

**Oral History Interview of  
Deborah Bigness**

**Interviewed by: Leslie Dutton  
June 10, 2002  
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:**  
*Leslie Dutton Fine Arts Interview Series*

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## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Deborah Bigness as she discusses her background in theater and the arts in Lubbock, Texas. Bigness starts of the interview by describing when her family moved to Lubbock and being a Lubbock native. She then moves on to explain why she got a job at 911 dispatch and getting promoted to the supervisor of the communications division before leaving to get a master's degree in museum science. Bigness then recounts her years in the theater department at tech and why she thinks so many successful artists come from Texas Tech and the South Plains. She then ends the interview by describing her time working with the Lubbock Arts Alliance.

**Length of Interview:** 02:51:58

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## Keywords

Theater, Arts, Arts Alliance, National Ranching Heritage Center, Museum Science

**Leslie Dutton (LD):**

This interview is with Deborah Bigness to Leslie Dutton, on June 10, 2002. Deborah has been a big player in lots of things for the collection, and in helping us with donations from Terry Allen and with the Theatre Alumni, and probably other things that I don't even know about. And Deborah is also a Lubbockite. And so I would like for you to kind of give me your life story and tell me when you were born and where your parents here? Had they been here? Where your grandparents here? How did they come to Lubbock? This kind of thing, so—

**Deborah Bigness (DB):**

Okay, well my family moved to Lubbock in 1926. They were originally from Central Texas, from Bell County—this is my mother's side of the family. And both of my—my grandmother and my grandfather were descendants of the first settlers in Bell County. So they've actually—my family's actually lived in Texas since 19—no, pardon me, 1846, I think it is. And some of that information actually may already be in the Southwest Collection. Because one of the earliest supporters of the collection, and someone who has donated massive amounts of material to the collection, because I've seen parts of it, is a woman named Dorothy Rylander. I don't know if you're familiar with Dorothy or not.

LD:

Not with her, but with some of the stuff.

DB:

Yeah, and Dorothy was actually my grandmother's cousin. And so there's a connection there. But they came up to Lubbock—my grandmother and grandfather were both the youngest of large families. And so they came to Lubbock in 1926, my mother at that time was about eighteen months old or so. And I remember my grandmother laughing about how the rest of the family just thought they were going to the ends of the world, [LD laughs] you know, when they were coming to Lubbock. So my mother grew up in Lubbock, spent her entire life in Lubbock. I was born here in 1956. My father, actually, is from upstate New York, originally, in Watertown, which is up on the Canadian border, on the St. Lawrence River. And he was a pilot in World War II, he was a B-26 bomber pilot. He was here in Lubbock early in the war as a student pilot. And then went overseas, flew seventy-two missions overseas, came back to the states toward the end of the war and came back to Reese Air Force Base as an instructor pilot, or what was then Lubbock Army Air Field. And so he was an instructor at the end of the war, and met my mother, and they fell in love and got married. And the story is, in my family—now how much of this is true, I don't know, but the family legend is—my parents got married in mid-October, and they went to my father's home on their honeymoon. Well of course—and they took their time driving up there. So that by the time they got to northern New York, it was, you know the first of November, mid-November. And the story they always told was that my mother said, "You can either buy me a fur coat or take me home to Texas." And, you know my father is still alive, and



is eighty-one years old and still lives in Lubbock. [Laughter] Anyway, so I grew up in Lubbock. I went to, you know, public schools here in town. I started to Tech, I was actually cast in a play at Tech when I was still in high school, right before I finished high school, I was cast in an upcoming summer rep production. I had always been interested in music and theatre. In junior high and high school and college I was French horn player as well as doing a lot of theatre stuff. And so I started to Tech when I was seventeen. And took me five years to actually graduate my undergraduate degree in theatre because I kept going off and doing things. I spent an entire summer doing Shakespearean rep. And then I—

LD:

Where was that?

DB:

At the Globe of the Great Southwest in Odessa, Texas. And then I spent an entire semester, actually an entire spring semester—would have been the spring of 1978—as an intern at the Oklahoma Theatre Center in Oklahoma City. And so it just, you know I kept going off to do practical kinds of things, and get paid for them. [Laughing] Which is very important, you know when you're a college student, and—money's always a good thing. So anyway, it took me five years to graduate. I graduated from Tech in 1979. And actually then continued, and put in all of the graduate hours for a Master's Degree in Theatre, which ultimately, eventually I never did complete because of, just about the time I finished the coursework I was offered what I thought was my dream job. So I took it, and moved back to Oklahoma City.

LD:

And so what was that?

DB:

I was the public relations director for the Oklahoma Theatre Center, where I had been before as an intern. But it was kind of interesting because the—their entire staff had turned over, so even though it was the same place, I wasn't working for the same people that I had worked for before. And so I went up to Oklahoma, and spent almost two years I guess, I think, in Oklahoma City. And came back to Lubbock because my mother was ill, was terminally ill. And so I came back to be there with her and help take care of her. And that was in, at the very end of '82. And when I came back to Lubbock I—there really wasn't at that moment in time an arts job in town that I hadn't already had that I was interested in having. And so, and I needed a job, so I went to work for the City of Lubbock as a police dispatcher.

LD:

Gosh.

DB:

I know, it sounds a little odd. But I did that for, well, I was a dispatcher for five years and then I was promoted to be a supervisor in the communications division, Emergency Operations Center for the City of Lubbock. And I did that for another, about six years.

LD:

Well, did you really like this, doing this kind of work?

DB:

I did, I did, I liked it a lot. It was very interesting. That was a real time of change within the city, particularly in the emergency communications field. When I first went to work for the city, when I first started, we, the dispatchers worked—we worked for the police department. And actually were—our offices were upstairs, right inside the front door of the police department, which is not particularly a good thing in terms of safety and management, that kind of thing. In 1988 the city actually opened what is now, and what is still, the Communications Center. And when it first opened they had combined the police dispatch function, the fire dispatch function, 9-1-1, and the emergency services all into a central division. And that was what I supervised—I was actually the supervisor of the midnight shift. I worked from ten at night to six in the morning.

LD:

Just when everything happens.

DB:

Yeah, abso—oh yeah. Yeah. But it's really interesting work. And we could talk about that forever, you know which is not why we're here but, it's very intense, but the people that you work with you become very close to, because you go through very emotional experiences together. And dispatchers and police officers, and firefighters, but I was always—you know my interest was always in the police department because that's where I started. And by the time we combined the fire department I was not dispatching on a regular bases. But police officers and dispatchers work very closely together. If one of them gets in trouble out in the field, I mean, you're the person they scream for. You're the person they ask for help, and you're not the person who responds, but you're the person who coordinates the response. And those kinds of experiences make for good friendships, you know, and plus you work odd hours, you work odd days, you know, you're not off on the weekends, you're usually not off on Thanksgiving or Christmas or New Years Eve. You know, and so you tend to socialize with the people you work with because nobody else has Tuesday as a day off, or you know, whatever. But it was really interesting work, and it was fascinating work, and while I was there I did a lot of training. I taught at the Police Academy. And was actually a certified law enforcement instructor by the state agency that does that, which is called TCOLE's [**Texas Commission on Law Enforcement**]. I was one of the few civilians that was a certified law enforcement instructor. But

that was not ever what I wanted to spend the rest of my life doing. You know, I was doing it because of my personal situation. And when my mother passed away, which was in May of 1993, I—that allowed me to, you know, kind of pursue what I wanted to do. And I had been looking at studying museum science, I was very interested in that, I was very interested in history, and how history is presented to the public, and the public programs that reach out to teach people about history and the arts and interface with the public. And as I started to research that I found that, you know one of the top three or four museum science programs in the country is here at Tech. Which I didn't even realize, initially. And this all happened—you know in retrospect I look back and I think, This all happened very quickly. My mother died at the beginning of May, and I started back to graduate school in the Museum Science program at the end of August of '93, and so it happened very quickly. And what I did, and I'll be forever grateful for this—I literally made an appointment to visit with Gary Edson, who was a director of the museum as well as the director of the Museum Science program. Just walked in literally off the street and said, you know, "Hi there, my name is Deborah Bigness, and I would like to be a part of your Museum Science program." And you know, Gary, as always, is very cordial to strangers and you know, was like, "Oh, and what do you do now?" And I told him, and he kind of looked me like, "Okay," you know, and I explained to him that wasn't quite as strange as it sounded, because my background was in the arts and whatnot. And so they got me—you know, we—as you have to do when you do something in a hurry like that I originally started as an undeclared graduate student, although I wasn't undecided but you have to do that for academic purposes. And I started back to school, you know at the end of August when the fall term started. And I was still working. I was still working forty hours a week for the city. And taking a full load, which I'm trying to think what, I can't remember if it was ten hours or twelve hours that first semester in the museum program. In the Museum Science program there are many things that you have to take sort of in order. Because you have to take this course because the course the next semester builds on the that course before. So, I was doing both of those things for a while. I actually was working four ten hour shifts at the city and then going to school during the day, which was interesting, you know, at the time. You know at the time I just did what I needed to do and I look back on it now and think, How did I do that. But I—for financial reasons I needed to be working at the city on December thirty-first. And so I—you know I did I actually didn't leave, end up leaving the city until about the first of February of '94, and then I just stayed in school full-time until I graduated with my Master's, which was in December of '95. And I had—in the summer of '94 I had started working, part-time originally, in the beginning, as a student at the Ranching Heritage Center, for a man named Dr. David Salley [?] [00:15:55], who at that time was the director and curator of the Ranching Heritage Center. And I worked for him first as a costumed interpreter in the Barton house, which is the big two-story Victorian house that's at the ranch. The semester before I had worked in the education department of the museum for Patsy Jackson, who was the museum educator at that time. And then I went that summer I was actually working for Dr. Salley [?] and for Patsy at the same time, and then in the fall I started working full-time for Dr. Salley. And I was—eventually the title they decided on was I was the special



events coordinator for the Ranching Heritage Center. And so I, for the last, oh at least the last year, year and a half that I was finishing my degree I worked full-time at the Ranching Heritage Center doing that, and stayed on after I graduated. I was, I didn't leave the Ranch until May—the end of May of 1996.

