

**Oral History Interview of
Jerry Ingham**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
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Spicewood, Texas**

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Jerry and Donna Ingham, who discuss their ancestry, upbringing, and experiences living and working in Oklahoma and Texas.

Length of Interview: 02:35:19

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Keywords

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Andy Wilkinson (AW):

This is the twenty-second of April, 2014. Andy Wilkinson here with Jerry Ingham in his wonderful house overlooking the plains of Lake Travis. We have been talking while the tape recorder was off about various things having to do with what's going on with water and all those kinds of things, which would make a great topic to cover later. Jerry, I think last time we had—we were talking, going over your career and working up toward getting into public education and we'd gotten to where you and Donna had moved back to Texoma, which was the town from which you had come. I think the actual year was 1967, is what I have down in my notes.

Jerry Ingham (JI):

We got married in '67. We came back in '69.

AW:

Okay. Maybe we stopped at '66. I have '67 married. Where were you between the time you got married and went to Texoma?

JI:

In the army. Still in the army. When we got married, we were stationed at Fort Hood. I had gone to helicopter school to learn how to fly a helicopter at camp—there by Mineral Wells.

AW:

I guess that had more helicopter trainees than probably anywhere.

JI:

Probably. It became the base, the primary helicopter school and then for larger helicopters or such you go to Camp Rucker. When I was finishing the basic course there by Mineral Wells, I was on orders to go finish school at Rucker and from there go directly back to Vietnam. I probably was not very patriotic in that I did not want to go back to Vietnam and there were so many men who hadn't had their opportunity there and in my class of eighty candidates, there were no—there was no one on orders to go to Vietnam but me. I went to the CO, commanding officer, and said that I felt that was not fair, I wouldn't mind serving over there again, but that everyone else ought to go. He got upset and he took that as me wanting to get out of flight school. I said, well, whatever you think. So he had me as punishment tour, sent to Fort Hood. And that was like sending a rabbit to a briar patch.

AW:

Can we hold on just one second? Let me get our levels set here, I'm having a little difficulty for whatever reason. Okay, now we're back. One of the problems with technology is you have to have an operator as smart as the machine is. And I'm not quite there. All right.

JJ:

That might be the death of us. The machines are going to get smarter than all of us. But anyway, we came to Fort Hood and we're here about six or eight months. I was transferred to Fort Carson, Colorado to fill in vacancies in a unit out of Fort Carson that was going to Vietnam. Maybe a year in Fort Hood and I still had another year to go when we got to Colorado before my end of time in service on ATS. We moved up to Fort Carson and in the meantime, before we got married, Donna's mother fell and broke her hip two weeks before we got married. We wanted to postpone the wedding until she was better and she said no, invitations are out, we're going to have it. And she came to the wedding on a gurney. The local mortician was a friend of hers and he got a gurney and decorated it all up, dressed her all up, put flowers all around her and she was parked right down the aisle of the church we got married there in Brownfield, Texas. Donna spent most of our first year and a half with her mother, taking care of her in therapy and such.

AW:

Wow, that was tough.

JJ:

It was tough times. Her mom was such a wonderful, wonderful sweet lady that I just—she was important to me and she did live all of her life with us soon after Fort Carson. We moved back to Texoma. There were three places we thought we'd like to go and settle and that was the Pacific Northwest, central New Mexico at Las Vegas where Highlands University could hire Donna and would to teach English there, or to Texoma. And we decided all of our family was in that area, so we decided to come back to Texoma.

AW:

That was a pretty radical decision also. Las Vegas, New Mexico, beautiful place. Pacific Northwest, you're talking about rain and trees.

JJ:

It's the little story about an Amarillo tree is one of the prettiest trees in the world. I had a fondness for the Ingham home place that you're familiar with. When I was over in Germany on the Czech border, I would sit in my forward observation post and after I finished my terrain sketches that a forward observer first does so that he can know where to fire the artillery in relation to features on the ground, I would sit and draw a map of the old Ingham place there, the old woodworking shop, the well house, the windmill, the chicken house, the cow lot, the house and the garden. I would draw all of this out and I would keep correcting it. When I got back, I had a copy of that. Got back to Texoma, and every place on there was located within a foot relative to my scale drawing. It just was from memory.

AW:

Your sense of place is pretty well ingrained.

JJ:

Exactly.

AW:

Well, there are those of us, I will add for the people listening to this a hundred years from now, there are those of us who really prefer that flat prairie to other things. And I'm one of them.

JJ:

My mother, when she decided she wanted to move down here with us sold her house in Amarillo and Betty and Jeff—

AW:

And for the recording, she grew up in—

JJ:

Oklahoma panhandle.

AW:

Right.

JJ:

When it was not a state. Well, it had just become a state. We were looking for a place around here and she came down to visit us and we were looking and she said, I just want someplace out on the prairie. And she meant that. All these trees, all this really was just—she got claustrophobia and I know that about going up to the mountains and all of a sudden, you can't see very far, you feel closed in.

AW:

You mentioned the tree in Amarillo, they're wonderful curiosities. When they're taking one at a time, they're like foreigners. One or two are interesting, but three or four are a mob. But now, Donna, I haven't had a chance yet to do the interview with Donna. Was this a stretch for her? The plains, the panhandle of Texas, the tippy-top of Texas?

JJ:

Well, I had told her about it, and I told her that it was right on the fifth hole of Texoma country club. Which it was. But the golf course there at Texoma was a sand greens golf course and had no trees. But anyway, she fell in love with it. It was fine with her. And her family was from the

panhandle and high plains there. It was fine. She loved—she got a job teaching at Oklahoma. Then it was Panhandle A&M College, Panhandle Agricultural and Mechanical College and then it became Panhandle State University, part of Oklahoma State University.

AW:

OSU system.

JJ:

Yeah.

AW:

Had it been part of the OSU system when it was Panhandle A&M?

JJ:

No, it was its own private independent school. It was first PAI, Panhandle Agricultural Institute. And during the Depression, in the Dust Bowl days, it was a very important factor in teaching irrigation methods and farming practices and was very well-thought of. It was visited by all the agricultural department heads.

AW:

Did we talk last time about—I think we cut away—

JJ:

Yes. They hosed out a ditch twenty feet deep, twenty-five feet deep to study the root patterns of prairie grasses and the buffalo grass roots extended twenty-five feet down. The reason it will come back after years of drought and died off at the top is its root system. But they did all sorts of wonderful experiments. My uncle, my mother's sister's husband, Burton Ikard was the first manager of the college farm that was the experimental station.

AW:

How is Ikard spelled?

JJ:

I-k-a-r-d.

AW:

Just like Bose Ikard.

JJ:

I have a Burton that wrote a history and he talks about Bose Ikard in this history that was off of their plantation in the south.

AW:

I just wondered—or had they started at that time when he was alive? You know, they have that joint black-and-white Ikard reunion in, I guess near Weatherford.

JJ:

Yes. And that was a part of the family. It's not anymore, as far as I know.

AW:

Too bad. That was an interesting thing.

JJ:

I'm not sure it's even still in existence.

AW:

The reunion?

JJ:

Yeah, the joint black-and-white.

AW:

I don't know. All right. So he ran the farm.

JJ:

And then his father owned a ranch out in Cimarron county and he went out and farmed it ranched out in Cimarron county near the town of Felt after he left the college. He was a very interesting man. He subsisted out there on that farm during the depression.

AW:

That was tough country.

JJ:

Sand hills out there. Yeah, Boise City was the center of the Dust Bowl.

AW:

And Felt wasn't very far.

JJ:

About twenty miles. Of course, right there near Felt is where my mother grew up. And she—her family consisted—they had an older brother. The first child was a boy. He was drowned when he was eighteen years old up north Texoma. They were swimming in an old mud hole along the Cimarron river, he got trapped under some branches or something and drowned. Then they had five girls and then two boys. So mother was the third girl and she became her father's right-hand man. And she loved horses and she used to—Felt is about sixty miles from Texline where the railroad had a roundhouse and a Harvey House there. They would freight the grain and peaches.

AW:

They had a Harvey house in Texline? I'll be darned. I didn't know that.

JJ:

He would hook up a three-team span of horses and two wagons loaded with wheat or peaches or apples or whatever he was hauling to Texline. Before dawn, he'd line them up and have them [going] toward Texline, running right on down the road, and tell her "I'll be right behind you when the sun comes up." And so then he'd load and harness his teams and they would go across that sixty miles and she'd drive that team of horses and carry—and then she got to spend the night in the Harvey house. It was the most wonderful life. She was about fourteen, fifteen years old, didn't weigh fifty-eight pounds and could handle that team of horses.

AW:

Now, how big a team was it? Two of them?

JJ:

Six. Three span of two.

AW:

The reigns weigh more than fifty-eight pounds. Golly.

JJ:

Grandy rigged her for that, and put the two best lead horses.

AW:

I'm still pretty impressed.

JJ:

Oh yeah. But anyway, she was his—and all her life, she'd do things that would just amaze me. She's a wonderful horsewoman. When we had horses she'd come to see us to go ride the horses with the grandkids. One day, they were out riding and a rattlesnake appeared out there where

they were riding, and she got off and got an old fencepost, a broken old fencepost there, and killed that rattlesnake and wrapped it around her saddle horn and took it back to the house. When they went back, showed the kids how to skin it and tan it. And cook some meat. Anyway, we moved there to Texoma and the old Ingham house hadn't been lived in eighteen years.

AW:

Wow. What kind of shape was it in when you—

JJ:

It was pretty rough. The windmill—the well had gone dry. Old Man Arnold, who had done all the drilling on the well for a hundred years, he and his dad, and he came out and he said, there's no more water in that hole. So we hooked on to city water. The original water system was extensive from that windmill and water tower. He furnished water for the school, the Texas-side school where Claude Wilkinson, your grandfather was principal. Superintendent. Then there was a mule pasture. There were four freight companies in Texoma at the time. There was a mule pasture across the road and back northeast—

AW:

Near the highway? Present highway? Not that far?

JJ:

No, it was more away from the highway. The one toward the school would've been the closer one. And then another one furnished about four, five houses with water there on the Texas side and then the one went to the cemetery. He furnished water out there. It was a one-inch pipe and some of it was lead. When that city water came on, the springs came up. I'd go dig up and go down and cap that off. Finally, I just dug around the well house and kept all of them off. And then Jeff would come help me and we'd dig and for a while, I just put a screw on the leak or whatever. Finally I just kept them all off at the well house, but it looked like God's little acre, just piles of dirt everywhere. In the kitchen, Duzay, Daddy's baby sister, had a pressure cooker on the stove and didn't release the pressure and it blew the lid off and created a whole in the plaster, in the ceiling of the kitchen. And you could look through that hole and where the cedar shingles had worn off under the overlap, you could see daylight. And of course, it was a twelve-twelve pitched roof. It was a steep roof.

AW:

I remember that.

JJ:

We eventually got it re-roofed. Daddy helped—after he came home from the war, he put electricity in the house. There's just a light bulb in the center of every room and a line from the

switch that went down below it and that one plug in every room, one outlet. And it was spooling wire.

AW:

So it was bare?

