towns. For Oklahoma City, we went to. We went to Lubbock a couple of times. We'd go to El Paso, Raton New Mexico. Up in Kansas. And run the races for them if they were NHRA signified, and they were a member of NHRA. We'd go put on the races for them. We'd set the Christmas tree up and the clocks, and I did a lot of that back then, the sixties and seventies, for them. So that's kind of how I got involved with it as far as the running the race or how the racetrack was built and that sort of thing. And then from there I kind of, you know, I'm still going. [Laughs]

DS:

So were you racing at the time also? Or just working?

TT:

No, most of this time I wasn't. I didn't have time to race and work and farm. But then in 19—about 19—early '68, '69, in there, I built a little '32 Ford coup, 292 Chevrolet. And it was run C Altered. And I had some help with that from Custom Car Supply, the guy by the name of Bill Rudd, he had a big, nice 292 Chevy engine and we put it in this little '32 to run competition. For Bill, being there, it's his motor, and we kind of partnered up. So that kind of turned me loose to still do my work with NHRA. Plus that means I could call that half of my car *my* car. So that's kind of how—I run that for, oh, two or three years. Then after that you start going up the stairway. It gets harder to go. Every year people get faster and spend more money racing. So I felt like that my part was probably officiating other than racing. So that's all car racing, I'm talking about.

DS:

You're showing me pictures up there where you traveled the countryside with different teams. How did that all come about? Going from where you were doing officiating to then being with, like, the blue max and stuff?

TT:

Well I will tell you this, and that's a really good question, Daniel, and you've asked me some good questions, Daniel, I appreciate it. That, it all is a good story. From me hitting the road and going national with some national stars, like the Blue Raymond Beadle and the Blue Max. My first big one was Tom "the Mongoose" McEwan, Fountain Valley, California. Then I got to—I didn't travel with them, but we traveled as a group from NHRA, with "the Snake" Prudhomme and Don Garlits. A lot of big names. Well my TV show started in 1968. That opened up the door, because anytime that a race would come to town—who would they call or get them on that show? Well they'd call me, and then that was my—I loved it. I've had the Snake, the Mongoose, and Garlits on my show. And lots and lots of people from the Dallas area and stuff. And that's how I got to know a lot of the racers, and that's how I got associated with those people.

DS:

Okay, well I guess we need to take a step back, then, and talk about that TV show. Describe it. You know you were telling me earlier how you got into it and stuff. Just let everybody know, you know, about the show. How it got created, and then how it led to those other opportunities for you.

TT:

Yeah, it was like a—most people of heard of Stanley Marsh. He was our person in Amarillo, just a civic person, done lots of things for the—he's the one put in the—Stanley put in the Cadillac Ranch out on I-40, which is one of the main tourist attractions in this area. So it is a—That's—Matt, and the fact that I went to work for Stanley. We had a—and this TV station was first started and the fact that they got me to do that TV show, because I graduated from high school, Amarillo High, in 1957. I just knew a lot of people, so somebody asked Stanley, "Well you need a children's show.", "Well who you going to get?" Well somebody else that was a student said, "Tuggie. He has a built in audience." And I did. I had five children. So that's how I got in, and the fact that my name was Tuggie, I think. Really, I do think that had a big play. And I was—and not to sit here and say and brag—but I was popular in high school. For no other reason than just I did things, and liked people, and liked to talk—like I'm talking to you, Daniel. If I get too much, tell me. [Laughs]

DS:

Don't worry about it. The more the better, where we come from. [Laughter]

TT:

So anyway, and in doing that—and in that TV show—it was just—we started off with cartoons, because it was a—that was just—they threw me out there. We talked about it, and the next Monday I was on that show. Well the first two shows—and my Monday show was live. Actually, my Monday show was taped, but let me backtrack a little. On that Saturday and Sunday before that Monday, I got to the studio dressed in a shorts and a funny hat, and with knickers. And my set was a New York stoop. And so I just did funny things like that. Well the first two shows was not rehearsed, nothing. And we played cartoons, so that I could introduce a cartoon. That would take up some of the time, that would fill up the show. But they taped the first two shows and they run those back on Monday, Tuesday, they were taped shows, and you could tell they were taped. It was kind of like reading, and I'd read what I did. Well the general manager up there was quite a general manager. He says, "We don't want no more taped shows. He's too funny. Do it live." And sure enough they did it live and that's because I'd make so many million mistakes. They had lots of English teachers calling up, says, "That guy's got terrible English." [Laughter] But it didn't hurt my TV ratings. So that's where we were all at. So in starting that it kind of set a precedent of what that show was going to be. Kind of the wall. I would have Amarillo High cheerleaders on the show, for instance. I've had a Tascosa high