LD:

Wow.

DB:

So I actually did that job for a couple of years, two and a half years, something like that, which was wonderful. I learned so much, it was such a, a marvelous experience to be able to do public programming at that level. You know because you're talking fourteen acres, thirty-three historic structures, when they do one of their large programs like candlelight at the ranch or ranch day, you can easily, in a program like that use three hundred volunteers, with an attendance of you know anywhere from five to ten thousand people. And the logistics of something like that is fascinating because it's not only the, the volunteers and visitors and the structures and the amount of ground, literally, that you have to cover, but in the case of the Ranching Heritage Center most of the time for us that also meant horses and cattle and dogs and sheep and, you know. You know and so it was, it was an interesting, interesting time.

LD:

Well, I'm going to go back for a couple of things, and just it seems like the job at the police department in the city of Lubbock, that doesn't seem so odd for me for someone who has a dramatic background. Because you're used to that, so you see it in life experience all the time. And that—that just seems pretty tied.

DB:

I used to say people—when I was working at the city, you know people would find out that my background was in theatre, and of course they thought that was odd. And I used to say, jokingly, that there really wasn't that much of a difference only in—with working with the city the bullets were real, you know that that was the biggest difference. And I say that, and said of at the time, you know I have had—when I went to work for the police department in 1983, there had been three officers killed in the line of duty in the entire history of Lubbock. That number has doubled in the last twenty years, and I have three very dear friends, all of whom were killed in the line of duty. And so I don't say that lightly. But the common thread, to kind of answer your observation, in everything that I have done, it seems to me, is communication. That's the common thread that runs through everything is—you know, what are you trying to communicate, how do you communicate it, and why do you want to communicate. And so no, you're right in some ways it really isn't all that different. And all of the jobs that I've had in various ways have all been very deadline-oriented, very logistics-oriented, high stress jobs in a lot of ways. Jobs that tend to

change at a moment's notice. And with also some component, for most of them, of actual physical—the possibility of actual physical danger, I mean, people don't tend to think about the fact that theatre is a very dangerous business. You know it's, I—

LD:

Well I'm going to let you expound on that just a little bit.

DB:

Yeah, well. It, it just—because of the technical aspects of theatre, and you're dealing with—first of all you're dealing with lots and lots of electrical equipment that is different from, you know the toaster that you and I plug in in the kitchen. And so there's, there's—

LD:

Yeah, there's lots more watts going through those lights.

DB:

Lots more watts, well it's actually different kind of currents and, you know and all of that and so you're—there's that that needs to be addressed and people need to be taught safety precautions of that, but you're also dealing with a lot of physical, you know you're flying scenery in and out, and that's done by balancing weights, and if that's not done correctly, or if there's a mishap of some kind things literally come crashing to the floor. You know there were, I guess twice when I was in college at Tech, instances of, you know battens or pieces of scenery that came crashing to the floor at great speeds, because they're traveling from a far distance up, that narrowly miss getting people seriously hurt. You know and I, just like everybody else that's ever been on stage I've had all kinds of mishaps, you know I fell off a platform one time, and from a pretty far distance up. You know one night on stage during a performance I gave myself second degree burns on one of my hands because the flash powder that we were using to make an explosion didn't work like it was supposed to. There was a, you know, an accident, my hand was in the way, and so it pretty much cooked, and I wasn't—it wasn't time for me to come off stage either so—this was during a live performance. And that's not all that unusual. Now I don't mean to at all give the impression that somehow these things only happened at Tech, that's not true at all, they happen in the theatre, you know it just is a business that has some elements of physical danger to it. You know when you go to rock concerts and you see the—you know in the coliseum or in the, some facility like the United Spirit Arena, and you see the giant speakers and stuff that are hung from the ceiling, from the I-beams and stuff on the ceiling, well somebody had to climb up and do that, you know the riggers that do those shows spend their time thirty, forty, fifty, sixty feet in the air, on beams that are, you know, six inches wide or something. I mean there's just a certainly an element of physical danger to the theatre. And certainly it was something we were all aware of on a constant basis in the police department. You know as for the officers as well as the civilian employees, I mean things happen. You know I wasn't ever

injured badly but I had a couple of instances where you know one of the arrestees was not in a—one night when I was not in a very good mood, shall we say, and they couldn't figure out who he was, they didn't know who he was, and he was lying to them and telling them all kinds of stuff, and they brought him into the police department, and this was when we were still upstairs, and our office was right behind the front desk and while the officers in the field had been doing what they were doing I was working on the computers and running different things, and I figured out who he was. And so by the time the officers got there I had a, you know a piece of paper about two feet long with his criminal history background and that kind of thing, and was able to say, "Well no here, this is who he is. And here are the warrants outstanding for his arrest," and you know and, and I mean he was standing right in front of me on the other side of the desk and I guess that didn't make him very happy because he shoved the computer monitor that was on the desk, he threw it at me. You know, not any big deal he—you know not particularly, I mean it didn't hurt me but—[laughter] You know things like that happen when you're dealing with people that are, that are intoxicated or on drugs or just plain mad or whatever. And this certainly was a concern for us at the Arts Alliance on occasion. I mean, last year when the arts festival was hit by what my coworker called "Every pestilence besides the frogs and the locusts," we were literally taking tents down in winds that were forty miles an hour. That's very serious business, people can get seriously hurt doing those kinds of things. Particularly when you're dealing with a volunteer workforce, and in that particular case, on that weekend, where everything's happening at once, people are excited, you know there's an urgency to it. And that was a very big concern of mine, was that we get that process taken care of without hurting anyone. You know, without hurting our staff, our visitors, our volunteers. Yeah, so that's always been an element of things, I guess that I've done. I don't mean to dwell on that it's no—in the big scheme of things I've been very lucky that nothing serious is—has happened to me personally, although it has to people that I was close to. But, that's just kind of one of those common threads that runs through those things, as well as the communication.

LD:

Sure. So Deborah, if I can get you to go back. Tell me something about high school productions. Were you involved with—in theatre during high school?

DB:

Uh-huh.

LD:

And where was that?

DB:

At Monterey High School.

LD:

Uh-huh.

DB:

And, of course like all high schools everywhere, you know we did our shows in the auditorium at the high school, which high school auditoriums are not meant to do theatre. You know, so you always have a stage that's too wide, too deep, too big, lights that aren't what you need, you know that are strip lights and things like that, but—

LD:

And you also can't hang them from the right angle.

DB:

Oh yeah, all of that, you know. But when you're kids and you're in high school and you're doing things I mean you just—we did have, which was interesting I thought—there was actually a drama room at Monterey, I guess there still is, that had a small stage in it, you know where people would do performances of class projects and stuff.

LD:

Really?

DB:

Yeah, yeah. And actually had a fairly extensive theatre library in the drama room, I mean it wasn't part of the school library, it was a collection of plays and whatnot. And so that's how I—yeah I got started doing that.

LD:

Who was the teacher?

DB:

Harlan Reddell was the drama teacher when I was there. And was for many years.

LD:

Is he still alive?

DB:

Yes, he is. And lives here in Lubbock.

LD:

Retired, though.

DB:

Yes, he is retired.

LD:

Okay. Do you think that that—I mean have you—did you work in theatre before then or was that the first time that you really experienced productions was in high school?

DB:

No, we did—we actually did them in junior high too.

LD:

You did?

