

**Oral History Interview of
Alice Virginia White**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
February 10, 2014
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*University Archives Interviews***

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

**Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library**

15th and Detroit | 806.742.3749 | <http://swco.ttu.edu>

Copyright and Usage Information:

An oral history release form was signed by Alice Virginia White on February 10, 2014. This transfers all rights of this interview to the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University.

This oral history transcript is protected by U.S. copyright law. By viewing this document, the researcher agrees to abide by the fair use standards of U.S. Copyright Law (1976) and its amendments. This interview may be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes only. Any reproduction or transmission of this protected item beyond fair use requires the written and explicit permission of the Southwest Collection. Please contact Southwest Collection Reference staff for further information.

Preferred Citation for this Document:

White, Alice Virginia Oral History Interview, February 10, 2014. Interview by Andy Wilkinson, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

The Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library houses almost 6000 oral history interviews dating back to the late 1940s. The historians who conduct these interviews seek to uncover the personal narratives of individuals living on the South Plains and beyond. These interviews should be considered a primary source document that does not implicate the final verified narrative of any event. These are recollections dependent upon an individual's memory and experiences. The views expressed in these interviews are those only of the people speaking and do not reflect the views of the Southwest Collection or Texas Tech University.

Technical Processing Information:

The Audio/Visual Department of the Southwest Collection is the curator of this ever-growing oral history collection and is in the process of digitizing all interviews. While all of our interviews will have an abbreviated abstract available online, we are continually transcribing and adding information for each interview. Audio recordings of these interviews can be listened to in the Reading Room of the Southwest Collection. Please contact our Reference Staff for policies and procedures. Family members may request digitized copies directly from Reference Staff.

Consult the Southwest Collection website for more information.

<http://swco.ttu.edu/Reference/policies.php>

Recording Notes:

Original Format: Born Digital Audio

Digitization Details: N/A

Audio Metadata: 44.1kHz/ 16bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: Andy Wilkinson

Audio Editor: N/A

Transcription: Cecilia Morales

Editor(s): Leah Blackwell

Final Editor: Andy Wilkinson

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Alice Virginia White, former Director of Public Relations at Texas Tech University. Alice discusses the various jobs she has had over the years, and how she ended up on her particular career path. Alice speaks at length on her various duties at Texas Tech, including her work as community college liaison and work with endowments.

Length of Interview: 01:47:07

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Small talk; Alice's background information	5	0:00:00
Teaching in Kansas City, Missouri public school system	10	0:09:35
Dealing with racism and violence as an inner-city teacher	13	0:18:45
Getting married; moving to Dodge City	17	0:27:50
Getting master's degree; working as a dental assistant	20	0:34:15
Quitting dental assisting; wheat farming in Colorado	24	0:42:25
Change in career; Dodge City Community College	27	0:49:47
Going to UT to work on PhD in journalism	30	1:01:10
Coming to work at TTU	35	1:12:04
Job description at TTU; "freelancing at TTU"	37	1:17:14
Working with Don Haragan; becoming community college liaison	38	1:19:45
Animal advocacy; retirement plans	43	1:33:06
Endowments involved in	45	1:40:00

Keywords

Texas Tech University, Public Relations

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

—retired.

Alice Virginia White (AVW):

Please give her my regards.

AW:

I will.

AVW:

We've occasionally e-mailed back and forth through the years.

AW:

That's good. Yeah, she's such a sweetie. Harry has written—since we're talking, let me preface this by saying it's the seventh—?

AVW:

(whispers) The ninth or tenth.

AW:

The tenth? Oh, my gosh, I've lost a whole weekend—of February 2014, Andy Wilkinson with Alice White at the Southwest Collection on a cool and almost frosty day in the Formby Room. Back to the conversation, Harry [Mithlo] has written a book, it's a very interesting book, he's been working on it for a long, long time, that is the voice of his father, Watson Mithlo who was born in San Augustine, Florida at the end of the train ride when the Apache were taken out of Arizona at the surrender of Geronimo. And it's a very, very interesting book, told in the circular style of native people. And we're looking at it for the series I edit at Tech Press. So I've been keeping in touch with Harry quite a bit about that book, so it gives me a chance to get back—although Texas Tech is not now doing what we'd hoped we would still be doing with Comanche Nation College.

AVW:

Did they ever get their accreditation?

AW:

Yes.

AVW:

Good.

AW:

But in the process, they wound up restoring, I think, their relationship with the college there in Lawton. Plus, the thing that we never did seem to find a good solution for was how little Comanche students wished to travel from their family and friends. We could see early on that it was going to be tough, but we thought maybe with a nuclear group, you know, up here of Comanches, they would feel better about it. But still, I think staying there near home was preferable to most of them. But yes, I still do get to stay in touch with them, up to a point, and they're just great folks. You know all about the archive, so I don't need to tell you, do I, about what we're doing?

AVW:

You're welcome to say anything you want to.

AW:

Well, we're interested in your story for a lot of reasons.

AVW:

I'm curious. I have no idea why you'd be interested in my story.

AW:

Just two things, very quickly: one is your affiliation with Texas Tech. We have the university archives here and we do a lot of collecting of things going back to the connection with the university, and we do oral histories along with that too. For instance, I'm doing oral histories now with the people in the—it's now the National Wind Institute. Before that, it was WISE, and before that it was a whole series of names starting in 1970. So we think that those things are important. But along with that, your contributions to the community as a whole are really not only important, but they're wide-ranging. And I will meet someone who says they know you in this regard, and someone else who knows you in this regard, and someone who knows you yet in a third regard. And so Jennifer, who incidentally sends her regrets—her mother had to be taken to the doctor today for an appointment or something—she wanted to be here to say hello, but Jennifer said the only way to figure this out is to get Alice to tell us.

AVW:

I really thought it was Mary Ann who'd twisted your arm.

AW:

No, no.

AVW:

Okay, all right.

AW:

No, Mary Ann—she does twist my arm frequently, but not on oral histories. (laughs) There's another thing—my wife, as you well know, is an animal rights person so she's come to know you in a very different way than I would ever have come to know you, I think. And you and I got to—I guess the most time we ever spent together was traveling to Lawton for the ceremony several years ago.

AVW:

I still have my blanket. I use it almost every day.

AW:

Really? That's cool.

AVW:

I do.

AW:

All right. It's warm, actually, it's not cool, it's warm. Well, let me just get some basic stuff for us. First of all, what's your date of birth?

AVW:

June 30, 1946.

AW:

Cool. We're almost—we're close. Twenty-sixth of June, '48.

AVW:

Oh, okay. You're my elder.

AW:

And where were you born?

AVW:

Wichita, Kansas. Or did you say 1948 for you?

AW:

Forty-eight. That's all right. But we're still on the same astrological sign, I think. Wichita, Kansas. And before we start on your growing up, do you have a new address? I know you're moving tomorrow.

AVW:

Yes. [REDACTED].

AW:

And that's in Fredericksburg?

AVW:

Um-hm. [REDACTED]

AW:

And will you still be able to get things at your ttu.edu address? Okay. Good.

AVW:

Um-hm, as well as my Gmail.

AW:

Okay. And I think I have all those. All right, now I remember when we were traveling to Lawton and you told me—or I assumed that you had grown up in Kansas. Is that accurate?

AVW:

Yes, with the exception of my fifth grade year and the fall semester of my ninth-grade year, when my mother and stepfather and I moved back and forth to San Diego, California, back to Wichita.

AW:

Oh. And having to do with their work?

(pause)

AVW:

No.

AW:

Okay.

AVW:

My mother longed to have a healthy relationship with my much older sister, and so twice we moved out there and twice we moved back.

AW:

Okay. And you graduated high school in Wichita?

AVW:

Wichita Kansas East High, 1964.

AW:

Do I remember that James Eastwood Brink went to that school, too?

AVW:

He did. He was a big man on campus.

AW:

Was he?

AVW:

I have put sticky notes in my high school yearbook in all the places where he was a big man on campus for tennis, for swimming, for leadership position, boys' state and so forth, and he has offered me money, he has offered me money not to show this to people. When that happened—

AW:

I'll double it. (laughs)

AVW:

Yes. That's why I kept the sticky notes in the yearbooks. And then we also went to the University of Kansas. I was a year behind him. He was a big man on campus there with the DU's [Delta Upsilon?]. That's where he met Pam and the rest is history.

AW:

So what did you study in college?

AVW:

My majors were Russian and Spanish.

AW:

Russian? What inspired you to major in Russian? The Cold War?

AVW:

I thought it would be fun to learn a new alphabet and the very first boy I ever kissed at age two lived down the street from me, he had gone to KU and he had taken Russian.

AW:

Well, there you go.

AVW:

Oh, and the clincher was Russian classes were never offered before 9 a.m., and I didn't want to get stuck with an earlier class, and they were in a hall that was very near my sorority. So I could get up like at 8:45, put on an overcoat and I was there.

AW:

Yeah. Was it a large program? How many Russian students were there at KU?

AVW:

I don't know how large it was, but in my beginning class, there were probably a couple dozen of us.

AW:

That's pretty good, really, when you think about it. Very interesting. Was that what you graduated with?

AVW:

Yes, with honors in Russian. And with distinction. And I was Phi Beta Kappa.

AW:

Cool. After KU, what?

AVW:

I graduated in three and a half years, and the fellow whom I'd eventually married said, "Well, if you're so smart to finish college this quickly, now what are you going to do?" I didn't know. So he said, "Why don't you get a teaching certificate or go to graduate school? Because let me tell you, I'm not marrying anybody who can't carry her own weight financially."

AW:

Really? My goodness.