JJ:

Bare copper wire on little spools. So this friend of mine, this electrician in Amarillo, Carl Elliott came up there and helped me wire it. We put lots of plugs in.

AW:

Because that spooled wire burned down a lot of houses.

JJ:

Oh, yeah. I worked with an old electrician there in Texoma. We rewired an old 54 Motel there. We'd crawl up in those attics and he'd go up there and he'd spit on his fingers and he'd touch a wire. And he'd say, that's two-twenty. That's one-ten. This guy, Bob Matthews, he was our scoutmaster.

AW:

And he lived through all that.

JJ:

And he lived through all of that. I said, "How do you do that?" He said, "You let go real quick." We had a good time building the house. The old chicken house, Granddad had built during the early part of the war—before the war. In the thirties or early forties. Anyway, it was a neat-o chicken house, it was about twenty by forty.

AW:

I remember seeing it as a living quarter. I never saw it as a chicken house. It was big.

JJ:

Right. It was large, originally. It had windows all around on the east, west and south side. And none on the north. It was just a sloped roof, shed-type roof. After the war, we moved out to Grandma and Granddad's house. Mother rented a house on the Oklahoma side near the school over there. When Daddy got home from World War II, he and Granddad poured concrete in the floor of that chicken house.

AW:

Under the roof?

JJ:

Yeah. It had foundation all the way around it. Just foundation—

AW:

[It was] just the dirt floor.

JJ:

Yeah. And used cedar chip insulation in the walls. It was the warmest, easiest-to-keep place you ever saw. We eliminated all but two windows on each side, sheetrocked it in and plastered the outside. It was a wonderful house but it didn't have much room. It had a bedroom, a living room, bathroom and a kitchen. They plumbed it and put a septic system on it. Lany and I, my older brother and I, stayed upstairs in the old Ingham house in the east bedroom. Eventually, he got the north bedroom and I got the east bedroom. When we moved back there later in '69, when the wind would blow and it'd snow, those little cubbyholes upstairs—it was half upstairs and they'd come in to about four foot high and put a wall in there and then behind them, under the roof, there were little cubbyholes back there and he'd put doors. Those areas back there would just fill with snow, and it would melt—

AW:

It'd melt through the roof?

JJ:

So the first [thing] Lany needed to do was roof it. One time, the door blew open on one of little cubby holes and our bed just got covered with snow.

AW:

Well, roofing that house would have been a challenge. You couldn't stand up on it.

JJ:

No, but you know what? I did a lot of roofing. To tell you a story about Daddy and his roofing job, but Granddad and Daddy taught me how to roof and when we had a bad hailstorm after we moved back there—see C.Y. and I, he was in high school my first year at Tech. All summer long we re-roofed seven houses. On the flatter roof, on the three-five pitch or something like that, you wear your butt off sitting down there scooting around on the roof. Well, on the twelve-twelve, you're standing up on a two-by-four scaffold, a rail. You put one-by-fours—two-by-four on one-by-fours above where you roof and you put a nail in and hold that and you just walk back and forth on that to work. So you're almost standing up. It's a lot easier. And you can just—

AW:

So you have good balance.

JJ:

Well, that's true. Donna, when we redid the old house next door, the old Holt house, we tore all the roof off when we got down to the sheathing, it was full one-inch sheathing. It wasn't planned out to three-quarter, five-eighths, seven-eighths, whatever. In a valley, there on the northwest corner of that old Holt house, on board it said, these asphalt shingles put on by A.Y. Ingham and Horse Winney, April 1920-something. Twenty-nine or something like that. (Crosstalk) No, that was my Dad. A.Y. Ingham Jr. But yeah, probably just in high school or something like that. So I cut that board out and I replaced a lot of that decking. But I've got that board out. We got up back there and worked on that house and then the old chicken house had been added on to. Granddad had gone to Gruver and Dan Schrader had found a couple of old houses, just small houses. And he hauled them to Texoma and added them on to the south side of that old chicken house, which gave a living room, two bedrooms and a nice-sized dining room and kitchen, bath and it was same thing, only this time, the insulation on that part was glass—

AW:

Fiberglass.

JJ:

Fiberglass. But it was still—it had one wall furnace that heated the whole house. It just did a wonderful job.

AW:

How much do you know about how they moved those houses?

JJ:

They had big trailers—

AW:

The used a truck?

JJ:

Well, they used a truck to pull a trailer. It was a house-moving trailer where you had two dolly wheels that are hooked together by a central pole—

AW:

So they can make—

JJ:

--make it any length, basically, they wanted to. And they were only about probably twenty feet by ten feet. They weren't very big. But anyway, that was the cheapest way you could make a

place for Duzay. And they gave that lot and that house to her. She allowed us to live there and then finally, she let Ben include it when he sold the property. When we fixed that up, I would drive from Fort Carson to Texoma on a Saturday evening and get in there about midnight and I'd go work on that old house out there, try to fix it up for Sue, replumb and everything—

AW:

For Sue?

JJ:

Donna's mother. She'd been living in the big house with them and moved in there and there were three floor furnaces in there, but you could stand over any one of them and it wouldn't keep you warm, so we curtained off that one big room where Granddad had his rocker and the old radio there.

AW:

That was kind of on the northeast?

JJ:

Northwest corner.

AW:

Northwest corner?

JJ:

Yeah. Northeast, yeah, there you go. But anyway, that was—we put curtains and shut the doors and that floor furnace in there. The other two we disconnected because eventually we pulled them out and put in central heat. Same way at the old Holt house. One time after we'd been there quite a while, the superintendent and his wife came over and we were sitting around cold. We'd just come in from a ball game out at Keys and there was a blizzard blowing in. We got in there and we were sitting in this room and I issued old Army blankets to everybody. We sat around the floor furnace and Jan Travis, the superintendent's wife wanted to use the bathroom and she got in there and said, ooh! She sat down on the stool, it was cool. She said she couldn't go. It didn't have any hot water. The hot water tank was in the kitchen, right by the sink in there. We'd run the garden hose from there into the tub. We got it going and then later when Ben moved in there, well, he really did lots of work for that. It was pretty crude living, but we loved it. It was such a great place. All my old friends' children I taught—I was teaching the third generation before I left twenty years later.

AW:

Well, but when you first got back there, I know we were talking during dinner last night that you were doing a variety of things while Donna was teaching at Panhandle State, right? Because you didn't quite have your certificate. So what were you doing—I assume you finished your degree at Panhandle State.

JJ:

I got an early out when I was at Carson, about two months early to attend school. I got there two weeks after school started at Panhandle but all the professors there were old friends of mine—not all of them. Ms. Muller was the registrar and she'd known me ever since I was a baby. She gave me credits for my military service that probably she wasn't allowed to do. But anyway, I finished my degree there and then in the meantime, I worked in a lumber yard and a grain elevator and then worked for farmers around there. I was out plowing for Bill Worley one day, way out west of Texoma and this car came up out in the middle of the field, I shut the tractor down, got off. It was the superintendent. Blankenship. And actually, he left that year. He hired me and then left. But he said, I understand you wouldn't mind being a teacher. A coach. We need a coach real bad. I said, 'Well, yeah, I'd be all right.' I hadn't really made those plans because I don't have a certification. "Oh, well, we've got that taken care of." So he worked it out with the college to send a guy over once a month to make sure I was doing the proper things to get certification. And so I was working under the new super—well, a new superintendent came in, this Travis guy that's a real good friend of ours. Anyway, I started school there and I started teaching and taught for nineteen years.

AW:

What did you teach?

JJ:

Well, my major—I double-majored in history and speech. No, history and P.E. with a minor in speech. Before I left Texoma in nineteen years, I'd been certified in fourteen different subject areas in the state of Oklahoma. Every time the state would come down and say, well, you got to teach civics this year, well, superintendent would come in and say, you're going back to school this summer, Jerry. You got to get enough hours to get certification. I'd go back. But everything—journalism, math, every type of geography, economics, government.

AW:

What was it like having that sort of peripatetic schedule of what you taught and what you didn't teach. It sounds like fun to me—

JJ:

I loved it.

AW:

Did you? I can imagine.

JJ:

Later, when I taught in larger schools, I'd have four preparations—or five preparations of the same class. It was boring. You get up and do the same thing. It was always a new challenge and then they made me—after this lady, the home ec teacher retired and she'd been the yearbook sponsor, well they dropped the yearbook on me. Which was all right, I didn't mind, and I had a journalism background. And later, we owned a newspaper there in Texoma.

AW:

You and—

JJ:

Donna.

AW:

Was it the—had it been there forever?

JJ:

Well, it's one that had been there many years ago. We did research and the *Times* was still there, the *Texoma Times*. But it had kind of fallen—Larry Barry had not done much with it. It just didn't do much for the community. Donna, who had a degree in journalism from Tech worked with KCBD writing copy for them when she first got out of college. But anyway, we researched and in earlier days, in the early 1900s, there had been two newspapers: the *Argus* was the more liberal paper and the *Texoma Times* was a very conservative paper. And they both—they were there for many years. But then the *Argus* quit and the *Times* kept going. So we started the *Argus*.

AW:

What year did you start that? Do you remember?

JJ:

It would've been about '74, '75. And for five years.

AW:

What was that like, starting a newspaper?

JJ:

It was fun. Of course, Donna—I was the publisher. Donna was the editor. Christopher, our fourteen-year-old—thirteen-year-old son at the time was the photographer and darkroom person.

Sue Graves, my mother-in-law was the bookkeeper. Donna and I both had full-time jobs, she was on the city council—not the city council, but committees like the clinic committee, they were trying to reorganize the local clinic and bring a doctor to town. She was successful in that. She had the newspaper over at the college. I was mayor of Texoma, Texas, coach and full-time teacher and worked on the harvest at the end of summer.

AW:

What'd you do with your spare time?

JJ:

This guy from—Senator Tim Leonard had talked to some people about me and the *Argus*. It won some awards. It was an excellent newspaper.

AW:

Have you got any copies?

JJ:

We got copies. We'll dig some out.

AW:

Those need to be archived.

JJ:

Yeah, they do.

AW:

We're the place to do it.

JJ:

Well, that's great. That's wonderful.

AW:

We have a great collection of newspapers from small towns all around. We find those to be—well, researchers just dearly love them because they provide so much information.

JJ:

We covered both city councils, we covered both school districts, we covered the whole panhandle area. I sold one-year quarter-page ads before the paper was ever published. We had a dummied-up copy of it, took it around. People in Guymon and everywhere bought the ads. We did great. We didn't ever have a good grocery ad, which you really need. Because they'd gone to

stuffers and that sort of thing. We had two grocery stores when we first took it over. But if you don't have a bean ad, you just can't make it. And of course, Guymon was county seat, so they got most of the required—what do you call them?

AW:

Where you have to put something in the paper, like a divorce, bankruptcy sale or whatever?

JJ:

But we got a lot of campaign—during the campaigns we had—Borne loved to come by the Argus. David Borne, when he'd run for senator. And they'd all come in there and they'd all buy ads. It was fun.

AW:

Was it a weekly?

JJ:

Yeah. But it was tough.

AW:

That was right at the time when the big changes for newspapers were starting to be evident.

