

**Oral History Interview of
William Tydeman**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall
November 17, 2017
Lubbock, Texas**

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General Southwest Collection Interviews

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Preferred Citation for this Document:

Tydeman, William Oral History Interview, November 17, 2017. Interview by David Marshall, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

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Recording Notes:

Original Format: Born Digital Audio

Digitization Details: N/A

Audio Metadata: 44.1kHz/ 16bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Related Interviews: This was the first interview in this series. Dr. Tydeman was also interviewed on November 28, 29, 2017 and March 23, 2018.

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: David Marshall

Audio Editor: N/A

Transcription: Elizabeth Groening

Editor(s): Kayci Rush

Final Editor: Elissa Stroman

Transcript Overview:

This interview features William “Bill” Tydeman as he recounts his childhood. In this interview, Bill discusses his involvement with the Boy Scouts and his interests in birds and the American West.

Length of Interview: 01:27:00

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Keywords

History, Boy Scouts, Birds, Natural History, Family Life and Background

David Marshall (DM):

The date is November 17th, 2017. This is David Marshall interviewing Bill Tydeman in his home in Lubbock, Texas, and let's just start with your date of birth.

William "Bill" Tydeman (BT):

9/1/42. September 1st, 1942.

DM:

Okay. Where were you born?

BT:

In Long Island. Mercy Hospital. I think it was about 1:30 in the morning.

DM:

What town is this?

BT:

This is—Mercy Hospital is in Rockville Center, New York.

DM:

Okay. Is that where you grew up?

BT:

Long Island was kind of a succession. We've talked about it before being a succession of small suburban communities. So, I mean, it's shaped like a fish with the—taking the shape of a hundred and ten miles from Manhattan Island to Sag Harbor in New York, which was at time in the nineteenth century, even late eighteenth century, was the wailing capital of America. Interestingly enough, many of the sailors, particularly the harpooners, were Native American. So it's been said by several seagoing people, Melville included, that this was—Sag Harbor was the most cosmopolitan place in the United States because of the mix of native peoples that were there. Most of them serving as harpooners on the wailing ships.

DM:

Okay. These are Algonquins, the local people?

BT:

These are—right. Most of those eastern tribes were and the difference on Long Island is north shore and south shore. Top and bottom. So the south shore tended to be mostly a settlement of—I guess the best way to put it was emerging suburbanism after World War I.

DM:

Oh, after One?

BT:

After World War I. On what was the south and north shores, the south shore, mostly suburban home development around the time of World War I. The north shore could be understood as a colonial settlement and landing place where they would have been individuals building and settling as early as the 1700's, late 1600's.

DM:

So a lot of commerce with Connecticut across there? Connecticut and Rhode Island?

BT:

Right. Connecticut, in particular. A lot of—you would cross what was known as the smile and sound, which appeared a bay like in a huge area. They were, depending on what time of the year, I guess, you had steam boats in the early nineteenth century and a lot of traffic heading back and forth, but south shore was always—north shore was always thought of as colonial and being largely settled by Europeans. Strange relations with native peoples. Difficulties, I mean, they were peripherally involved in King William's war, many of the uprisings and difficulties. In the twentieth century, Rockefeller Center, the town that I grew up in, to get around to answering your question, was Roosevelt, New York, named after Teddy Roosevelt and known to locals as Rum Point because it was a halfway stop between two of the principle villages, larger villages, on the south shore. Free Port on one side, where I went to high school, at Free Port. The other side being Roosevelt—I'm sorry—Hempstead. Hempstead was settled in the 1700's, early 1800's. So the stagecoach ran between Free Port on one side and—

DM:

Hempstead.

BT:

Hempstead on the other. The halfway point being Roosevelt, or as it was earlier known as Rum Point. Kind of a working class. Some little patches of upper middle class, but for the most part, working class folks who were making their way, there was always a movement, out the island, to escape the perils of the city. My father was in World War II, so he was gone for the early years of World War II. My mother found a place to rent and so we lived in rental housing when I was probably not more than four or five years old. When he returned from World War II, which was, I think, about '46. I'm not certain of that date, 1946, They bought a house in Roosevelt. My mother was born in Roosevelt and she knew everybody. It was one of those situations where you're local and you knew everybody's business in town and what they were up to.

DM:

You have any idea of the population at that time?

BT:

Good question. I'm not sure. I would guess probably four or five thousand. Some of the streets named after explorers. Fulton Avenue. Robert Fulton.

DM:

Speaking of steamboats.

BT:

Yeah, speaking of steamboats. What a transport. And so once you got off the main street, the main street being Main Street, as everybody understood where you're talking about, the main artery, then all of the side roads filtered into Main Street so it would be like a grid, you know? Lined up. I can remember my father coming home from World War II.

DM:

Where had he been?

BT:

He'd been in England. He, in a sense, lucked out to noncombat, behind the scenes role. He was a—he graduated from high school and in those days, you know, going to college, was virtually an impossibility given the economic conditions that were available. It was the Great Depression. He was born in '22, so had two brothers who are younger and my grandma, mother, and grandfather, his mother and father. My grandfather, my father's father, kind of lucked out. He worked for the Journal American, a New York newspaper, which was one of the big competing newspapers and worked all through the Depression, so he always had a job. He was never—he didn't feel the pains of Depression like many people, even in Roosevelt did, but he was like at the head of his class. I guess you would call it—today, we would probably call it mechanical engineering, but he was very, very skilled and because he had all those mechanical skills, he was hired by Grumman Aircraft almost right out of high school. And that lasted for part of a year until he was drafted, but he became a repair—key repair person—on the maintenance and upkeep and care and feeding of the plains, local feeds.

