

**Oral History Interview of
Lee Harris**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
October 15, 2015
Fort Stockton, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Fort Stockton Interview Project***

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Transcript Overview:

This oral history interview features Lee Harris of Fort Stockton, Texas. Harris talks about running a service station, her two marriages, and her ranch. Harris also discusses her children, grandchildren, and retirement.

Length of Interview: 01:19:46

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Keywords

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Lee Harris (LH):

And the doctor had put them together, and they solidified, and so, hey look I can raise my arms now. I wrote a check the other day for my daughter and she said, "Oh my god you can write."

Jody Day (JD):

That's wonderful.

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

Do you understand what it is we're doing?

Lee Harris (LH):

Have no idea, she said you played the guitar and sung.

AW:

Okay let me tell you about it. I do, but that's part of why I'm here.

LH:

I think I've heard you because you've probably been up here, and I used to could drive. I can't drive now, so I'll probably be able to in a month or two, but I haven't healed that well yet, but I'm pretty sure I've heard you.

AW:

Yeah, I used to play a lot at the Annie Riggs on the patio and off the patio, both, and I've done a number of things down here but I—

LH:

And down on the park.

AW:

Yeah, I played at the Zero Stone one year.

LH:

I built that gazebo.

AW:

Did you?

LH:

Yes.

AW:
Really?

LH:
I was working for the county at the time; they gave me a trophy for it.

AW:
I wish they would've done it, had us out there playing when it was cool weather. Well let me—
I'm working with Texas Tech, with the archive, and we collect things to document the history of
this part of the world, and among those things besides letters and journals and photographs and
all the kinds of things that you would expect to be at an archive—

LH:
Wait a minute you're a Red Raider?

AW:
Yes ma'am.

LH:
Okay, I've got to get this straight.

AW:
Oh so what are you?

LH:
I'm a Texan.

AW:
Oh that's okay, so are we (laughter) we're just—

LH:
I have a story for that.

AW:
Okay.

LH:
Do you know The Robbins that lived here? Ranchers, millionaires.

AW:

I know of them.

LH:

Okay Winnibess had dual citizenship, Canadian and American. We had this preacher that took a whole bunch of people on a tour to the Holy Lands, and he was actually, he was a chaplain in the service, but he had retired and came here as their minister, and so Winnibess and Phillip went and also there was a lot of other people that went too like Betty Howell and Buzz and—do you know people here?

JD:

Some, I know Winnibess and Victor Gene.

LH:

Okay, if you know anybody here, you knew Betty Howell.

JD:

I think. Was she in Garden Club? Right.

LH:

Best teacher in the country okay. Anyway, Judy Lighter, and she was just Canadian, well the airplane was hijacked and when they got to Judy Lighter, and she was Canadian they pulled her aside. Well, here's Winnebess and she's dual citizenship, what does she say? Does she say I'm Canadian? So when they got to her she said, "I'm a Texan!" The man that was holding the guns on us, "Oh Ms. Robbins I got my training at San Antonio, I love Texas!" From then on, I don't say I'm American, I don't say who—I'm a Texan.

AW:

Yeah, well that's good. I like that.

JD:

I didn't know that story.

AW:

That's a terrific story, so now I know what to do if I'm hijacked.

LH:

There you go.

AW:

Well, what we do in our archive besides collecting documents is that we do these oral history interviews, and the object of them is for someone in the future, two hundred years from now maybe, can hear you say in your own voice and your own words, your own story, so that's what we're doing. That's it. So I'm going to give you my card, so you have that. I'm going to say at the beginning now, this is the fifteenth of October, although from outside you'd think it was the fifteenth of July, it's so hot, year 2015, Andy Wilkinson here in the nice public library at Ft. Stockton, and Ms. Harris do you spell your first name L double E?

LH:

My first name is Mamie.

AW:

Mamie, M-a-m-i-e?

LH:

No kin to Mamie Eisenhower.

AW:

Really? And—well you're young enough to be named after her maybe.

LH:

No, I was named after my mother's best friend.

AW:

Really, so—

LH:

My mother's name was Myrtle, her best friend's name was Mamie, and so she named me Mamie Lee and Mamie named hers Myrtle Lee, here baby.

AW:

So is it L double E, E?

LH:

Yeah, L double E.

AW:

What was your maiden name?

LH:

Abbott?

AW:

A-b-b-o-t-t?

LH:

You know Greg? (Laughs)

AW:

Mhmm Is that the same? Okay, just one T then, and your last name is Harris, H-a-r-r-i-s?

LH:

Yes.

AW:

Great, what's your date of birth?

LH:

Five, eight, twenty-nine, a woman that will tell her age will tell anything.

AW:

(Laughs) That's true. I've quit even worrying about my age, when I say what year, people say what century. But where were you born?

LH:

I don't know if you know where the Germania Oil Field is in between Stanton and Midland, but that's where I was born. Daddy ran a gin, and the doctor lived about a mile and a half from where the house was, and they made home deliveries at that time. I blew in on a sandstorm.

AW:

Well yeah May, early May, that would be right between Stanton and Midland. Did you grow up in that area?

LH:

No sir.

AW:

Where'd you grow up?

LH:

All over Texas.

AW:

Because your daddy was in the oil business, right?

LH:

No, because there was a war on.

AW:

And so you were—the family was moving for—?

LH:

Following defense work. I went to twelve different schools in eleven years.

AW:

My goodness.

LH:

I graduated from the twelfth grade, but when I started to school there was only eleven grades, I skipped the sixth in order to—

AW:

So where did you graduate? What was the last?

LH:

Galena Park

AW:

Galena Park, okay we were just talking about Galena Park.

JD:

I went to first grade there.

AW:

In Houston, yeah well so—

LH:

I still know the school song, you want to sing it?

AW:

I'd like to hear it.

JD:

Sure.

LH:

Jackets, jackets of old Galena Park—

AW:

That's great. I still know my high school song too, and none of my high school classmates know it, so I don't think they knew it then. Well so this would've been about 19—

LH:

'45

AW:

Yeah right so right as the war was—

LH:

On my sixteenth birthday Germany surrendered, VE Day.

AW:

Yeah that's great. What did you do after graduation?