DB:

Yeah. I went to Hutchison Junior High, and the speech teacher, they didn't call it drama or theatre, they called it speech, when I was in junior high was a woman named Quita Fisher [?], who was not from here, and left here—I don't know, a couple years I think after I went on to high school. But we were doing shows in junior high, and I was also—I had started out—we'd go down and volunteer at the community theatre. They used to at that time, the community theatre was—the building doesn't even exist anymore. It was at 26<sup>th</sup> and P, Avenue P, at the back of the park that's there, Mose Hood Park. I remember the community theatre sat right between the Girl Scout council office—that building is still there, that building actually, ultimately, belonged to the city and was the home of the Fine Arts Center for years, and years, and years, and they actually moved out of that building when they built the Buddy Holly Center, so that's been pretty recent. But the community theatre sat right between that building and an apartment complex, and it was a small theatre that had a very long history. And they had—they would do—I think it was Wednesday nights were crew nights. And anybody could go down and volunteer and help build flats and paint scenery, and you know and so I would do that. Even in junior high I started doing that.

LD:

I guess what I'm getting at in a roundabout way is, who—

[Pause in recording]

DB:

Really and truly the one word answer to that is Hollywood. You know when I was a kid growing up you would come home—like when I came home after school and turned on the television, which was black and white. [Laughter] I'm showing my age. Well, and color televisions certainly existed when I was young, even when I was very young, but they were very expensive,



yeah, so everybody had black and white televisions. But you know, instead of—cartoons were a Saturday morning thing, and when you came home after school and watched television, I mean the things that I remember watching after school were like the Donna Reed Show and “My Friend Flicka” and movies, lots and lots of movies, from what’s now called the golden age of Hollywood, you know, thirties, old thirties and forties movies, you know big Busby Berkeley musical extravaganzas. And I saw, for some reason that’s what I remember seeing a lot of when I was a kid was old movies. And I wanted to do that. I mean I—you know I don’t—I can even remember being very young, and I mean very young, like four or five, and pretending to be Dale Evans. [Laughter] You know, I mean—so I don’t know where that came from really, it was just always, much to the surprise of my wonderful parents, just always sort of there.

LD:

Really?

DB:

I mean, yeah, oh yeah my parents were not—this was just not anything that they were into or have really ever done or—and my mother was very musical. She was a pianist, and apparently at one time a very, very good one. So she was always very musical. Although when I was very young we didn’t own a piano, but she had played piano her entire life, and my father had, because he was from New York, had seen plays on Broadway and stuff. But neither one of them were, certainly not into the theatre or, they were very—my father was, of course, we talked about—was a pilot. But after the war, you know he was a salesman, basically. My mother was a stay at home mom when I was young, although my mother was—and I realize I’m prejudiced because she was my mother—but it’s true nonetheless: she was an amazing, amazing woman. My mother graduated from Tech with a degree in business in 1945 I think it was.

LD:

That still was not a time when women were in school, in college. It’s a little more—

DB:

Well certainly not in the business college, you know. And as a matter of fact my mother—at that time, of course, that was decades before Tech had a law school. One of the professors in the business college was—they would teach law classes in the business college, they would teach business law classes. And one of the professors in the business college became sort of my mother’s mentor. And he was teaching the business law classes. She, without her knowledge or her knowing about it submitted an application for my mother to Columbia Law School. And she was accepted into Columbia Law School, as a woman, in 1945. So that was a pretty big deal. She didn’t—ultimately didn’t end up going, because that’s not what my mother wanted to do. My mother wanted to raise a family and, you know. But yeah, she was an amazing, amazing lady. Highly intelligent. One of the things that she did when I was younger, I guess I don’t know how

old I was when she started, probably eight or ten—she started typing theses and dissertations for Tech. Course this was before computers, you know. And the graduate school keeps a list, or did at that time, I don't know if they still do, of people who did that for a living. And so my mother would literally type someone's dissertation. And we're talking about the clean copy that went to the graduate school, that had to have no white out, no errors no—you know. It's interesting—Bill Dean, who is the head of the alumni association, my mother typed his dissertation. In fact, I think that's the first one she did if I remember correctly. But you know she did—she was an interesting, interesting lady. But she did that in part because—so she could work from home, because that's what people did when I was a kid. And it's really interesting to me to think that it's—I mean I'm not that old, you know I just turned forty-six a couple of days ago, but to think how much has changed and how much people took for granted. I remember the day that President Kennedy was killed. I was in the second grade. The principal came on the loudspeaker, shortly after lunch, told us that the president had been killed in Dallas, and we were to all go home, and they dismissed school, and we all walked home. Now, you know I was seven years old, and we only lived three blocks from the school, but in retrospect—and my mother and I even talked about that—you know in retrospect, no one would do that today. I mean, the assumption as that A, the child could get home, walking, and B that when the child got home, there would be somebody there. And they just dismissed school, which at the time didn't seem odd at all, you know, but in retrospect it's like, wow, you know I can't believe they did that. They certainly wouldn't do that today, I wouldn't think.

LD:

No, because you have too many kids bussed.

BD:

Well, not only bussed, but—

LD:

And you don't know when—

BD:

You know when two working parents or single family parents were, I mean single parent families where the parent is at work or—and probably not even dismissing a child and letting the child walk home, and that would probably be a liability issue—

LD:

Uh-huh, unsupervised.

BD:

—if something were to happen to that child. It's one thing for the mother or the father to tell a

child walk home from school, it's another for the school to say that. Anyway, I don't know how we got off on that. So my parents were not—they were very supportive of me, I mean they—that was wonderful, you know if I wanted to do that—and of course my father worries about me making a living, you know even now, that's what they pay dads for. But they saw every show that I ever did, with the exception of one, and that was because I asked them not to come. Well, I really was not comfortable being up on stage spouting all manner of foul language with my mother and father in the audience. You know I just wasn't comfortable saying the F word in front of my parents. [Laughter] My mother was actually even in a play when I was at Tech, which was interesting.

LD:

What—I mean was it the same one that you were in?

BD:

No, no. A friend of mine, Brad Williams, directed a play in the Lab Theatre that called for, the lead character of the play, ages from the age of six through adulthood, early adulthood, during the course of the play. But he also narrates the play, so you see him in the present day, you see him, then you see his memories take place on the stage, where he is playing himself at six. And what happens at the end of the play is, he talks to his mother. And, of course, his mother is a character in the play, and that's a big part of the play is what his childhood was like and what the relationship was like between his mother and his father and this other woman and all of this plays itself out that—the name of this play's *Who's Happy Now*, and it's a lovely, lovely play. But what happens at the very end of the play is he steps away from the action of the play, which is done to narrate the show, and starts talking to his mother and saying, you know I hope you understand, I hope it's okay, and his mother, not the actress on stage, but someone who has been planted in the audience, who is, for all intents and purposes his present day real mother, gets up and walks out without saying a word to him at the end of the play. And so Brad, when he was doing the show said, "Okay, I've got to have a mother, you know I've got to have—" and I was actually the business manager of the Lab Theatre at that time, and, was like, "Well Brad, if you sent out to central casting for the All-American mom, they would send you my mom." And so we went and asked her if she would do it, and she was like, "Well, what do I have to do," and we're like, "You know, just sit in the audience, and when this happens you get up and you walk out," And we, you know as soon as she left the theatre, we would secret her away so that the leaving audience couldn't see her just standing out there. Because really she was a character in the play at that point, and so my mother, great sport that she was, sat through umpteen performances of *Who's Happy Now*. I don't even remember now how many performances we would do in the Lab, maybe ten, twelve. You know sat through the show ten, twelve times, plus dress rehearsals. And we would seat her in the audience before the audience started coming in, so that it just looked like she was an audience member, you know nobody knew, of course, what was going on. And my mother was a very distinctive lady, she was five-eleven and coal black

hair, big brown eyes, and was just drop dead gorgeous, I mean just drop dead gorgeous. Had legs that like, come up to my waist, you know. [Laughter] And if she was sitting here right now she'd be saying, "No, Deborah, don't say that," but it's true. And so she was just a very striking woman, and so she would be sitting in the audience, all dressed up with her dress and her heels and all of that through the whole show and everybody just thought she was somebody in the audience, and so at the end of the play when he starts talking directly to her and she storms out, it's a very emotional moment because you've really invested yourself in this character and in these people, so yeah, my mom was in a play, what a great sport she was to do that.

LD:

That is.

DB:

Yeah, yeah. As long as she didn't have to talk, she didn't want to have to talk, which she doesn't in the play anyways, so it was fine. But they were very supportive in all kinds of ways. I would routinely raid my mother's house for props and costumes, and even years—I remember, oh, years later, I was like, "Mom, you know that big copper tray that you had? What ever happened to that? I want to see—I need to use—to borrow that tray." Because my mother and I were always borrowing stuff back and forth from each other, any my dad too, you know, and, and she was like, "I don't know, the last time I saw it you took it to put it in a play, and I've never seen it again," which was unfortunately more common than not. So yeah, they were really good sports about the whole thing.

LD:

And your parents were together the whole time?