DM:

That's what kept him in England.

BT:

Um-hm.

DM:

Yeah. You know, you've talked before, you've mentioned your Tydeman ancestry, which goes back quite a few generations right there. What? On Long Island? Is that right?

BT:

Yeah. My father's father traced his family roots to England and to actually—I'm trying to think. There was a town in England, the name escapes me for the moment, that had proverbial tip of the tongue. Anyhow, his family goes back several generations on this town in England, in the midlands, I believe. Apparently, prior to that being—trace the origins in England and on this particular town, before that, it was Holland. There apparently was some connection between the Dutch and Tyde building and Tydeman, which is a much more common name in Holland. I talked to a couple of people along the way and they were native Dutch and they immediately recognized the name.

DM:

I have never heard it before here.

BT:

Yeah, that's alright. So when my father's father, my grandfather, they moved to—they came through New Jersey and actually spent a good part of their lives in New Jersey. Part of that wave of new immigration. My mother's mother, I didn't know at all, who died of cancer, was from Scotland and she came over with her sister. We knew her as Aunty Nan.

DM:

So what was the maiden name? Your mother's maiden name?

BT:

Brantley.

DM:

Brantley, okay.

BT:

And I'm starting to think of Nan's last name. She worked as a housekeeper, a general jack of all trades, for a very rich, wealthy new Kingston's and they lived up river up the Hudson in the very wealthy sections of settlement along the Hudson River.

DM:

So how far back do you think?

BT:

I think Auntie Nan finally retired from the Kingston's and came to live on Long Island. This would've been—I think when they first came over, the two sisters must have been in that wave of new immigration, 1910, 1912, somewhere in that ballpark area. So that was my mother's side. Nan had another sister, I think, who we never saw too much of. Then there was the Tydeman side, which had the history of work and being embedded in place for a couple of generations.

DM:

It's interesting that, you know, you hear a Dutch name on Long Island and you think it would probably go back to the early Dutch colonies there, but that's not the case here.

BT:

Right.

DM:

Okay. That's interesting. Let's go back to Roosevelt. This must be the first place you remember.

BT:

Yeah. I remember the kind of rental apartment that we lived in to the fact that my father was gone and was aware—I must've been three years old, maybe somewhere around that time period. It was a kind of transitional area where people were moving around. There were a lot of—we called them 'The Woods,' but probably at age three and four, we're outside roaming around, going down to The Woods.

DM:

Well remember, you mentioned scouting out there on Long Island.

BT:

Yeah.

DM:

And also, I seem to recall something about a good waterfowl population. Is that correct?

BT:

Yeah.

DM:

Maybe on some lakes?

BT:
Right.

DM:
Tell me about the natural habitat a little bit.

BT:
It was, as I said, a kind of transitional area with more reasonable housing. Some rentals. Streets that fell—that kind of merged into other homes. That was like the end of this, we called them blocks, but the end of the block would take you into the woods where we'd tramp around and try to avoid the fact that the local sewer cleaners pump their refuse into the woods. You had to be on the alert where you were headed, but the scouts didn't come along—I was in cub scouts. The cub scout leader, Mrs. Tatum, was the den mother and she kept track of—there were probably twenty-five, thirty kids. If I remember right, 264. But we did all the things that cub scouts are supposed to do to become boy scouts and—

DM:
What was that at that time?

BT:
Mostly a merit badge related—the cub scouts, you would get—I think pueblo was the highest rank you could get before you petitioned to become a boy scout and then there were all the boy scout—I don't remember. Trying to think. I don't recall all the gradations. You know, all the steps you were supposed to take to become a scout. I think the highest was pueblo.

DM:
Was it pueblo or webelo?

BT:
Maybe it was webelo.

DM:
I don't know. When I came along, it was webelo. Maybe it was pueblo then. I was just curious.

BT:
Yeah, you could be right.

DM:
I don't know.

BT:

But my father was a scout and he was a—I don't think he ever got eagle, but he got life, I think, which was the next step below that so he was very, very sold on the scouts experience. And so we met—our troop would meet once a month, probably, something like that, at Jeffrey **Ruthiser's** [0:18:53] house. His father owned the local hardware store in town and there were, probably in our little band, maybe eight or ten kids, and Mr. Seabury was the scout master, and Mr. **Pachaska** [0:19:12] was the assistant scout master and we did a lot of things preparing for becoming boy scouts and we thoroughly enjoyed it.

DM:

Was this like knot tying, and fire making, and things like that?

BT:

For boy scouts, it was.

DM:

Yeah.

BT:

I'm starting to remember, with cub scouts, it seemed like we did a lot of things, but I can't recall exactly what it was. We were always conscious of the merit badges and the steps and what needed to be done, as I'm sure you were.

DM:

Well when I came along, cub scouts was more of an indoor craft kind of activity.

BT:

Oh, was it?

DM:

There were some small things that would relate to boy scouts, but I'm just wondering if when you were in boy scouts, or cub scouts, if it was outdoorsy at all?

BT:

That's a good question. I think you're right. There was probably more emphasis on indoor activities for younger kids than there would've been for the real outdoor experience. The cub scout handbook and the cub scouting way of doing things. Remember always the scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, thrifty, brave, clean, and **[redacted]** [0:20:44].