LH:

Well I—help was hard to get, and I was the youngest in the family, and I first went to work for the doctor across the street, Dr. Labrey, and as his receptionist, and then I decided I wanted to be bigtime and catch the bus into Houston, and I got a job at S. H. Chris and Company, and they put me on the counter, and because my cash register checked out every day, they moved me into the office and I learned bookkeeping, and then my sister lost a baby, and she had a little boy that was two years old, and she lived in Combes, Texas. Do you know where Combes is? They call it the Combes mountains, it's outside of Harlingen.

AW:

I don't remember any mountains outside of Harlingen.

LH:

So I went to move to Combes to take care of Bobby and Matilda until—well Reese Oil Company found out I could do bookkeeping, and so they hired me, and it was lots of fun because there was twenty-two boys and only seven girls in the community. God bless the boys I loved them all. (laughs) And from that, I just kind of—in 1950 I married a damn Yankee, and I was, in 1964 I was working for Superior Oil Company in Midland when Bob was in the Navy, and so part of the time I lived in Norfolk, Virginia and then he wanted to come back to Texas so we came back to Texas, and my last little girl was born in Midland. But I was working for Superior Oil Company, and my first husband was a schizo, and I didn't know what schizophrenia was, and he had been diagnosed as that in the Navy, but they didn't let me know it, and so he—there was a good Bob, dearly loved the good Bob, but there was a bad Bob and so we had separated and so he asked me to please come to—I was blaming it on drinking, and he gets down on his knees and says, "Please come to Fort Stockton I promise I'll sober up," blah, blah you know. So in 1964 I moved to Fort Stockton, and a legal secretary, or a bookkeeper, only made two hundred and fifty dollars a month, and I found out I was going to have to get rid of him. I had three children. So I started running a service station.

AW:

Really?

LH:

Got the contract from the highway department, kept it open twenty-four hours a day, I could make eight, nine-hundred dollars a month working there, and I ran it until 1974.

AW:

For ten years.

LH:

I guess actually it was in '75 when I—at that time Nixon had come in, and you couldn't drive but fifty-five miles an hour and gas, you had to follow ahead of time. I couldn't keep my men working twenty-four hours a day, I adopted a little girl, and in the meantime—are you sure you want this recorded?

AW:

Sure.

LH:

Well I shot my first husband.

AW:

Oh really?

LH:

But the chief of Police here told me the only mistake I made was that I used a regular bullet, I should've had magnum. It was just in the arm, God knows what's best, and he directed that—I would've hated to have killed my children's father, and anyway I divorced him and met John Harris, and we got married and—

AW:

What year did you get married the second time?

LH:

I don't know.

AW:

You can estimate.

JD:

Sometime after 1975, or what is it during the time you were at the gas station?

LH:

I probably married Johnny in '67.

AW:

Just for the tape, what was the name of your first husband?

LH:

Well the first one was Thrifty.

AW:

Thrifty?

LH:

Yes sir, and it's where Quality Car Wash is right now, and I sold diesel, and I busted down truck flats, all of that kind of stuff. Then Shamrock contacted me and asked me if—they were building a new station here—and they asked me if I would manage it for them, run it for them, and I said yes, and Dana Simmons was the man from Shamrock that came in, and he brought the plans, and I wanted things like, I wanted a shower so the truck drivers could bathe, I wanted a safe that was in the floor that could be locked and not robbed.

AW:

Yeah, not pulled out by a pickup truck or whatever, yeah.

LH:

I did not want water. I did not want to wash vehicles because Fort Stockton's water was sorry, terrible. It's not now, but back then, I mean we have a reverse osmosis plant now, we didn't then. But I wanted a grease rack where I could change the oil and adjust it for trucks and so forth, and so I went into it in I guess it was—wait a minute, I was here in '64, Johnny and I must've gotten married in '66, but then I ran Shamrock until 1975, and I told Johnny, I'd just adopted a little girl, and I had a ranch when I married Johnny—that's another story I still have it.

AW:

Really?

LH:

It's twelve sections out west of town, but I had gone in with a cousin, he was old, I thought he was old he was in his late seventies, but I would drive him out, and we'd take care of the ranch and I used his bull, bought me some cows, leased some more land and so forth, and so in '75 I said something's got to go, I cannot keep running the service station when I can't keep it open when it should, and the dealer that I was buying gas from was selling some of my gas through his station. I'd filed for hardship, and so his name's Commador Ryan and he lives in Monahans.

AW:

So he was your competitor as well as your supplier?

LH:

So I told Johnny, I cannot be a housewife, take care of a new baby, and I mean I was forty-four when I adopted Mandy, and run the ranch and my service station all, and I said something's got to go I just can't do this, and he said, "What do you want to let go?" And I said, "Well I want to keep the baby (laughter), I want to keep the ranch, I really would like to keep it, and I'd like to keep the house with you and me," and by that time I had two daughters in college and a son in the service, and I said, "I guess I'd like to let the service station go," and he said okay. So I sold out, somebody else wanted it and—

AW:

How many women were running service stations in Fort Stockton in the 1960s and early seventies? Were you the only one?

LH:

I was the only one. There was beautiful young girl that sometimes worked—I don't think Johnny has a service station, but she also did the, you know, and her name was Kathy Barbee, she's divorced Johnny, but sometimes there was a Gulf station west of town, and sometimes Kathy would come out and gas up and so forth, you know, for the people. I don't believe she ever fixed flats, but it's not that hard.

AW:

So you gave up the service station in '75 and ranching and raising the new child by that time. What—where did you learn about ranching?

LH:

I was in Daddy's hip pocket. I was riding horses behind him before I ever could walk, and we always had milk cows, you know that sort of thing, and you lived off the land. My physical therapist is from the Philippines, and I was telling him the joke about the Chinese over in Sanderson.

AW:

What is the joke?

LH:

Well they built a restaurant, they were building that railroad through, and they had—

AW:

Ah, when they were first building it?

LH:

Yeah, and it was the Chinese that were doing all of the work and so they built a restaurant and so the cattle came in, and boy that was good food, he was eating it, and he said, "What kind of meat is this?" And the Chinaman said, "Dog!" He said, "What?" And he said, "Dog!" He said, "Duck quack, quack?" He said, "No dog I mean bow wow." (laughter) And I'll off on Ned [?] because he said that he had eaten dog in the Philippines, and he asked me if I'd ever ate it, and I said, "Not that I know of, but I've eaten, the awful-est animal you could think of eating is a possum and I've eaten possum." Daddy went squirrel hunting, and I mean we lived off the land, we—when I was little that was.