school band on that show. We were on the bottom floor of the Vaughn Building at 4th downtown downtown, and you could open the big backdoor and the band could walk into the studio. We had little mini bike races in the—just live, little live things like that. So it was always kind of motor head, motorcycles racing because that's the way I was. So the whole show kind of developed around that a little bit. And so in doing so when the races come, well I'd get some drivers, some good drivers, down on my show. And fact is we had two or three marriages out of my show. Having the drivers on TV and then meeting local girls that saw them on my show.

DS:

Wow.

TT:

So it was a—that was part of it. And that show just—I was on the air for darn near, oh, nearly four years. Four and a half years. It was—and on the morning show is where we started. It was six thirty in the morning. Well I never got used to getting up at five, but I did. Of course Amarillo has snow so it sure was bad on the snowy morning, but we got through all that. The show got so—its ratings got so big—not especially me, I didn't ever think, but with the—we showed *Our Gang* comedies, and *Gilligan's Island*, and *Looney Tune* cartoons, and *Foghorn Leghorn*. And the reason for that was to get early morning kiddos. We wanted—it was a kid show—so we wanted them to turn that TV to Channel 7. And so that kind of worked. Then the kids would listen to what I say and they'd kind of get interested in drag racing, and into what I was talking about. Thank goodness. Then that just went from there. We had lots of stuff on my show and a lot of—it was, like I said, it was just impromptu. But Stanley Marsh got on it, loved that too. And fact this one night he called me and he said, "I've got Kenny Rogers over at my house." Stanley was all into society. He said, "I want to set Kenny up on your show in the morning. I said, "Sure." So I had an interview with Kenny Rogers, which was—I can't explain it. Kenny didn't even know where he was, too, on that morning.

DS:

I was going to say, that's probably pretty early for him.

TT:

Yeah, early. So we did all that. But people like that, anytime somebody would come to town of notable, I would get them on my show. And it turned out to be a good show. But anyway—what I was trying to tell you was, it was so big in the mornings that they put it on afternoons, too. So I spent—on TV—and we figured it up one time, I ain't remember now—about two hours in the morning, about two hours in the afternoon, five days a week. So I logged lots of TV hours in four years. And so that—my whole life and since that point has been built around that. It was a wonderful thing for me, and so was racing of all kinds. So that put me into racing and we call ourselves motor heads. Or somebody else might call us motor heads. I never did call myself one.

But that's what a motor head comes from, I suppose. Lots of them here in Amarillo and in Lubbock. And Oklahoma City is so big in this fort. We did Handlebar Hills. I might get ahead of myself, but 840 acres out here north of Amarillo. With 230/40 cut trails. It was in the river breaks of the Canadian River. So we had this family called Handlebar Hills. So we'd have weekly events out there. It was a family thing. We had an office in our building right there at the gate, and it was monitored. We'd have a motocross or some kind of a motorcycle event there nearly every week. Wednesday night was Family Night. We would have a big bonfire. We had to cut down a lot of mesquite trees to make room for the trail. Well nobody ever told us, "Don't start a mesquite fire, because you can't put it out." So we ain't never hear them. We'd start with them on Wednesday night. We'd built them a mesquite cinema [?] [0:29:08.9] bonfire. Somebody'd cook. Well, sure enough, that mesquite there burned about three weeks. [Laughter]

DS:
Wow.

TT:
So, to this day, don't start a mesquite fire unless you're going to stick with it. But anyway that was called Handlebar Hill. That was family riding.

DS:
Okay. You know that Handlebar Hills. Did you already own the property or did you buy it specifically for that reason?

TT:
No, we leased it. There was a man, and that has something to do with TV also, there was a man in that office named Buddy, Buddy Wells. He was in that building, the Vaughn Building, I got to know him, and we was talking about motorcycles and he said, "Well I got 860 acres out here I'll lease you." For nearly nothing. We couldn't spend very much money because we didn't have any. It was something like a hundred dollars a month or two hundred, or something, we'd leased that land back in '68. Plus we cut all the trails for it. We had a guy that also cut the trails for us. He had a road company and so that was also a benefit to us. You know we did all that with nearly nothing, but it just grew to be a big thing. So when that land did sell, and whenever we quit doing that after, it was a long run. Well Buddy sold that land out there as a development because it already had the roads cut for him. [Laughs] So he fell into a really good thing, too. So that was how that all got going.