DM:

That's a pretty good memory, Bill.

BT:

Those were the guiding principles, if you will. When we got to an age to be a boy scout, I'm trying to remember. It seems to me like twelve was the magic number, but I'm not sure that's right.

DM:

Was eleven for me, but I don't know what it was then.

BT:

Yeah, but that eventually led to camping and like you suggest, there was a lot more going on with boy scouts than there was with cub scouts in Mrs. Tatum's group, but we eventually went to camp. Camp Wauwepex.

DM:

How would you spell that?

BT:

Whoa, [DM laughs] thank a lot. W-a-u, I think. Wau. W-a-u-w-e-p-e-x. Something close to that.

DM:

The Algonquians got their revenge with these names.

BT:

That was a big deal. We had a great time going to camp. It was two week sessions. The first time I went was two weeks and the next year I went was a month.

DM:

Oh really?

BT:

We had individual camp sites. Camp Wau Wepex had a lake and it had a track or trail that went around the lake and you could fish in the lake. First bass I ever caught, excuse me, at Camp Wauwepex. We had different campsites. So there was the Indian campsite. There was the general campsite. General Lucien Maxwell. So that was quite fun. My mother said I looked like I just got off the boat, was one of her favorite expressions, when they came and picked me up. Not sure we ever took a shower. It was a number of months.

DM:

Was this pretty remote? I mean, was it near a town or was it really way out there?

BT:

It was, for what New York is thought, was pretty way out there. It would've been about maybe fifty, sixty miles. Maybe I'm over exaggerating that.

DM:

Wow. Pretty good.

BT:

We—there was, unhappily, a girl scout camp just down the road at the end of Camp Wau Wepex, which the counselors kept careful eye on who was going where and when. While we tried to sneak off to the girl scout camp, we were never successfully reached our objective.

DM:

What about aquatic activities with that lake? You know, scouting came to really focus on aquatics, especially in the later ranks.

BT:

Right. Yep. Lot of swimming stuff. One of the first things you did was be tested on your swimming skills and I couldn't swim. I was, at that point, thirteen or fourteen, so it was unusual, but all the areas were roped off. You know, swimming. Float areas or lanes. I learned to swim there. I remember sticking a pole down the—holding on, you'd grab a hold of the pole. I couldn't swim, so I was nearly drowned when they said, "Jump in. Do the dead man's float." I remember saying, "What was that?" The instructor saying, "That's what you're doing right now." Red, white, and blue, I guess, were the three markers of your swimming progress, so I was—you're working on merit badges, so you cooked your own meals in many cases, but I had friends that were there, some people from the troop. Eddy Slater and I bunked together. You know, they were those camping style—

DM:

Wall tents on a platform.

BT:

Yep, exactly. So I earned a few merit badges there, enough to be that first rank or star, I think it was, which means you had to have six or seven merit badges. But it was probably a formative experience for me. Bigger introduction to the outer doors.

DM:

You trace your interest in natural history back to those days?

BT:

I think so. I'm trying to think of what might've preceded that, where the interest would've come from, but I had a very close friend. It was my closest friend during boyhood and growing up, Todd **Schlegal** [0:26:47] and he—his father was an outdoorsman and if you think of Long Island, again, has that fish in between the Connecticut shore, which was considered too far away. It was probably twenty or thirty miles across the sound, but he was master of the slingshot and so we never went anywhere without being properly armed, including probably several activities today that would be enough to throw you in juvenile detention court. We were after big quarry, and often meant that we had a circle. This was probably—trying to think of—I'm not sure exactly how old we would've been. I think, probably thirteen or so. We had a regular circle that we followed every day during the summer where we had to visit all our sites and all our traps. I think the inspiration probably came from Mr. Schlegal, but he wouldn't have approved of what we were doing, which was mostly stealing hub caps, rigging roads with nails and other material that would prevent any car from coming through and interfering with our softball game. We played softball in the streets. We played stickball against some of the road—some of the surfaces at the school. I don't know if you know of stickball.

DM:

You know, I've heard the term, but I really can't remember what it is.

BT:

It's broom handles, a box drawn on a flat wall, and then walls and strikes were called with a—I guess you would say, you know, just a combination of slingshot and anything else we could lay our hands on that we thought might add to our collection of birds. So unfortunately, we were bird killers as much as we were scouts or trying to defend trustworthy end of things. I mean, we were—we thought it was high adventure. We would do such things as kind of skulk away into a building area where new homes were going in and come with a trustee pair of clippers where we could trim off lead from—you had a—you know, where the—trying to think what the exact analog would be, but the lead was the base for where the builders put down their—well I guess they actually deposited the lead casings for the support of the—I'm not making too much sense here, but for making support for the—

DM:

Was it for like the pier of the building? Is it lead on the ground?

BT:

Yeah, so it would be the same locations as the modern day water closets and bathrooms, but with

the clippers, we'd go in and take an inch or so off by cuttings off the thing, which we, in turn, used as our ammunition.

DM:

I was wondering what you used as ammunition. Okay.

BT:

We used—

DM:

Did you melt it?

BT:

Yeah.

DM:

Wow.