AW:

Yeah, your ranch—so when did you acquire the ranch?

LH:

Well, I was running Thrifty Service Station, and this old man started trading with me, and his named was Charlie Elden, and his mother was an Abbott, and Charlie had a stroke and was having trouble driving and when he'd come up to try to stop, he'd just turn the key off because he couldn't use his foot, and I helped him to where he didn't go through my windows you know, and I'd gas him up and then when I could I'd take him out to the ranch feed. So I found out that Chevron had two sections out there, so I just leased them, and I knew—I worked for Superior in Midland, and so I knew everybody with Chevron and Gulf and so forth. At that time it was Gulf, later Gulf sold to Chevron, but I leased from Gulf and I ended up buying ten cows at—well, I used his bull until I got a pickup truck and got a frame on it, and Charlie and I went to _____ [?] [0:19:57.5] and bought us a bull and jumped it in that, and then we'd kind of ran together, but he owned three sections, I own them now, but you know we—and 1776 wasn't even run through there at that time from Firestone, I mean from Leon Valley Farms to Firestone on that side is my ranch.

AW:

Wow, yeah how are things now? You had good rain the last year and half of this year, right?

LH:

Yes sir, but the thing that happened to me, I always poor-boyed it, and I never thought about anything except taking care of my ranch, but we had a drought, and I could not take care of it, so I sold my cattle and my stepson put a few head, I have a longhorn steer his name is Mike, and you can come out and pet him. He's real sweet but he's got a rack that's over eight feet wide, he's prettier than Bevo too. But I have—I've had some physical things that have happened to me, like falling and shattering a hip and having a knee and part of my leg replaced, almost hemorrhaging to death and major surgery, and I was in the hospital away for a long time. But last year in September, this good looking man knocked on my backdoor, and I, "Well come on in John, how're you doing?" His wife is one of my best friends and he said, "Lee, I want to talk to you. I want to lease your ranch." And I said, "What?" he said, "I want to lease your ranch," he said, "I've overgrazed mine." His name's John Barry and he has—the Mackenzies has everything east of town, just about—Millabees [?] and Mackenzie, love the whole family. Houston's out there, but anyway I said, "John I haven't even thought about it, but I'll tell you what I'm kind of involved with family," and I said, "I have put my two daughter's name on the deeds to my ranch too so, of the nine and a half sections," and I said, "two and a half sections I have to die before Mandy gets it." (Laughs) That's the one I adopted, and I said, "I'd have to talk to them because, and I said, "Tom's just got four or five head out there and he doesn't pay the repairs or anything," and I said, "You'd have to pay the repairs; you'd have to pay the freshwater tap." Oh he said, "I will." And I said, "Well, make me an offer." And he said, "A three year lease, a dollar an acre," he said, "that's what I'm paying the state right now for my lease land out here." I said, "There's six hundred and forty acres in a section." So I said, "Well I don't know

I'll have to talk to the girls." And so Laura called me, and I ask her, and she said, "Mother, it's your ranch, do whatever you want to do, but don't you go lower, that's what everything is leasing for." I was thinking, Well I might lease it for less than that because that's a lot of money you know. She said, "No it's leasing." She did some checking, the land is leasing that is the very least they are paying for lease land now, so I said okay. Well I didn't expect to hear from Lee until a month or so, but in the meantime, I gave John the key to the ranch and I said, "You can go look at it," and I said, "I can definitely let you have the two and a half sections that's on the other side of 1776," and I said, "there's a fresh water tap there, you'll have to pay for it." So he came back, and he said, "I want the whole thing," he said, "that's the best ranch I've looked at."

AW:

Really?

LH:

Well, my husband was a welder. My pens are awesome.

AW:

So your fences and pens looked good?

LH:

Everything, and it's laid out just right you know, and he said really—well it just happened that Lee called me just before he got there, and I ask her and she said, "What'd Laura say?" I said, she said, "Well it's my ranch do whatever I wanted to." She said, "That's exactly the way I feel." So when he got there he said, "I want to lease the whole thing." And I said, "Well, I'm letting my step-son run cattle out there. I'm going to have to tell him to move it because—" and I was mad at him anyway. He bought a damned ole Charolais bull and I like—I had the prettiest cattle in the country, everybody knew my cattle

AW:

And what were they?

LH:

Brangus, that's perfect for West Texas. I don't know if you know cattle, but that's three quarters Brahman, it's an American breed, three quarters Brahman and five Angus, so you've got good beef, but they'll travel. You get an Angus that has good beef, you get a Hereford that has good beef, all they'll want to do is hang on your windmill, they don't want to go out and graze. Boy, the Brangus will go out and graze and come back, and you've got beautiful cattle, and so I sure am rambling on, check both your ears I can talk them off.

JD:

It's fascinating.

AW:

No, that's great. You know one of the things I'm seeing in the Panhandle is there are a lot of people going back to either Hereford or Hereford-Brangus mix so you'll see these black face Brangus

LH:

Yeah, the bad thing about Herefords is they get pink eye.

AW:

Yeah

LH:

Did you ever try to doctor a pink eye on a wild cow? (Laughter)

AW:

No, yeah, I wouldn't do that. No, I just thought it was interesting to see that because for a long time—

LH:

Well, it's a good beef. England likes good beef and see, do you know what a Charolais was bred for?

AW:

I would think for milk and cheese.

LH:

Charolais? No.

AW:

Because they come from England, from France right?

LH:

French. A Frenchman will eat anything!

AW:

That's true.

LH:

Yeah I think they crossed a mule with something, back in the 1700s they were bred to be oxen to pull big dredge, they're big and strong, they're liable to throw a two hundred pound calf, and you can lose momma cows, and so that's why I did not want to go—and I did not know this, I mean I learned the hard way about ranching, and I thought for instance, King Ranch had Santa Gertrudis, so that's bound to be the way to go. They don't calve until they're almost two years old.

AW:

Wow, that's a lot of time.

LH:

Yeah. You've got two years invested before you've got them multiplied.

AW:

Yeah gosh, well that's very interesting. So you leased the place, you leased the ranch then?

LH:

To John, yeah, and the funny thing is, is that he looked at the two and a half sections and he said, "Lee, there's a wire gap." Now I don't know if y'all know how we used to have net wire and some barbed wire across the top, and we'd stick a post here and we'd wrap a thing around this one. He said, "There's a wire gap over by the service road," and he said, "I definitely want it," and he said, "I just bought a green gate and put up there" because green's my favorite color.
(Laughter)

AW:

Did he know that?