AVW:

So I got a teaching certificate. [It] took me an extra semester at KU, and there was such a big cohort of us students going through whatever was required to get a teaching degree—I was a liberal arts degree—but to get the teaching certificate, at one point they offered us a choice to help pare down class size. And they said, For those of you who will be teaching in inner-city

schools, take this path, and the rest of you, take this other path. And so I thought, I'm never going to be teaching at inner-city schools, so I took the other path. [I] got hired by downtown Kansas City, Missouri and was immediately teaching in an inner-city school during the time when Martin Luther King was assassinated and armed helicopters were flying over our playgrounds.

AW:

Wow. Yeah, that was a very difficult time to be in that neighborhood, was it?

AVW:

And they—although I was a secondary teacher and most likely to teach in high school, they instead assigned me to a junior high, or whatever they called them at the time, middle schools, I don't remember what they were calling them, because they said the high schools here are too dangerous for you to be—I was a contract substitute teacher. And they said, they're too dangerous for you to go into, because one of them they mentioned, two teachers had been murdered the year before.

AW:

Good grief. That's pretty startling. Murdered in school?

AVW:

Um-hm.

AW:

I don't remember Kansas City being that tough. That time period, huh?

AVW:

I don't know.

AW:

So did you teach for long?

AVW:

I taught in the Kansas City, Missouri public school district for a year and a half. The first semester, because I'd finished college early and then gotten the teacher's certificate, they hired me as a fully-paid—as though I were a regular contract teacher, to be a contract substitute teacher for the second semester. So that was spring of 1968—Martin Luther King, Bobby Kennedy, oh man. The good thing about being a contract substitute teacher was I got long-term assignments so I really got to know the kids. First, I had a couple of small-time assignments at like a sixth-grade class or something. And I'm sorry I've forgotten the name of that school. But

then they assigned me to Swinney Elementary right near the plaza. So it was up on top of the hill from the plaza at Swinney and the teacher had had major surgery, so she was going to be out a long time and had left very thorough lesson plans. I was so green that I didn't have the presence of mind to say, What does it mean that you call this sixth and seventh-grade class AT? I didn't know what that meant. So I was going through—it was a small group of kids, maybe sixteen or seventeen kids, some of whom I still keep in contact with.

AW:

Really?

AVW:

Yeah. So we had a dandy time. They were all very bright. And so even when we'd go to the playground and play, I'd be on one of the teams and we would play. Discipline just wasn't a problem. And toward the end of that long-term assignment, I said to the kids, "What is that AT on this class mean?" Because I noticed that this class was a much smaller size than the other sixth and seventh-grade classes in that school, and they said it means academically talented. For instance, before I realized that, I said to them, "I bet I can tell you a word and you won't know what it is?" And they said, What is it? And I said, "Onomatopoeia. What does it mean?" And they proceeded to say, It's like having the sound of the word inherent in what the word means, or something like that. Or maybe onomatopoeia is the opposite of it, like—I laughed so hard—it's the old Susanna song. It rained so hard, I froze to death. Susanna don't you cry. Anyway, it was a rhetorical term that they knew already.

And one time, it was sort of an awakening as a brand-new teacher. One of the sixth-grade kiddos said to me—they all came in upset after lunch, and he said, "They're prejudiced against us in this school." And I said, "Well, what makes you think they're prejudiced against us in this school?" And he said, blah, blah, blah, and it sort of sound like he was right. And the other kids were agreeing with what he said. So I was glad that they had been straightforward with me and trusted me with that information, and I was glad that I didn't have a knee-jerk reaction of the newcomer that I was to teaching and just say, Oh, that couldn't be right, forget it. But it really did sound like they were prejudiced against kids, and I think long story short, I think they were, because they were in the academically talented class. It was smaller, they got me out in the playground playing whatever it was we were playing, kickball and all that. And so I think there was some jealousy.

Then my next assignment was in the same school in a non-academically talented class. Oh, man. A lot more kids. A lot more issues. And they were issues that I was emotionally unprepared to deal with. Issues of sexism, racism, and what I want to say about that, despite some of my egregious errors, I still remember a wonderful African-American young man who'd gotten into a physical fight with a white girl and I took her side, for whatever reasons. And he stood there heroically—he was standing up in the classroom heroically with tears streaming down his face and without a quiver in his voice, he said, "My dad is a pastor and he's taught me to turn the

other cheek.” And I thought, Oh my God, I am seeing such wisdom. He’s so far ahead of me. I don’t even know what to say. I probably didn’t even have the presence of mind to say, I’m sorry, I made a mistake. But I haven’t forgotten him. And so then I called Kansas City, Missouri Public Schools and I said, “Look—”

Oh, two more experiences. Then, I accidentally was mis-assigned for somebody who was scheduling the substitute teaching. I got assigned to a first-grade class for one day. Oh my God. And then I knew why I didn’t want to teach the young ones, why I wanted the old ones. I said, “Why did the teacher leave?” She got fired because she couldn’t handle discipline—In a first-grade class. How hard could that be? So then the first day and my only day with that class, cute bunch of little kids, all of a sudden, the fire drill alarm goes off. So I think, Oh God, a fire drill. I hardly know which door to go in and out of, much less—so some little girl came to me with tears in her eyes and she said, “My brand-new coat is in the cloak room.” And I said, “Get out that door and follow whoever’s going out to the playground. I don’t give a damn about that coat. Just get out there and follow them.” So out I go.

Okay, remembering that the teacher had gotten fired for no discipline, okay, so guess whose class when we got out to the playground was playing on all the playground equipment? All the other classes were neat, all lined up in single file. Out came the TV reporters. I thought, Oh dear God, please don’t let any of my KU classmates, much less my sorority sisters who were actual education majors ever see this TV broadcast. Because they wanted moving visuals, so they were on my students.

AW:

Sure, because they were moving.

AVW:

Yes. I thought, Oh, never again am I going to let something like this go on in one of my classrooms. And then I got assigned back to that school—oh, well, who knows where I went, but I eventually went to an elementary school where I was assigned to a seventh and eighth-grade class. There I was in an almost all-black school. There was one white kid in the class, but I think I think he was intellectually slow, and whenever he came to class he’d just get beat up, so he didn’t come to school very often. And it was in the feeder school that went to the high school where two teachers had been murdered.

So my sort of confidence-building trick was to always, as a substitute teacher, to show up early so I sort of emotionally owned the room. So here came these kids, a bunch of cute kids, smart kids, and this was the last month of the spring teaching, and this is the time when Martin Luther King and then Bobby Kennedy were assassinated. So it was just a mess emotionally for the kids, for the town, for the country. It was just a jittery time. And this particular school, they had an armed security guard who walked the halls all the time. I’m not sure he was armed with a gun, but he was armed with a baton.

I realize now that I was looking straight into the face of racism. The school was a mess. It was all run-down, there were broken windows, the toilets constantly were backed up. It was just as bad as it can be and it was still in the Kansas City, Missouri school district and I came from the hotsy-totsy school right near the plaza, see. Oh, man. And so when I would go into like the teacher's lounge, I came face-to-face with teachers who really wanted to make a difference in life. And I was very humbled. All I was interested in was finishing out the semester because I was getting married in June. That's all I was thinking about. And I could begin to see the depth that some people had within their own lives and within their mission in life. I never had even addressed issues like that.

Sometimes my kids would go out in the playground with other teachers, because the other two teachers of my age cohort were both males, African-American males. And they came to me very quickly and said, Don't ever take your kids by yourself out on the playground. Always make sure that one of us and our classes is out there at the same time. Broken glass all over the playground. Nothing kept up. Nothing nice for those kids. And as I walked around in the room while they were out in the playground, I was looking at some of the graffiti on the tables that they'd carved into their work tables and it was pretty hardcore pornographic and obscene. So that was just kind of the milieu in which they were operating the best they could with their lives.

And so one night, they were going to have a dance. I consider myself a pretty good dancer, so I told the kids, "Oh, I'm coming back tonight for the dance, and I want some of you to dance with me," and all of this. And they said, Don't come back. Don't ever come back here at night.

AW:

The kids did?

AVW:

The kids did, yeah. They said, We'd love to have you at the dance, but don't come back. And my girl students would report—

AW:

How old were these kids?

AVW:

Seventh and eighth, I think. Going into this tough feeder high school. So whatever I had there was mild compared to what was going on in that high school. And the girls reported to me that whenever they'd walk to school, they'd have pimps out there trying to get them into prostitution. Just a whole different world. Now, a very bright side to all of this is, and it went right over my head when it happened. It was years later when I was thinking about this and I thought, Oh my goodness, what a gift. One day, I was in the classroom, and it must have been when my kids were out in the playground with one of the other teachers, and this very nice, dignified African-

American woman, all dressed up, wearing a hat—I'm always very impressed with hat—you're often wearing a hat, and I've noticed. Yes. Okay. So—

AW:

Mine probably won't impress you.

AVW:

(laughs) Well, anyway, I just liked the look of this woman from the get-go, and she said, "I'm president of the PTA here. And I have come to tell you that I've talked to all of the parents, and we want you to know that we back you 100 percent. You are the twenty-fourth substitute teacher these kids have had this year. And we want you to know that we're begging you to stay with this class through the end of the year and just hold it together the best that you can. And whatever you say in this classroom, we're going to back you up." So I said, Okay, that's nice and just went on my merry way. Years later I thought that was very profound, very courageous. And also, what a leadership position those parents were taking in that community.

Then I saw the academic difference. These kids were probably two and three grades behind and they weren't any dummies compared to the kids that were someplace else. And yet I could see myself giving higher grades than they deserved just to say, thanks for showing up, and thanks for trying to participate. That was wrong on my part, but that's how I handled it. And then—okay, so I'm focused on getting married and just getting through every day. So I didn't do my part in challenging them academically as they deserved. And it really hit me in the face when one of the students said—so I was just going through the mechanics. I was just there, going through the mechanics, grading the stuff, giving them a better grade than they deserved, putting it in the book and moving on. And one of the kids said, "My dad made me re-do this last night. He looked at my first draft and said, 'That's sloppy. I expect something better from you.' " I wasn't expecting something better from him. Mea culpa. Mea culpa.