JJ:

Before we quit there, people were calling in their stories and it went straight to the page, it was just that much. Like I said earlier, we looked at buying a press. There was a beautiful Heidelberg press over in an old building out in the country. Tiny, the printer, the guy over at the *Daily Herald* told us about it, he said he could make it work. So we thought about doing that. But in the mean, we bought that IBM—

AW:

“[IBM] Graphic” something?

JJ:

Yeah. That would put out tape of the copy that we could paste on it. We still take the paper over and have Tiny shoot it and print it. Anyway, we remodeled the old post office to put our place in. I remodeled about six houses in Texoma, and that old building downtown.

AW:

That post office didn't have any WPA art in it, did it?

JJ:

No. It had old printed stamp in it, but it didn't—and all of the boxes had been removed to the new one, I guess. I remember going in there as a kid and I'd go over to box five, which was grandmother and granddad's mail. I'd do that when I was a little boy. I'd walk into town. Anyway, we did pretty well. It was never a moneymaker. Sue would always figure out how much we could take out to buy a new couch or something. And I would bring in my receipts in for all the things. She kept track of all the money I spent remodeling it and one day I brought a bill in there from the lumber yard and it said, "box of nails." She looked at it and she said, "Jerry that's not nails, that's beer. How did you do that?" She wouldn't take it. She thought I was buying beer and with it and she was right. When we first met—

AW:

So how did she know?

JJ:

She knew me. Surprise, surprise.

AW:

I thought maybe the price, she'd bought that. (laughs)

JJ:

I think she recognized it, a case of Natural Light was going for ten dollars or something. (laughs) But when I first met her, after Donna and I started dating, I went over to Brownfield and she was sitting at the kitchen table, snapping beans. Or shelling peas, I don't remember. And I just went over and met her and sat down and started helping her snap beans or whatever it was. She had some Schlitz there and I kind of hinted around, she finally offered me one. We'd always have a beer when we were together, but she kept changing her brand of beer, thinking I wouldn't like it.

AW:

Well, she'd started y'all with Schlitz, I don't know what change she could have made.

JJ:

That's right, that's top of the mark right there. That's what Mark and Margie—one time I came to visit with them, I was working in Amarillo there, living in a boarding house, Daddy was down in Austin right here and he got back in Amarillo looking for a job and he was standing there with Margie and Mark. Well, I'd go out there on weekends and Margie would cook dinner for me. I'd eat at the boarding house during the week. I just slapped this six-pack of Schlitz on the table over this guy's shoulder and Daddy turned around and he said, "Well, thank you." He'd never drunk in front of me before or vice versa.

AW:

A bonding moment.

JJ:

He always drank—he didn't drink a lot because mother didn't like it. When he did—he didn't sip his beer. He'd just—in three swallows, he'd have it drunk. But he didn't sit around sipping on it. We had some great times there. But back to Texoma.

AW:

Yeah, the newspaper. What made you—

JJ:

Shut her down? We found ourselves just totally exhausted. Without the bean ads, we lost the grocery ads, the stuffers didn't pay enough to offset that. We just got worn out. One of her former students came over and took the paper over, ran it for several years, and the city bought it.

AW:

So is it still—

JJ:

No, it's not still—there is no paper there anymore. Ran it for three, four years and then he moved on to something else. I was going to say, Oklahoma City University had a Taft Institute for Teacher where teachers would come and have a conference. Tim Leonard was going to talk and David Borne and Patience Latting who was mayor of Oklahoma City, the first woman mayor of a city in the United States. She was from Texoma. Her father was the president of the bank there. Frosty Troy, who was publisher of the *Oklahoma Observer*, the opposition paper to the *Daily Oklahoman*. Frosty Troy had presented us an award for our paper one time. I took a copy of the *Argus* and a copy of the *Observer*, I said, "Okay, which one of these do you think is the nicer-looking paper? Let's vote on this one. Boo! Yay!" Anyway, they asked me to speak because of my involvement in so many things. I was mayor, I was coaching still, I was teaching school, I had the newspaper, I was on the panhandle regional planning commission. We were busy. So anyway, I talked about how I got into politics. When I taught junior high civics and social studies in general, I would have students go and talk to board members. Either the school board of the Texoma, Oklahoma city or Texoma, Texas city council, both boards and do interviews about government. City councilmembers got real sick of this. One day—they'd come back and do reports. One day, the guy that had been the mayor of Texoma, Texas called me up early one morning and he said, congratulations, Jerry! You've just been elected mayor of Texoma, Texas. With eleven write-in votes. So for five years, I was mayor of Texoma, Texas. In my mayorship, we bought the water system from Southern Union gas, put in our own well and our own windmill

tower. We built tennis courts. We built a city hall for the first time. And it looks like Judge Roy Bean's law west of Pecos. It has a little front awning on a little building. Of course, I had a benefactor: Jess Riffe. The Riffe brothers—

AW:

R-i-f-e?

JJ:

Mm-hm. R-i-f-f-e, maybe. Anyway, Jess and his brothers, two brothers, owned all of the grain elevators along the Rock Island railroad in Highway 54 from Dalhart to Salina Counties.

AW:

If I remember Texoma geography correctly, the grain elevators are all in Texas, right?

JJ:

Well, two of them are on the border. When I was trying to get a tax passed, a sales tax, there were only three businesses in Texoma, Texas. But one of them was part of an elevator that they had to subtract a percentage of the taxes.

AW:

Talk a little bit about the—because Texoma is such an interesting place, being half and half. A school district, I know Ben had told me one time about it was one of the only school districts in this whole region, like Louisiana, Arkansas, etcetera that had an elementary and upper-level in the other state.

JJ:

For sixty-five years, Texoma had tried to get the schools incorporated. It took an act of the legislature in both states to get that done. And it was a long struggle, but we did and both bills allowed us to transfer teachers, funds, textbooks, materials across the state line.

AW:

And when did that get accomplished?

JJ:

That happened during Ben's tenure as principal over there.

AW:

What in the world could've been the opposition if both districts wanted it? I can't imagine—

JJ:

It's the wisdom of our political system. It's just like, why do we have a federal department of education?

AW:

Yeah, when they don't operate any schools.

JJ:

Well, and it's unconstitutional. Article ten says all powers not herein granted all given to the states and the people. Well, education's not mentioned. How did we develop this screwed up—our education system in the United States is screwed up because of federal control. In Texoma, we have a hundred students in high school. We only have thirty students at a time in a topic class. Well, every year, you're supposed to buy new typewriters to keep upgraded. That's stupid as hell.

AW:

You're not going to wear them out.

JJ:

But if you don't spend that money, you don't get it. You've lost it. So if you ever do need new typewriters, you don't get anything. You know, the small amount of federal money that a school district gets—Texoma, Texas gave it up. They said, "We make more money in a Halloween carnival than we do kowtowing to your dictates." But it is unique. But when that happened, it was such a boom because you'd have a fourth grade in Texas that had four students in it and one in Oklahoma with nine. Two teachers, two sets of—

AW:

So they really needed to be combined.

JJ:

Yeah, it was so money-saving and it was a better cooperative spirit. See, when Daddy graduated and Doris graduated, she graduated in Wichita.

AW:

Stratford, maybe. Didn't she?

JJ:

Maybe Stratford. Yeah, I believe that's right. But anyway, you couldn't attend—like C.Y. had to get special permission to go to any school in Oklahoma and he couldn't get into state tuition.

AW:

This is your son's—

JJ:

Our son, yeah, C.Y. And daddy—

AW:

Because he lived in Texas but graduated in Oklahoma.

JJ:

Right. And Daddy graduated in Oklahoma 1929.

AW:

So they were out of state.

JJ:

And he tried to get in at Texas A&M, they wouldn't accept his high school credits because of the Oklahoma history. They were different requirements. He couldn't find a school that he could go to, really. It's a screwed-up thing. Anyway, that's not near as tough as city government. It's against the law to transport sewage, garbage across the state line, about anything else.

AW:

So you had two sewer systems.

JJ:

No, we had no sewer system in Texoma, Texas because Texoma, Oklahoma built theirs to accept our sewage. But the state would not let us run the line across. So we had nothing but septic tanks until I became mayor. And now we transport sewage.

AW:

How did you circumvent that? In the dead of night?

JJ:

No. I made four trips, paid my own way down to fight—and the county attorney—

AW:

Was it a Texas law that precluded that or an Oklahoma law?

JJ:

It's both. Both. Texas was more stringent on those things. Oklahoma though, the garbage dump was over in Oklahoma and they were adamant about not transporting garbage across state lines. We finally got an act of legislature there and we now use the same dump, which we'd been doing anyway. Illegally. Southern Union Gas owned the water system in Texoma, Oklahoma. They provided water for Texoma, Texas. Well, I discovered that they didn't legally provide water. They were a gas company. They had no right to have a water plant. I'm not kidding. So we came down and—what's the commission? Public works commission or whatever in Austin.

AW:

PUC? Public Utilities?

JJ:

Yeah, PUC. Public Utilities Commission. This lawyer friend of mine in Stratford—and we did it all on our own time and money. We paid our way to Austin while we were down there, our expenses. We discovered that Southern Union couldn't legally own this system. We were trying to buy it from them. What they did is they gave us a map of the lines and I dug down and found out what they said was on paper definitely was not there. They had four-inch mains. No, they didn't. They had an inch-and-a-quarter mains. They didn't have half of what they said they had. And it was all in ill-repair and it was just another one of those—kind of like our deal here. So we put the monkey on their back and got a favorable ruling and I think the water system cost us something like six or seven thousand dollars. We didn't have anything, but we got it out of their hands. And then, in order to get a grant to put in the water tower and the well so we'd be producing our own water—we never did get the sewer but we got permission to put sewage across to the other side. We needed a tax because they won't give you a grant to get your federal money back or state money or regional money back if you don't pay to have a sales tax. So I went around, explained this to all three hundred and seventy citizens of Texoma and eighty percent of them voted to have a tax. So that gave me an opportunity to write a nasty, long grant. We got I can't remember how much money, but enough that we drilled two wells and put water in out to the cemetery and a four-inch line. That allowed us to have an uphill storage of water too, up the pressure. We put in a water tower that they'd taken down over in Mobeetie or—anyway, some little town in Texas so we had it brought over and assembled and put together. Then we started improving the meters and everything else. I hired a guy to do that and one of my former students to be secretary for the—she had become the justice of the peace for that district and she now works for the department of counties or something here in the state. But she became judge of Sherman county because she was such a great JP. The judge came over and asked her to run—to fill his term. And then she ran and won two or three times. She had played judge in our mock trials in government class, and she was good. Anyway, Jess Riffe gave us I don't know, fifty-seven thousand dollars to build a couple of beautiful tennis courts right next to the Texas school. I donated the land for golf course and recreation center out there and had plans

drawn up for all of that. And when he and Esther died, their heirs took that away from us so we didn't have that anymore. He gave me a half-million dollars for the city to do whatever we wanted. He said, "We're going to contribute every year this amount and build up enough reserve that you can put in grass greens out here on the golf course," and it would have perpetual care as the cemetery would and all. They died before we got that going and their heirs—

AW:

They weren't interested in grass greens.