BT:

We had coffee cans, which we bent to create a lip or a barring spout and we would light that up. Sufficiently lit, it would all melt and we had either holes in the ground or a little bit more sophisticated, instead of putting a hole down and pouring the lead into the hole, we would pour the lead into a fixed surface. A fixed round area. And then cut it up so that you had sharp points all the way. So we would have a bag full of ammunition in case we needed it to fend the fort against all interlopers.

DM:

Is this what you hunted birds with also?

BT:

Yeah.

DM:

Did you have any guns?

BT:

We had bb guns and as we got a little older, we had pellet guns, which were pretty lethal.

DM:

Did you trap? What kind of traps did you use?

BT:

We built our own traps and we used box traps, so we'd pick out locals and we'd figure out, well there's water here and this looks like blackberries. There were a lot of wild berries and we'd have all our ammunition, maybe half a quarter inch. Sharp points on either side into the slingshot. So we thought we were on the edge of being arrested many times.

DM:

I have to wonder how many kids around there had little welts.

BT:

Yeah, and they were deadly.

DM:

Woo, it would be.

BT:

Really. We would catch the ammunition in the slingshot so we had boxes where we would bury the lead and use the lead pellets. Whatever.

DM:

You had them cashed in different places along your trail, your circuit?

BT:

Right, right.

DM:

Wow. That's pretty sophisticated. What kind of—did you have a flat rubber band type slingshot or was it a rubber tube?

BT:

It was rubber band, so it was the biggest, thickest rubber bands we could get.

DM:

Maybe an inch?

BT:

Yeah, I would say it was probably half an inch, maybe three quarters of an inch. But then, we discovered, so this has to be another year or two down the road and we're still at it. We discovered Wham-O and it's—

DM:

The toy brand, Wham-O?

BT:

It— [clears throat] they were much—they were hand manufactured. The one—I guess you would say they were similar to what you were saying about—

DM:

Like a rubber hose?

BT:

Like a rubber hose and then tied to a—the bands tied to a piece of leather.

DM:

Right, right.

BT:

And we were menace. You know, did a lot of bad stuff. Broke people's windows. Mr. Harrison, one of the world's nicest guys, in the house behind us, who was the county veterinarian. He was always talking to us and telling us stories, things he was doing. We end up breaking his window over the dining table, sitting down for dinner, running off. It was terrible.

DM:

Were you pretty good at hitting birds? Were you accurate?

BT:

I was pretty decent. Although, I think Todd was a little better and best of all was another kid who was a couple years older than all of us, Billy Calwhen [0:36:18]. Calwhen was the ace shooter, if you will, and in that time, there was still a sizable, neo-tropical migration happening through over the sound or in locations where there was sufficient water and material for the birds. It turned out that we didn't attempt to go too far. We stayed in our own area, but there was a lot of woods that were still around. Undeveloped lots, which ten years later, would be all filled—would be a strong ranch house component, so to speak, where lots eventually disappeared and in that place, came different interests and more sophisticated interests, like girls. I can still remember the girls from sixth grade.

DM:

How about the hunting? You said you had your slingshots and you had your bb guns and pellet guns. Did you go on to 22's? At what point did hunting these birds become an interest in observing birds for the sake of birds? You know, which is a great interest in your adulthood.

BT:

Yeah, right. I would say it was probably—I was in the sixth or seventh grade.

DM:

And already you were looking at them as more of an object of interest?

BT:

Yeah. We were very conscious of what birds would show up and what time of year. I've seen a Scarlet tanager, for example. Made it all, to our mind, worthwhile. You know, we were very tuned in to where it was and what it was doing and how long it was going to be around. The box traps we made were simply rectangles box with a flip top so we drilled holes in the side of the box and then put nails or screws into a top, a flip top, and would make the rounds during the summer, at least once a day, to check all the trap lines.

DM:

How did they trigger the trap?

BT:

You had a—inside the box, you had what was the equivalent of a ten penny nail. It went into the base of the box and then on top of that would be the flip top so you could keep it—I guess, keep it in such a way that if they knocked it loose, we would put bread and different things like that—

DM:

It'd just fall shut.

BT:

Yep. And we would keep records so we didn't—at that point, we were probably less interested in shooting birds. I don't know when that transition occurred, but it would've been seventh grade thereabouts that I was charting their activities. So we got bird books and field guides.

DM:

This is so parallel—I don't know if we've talked about this, but it's so much parallel with other people who became professional biologists. They started out hunting small mammals or birds and then developed an interest in the animal themselves and began to study them.

BT:

Yep. I thought for a long time and I can't really trace what the reasoning process was and how that came to pass, but I thought, for a long time, I was going to be an ornithologist. I thought right about that time period, about seventh, eighth grade. And so I read what I could find on bird migrations. I remember presenting a paper, a research paper, to the seventh grade science teacher

on bird migration, which was still more heavily debated then it became later on. I mean, the Peterson Field Guides, we were just talking earlier, were a big part of that. Suddenly, had a base to make comparisons with.

DM:

That's actually an early age to be looking at possibility of a profession because these same biologists I've talked to have said, "Yeah, later on, when I was a late teenager or so, I found out you could make money doing this stuff so there was a career," but you knew this in the seventh grade.

BT:

Yeah.

DM:

Do you still have the paper?

BT:

I've got some—I don't think so, but I've got some material that probably needs at some point to be properly stored and archived. I can't recall—I knew that Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology had the best collections and that was probably a couple of years later, but that was always what I was kind of pointing to and keeping an eye on what was happening, but somehow, I got sidetracked with all that. I don't know.