Then I called Kansas City, Missouri and I said, "If you guys do not transfer me next year to Bingham Junior High School," over in the elite, predominately Jewish part of the town—"I'm quitting. I'm finding another job." I was completely overwhelmed with either discipline or potential discipline problems. Mostly, the kids didn't give me any problems. I wasn't about to put up with it. But they didn't really try me as sometimes I had seen kids do with substitutes. So looking back on it, I had virtually no discipline problems, I was just a greenhorn kid expecting the world to bow down and say, "Hosanna" to me because I'd finished college. So they put me over in the other school.

AW:

Really?

AVW:

Yes, they did. So I go over to the other school, and some of the kids from this elementary school either know or they themselves are getting bussed into the junior high where I was. And that was a high-performance school in every—I did inherit an all-black second-year Spanish class. And they deserved the As' they got, just like everybody else. Live and learn. But they figured out that I'd been over at Kumpf Elementary, because I said, "Some of you come from Kumpf," and they did. And then so we started comparing notes on who was in their neighborhood, who they knew and so forth. So we had that in common, as miserable a performance as I might have given over there.

AW:

Well, in your defense, it takes a while to figure out on a student's performance, what are they capable of, when they're suffering other challenges. You know, you can't just automatically tell, especially as a sub. I've had my turn being a sub. I refer to it as being a human bookmark; you kind of hold the place for the real teacher to get back. But when you don't have a chance to get to know the kids—after a while, you know who can perform.

AVW:

Well, I had this—I still sort of carry this naïve thing that they can all be brilliant in some aspect and in some way. So yeah, I really do believe that to my core. Also, much to my complete surprise, since I wasn't an education major and I was just sort of doing this to pacify this guy that I hoped we were going to be married and he'd soon forget all this stuff and then I'd run my own schemes—what was I working up to? Oh, my complete surprise in teaching was that I knew, somehow, from the get-go when I walked into that classroom that my main job was to really, deeply love those kids. And although I didn't have the wisdom or the words to say unconditional loving kindness, I think that's what the direction I was given in dealing with them. Yeah.

AW:

So did you get married in June?

AVW:

I did.

AW:

What was your maiden name? I forgot to ask you that.

AVW:

It's White.

AW:

White. Oh, okay.

AVW:

I returned my maiden name.

AW:

Okay. So what was your married name?

AVW:

Breitenbach. Wide brook.

AW:

B-r-i—?

AVW:

Time out. B-r-e-i-t-e-n-b-a-c-h.

AW:

Okay.

AVW:

I still keep in touch with some of those kids who were in the junior high, too.

AW:

How long did you stay at the fancy junior high?

AVW:

One year. Because Chris then graduated from dental school and we moved to Dodge City.

AW:

And now in Dodge City, did you go back to teaching?

AVW:

Well yes, because I had been given my marching orders to contribute financially, yes. (AW laughs) For better or for worse, I married a full-blown entrepreneur. I had no idea that's what was happening or that that was his true gift in life, and so we were at opposite ends of the spectrum.

AW:

You don't consider yourself entrepreneurial?

AVW:

I do now in certain dimensions. He was a true financial entrepreneur. But anyway, okay, so then we moved to Dodge City. I got a job in a rural school district. Well, that was like kind of going into that inner-city school, there was as much not knowing about the inner-city school culture and all of that as there was going into this rural school. I graduated from the largest high school in Kansas, and here I am teaching in one of the smallest. Chris had graduated from a high school with a class of five. Fortunately, he was there to translate for me before I got myself into too many cultural pitfalls in that small town. I ended up staying there for three years.

AW:

What was the small town?

AVW:

Ingalls, Kansas, in between Dodge City and Garden City in Southwest Kansas. And I still keep in touch with a bunch of those kids.

AW:

So three years in Ingalls.

AVW:

Teaching first through third year Spanish, first through third year Russian—

AW:

Russian? They were teaching—this is a small rural school—

AVW:

Well, they got me. Here you go.

AW:

So how many students did you get that wanted to take Russian in this small Kansas high school?

AVW:

Thinking back on it, I had about ten for first year, let's say maybe six for second year and one for third year. And the one on the third year, she ended up being a CPA and her beautiful photo appeared on the front page of a magazine out of Colorado for being the Colorado CPA of the year.

AW:

Who could also speak Russian.

AVW:

Yeah.

AW:

Or at least knew some Russian. That's very interesting. Very interesting that you would get—I mean, that sounds like a lot of students in a small school.

AVW:

Yes, and especially since it wasn't required. I had to also be aware [that] they don't have to take my class, and this school district doesn't have to hire me. So I had maybe larger classes in Spanish all three years. And then I taught PE. Oh, and I taught speech. And the school district got put on probation for letting me teach speech because I had quizzed out through advanced placement tests, six hours of college English, which meant, according to the Kansas teachers' association, I didn't have enough in English to be teaching speech.

AW:

Even though you'd placed out of it. Seems like a—

AVW:

(laughs) Yeah. They put the school district on probation. The teachers automatically elected me president of the local teachers' association and then we promptly dropped out officially of the teachers' organizations, because that's what the group wanted. I was also the pep club sponsor, the senior class sponsor. Chris and I went on two senior class trips out to Branson, Missouri. All this was completely new to me. I didn't do any of this stuff in high school. I was the prom sponsor. They ended up with a bare-chested woman on one of the black light posters. Some of the parents came and told me about that. I held a regional speech clinic, in charge of the regional speech clinic.

And my third-year Spanish students that I just couldn't see that they were going to be reading highbrow Spanish literature, so we decided to opt for going down and having my third-year Spanish students teach Spanish to the grade school kids, and that was a lot of fun. And then why I ever dreamed up of having a Spanish fiesta for the parents to come and have part of—by the time I got to that question, the parents were arriving in the gymnasium and the fiesta was going on. They broke a piñata, and when they broke the piñata, they also broke the stick and the stick came flying up and fortunately one my teachers who I was very fond of ducked just in time. I thought, Oh, liability issues, who knows what.

AW:

Yeah, I've never seen a successful piñata breaking in my life. They're always replete with—either the piñata won't break or the stick breaks or the—falls down—

AVW:

Yes, and within the school district, not only was I clueless about the culture of a rural area, we also had Church of God in Christ Mennonites who wore the caps, have the beards and all of that. Ironically, one of those families became our very best friends, remain our very best friends to this day, and yeah, there you go.

AW:

It sounds pretty entrepreneurial to me. (laughs)

AVW:

Oh, well, thank you. I'm always up for an adventure.

AW:

So why just that length of time in Ingalls? Did you move again?

AVW:

Well, as the pep club sponsor—go bulldogs go, fight bulldogs, fight—I was going to all the Tuesday night and Friday night basketball games, and then bleary-eyed driving thirty-seven miles back to Dodge City all this time. I was a menace to myself and others on the highway when I was seeing double, being so worn out. And I said to the principal, "Couldn't you get one of the local teachers to either be the pep club sponsor or some of this?" "No." So I said, "I've had enough of this." And so I announced that I was leaving. About day three of the fall semester, when everybody was starting school, I thought, What have I done? What am I going to do? So I got my master's—I started my master's in counseling, absolutely convinced I was going to be God's gift to high school counselors. So I drove back and forth to Hays, Kansas, which was 108 miles each way. I say that I got my master's through 21,600 miles, because I went a hundred times. I did that. Fortunately, gasoline was fifteen cents a gallon. The drive was beautiful. Only once did flying rocks ever keep me from getting to class.

AW:

What sort of flying rocks? From the wheels?

AVW:

From the wind. Oh, we had a horrendous wind storm that even by my Kansas upbringing was sort of surprising. I started out for Hays, two hours back and forth, and when the rocks began to fly up and hit the car, I thought, You know, I think I'll go home this time.

AW:

Right, yeah. So counseling. Did you get to put that to use?

AVW:

Only for personal use. Because about the time I finished, Chris fluttered his eyelashes at me and said, "I need a chair-side dental assistant. Would you come help me until I hire somebody?" And he said, "I'm also worried about the dentist that just lost his license for doing—" he was correctly convicted, it turns out, for doing naughty things in the dental office. He said, "I don't want there to be a scintilla of doubt about what's going on with me in this dental office and there won't be as long as my wife is right here with me." So I became his chair-side dental assistant for ten years.

AW:

Wow. That's a whole other thing to learn.

AVW:

I fainted at the sight of blood. I don't anymore. The first root canal I ever saw—I'm sure I was white as a sheet, leaned back, up against one of the counters so I wouldn't fall over. And the darling woman who was having the root canal performed on her that became a best friend, she and her husband would drive in from Artesia, New Mexico.

AW:

All the way to—?

AVW:

Yes.

AW:

That's a long way.

AVW:

Yes, for him to be their dentist. Well, he was a good dentist. So she reached over and I guess I just looked like I was about to pass from this world to another, and she got a hold of my hand and she patted it and said, "Don't worry honey, this doesn't hurt a bit." And so he's behind her head, saying, "Don't faint, don't faint." Yes.

AW:

Oh my goodness. Ten years, gosh. Did you have to—did the state require you to go back into any kind of education or anything?

AVW:

Not for a dental assistant, which meant that I could only say, "Andy, come on back, have a seat," put the thing on you.

AW:

And then the dentist would say, Hand me this, hand me that, but you couldn't do anything else?

AVW:

Yes. I could do Ajax on the countertops. I could go in with the Bitewing x-rays and dunk them in one solution and then the other. And I could floss their teeth and that's it. Otherwise it would've required a dental hygiene degree.