JJ:

No. Well, they kind of were. One of their sons was an avid golfer. And he was going to be the golf pro. It was wonderful. Jess Riffe one time said, "I've been mayor of Texoma about four times in the last seventy-five years and you've done more in six months than many of us did for seventy-five years." So he'd do anything for me.

AW:

Let me ask you a question. I want to get back to your coaching before we get too far in, but one of the things that strikes me about Jerry Ingham is that you have a checkered past. And I mean that in a good way. You've done everything on the planet from wheat to roofing to being in the military to college to working in the smelter and all these various things. It's almost as if a Texoma, Texas and a Texoma, Oklahoma, this odd little spot in the planet that is neither fish nor fowl and has all these issues, that it simply required someone with a background and the set of—

JJ:

The checkered past.

AW:

A checkered past like yours. You know, is there something to be said about the lack of that in the rest of America that would—towns like the two Texomas that don't have anybody with those kinds of—

JJ:

So many people in Texoma had never been out of the five-state area. I have a friend who I taught his son and his daughter and I would tell them stories about—I'd open every class saying, I've been to thirty-seven countries, I've been to the ten largest cities in the world and on five continents and this is the best place in the world, Texoma. Harvey—I'd see him out around, he was a farmer, rancher and he'd say, "Even you haven't done all that! You haven't been to all those places!" And I said, "Well, Harvey, I have. I swear, I have." He'd say, "Oh, that's a bunch of bullshit." I said, "Harvey, you've traveled quite a bit so—" come to find out he had only been to Colorado about two times and that's about forty miles up the way. It's just—a lot of those

people don't want to go. But what I'm most proud of is when I was teaching, I did this and it caused me to get a gig at UTSA the last two years the department of education had Donna giving workshops on using story and teaching. And so she had me tell about having young students go out and interview people and bring that history back. I would have my junior high students talk to some elder of the family, whomever they could to tell them about the Depression and about the Dust Bowl. And they would come back and do reports. It's marvelous what they learned, but the most marvelous thing is those grandpas and grandsons and granddaughters got to be close friends because elders are afraid of youth and youth are afraid of elders. But when they'd sit down and talk about something that the elder knows something about and the child is interested in, they developed a bond.

AW:

Yeah, Neil Young: "Old man, take a look at my life. I'm a lot like you are." Whatever happened to those reports? Do you know?

JL:

I had them for years. The one that I really wanted—I don't have them anymore, they went back to the kids. I had some that I'd saved and I don't know what's happened that I don't have them. This one pair of cousins that were in the same class, David and Wade Pugh, their grandfather, Bill John Pugh, was a character. Cattleman, rancher, he always provided us with a fresh milk cow. We'd buy a cow and he'd make sure when it went dry he'd get it bred. He was a wonderful old man and had craggy face, a photographer came and took a picture of him and it's just a marvelous face. Every baker in the panhandle has a picture of that face of old Bill John Pugh. His grandsons were in my class. They asked, "Could we go talk to Grandpa alone—I mean, together?" And I said, "Well sure." And then they came back and they said, "Could we take a tape recording?" And I said, "Sure, if he'll let you, that'd be great." They interviewed him. When they brought the tape in, they said, "Coach Ingham, this tape is grandpa. Ain't no cussing on it. He's sucking on candy, but there ain't no cussing on it." This was the most beautiful history and economic and government lesson that these kids could ever have. Of course we played it and used it for a long time, but the parents lost it. I mean, it's horrible. He would talk about, "Well, I ran some cattle up there in Colorado. I had several hundred head. I raised a bunch of bottle feed and I had a good supply of bottle feed. It got to where I want sell of my cattle, I get about twenty-five cents a head for them. It cost that much to pay the feed and rail them to Kansas City. And that bottle feed was selling for twenty-five cents a bone. Now what do you do?" The kids were talking and saying, "Well, you could sell the feed, sell the cattle—there is no solution." I mean, you're sitting there with something that's going to die, but finally, he said, "Well, the government came in and helped me out. They brought a dozer up there and dug a big hole and they ran all my cattle in there and gave me a dollar a head. Most money I ever had. And I came down here and bought my farm."

AW:

So there's the New Deal explained—

JJ:

Exactly. And the Depression and the Dust Bowl and the whole thing all in one inaudible, and it was sold beautiful. And all the kids in school loved it because they knew Bill John. And he always had some funnies and it was clever, answered questions and all. But he's the guy that found Mother's brother that drowned out there. He and his—they him out of drug that pond out there.

AW:

It's hard to imagine anybody drowning in the Cimarron.

JJ:

Of course, I've seen it when it was back-to-back across, but this was—it was after one of these and it was big pools of water along—I don't know either.

AW:

That's Pugh, P-u-g-h?

JJ:

Uh-huh. Bill John. And his brother, Tom, bought Ann Hermian's land out there. And he always bragged about buying it for twenty-five cents an acre. Nobody would buy the land anyway. He was sort of a cattle thief. The name Bardich Cattle Company came from Tom Pugh who'd run his cattle in the Bardich and he'd haul a bale of hay around on the hood of his car.

AW:

That's cheap feed, the Bardich.

JJ:

But he got caught running some cattle at one of his inaudible. Texoma was a wonderful experience as a child. I went to first grade in Goodwell. Mother was living there while Daddy was in the service, until we moved over to a house in Texoma. Mrs. Warick, the first-grade teacher in Goodwell, came to see mother and I was just five years old and the year before I had started school, birthday's in December. She convinced mother that I was ready for school. I started school there at five. Then we moved to Texoma and I went from second through the ninth grade in Texoma. Then Daddy got a job in Amarillo and we moved to Amarillo.

AW:

And you met—

JJ:

Wick Alexander, that's right.

AW:

Tell me about coaching. What kinds of things did you—I'm guessing I know the answer to this, which is everything, but what did you coach at Texoma?

JJ:

That's kind of it. A small school like that, you—

AW:

That small a school, what were you able to offer students?

JJ:

When I got there, we offered two more sports. We had a track. It was a horrible track. Since, they've rebuilt it. It was made out of asphalt.

AW:

Oh, my gosh. Shin splints galore.

JJ:

Fall down and it just breaks you—we'd run on the grass most of the time. But anyway, I coached—the year that I came there, we won the state championship in Oklahoma. The smallest eleven-man school in the state of Oklahoma.

AW:

Is it a state track championship?

JJ:

No, football. I'm sorry. Football. We claimed we were five-state champions. We beat Elkhart, Kansas, who won the state championship in Kansas. We beat Walsh, Colorado that won the state championship in their division in New Mexico—I mean, in Colorado. And we beat Clayton, New Mexico, that won their state championship. But we beat Sunray, that were runners up. And then Oklahoma. Fifteen and up. Then came back next year and were runners-up in the state.

AW:

So that year that you won was what year?

JJ:

Seventy-one. Seventy-one and then '72 we were runners-up.

AW:

That sounds like a remarkable set of kids. Did any of them go on to—

JJ:

We had one guy that played at OU, three guys played at Panhandle State. One played at Missouri College, one at WT[AMU]. That's some quality play. We had five juniors that were speed deluxe. They were the mile relay team, they were the sprint relay team and they were gifted, talented kids. But we had eight seniors that three of which could've started running back. They were as good as these juniors, but they volunteered to play pull and guard and we had eight seniors on the line. And they were outstanding. One of the was all-state and played at OU and played at Northwestern. OU and then transferred. They had the heart—they coached the team. They really did. Mark Friedman, who his dad, Jack Friedman was the largest individual landowner in Oklahoma and Texas at one time. Sixty-five sections in both places, continues to Cold Water Ranch and Anchor D Ranch. He just died not long ago, but his three sons were just marvelous young men, as he was. He was a great guy. When I was growing up, he was in high school, he's about ten years older. Mark Friedman the oldest was proprietor of the bank. He was the glue that held the team together. And these three boys, before we had early morning workouts, they had to go to the ranch and feed. So they came in having done two hours of work before they started practicing football. Good kids. Mark would say, we haven't worked hard enough today, line up on the goal line. We're going to run some sprints.

AW:

This was—this was the senior.

JJ:

This was the senior coach. I mean—the coach. Of course, I'd come out of the military and I'd do military drills with up-downs, all the stuff they do, you know. I'd worked their buns off and this one junior, just really a superstar, he was our tailback. While he was waiting, he'd sit there. I'd say, "Winchester, are you interested?" "Yes, coach." I'd say, "Winchester's not paying attention. When one guy doesn't pay attention, the whole team hurts. So we're going to hurt. So we're going to do up-downs." I'd say, "Winchester, if you want to do some more up-downs, just keep that attitude." He and I are now very good friends. We weren't at the time. We just had an excellent group of talented kids. And they were the rare type of kid that weren't hoo-rah. None of the three coaches, the head coach and the two assistant coaches, me and Rich Boodey, didn't believe in rah-rah.

AW:

What do you mean by rah-rah?

JJ:

Well, get out in front of the other team and jump up and down, we're going to beat you and all this crap.

AW:

Trash talk.

JJ:

Yeah, trash talk crap. We didn't allow that. None of the after-touchdown crap.

AW:

No spiking the football after the goal line?

JJ:

No "come on, crowd" shit. Didn't have to. We had six hundred people travel with us wherever we went.

AW:

That's everybody in both Texomas.

JJ:

They were just such self-motivated kids. After we won the state championship, they got on the bus going back to the hotel. The parents were jumping up and down and celebrating and everything in the locker room, these kids were on the bus going back to the motel and small groups were talking about the game.

AW:

No rah-rah.

JJ:

No rah-rah, no crap. Just having fun.

AW:

That's got to make you feel as good as about anything.

JJ:

Oh, yeah. And everyone that I know anything about—I hear from alumni all the time. I'm going to cry, but—one day, two boys drove up in a pickup out here.

AW:

To your house, here?

JJ:

Mm-hm. They'd heard that I'd had cancer and they came to see me.

AW:

Golly. And where from?

JJ:

Texoma. They wanted to know if coach was all right.

AW:

That's amazing.

JJ:

Isn't that beautiful?

AW:

Yeah, it's incredible.

JJ:

Yeah, it's neat stuff.

AW:

Did you get to coach basketball, baseball—

JJ:

Track. We didn't have baseball anymore. You either had track or baseball. I coached in the summer league baseball. I coached in high school, I coached football, basketball, track and then toward the end of the year—I had junior high and high school. And toward the end of the year, when there's not much to do and the track season's over, there's about three or four weeks in there that I would take them and I would have—I had a former student from Texoma there that lived in Amarillo and he brought a friend of his and he would have tennis clinics on the new courts over at Texoma, Texas. And everybody in town would come, set up bleachers and everything, but the kids, they would work with them individually and as a group and everything. I would teach them some tennis. We'd go over and play tennis. And then we would play golf. I got a bunch of the guys from town that had extra seven-irons and extra balls and they would come out there and take a group of kids and teach them how to hit the ball. We would take a test that Panhandle State used in their classes when they talked. They learned the history and the

rules of golf and tennis and they had to make a passing grade on that before we could all go participate.

AW:

Talk about a little pressure.