DS:
Well now I'm going to go all the way back to where we were talking about—where we went into the TV program. Because you're talking about how you had gone national and meeting national

peoples. And in fact it was even people like people from Lubbock that were coming here who went national. So talk about that.

TT:

Well, you know, at that day and time Amarillo was really—when that dragstrip hit here Amarillo was one of the first in the area. I don't even think, I could be correct, I don't think Lubbock had a dragstrip then. And a couple years later they built a dragstrip in Lubbock. But all of the people, Prentiss Cunningham from Lubbock, Bryan Teal from Lubbock. You'd have Charlie Thurwanger from Lubbock. Big, big racers that would come through here. Prentiss Cunningham. They would all come up here and race. And that right there just meant that much more racing. Those same racers would go to Oklahoma City and Oklahoma City would come here to get away. So they'd go to Albuquerque, they'd go to Denver. So that opened the door for me knowing more people, and those people knowing me, and the Amarillo Dragway, and Ernest Walker, who owned it. It's not about me, it's about this dragstrip and about the thing. But that's kind of how that came about, because I knew a lot of those racers. And whenever Amarillo put that strip, a lot of Lubbock, Sweetwater, and Plainview, and that area had lots of racers in it. They all came here to do that. Then when Lubbock built their dragstrip—it was not the magnitude of Amarillo's, but it was a nice place. Then we'd go through there. We'd race up in Hobbs, New Mexico was a good one for us to run at, and Lubbock, too. So met a lot of people from New York—New York—New York, too, but New Mexico, I'm trying to say. Yeah, that's how it all got started here. To me that's where it all came from.

DS:

You mentioned—or we talked earlier about the different companies that you worked for over the years. Like, you know, Coors and other alcohol companies.

TT:

Yeah.

DS:

Because of this involvement. Talk about how that all worked.

TT:

You know, here's how that happened. Here's how the big name companies got into drag racing. Number one is—and I'll take Coors right now. Coors Brewery, it took somebody like Coors that spent X-amount of dollars on advertisements, always big bucks. Budweiser was a—Miller High Life, Old Milwaukee. All the car dealers Chevy, Ford, Pontiac, all of those was helped sponsor. Because it took big bucks. Sponsors say a double A fuel dragster. We're talking about big money, so it had to—You know, your local drive in couldn't do that because they couldn't. We needed big money for travel, and new cars, and parts, and trucks, and all that. And pretty soon it

came to—and not only the sponsorship of Coors and Budweiser, but also sponsorship of Ford and Chevrolet. And sponsorship of insurance came about. Everybody had to have insurance. So that could be another avenue there for that thing to grow and more people could get involved in it. Just anything you do on a daily basis takes of most of those that we do and know-- and Pepsi-Cola and Coca-Cola, they were big involved, because they could afford a big paycheck to sponsor a rich car. When television come along, it took seeing that sport was big and then Coca-Cola was “Oh, they’re on TV.” And so was Coors, and so would Budweiser, and so would car companies, and so would insurance companies. So when TV met up with—“Wow, okay, we got this.” So that’s how that all—I would say that’s how it really blossomed. Big markets like LA, Michigan, and Dallas, and Indianapolis—that’s where the big markets come in, and Florida was a big, big market for the—in Gainesville. That was a big, big drag race, still is, to this day. But that’s kind of how it had to be promoted. Everybody loved it, and then TV got it. Now then everybody knows about it. So today, at this day, right today, Fox TV owns it, owns the right to watch it, getting all the national events. So big TV audience at primetime.

DS:

Yeah. And also another part of that is the offshoot things. Like you mentioned selling t-shirts out of the back of—

TT:

Big thing.

DS:

—the vehicles but also, you know, on the outside they also have the, like, Revell would make model cars.