AW:

Which is pretty involved.

AVW:

Yes. I admire dental hygienists, because they have to take all that chemistry and that hard stuff. I would rub shoulders with them at dental conventions and always be very impressed. And then the last year in my ten-year stint of the dental practice was I also ran the front desk, but I couldn't have done both. We were in an office with some optometrists. And so their front desk folks helped me run all the billing and checking-in and all of that. I couldn't have done both by myself. And so I was grateful that the other staff didn't resent me for being the spouse of, and just pitched in and helped me as another team member. And then the optometrists loved being in with a dentist, or having a dentist in with them because when they had to unscrew the screws in the glasses—

AW:

They would go over to get them?

AVW:

Yeah, they would just have him do it with his dental drill and that saved them a lot of breakage and costs.

AW:

How interesting. I would never have thought about the connection between optometrists and dental work.

AVW:

Yeah, I don't know when all those guys figured that out.

AW:

Did you like it? Did you enjoy it?

AVW:

My first seven years, I made myself miserable for saying, Why did I get a master's? I should be doing something else. So I was just mostly a horse's patoot. Then I went to a dental convention, and I heard an inspiring dental hygienist talk about how much she loved her job and why it was such a calling for her. [It] completely changed my mind. (whispers) I'm very wordy.

AW:

No, that's good. I'm just looking at the battery level.

AVW:

So the last three years were a joy. Because I decided, wait a minute, if I decide this is my mission and my calling, what can I do to really make this thing work? And so, among other things, either then or maybe before, I'd watched the newspaper and I'd cut out clippings when our patients or their patients were in positive news stories and I'd save it for them. And when he was asking—you know, just making conversation, I was over there with their dental chart writing down all this personal information so the next time they could come in, I could say, Hey, how did so-and-so turn out? Or when everybody out there is related to everybody else, I'd write down all of those things and the relatives that they liked, and I would inquire about them. So I kept kind of a running ledger that also helped keep the conversation going.

And so many people, it seemed to me, were terrified of dentists. That anything I could do to distract them was a relief to them. And they really appreciated being remembered with the clippings. I just tried to make it personal and let them know we really cared about them, because he was an excellent dentist, and as far as I know, very reasonably priced. And so a lot of people would come to him who lived elsewhere and say, "I'm going to go back and get my dental treatment, but before I do, would you take a look at my situation and give me a common-sense treatment suggestion on what you would do before they try to sell me the moon and about what this ought to cost?" Yeah, yeah, we can do that. So he would suggest, like some dentists, I think, would sell crowns—really expensive crowns and partials and so forth. He'd say, "I really think you can get by with a temporary crown. It's temporary because, compared to the other that's high-priced and really likely last you for a lifetime, this thing may last you five or ten years or longer, but at least you have a choice."

AW:

Yeah, that is unusual. Well, if you've gotten to like it, why stop at ten years?

AVW:

He didn't like it.

AW:

Oh.

AVW:

When he was in dental school, he put himself through dental school by becoming—he and one of his buddies—the sole contractors for all the Kansas City—Kansas and Missouri Sears installation for air conditioners and ice makers. So those guys put themselves through dental school that way. Well, being a financial entrepreneur, he took out the maximum dental school loans and took all of that money and invested it in dry-land, wheat farm land, in Cheyenne County, Colorado, to the tune of about fifty dollars an acre. Well, it was only fifty dollars an acre because it was summer fallow, and they only had crops about half the time because it's practically a desert, and nobody else wanted the land. So [he was] paying for his way through dental school, taking those dental school loans and starting a kingdom, so to speak, out there. His big plan was, if we had to go more than four years before we had a wheat crop, we could always pay for the land through the dental office. Well, there were some years we had wheat crops year after year, twenty and more bushels an acre.

AW:

That's phenomenal for dry-land.

AVW:

There were years that the oil and gas people came through and paid us as much per acre that we had paid for land just to thump on it just to see if there was oil and gas. There were years that some of the neighbors out there who didn't really like us because we were suitcase farmers would pay us almost as much as we had paid for the land just to let their cattle graze on our weeds.

AW:

So it turned out to be a good fifty dollars.

AVW:

And other entrepreneurs, including some of the optometrists that were in the office, and then people they were doing business with in other enterprises knew what he was doing and knew that he was very honest and fair, they let him—he was also a real-estate broker—they let him choose land for them to buy, and then they let him manage it for a 3 percent on whatever the crop was. So given my complete cluelessness about business or money or simple arithmetic in those kinds

of areas, and being, I don't know why, completely prejudiced and paranoid about business, when I began to see how all that was working, that changed my mind.

AW:

To?

AVW:

Seeing that they weren't all a bunch of shysters and just out to get me, and that when they're doing business with each other and with other people, try to figure out how to make it profitable for everybody.

AW:

So that changed your ideas about the business side. How did that affect your being a dental assistant?

AVW:

Well, after I heard that dental hygienist, then the job was a breeze.

AW:

Yeah, but I mean, at ten years you stopped doing it and you said—

AVW:

Oh. Well, the farming was going on since he was in dental school. And when I became a dental assistant, then I had no excuse not to be a hundred percent engaged in the farming, because I couldn't say, Oh, I have my job. Or I need to go back to school. Then here I am in this whole farming enterprise of which I had no familiarity and I couldn't find things in my past to kind of associate it with and hook it on to, so I was probably a slow learner, but I was methodical. I would read, he took a lot of farm magazines, so finally I thought, you know, my passive-aggressive approach to this: Oh don't make me do this, I'm no good at it, wasn't working out too well. So I thought I may as well just read these farm magazines and figure out to the best of my ability who's on first.

AW:

So what did you learn about farming?

AVW:

Well, that there is some, I think, deeply spiritual value for those who either grow up with it or come to understand it. The beauty of ready-to-harvest wheat and the sound of it, the idea of helping to feed other people, the opportunity to have the real-time physical and visceral experience with the changes of the season, the changes in the land, how it looks, how it feels,

how it sounds, you know, just—I don't think I have the deep love that some farmers and ranchers might have for land, but I have a better respect for it and understanding of it. Yeah, and how to be good stewards of the land, of the crops. I can understand why farming families find it so heart-breaking when they can't figure out financially how to make all these things work and are asked to look for other occupations. And also that family history of it.

AW:

Yeah, right. I know exactly—in truth, it would have been hard to develop that kind of intuitive understanding of it though, being a suitcase farmer, being a windshield farmer coming in from—

AVW:

And having no farming experience. Now, he really had it, and so he really blew off the naysayers who [said] You should move out here.

AW:

He'd grown up with farming?

AVW:

Yeah. And in fact, after we had gone our separate ways, he did go out there and live.

AW:

Really? So how long before you divorced?

AVW:

It was shortly after the sale of the dental practice.

AW:

He sold the dental practice to do farming?

AVW:

Full-time. Farming and—well, he wasn't doing much of the farming, we just had a quarter irrigated section in Finney County, Kansas that he actually did the farming on and took care of the irrigation stuff. The rest of it, we had almost all of it custom-farmed, and a little bit of it rented. Yeah.

AW:

Did you have children?

AVW:

We had dogs, three dogs who went farming with us in our pickup. They were in the back and all of that.

AW:

Yeah, dogs love that. They do for a fact. So after you separated, what did you do? Where did you go?

AVW:

I stayed in Dodge City, Kansas for two more years, heeding the advice of, in a big change like that, don't make any big move. And I—

AW:

What year would that have been?

AVW:

Nineteen eighty—'85-ish. And I realized I have no work history. I need to get a job. I don't know how all this is going to turn out. I had only him and I didn't think he was in the mood to give me a positive job reference. So I—one of the women with whom I'd worked in the optometry office helped me get one of my half-time jobs. It was job placement for people with disabilities, because I had that counseling degree, but what did I know about job placement for people with disabilities? But she said, Just do it and we'll help you, and all that. Then I got—I applied for and was turned down the first time, but eventually they came back and hired me. It was Arrowhead West, for people with developmental and physical disabilities—what was I doing for them? I did two things for them: I taught a life skills class for them at Dodge City Community College. What was I doing half-time for them? Oh, I was doing job—that was the job placement for people with disabilities, yes. So I had two kinds of jobs with them.

Then the community college decided they needed somebody to be an assistant director of their center for business and industry and go out and hustle the businesses of what kind of training their employees needed and then go back to the college and get the teachers to do the training. And then I had a fourth job, a fourth part-time job. Oh, I was hired by the Kansas Elks Training Center for the Handicapped. That was the job placement with people with disabilities. Anyway, somehow I had four part-time jobs for at least a one-month period of time. But most of them lasted a year or two combining half-time jobs.

Then I had also in previous years been elected to a five-year term on the national Kansas University Alumni Association board. Well, Chris loved that because he loved KU. He never finished KU. He went three years, never could pass the English proficiency test and thought, To heck with it, I'm going to dental school. And so he just went to dental school, but he loved KU and was thrilled when they wanted me to run for this competitive office, and he became my campaign manager, and he told me, "We're going to put a picture of you on a postcard and then

we're going to have some sort of message and you're going to sign it personally and say, Vote for me. You're going to ask the KU Alumni Association just to provide all the mailing labels for the tens of thousands of people who are on their mailing list, and we're going to send out those postcards and you're going to have a landslide win." And all of that happened. And so then he was thrilled to go back and forth five times a year from Dodge City to Lawrence to have me go to these meetings. Yeah.