LH:

Yes!

(Laughter)

JD:

He's no dummy

LH:

Well, all of my gates are painted. The wood or metal is painted green, so he put a green gate over there. He said he was afraid somebody might come in, you know pull off the service road and see

that wire gap and just drive on through there or leave it down or something. I never had any problem with it, I had other problems.

AW:

Well, having a ranch generally leads to some other problems (laughs).

LH:

Well, the thing about John too is, that was in October when I said I'd lease it to him, and so he said, "Okay we'll make it the first of November." And the first Monday of November, I was hurting and I called 911, and they came and picked me up, and I kind of passed out, and they said, "Would you like to go for a helicopter ride?" and I said, "Hell no." They said, "Well that's too bad because we're taking you to Odessa." John went ahead and contacted Ori White, I don't know if you know who Ori White is, but he grew up in Sanderson, his other was a Mitchell, and he would go out at the ranch after playing football Friday night and spend the weekend with the ranch and Monday morning he'd come into school and then he'd spend the rest of the week with my sister and her husband, her husband was the sheriff of Terrell County, and so I've known Ori as he grew up, and he's our county attorney now and so, and John likes Ori, and I said, "Well now, a handshake's good enough for me John, with you and me, but we're older and we've got grandkids, and we need it done right for the survivors." He said, "I agree with you." So while I was in the hospital, he went to Ori and I mean, you ought to read that lease, he did everything and more that I would've even thought of, he's a good man.

AW:

Yeah, that sounds like a great deal to have someone like that leasing your place.

LH:

Yes, and I told him when I got back, it was in the next year, and I said, "Well, you've dated this lease November the first." And he said, "That's when we agreed, it was in October that I'd have it November the first." I mean you just can't beat anything like it. Another little note of interest is he has a son named Josh, and Josh is taking care of that ranch and helping his dad out this way too, and he'd quit his job, and that's what Josh is doing now, he's being a rancher. Well, they brought my longhorn steer in, and it's up at my house and I can't walk, you know, I have to be on something smooth with my driver, and—that's what this is called, not a walker, it's a driver.

AW:

It's a driver? Yeah, I like it.

LH:

And he comes out and feeds Mike for me (laughter) and charges the food up at the feed yard and then brings him on in.

AW:

How old is Mike?

LH:

I think he's eleven.

AW:

Wow.

LH:

I'd have to check his papers.

AW:

Yeah, that's pretty good. Well, you've been in ranching and this community for quite a few years

LH:

Since '64.

AW:

What has changed here over that time? What big changes have you seen?

Peggy:

Walmart.

AW:

Walmart (laughs) Peggy says, Walmart.

LH:

Well, I was thinking of Pecos County, and—

AW:

Yeah, well that's what I mean, just this area, yeah.

LH:

Okay. Just before I moved here, Comanche Springs was flowing. I live in water district one and I've been a director on that board for twenty-four years. I keep hoping it will flow again, but it was like an oasis, the trees grew—in fact one of the funny things that went in the minutes of water district one was when they went to plant the trees they said they wanted to plant pecan

trees. Somebody said, "Well it takes pecan trees a long time for them to ever bear." And they said, "Well how long does it take an oak tree?" (Laughter) I don't see a whole lot of changes.

AW:

Really? Well, what is—

LH:

It's growing. And it's the oil center of the world, really.

AW:

Yeah. But things like the water, especially Comanche Springs, I have had people here tell me that that's all because of the drilling, the irrigation drilling at Belding Farms and

LH:

I'm very, very soapbox on this.

AW:

Good.

LH:

We do not have any surface water; you have to drill for the aquifers. Okay I'm warning you, in this world, the backbone of any country is agriculture. If we go to the third world, and they're not under the restrictions, beef, I mean where did we get the mad cow disease, from Canada. Where did we get the venereal Fort Knox, or no whatever, from Mexico, they were bringing them in. Okay, who is the agriculture center of the United States? Texas. What county in Texas is the agriculture center? Pecos, Pecos County, and they don't even have surface water. I mean Mexico's stole just about all of our Pecos River, but when it rains in Fort Davis the aquifer for water district one fills up and we've got the best tasting underground water, and so I'm kind of rattling on and on.

AW:

No, that's good.

LH:

I don't know if I'm answering your question or not. But—now do know that Clayton Williams and Chick Williams were very dear friends of mine, and of course Clayton went to his grave sorry that he drilled those wells west of county.

AW:
Really?

LH:
With Belding, yes. And then his son comes along, and I know Claty quite well, I knew his sister before I ever knew him in Midland, and when I came here I met him and he's a clown. He was an insurance salesman at that time and was married to a different woman, but then he married Modessa, and Modessa's dad taught him to be a businessman and helped him, and Clayton wants to come in and suck all of the water out of Pecos County and ship it to Midland and Odessa and San Angelo and so forth, and so I rejoiced when we had the last hearing last week, and Claty didn't win.

AW:
So that's settled?

LH:
What?

AW:
That's settled now?

LH:
It's pretty much. He ought to give up by now.

AW:
Yeah, water is such an issue all over.

LH:
Yes, yes, it is, that's the most important commodity gave us. It's right up there with the air, we can't—but we messed the air up you know, so.

AW:
But at least that blows off sometimes. The water, I know up where I live in Lubbock, you know, a good rain doesn't recharge our aquifer, it's too far down and there's clay in between, so that aquifer, we're digging up water that's tens of thousands of years old, and that's really—you know, we're not going to replace that which is a sad thing. What about the—one thing I've been coming to Fort Stockton a lot of years, and I'm always impressed with the people here. What makes the people here different?

LH:

I don't know, but we certainly are blessed with wonderful people. When I moved here, I did not want to come here, I would've much rather moved to Alpine or even Sanderson, you know, my sister and her husband was in Sanderson. But I love these people, they are just—I don't know how to describe it, but in being handicapped I stayed in Florida with my daughter there for a couple of months after when I got out of the hospital, and then I have a daughter in Kermit, and I dearly love my family, and I have—my son is retired from the service, and he lives in Augusta, Georgia. But these people are—they're friends, they care, they're not indifferent like they are other places I don't know why.

AW:

Have they been that way since you've been here?

LH:

Yes.

AW:

That's really something.