TT:

Big thing. And that t-shirt thing was back in '68. That's back whenever there was lots of t-shirts that said something. But that's when drag racing come, and that got into the t-shirt business. Wow. They show—and at a national event. And it wasn't long until the NHRA said, “Oh, wait a minute. We're going to have to have a t-shirt business.” [Laughs] So NHRA got into the t-shirt business. If you raced at one of their tracks you had the “okay” to sell your shirts there, so they got a cut of it. Which is a money-maker. That's what—everybody wanted a part of that, and especially that t-shirt business. Everything to do with it was—and I'm trying to think—the number one is—I'll tell you what. This gives people a job. The Blue Max, in Dallas? The Blue Max, in their shop in Dallas, Texas, employed, full-time, I would say twenty people. Office and stuff, booking the Blue Max. And we had a t-shirt plant right there, and jackets and hats. We had a t-shirt plant in Dallas, Texas that we made t-shirts. That's what I was telling you about. We made t-shirts for a lot of those people I've talked about, because we were in the business. And

that was back in the eighties. Then we had a trailer company called Chaparral Trailer. I showed you that picture—that big, long, red trailer?

DS:

Um-hm.

TT:

That was handled by—that was made by the Blue Max. It was called Chaparral Trailer. That was all big, big, big back in those days. Then, as years went by, other people, competition came along, and now there's thirty trailer manufacturers, or more. I don't really know how many. And then the people employed. I mean, my gosh, that gives a lot of people jobs. So now that a regular NASCAR [**National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing**—like Joe Gibbs NASCAR, I think they employ 120 or 130 people, or more. It's probably more. What things I'm telling you I'm probably not current on, but it's pretty current. So it's just—it all kind of started from like a lucky candy store having a one kind of candy, and then next Monday they had two kinds, and then Fleeer's Double Bubble come out and they've got three kinds. And then Hershey's came out and just kept growing from there, is kind of how that happened.

DS:

So what's it been like, watching drag racing evolve from those early days through what you saw through your career?

TT:

Well, to me, it's just wonderful, because I had some part in it, not a big part. But, to this day, when I sit at home, in an air-conditioned house, and I watch that on my TV—for instance they had the Denver Mile High drags, which is just wonderful. You go to Denver and you go to Mile High. In the mountains for several days. Go to the drag races. It's a vacation place. It's just—you see it on TV the places you would never normally would go. Like Gainesville, Florida. It's a great, good thing to have on TV. It's kind of like the *Today Show*. They go a lot of different places, and you see that. Well in drag races it's the same way. They go to Pomona, California for winter nationals. Well that's a good place for people to go to start. That's always in the first race of the year, which is in February. Gives people the chance to get the year started right and to go take a vacation in Pomona, California. I'm sitting here at home watching it, and I see people I know. And then Facebook has been really the big thing in the last five years. Not especially Facebook, but just your computer. To get on there and compete with somebody that lives in Corona, California, or somebody that lives in Indianapolis, Indiana, or Houston, Texas. So now with your Facebook and your computer, you keep up with those guys daily. So that really makes it worthwhile to have known that I was back there—I don't know how many years ago that was—but say it was 1960 on to now, I've been involved, somehow, in this sort of thing. So I'm

seventy-eight years old now, so we could figure that up. Always, racing has been something to do with numbers, so that's still another number that comes in on you. [Laughs]

DS:

Yeah, and racing has always had something to do with people. Can you tell us about some of the people that you've met along the way, and what they were like, and how they impacted you?

TT:

Oh yeah. I would say number one is, in drag racing, is Wally Parks. He was the man that started that. In the forties they had the sand races. They'd race on the salt flats, in other words. And then the time came that he saw a need for taking the whole road and making a quarter of a mile, or whatever. Get two cars run together. He saw that and then he's the one that made NHRA, National Hot Rod Association, what it is today. I would have to say Wally Parks, because it didn't make any difference if he was in Amarillo or in the nationals at Indianapolis, or in a division race in Houston, Texas or Pomona, California—he treated everybody the same. He would call my name. I'd miss him two or three times in the early years. I'd see him a year later and he'd call my name out, "Tuggie!" That was a big impact on me. Another big impact on me was Tom McEwen. Tom is the one that did—that got the sponsorship from Mattel Toys, and all of them. The little cars, they'd built it. In fact, Tom developed and sold a contract on the Mongoose Bicycle. He still—to this day—has some hold on the name Mongoose, and that thing. But he was a true promoter and person. You look for people like that and you think, "Boy, I bet he was a party dog." McEwen was anything but a party dog. He didn't drink, didn't smoke. He's just a great guy. He loved to eat. One of his main places to eat was the steakhouse—a little steakhouse—out in California, and the man that owned it is named Billy Bones. Well we'd go eat at that little steakhouse and Billy Bones had two or three of those steakhouses, and he'd helped us finance the racecar. And Billy Bones to this day is a friend of all of ours. That comes from McEwen. McEwen was a wonderful guy I met. Also local people here I met was Ernest Walker, who owned the drag strip here. Ernest was a hardworking man. Him and his dad owned a service station in Amarillo, Texas, right on the Canyon highway—or the Lubbock highway, if you want to call it that. And Ernest—he would be in that service station from six o'clock in the morning until closing time. One of the few front service stations that I ever was around that had charge account. He trusted people with a charge account. You come in there—but then you could fill your car up in 1968 cost about four dollars, maybe. Or maybe not even that much. So gas was cheap. And then when they shut that down he'd go somewhere else. He worked—Ernest always had a fast car. He brought his '58 Pontiac one time and souped it up for a big old race. But Ernest was common folk, just like me. That was kind of a hangout at that Walker service station. So to be there—and for national figures, oh my gosh. All the national racers, Don Garlits was one. When Don Garlits would come to Amarillo to race—and he'd come to nearly all the bigger races here in Amarillo. Well Bobby Johnson, at Custom Car Supply, which was out here on East 10th Street, he would open his doors up to Don Garlits he's such a big name. Well he had a little