Okay, so then in all of that, he also said to me, Look—KU had a wonderful outreach program that I reluctantly went to, because I said to him, "I don't want to go into anything involved with KU. That school was too damned hard. Cut into my social life. Just forget it. I don't want anything to do with that." And he said, "Oh, just stop complaining and start coming to these Kansas honors programs." So KU was doing this state-wide, throughout all the communities, they would go in and get the top ten percent, academic percent of the seniors and present all of them a personalized dictionary from a donor who provided it, it had a nice nameplate in it. And KU would come out—when they came to Dodge City, they'd have on or about—was it two hundred students? I don't know. Anyway. They were going five counties wide. They would honor the students and then fly out KU students who were in drama or singing and acting and they would perform and then they'd have a student stand up and tell his or her story, and then some of the big wigs from KU.

So I went the first year reluctantly. And son of a gun, if it wasn't some of my former students from Ingalls High who were being honored. Well, I was sold then. It was my kids, and I knew that those rural kids were so often overlooked. Many of those rural kids, unless their parents were real aggressive about getting them out into the world to see a lot of things, they didn't know straight up from sic 'em. They didn't even know if you went into a tall building, that the fourth floor would be like, room number four hundred something or other. We discussed that one day and I thought, Oh my God. So I was thrilled that my students were getting the honor. And then I was unstoppable.

I became the person who organized this five county thing, and some of the schools all got in a fight. "Oh no, it should be the National Honor Society." And essentially KU said, "We're running it, it's the top 10 percent and you're either in or you're out." And one year, I got Dodge City High School back in, thank goodness, but anyway. And then we'd have to get all our alumni to pay for students' dinners and all that, so that was sort of worrisome to me, but it all worked out. And then after I was the person in charge of making it work, I somehow got propelled into the emcee role. And sometime during those two things, Chris said to me, "Look. With KU coming in here, you need to get a hold of the Dodge City Community College president and the president of St. Mary's College here in Dodge City and get them in here and meet all these KU people." So you know, lock step, I was in love, I did whatever he said. And so I just had the habit of doing that.

So again, when I had all these part-time jobs, I was the emcee for this KU deal. So I called the president of Dodge City Community College and I said, "We're expecting you to be at this dinner. I know you're new to town and everything, but I'm going to be the emcee, I'll be in

charge of introducing you and the president of the other college, so all you have to do, is you just show up and on cue, when I start talking about you, you just stand up and you wave to people.” And he said, “Okay.” And then he said, “I want to meet the newspaper publisher.” I said, “Oh, she’ll be there. We were in AAUW together, she’s a KU alumna. I’ll make sure that before you leave, I’ll say hi to her and get you introduced.” He said, “Okay.” So being the bossy boots that I am, he decides—he calls me up and he said, “I’m going to be firing two people and I want you to take both of their roles.” And I said, “I’m very flattered.” Plus, he knew I was out doing the center for business and industry for his college—oh, I know! I was teaching English composition part-time for Dodge City Community College. That was my fourth part-time job.

Yeah. And so he would hear of me stirring around, and he said, “I want you to be the director of community relations and resource development. These two old-timers are going to be gone. My excuse is going to be we’re consolidating the job, and you’re going to get this job. You’re going to go through the interview process, but you already have the job.” I said, “Oh, I’m so flattered. Thank you, but I’ve already applied to the University of Kansas to get my PhD in counseling psychology.” And he said, “Oh, that’s fine. All I’m asking for you at this point is that you come back once in a while and have a conversation with me about this.” I said, “Okay.” Talk’s cheap. Well, long story short, he talked me into postponing this PhD at KU when I already had a TA-ship there, they were going to pay me. And he said, “Look. If you get a PhD in counseling psychology, you’re going to end up working in a mental institution and that’s not where you should be. You should be out here doing a job like this. So let me tell you what we’re going to do. I want you to take this job for six months. That’ll give me enough time to work the politics of firing these two other people and getting you in there. And after six months, if you don’t like it, then leave. Then go off to KU and get your PhD in counseling psychology. Just give it a try.”

And I thought, Well, firing these two people, that wasn’t too keen on my hit parade, but that was going to be a done deal no matter what I was going to do. So somehow I had the presence of mind, or somebody got a hold of me—the people who were going to report to me found out all the shenanigans that were going on and they said, Come talk to us. And so the whole group lined up and said, If you will take this job—we want you to take this job—if you will take this job, we’ll teach you how to do it. We know what goes on in this job. We’ll teach you. I said, well hey, okay, all right. I’ll do this. And so I got the job and they taught me and I think it was a roaring success. But this president had told me from the get-go privately, he said, “Look, after one year, you’re going to have fulfilled two jobs as best you can that first year. Then the second year I’m going to peel off the resource development, get somebody else to do that, and then we’ll settle back in to kind of how the jobs were arranged.” I forgot that conversation. And a year—

AW:

So you wound up with the two all along.

AVW:

No, no. A year later, after I'd had a very successful fundraising event—and there was a whole lot of infighting with various people, but I just don't really have time for that. So we had a nice fiftieth year reunion of the college, we had a great successful fundraiser for the endowment association who were all busy nitpicking each other; I'd never seen such a contentious group, but that's another story. I loved Dodge City Community College. I loved all the faculty and staff despite the people outside of it who were nitpicking at this, that and the other of real or perceived issues. So then all of a sudden at one of our regular group meetings, he said, Alice will no longer be this. And instead, I'm going to put so-and-so. I was mad as a hornet. And long story short, I ended up at UT in the department of journalism. He never knew I was mad as a hornet, and I didn't remember that conversation about, year two, somebody else is going to get that part of your job. And after I'd been at UT for a year or two, I thought, Oh. I left because I was mad, but he really did do what he said he was going to do, and I shouldn't have been surprised. Well, I left, and about the time I left, he got indicted by the Kansas FBI and thrown into the penitentiary for some illegal money stuff with the continued education. I didn't know a thing about it, but I just dodged a bullet. And that's sort of been the story of my life. I just dodged a bullet during my eclectic career.

AW:

So you went to UT to finish up your PhD?

AVW:

To start.

AW:

To start a PhD, rather.

AVW:

I had taken one journalism class. It was at Dodge City Community College while I was a staff member, and it was a photography class. I wasn't very hot at it, but it was wonderful teacher and so—

AW:

So what happened to counseling?

AVW:

Well, the president said, "You'll end up in a mental institution with all those patients." And so I sort of—oh, I'll tell you what happened to counseling. I really enjoyed that job at Dodge City Community College. Especially with the people who knew how to do the job training me how to

do it. And then I had a romantic encounter with—a twelve-year encounter—with a manager of a TV station who also told me how to work all the media—

AW:

In Dodge City?

AVW:

He was in another town, but I was in Dodge City.

AW:

But in Kansas?

AVW:

Yeah.

AW:

While you were in Kansas.

AVW:

In that Dodge City area. He was from Dodge City. He's a general manager of a TV station, he told me how to work all the radio and TV and newsprint. And so I had that. And so it occurred to me when I was buying advertising for Dodge City Community College and sort of making all this up as I went along, and just hoping that people who were selling me the ads were really producing stuff that was quality—(whispers) probably not. I thought to myself, there are probably people out there who really know how to do this, how to make media buys, how to make them strategically, and how to leverage that money and how to put together really compelling messages. I wonder how they do it. And I've always loved advertising. So I decided, I'm going to UT Austin, after going through where I'm going to go, and I'm going to get my PhD in advertising.

Long story short, I went, and went to journalism instead because staff members in advertising, when I showed up at UT unannounced, and I showed up in between semesters, nobody was there in advertising except for the staff members. And so I was telling them my great plan, I'm coming here to get my PhD in advertising. They said, Don't come to this department now. They said, Go downstairs to journalism and tell them you're interested in advertising, but that you'll sign up for journalism and they'll let you take as much advertising as you want. And I did and they did and it all turned out fine. It was an emotionally healthier environment in journalism that I didn't have to go through a whole lot of shenanigans that the other department was suffering at the time. And they just rolled out the red carpet and paid me buckets of money.

AW:

To go to graduate school?

AVW:

Oh, yes. Buckets of money. So when I realized buckets of money was going to be coming in, I went back to my president, when I was still working, there at Dodge City Community College, and I said, "Guess how much they're going to pay me?" I think they paid me about—it seemed like trillions of dollars. It could've been twelve thousand or eighteen thousand dollars a year. They waived all my tuition and fees and—

AW:

This would've been in the mid-nineties? Is that right?

AVW:

Eighty-seven.

AW:

Eight-seven.

AVW:

Eighty-seven to '91. And all I had to do was take nine graduate hours and maintain at least a B average, which seemed very easy to me when I was sitting in Dodge City, Kansas. Well, let's remember people going into a PhD program in journalism are very likely to have had journalism.

AW:

Right.

AVW:

So here I am, out of my element once again. But I managed to finish the PhD in three and a half years with a lot of weeping, wailing, and gnashing of my teeth emotionally. And decided, I don't think I'm going to try to fit this round peg into a square hole again. And during my dissertation defense, they knew not to ask me, So what's your next research going to be on? I thought, God, this is more than I ever wanted to do. And so my dean hired me before I finished to become the college's first full-time fund development person. So I was doing that full-time while I was finishing my PhD, which was very easy because I said to him, "Hey, could I use my office?" God, they gave me a corner office with glass from top to ceiling. I overlooked the place where the people signed up for Austin City Limits, every time, you have to get in line in a queue.

AW:

I know right where that is.