JJ:

Yeah. And this one kid, really dull kid—these guys worked on him both physically, mentally and everything until he passed and we could go. I'd line them up out there and I'd have a bus pull up out there and they'd take four kids apiece. I think we finally wound up—we had thirty seven-irons or six-irons. Hundreds of balls.

AW:

So they played the whole course with the seven-irons?

JJ:

Yeah. And that was the deal.

AW:

Well you know, that's an interesting—I don't know why that happened, I guess because nobody sells golf equipment wants it to take off. It's a real interesting game when that's all you've got to work with.

JJ:

Well, and the thing is you develop confidence in that club and you can do anything in the world with it. You can pitch and run, hit it for distance and accuracy. But anyway, these guys would take a foursome then and play around on that old sand greens course. What's marvelous is that my civics students are in city government. On the boards. Year before last, all but one of the Oklahoma council members were my former civics students. All of them in Texas were.

AW:

Something that really strikes me is that unlike ninety plus percent of the small towns in Texas and Oklahoma, probably in the United States, but certainly out here in the west, it seems like a lot—a very high percentage of the people that graduated that went through those schools that you taught, stayed. They didn't go elsewhere.

JJ:

A lot of them did and some of them are coming back. In that book I think there's a copy of the Texoma—it's a newsletter that the city manager, who's the grandfather of this boy who comes to stay with us every year during baseball season—to take baseball camp, Ralph Hyde is the guy—

AW:

H-i-d-e?

JJ:

H-y-d-e. He publishes this little newsletter. The things that they've done there, they've burned down old houses, cleaned up lots, just a real strong effort. And they get the county's help, the electric co-op up there comes in and helps them. They just kept it a neat, clean little town that's dying, basically. Some of them are insurance salesmen, some of them work in Guymon but they live there. Awful lot of them stayed.

AW:

I know it's tough to do this, but over those nineteen years teaching there, is there a particular, other than that state championship, are there some real accomplishments, real highlights that stick out for you?

JJ:

Well, they competed in everything and competed well. I think we won two or three track championships, girls and boys. We had students go on in music. Marvelous—always had a marvelous music program, both band and choral music. In the play Texas, we've probably had twenty or thirty kids that have been in that performance. Both dancing and singing. Several of them had lead parts. They go on and do well. I think you're right, it takes a village—what is it, I guess Clinton said that one time.

AW:

Old African saying, I think.

JJ:

I think so. But the thing is year before last was the forty-first anniversary of the state championship. Mark Friedman called me and said, "Coach, you got to get here. We're having a celebration, recognizing the team, '71-'72 football teams. On Friday morning, on game day, at one of the churches we have a breakfast for the team and I want you to come and talk them."

Well, it so happened that Donna had a gig in Fredericksburg and when she got back that afternoon, we drove back to Amarillo. At the same time, Amarillo High School was having its fiftieth association reunion, and I'd signed up for that. We drove to Amarillo and got in about eleven o'clock to be there at the breakfast at the church. We had to get up at four o'clock in the morning. So we just went down—

AW:

It's a hike to Texoma from Amarillo.

JJ:

It's a hundred miles. I got to the church—well, Donna had a gig in Gruver, a little school up where one of my cousins is a teacher. Found out when we got there that the principal there was a guy I coached with in Dalhart. That weekend, we figured we slept about six hours and then drove back to Austin. But anyway, we go through with the breakfast and drove to Gruver and Donna did her thing and we ate dinner with a cousin over there, then came back to Texoma and they were having get together all over town for the homecoming. That night, we went over to Friedman's house and watched movies of the team and all the games.

AW:

That sounds terrific.

JJ:

We left there about one o'clock, drove to Amarillo, got up the next morning and started the festivities of Amarillo High's fiftieth anniversary reunion. That next morning we got up and drove back to—we did get a nice sleep Saturday. Anyway, it was fun. I got invited to the Taft Institute there in Oklahoma City, that was fun.

AW:

Why did you leave Texoma?

JJ:

Well—

AW:

It sounds like it'd be hard to leave Mayberry.

JJ:

We have these friends in Germany that I met when I was teaching in Brownsville, Eckhart and Monica. Real dear friends. When we were teaching down there in Brownsville, we'd come back to Texoma and they would stay and they would go to the Lutheran church, and we'd go to Methodist church. The people in the Lutheran church would take them out to dinner and take them out to the farm, let them ride the combine, tractor, whatever. And they came and said, "Why did you move from Texoma? These people love you." And I said, "Well, they do." Two reasons, mainly: C.Y. was gone off to college and then he was in the Navy. Sue died, her mother. We both were eligible to retire in Oklahoma. I retired with nineteen years plus a year for—I was not absent one day. I never missed a day of teaching in nineteen years.

AW:

So a sub would have slim pickings in your town.

JJ:

That's true. And so I was eligible to retire and I also could count five years of military. So I retired with twenty-five years. In order to retire in Texas, I needed to have ten years, then I could count ten and five, ten for Oklahoma retirement. As much as you teach in Texas, I bought that back, fifty-eight thousand dollars saved up for it. And then Donna was eligible to retire there in Panhandle State. We didn't have everybody that were basically friends of ours were either dead or had left Texoma there, basically. Of course, we had all these young people that hung around there and I still loved it and I loved the house that we built there across. We always wanted to get back to the hill country. Both of us went to UT two different times and we really liked it down here. Then when I wound up teaching at Hutto my last four years, we decided to—we'd been looking for a place for eight and a half years. We'd been going around and staying in every state park and looking all over Texas. Two summers I'd driven all over the state of Texas, interviewing for jobs, from Rockport to Brownsville to Dalhart. My first two years, I taught in Dalhart. Donna taught a couple more years at Panhandle State.

AW:

And you just drove from Texoma?

JJ:

Well, I was coaching so I got a fifth-wheel trailer and moved it down there the first year and then the next year, I rented an apartment down there because I had to be there early in the morning.

AW:

Right, and that's a little bit of a drive.

JJ:

Fifty miles. But anyway, so she came down there a lot. Dalhart was a wonderful place. Those people are just so good. And they were good to me.

AW:

Yeah, the history of that town is really interesting.

JJ:

I tore my Achilles—I'd had an ACL repair. That's when I first tore it. They put a cadaver [graft] in it. One day I was limping around and this kid, one of the players, said, "Coach, you can get up here on that taping table. Let me check you out." So I got up there and he felt around on my knee, and he said, "Yep, you've got a torn ACL." So he gave me the number of Dr. Wiggins in

Amarillo that had done his surgery, and I went and got that surgery done. And they did everything in the world to make it comfortable for me. They had people come around with a golf cart and take me around and everything. Just unbelievable. And then when Sue died while I was teaching there, the superintendent, junior high and high school principals and the whole coaching staff came to her funeral.

AW:

That's pretty impressive.

JJ:

Yeah. There was a lot of love there.

AW:

Dalhart's the town where they decided they could defeat the Depression and Dust Bowl by taking a positive attitude. Do you remember that?

JJ:

That's right.

AW:

And that wonderful book, *I Like The Depression*, that the guy in the chamber of commerce wrote?

JJ:

Yeah, that's right.

AW:

It's a pretty remarkable—

JJ:

Well, and the XIT, all that stuff, all that volunteer, that's a huge deal. And it's the job of the coaches to go serve the barbeque.

AW:

Really?

JJ:

Yeah. My great niece had gotten scarred by a dog—

AW:

And this would have been a niece—

JJ:

This is my baby brother's granddaughter. His son's daughter. Anyway, they were living in Texoma there and I was teaching in Dalhart and they came over there for this lawyer to handle this case, this friendly lawsuit to get her medical bills paid. Her name was Brooke. And one day—

AW:

This is C.B.'s Ben's son.

JJ:

It's was Ben's son's daughter.

AW:

I talked to C.B. on the phone just the other day.

JJ:

Oh, you did? Cool.

AW:

Well, I was in Oklahoma City, we were trying to connect with—the weather was just terrible that day. C.B. had just taken delivery on a bunch of bees.

JJ:

Oh, yeah. He lost them.

AW:

Oh, did he? Oh, how sad.

JJ:

And I don't know what the deal was—

AW:

Well, they were worried about losing them because the front was coming in. They had tornadoes and all, the temperature dropped—

JJ:

They're speculating that bees need a calm time—bad weather and all that can mess them up. But anyway—

AW:

So back to Brooke. I'm sorry.

JJ:

I was teaching class, junior high, and this guy came knocking on the door, his name was Bill Cunningham, a lawyer in Dalhart. He said, "I got to talk to you." I said, "Okay," and I told the class I'd be right back. Stepped out in the hall and he says, "Do you know Brooke?" And I say, "Yeah, that's my great-niece." And he said, "Oh, God, I thought so. I told her that she was just an awful pretty little girl and she said, yes I know, it's because of my uncle Jerry." And I taught Ben's daughter, Becky, to say that when she was a little girl. People said, "Becky, you sure are pretty. Yes, I know, it's because of my uncle Jerry." So they still do.

AW:

Oh, that's great.

JJ:

But anyway, his wife was teaching—this lawyer's wife was teaching across the hall from me and he had to go tell her about it. And then she told everybody and all the teachers were out in the hall, laughing. But that coaching was—I wasn't sure I wanted to get into it. Of course, I participated in every sport I could at Texoma and then at Amarillo I played basketball because you can't really—

AW:

Well, that was a big school when you went there, you couldn't play everything.

JJ:

Largest school in Texas when I went there. Twenty-five hundred students. Doesn't seem it right now when you've got five thousand.

AW:

Oh yeah, but a lot of things have changed. Now, after you got here—you've been here in Spicewood for a long time. It doesn't strike me, as we were driving in months ago when we sat down to talk first, you were pointing the repairs here and the repairs there and the fence there, then I got in last night, you were on the phone talking to someone who had a leak. How does this count as retirement?

JJ:

Well, I've got this one buddy up here—I've got a change though, I've got a trailer, I had a big old chipper here, I moved it out the ranch and I'd go around on the intersections where you can't see around the corner, I'd just trim all that out and chip it up. If somebody had some limbs they needed chipping, I'd got chip them and I started just clearing out cedars wherever the city council or probably association board would authorize me too. And clearing out the entryway, there was no fence down there so I tore it all down, pulled all the posts and swear they could mow it. And then the trees, one of the trees got mowed over while I jacked it up and straightened it over a four-year period. Patched up all the wounds and then pruned all those trees and when they need watering and the watering system needs work, I go load up my trailer and two fifty-five gallon drums and go water those out on the front gate there we planted, there's no water out there, so I haul water out there. This guy up here on this condo, Brad—excuse me—he had a bunch of brush out there and I said, "You mind if I chip this brush for you?" And he said, "Hell no." So I loaded up, took down and chipped. And then he said, "Could I borrow your chainsaw?" I said, "Yeah. I've got oil, gas, electric, what do you want?" He said, "I'll take the electric." So he pruned my stuff and went up and picked it up; and then I helped him prune out some more. And this woman who lived nearby, a young girl, forty-year-old girl, she wanted me to prune out a tree so I did. And then across the street, where this guy's mother-in-law lives, I'd seen this mesquite, beautiful mesquite, one branch was laying down on the ground, some branches had fallen off, I couldn't mow under it and so I knocked on her door and asked her, "Could I prune those out? Neaten that up." She said, "Oh, would you please?" And so I pruned all that out and hauled it off and raked out around it and weeded around it. I just stay busy.