DB:

Oh yeah. My parents were married for forty-seven years. My mother died just a couple of months before, well, four months I guess before their forty-eighth wedding anniversary. Yeah, they were—a mutual friend introduced them at a drive in, not in a, like drive in movie, like a Hi-D-Ho kind of a drive in here in Lubbock, toward the end of the war. My mother was actually a widow. My mother had—and I did not know this until I was probably ten or twelve years old—my mother had married at the very beginning of the war—World War II obviously—had married a pilot at Reese, an instructor at Reese Air Force Base, at that time, Lubbock Army Airfield, and she was eighteen, and they moved immediately—he had been transferred to Pecos. There was a big air base in Pecos at that time, and they got married sometime around the beginning of December. And they moved immediately to Pecos, because, I mean there was a war on, and he was—you know that was his duty station, and of course she went with him, they were newlyweds. And a month later he was killed in a plane crash. And, you know, here's my eighteen year old mother, who is married a month and a widow. And he was from Tennessee,



and she literally rode the train back with his casket to Tennessee where his family was when they buried him. And I actually have some papers that stayed at my grandparent's house until the last one of my grandparents passed away when she was in her mid-eighties, and then was at my parent's house. And when my mother died my father gave them to me because he didn't know what else to do with them. It's a, just a collection of papers that are connected to him. Robert Copland was his name. And I had never really—I knew they existed by had never really seen them or had never really gone through them until after my mother died. Because she didn't talk about it much, I mean she told us about it when we were kids, and of course my father knew, but she didn't really talk about it much. She would refer to it as "my tragedy," you know, "when my tragedy happened." And Leslie, I went through those papers, and it was amazing to me. And it, it's a collection of just ordinary, everyday kinds of things. Some of them are actual military orders, some of them are receipts from the dry cleaners, I mean just all kinds of things. But one of the stories that becomes clear when you look at those papers and you kind of look at the collection of what's there, my mother's husband had changed his insurance policies and whatnot, as you do when you get married, you know newlyweds do frequently, to make my mother the beneficiary of things, two days before he was killed. My mother actually finished paying for her own wedding ring—he had bought it here in Lubbock and was paying it off, paying installments or whatever. My mother actually finished paying for her own wedding ring after he was already dead. Just horrendous. And so what my mother did was she moved back to school after that experience, she had been in Tech before for—I'm not even sure a semester or two, I think, and then after that experience she went back to school, of course she moved back to Lubbock, moved back in with her parents, who lived over on Main Street on the Twenty-Two Hundred block of Main Street, and basically spent the rest of the war going to school and working. She worked for—and I don't, I can't remember the actual name of it—she worked for one of the wartime governmental agencies that did, like handed out ration stamps and all of that kind of stuff. And so she worked some doing that and went to school in the business college. And then it wasn't until the very end of the war that she met my father, who had come back from overseas. And they met in April and got married in October, and he had met my mother, and then he went one night to their house, to my grandparent's house on Main Street to see her, and just—he didn't—she didn't know he was coming, I mean he just went by there, and my grandparents told my dad that, you know, she wasn't there she was at the movies. And so he went on down Main Street to the Lindsey Theater, which at that time was at the corner of Main and Avenue J, and found my mother standing by herself in line waiting to get into the movie, and went up to her and said, "Well, do you want to do something," or whatever they said, you know and, and there actually was a bowling alley like a block away from the movie theatre, so they went down to the bowling alley and went bowling. And that was their first date. And my mother, because of her experiences was very afraid of airplanes. I remember one time my mother flew in my whole life, and that may have been the only time she ever flew. And my father basically gave up flying for love of my mother. He was an instructor pilot, he had flown over seventy missions overseas. I even remember when I was a little girl, of course all of this happened long before I was born, but



I remember when I was a little girl they would call my dad from the civil air patrol and try and get him to come fly with them, and he wouldn't do it, he would never do it. And it was because of my mother. He told me one time, actually not too long after my mother died that, because the—he was actually in the air force reserve for many years after the war, as were, you know a lot of veterans. And he was a captain in the air force. And they actually contacted him when the conflict in Korea started, and wanted him to come back in the service and train a squadron of pilots and fly bombing missions in Korea. And of course he didn't do it. But he told me one time not too long after my mother died that had he not had a family, you know a wife and a family, that he would have done it. Course he would have done. You know and over the years he said, "Oh I should've done that, I should've stayed in the military, I would be retired by now, have a military pension," and you know and every time he said something like that I'm like, "Daddy, yeah, and if you had—you know you're a pilot, you're a bomber pilot, that's what you do." And so many of those men who got shot down in Vietnam, especially in the early years of Vietnam, were men just like my dad, who were World War II combat pilots who either stayed in or came back, you know, and by the beginning of Vietnam were lieutenant colonels or full bird colonels, and they were flying missions in Vietnam and they were getting shot down and, you know if they were lucky enough to live they spent the rest of the war in the Hanoi Hilton. So who knows what would have happened to my dad. And he's always like, "Well, yeah, there is that," you know, but—but yeah, it's quite a story, my parents. But the thing that's interesting to me about it is that kind of thing was happening—I mean it's extraordinary because it's so ordinary. You know it was happening all over and it was happening to everyone. And even though I have been raised listening to my parents tell me stories—I mean I was always very lucky because they were both very open, and very—you know my father has always told me stories about what he did in the war, this or that, ever since I was tiny around the kitchen table kind of thing. I still don't think we have any concept of what it must've really been like, you know what they must've really done because as extraordinary as my parent's story is, I mean each of them individually and then ultimately as a couple, it's so ordinary. I mean they were two little people in this massive effort. And that's really amazing to me. So, what—we got off on that too, well—[laughter]

LD:

That's fine, that's fine.

DB:

But, yeah, so that's kind of who my parents were and—and that's, you know, so none of my artistic inclinations really came straight from them, you can't really pass it off on that, I don't know where they came from. Like I say, old Hollywood movies, really, truly, I just remember—

LD:

Did that high school teacher, did he influence you to come to Tech?

DB:

Well, there were—not directly, I mean there were a lot of things that influenced me to come to Tech. One of the—probably the biggest one was Tech did, at that time, and still does I think, a summer workshop for theatre students, where high school age theatre students from all over come here and do shows and—just like they did band camp, which I also did when I was, you know, that age. And so I had worked with some folks in the theatre department at Tech as a high school student. [LD sneezes] Certainly, and that was a big influence on my decision to come to Tech. Ultimately, the thing that was most influential probably is just much more mundane than that, I mean we were not, certainly not poor but we were not wealthy either, you know, and it was a question of what school could you afford to go to, and of course I was here in Lubbock, and—

LD:

Just live with mom and dad and go to school.

DB:

Yeah, which I did for, you know on and off for here and there. I certainly didn't live with them the whole time I was in college, but I'm sure when I was a freshman I did. Well, in fact I know I did. Wasn't until the summer after my freshman year I think was the first time I ever moved away from home I think. But anyway, you know so it was kind of mundane issues like that, what can you afford and what can you—there are a lot of UT graduates in my extended family. [Laughter]

LD:

Oh no. Heaven forbid.

DB:

Oh yes, oh yes. But I never really—I don't remember going through a lot of stuff in high school about where was I going to go to college and, you know, that was kind of a foregone conclusion in a way. For no other reason than we couldn't afford it. But I don't even really remember having a lot of desire to go, you know off to a big fancy Ivy League school or whatever. And maybe that's just because I knew it wasn't an option so I didn't waste time worrying about it. But—

LD:

Well, once you came to Tech you went straight to theatre.

DB:

I did.

LD:

And tell me about the people who were here during that time.

DB:

Oh my gosh.

LD:

Who were your favorites, what kind of shows did you do, what did you all do when you hung out?

DB:

We did—actually, and I, I've always said this was a stroke of brilliance. Okay, when I started at Tech, I did, I went straight to the theatre department, I was always a theatre major, although I did other things too. I was in the music department playing French horn as well as studying voice, although I never played in the Tech band. They tried to get me to on numerous occasions, and I just, you know I was too busy doing theatre and I didn't have time to do that. Plus I, at that point, pretty much marched all I ever really wanted to march. [Laughing]

LD:

I know.

DB:

And especially with the French horn, you know it's not like being in the marching band when you play a piccolo.

LD:

Right. And now, did you do flugelhorn when you marched?

DB:

No, actually we marched with horns, we marched with French horns, instead of flugelhorns. Straight up, parallel to the ground.

LD:

Okay, okay, I wanted to make sure.

DB:

Straight up, parallel to the ground. So, but I was always a theatre major, declared from the very beginning.

LD:

What about voice, who did you study with?

DB:

Judith—oh my gosh what is her last name? You know, I can't recall right off the top of my head.

LD:

Was she a regular faculty?

DB:

Yes, she was a faculty member in the music department.

LD:

Well, so that's—you're really fortunate, because now you probably wouldn't get a full-time faculty, you'd get a T.A.

DB:

Probably, yeah, that's true. And I also studied French horn with Anthony Britten.

LD:

Really. What was he like then?

DB:

Oh he was wonderful, I mean he's an amazing musician, and his musicianship is amazing. He totally intimidated me. [Laughs] For no other reason that—well ultimately why I quit taking, he and I discussed it, was because I wasn't—

LD:

A major.