DM:

Anyway, this was a pretty formative time, in that regard. What about in relation to your later becoming an historian and an archivist? Is there any indication that around this same time you became interested in history or preserving history or preserving records?

BT:

I think the answer to that rests with a fifth grade teacher named Miss Garastina.

DM:

How do you spell that, Bill?

BT:

I could do better with that one. G-a-r, it starts with. Gara – a-s-t-i-n-a. Somewhere close to that, but she was a great teacher and really liked the kids. Interacted well with them and so was a big sponsor of field trips. In those days, you didn't need three hundred forms and six permissions and special buses. You just said, this is where you're going. She filed maybe a half page and we were off. She took us to historic sites on Long Island. Took the fifth grade class. So that meant

we were going to places like Walt Whitman's home. To the old mill in Roslyn, which was still working and producing flour. You know, colonial period. Reynard Hall, which was a meeting place for colonial troops involved in the revolution. I'm trying to think—in any event, she was doing everything she could. You know, would go to the Episcopal Church in Hempstead, which still had bullet holes and a steeple from skirmishes fought in the revolution. She would take us to Stern's Pickle Works, which made the whole process of the transformation of cucumbers into pickles and it was wonderfully interesting to fifth graders. So it was what made history interesting was you could see with Miss Garastina, the connection between historic events and the actual living history that came along.

DM:

It's great commentary on how one teacher can have such an impact also.

BT:

Yeah, absolutely right. She had the famous Garastina special so if you didn't do what was suggested was a reliable activity or had to do something that—the Garastina special meant, she would come up and grab your cheek and kind of shake it a little bit to indicate that this was not to be practice or regularly follow so everybody tried to avoid the Garastina special. She was quite the character and continued to teach for a long time after that. Probably fifteen years ago, passed away, but she was great, and so I remembered doing some a year or two later. That interest was still there. I was collecting a few books. "Birds of America," which was illustrated by the great birder. What was his name? The artist, Louis—it's gone out of my head—who was considered, you know, if a book had—Fuertes, Louis Agassiz Fuertes, if it had Fuertes illustrations, it was like, couldn't get any better than this. And I've often thought that there was a connection between the kind of work that the great bird artists and there was half a dozen that I was aware of, the kind of appreciation and talent they had as artists, and as part of a larger appreciation of beauty and the natural world. She makes the point with Tory Peterson, that he was a great appreciator of the female form and was very tuned into the world that surrounded him with women who—young people who enjoyed the outer doors, but he was very conscious of his surroundings, particularly, if they were attractive young women. I always thought, we haven't probably established that connection as strongly as we might, it wasn't that he was taking advantage of any of them or suffering through any of the kind of nonsense we've been listening to this past three or four days where all of the world is sexual harassers. I mean, we're dancing around the fact that an awful lot of these naturalists, for want of a better term, were enormously talented and part of a larger world of nature and appreciation. As you know, you notice some that filters in people like [Anna] Comstock, who were doing all the teaching and lecturing and appreciation and the women who are, again, purveyors of birds and natural history, were very, very involved in giving recognition in space, recognition of their work.

DM:

When you're talking about Tory Peterson and Fuertes and people who had this appreciation for birds specifically and through their artwork, made this a national phenomenon. We were talking about that earlier. Can you mention some others that would fall into that category?

BT:

That's an interesting question because in my cases, they didn't fall into a neat category, saying, this person is, but the other crossover, I mean, learning to use paint and materials and particularly working with current emerging—what do I want to say? Appreciation of moving away from the pure woodcut to a watercolor of a Blue Jay, for example. It was in transition. Part of that transition was that there wasn't exclusively a domain for X, but photography was just coming along as a recognized medium and an acceptable means of artistic expression. So the result was that you had a number of highly talented artists, who were beginning to be understood for their photographic work and that was considered increasingly, an important form for communication. Maybe a little less so directly saying, but people that you didn't hear much about unless you were a part of the inner circle. Herbert K. Job was one of the leading photographers. There were a couple of photographers who worked the Rockies in the Rocky range.

DM:

Are you talking specifically with birds?

BT:

Yes, but again, interested enough to be broadening if they found a mammal or found another not well understood nesting habit or something like that, would make it a point that they recorded all that so. The author of *Birdwatcher*, she cites one hundreds of individuals.

DM:

Give us her name here on the recorder.

BT:

Elizabeth Rosenthal.

DM:

Okay. *Birdwatcher*.

BT:

Birdwatcher: The Life of Roger Tory Peterson. You know, these, I'm not exactly answering your question, but I see it with Peterson and with that circle that becomes increasingly wide and well thought of in travel that it's always struck me—it's true with Peterson, but it's true. You ask for names, I could probably go through here and come up with two dozen people who are significant

in promoting natural history. The characteristic of genius, seems to me, can be applied to Peterson carefully, but he's careful. The characteristic of genius is to be one sided that is just so absorbed, it rules your world. It begins and it ends with a well-defined, well thought out immersion that stays with you for all of life's experiences. I mean, you're not interested in what's happening in the immergence of Syria. You're interested in why is it that the people can continue to report an occasional siting of the Ivory-billed woodpecker. I think that there's still an awful lot to be learned. What was the other? Anyway, Cornell or one of the other labs, they've recently been working in South America, particularly on the Indian corridor, and what they've done is take the list of so-called extinct species and go look for them and find them. In the case of the Cornell experience in the *Living Bird*, which is their publication, they've identified nearly a dozen birds that have not been reported on twenty, thirty years or have been officially classified as extinct.