AW:

Does anybody ever turn you down when you offer to prune something?

JJ:

No. Well, I just explained to them. My mission in life is to rid central Texas of cedars, mountain juniper, whatever it is.

AW:

You're going to need to live a little longer.

JJ:

Well, I'm getting a lot of people—have you noticed there a lot of trimming going on? It's become a fad. But anyway, this Brad is a beer distributor. He knows how to drink Lone Star. He said, I've got something for you, finally he caught me up there on the intersection. He said, "Hey, I'm coming." He had this beautiful blue golf shirt with a Lone Star emblem on it, a Lone Star cap and Lone Star kerchiefs and Lone Star glass. And I said, "You know Brad, there's only

one thing missing and that's beer." So we had one. But he said, "You're something else." I said, "Well, I'm happy to do it."

AW:

So if they had a mayor in Windemere, you'd qualify? I think so.

JJ:

I've been on the board and I've been the chairman of the architectural control committee. We had an administration that was very unpopular. They spent a lot of money on lawsuits—

AW:

Were those the gate people?

JJ:

The ones that put the gate in and they had lawsuits about any little thing. We had lost our liability insurance and no one would insure us. So we had what we called the Committee for Fairness, and we got three people to run for office that would help overthrow this board. And we elected those three people. So that gave us a majority on the board. Eventually we got all of them on our side. We have now brought ourselves back to economically stable and we do have liability insurance. But the compromise with the old group and the new was they wanted the president of the board to remain on for another year and so the new group said, well, then we want our person to be chairman of the architecture control committee. That was me. So I became the bartering thing between the two. And now we really got a good, strong board and we're financially in better shape than we've been since I've been here. I got on the board when I was first here. I served for four years and was disappointed. The president of the board said, "Well, we don't ever adjourn a meeting. I go by Sturgis' rules¹." And I said, "Well, the by-laws say we go by Robert's Rules." He said, "I know, but I use Sturgis'." So when they put the speed bumps in, he knew I was opposed to it, and I'm only recording secretary. I saw these minutes that said that we approved that. And I didn't know anything about it. I asked him. He said, "You know, I tried to call you and I just couldn't get a hold of you." And I said, "What?" He said, "Well, we had a telephone meeting, conversation and we went ahead and passed that." And then a couple of times, they did the same thing and it caught up with them. They had a lawsuit on a gal here and in my minutes, they proved that they were in the wrong. So the defendant—her lawyer asked me if I'd testify and I said "Yes." I showed up over at the court and he had my minutes that were proof that whatever the woman had done was not wrong. They had another seven minutes that proved that they were right. They accepted mine. She won her case. And I didn't even have to testify. It's one of those old deals. And this president, I still speak to him and ask about his sons and his wife and he's in my prayers. If you hate him, it hurts you worse than it does him. They don't care.

¹ *The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure* by Alice Sturgis

AW:

Right. That's right.

JJ:

So it eats you up. I used to dislike a principal there in Texoma. I'd get up early in the morning and I'd go run as long and hard as I could run just to get totally exhausted, take a cold shower, eat breakfast and go to school. "Hey, how are you doing, Ron? How's your day? Is there anything you need me to help on there at your house?" So you kill them with kindness and you put them on your prayers.

AW:

That sounds like a good place to take a break. But before we do: is there something I haven't asked you about or we haven't covered that we need to cover? We'll have more time to talk. We've still got to look at boxes and talk about materials and now a whole bunch of newspapers that I'd like to find out about.

JJ:

I don't know. Texoma was a wonderful experience. Twenty years there. I've lived there longer than I ever have anywhere else in my life until we got here. And now—well, I'm not that far along here, but we lived there for five, let's see—two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine—twenty-eight years. So I've got a ways to go. That was my—when I talked to the kids that morning at the homecoming game, my message was "pride." I had learned to—the things that I was most proud of in my life I'd learned there in Texoma. The library, little old ten by ten room with books to the ceiling, C.C Reed taught me to love to read. And I took pride in my ability to read. The churches there, more than one, taught me my love of God and our savior. Mrs. L.B. Field taught me love of nature in the Audubon Club, and she always praised me for being so observant, so all my life I've tried to preserve it. And that Jack Freeman had taught me the pride of working hard and to persist. I remember as a little boy, he would come up the back steps of the house, we'd go next door to him and he could hardly breathe, he'd come out of the alfalfa fields from asthma and hay fever and just totally choked up. He was out the next morning, working. He took over his dad's ranch, which was about to go to pot and he built it into an empire. He bought the bank, the place for one son to work, and they said they were going to buy for the youngest boy the Chevrolet dealership, because he liked to have wheels. He'd run the wheels off his cars. But anyway, Jack taught me to have pride in working hard, enduring. All of these things. That carried me through some tough times. Those memories and that pride that I had growing up in Texoma and that I hoped they would feel the same way when they were my age. I think I did a very good job, but that was the idea.

AW:

Well, it's got me motivated. All right, we're going to stop this. Not forever, but at least for right now.

Jl:

Okay.

AW:

Thanks.

Jl:

You bet.

Break in recording

AW:

But let me say to start with, Andy Wilkinson and cousin Donna Ingham. And we'll get to more particulars later. The twenty-second of April, 2014 in the afternoon at her lovely home and we just had a lovely lunch to go with it. We were talking about past concerts in music and now that you mention that there are—my question, well, why don't storytellers do that? And you were saying that there's a group in the north—well, not northeast, sort of the southern end of the north in D.C.

Donna Ingham (DI):

Right. Mostly in the D.C. area. And I don't know who started it. I know a number of the people by name who are involved in it, but they saw the need as many musicians have in the past to provide their own venues. And so one way to do that was to invite people over and have a house concert. It's gotten—I've not been to one there, so I don't know how big a production it is, whether they do use microphones. I wouldn't think so.

AW:

Do you know if they have more than one storyteller?

DI:

Sometimes yes, they do. Now that we have social media, they do a lot of advertising by Facebook and I suppose some of the other ones. And some of them have made it a regular occurrence, monthly even, or at least quarterly. They give them names. There's a great vine storytelling venue, there's one called two chairs telling, so they have—

AW:

--So you have two. I like that. That's a great name. As you described it, it sounded as if the storytellers themselves were the impetus for this.

DI:

They were. They initiated it.

AW:

That's a little different than I understand the history of singer/songwriter house concerts. As I said before we turned the tape on, I've been doing those for twenty years, maybe longer. And already, there was a circuit established and there was a little—like the Bible of how to put on house concerts, written by a singer/songwriter. My impression was always that those came about to assuage the dissatisfaction of audiences, who were tired of the folk music movement, having gone to jive stages with giant PA systems. The loss of the intimacy that they had felt before Newport and before Vancouver and before Kerrville got so big that they wanted to be able to reconnect that way. What a terrific way to work. I would think it would really adapt well to storytelling.

DI:

Back to that whole thing in Ireland, the *seanchaí*² went from house to house to house and people hosted them. It's certainly got a precedent in history.

AW:

Now, they were essentially doing the same thing that you do, which was they had stories that were folk tales. My history on the *seanchaí* is real rough but do they also have stories that were essentially kind of like *The Daily Show*, contemporary—a commentary on contemporary events? Was there some of that?

DI:

I don't know. I know that they—that part of what they did was the history, not just the folklore, but also elements of history. So I don't know how contemporary they were with their commentary. I'm sure that must have come about. Whether as part of the program or whether it was just in conversation, because many times, they spent the night in those host homes.

AW:

Much as house concert performers do today. But you think about the tradition from which they come, that ballad, traveling balladeer tradition, one important aspect of which was to convey the news. Do you know if any of these storytellers are tapping into the already-existing singer/songwriter storyteller house concert circuit?

² Traditional storyteller of bardic Irish culture.

DI:

I don't know that. There's a woman here in Spicewood that has hosted a number of musical house concerts. She's shown some passing interest in storytelling but to my knowledge, she hasn't made—certainly not one that was totally storytelling, whether or not she's involved storytellers. She hasn't involved me, so I don't know. But no, I don't—I think it's pretty new here in Texas. I've hosted one here for a friend of mine who really just wanted to try out some new material. And then I've been hosted at College Station?

AW:

Where did you get your audience for here and how did they react?

DI:

Invitation. Primarily neighbors. They knew me, and actually, they knew her because she had done a performance for the Spicewood Arts Society in a play. This was her own original work that she wanted to try out. And of course, we're pretty limited here in terms of seating, so it almost had to be by invitation. And RSVP. And that's the same way it was the one I did in College Station was a retired A&M professor who got interested in storytelling. She was not a storyteller, but she has brought in a number of storytellers. And she has a list of people that she notifies.

AW:

Which is pretty typical for house concert M.O. They build a list and typically, after a while, we weed out the wastes and you get a really hardcore group of people that come out for anything and everything. In fact, a true house concert audience member relishes going to hear someone they've never heard of. That's part of the charm of it.

DI:

The discovery, I guess.

AW:

Real quickly before we go, because I want to obviously come back to storytelling, but we need to start a little earlier, back like when you were born, that sort of thing. Start at the beginning is the best place for a story. Do you—what do you think of mixing the two? Music and storytelling? Do you think it will work?

DI:

And I think that's showing up in both musicians' territory and the storytellers'. I think there's a merging, because for example, at the National Storytelling Festival, a number of times, Pete Seeger performed.

AW:

The one time I've been there, I went with—

DI:

And Buck Ramsey has been there.

AW:

Yeah, that's the only time I've ever been, was with Buck.

DI:

And John McCutcheon is a regular. David Holt, who's primarily a musician, although he tells stories.

AW:

Is that David Holt from Austin? The rock and roll musician?

DI:

No, he grew up—he has roots in Garland but now he lives I think in North Carolina. And he went in search of folk instruments. So he's a wonderful guitar player, banjo player, washboard player, spoons player, jaw harp player, stunt fiddle player. That was his sort of drive, mission I guess, to find all that and research it. But in the course of doing that, he heard a lot of stories. So he began to share the stories too and then he and another fellow got all interested in urban legends and they kind of went off in that direction for a while. But when I go hear David, I really want to hear him play music because I think that's his strong suit. But a lot of—again, most of my experience has been through the storytelling, but we've had a number of people who came to be recognized as storytellers because they were musicians who also told stories on stage. Sometimes their stories were as entertaining as their music.

AW:

I think my stories are better than my music. Of course, if you're sitting on stage with a storyteller, maybe you're not excited to hear that same story the fifty-eighth time or whatever. Well, let's do go back to the beginning, and this is mainly for our cataloguers. Date of birth?

DI:

April 14, 1939.

AW:

Just had a birthday. And where?

DI:

Brownfield, Texas. Terry County.

AW:

I knew that you spent a lot of years there, but I didn't know for sure that that was—and your maiden name?

DI:

Christopher.

AW:

T-o-p-h-e-r?

DI:

Mm-hm.

AW:

C-h? And it's Donna—

DI:

Sue.

AW:

And your mother was named Sue.

DI:

That's true.