DB:

A major. Well not only—not so much that I wasn't a major but that I wasn't playing in any of the various ensembles. You know I wasn't in the orchestra, I wasn't in the band. I was continuing to play the horn because I wanted to play the horn. So it was—you know and he made the point, and I certainly understood, that really his time needed to be dedicated to, you know teaching people who were in the music system, as it were, which I was not. You know, French horn is not exactly like a piano, it's not something you can go off and just—

[Pause in recording]

DB:

Okay, so the theatre department at Tech when I first started, which was in the summer of '74, as we said, I was actually cast in that play for summer rep while I was still in high school. Dr. Richard Weaver was the head of the department, Ronald Schultz was directing shows, teaching acting, teaching directing, Dr. Cliff Ashby, Clifford Ashby was the theatre historian, and he directed as well, taught an acting class while I was there, at least one. Larry Randolph was the costumer, taught introduction to theatre as well as introduction to cinema. The first year I was at Tech, Waylon Winstead was the designer, and Waylon went on then to help build, not in the literal sense of the word, but when they put together the Allen Theatre in the University Center Waylon was in charge of the Allen Theatre for some years when it was newly built and outfitted and all of that. So that was the faculty when I first started. It changed somewhat, Waylon left after the first year and was replaced by Forrest Newland, Dr. Forrest Newland, who came here from Emporia, Kansas. Dr. George Sorensen came from Texas Christian University my sophomore year or junior year. And Larry Randolph went on sabbatical. And then the costumer became—wonderful woman, talented woman named Nancy Steele, who came here, I believe, from California on a kind of a temporary assignment but was actually here for two or three years. And those were pretty much the faculty changes while I was in the department, I mean of course T.A.s came and went and all of that but, but the faculty itself was remarkably stable and remarkably diverse. And I think part of the reason why everything worked as well as it did in terms of the education that we were all able to get. Because all of these people, and of course primarily men as it turned out but, they were all very different, they all had very different ideas, very different theories, very different personalities, very different interests, and so at times it could be a rather contentious situation. [Laughing] And students being students, what would happen is we would tend to, you know break up into groups and you would have the, you know the Sorensen supporters or the Ashby supporters or the Schultz supporters or the—well, actually when it came to Mr. Schultz everybody was just universally in awe of the man and you know, loved the man dearly. And Mr. Schultz has been dead for quite some years now, and rarely, even now rarely if ever when we're together and talking will you hear any of us call him anything other than Mr. Schultz. I mean that's just—you know we're not like that necessarily with other professors, but with Mr. Schultz we are. He was an amazing, amazing man. And so the fact that they were all so different and did have different ideas and different philosophies, because students are students and they're kids and they're not terribly mature in some aspects, they tend to—and they still do, I mean tend to become groupies of one professor or another, which sometimes causes lots of contention amongst themselves, which, from a little bit more mature perspective is totally unnecessary and silly. But being young and artistic and theatrical and convinced, as all nineteen year olds are, that we know all the answers and we're going to save the world, all of that was terribly important and terribly dramatic. And in retrospect I think what we have all come to realize, or at least most of us, is that because we had those people here at that time, and because they were so diverse, we got an excellent, excellent education. Because you learned, you pretty much could touch every different style of acting or theory of directing



that you wanted to touch, either by taking the class from—you know, taking an acting class, for instance, from Mr. Schultz was very different from taking an acting class from Dr. Sorensen. Not better or worse, just very different, you know their techniques were very different, their styles were very different, the types of acting they taught were very different. And so you could, if you had a mind, learn things from all of these different people, who had all of their different, you know pet theories or whatever that changed over the years. And that was true in all kinds of areas, not just acting and directing, but also in design. The design program wasn't as stable as the other kind of side of the coin, but, but it was certainly true in design. Forrest Newland was an excellent teacher. It was certainly true in management—you had Dr. Richard Weaver doing amazing, amazing things for the time in terms of arts management—he was a real pioneer in the field of arts management and how the arts are managed, how nonprofit organizations work, who the audience is for.

[Pause in recording]

LD:

So, now Deborah if I can get you to tell me about influences of these people, these faculty.

DB:

I had different, you know different influences, of course, from different faculty members as well as opportunities. Richard Weaver, Dr. Richard Weaver, was probably the biggest overall influence on me because, not only did I work with him as an actress and do shows for him, I also worked for him. He was the head of the department, chairman of the department, and his—well one of his sort of areas of specialty was management. And he was at that particular point in time doing some very new, very kind of groundbreaking teaching in terms of promotion of the arts and—I think we got into this, or were about to get into this when the tape stopped—who the audience is for the arts, and how you promote them, and how you reach out to them, the importance of a media mix to do that, you know television, radio, print advertising, those kinds of things. And at that time that was pretty novel, pretty land breaking stuff in terms of the theatre, in applying that kind of theory to promotion of the arts. You know he was a true believer, I mean he absolutely believed that it was essential for the health of any arts organization to do those kinds of outreach things and promotional campaigns. And I was—you know I was so young at yet at the same time I was—it was just so logical, it just made perfect sense and it was something that interested me greatly. And so, he kind of, as professors will do sometimes, took me under his wing and gave me some wonderful opportunities in terms of—I was the—you know he hired me to be the business manager of the Lab Theatre, at one time I was the associate business manager of the University Theatre, and at that time the University Theatre really didn't have a position called promotions director. And so that's what the business managers did, I mean it was one of the things they did, aside from oversee box office operations and that kind of thing, you know. And actually now they have a paid staff person who does that,

who is Richard Privet. A few years ago, I guess maybe it's been three, four years ago now, one of the PhD students called me and was writing her dissertation on the history of promotions at the University Theatre. And she had actually gotten my name and number from Dr. Weaver, who told her that I was the first promotions director for the University Theatre even though I really never had that title. But that's—you know functionally that was his—that's what she asked him was who was the first and he said, "Well Deborah was." And it tickled me because, you know I was like, "Wait, I am way too young to be a historical source." [Laughing] But I was really young, and the thing that was so amazing, as I look back on it, is he gave me opportunities to do that, to really fly and to do as much as I could as you know, the actual hands on doing of it in addition to the classroom work. And—

LD:

Tell me a typical week, or things that you would do to get ready for a season.

DB:

Oh gosh, I mean, we did one of the very first big promotional campaigns in terms of selling season tickets. Not too many years before this particular time, probably in the very early seventies, there was a man who did a bunch of work with lyric opera in Chicago and some other people named Danny Newman, who wrote a book, very famous book called *Subscribe Now*, which is about selling season tickets. And the book was pretty new at this time and pretty radical in some ways and Dr. Weaver just thought it was absolutely the way to go, and absolutely essential to the operation of the theatre. The theatre department is funded a little differently from a lot of the academic departments, I mean yes they do get money from the University just like everybody else does, but certain things within the theatre have to be paid for from ticket sales. So they depend on that money to do certain things just like any other theatre would, even though they're at an educational institution. And when we did that first campaign, I mean it started way back in the summer, if not the late spring, and the first thing that—one of the first things we did was work on the design of the brochure. Which we didn't do, actually the actual design was done by an artist over at what now would be Tech Press, I don't know what the—I think they had a different name back then. So you know we would meet with her, and she had ideas for what the brochure ought to look like and we had ideas and so we worked through that process of what it was going to look like, what it was going to say, how you opened it in what order, you know how you actually ordered the tickets. I mean even at that time ticket packages were kind of a new concept, you know that you could—not a new concept, that's really not true, it's a recycled concept. Season tickets, what we would now call seasons tickets have been sold through the history of the theatre in various kind of configurations at various times in the history of the theatre, but this way of doing it was, was somewhat new. And so it was like okay how do you do—because of course that interfaces directly with box office—my brain is operating faster than my mouth at this point. You know if someone wants to call and by a season ticket, and they want to come every Monday night, then what does the box office have to do in order to make that