muffler shop over at one side of that building. Well he just kind of moved things over. "That's Don Garlits. That's your shop." Because they'd each come to town and stay for three or four days—needed a place to work. And Garlits was another one. Just so talk our language. He could sit here and talk to me and you like we're talking today, that's how calm he was. Didn't even ever know that he was a bigtime person. Now he has a big museum out in Florida. He was a good person. I met a lot of them. I've met just a lot of, you know, governors. We used to run the Governor's Race in Sacramento, California once a year with Tom McEwen. I'd go race that race that. Just—I can go on and on. But I mean it was anytime you'd go into a city, and you'd come into a city with that big trailer, that great big trailer, said, "Coors" on it. It had the Mongoose on it, and a picture of the Mongoose—wherever that trailer was parked, and we'd hit a city a couple of days before race day, trying to get everything—we shop in that truck. So any hotel that we would stay at, or any wherever we were staying at, people would see that trailer. That night we'd have a crowd around, you know? They'd just see that Mongoose name and anyplace we would go we'd have a crowd around. So that was a big fun thing to go travel in that big billboard going down the road. And so that's how a lot of that promotions came around. The people got involved, put their name on the side of a trailer, and here they went.

DS:

And, you know, also we talked a little bit about the motorcycle interest. Did you ever race motorcycles, or—

TT:

No. Well, here's what we did. There was two or three categories. There was the Hot Shoes, we'd call them, that could go fast and they would go quick. Younger guys and people had been with it a long time. And we had some of those—we'd call them Flat Track racers. And in the later years of course they got into motocross, which you see on TV. It kind of developed like drag races. Starting back from all that. And yeah, I drove several Enduros, and that's something the old guy could race and somebody that wasn't so fast could race, because you'd have a marked time and get thirteen miles. That was a competition. Yes, I've done that, never in a speed event. But involved in that—in this whole movement—in 1974 we had—we rented the Civic Center. Amarillo, Texas, the Civic Center. We had seen in San Francisco a flat track on concrete in the building out there—called a cow palace. We thought, Well, why can't we do that in Amarillo? We went and talked to the man that was the administrator in Amarillo and he says, "What'll it tear up?" We said, "Well, shouldn't tear up anything. We'll have hay bales," you know. And sure enough we to that race on we run approximately fourteen or fifteen professional indoor AMA, American Motorcycle Association, indoor, flat track, motorcycle races at Amarillo Civic Center. And that went on for that period of '73,'74,'75. That was a big, big draw. We could have a full house several times at Amarillo Civic Center. Was nothing to do that, anyways. Introduce people to motorcycles that wouldn't normally be going, because it was cooled, air-conditioned,

well of course, it was loud. [Laughs] So that was a good feature, the indoor motorcycle. And they still do it to this day. Not in Amarillo, but other places.

DS:

So was your role then more like a promoter?

TT:

At Amarillo? Amarillo Dragway was promoted by Handlebar Hill, which I owned. Which used that name and I promoted the races through the city and through, like, me telling them. When you have something that would fill the civic center up, everybody else was kind of getting, "Well, what is this?" Amarillo—I had a meeting one day at the civic center with the city commission and the mayor and all that stuff. Shook their hand, cut the ribbon. So that's how big that got. The one thing—people ask me, "Why did he quit?" Well the one thing—we've talked insurance, you and I have—the one thing after a while insurance got so high that it just wasn't feasible to do. And we were doing drag racing at the time, so that's kind of—because that was in the seventies, so and then I went with McEwen in 1980.