AW:

And what did your folks do?

DI:

My dad had been—both my parents grew up in Ochiltree county, up around Perryton. And my dad had had ambitions to be a rancher as his father was before him. My folks got married in 1928, so they got married just in time for the Great Depression, followed closely by the Dust Bowl.

AW:

It was tough in Ochiltree county too.

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JJ:

Oh, absolutely. He had a little farm when my folks first married. They first got hit by a tornado. And then the Dust Bowl. And so he lost the farm—I don't think he owned the farm, I think he probably had some kind of lease or something. But at any rate, he lost that. They moved into town in Perryton, shared a house with another couple. I asked my parents at one point, my mother particularly if she remember Black Friday, the very worst dust storm in that area, in the early thirties, which was April 15, 1935. And she did, what she remembered was is that they had moved into Perryton, they were sharing this house with another couple. My dad had gotten a job with the PWA building roads through that part of the panhandle. And he started out as a manual laborer. He was using a pickaxe, shovel, backbreaking work. He said—or my uncle said, who also worked during that period that they didn't dare complain because if they looked up, they saw a long line of men just waiting for that job if they didn't want it. But because my dad had had experience driving heavy farm equipment, he got promoted to driving a road grater. In the meanwhile, they befriended the two young engineers who were in charge of the road building process. They were young bachelors and my dad would invite them home for supper. My mother made a lot of chili during those days. And one of them, one of the engineers, his last name was Smith, liked mother's chili so much and ate so much of it that he earned a nickname, Chili Smith. And he had that nickname until he died. He was a big engineer in Amarillo in later years. So, at any rate—you ask a storyteller a question, and you get a story. At any rate, at some point along 1937 my dad had an opportunity to go to work for Phillips Petroleum Company as a wholesaler if he was willing to move to the South Plains. So they moved in 1937 to Brownfield. And he was the—he had the Phillips 66 warehouse there. Then I was born in 1939 and they built a house. He stayed basically in some form in the oil and gas business until probably in the forties we moved to Amarillo and he got back into farming and ranching with his dad a little bit. And then my parents divorced, my dad moved back to Brownfield and mother and I stayed in Amarillo. My dad from then on was a farmer and rancher—not really a rancher by Texas standards. So real estate—

AW:

A stock farmer.

DI:

Yeah. Stock farmer. That's exactly the term he used. Yes.

AW:

In Brownfield.

DI:

In Brownfield. And he was there until he died.

AW:

So did you ever move back to Brownfield?

DI:

Yes. When I was in eighth grade, I moved back to Brownfield. Mother, like most women of her generation, she had only a high school education, so she couldn't teach, so she wound up, after she and Daddy divorced, clerking in a drug store, doing bookkeeping and that sort of thing. And she was sort of between jobs and so I moved back to Brownfield and lived actually with my dad for a school year until mother came and then got a job there in Brownfield. And then I graduated from high school in Brownfield. And mother stayed there until she went through some bizarre medical episodes after I was out of school, and Jerry and I were married. We moved her up to Texoma in 1967. No, '69. And she stayed there until she died.

AW:

Interesting. What was Brownfield like in that time when you were growing up?

DI:

You know, it was a typical small town in that day and age. It was the county seat, so a lot of activities were around the courthouse square. Most of the businesses were around the courthouse square. We had a little club on the corner. Most of the activities were either the church, the school, or there was a VFW hall where they had the dances and what have you. They did actually build a country club at one point. I don't think it was there during my growing up years. I don't know, I just remember neighborhoods. Of course, kids played outside and neighbors visited on the porches. We didn't have air conditioning except for a swamp cooler in the living room. You didn't feel quite so insulated as we got later when people went into their houses and shut the doors and never visited much. I can remember our next-door neighbors, our across-the-street neighbors. We always look back and think, that was the simpler life, pine a little bit for it. I'm sure there were things about it that were not—but for a kid, it was ideal.

AW:

It never is all that simple. I think our memories are good bandages, band-aids. Because Brownfield, I know that on the square, there's still the Ku Klux Klan building on the west side of the square.

DI:

And you know, I never knew anything about that.

AW:

Well, it happened of course long before you were born. The other thing that struck me about Brownfield and I wondered—and your father would be some evidence. Brownfield was always

sort of unlike most other South Plains towns in that it had a strong ranching connection. There were a lot of ranchers from New Mexico that lived there. Was that evident at all while you were growing up? I just wondered if there was a sense of that.

DI:

Sometimes yes, because my dad knew some of those people. He thought—my dad thought—he was the last great cowboy of the western world, so he drifted to that direction. We had a rodeo every summer. They had the Terry county sheriff's posse and riding club, my dad was a charter member of that. There was that connection. I remember there was a woman whose name I don't remember at this point, but maybe it'll come to me, who was from New Mexico. Quite a character. She's in the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame who had that ranching background. My dad was fascinated with her. He had an eye for the women, I have to say. I can't remember her name.

AW:

They were a little much. I'll think probably of—did she dress like a cowboy?

DI:

No. She dressed western, but it was very fashionable. She was a little woman. I cannot think of her name. I'll keep going through my Rolodex.

AW:

What was your father's name?

DI:

His name was Ray. Willy Ray, but he hated the Willy part. His dad's name was William David and why they called him "Willy" I don't know.

AW:

So you would have graduated in about '47?

DI:

Graduated high school in '57.

AW:

I mean, '57, yeah. What'd you do after? Did you go straight to college?

DI:

Straight to Tech and did it in four years. The only one in my family who's done it.

AW:

Well I certainly didn't do it. You got a degree in journalism? What propelled you to journalism?

DI:

I didn't start out in journalism. I had visions of being—I always leaned toward art. Drawing kind of art, but had no training and so I decided I'd sort of compromise and go into advertising art.

AW:

An artist that could make a living.

DI:

Yeah. But when I went to talk to my advisor, who asked me about my background and what have you, he said, "You know, you might want to go into the advertising option in journalism and kind of try that out." And that was probably a wise suggestion on his part. And so that's what I did. My degree is in journalism with the advertising option. Which meant that I just learned to cut and paste stuff, mostly. And then I got a job before I even finished at Tech at KCBD radio. It was radio TV, but I was working on the radio side, writing advertising copy. So I did that for probably half of my senior year and then they hired me permanently and I did that for about a year and decided I was not cut out—whatever visions I might have had about making it to Madison Avenue and becoming a big advertising person, I soon saw that's not where my passion was. So my motto, when in doubt, go back to school. I came to Austin and went to the University of Texas and by that time I decided, I like to read, I like to write, so English seemed a good choice. So I got a master's in English and at that time, you could actually get a job in college with a masters degree. So I got a job at what was then Arlington State College.

AW:

UT Arlington.

DI:

It's now UT Arlington. They were actually going through that process when I left. I was there for four years. And I kept going to school in the summers. And then Jerry and I married so I left Arlington and didn't teach for a couple of years. He was still in the Army, so we were first at Fort Hood and then we were at Fort Carson. Our son was born in Fort Carson. Meanwhile, I'd gotten a job at Oklahoma Panhandle State University, which was just going to be a stopping off place. We were just going to stop there for a while and go on to bigger and better things. Twenty-some odd years later, I retired at Oklahoma Panhandle State University. Meanwhile, I went back and finished a PhD.

AW:

Where did you complete the PhD?

DI:

Tech. Texas Tech.

AW:

In English?

DI:

In English. Mostly going summers but finally had to go—

AW:

That's pretty remarkable, to finish a doctorate going summers. That's not an easy job.

DI:

I spent two semesters because I—or maybe not—but I was in residence there for a semester and then when I was working on the dissertation, I was going back and forth, working in the library a lot.

AW:

What was your dissertation?

DI:

Ambrose Bierce, fabulist.

AW:

One of my favorites.

DI:

Because nobody had done anything on that yet.

AW:

Okay, so tell me what really happened to Ambrose Bierce. Does anybody know?

DI:

Nobody knows. Carlos Fuentes had a pretty interesting idea on the old gringo.

AW:

Probably as good as anyone.

DI:

But no, nobody knows and I think maybe Bierce wanted it that way. I think he just wanted to disappear. So he did a pretty good job of it.

AW:

How did you get interested in Ambrose Bierce?

DI:

I'd read some of his Civil War short stories and I'd read *The Devil's Dictionary* and I'd read a few of his fables. And I was intrigued by the satire and I wanted to work with—I had done my master's thesis on James Thurber, who also wrote short stories and fables.

AW:

And in some ways was very dry and Ambrose Biercian.

DI:

Not quite as bitter, maybe, as Ambrose Bierce, but yeah. And you're always looking—the first challenge when you're trying to decide on a dissertation is find something that nobody else has already done something on yet. So some of those lesser lights in literature are usually safer options than somebody with that's more popular, well-known that everybody's examined from every possible direction. And I was kind of interested in the fable form, too.

AW:

Is it safe to say that Bierce may not have been taken as seriously by some academics as maybe the rest of us would care that he be taken?

DI:

Absolutely. I think part of that is due to the fact that he published his entire works. It's a little bit like Emily Dickinson, we were talking about that earlier. She didn't get much published during her lifetime, and when her sister-in-law found everything up in the attic and they just published everything, some of her stuff is not all that good. It is like greeting card poetry. So it probably would have been a good idea—and I think same too with Ambrose Bierce. His entire works are like twelve volumes.

AW:

Oh my Lord, I had no idea there was that much.

DI:

And some of it is—you know, you don't want to read it. But other stuff is really good. Plus, I don't think by and large, maybe with the exception of Poe, I don't think that authors who never

publish a novel get the kind of scrutiny than somebody who writes a novel. Although Pierce's opinion was that only very skilled people can write short stuff. Anybody can write a novel, but it takes somebody who's very skilled to write a short story.

AW:

I believe he's correct. And Twain, of course, would agree. I'm writing you a long letter because I don't have time to write you a short one.

DI:

Exactly. Exactly.

AW:

I think that every time I sit down to write. Well, what stimulated your interest in reading and writing? Did that began to take shape in Brownfield? In Amarillo?

DI:

Well, the reading part was—that's what we used to do back in the days pre-TV. That's what we did for fun. I remember coming home from school when we lived in Amarillo, and I was sort of a latch-key kid because mother had been working at a drug store and she didn't get home until after I did, so I would get home—this was like in the third and fourth grade, which no parent now would allow a child to come home and unlock the door and be alone for however many hours. This must have been more innocent days that we just didn't know any better. Anyway, I didn't have a problem with it, she didn't have a problem with it. But the deal was I got an allowance, like I don't know, ten cents a week or something. And I could come home, change immediately into my jeans, because back then we had to wear dresses or skirts to school, go to the corner grocery store that was about a block and a half away, buy a popsicle and go read Nancy Drew mysteries. That's what I was into at the time. I had already gone through my dog and horse book stage. I'd read all of Albert Payson Terhune's collie books. I'd read all of Walter Farley's horse books. I'd read *Beautiful Joe*, which is still one of my favorite dog stories. I had my library card, and I had neighbor kids who had books. We'd swap out the *Nancy Drew* mystery books. So I was always a reader. For fun. I decided at some point I wanted to be a writer during that period. So I got out my little big chief tablet and my pencil and I said, I want to write a dog story. That was in my dog story phase. I wrote about a—I thought fiction had to be totally fiction, and so I wrote about a dog I didn't know. I had a dog, but I didn't write about my dog. I wrote about some dog I didn't know, and it was awful. And I learned lesson number one, and that is, write about what you know.