DM:

What's the secret? How are they finding these that have not been seen or reported? Is there some new technology?

BT:

New technology is part of it, but I think it's a detective work that it has built intimate familiarity with a given landscape or place. So they take all the locations that were last seen and then work to see if it has all these elements that were characteristic of the feeding habits or migration habits or anything else and then spending time with and I mean, intimately, over several years at a particular locale that meets these criteria and they're finding it now because they are able to get to areas that they couldn't get to at earlier points.

DM:

And intensively spending time there.

BT:

Yeah.

DM:

After studying the proper habitat where this would occur. That's really exciting.

BT:

Yep. In fact, I'll—I've got a copy of that issue. I'll make a copy of it or we can make a copy of it because you'll find it really interesting. Peterson and others—Peterson died, it seems to me, about ten years ago, but we're quite insistent that there's a lot of work to be done, especially with genome classification. In fact, what they thought were separate species, have turned out not to be separate because of interbreeding and reproducing in areas that we just hadn't systematically

surveyed. Very interesting.

DM:

When we're thinking about illustrations of birds and bird field guides, your own personal preference would be for what? For photography? For artwork? For the work of any specific individual?

BT:

You know, there was a point. I mean, the first—I can't remember the date on the first field guides that Peterson did. It seems to me it was the fifties where *The Peterson Guide to Birds*. So I think he set a standard that was pretty difficult to achieve. It took most several years before a second edition came along and a great expansion of field guides that disparaged, but I use several field guides. *Birds of Texas*, which I like a lot. I don't know if I've got it. I'll have to gather up some of these. The very early turn of the century of Florence Miriam Bailey's *A-Birding on a Bronco*. These are way early. These are just turn of the century, but they contain material about bird watching or expeditions that come along that are very useful. I don't have here. So a very fine, must be I don't know, three or four volumes, *An Introduction to Ornithology*. That's put out by Cornell and it really is a scientific overview of the ornithological field and so one can read on a specific region or area and then go and look.

DM:

Cornell also has a good website, as I seem to recall you saying.

BT:

Yes, a very nice website of all American birds and American species.

DM:

When did this start with Cornell, by the way?

BT:

Seems to me it was the late, late nineteenth, early twentieth century, where there's that expeditionary influence, but I don't know exactly when the starting point is for Cornell putting a stamp on—there were two individuals who were largely responsible for ornithological reports that either accompanied the railroad surveys—so that was late—middle—kind of later twentieth century. But I'm forgetting a name. There was a real mover and shaker, as there often is.

DM:

Surely, there's a book about Cornell's rise in this area.

BT:

Yeah, you're probably right.

DM:

Be interesting to see.

BT:

Yeah. So that was just kind of kids stumbling around. Our interests taking them some places. I can remember my sister being mad at getting so much attention. I got *Birds of America*, which was 1912, 1915. Somewhere in there.

DM:

Edition?

BT:

Edition. *Birds of America*. With Fuertes plates and my sister took all of the plates with a bottle of glue and stamped them all so the pages had stuck together.

DM:

Oh my goodness. Because you were spending too much time with it or what?

BT:

Too much time, getting too much attention. [Laughter] It was—I mean, I still have that book and you can usually see the glue markers on it. She thought it was quite interesting. I laid low for a couple of days. That was a major blow to--

DM:

Oh boy.

BT:

--common place research. We pick up anything. *Guide to backyard birds*. Especially, in the summer time, which seemed like we had nothing but time on our hands.

DM:

Isn't amazing that something that becomes an interest when you're in the seventh grade or that time period stamps your life? It impacts your entire life. That, history field trips. At some point, this might've been later, but at some point you became interested in the American West. I assume because you spent all of your later life in starting with New Mexico, Idaho, Texas, and Long Island, well to the east. When—can you place when that interest arose? Was it when you came to New Mexico or was it—

BT:

No. I think it was earlier than that. The interest was always there, but it fluctuated depending on where you were. So there was a point in the last twenty years, where it's mostly visiting locals or places that aren't carefully planned, but taking advantage of being in Yellowstone in the middle of winter or hiking through the Sawtooth mountains.

DM:

Searching for wilderness.

BT:

Looking for wilderness. Looking for, I guess, everything from grizzly bears to bird species.

DM:

Is it the open spaces? Is it the wilderness? Is it the natural wildlife? Or is it all of the above?

BT:

I think it probably touches all of it, but for want of a better term, cultural landscape studies are probably as close to—so it's kind of interdisciplinary, but it's a variety of settlement patterns that each put their unique stamps on giving cultural areas. Went to a couple conferences over the years that were sponsored by park service people. Things like that. They've had a deep longstanding interest and transferred that into their work. Working for BLM gave me a pretty good idea for two or three years that that was the last thing I wanted to do on a long term basis because the amount of bureaucracy and crapola that you had to deal with. It was staggering how much stuff, but still, the interest was knowing that you could break away. In your own backyard you might find evidence not only of raccoons and mammals, but migrating birds. Learn to cultivate patience. Take a few people and go on a few field trips where you understand the art of listening and watching and kind of turn—getting away from the hustle and bustle and all of the craziness that prevails when you get people who are there to record their 121st species. I mean, that always drives me crazy. But there are Ro Wauers of the world that would be a lot poorer for our collecting interests and observations if they weren't doing the work. I chastise myself for being an armchair naturalist. I'm getting about as far as the front door and current state of health, I don't know how many times I'll be walking through that door not having taken advantage of the opportunities that were there. I admire all the work you've done. You know, all the travel and all the observation and all the understanding that you've brought and doing all the work that you've done over your years here. I can look at that longingly, but it's not propelling me into any form of action.