DS:

You mentioned the insurance. I was thinking about that when you were talking about someone saying, "Well I've got these eight hundred plus acres, and I'll lend it to you." I'm going, like, liability issues today wouldn't let that happen. It's just—

TT:

They wouldn't. That's what, exactly, what happened to Handlebar Hills and the eight hundred acres. We had a gentleman, one day, running his motorcycle, and the place was marked off by barbwire fence. Well one of the roads was within fifty yards or so of the—well, for some reason he went straight on this road and hit the barbwire fence. Cut him up pretty bad. Well—and that—we didn't have insurance to cover that. We had a liability insurance policy that actually only covered the building and the stuff right there. We didn't have riders billed like that. So after that it just wasn't feasible to do that. The insurance got totally out of shape. So that was—insurance had been a big factor as far as motorsports goes. Still to this day it is.

DS:

You know, I cut you off. You were getting ready to talk about, again, about going to the—like you and all those people going around the country. I mean, you mentioned North Carolina. What were you doing there and how did you get there?

TT:

Well, you know, that's a good a question. Thanks for asking me. I have some good information for you. The Blue Max—and I worked for McEwen till 1983. And I went to Dallas with

Raymond Beadle, the Blue Max, because Raymond had bought into a NASCAR. He brought a car, the Number 27 Pontiac, driven by Tim Richmond, sponsored by Old Milwaukee beer. Raymond bought into this; bought the shop in Charlotte; bought a condo at Charlotte speedway. They had built new condos on turn one in 1981—1983, I'm sorry. They built new condos. Well, Raymond bought a couple of those new condos. It's where I lived for four years—in one of those cond-oos—cond-oos, condo—on turn one. Well we bought that and I moved. That's how I got to live in Charlotte, because I went there with the t-shirts, the apparel, and the big trailer that I had, had Blue Max on the side plus Old Milwaukee beer. Here we go to sponsorship again, and that trailer. In that trailer we'd take a show car to whatever city we were racing in. In Florida, for instance. And we'd set that trailer up, usually by a distributorship—that was a beer distributor, or associated with them—and we would sell t-shirts out of that. We'd back the show car out, and we'd have a little show, all of our own, at the Old Milwaukee dealership. That was what I did out there, plus going to all the NASCAR racing. We would set this trailer up. This was in the early years, when I went out there. That was in, like, in '83, '84, '85, and '86. Well, about '85 we pulled that trailer up and sold all of those shirts and all of that paraphernalia of the hats and such, and then we put the show car out. Well, after a while, NASCAR come up and said, "Uhn-uh. Can't do that no more. You've got to pay us if you're going to come to our races." So then that kind of abolished that, because they wanted too—they didn't want you selling your shirts. They wanted you to pay—put it on the inside of the tracks so they could sell them. So that kind of took the—then we had to take to going outside the track a mile or two down the road, set up our tents and stuff and it just wasn't as feasible as it was back when you didn't have to do that because we'd park right by the racetrack and sell our stuff, you know. So that's what I did with the Blue Max till 1986. Then I came back home. I went with the drag car and it intertwined with this, too, because if we'd be where the NASCAR and the NHRA was racing we'd try to make both races if we could. If we could. That's something else. But that's kept me busy for quite a years. I love NASCAR, that race. You'd go twice a year to about—I don't know—twelve different race tracks. And after a while, I have to tell you, you think, Dang, what do you mean I've got to go back to Daytona Beach, Florida again? [Laughs] But it was fun and you went all over the country. From Dover, Delaware to Sonoma, California to Dallas, Texas and all. Mostly up south. See, Dallas only come up about—you know what—ten years ago. So it's been a long time. My years kind of run together, Daniel.

DS:

You know, were you trying to raise a family during all this?

TT:

Yeah, I was. You know, it happened. But it's good or bad. I should have spent more time with my family, but I raised five great kids and that worked okay.

DS:

Yeah, because I was going to say, that's got to be hard on a family life—[simultaneously] just on the road.