AVW:

Okay. Well I was in the rusty bucket in a corner office on the fourth floor, still a PhD student and bringing in this—for all intents and purposes, as far as I was concerned, a multi-trillion dollars salary a year. But the person in the career center in that college had befriended me because we were about the same age. And she'd take me on all the interviews when newspapers and the AP and all that were coming in to interview our undergraduate and graduate students. So I just got to go for a free lunch over at the faculty center for which I was not eligible and just have a high old time and think I was really something. But I looked to her when the dean offered me this full-time job when I wasn't finished yet, and I said, "What would you do?" She said, "Here's what I'd do. Take the full-time job and get a line-item on his budget. And then if you find out after a year or two you can't finish the PhD, then just back it off for a semester and go part-time and then finish." Well it turned out all that theoretical stuff that was so hard for me to take, when it comes down to doing something, I will do something. So it was duck soup finishing my experiment, the dissertation and blah, blah, blah. And I had a full-time job in the process. So then that dean leaves and I proactively left a little before he left, and it happened to coincide to make me available to take a real, hard-core, almost sixteen hours a day, four-day seminar called "Money and You." Which bottom line helped me clarify what I thought my cause in life was. [It] helped me notice I might have a knack for financial investing, helped me get my grandiose ego more into check about what my role in life might be. A friend from my leadership Austin class, because I'd been doing that while I was finishing my PhD and had this full-time job—because they had told me at the Austin Chamber of Commerce, "You will not get into Leadership Austin the first time because you haven't done enough community service here." Well, I can make most anybody, including me, sound like Mother Teresa so I got in the first year.

I was still kind of surprised, but I had those three things going on, and I made some good friends in that class, including Lynn Denton who was an assistant vice chancellor here. Long story short, while I was between jobs, she called me and she said—oh no, that's another story. Anyway, she asked me to come over to the Texas Department of Health and help her for four weeks because this commissioner, David Smith, hello, former Texas Tech University system chancellor was kicking off this infant immunization program and she was supposed to do a press conference and she didn't even know what that was, could I come help her for four weeks? I said—and I don't know that it dawned on her that I was a former PR person because we were friends, we weren't comparing vitae or anything like that, or resumes. And I said, "Yes, but I can't come every day, and I can't stay all day, because I have a lot of things already planned with my friends. We're going out to lunch and we're doing this and that, but I'll help you as I can, if that's okay." She said, "I'm so desperate. If you can just show up." So that four week—I thought it was a volunteer thing, and she said, "I think we can pay you about six dollars an hour. I thought, six dollars an hour? I've got a PhD. But wait a minute. I just went through this Money and You thing where I realized I need to get a check on this grandiose ego, and she's a friend, so what the heck. Turned out to be \$5.75 an hour.

AW:

(laughs) Not even six.

AVW:

I had no desk—

AW:

Austin wasn't that cheap to live in in 1991.

AVW:

Well, but my romantic interest who was this TV station manager had decided he'd move to Austin with me. He had become an MBA student at St. Edward's University, and between the two of us, it was duck soup. And plus, UT Austin was paying my way.

AW:

Oh okay, that makes a big difference.

AVW:

I had a home to sell in Dodge City to buy one in Austin. So—oh, and I forgot—at the divorce—Chris had taught me the dental practice. He'd also taught me farming. So I knew exactly where I stood legally and I knew how to divide by two. And my attorney said to me afterwards, he said, "This could never have turned out the way it did unless you had known everything." I didn't want to know anything. Chris is the one who thought that the spouse ought to know everything. And [in] hindsight, I agree. So to his credit, even though it may have been at the top of his lungs and shoving it down my throat when I didn't want it, I knew it. I never reached his level. He was gifted and self-taught and did his due diligence to get himself prepared for all of this. It's just like the goose that laid the golden egg. He had no idea that with a good plan and a win-win kind of approach that we would have crop after crop out in that desert.

AW:

Well you can't predict that part.

AVW:

Unh-uh. And I'm so happy for him. And everybody who was associated with him financially—because that tide raised all the boats. Yeah. Including mine. And I didn't even want to be in the boat. (AW laughs) So there I am at UT Austin, completely out of my element, and—but anyway, I managed to survive.

AW:

And your dean leaves but you leave ahead of him?

AVW:

Yes.

AW:

Is that when you wound up here?

AVW:

That's when I wound up at that seminar that really changed me to a very deep level in lots of dimensions of my life. Financially, as far as having a life's mission, as far as getting a recognizing and dealing as best I know with the grandiosity part of my ego and all of that. Just on lots of dimensions. So this four-week invitation at \$5.75 an hour turned out to be a fourteen-year career that ended with my number eighth retirement from Texas Tech. So I came in under David Smith's umbrella, and I had a little chit-chat with myself. If I'm going in as—what would I want to call it? When a student is favored by a teacher—oh, the teacher's pet! If I'm going in as teacher's pet, I need to know that if the teacher leaves, I'm history, too.

AW:

And particularly that teacher, because when he left, there were a lot of people glad to see him go.

AVW:

I'd already had that conversation with myself. I was happy for—

AW:

So I mean, how do you keep—what I'm getting at is how, if you come in with that person, they leave—not with the dogs after them, but you know, in not the best shape—how do you shed yourself of that connection?

AVW:

When I arrived here, my friend [Lynn 1:13:51] and my marching orders were to bring in a new visual identity system. Remember the cotton bolls? She took all that brunt. She's a kind-hearted person, and really a win-win kind of person and very smart. It was hard to see her take all of that. When all of that was coming down, or even shortly before, because they were completely out of space in the office, I took a secretary's desk that was in a hallway, and that was my desk over in the administration building. And they moved me over to the Bank of America building on the fifth floor, right under Skyviews. Well, remember my grandiosity. Right before I got into a grandiose snit about that, an administrative assistant had adopted me. She was supposed to report to somebody else, but she told Lynn, "This other person never uses me for anything, I'm going to work with Alice." Well, fine with me. I hadn't figured out what she was going to do. Anyway, and she was an old-time around here. I got blessed because of her with a housekeeping seal of approval because of my association with her. She got me in to meet all the deans here over at the

Health Sciences Center—just everybody that I needed to meet on campus and around town, because she was from Levelland. She knew—

AW:

And who—

AVW:

Sheryl Epperson. You ever heard of her?

AW:

Is she kin to Andy Epperson in the Epperson's—Dr. Epperson, the dentist? Speaking of dentists?

AVW:

I don't think so. She's from the Levelland Eppersons.

AW:

Just curious.

AVW:

So when I would go into meet deans, rather than the deans becoming distracted by where I worked and whom I worked for, here I come in with this unassuming, well-known, very respected administrative assistant whom they are hugging and kissing on the cheek. So then I thought, Oh my God, I've hit pay dirt here. First of all, she said to me as I was trying to find my way around town, because that isn't my long suit—she said, "Would you like for me to drive you around town?" I said, "Oh my gosh, yes." Because then I didn't spend an extra hour or two finding every place. And then I said, "As long as you're driving, just come in and be part of the meeting." Well, it turns out she's a strong writer and a terrific editor. And she would catch things that were important to what she knew I was trying to accomplish and would sometimes go over my head. And when we'd compare notes, she'd say, Don't forget this person. Don't forget how that is connected to that, of things that I would have otherwise missed. It was like having my own personal angel coming in the form of an unassuming administrative assistant. So then the whole crowd got distracted by the cotton bowls. Long story short Andy, here's my version of it: I never had a certain job to do at Texas Tech. And even when I seemingly did, there was such as changeover in who was on first and who was in charge that they would come in and change it every six or twelve months. So I called it freelancing at Texas Tech.

AW:

I do remember when we rode to Lawton, we talked a little bit about what you did and I never did quite—I couldn't quite peg in my mind, okay, where does this fit? It really was freelancing, wasn't it?

AVW:

Yeah. It really was. But nobody seemed to cross me. Sometimes, people would say, "What do you do?" Or they'd ask other people, "What does she do?" And sometimes I took a little bit of offense, but eventually I sort of realized that I had naturally developed a niche for myself that others either don't want to do, nobody has the presence of mind to tell somebody to do, or that they don't know how to do. Because I think what my niche is, [is] I can take an organization and tilt it ninety degrees and kind of look across all the different kinds of silos and I can see it from that perspective and start connecting the dots of—and try to look at it from a win-win of whomever I'm working with, what is it that they really need, and keep it in mind as I'm going and meeting other people. And then I can double back and make some connections of where people ought to be connected. And I can do this across a town, I can do it across a state, and across issues, kind of take a ninety degrees sideways look at it.

And so I was just let loose to my own devices. And although in theory, I had someone to report to, most of whoever I was reporting to were entangled in real or perceived controversies. So I didn't know it was going to turn out this way. I just figured every day at Texas Tech was a gift and really, Andy, what I was hoping for were three years here. Because if I could have three years here, somehow, in all the retirement system stuff, I would come out very sweet. Because even though you can hear I'm a job-hopper and I've hopped from state to state, it turns out that all the places I hopped, all of those retirement systems talk to each other.

AW:

Oh, cool.

AVW:

Who would've thought?

AW:

Yeah. That's very good.

AVW:

So I was just praying for three years. So David Smith leaves at about year two and a half. And they put Don Haragan in as temporary chancellor—I just swoon at the thought of Don Haragan.

AW:

He is terrific.

AVW:

Oh my gosh. Okay. So they put in Don Haragan. And I'm going to credit Dr. Margaret Luther and Sally Post for saving me. Because they're long-timers around here, and whatever I was doing, I think they understood, to some degree, that I was doing it in a win-win kind of way, that

I really liked Lubbock, and I really liked West Texas, and I wasn't just here for the job. I think that they told Don Haragan to keep me. And he listened to them—Margaret Luther, Sally Post. I think those—

AW:

They are two great people also.

AVW:

Yeah.

AW:

You couldn't do better than the three of those.