LH:

Yes. In fact, when I was having personal problems with the man I was married to, the cowboys went armed and said, "He won't touch you." It's not every place that you would see that.

AW:

No, no. Well tell me about your children, you have—

LH:

How come you're interviewing me?

AW:

Because we think you're important.

LH:

Where did you ever hear of me?

AW:

Well, everybody in Fort Stockton knows you.

LH:

Well, yeah, and I've had the same telephone number and it's unlisted for over fifty years.

AW:

Well the writer Ernest Hemingway said, "Any person's life truly told is a novel," and what that means to me is that the most important thing that happens in this community is told by the people who live here and who do things like you've done. How many people, women of any age, have run a filling station and a ranch?

LH:

It wasn't a filling station, it was a service station.

AW:

Service station. That's right.

LH:

There's a difference! (Laughter)

AW:

There is a difference because you can get service there instead of just filling—but that's pretty interesting right there, I mean that's enough, in that part, not to mention all of these other things that make it very interesting, so that's why we want to hear your story. Plus, Ms. Harris, you tell a good story, and that's a plus too.

LH:

Have you seen our Pecos County history?

AW:

Mhmm.

LH:

Do you know who was chairman of it? Worked on that book for eleven years, love those people. They're junior historians, I used to have them meet here and the _____ [?] [0:41:08.7].

AW:

What was it like to do that book? Tell me about that. How did you get involved in it, because it looks like a lot of work to me.

LH:

No, it's a labor of love really. I came here from Midland and was running a service station, and had got up in '71, Buck Luttrull was our sheriff, no not sheriff, he was the deputy sheriff but then he was judge, and he put me on, and at that time it was called the Pecos County Survey Committee. John Van Shepherd had started it. When in 1936, Texas was a hundred years old

from leaving Mexico, and he was secretary of state at the time, and he said every county should have, at least if they don't volunteer, appoint at least seven members in their county to go and survey the county and pick up historical sites people might want, and so Pecos County, I mean Buck Luttrull appointed me, and I called him and said, "I'm not a tea sipper and I don't party in this kind of stuff. This is the kind of thing's that—" you know, and he said, "You don't understand it's a court order."

(Laughter)

AW:

So you were drafted.

LH:

He said, "But I'll make a plea deal with you, Lee, and that is, you try it for one year, and if you still want off the committee, I'll see about letting you go." I was on it thirty-one years.

AW:

So I guess it agreed with you?

LH:

It's so interesting, so many, many things. Who else had their sheriff murdered in the courthouse and never found the killer? A. J. Royal was killed. He's buried at the Fort Cemetery up here. I don't know, I've always been fascinated—I love to always—I've never taken ancient history but I would really like to learn more about the good guys and bad guys back before America was discovered, and so. And it came from the state, they suggested we write a history, and Terrell County had just, Alice Downing had just published *Terrell County History*, and it is so big and heavy that you can't. And so I said, "Let's make two volumes. One is the history of Pecos County, and one is the history of the families," and so that's why it's divided up into two books.

AW:

Yeah, good idea. Well tell me about your children. Where are they? What do they do?

LH:

My eldest—well, my son is my eldest, and he's retired from the service.

AW:

And what's his name?

LH:

What?

AW:

What's his name?

LH:

Dalton Thacker, Dalton Nye Thacker, he named after Uncle Nye, named after Dalton Hogg my brother-in-law, my favorite brother-in-law.

AW:

N-i-g-h, Nigh? Or N-y-e?

LH:

N-y-e.

AW:

And he's retired. and he's the one that's in Augusta.

LH:

Yes.

AW:

Okay. And who else?

LH:

He'll be sixty-five years old October 18, and then the next one is my daughter Lee Francis, and incidentally I think, I'm an old chicken eating Methodist, but I think Pope Francis is wonderful.

AW:

He is something, isn't he? He is something. I grew up Methodist too, and my wife did too, and we were looking at all the news, and we said, "You know we might could convert." (Laughter) My mother would be turning in her grave, but—so is Francis her middle name or her last name?

LH:

Her middle name, Lee Francis.

AW:

Yeah what's her last name, her married name?

LH:

Now?

AW:
Yeah.

LH:
Edwards.

AW:
The reason I'm asking all of this is, people often come to archives for genealogical information too. Okay so you had another daughter?

LH:
Yes, her name is Laura Ann Tarver.

AW:
T-a-r-v-e-r?

LH:
Mhmm.

AW:
Really? I grew up with some Tarvers in Lubbock, really great people.

LH:
Well, David's family lives in College Station, and one of the men at College Station that raises Brangus cattle is his uncle, (laughs) and I didn't know that I dealt with his uncle until I was up in Florida.

AW:
Yeah, and then you have the adopted—?

LH:
I adopted Mandy, her name is Amanda. Middle name is Rae

AW:
R-a?

LH:
R-a-e, and the last name now is Wilcox.

AW:

Good. Now you had brothers and sisters?

LH:

I had three sisters and a brother.

AW:

And did I remember that you were the youngest or—?

LH:

Yes I was—my ninety-four-year-old sister still called me baby sis.

JD:

You'll always be the baby.

AW:

And where do those of your siblings who are alive, where do they live? Are they scattered around like—?

LH:

They're deceased, all except Henri Beth. Henri Beth is the one that was—she's the ninety-four, she was eight years old when I was born, and her husband Dalton Hogg was the sheriff in Terrell County for many years, he's the one that caught the bandit. I don't know if you know the story of the bandito or not.

AW:

Yeah, I remember.

LH:

He shot Cooksey, and Cooksey said, he died, and he said, "I cannot tell you how wonderful and peaceful it is, but then I came back to life." They revived him, and when they caught the bandito, and I have the bandito's picture, a wanted thing some place in my upstairs. But they shot him, and he wasn't the one that shot him. it was—I don't remember who it was, it was a highway patrolman or something that shot the bandito because everybody—it might've been a Texas—I bet it was a Texas Ranger—but anyway, Dalton said he was sitting there and said, they had this thing down his throat you know and oh he was hurting and Dalton said, "I was watching him," and he said, "I acted like I was asleep," said, "he reached over and he grabbed the stuff and was going to pull it out," and he said, "I just thought I'd be Clint Eastwood, and I said make my day."

(Laughter)

AW:

Oh my goodness.