AW:

Did you recognize that at the time?

DI:

No, I did not. I just knew it wasn't very good and I gave up on it. But the in later years, I thought, "Oh, that's what people mean when they say, write about what you know." And I always did well in school, in English classes. I had some encouragement from teachers who thought I should maybe pursue some sort of writing career. But at that time, I didn't—now, with creative writing programs and so forth, we didn't have that at Tech. They do now. You go straight English. We didn't have tech writing, either. We just had English. And what most people thought they'd do with an English degree is what I did, is teach. So I never did really—

AW:

I quit my major in English at Texas Tech because I didn't want to become a professor. And I didn't go far enough along—I started in the fall of '66, but I don't remember creative writing as being one of the options.

DI:

No, I don't. When I went back to graduate school, it was a very integral part of—in fact, one of the women on my dissertation committee was in the creative writing program. It wasn't a recognized field, I guess. And I don't know who started it. I guess the OWL writers' project³ and some of those other universities.

AW:

I don't know the exact dates, but after the Second World War it was kind of when they came into their fore. So that is interesting. It's also interesting that you, not just as a woman thinking about a career in journalism and writing but as a person, because that's also one of those majors or interests that people think, well, that's not a real job. A real job is, you become a teacher, you become an accountant, you become a whatever.

DI:

Or if you work for a newspaper, you write feature stories.

AW:

Yeah. So what kind of encouragement did you get there, or was it just something that you did on your own?

DI:

You know, I think I was there at a good time because there were—two of my good friends with whom I still stay in touch were journalism majors also. One of them became a very respected editorial writer for the *Dallas Morning News*. She's been honored by Tech, years ago. And then

³ She may be referring to Purdue University's pioneering writing project, now known as the Online Writing Lab (OWL).

another one, who actually wound up in broadcasting. We became good friends and we earned the respect I think of our colleagues, our peers. The department then was pretty small at Tech. I certainly felt accepted, and I got to write news for what was the *Toreador* then, it's the *University Daily* now.

AW:

No, it's back to the *Toreador*.

DI:

Yeah? Oh, is it back to the *Toreador*?

AW:

Which I think is a great move. We've been back to the *Toreador* now for several years. The UD always sounded like some medical device. I never did cotton up to that.

DI:

So yeah, we had some great experiences. I tell the story about—in 1960, I guess it was when Kennedy and Johnson were running, they came to Lubbock. I wangled a press pass on the strength of my being on the university—what was then the college—newspaper. And I checked a press camera out, one of those old—

AW:

Yeah, a Graphix.

DI:

Yeah. Hung it around my neck. Actually got to walk out on the tarmac—because they actually did have red carpet to the plane and the little ropey things, and it was just reporters out there. It wasn't a huge crowd. Most of them legitimate reporters. I remember that I got in on the side away from the side that Kennedy went down. I was kind of disappointed, but the one I was most impressed with Lady Bird Johnson who knew most of these people and called them by name and asked them about their kids. She didn't know me, but she was very friendly and she shook my hand. I remember LBJ, who always was such a presence. I don't remember whether he shook my hand or not. And of course, I did get to see Kennedy. One of his sisters, because Jacqueline—and that was when their son was either not yet born or just born, so she wasn't traveling with him, but I think it was Eunice Shriver, or it might have been Pat Kennedy, one of the two. I think I was the only one who had the gall to do that, because I don't remember anybody else from Tech being there. I thought, what the heck, I'll just give it a shot.

AW:

Must have been quite interesting.

DI:

And I never took a picture. I just had a camera hanging around my neck. And then I was co-editor of the yearbook, of *La Ventana*.

AW:

Who were those friends of yours that you mentioned?

DI:

One is—we called her Sis. What's her actual name? Caroline, I think. Jenkins. She's retired now I think from the *Dallas Morning News*, but she made quite a career. And the other one is Marilyn Gardner Woods is her name now, who's in California. She's retired too, I think, from broadcasting. She had quite a career out there. And Marilyn and I were co-editors of the yearbook. And that was back when—and I guess it was Wally Garrett's idea, he was head of the department at the time and as a teaching opportunity, he came up with the idea, or maybe he borrowed it from someone else, but it was new to us of having the sections of the yearbook be magazines.

AW:

That was still going on when I went through Tech.

DI:

And back then, you could actually take them apart, which I always thought was a dangerous thing. They were sort of bound with a little thread that went through. I thought it was a great idea. And so we had a good bit more text to write and magazine layout. We had to get permission from all the magazines that we—

AW:

And plus you would have to have studied styles because each magazine would be different.

DI:

And because we were somewhat innovative with that, we got to go do presentations at some college and university press association meeting. One was in New York City, one was in Baton Rouge. Of course we checked into the hotel and immediately went to New Orleans. I found that very encouraging, very enriching, that whole period of time with a journalism degree even though I didn't really—well, I say I didn't use it much, but I did. I owned a newspaper.

AW:

Yeah, we talked about the *Argus* today.

DI:

And we got all kinds of recognition for small newspapers in Oklahoma, although we never made any money to speak of. It was an experience. We certainly learned to do it all. Wrote the sports, wrote the editorials, went out and sold the ads. And teaching full-time.

AW:

I don't know how in the world you all did that.

DI:

A foolish thing to do, but—

AW:

Was your current interest in storytelling—was some of that developing when you were younger?

DI:

It was although I didn't recognize it as such, I guess. From the time—well, probably junior high and high school, about the time that Dick and Andy Griffith was coming to the fore as a comedian and entertainer, I don't know if he ever called himself a storyteller, but what it was was football—

AW:

That was storytelling.

DI:

Yeah, absolutely. His little parodies on Shakespeare's plays and *Swan Lake*. I loved all that. I was drawn to that. And at that time, I would mimic him. I would learn the routines. I'd do them for church socials.

AW:

Oh, really? I'd say you were smack dab in the middle of storytelling.

DI:

So I was storytelling, or as I say, more as a mimic, and then along came Bill Cosby and I was drawn to him. He started out telling that wonderful story about Noah and the Ark. He started telling stories about growing up in Philadelphia. We learned to love Old Weird Harold and Fat Albert and all those characters. So I think—although the term storyteller didn't register with me until later, I learned some of Bill Cosby's stuff, too. And then I would do parodies. Shelly Berman. His routine that he did about flying in an airplane, Sherry was never going to get off the ground, and the stewardess who had been to smile school, all that. I would do little routines like them. I began to come into my own to a slight degree. I would use that style but I would do it on

some other thing. And this was mostly like skits in the sorority meetings or something. This was never really public performances. So I think all that came back then when I retired from teaching in 1990 or whenever it was. Or '92, somewhere in the mid-nineties. Early to mid-nineties. And I was looking for something to do and I decided to write. I wrote a mystery novel because I figure that's a formula, somebody gets killed and you spend the rest of the book figuring out who did it. And that's still in a box somewhere because I was lousy at marketing. Still am. I did show it to a couple of agents who gave me totally opposite opinions. One said, love the central character, but the plot sort of moves by fits and starts for me. And the other one said, great hook at the beginning, love the plot, now the main character you might want to—and I thought, okay. A friend of mine who's a librarian in Dallas, we'd been roommates at one point said to me one time, she said, you ought to be a storyteller. Because she'd seen me do those skits. That's the first time I ever heard it as a possible career choice. So she took me to—we were living in Brownsville at that time. So this would have been in the mid-nineties. And she came to a Texas Library Association meeting in Corpus Christi. And I met her there, drove up from Brownsville and they had what they called a concert, a storytelling concert and it was three storytellers, all of whom I got to know later. The first one told an old joke, and I'd heard the joke. And I knew the punchline, but I was having a great time listening to see how he was going to get there, because he made it a personal story. The next one was a woman who told a story about a disastrous date, also a personal story. I thought, I could do that. And then the last one told an old folk tale, but he told it playing a ukulele. And they all were having such a great time, the audience was having a great time, and I thought, I think I want to do that. So I went back to Brownsville and I knew—I'd learned by now, write about what you know, so I thought, I know about Texas. And I know some Texas folklore. So I put together about an hour's worth of program. I did my version of Pecos Bill, I did the sort of a border ghost story. I did the legend of the sand dollar, because we were right down there on the coast. I don't remember. Anyway, it was about an hour's worth. And then I blithely sent out—I made a brochure on my computer, wrote a cover letter. We were staying in an RV park because we were sort of nomadic schoolteachers at that point. Only I couldn't get a full-time job because the colleges had all figured out, we can do adjunct and not have to—so I did teach some classes at UT Pan-American. Anyway, I sent out my brochure with a cover letter to all these RV parks down there that are like resorts. So they bring in entertainers. And I'd ask our manager at our RV park how they did that and what they paid and he said, well, they usually get together at the beginning of the season. And they would bring in these performers that would kind of make a little circuit around all those south Texas RV parks. Well, this was already in the fall so I thought I'd probably missed my chance. But anyway, I sent out my cover letter that said, I know you've already probably booked your season but should you have an opening or a cancellation, here I am. Within a week, we got a phone call from the Sunshine RV park in Harlingen, Texas, saying—

AW:

You can't make that stuff up.

DI:

No. [They were] saying they were going to have a little ice cream social the next Sunday and could I come over and tell stories? For a hundred dollars. Well, I had envisioned thirty, forty people sitting around the ice cream maker, I'm going to tell my stories to this little intimate group. I go over there, they have a hall that is the size of a big auditorium. It has an actual raised stage, sound system, and I don't know how many ice cream freezers they had and probably three or four hundred people showed up. I found out later the Sunshine RV park was the second-largest RV park in the world. Acres and acres and acres of RVs. So anyway, I did my hour's worth and they had a good time and I had a good time and I got paid and I didn't have to grade papers or go to meetings. And I thought, I have found my calling. And then I got some work and some schools down there. And then we moved back to central Texas and I had to start all over. By that time, I'd discovered there were actually groups, storytelling guilds and a state storytelling association and a national storytelling association. So I joined everything and went to everything that I could afford to.

AW:

Have those kinds of things been helpful to you both in terms of your craft but also in terms of the business side, the marketing, how you get gigs and those kinds of things? Because it seems to me as an outsider looking in, you seem to be very tightly integrated into the storytelling establishment, not just here but all over. I can go anywhere and there are storytellers and I say, oh, my cousin and they all know you. At least among storytellers, you're very successful.

DI:

And I did get one piece of advice when I first came here. A fellow named Tim Tingle, who's a very successful storyteller, but at that time he was ahead of me but he wasn't that far ahead of me and he said, "I'll give you one piece of advice. Join everything you can afford to join and go to everything you can afford to go to. Because it is through that networking largely that—certainly for festivals and that sort of thing, that you have an opportunity to meet people that can do things."

AW:

Let's hold that thought for a minute, I'm about to run out of battery. I need to change batteries, it'll take just a moment.

End of interview