DM:

Well you've certainly had your times at that. I mean I remember all the stories that you've told or you've casually mentioned in being Yellowstone in winter and here and there and just so

many places in the west. Maybe not quite as much as your friend who visited every county in the United States. What was his name?

BT:

Merrill Wells.

DM:

Merrill Wells, who actually literally visited every county in the United States.

BT:

Yeah, I'll never forget old Merrill. I've told this story before when I first got to Idaho and I went to—began work for the historical society, largely because Sandy Shackle was there and we were keeping company during that time. And one morning or a week or two into my job and old Merrill come in and he said, well I've been thinking there's a lot of work to be done on Idaho and I think there's probably twelve volumes to be written, Idaho, in the making of the west, that would be a real good project for you to be involved with. I said to myself, twelve volumes? I don't think so. But Merrill was—he had done a two or three volume history of Idaho, so he had an encyclopedic mind, but he was bound and determined to get his Idaho into a larger context and understanding of the west.

DM:

Tell me the story of him being gone for a weekend and coming back and reporting in.

BT:

Merrill would disappear. It was just like, come Friday, somebody would be looking for Merrill and, "Is Merrill in the office?" He never kept an office, but he floated around, sharing information, suggesting somebody look at this, that meeting with somebody, and, "No, Merrill's not here. I don't know where he is. I haven't seen him today." The state historian was there at an office. A couple of archivists, a couple of guys from the reference desk were terrific. Took care of everything. Only once in a blue moon they'd go corral one of us to come out with something, but Monday morning, come to work, "Did you see Merrill this weekend? I haven't seen him. I'm getting a little worried." I said, "You know Merrill." He had a reputation for showing up at a friend's house in the largest snowstorm ever to hit Idaho and he made his way through the snow and slush and everything else on his own and all of the sudden, the doors to the historical society open up. Time to meet the public. "Merrill, what's going on? Where you been? I was getting worried about you.", "Well I decided to take a little trip. Went to Sydney. [Laughter] I didn't have too much time there."

DM:

This is the weekend.

BT:

The weekend. But I left on Thursday, Thursday late afternoon. Got to Sydney on late Friday. Had a chance to walk around a little bit and then got on a plane and came back. I was like, holy crap. [Laughter] You know, we walked the Lewis and Clark Trail and I'm walking from memory and prepared texts, which is pretty iffy and Merrill doesn't have a preference to it or a note with him the whole time. Now, at this spot, an Indian post office, Lewis stopped here to do—I'm saying to myself, how in the hell do you remember? You know? He hadn't been at that location in years.

DM:

Golly.

BT:

And then my favorite one was we were driving around. I think it was Lobo Trail related. We were going to the jumping off place. What's the name of the big—

DM:

Traveler's rest is right there as you start up Lobo.

BT:

Yeah, and Merrill's asleep. You know, he goes off like that and he's sleeping [snores] in the backseat of the historical society van and he goes—

DM:

He wakes up.

BT:

Wakes up and says, "Now, on the next curve, we're approaching Indian Post Office, you'll see it just on your right." [Laughter]

DM:

He was asleep, but he didn't miss a beat.

BT:

Didn't miss a beat. He was perfectly well. One of the interesting things about being in a historical society or being connected with that aspect of things is the characters that you meet along the way. You know, the people with so grounded and local knowledge, that you realize there's a lifetime of work that's gone and you must experience that monthly, if not sooner. More often.

DM:

I come across a lot of people around here that know West Texas. They might not know outside of west Texas, but they know the South Plains. Yeah.

BT:

Yeah. Their world is carefully defined and in depth topics that we might kind of—

DM:

Yeah. Personally, it makes me glad I'm a generalist, but it makes me glad that there are specialists, whose knowledge I can tap on. How do you feel about that, by the way, now that we've touched on that subject? The specialists vs. generalists. How do you categorize yourself?

BT:

As a generalist. I think that the local history mindset is worth a greater exploration than what it's received to this point. We know our genealogists. We know our key books. We know where to find obscure material that was filed away twenty years ago that we're taking a look at, and it struck me that somebody could write a very interesting book on the kind of thought processes and patterns that seem to develop almost predictably in given circumstances and locales. I mean, in Idaho, not a day would pass where there wouldn't be some question related to the Chinese tunnels, which were passageways from the stores and opium shops. You know, means of escaping certain influences and things like that. I think it's fed, in part, by librarians and people who attain specialized degrees that really have interests that extend not very far, but as you suggest, are enormously deep and to them, well understood that we find out about, but it's a frustrating part of the job and at the same time, can be enormously enjoyable and fun if you can put it in the proper perspective.

DM:

Fortunately, it's often published, so a generalist can find it. Find what they need from that detailed information.