TT:

Yes, it was, but my wife understood that and she was a fan of that. But I will say I wasn't gone that whole time. We had an airplane—the Blue Max did. It was stationed in Dallas. So part of the time I would—I had office in the Dallas office, and doing different things—and then I would fly home on the weekend on good old Southwest. So it was not like I was gone. If I had a week off or two or something, I'd come back to Amarillo and stay. So it wasn't like it sounds. I wasn't gone that whole time. Same with drag racing. And a lot of time we'd be coming this way through Amarillo and we'd stop and stay for a day or two if we were traveling, so it worked, and it still works today for those people, but it's because of airplanes.

DS:

Um-hm. You know you mentioned that '86 is when you kind of took a change there. What happened then? What was your next step in '86?

TT:

Well, I came back and I have a good friend here in Amarillo. I mentioned his name to you a couple times, and it was Jack Sisemore. Jack is a big fan of, especially, motorcycle racing. He loved my indoor races. He loved going to flat track motorcycle races all over the country. Jack has a, probably, Texas's—one of the largest motorhome/RV dealerships in Texas. Very big promotion. Just a big, very strong dealership. And so I come back from home—and I wasn't really going to stay home. I went to Jack's one day for something, because he was my friend in high school. I'd talk to him, and he says, "What are you going to do?" And I said, "Well I'll probably go back." He said, "I want you to stay here and go to work for me." And I thought about that for not long. But I thought, You know, probably time to come home. And I went to work for him and I worked for him for, oh, nearly twenty—sixteen years—selling Pace Arrows and Airstreams and Winnebagos. I did that, and in the meantime, involved with him, we also sponsored, through Jack Sisemore, and my help, we sponsored several motorcycle races. Racers, I should say. And cars; we sponsored some racecars. That kept me kind of within the motorsports business. So I'd sell them RVs. And every time we'd go to an RV convention or show I'd promote motorcycles and RVs, too. I'd know a lot of those people that would come to the RV show—I can't like—you know, just a lot of them. Like Mike and Kenny and the Wells guys—just a lot of people. Those names don't mean nothing, but that's how I stayed in the business. With Jack Sisemore Traveland. Then, after that, I told you that—a while ago—that I've had a chance to do things that was not like a job. The things like I liked. And the next thing I did was went to work for—on the same principal as I went to work for Tripp's Harley Davidson. And I was there till I retired two years ago. That was around racing, and motorcycle racing, and selling,

and riding Harleys—been all over the country on a Harley. Been all over the country. Me and my wife, Lorelei, we've been everywhere. And I guess—and when I retired two years ago from the Tripp Harley Davidson company, I had been so many miles, and so much carrying double with Lorelei, never been down. Never been hurt. So, as you've seen out in my shop, there's still motorcycles, but there's no big Harleys because we discussed it. We thought, You know what? Now is probably the time to get off of those things. My legs are getting shorter and we're getting a little heavier. So she agreed, and I sold that Harley. But I still go to the Harley shop two or three times a week. I walk at the Medi Park out there and try to keep my health up. I come by the Harley shop, have me a cup of coffee, which is right out here on I-40. Sold Harleys and then I thought now's a good time to sit back and look at it, and that's how I met you, is through our—which I only got involved in not too much before you did—in the Panhandle Motorsports Hall of Fame. Which has been—all of these names that we're talking about now on our talks we've doing today, Daniel, have been mentioned again in the Panhandle Motorsports Hall of Fame. It's just smack right now, sitting back, thinking, Wow. And so it's through me—not really through me, but through my suggestion, last year—actually the year before last—because I suggested, “Well, you should put Raymond Beadle.” Even though he's not from Amarillo—not actually from the Panhandle—but Lubbock. I said, “That's close enough.” Plus he run at Amarillo Dragstrip every time we opened the door. I said, “He definitely needs to be in this Motorsports Hall of Fame.” So now that's kind of opened up to a little bit. They've got a couple of more Lubbock people, and area people that they're—you know—

DS:
Yeah.

TT:
You know, the McClellan brothers out of Friona and just a lot of people in the area. So that's what I'm doing. I'm kind of on the board now, of the Panhandle Motorsports Hall of Fame. Of course that's how I met you, and I'm really glad to have met you, Daniel, and hope we'll keep this thing a'going.

DS:
Well you know I'm going to probably be bugging you and the rest of the guys for quite a while.

TT:
Yeah.

DS:
Because this is a lot, you know.

TT:

Well—

DS:

I learned it on the fly—

TT:

It is a lot to—it is a lot, and we could talk another two or three hours, but I think to divide it up is even better. Because I think you will come up with some more stuff. And as you can see, I'm available.