LH:

Henri Beth is in Plano right now. She can't live by herself. She's in a wheelchair, and she had one son, and then she has one grandson and a granddaughter, and Wesley lives in Plano and Joelle lives in Round Rock, which is pretty close.

AW:

Yeah, and John Harris, I assume that he's passed away?

LH:

Who?

AW:

John Harris?

LH:

Yes.

AW:

Well, what have I not asked you about that I should have?

LH:

I don't know.

AW:

This is your chance to get on another soap box if you want.

LH:

I don't know anything to add.

JD:

Did you work for the county? You told me one time about—I don't remember where you were working, but you were upstairs in a room, and there was just boxes and boxes of documents and you said you just sat and went through them and learned all kinds of stuff that nobody else knew, or had forgotten.

LH:

Oh yeah. Okay the way I got involved with the county was with the historical commission and me researching, and they had taken the records and put them in the basement of the courthouse, and we had—with researching history and so forth, I worked with Carmela Leal who is the state archivist, she came down here, and anyway I was doing that contract labor, and one day I was—

Unknown:

Excuse me, I'm so sorry to interrupt but Elva called to be sure, are you Andy?

AW:

Mhmm.

Unknown:

To be sure and go to the Q8.

JD:

Q8?

Unknown:

Yes because that's where they're going to feed him.

JD:

Okay

AW:

Oh okay.

JD:

I think the fort. Yeah. Thank you.

LH:

Love her. I was at home talking on the telephone, and Martha Wilson came through the backdoor and—do you know who Martha Wilson was?

AW:

Huh-uh.

LH:

Bruce Wilson's wife, he was sheriff, and Martha and I were ace buddies, they lived in the old jail in the bottom of it when Bruce was sheriff. Cliff doesn't—Cliff lives out on—and his last name's

Harris, but he's not mine, but I'd take him (laughter). Anyway, Martha said, "Get your ass up there at the courthouse. Garnett wants you." Garnett was our county treasure, and I said, "What's wrong? What's wrong?" Because I was working with records, sorting them. They let me have—I had my office in the old jail on the solitary confinement part of it, and I had been all the way up, and I know what is on top of that roof, in fact I've been in the basement—anyway, I ramble on and on, but anyway, I came up and asked Garnett what she wanted, and she said, "Commissioner's courts meeting, and they just hired you as maintenance supervisor." (Laughter) And I said, "What am I supposed to be doing?" You know and she said, "Whatever you want to be." Well, I started out with maintenance supervisor and I think I started out—at that time we had such a wonderful commissioner's court, and it was a Greg Mackenzie and M. R. Gonzales, and I was trying to think of the man's Skaniers [?] at Iraan and Truman Grove, and anyway they said that they wanted me to come and straighten up, I didn't have to do the work, but I would supervise, and I only started with, I don't know, five or six buildings and I ended up with eleven buildings and a park, and I loved every minute of it, and Johnny just cracked up laughing he said, "You'd do it for nothing and they're paying you." (Laughter) And Reagan was president at that time, and they started this job training for children, and I said, "If they can count, they know their alphabet, I can teach them office work." And right today I can go in Lowe's, and there's one little girl that I've taught how to file and so forth, or I can go up to Stripes and there's another little girl, you know, and little boys and so forth, and we were in Dairy Queen, wasn't it? And one of the little boys came over and hugged me, and I'm telling—I love the people. It's the people that make Fort Stockton so wonderful because it's really, you know it's just pretty much desert land but—

AW:

How long did you do that with the county?

LH:

I retired in 1998, and I started—now I've started part-time, I would just come and work and bill them for it. But I went on full-time in '82, so '82 from '98 is—

AW:

Yeah, sixteen years.

LH:

Sixteen years, and that's what I was thinking it was, but sixteen and a half, something like that. And I'll even tell you why I retired when I did. Tony Villarreal came in as county commissioner in M. R.'s place; M. R. watched my back, I watched his. By golly, we accomplished a lot. Tony Villarreal came in, and I knew what he was doing, and there was nothing I could do about it, he was indicted three times and never had to stand trial.

AW:
Gosh.

LH:
And it was getting to me, I had two small strokes because I knew what was happening, and I couldn't do anything about it, and so I went in and I said, "I think I'll retire in May, I'll finish out we've got some projects going and I will retire in May." And they said, "We won't send it in until May but you can." But the last of May I retired, and God knew what was best because I would not have retired if it hadn't been for Tony and me knowing what was going on, and Johnny for six years who's bed ridden, and I wouldn't leave him over and hour and a half at a time, and he just, God works in wondrous ways, and I'm so thankful I had those years with him.

AW:
Yeah, that's really good. Jody, do you have any additional—?

Jody:
I'm just in awe of everything that you know and have experienced and just—

LH:
When Elva called me and told me that you know you wanted to chat with me—I have taken people on historical tours and I thought, Oh he's going to and here I am! (Laughter) Going to have to push my driver. At my office when, well I was—I didn't stay in the old jail I was on the third floor of the courthouse, I had the prettiest office in town, and I have a little story that I think is humorous, I like to talk. I have a grandson, and as the family says, one of my daughters was jealous of my relationship with Jacob and she said, "You think he can walk on water." And I said, "If he keeps his eye on Jesus, yes." But he always came, and he liked to stay with Granny, and he made me things, like a little cup that I've got in my kitchen right now that I keep Sweet'N Low in, he made it in first grade and his mother, "Oh that is so cute!" It's a little snowman, "Oh that is so cute and it fits right here!" He said, "I didn't make it for you, it's for Granny." I have a rolling pin that he won at District 6 in 4-H cooking if you can believe it. Well, one day I was walking, he was with me, and they were wonderful to me. I could take him with me, and you know, a lot of people wouldn't let you take a little boy, if you were working. So I went in Freddy Capers' office, and he was county judge at the time, and his wife did home teaching, he lives across the street from me, he's right in there—he should've—no one will [inaudible]—lives right down the street from me. Anyway, I had circus tickets, and I gave them to what's her name, and I said, "And here's some money you can buy the kids—" the circus was here "—you can buy the kids some—" Well she took the money, and I said, "And Jacob wants to go." And she said, "I'm not going to take Jacob with me! No, there's no way. Taking these other kids, I'm not adding another one and going to have to—" and I said, "Well okay." So Jacob started crying. I mean, he's like in second grade or something like that, and as I walk down the hall Tina Haggy was

sitting there, she was Frank Madla's [?] secretary, and I met her back in '64, she was my assistant Girl Scout leader, her name wasn't Haggy then, it was something else, she was married to Roger then, and anyway Tina said, she claims Jacob is her grandson too, because she didn't have a grandson—Candy and Monty have no children, and David lives in Houston and she doesn't see him very often, didn't have any boys at that time. But anyway, she said, "Why is Jacob crying?" And I said, "Well I was just giving the tickets to the home schooling group and Capers won't let him go too." She said, "Give me those damn tickets!" And said, "Give me some money too." And so, "We're going to go to the circus!" So from then on Jacob was—but an incident happened in the courthouse on the third floor, that was where they used to sequester the jury or the prisoners, and my room was where they sequestered them, that was my office, and there was this man, I can't think of his name right now, but he had ranch land out north of town and—I have "sometimers," sometimes I can remember.