AVW:

Yeah. So then it comes time for me to have the talk with Don Haragan. And I said to him—I'm still over in the bank building, over there with Michelle Hougland, who's still around, and Sheryl Epperson. Sheryl was really excited about moving over to the bank building. She said, "Oh, that's going to be a blast." Because she used to work in human sciences and Skyviews was up there, she knew everybody. We got lots of free Coca-Colas when they were fixing rolls or something, we'd call—she'd call. And so Skyviews became our conference room, where I did a lot of my speed networking. So everywhere I turned, Andy, there was, unbeknownst to me some unsuspecting person being the wind beneath my wings. I just cannot be grateful enough.

So then the Turkish graduate students decide I'm going to go with them to Turkey that summer that I'm about to have the talk with Don Haragan. So Margaret has it all fixed up somehow. She calls, and she said, "I want to get you an appointment with Jon Whitmore," who I remembered from UT Austin when he used to be the dean of arts and performing arts, blah, blah, blah. He didn't remember me, but I knew his development person, with whom I'm still good friends. So I said, "Okay, what does he want to talk about?" She said, "Fund development." You know, I do the money—I like to invest it and get it and give it. I don't like to go out and get it. And I said, Oh, Bess Haley just talk to me about that, because by that time, Don Haragan had said—I went to have the talk with Don. I thought, Oh, well at least it's coming from Don and I'll get to be in his presence for at least five minutes. So we went in and we chatted. And about the first thing out of his mouth was, "We want to keep you." I said, "You want to keep me?" I think I said it twice. "You want to keep me?" He said, "Yes, so start looking around and figure out what you want to do. If you want to teach over in communication or do fundraising—" I said, "Listen, could you somehow figure out how to keep me through January 15th of the next coming year? Because I really need that in order to do my retirement. Don't pull the trigger until after that. Could you do that for me?" He said, "Oh, sure." Well by then, Margaret and Sally were working there behind the scenes, and they had me talk to Jon Whitmore. I was kind of bummed out about talking about being a fundraiser. And the first things out of his mouth were community colleges. I said, "Oh

my God, I love community colleges. I used to work for Dodge City,” blah, blah, blah. He said, “That’s what we want you to do.” And I—before he could even finish his sentence, I waved at him and I said, “Count me in.” So they put me over in undergraduate admissions. And I was a community college liaison. And I didn’t really know how to work that because they’re a high-performance sales team over there, going out to high schools and working their magic.

AW:

As I recall from my friend over there, it was a pretty high-stress environment, too.

AVW:

It wasn’t for me, but I could see that for some of them—that friend is a high-performance person who knew how to get the job done, but wasn’t sometimes allowed to do it. And/or if she did it, wasn’t—because it all moved so fast and people were coming and going in those roles. People didn’t understand the depth at which her relationships were and the importance of that. And things she was looking after that may have seemed optional to some people, but in my perspective, were those high-performance leverage points. But you have to know a lot and you have to have experienced a lot in some of that business and elsewhere.

AW:

Yeah, and with the revolving doors you said above her, how would you ever learn? You wouldn’t be there long enough to understand.

AVW:

Right. Or even if the door isn’t revolving, they have so many fish to fry with some of the others doing “thou shalt” down to them, that unless you have the wisdom or experience or presence of mind to be able to notice what she was up to, it could be as easily lost about what she was doing, as about what I was doing. I just happened to have well-wishers all along the way, for whatever reason, spontaneously supporting me even when some of them probably didn’t even notice, is the truth of it. She didn’t have the advocates that somehow stepped forward for me. That’s how I see it.

AW:

No, it sounds very accurate.

AVW:

I admired her tremendously. And I think she was annoyed because she was the community college person. And here I am getting shoved into this job.

AW:

Oh, I never heard her say anything about you.

AVW:

She had every right to feel that way.

AW:

Yeah, no, I didn't pick—the difficulties that she saw were all in the other directions.

AVW:

And I had sympathy for some of those upper ones. I had, I think, five or six different supervisors over a one-month period one time. Which included some of the ones that may have been overlooking or not understanding her importance. Okay, so then I'm still freelancing—okay, so then they said, community college liaison, and I never knew exactly what to do with it except one time I was sitting down talking to Michael Shonrock and he said, "Here's how you do that job." He said, "You focus on the three big community college districts, Tarrant County, Collin County, Dallas County, for example. I could have that same example down in South Texas with those big communities. But nevertheless, for example, go up there and focus on them and get in with their honors program, their student government program and their service learning program. Work those relationships and they'll all come over here." I thought, Oh my God, he's right.

So then when I actually had a job and knowing what would work, I knew it would work after he said it, I pronounced I was moving to Dallas. Well, somehow no one else thought that I was moving to Dallas, and I just assumed, they moved here and paid for it, they'd move me there and paid for it. Jim Brink got me out of what could've been some missteps on my part and they said, No, you're not moving, we want you to stay in Lubbock. Which was sort of a surprise. Very flattering. And Tibor Nagy chimed in, "No, you've got to stay here." So I guess some people thought I was doing something right.

So I stayed and then, you know, multiple jobs and multiple people—I just kept kind of working the going out and meeting people and making all the connections. And what I used to do with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board right before I came here—right in between the health department, again, David Smith got Lynn the job there, because David Smith had been trying to get Lynn here since he came here and he finally talked her into it. She didn't like West Texas. She said, "I'll never come to West Texas, I don't like West Texas." I think that mindset may have torpedoed her from the get-go, because you just don't say something like that to anybody anywhere about West Texas. No matter where you are, you don't. Well see, I came here in 1999 with my Leadership Texas class and fell in love with the place and I thought, "I'm moving there when I retire." Well, so when Lynn said to me, "If I can figure out something for you to do at Texas Tech, will you come?" It's like, oh, yes. Because that was on my to-do list without a job, and this was just gravy. And they paid me to move here and gave me a job. So I didn't realize it, but when I arrived, I was already talking the party line. I wanted to move here. I didn't know that was what I should be saying, but that was true. So anyway, there I am. So it really annoyed me when I was working on these big agencies, when they got a new commissioner they ditched whatever they were doing and coming with something new. And

likely they would ditch what **Lynn** and I were doing. She is brilliant. Not trained in any of this stuff, she's a music therapist, for Pete's sake.

AW:

Really?

AVW:

Yes. Anyway, that's another whole story that I hope somebody will talk to her someday and get that story. I'd love it if you would talk to her.

AW:

Where is she?

AVW:

She's in Switzerland, living out her dream retirement. She is the marketing director for a non-profit human rights, human welfare group.

AW:

Boy. Next time I'm in Switzerland—

AVW:

Well, she's available by phone. I'd love to her story. Anyway. So a new commissioner came in to the Texas department of health and I was trying to find my way over there and that's when she called and said—oh, she got the job at the coordinating board. And I e-mailed her and I said, "Oh, I have this fabulous e-mail list of six hundred people and they will all help you in this new job." I thought, six hundred people, life is sweet. Now I have a list of several thousand. And so I told her, "Contact all these people. Here are the e-mail addresses, just paste it in something," blah, blah, blah, the way I did with that president at Dodge City Community College. You do this, you stand up and you wave and pretty soon I was working for him. She sends me back this e-mail saying, "So how busy are you?" Long story short, I got loaned for a year and a half from the Texas department of health which they said could never happen, over to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and while the new commissioner at the coordinating board was saying, "They'll never loan her." I was already moved into one of the offices a floor below him. And so—but what annoyed me was we lost excellent stuff with our college for Texans campaign when a new commissioner came in and said, That's done. So here we start a new campaign over at the coordinating board and eventually that commissioner left, and they said, We're done with that. That's when I decided to systematically carry with me from the Texas department of health, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and everybody I meet forever and ever, amen, who wants to stay on my list, I'm carrying you with me. Because I don't care what you're doing, I don't care what I'm doing, I don't care how many commissioners come and go and give some

“thou shalts” that screw up the stuff that we know is right and good, we’re all going to hang together and be there for each other, however all this stuff evolves. So that’s what I did. I got mad again, see. And so that’s how I carry these lists with me.

AW:

Cool. So a couple of quick questions.

AVW:

(whispers) I don’t have any quick answers.

AW:

This is where you wanted to retire and you’ve retired, and now you’re moving?

AVW:

I started having some challenges with my eyes.

AW:

Yeah, I remember Mary Ann telling me that.

AVW:

I’ve had three surgeries, two dozen eye shots, some over here, and I’m thinking, you know, someday someone might say to me, “You can’t drive anymore.” I think I’d rather be in a smaller place where I can either walk there or somebody will know me and be willing to take me. Also, I’d like warmer. Because that’s why I moved to Texas to begin with from Kansas, to get to warmer. And I sort of knew when I moved to Lubbock, wait, wait a minute, I’m back dragging on this temperature thing.

AW:

You’re back to Kansas.

AVW:

So who knows what the real reason is because I may be saying this and two or three years later I’ll say, Wait a minute. The real reason I did that—kind of like going to UT.

AW:

I’m just curious. I wouldn’t have thought about until you made that mention. Well, the other thing that I would like to know about, because in some ways I know you best about this through my wife and through Jennifer and other people, is this terrific commitment you have to animals, or what seems to me to be a terrific commitment to animals.

AVW:

My mother tells a story: when I was two or three, I went to visit her mother in Arkansas, then all of a sudden they had lost track of me, and when they found me, I was outside pulling up grass and feeding it to a calf who'd been crying. I think it's in my DNA. I couldn't tell you why because neither of my parents were that interested. My father said he went hunting once with his father and shot a rabbit and then when he realized that rabbit was dead he laid down and cried and never went hunting again. That's a close as I can come to a story. My mother was afraid of animals and we had pets in my home when I was growing up—a dog, several dogs, some fish, turtles, one bird, one cat.

For me, looking into the eyes of another species is like mainlining God. So when I may not have much patience or respect for some of my own species, somehow that other connection with other species puts me into a different dimension for which I'm eternally grateful. Now, having had 146 cats go through my own home as foster cats over a thirty-six month period, sometimes you wouldn't know that that's how I felt about it. And I have a much deeper respect for the old adage about herding cats. I know how hard that is. I had to herd a few of them this morning when the movers came. So that's the very deep reason.