DS:

Sounds good.

TT:

With a cell phone, and all, I'm available any time. And You can record that, I don't care. But I'm just saying that that's kind of where we're at and more things will come up. Fact is some of the name—And I'm not mentioning all the names I know because I'm not—Will think about it. You know what I'm saying?

DS:

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. I mean, because you've got lots of photographs and stuff you could through and it'll jog your memory, and it's just—

TT:

Yeah. And I do have tons of photos. And the reason that I don't show a lot of people my photographs is because I don't want people to think I'm selling myself. I'm not, you know? I don't—just like they inducted me to the Hall of Fame. I thought—I told him, I said to James Gibson, I said, "I thank you but that's not really why I'm helping out." I don't really like my name be on there. But then I got to thinking that's pretty nice. Of course what I do is kind of hoping that people see my name again that I knew back forty years ago. And that's already happened to me—

DS:

Oh good.

TT:

—in fact. Some people that I haven't seen in forty years that I've seen on Facebook and stuff. So it's just a—the whole thing's coming around, you know? What a wonderful thing at this time of life, in this time of turmoil and crap going on.

DS:

Yeah. Well, you know, what you mentioned there is a great thing. How technology now has united people that are across the globe.

TT:

Yeah.

DS:

People that you've lost, you can find them on the Internet.

TT:

Yeah, I know.

DS:

Yeah.

TT:

But for Amarillo/Lubbock area and, really, kind of like Amarillo/Lubbock—maybe Wichita Falls a little bit—but that's a pretty big part of Texas, as far as people go. Now Dallas, of course, is much, much bigger. So is Houston. Much, much more people. But this little area around here got people that no one would rather talk to one another. whereas in Dallas most of them would move there in the last twenty years, you know what I'm saying, for jobs. They've got tons of jobs. But Amarillo, I drive—and Lubbock too—my wife's in Abilene. And last time I was there we drove in Abilene out towards Hill Country. I'm thinking, All these new houses—I said, a lot of people are moving into this area here. I know that Lubbock's got a bunch of new buildings and I've got quite a few people, friends, in Lubbock that can talk to. A lot of people in Amarillo go to Lubbock to shop, they like the mall. And that mall is forever bigger and nicer than our mall. So a lot of people go there for that. Their school has done well. Amarillo is kind of—I don't know. I don't even know what the comparison would be. They're two pretty close cities, really. We do have I-40 and that brings a little bit of national trade in here. Plus the drag races. That's really what got us on the map, is I-40. And I-27, too. You know, I-27 goes plum to the coast, and they say about expanding it. But I don't care if they do or not, you know? Goes to Dumas from here. But it is coming through Lubbock—Amarillo—that's all I know it. [Laughs]

DS:

You know, I'm thinking about something that you mentioned. You mentioned Raymond Beadle and the Blue Max. How did they wind up in Dallas?

TT:

It was the—because that's happened to several people, and I'll use a comparison for you. The big bunch of drag racers now, all the big names, and all the big names in drag racing live in Brownsburg, Indiana because it's close to the middle of the country, and that's where the national race is, Indie nation race is there, plus the Indie 500 and all kinds of stuff. Well Dallas is the same way as far back then, mainly. Thirty years ago Dallas was kind of a—they had machine shops there and they had several speed shops. And fact is the Blue Max when he first got down to Dallas, Raymond—the motor shop was there—but he also put into a couple of part stores. Blue Max Parts, kind of like AutoZone and that sort of thing. Dallas was just—you know, Lubbock was here, Amarillo was here, but Dallas was *here*—closer to everything he was wanting for. Raymond was one of the bigger names. He promoted real—Raymond had promoted so much stuff with such little money. If you'd have known that you would could've seen. How the heck did he do that? But I know how he did it. He's just a country boy like me and talks good. Talks in the good old southern boys, out there in the southland where they talk just like us. Go out there and we're just like one of them at NASCAR. So that all fit in good. But it was easier to get things done in Dallas. Just like that airport. He could do all this Dallas stuff. Because that racecar's going somewhere all the time. And getting that jet plane. He was one of the first people. They all fly now, all those NASCAR drivers and all. They all do now, because it's big enough they can. So they all drive now. So anyway. [Papers rustling] I'm going to—

DS:

Okay, let me go ahead and stop this for today.

TT:

Oh I thought you was done.

[End of Recording]