AW:

Yeah, me too.

LH:

And anyway, he killed his best friend, and then as he was leaving there was a man coming from Pecos—this was on Pecos highway—a man coming from Pecos his car was overheating so he goes to turn in on the ranch, and this man is coming out and hits the side of the cattle guard and caves his fender in and then takes on off to Fort Stockton. Well this man, he just kind of slowed down and stopped, well he pulled on in because the windmill was there, and he wanted to water his—put some water in to get on to Fort Stockton. Well he looked over and the house was on fire, and so he went over and checked the house to you know to put it out, and there was this man's best friend dead in the kitchen where he'd shot and killed him, and so he called the fire department, and you didn't have cellphones then, but you had radios, and so he radioed in and had the fire department come. They brought the body out and the man stood trials, and so he was sequestered in my office at the trial and was convicted, could not get by with it. As he came out to go down, it's on the third floor, and go down to the courtroom, the window was up, and he dove out of that window and killed himself.

AW:

Out of your office or—?

LH:

It's in between.

AW:

Oh in between, got it yeah.

LH:

There is a space there, and there's windows across, and there's a window seat now—I put the window seat in there—and that was the moral to this story. When I had Jacob with me, and Anne Daggett and I was up on the third floor and we were going through records and so forth, and I could hire other people to work for me part-time, you know, like Anne, and I looked over, and that window was up and Jacob was laying on that window seat, and I said, “Uh, Jacob, honey, can you come to Granny?” And I'm going to him, he just rolls over, little ole fat thing if he would've rolled the other way, he'd have been dead. He rolled over this way and came—
[screams]

AW:

Yeah, my goodness.

LH:

So I thought you might like that little story.

JD:

Yeah, my goodness.

LH:

Also a continuation on Jacob is when my husband died, he came and lived with me for several years, and he shut the pickup door on his hand, and it was bad, and so I grabbed paper towels and put it around it—I had just got out of the hospital—and I wrapped his hand up and it was his right hand, so he couldn't write and I said, “Jacob you can drive with your left hand, I can fill out the papers let's get to the emergency room.” So we came running up to the emergency room and I'm filling out all of the papers, and I'm looking to see if my grandson's going to bleed to death, you know, and what the heck he's sitting there trying to make out with the nurse.

(Laughter)

AW:

How old was he?

LH:

He married her two years later

JD:

How funny. That's cool.

AW:

That's a great story.

LH:

And another part of the funny stories with me and my grandson is when he and Ryan got married, he was born in 1982, so they got his football number when he played football in high school was number eighty-two, my favorite Cowboy's number is eighty-two, Witten, okay? And my daughter Laura is telling me, "Jacob can walk on water." What does the preacher preach on when he got married? But when Peter walked on water, (laughter) and so I turned to Laura and go, "Yeah." I go the preacher and I said, "Sir, I think that for some reason I have never heard of a marriage ceremony when they preached on Peter walking on water. I feel like, you don't know this, but there is a family thing connected to this I think you had divine guidance." And he said, "I think so too ma'am, I never heard of it either but I felt compelled to preach." Well, just about that time Jacob puts his arms around me, and I said, "Jacob just remember you can walk on water if you'll keep your eye on Jesus." He said, "Oh I thought he was telling me to buy a boat!"

(Laughter)

JD:

Do I know Jacob? Does he still live here?

LH:

No, they live in Victoria now. She just got a promotion; she's over all of the nurses in the ER there now, but he did live with me for several years.

JD:

That's wonderful.

LH:

And he was my husband's only grandson he ever claimed. We had other grandsons, but he taught him to drink beer, smoke cigarettes, and chew tobacco (laughs). He can drive maintainers, he can ride horses. Jacob and I could go out and round up everything, and then I'd hire somebody to come in and separate the ones, you know, work them in the pens. But we'd pen them and—he's a character, he's about six foot three.

JD:

Yeah, that's awesome.

AW:

Cool.

LH:

Okay a woman that'll tell her age will tell anything so—

AW:

That's it. We could've made this interview a lot shorter if we just asked you to list the things you hadn't done.

Jody:

Yeah, you've done everything.

AW:

That would've been a much shorter But thank you.

LH:

God has been good.

AW:

Thank you very much.

LH:

Well, I'm glad to meet you, and next time you're going to play the guitar maybe I can get a ride up here and listen.

AW:

Tomorrow night.

LH:

There is one thing that might be of interest since you do—

AW:

Sure.

LH:

My family were musicians more or less.

AW:

Oh really?

LH:

Yes

AW:

Well, tell me about that.

LH:

And the one that was actually the most talented was Matilda, she was the middle daughter, and she could play any—

AW:

Of your sisters?

LH:

Yes, she could play—my daddy played the banjo and wanted to play the piano. Now my sister Henri Beth never did—she has a beautiful voice, but she never did—but during the wartime my sister Inez and I were with the USO [**United Service Organizations**].

AW:

Really?

LH:

Galena Park furnished the school bus, and they would take us to Fort Poke, McCloskey Hospital which is now—McCloskey's in Temple it's Scott and White now—and I was the clown. I wanted to be the glamor girl, but I was fourteen, fifteen, sixteen years old, you know, and so I was—and like I say, on my sixteenth birthday, it was VE day, and we went in—my Daddy and his buddy from World War I—we went on into town in Houston for the ticker parade and so forth, and here's my twenty-one year old sister with all the soldiers and sailors, hugging them. I'm standing there sixteen, it was my birthday and I didn't get any hugs. (laughter) [inaudible]

AW:

Do you have any photographs of your time with the USO? Just out of curiosity.