AW:

So what—I cannot believe that you're actually going to be retiring.

AVW:

No, no.

AW:

What's your next gig?

AVW:

My next gig after number eight retirement from Texas Tech was the hundred and forty-six cats over that three-year time period. Plus, I was doing rotary; I was the president of our local rotary club's foundation. I was their newsletter editor for three years. They propelled me into the 51 Club, district 5730, district foundation chair position for three years. For three years, I oversaw the Lou Diekemper South Plains Food Bank Luncheon. And then remember, I have this 856 GO Center organization that I nurture, which means if they need something, I try to find who has it, so I have this e-mail lists for the GO Centers that requires some care and feeding.¹ It's somewhat labor-intensive. Then, I became kind of the communications liaison for the forty-six-year-old CEO round table that like rotary, meets every week. So I'm in rotary every Wednesday, Lion's Club every Tuesday, and the CEO round table every Saturday—

¹ GO Centers were a support resource group meant to help college students. See "GO Centers help students achieve success in higher education," Lubbock Avalanche-Journal May 13, 2010 (accessed September 5, 2019), <https://www.lubbockonline.com/article/20100513/LIFESTYLE/305139772>.

AW:

That's a full-time job right there.

AVW:

Working all these lists.

AW:

Have you been involved in rotary before you got to Lubbock?

AVW:

Only as speaker. When I was brand-new to the Shots Across Texas campaign at the health department, getting \$5.75 an hour, one of my first assignments was to go to Corpus Christi because they were having a district rotary meeting, and because rotary's big in Polio Plus, they were interested in our immunization campaign. So here I am, two weeks on the job, can hardly find my own parking space at the health department, I'm going off to Corpus Christi to act like an expert about immunizations. So I found some public health people down in that area and I said, "Please attend this thing, and if one Rotarian utters any question about anything slightly medical, you spontaneously jump up out of your chair and you talk about it. Because I don't know any of that, I only know the marketing plans." Fortunately, no one asked a question, thank God.

But I began to meet some of the wonderful people in public health. I thought MPH stood for miles per hour, I had no idea it stood for Master's in Public Health. Truly, that is no joke. And then when I began to understand how people with master's in public health, master's in public administration, that they know how to look at and work systems that I don't even know exist. I just had a profound respect for them and what they knew how to do that Lynn and I had been hired to do as newcomers. You know, that doesn't build goodwill and friendships, to be the new kid on the block and here you are, having other people marching to your orders who really know how to do this stuff. Nevertheless, there you were.

So rotary. I would go speak to rotary for Shots Across Texas. I'm sure I spoke to rotary about—I can't remember, but I had a dozen or so speaking gigs with rotary. That's all I knew. So that darling Sheryl Santos—remember the dean of education with the long, red fingernails, the red hair and red boa? When I lived in Austin, she shows up at the coordinating board saying she wants to meet me. I said, "A dean from a university wants to come and meet me?" here she sails in in all her radiant glory and long story short, she's still one of my best friends. So she took me to rotary. She said, "Do not be put off that every week they sing. They say the pledge of allegiance, they pray and they also talk about everybody who's sick or dead. Just let that slide by and listen for service above self and the values that they have, the four-way test."

Well, it used to be over at McInturff, before they ran out of space over there and we had to move to the First United Methodist Church. So I walked in to that first rotary meeting, and here I am, single. I looked at all these men and I said, "Count me in!" (AW laughs) And then the other stuff

came along. And so one of my best friends in Wichita, Kansas, her husband is like a forty-year Rotarian, and she said to me, "But most of those guys are married." I said, "I wasn't looking to take somebody home, I just wanted to have lunch with some nice men." And so that worked out really well. I don't think Monte Monroe knows that version of the story.

AW:

Good. (both laugh) I like to have a one-up on Monte. All right. Well I'm sure there are other things that I would like to ask about, but right now, I'm going to ask: on the materials that you brought, all these things, are these things you would like to donate?

AVW:

Uh-huh.

AW:

Great.

AVW:

And let me say one, that you haven't asked me about that's significant to me that not too many people know about. I have formed a lot of endowments, either with Texas Tech, the Lubbock area—

AW:

Actually, I saw some of that one your—

AVW:

I'd like somebody to know about it.

AW:

How did you do that? How do you do that? How does it occur to you to say, I'm going to form an endowment?

AVW:

I learned it from Curtis Meadows who founded the Meadows Foundation up in Dallas. He was as speaker at one of my—when I was a fund development officer, he came and spoke about how they did it, that planted the seed. Curtis Meadows doesn't know me from Adam, but that's when it happened. Then I read in the newspaper about a guy who used to work for UPS and never made more than sixteen thousand dollars a year and ended up donating multimillions of dollars. Then I read about a woman who worked for the IRS all of her life and never made more than six thousand dollars a year. She ended up donating multimillions of dollars to causes she believed in

and that's when I thought, I can do something, too. It may not be to that big a level, it may be, but I can do something, too.

AW:

So how does the person that makes six thousand a year donate multimillions? Do they do that by clever investing of their money, or do they do that by getting other people involved?

AVW:

The story told about this guy is, UPS offered stock to their employees and so he would always either take the stock or he started buying the stock. He and his wife lived very modestly and he just kept working there and so this stock that way was the multimillions of dollars he ended up with. The woman with the IRS—her name is Anne Scheiber—these are my heroes. I have pictures of them that are articles about them. I think she may have invested in the stock market. But the thing is, see, at Texas Tech and all these state agencies and so forth, we have 401(k), 403(b), we have the entire employee retirement system, the entire teacher retirement system, they're doing the same thing. And they're doing it just as magnificently as anybody that I've seen who does investing.

So one of my colleagues told me, "Go take a look at all of this, because what you're doing, they're doing too." I thought, ugh, whenever I quit or retire, I'm going to take all that money and do it myself. I did not. I'm living on ERS. I'm living like a queen by my standards on my ERS retirement. But only because somebody said, "You better look at that." And I was doing it because I thought, They'll never have Social Security by the time all of us baby boomers get there. And I don't know what they're doing over there, but it'll never be as good as what I'm doing. Well, it may be, so now I have two streams. I don't know if that answered your question. That's how I'm doing it. It can be done by anybody. And people will tell you, Oh, you can't do it on a salary. You have to start a business. You have to be doing real estate. Well, maybe so, but look at that guy on sixteen thousand a year. Look at that woman on six thousand a year. And look at me job-hopping from state agency to state agency. They aren't real known for high salaries. I'm very grateful for all the salaries I had, including the \$5.75 an hour. Yeah.

AW:

Cool. Very good.

AVW:

I go around to people who invite me and give talks. I had to give one of those talks this morning while the movers were packing up my house to Dr. Comfort Pratt, over in Spanish, who does the Sigma Delta Pi that I endowed at the ten thousand dollar level, and she got us national publicity over that. I forgot what you asked me, but—

AW:

No, that's—all right. I'm going to end it right now because I need to digest some of this, but I know how to get a hold of you. I get down to that part of Texas all the time doing the work I do, so when I come up with some follow-up questions, if you wouldn't mind, I would like to be able to do that. I can do it over the phone, but I prefer to do it in person.

AVW:

Okay. And while you are doing your work, and especially if you bring Mary Ann, maybe we can figure out some stuff that we can all do together.

AW:

Good. Getting her out of town is not easy.

AVW:

Oh okay, then if you can't get her out—

AW:

She gets up every morning at four o'clock and rides her bicycle and feeds cats in the neighborhood.

AVW:

Oh, God.

AW:

Every morning—

AVW:

She's my heroine.

AW:

The notion that she—you know, I've asked. Why don't we do this—she said, "I've got those animals. They're out there every morning on the curb waiting for me." She just won't do it. She won't leave town. She used to travel, but she won't anymore.

AVW:

I don't like to travel either.

AW:

Well I don't think the travel bothers her so much, but she's not about to leave her cats.

AVW:

Okay, so listen. Bob—

AW:

She'd love to do something. Bob, yeah—

AVW:

No, Bob Hickerson.

AW:

Oh, Bob Hickerson.

AVW:

You know him. We've been friends for many agencies and many years ago. So I stayed with him and Judy when I was house hunting down there, and he already has recruited me to the university center board. And the next morning I had the presence of mind to say, "How often do they meet?" So there. If you scheme up something to do on a volunteer basis, count me in.

AW:

Okay. Because I've said to my wife many times that what you're doing is gallant and it's admirable, but as intelligent as you are and as hard as you work and as much as you believe about this, if you can learn to multiply your efforts through other people, you can do so much more.

AVW:

Well, she did through me.

AW:

Well, but she navigates the world with a different sextant than I use, and I'm not quite sure how she goes about it but I think she would love to do something.

AVW:

There is a wildlife rescue down there close, Kendalia, that also takes cats, immune-compromised cats, and I have six of those, including Leonard Wilkinson, that I'm moving to Fredericksburg. He was the last one I took in. She said, "They're going to put him down because he has AIDS." I said, "Bring him over." I love Leonard. But they keep their last names so I can remember who gave them to me.

AW:

So my wife brought him over?

AVW:

Yeah.

AW:

Cool. Well, we will visit more.

AVW:

Okay.

AW:

All right. I'm going to say thanks and stop this because I'm about to run out of battery. Thank you very much, Alice, especially on a difficult day, moving day and movers and all that.

AVW:

My kindergarten teacher wrote on my report card, "She spends too much time talking to her friends." I thought, why are we here?

AW:

(laughs) Exactly. That's not a curse, that's a blessing. Thanks.

End of interview.