happen. So it's not just what's in the brochure, it's all the steps that come after that. And then, of course, just to plan the media campaign itself—are there going to be television commercials, if there are, who's going to do them, what are they going to say—I mean somebody has to write them, somebody has to find the people in them, if you're using film clips or slides, which at that time which was more typical was use slides, you know where do those come from, who do they belong to, how do you get permission to use them if you don't own them. Same thing with radio, and then I know one thing that we worked on a lot was what you actually did with that brochure once you got it printed. One of the things that we did and we—I couldn't even tell you how many thousands of those brochures we printed but it was a bunch. Because we didn't just use it to mail to people, we used it—for instance there's a way you can code a brochure so that when you get it back in the mail you can tell where it came from, like which mailing list it came off of, or—and you go back ultimately after a campaign like that, and you analyze all that data, you know, where is your audience coming from, did you get more subscribers off the music department's list or the alumni list, or the—you know I mean there's all kinds of ways you can do that. And that all has to be determined before you print the brochure because if you're going to put a code on the brochure itself so that you can tell, then, you know, that has to, you have to back all that stuff up. And any time you do PR it's always an exercise in moving backwards. You know if your target date—if the show opens on this date, then how long before that do you have to have the commercial on the air, and how long before it goes on the air do you have to have, to put it into production, and how long before that is it going to take to write it, you know so you're working backwards through the calendar. The other thing that we did with that particular brochure, which was screaming yellow, as I recall, was we inserted it into the *Avalanche Journal*. You know when you buy a Sunday paper now there—you get stacks of circulars and stuff that are as big as the Sunday paper, and in the promotions business that's called flack, is what that is and so one of the things that you look at is how much flack do you have to compete with and is it worth your money to do that. Because it's not cheap, you know, I mean there's a lot of labor involved, and the AJ charges for that, as any other business would. You know but at that time, and that was probably, oh, twenty years, around twenty years ago, there was much less of that, I mean yeah you still had your grocery store ads and that kind of a thing, but it was not like it is now where sometimes the ads are thicker than the paper. You know just as a promotions person if somebody asked me today, "Should we do that?" my answer would be no. It's—you don't get enough bang for the buck, as they say, there's not—there's too much competition from all that stuff. And if most people are like me, I mean I get a Sunday paper, first thing I do is I reach in, take all that stuff and throw it in the trash can without ever even looking at it. And I know there are people who religiously read all those flyers and, you know, but, but I'm not one of them. But if you've paid money, not only to print the brochure, but to get it in there, and nobody's ever even seeing it, then you've wasted your money. And quite frankly we didn't know how that was going to work, we didn't know if it was going to be successful or not, we were kind of going out on a limb to spend the money to do it, because, you know as most university departments are we were not exactly flush at the time. Of course, it had to be done in the summer, we did it in the

late summer. And I remember some meetings during the second summer session, which in the theatre department is typically dark, I mean there's not hardly anything that goes on in the theatre department in the second summer session. A few classes maybe, but you're done with summer rep, you know every new production cycle doesn't start until the fall, and so that's the time of year where everybody takes vacations and all of that. And I remember several meetings that we had, you know talking about all this stuff and planning all this stuff, where we'd be sitting there and the building would be pretty much dark except for where we were. And he and I talking about, gee, well, oh we could do this and this is how much it'll cost, and what do you think our returns are going to be, we were kind of guessing at stuff, because it had never been done before, we didn't know. And I remember Dr. Weaver asking me, and of course, not like I had the decision-making authority, I didn't, he did, but I remember him asking me did I think we ought to take the chance. And those are the kind of opportunities that I had because of him. Even though I was a student I was treated as a staff member, I was given the responsibilities. And because of that I was able to learn and grow in ways that I probably wouldn't have had the opportunity to do strictly taking classes. I was very lucky that the same thing happened to me in the museum program when I was working for Dr. Sallay [?], David Sallay. He was very similar in that way. He basically would let me run with whatever. Because he trusted me to come to him when I needed him, you know? And to keep him informed and to do those kinds of things. And I had some marvelous acting opportunities and directing opportunities that I wouldn't have probably had otherwise from Ron Schultz and George Sorensen, two amazingly talented men with very different techniques and very different viewpoints. And I was able to work with both of them and learn from both of them.

LD:

Would you do an example of each?

DB:

Sure. Mr. Schultz was very—he was a very technique-oriented director. I mean his method of directing a play or teaching an actor was very—I really hesitate to use the word traditional, but very technique-oriented. You know he would study a play sometimes, I'm sure for months before he ever directed it. I understand that the collection here has a lot of his prop books and stuff, which are, for most people would be a dissertation. All of the research about a play, all of the original reviews, all of the, you know, if it was a piece that took place at a given time or place, what was that place, what was that time like, what—you know putting it in a historical context. And he did that every time he directed a play, which was at least once or twice a year. And so that by the time the actors came into that process he knew what he wanted, I mean he knew what that play was, he knew what he thought the playwright meant by that play, and so he worked to help the actors find their way to that. And the way he did that was very methodical and traditional and full of technique. He would have, for instance, a sketch, a ground plan of the theatre, or the stage with the set in it, and all of the furniture and all of that drawn out for each



page of the script. And on the ground plan would be all of the blocking, which is the, how the actors move, who moves where when, on what line, and all of what actors call “the business,” you know do I cross to that table and pick up this glass when I say this line. All of that would be written in the prop script before he would ever even direct a show. And so when he started a rehearsal process it was very much about telling you were to be when, helping you learn how to present yourself on stage. You know I mean there are certain kinds of do’s and don’ts that actors learn that after a certain period of time you almost forget that you’ve learned them because they’ve become second nature. You know, you don’t turn your back to the audience unless you’re doing it for effect, you gesture with your upstage hand as opposed to your downstage hand, upstage meaning the one closest to the back of the theatre, because otherwise you’re blocking yourself or what’s called blocking yourself—the audience can’t see you, or they can’t see the expression on your face or they can’t—and then he was very good about working the script through those kinds of techniques but also very good about helping you learn who this character was, who this person was, and how you conveyed that to an audience. Very methodical, very—and that makes him sound kind of stodgy or something, and he wasn’t at all. I mean his method and his technique [phone rings] was brilliant. And I learned an awful lot from him, just about how the business works, you know and how you conduct yourself on stage, and what a play is meant to do in terms of the relationship between the play and the actor and the audience. One of the things that took a lot of getting used to with Mr. Schultz, and he was this tiny man, I don’t know if you’ve really had anybody talk to you about him before.

LD:

No.

DB:

He was this very small man who smoked incessantly, was very soft spoken, very gentlemanly, quite humorous in his own way, although it took a while for the students, you know each new crop of students, to really understand his humor and his—first of all I think to understand that he had a sense of humor because they were so in awe of him. But to then to understand his humor and understand that he was—he could be quite impish and quite cute, and you know he would say things to you and sometimes it took you a minute to catch on that he was teaching you or that he was making a joke or whatever. But one of the hardest things I think is that certainly for me as a new, you know, seventeen year old college student was, if you were doing what he wanted you to do he didn’t say anything to you. And actors being actors, you know you’re—I think you’re first response is just the opposite of that, you know that if somebody isn’t talking to you about what you’re doing your like, “Oh god, I’m terrible, they hate, me.” You know, and that wasn’t it at all with Mr. Schultz—if you were doing what he wanted you to do, what he thought you ought to be doing, he just didn’t—



LD:

He let you do it.

DB:

Yeah, he let you do it. And it took me a long time to figure that out, and it took me a much longer time even to—even years after I left Tech and even after Mr. Schultz was gone. Because I did a lot of shows for Mr. Schultz, he kept casting me in shows. And one of my fondest memories, and I think one of the greatest compliments I have ever received was one of the very last shows I did at Tech was *The Shadowbox*, which is a fairly straight, fairly—I mean that as in, you know non-comedy, non-musical sense of the word, serious drama that centers around three different family units, each of whom has a member dying of cancer. And the play is about how these three different unrelated family units deal with this issue. And I was in the play the wife of a man who was dying of cancer. It was a very dramatic role, very serious role, very long role. And I don't, it was the very last time we did the show, or one of the last performances of the show, you could literally hear people crying in the house, you could hear the audience sobbing while the play was going on. Which is a little disconcerting to an actor but also there's voice in the back of your head going, "Yes!" you know. [Laughing] [coughs] Pardon me.

LD:

"I'm playing right, I'm playing"—

DB:

Yeah, you know it's wonderful. And I remember after that performance Mr. Schultz caught me in the green room backstage and out in the hall actually, and he came up to me and said, "Oh, Deborah," because he had this wonderful way of speaking, and he said to me, "Well you've certainly done your swan song tonight, haven't you." And you know, coming from this man who I admired so greatly, that was just one of the greatest compliments I ever received. And it's interesting, because it wasn't until years and years later that it—this is going to sound terribly silly, but—that it dawned on me that he actually thought I could act. Now I know that sounds silly, because he kept casting me in plays. And in fact I even, just in the last year or so I was corresponding with his wife and told her that that came as such a revelation to me, being—because I never thought that at the time. I don't know why. I mean I guess I thought he just couldn't find anybody else or you know, whatever my self-effacing reason was at the time. But he was interesting that way, you know, where you really could learn the technique from him. Dr. Schultz worked a totally different—

[Pause in recording]

DB:

—with Dr. Schultz. His technique was much more geared toward exploration, exploration on the part of the actor, coming to a character through exercises or emotional and physical movement and expression, that was not saying your lines necessarily, you know it was trying to get to the emotional core of the character rather than—that in turn would give you the blocking the movement, the line readings, rather than the other way around. And so it was very different, and Dr. Sorensen has worked in lots of different ways and techniques over the years doing different things, but my experiences with him were in those areas, because that's something he had an interest in, that he was experimenting with at the time, and so it was a very different experience, it was a very different experience of doing a play in a totally different way. And in fact the play that I did with him during that same time period, we did a play called *Kennedy's Children*, which is essentially a series of monologues. There are five or six characters on the stage, they're in a bar and each of one of them talks in these long monologues to the audience, they never talk to each other. And what we did with that play, which was very interesting, is we did it with a different cast. It was actually a class project. We were all in an acting class with Dr. Sorensen. And there were, oh gosh, I don't know probably twelve or fifteen of us, and each of us played different roles in the play. There were three women, there—in *Kennedy's Children* there were three women's parts, two men's parts and a bartender who can be either gender. Every time we did the play it had a different cast. So one night you might be playing Carla, who is one of the women, the next night I would be playing Rhona, who is another one of the women, totally different characters. And the same was true for every actor in the play, so that every night you were playing a different character, or you were onstage with people who weren't playing those parts the last time you did it. So it was a very interesting experiment. And it worked, you know it worked well, but no two audiences ever saw the same play, because they literally saw a different cast every night, or the same actors playing different parts, and so that was an interesting experiment, an interesting way to get a play on stage. And that was very, that whole process was very emotionally oriented, you know at finding out who these people were emotionally, and—because this is a serious play and there's some real issues. I mean one of the male characters in the play is a Vietnam vet who's like completely messed up in all kinds of ways. One of them is, there's a woman named Carla in the play who's kind of a Marilyn Monroe-esque character who actually kills herself at the end of the play. The audience sometimes gets that and sometimes doesn't, but at the end of the play she's passed out on the bar, and what the audience knows, that the other characters on the stage don't know, is that before she came to the bar she took all these pills and stuff, and she's been drinking the whole time she's been there, and she's going to die at the end of the play. The audience knows that, the other characters on stage really don't—you know they haven't been paying any attention to it, essentially. So that was an interesting experiment, an interesting thing to do. So there were a lot of opportunities to work in lots of different ways because of the variety of the faculty at that time. And I think that's one of the reasons why [coughs] pardon me—there's so many people now out working, doing all kinds of things that are—that still have very strong opinions about theatre, and very—are very committed

to it. Even people that are not making a living doing it in some cases, I mean some of us—and I don't know if we've actually talked about this on tape although you and I've talked about it—the alumni of the department of theatre are very close. We have founded an organization, we're about to do our second reunion, we did one last year that was a very large event, people came from all over the country. And as a group there are lots and lots of people that are alumni of Tech department of theatre doing all kinds of things. There's one that's vice president of MGM, Metro Goldwin Mayer, there's one who is a producer of "Dharma and Greg," there's one who is one the creators and one of the writers for "King of the Hill," an animated series. You know there, one who's an opera singer in Chicago, one who builds sets for Hollywood movies, you know they're just on and on—one who's an airline executive but is also the—at least I think that's what he does, that's what I heard last—but is also the president of his local community theatre board, I think. All kinds of alumni working in community theatre or teaching, you know whether it's in the public schools, different universities, or all over the place, you know folks on Broadway doing shows, folks making national commercials, folks making local commercials, I mean there's just all kinds of people doing all kinds of stuff, and I think a lot of it is because we had good training, and we had—we were expected to perform at a level that was an industry standard, not a student standard. You know, if rehearsal started at eight o'clock, rehearsal started at eight o'clock. That didn't mean you walked through the door at eight o'clock and took your coat off and found your script and, you know all of that, it meant you were standing on the stage ready to go. And we rehearsed sometimes very late into the night. You know I've pulled many of an all-nighter in the University Theatre, either rehearsing or building a set or—and in fact more than once we—I'm sure you've probably been to the University Theatre, but for the benefit of this tape it has what's called Continental seating, which means that the space between the seats, between the rows of seats, is very wide. And more than once we would be at the theatre into the wee hours of the morning, I'm talking three, four, five o'clock in the morning rehearsing, and we would have a nine o'clock acting class with Mr. Schultz or whatever, and more than once Mr. Schultz would come into the theatre the next morning and wake us up because we had just gone—instead of going home we had just gone to sleep in the aisles of the theatre, you know and he would come in and wake us up for class. [Laughs] Which, I'm sure tickled him no end in some respects, but we were all like that, I mean it was very much—and we didn't think that was odd, strangely enough, I mean we—of course, you're nineteen and you're young, and you think you're invincible, but that was just—there was a job that had to be done and we did it. And we didn't think that was odd, we didn't think that it was unusual that we spent all night sometimes into the wee hours of the morning many, many, many times, doing this thing, it's what we wanted to do, it's what we loved to do. And I think we were probably all vaguely aware that English majors and math majors didn't live like that. [Laughs] But from our perspective it was more the pity for them, because they don't have anything that they're passionate about.

LD:

Just a feeling of camaraderie.

DB:

Yeah, yeah. And it was very much a place for me, on a personal level, to belong. You know I think in some respects that's what the Greek organizations are for some people, other kinds of things, you know and I certainly did other kinds of things when I was in school. I was, at one time, a member of the Chordettes, which is a—like the angel flight with the air force only this was with the army. You know, like we talked earlier I played the French horn and I was in the student senate, and you know, different kinds of things but there was never any doubt in my mind that the theatre was my home. And I think that's true of all of us, I mean I think that is true for all of the kids that I went to school with. And I attribute it directly to the leadership that we had. And the fact that we did have a little bit different relationship probably with our professors than most students and most professors. They were still the professors and we were still the students, and everybody understood that, but we related to them differently I think probably than a lot of students in different departments. Because we saw them outside of class, and we were working as part of a team. You know the production team of a play is different from the academic hierarchy in the classroom. And you know we did work with them at all hours, late into the night, on weekends, on you know, many of them we called by their first names, even then, and still do. Which is kind of an outgrowth of just the situation that we were in. There was no lack of respect that was meant by it, but we worked with them differently. And at times we socialized together. You know there would always be some big celebratory party at the end of summer rep, and for a while I remember Dr. Weaver and his wife Alice French were living in a duplex that had a swimming pool. So that was always a favorite hot spot for the end of summer rep party.

LD:

I bet so.

DB:

Yeah, oh yeah. And that was—plus he was just real into that kind of thing. I remember telling him one time that I thought he missed his true calling in life, that he really should have been the social director on a cruise ship. You know, because he was just always, wanted everybody to be you know, together and having a good time, and he just loved to plan that kind of stuff, he had a good time.

LD:

Now, I conceive, especially from that era that you're talking about, and all these people when they were in theatre, and many of them, music department same sort of thing. But we have a great number of people who are very successful in the arts from this area.

DB:

Yes.



LD:

And they're not always involved with theatre or even in music that's associated with Tech. So why do you think that is? I mean do you think it has to do with the society? Do you have any thoughts on that?

DB:

Well, there have been entire books written trying to answer this question. [Laughs] My personal belief, and you know this is not scientifically nor historically accurate, but I think the thing that it has the most to do with is the land itself. Now Terry Allen would tell you, because a number of people have asked him that same question, what Terry Allen would tell you it was because there wasn't anything else to do here. That's sort of a cleaned up version of the way he would probably say it, but I really think it's more than that. I think Texas in general but particularly the Plains in specific are so massive and so open and so different from what we're told that we're supposed to want, or we're supposed to like, that I think as human beings we have to somehow attempt to cope with that, attempt to cope with the space and the immensity that we find ourselves in the middle of. And I think one of the ways that people do that is through artistic expression. Another thing I think that enters into this, that we are not very far from the frontier, in a historical perspective. In 1880, there wasn't anything here, literally, I mean this was what was called the Comancheria, which is the land of the Comanche. There wasn't any—there were not towns here, there were no Anglo people here, there were—there was nothing. That's 120 years ago. I mean in the span of time that's nothing. And you know, there's still people alive today—Georgia Mae Erickson is a wonderful example, I mean Georgia Mae is—well no one knows for sure how old Georgia Mae is but you know, up in her eighties, shall we say at this point. She is still alive, you know you can walk up and have a conversation with the woman.

LD:

Oh yes.

DB:

And Georgia Mae's grandfather was the first Anglo settler in Crosby county, which was before there were any Anglo settlers in Lubbock county. Now, this was not her great, great, great, great, great, great grandfather, this was her grandfather. She knew him, she talked to him, she was raised, you know, running in and out of his house. And you know to a lesser extent even my own family that we talked about this morning—1926 is yesterday, that's nothing, and yet when my parents, or my grandparents, pardon me—came to Lubbock, Lubbock, the entire city of Lubbock was between 4<sup>th</sup> street and 19<sup>th</sup> street and Avenue Q and University. That was it. Actually Avenue A and Avenue Q probably, but—so we're not far from the frontier in terms of our own existence and our own experiences. When you can talk to your own grandparents about what are essentially frontier experiences, that's very new and very fresh. And the other thing is that we live kind of on the—we live on the edge. By living on the plains we live on the edge in a