BT:

Right. Exactly. I've always thought in the last ten years that's why it's gotten some attention and not as much as it deserves and it's part of this idea of a localists vs. generalists, but that—I'm going to lose my train of thought here. That the movement that, in historical profession, that's been identified as micro-history really has some validity if you spend time and work. The return of Martin Gere becomes a movie, becomes a collection of reminiscences of a nineteenth—eighteenth century—whatever the right century is. A planter who—a farmer who returns from the wars, thought was dead or dying years ago, but again, casts a way of being or an understanding that nobody knew anything about. So there's always new and interesting things going on, but you're right. I mean, it seems to take us down—I guess it's not directly related, but

one of the statements I ran across that's stuck with me all these years is the way to nature is a footpath and so that we get on that path and suddenly, you're discovering things that you'd only heard rumors about or never got the real story of the battle of so and so. But it is interesting and informative at the same time. At the same time, you've got to balance that by certain genealogists or others who will drive you crazy if you grant all the assumptions for which they're absolutely positive about.

DM:

When you start talking about people who go into extreme detail on small points, that's a good example. Often happens that way. Well when we began talking about your interest in the west, you said that there had always been some interest. Can you remember some child—was there any childhood interest or curiosity about this western part of the US? Here you are on the eastern seaboard where most of the people are and looking—I don't know. What would encourage a person on the eastern seaboard to think of the west? Would it be movies? Would it be books? Would it be—where would you become interested?

BT:

I was certainly interested in the—as a kid, in the Walt Disney vision of the American West, there were Disney specials that came along that I found very interesting.

DM:

Can you think of the names of some of those?

BT:

Well the whole Davey Crockett deal was a major impact. King of the wild frontier. There was an understanding of the—I mean, an appreciation for the sense of excitement and adventure that would come from a movie. I knew all the cowboy heroes. Paid attention to them all, from Tom Mix, to Hop Along Cassidy. I remember putting in my bedroom a sign on oat tag that was carefully lettered, that said, "Sheriff's Office." [Laughter] So you know, I don't think I could've been more than eleven or twelve when I did it.

DM:

For someone born in the west, like me, I wonder about that and have an interest, but I was born here, but it comes from outside as well. That's what I ask, but it's maybe this popular—this mass media popular culture.

BT:

Yeah, I think so.

DM:

Interest in the west in that time.

BT:

You know, in some ways, if you think of cultural landscape studies or you think of an appreciation for Native American peoples, that was probably always latent in a lot of the stuff, I just bump into. I think National Geographic played a big part in thinking about the sense of adventure and expedition that come from all that. I remember coming across my first National Geographic, an exploration of Andean birdlife, focusing on a bird species known as the cock-of-the-rock [**Rupicola peruvinus, also known as tunki**]. I didn't know that world existed. At the same time, I was married to this sense of adventure about—I'm trying to think—they dwelt in *tashkentensis* [**possibly of the genus Chitalpa, a flowering tree**] or something like that language. Wow, this is really neat stuff.

DM:

What was that last part? They dwelt in?

BT:

I think Tashkent [?] was the city or the locale where a lot of the desert life of the Midwest—I'd run into a fellow teacher who is now deceased, but was probably the best teacher I'd ever known, by the name of Herb Kamins, K-a-m-i-n-s. Herb was a NYU [**New York University**] ABD [**All But Dissertation**], taught advanced placement American history, but Herb had a very wide view. Introduced me to all the book sellers and purveyors of history and culture in New York City. We'd go in once every couple of months to this strand bookstore or to other locations, come back with shopping bags filled with stuff that Herb said, oh you got to read this. This is the best illustrated history of America pride who—whatever it might be.

DM:

Great advantage of living in New York.

BT:

Sure was. So in some ways, like the next step might be attending an event or something that—I mean, I spent time in North Carolina, so I knew a fair amount and learned a fair amount about colonial history, and it was not specifically the west that time. It was settlement in Ocracoke and that early island chains and the disappearance of the colonialists. You know what happened to most. Got caught up in that world. But it was just high adventure to me. It was like, wow. This is incredible. I mean, your studies of the mountain man. You know, you read that and it's like holy mackerel. How did these guys do this? How did they manage that?

DM:

Now, when you were at Morris Hill, you were up in the Appalachian, right?

BT:

Yeah.

DM:

Which was, I mean you were close to the—that was a conduit into the west.

BT:

Absolutely. We started—you know, Morris Hill had been a—I think we talked about this before, describing it as a buckle on the Bible belt, but had as often the case, teachers, individuals, and subject areas, who were terrific teachers and at the same time, enormously knowledgeable about what would've been early twentieth century culture and settlement of the Appalachian frontier. So studying how the transition occurred between small settlement tobacco growing and how would you categorize it? How the stereotype of feud and fussing and fighting and the decline of folk culture occurred so that if you look at travel accounts prior to the Civil War, you see descriptions like Frederick Longstead and those folks, who had travelled all through the southern mountains with the idea of paying attention to people instead of having largely misunderstood undocumented. And then how that transition occurred to the poor, down trodden, otherwise unsubstantiated ways of life that were based on small traditions and hollows and craft making and self-sufficiency. So all that seems, to me when I think about it—I haven't thought about it in a while, that there's kind of a thread. You know, the thread that runs so true and it was the interesting folk expression and in peoples that had a lot to offer and one time, were considered not only objects of great interest, but also connected to a whole welter of activities that we would describe today as probably still being exotic, but part of greater integration and more thematically related, I guess.

DM:

Yeah. [Pause in recording]

BT:

No Midwest, but there's west coast and there's a notion of American regionalism always fed into that to me. You know, the validity of studies and attention being paid to the similarities and differences in different areas of the US.

DM:

Yeah.

End of Recording