LH:

Probably but my daughter came in and redid my house while I was in the hospital, and everything's been dumped in the reloading room so—

AW:

Okay well, you know, you've led such an interesting life. All of those photographs and letters, all of that kind of stuff, you need to save all of that because there are people like us that like to have those kinds of things for people to look at for—

LH:

Well, you might talk to somebody around Hamilton or Waco or someplace. In years, later my—during World War II, my sister Matilda married Joe Treadway, and he had what he called, the Greenville Hillbillies, and we sang on the wing of an airplane, and we gave drives because back then you collected stuff, you know paper drives and so forth, and he is the one that got, I don't know if you know of Jerry Naylor, but he got Jerry Naylor into singing, he was with the Crickets, still singing, still alive. Jerry's daddy died, and he came and lived with Joe and Matilda for a while in Sanderson and—

AW:

That's very interesting.

LH:

All of Matilda's children sang, and—no Bobby didn't do much singing, his favorite was "Slap Her Down Again Pa." But anyway, it was a fun, fun life. I was very, very lucky.

AW:

Tell me the name of that band again, The—?

LH:

Greenville Hillbillies, we lived in Greenville, that's a suburb of—and rode the bus to Galena Park, it's right next to a little community called San Jacinto too.

AW:

Yeah, I know that part of Houston. That's really interesting. So did you keep up your music?

LH:

No, actually when I married Johnny, he was not musically inclined, and one day, for instance, we were out at the ranch, and I felt real romantic, and I leaned over and I said (sings), "I love you because you understand, dear, every single thing I try to do." He said, "Oh my god, you don't even have a guitar."

(Laughter)

JD:

Oh no.

LH:

That's the last time I sang for him.

AW:

I reckon, yeah.

LH:

And incidentally I knew Leon Payne personally

AW:

Really, how?

LH:

I've even sung with his band.

AW:

Yeah, how did you—?

LH:

Because he played on the south side of Houston, and I had friends on the south side of Houston, and I'd go spend the night with Sarah Lee and go honky tonkin you know. I mean I was nineteen years old then and—I don't know if you knew this but Leon was blind.

AW:

No, I don't think I did know that

LH:

Yes. And he wrote that song for his wife because—and the amazing part is south side of Houston, I mean it's a bloody south war, you know.

AW:

I know it. That's a tough part of town.

LH:

And it went all the way to number one.

AW:

Yeah that's really nice. Cool.

LH:

Anyway, it's been a great life, and then I started falling down, and all of that kind of good stuff. It's slowed me down a little bit.

AW:

Yeah, well you're driving pretty good I see.

LH:

The doctor told me not to ride anymore horses. I had three horses, and I wouldn't sell them for dog food, so I gave them away. But one of them is a little horse named Appy, and he's fourteen hands high—no he's not—what's her name is—my mare was fourteen hands high—he's thirteen hands high. Daddy had Six Shooter, and he was twelve hands, but Abby was one hand higher than Six Shooter was, and Daddy would ride down to the domino hall with Six Shooter and he had little chrome wheels on his—and everybody would say, "Well Dick's down at his office," because he played dominos, and I love to play dominos, and so I got his car and I bought Appy and I could drive Appy down the highway and the diesels could pass, and all he'd do is wiggle his ears, he's wonderful.

AW:

Really? Now is he named Appy because he's an Appaloosa or—?

LH:

Yes.

AW:

He's a calm Appaloosa?

LH:

What?

AW:

He's a *calm* Appaloosa?

LH:

Yes, absolutely.

AW:

Well, that's pretty unusual.

LH:

I gave him to my niece, and every once and a while, she'll put pictures of him on Facebook, and she had never had a horse, she had never ridden, and boy does she love horses now and she's giving her granddaughter riding lessons and—this was the year before last, they came out and I

let my kinfolks go dove hunting, and Autumn hugged and kissed me bye and said, "Aunt Lee I'll always love you because you gave Granny Autumn," I mean, "You gave my grandmother Appy." So she loves Appy too, and Appy is probably twelve or thirteen years old. The last horse I trained name was Sugar Starlight, and I gave her—she's twenty-three now—and I gave her to Jimmy that works at the feed store, and I asked him how Sugar was doing and he said his granddaughter was showing her in 4-H, and he said, "Lee, let me tell you, my wife has started riding her. She loves her." So they have good homes.

Jody:

Oh that's great.

AW:

Yeah, that is great. Did you keep the buggy or did you give that to your—?

LH:

I let my niece have it and the—I even gave her a stock saddle so that Royce could ride too and Mandy's little saddle for Autumn and—

AW:

Great.

LH:

And they love Aunt Lee too; that helps. Actually right now Royce is in Afghanistan, he is out of the service, but he's with the Civil Service, and he works out of Fort Hood. They don't live in Fort Hood, but he goes down there and works, but he's been there, I think this is three times he's been over there, and I told him when Prince William—wasn't that who it was that went over there?

AW:

Yes.

LH:

And I said, "Don't hang out with him," (laughs) and he said, "No, I'll stay in the office, and I'll shoot, aim out that way." He's got a great sense of humor.

AW:

Good. Well—

LH:

It's so nice of you to letting me reminisce.

AW:

Oh this is fun.

Jody:

Oh just loved it

AW:

Could you tell me your phone number so that when I'm back in town maybe I'll call you again and we can?

LH:

Yeah, and if you lose it everybody in town knows it; it's not published, but as you know Elva called me on it. It's, everything is [REDACTED] and then it's just like you're accountant, [REDACTED]

AW:

[REDACTED] all right great.

LH:

I have a cellphone too, but half the time I can't hear it. (laughs) It doesn't ring very loud.

AW:

Yeah, well and cell phone service out here is a little spotty from time to time. All right well I'm going to stop this but not before I say again, thank you very much.

LH:

Well, I have sure enjoyed it and I couldn't understand why you wanted to talk to me, but you didn't, you had me talk, and so I can— (laughs)

AW:

All right, thanks.

Unknown:

She said, "I wonder what he wants to talk to me about?" And I said, "Well I imagine he's wanting to hear things you have to say, you know, about your life," and she said, "Well I'm a great story teller!"

(Laughter)

AW:

Well, that's true.

Jody:

That's right.

Unknown:

She said, "I won an award when I was in the third grade!"

AW:

All right, I'm going to put a stop to it here.

End of Recording



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