geographic, and emotional, and resource sense of the word I guess. And what I mean by that is for instance right now there's some stuff in the news about—they've given—sold someone permission to mine, quote unquote, the Ogallala aquifer, and pump water out of the aquifer to sell. Well, without that water we might as well all pack up and move, because we cannot live here. It's that simple. We live in a place that literally can be destroyed in the blink of an eye. And the chances of it happening are very real. It was only thirty, just over thirty-two years ago that a great segment of the city was destroyed by a tornado, you know, what ultimately became what they consider to be the first F-5 tornado that they ever calculated. I mean, all of the symbols that you used to see on the television before they got Doppler, you know the clouds and the funnels and all of that, were a direct result of the Lubbock tornado. And that system eventually became used nationwide. When I was working for the police department we did a workshop with FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and they had some really interesting statistics—of course they deal with all kinds of emergencies, anything from the possibility of nuclear war to natural disasters. And one of the things that they were saying was that for some reason that scientists do not understand, a tornado can form anywhere on the globe at any time. They know that. But for some reason that they do not understand, 90 percent of all the tornados on the entire earth form in North America. Of that 90 percent, 90 percent form in what's called tornado alley. The epicenter of tornado alley in terms of frequency, and number, and severity et cetera, et cetera, is geographically pretty much right smack dab halfway between here and Plainview. So we live in a place where not only are we very close to the, the frontier culturally, but there is an element of physical danger that I really do think permeates a lot of the art that's produced by people in this area in a way that's not always really identifiable. It's not—certainly not something that a native of this area spends a lot of time talking about. But I guarantee you it's something they're always aware of. People here—I don't know how much people in other parts of the world look skyward to see what's going on, or to see the signs, or to see—or even know what that means, when a cloud looks a certain way or whatever, but people here do. Because it's very real, and it's very—and it's just right there. And they can drop out on top of your head in a split second. And so I think that's part of it too, I mean I think part of it is that sense of living on the edge and living on the edge of all kinds of things, I mean, in a part of America that was always identified as the Great American Desert. In a part of America that's still, is sort of an enigma, I think, to most of the country. I mean there's the East Coast and then there's the West Coast and then there's this giant center section of America, that I'm not so sure that either coast really gets unless they were from there originally. And I think that continues to—you can shrink that down even on a state level. I mean it's amazing—we laugh, in fact I was laughing with a friend about this just in the last couple of days, people say—typically people from Austin or Houston or wherever will say, “Oh Lubbock, it's so far out there.” Well, you know last I checked on my map it was exactly the same distance from Lubbock to Austin as it was from Austin to Lubbock. What a concept. And yet they tend to think, you know people in other parts of the state just to think that we are out in the boondocks, when in actuality we're pretty much in the center of the country. But because the way America was settled, because it

was settled from both coasts in, roughly, we're kind of the Johnny-come-latelys, in terms of that. And I think that has influenced the art, you know whether you're talking about visual art or much. First of all, because we are so close to the frontier, people made their own recreation, people made their own entertainment. There were people in this area who did not even have indoor plumbing until after the Second World War. And I don't say that to mean that they were backwards or they were ignorant or anything like that at all, I'm just saying they lived a different kind of life. And so they made their own entertainment, they made their own—in a lot of cases own intellectual stimulation, and those skills weren't considered something that somebody else did. I mean if Frankie McCourter, who lives up around the Canadian Breaks up in the Panhandle, who is in his eighties I'm sure, and Frankie's a cowboy, that's who he is, that's what he is, he's also one of the world's best fiddle players. Well, now Frankie was just the guy who played the fiddle, and it was great to have him on a Saturday night when you wanted to do a dance. But that was what Frankie did, that was what the neighbor did, that wasn't something that somebody over there did, it was—art was not set aside, I guess is what I'm trying to say, for somebody else to do. Art was something anybody did, or could do. Although I wonder if they really would have thought about it as being art.

LD:

Probably not.

DB:

You know something that I have said before to other folks is, "Buddy Holly didn't start something. Buddy Holly came from something." This place, and these people, and all of the musical influences that were present in Buddy's Holly—Buddy Holly's life, who made Buddy Holly what he is—was, musically speaking, that was a—he didn't just spring out of nowhere, formed totally. I mean all those things had an effect on him just like they did on other artists, and the musical and artistic expression of the people in this area goes back much further than that. I mean yeah, yeah he was probably the most well-known in terms of chronological history, you know, at the earliest time, but he came from—I have a feeling, I mean this is before I was born, but my guess would be that he came from a time and a place in which music and the arts and that kind of recreation was part of everybody's everyday life. So it was a very natural kind of progression.

LD:

"We're going to have a garage band, you want to come play?"

DB:

Yeah, or "Give the kid a guitar for Christmas," or whatever, I mean it just—and that's typical of frontier societies certainly, and also of young societies. And I think part of it too is a reaction to being told that what you are is bad, or that what you like is bad, or that you don't have any taste

or—because I think people in this area for a long, long time have had a kind of a complex about, “Well what do you mean you don’t have any—” I mean it’s everything. It’s the land, it’s the way we talk, it’s the—you know people make fun of our accents, they make fun of the fact that we don’t have any trees or we don’t have any hills or we don’t have any rivers or—and I really think that it’s a sign of maturity. And I think that it’s interesting to observe that within the artistic community. Because it’s just been certainly within my lifetime that there has really started to be an acceptance that who these people are and the art that they make is okay. And you look at—well I say within my lifetime, really that’s not true—the generation before mine. You look at the early history of rock and roll and you have Buddy Holly from Lubbock, you have Buddy Knox from Happy, you have Roy Orbison from Wink. I mean these are huge names in the beginning history of rock and roll, and where did they come out of? West Texas. You look at, even now, today, the vaunted live music scene of Austin, which they—

LD:

They’re all Lubbock people.

DB:

Which, yeah, I mean which they get so much mileage out of, well where the heck did they all come from? Or even the generation before, I mean certainly you have the generation of Terry Allen and Joe Ely and Jimmie Dale Gilmore and Butch Hancock and all of those people, but even the generation before that, the generation of what was really known as Texas outlaw music—Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Kris Kristofferson—and what that really was, which is just kind of interesting to me is, that was very revolutionary when you really stop and think about it. Because that Texas outlaw music was a marriage of old-time country western, and I’m not talking country western like what you hear on the radio today, I’m talking Porter Waggoner and Patsy Cline kind of stuff, with rockabilly, or early rock and roll. But it was also a statement to the country music powers that be, you know, the people in Nashville who basically said, I mean Waylon and Willie and Kris Kristofferson and all those guys, what were they saying? They were saying, “We’re going to make our music the way we want to make it, not the way you want us to make it.” And that was very revolutionary.

[Pause in recording]

LD:

Okay.

DB:

Anyway that’s a kind of a long-winded answer to your question but I think all of those things contribute to why is so much art created by people from this area. And the interesting thing that I think is happening now, and has happened really since Buddy Holly, but is continuing to happen,



is this sort of evolving sense of—you know what I don't have to apologize anymore for where I'm from, or what kind of music I make or what kind of art I make. It's okay, and if you don't like it, then tough for you kind of a—and it does have a little bit of an edge to that, that kind of an attitude of, "Well if you don't like it buddy, that's just too bad isn't it." But it's taken a long time for people to get to the point where they can say that and not feel like they have to be apologetic for, you know—you listen to the lyrics of some of the songs that, pick one, pick one that anybody's written, practically, and they're talking about the flat land and the highway and the sky and the clouds and the—the Maines Brothers do a marvelous song called "Panhandle Dancer." And "Panhandle Dancer" is a tornado. The "Panhandle Dancer" is a tornado. And that's what the whole song is about. And it's that kind of imagery that you see popping up over and over and over in the music and the art of all of the people from this area. And so, yeah, it's there, it's in their subconscious and its—

LD:

The colors in the visual arts—

DB:

The colors, and well the light has a lot to do with that. There's a lot of talk in the art world about the light of New Mexico, of Taos or Santa Fe or whatever, but where—one of the most illustrative things I think I've ever read was, and I couldn't tell you who said it or where I read it, but they were talking about the fact that on the plains god can create mountains and sky. And I just thought that was such a wonderful image that—because the rest of the world is pretty much set, I mean yes, it is a living, breathing entity and I think we forget that all too often, but it looks like what it looks like. Here on the plains it's a—it's kind of like a playground for god. It can be anything, every day it can be different. It can look different, it can be a different color, it can be all kinds of colors, it can have mountains in the sky or not, or it can—you know it's just—

LD:

Or an ocean.

DB:

Yeah, I mean I mean it's a canvas that constantly recreates itself. And I am fond of saying, or known for saying that trees are overrated and water is a foreign substance. But I really feel that way, I mean I'm very much a child of the plains and I will be the first person to admit it. What's interesting to me is how there has been sort of a general consciousness that it's okay to feel that way, it's okay to look at what we have and think it's beautiful. And then I don't think that was always the case with people here. It certainly wasn't, even if it's something that people felt privately, I'm not sure it was something they advertised publically. And I think that's changed, I really do, I think that's changed quite a bit. And I think those, all of those things have an awful lot to do with why so much art, and why from this place, and why from these people. [Pause]

And I think it's all of those things, I think it's the geography, the history, where we are in the history, it's the weather, it's the experiences of our families over the last, you know, three or four generations. And the fact that that is so close to us in terms of—to some extent, and in a different way in some cases, but to some extent I think that's true of America too in some ways. I mean we don't—we're still working out who we are as a country, we're still having arguments about it. And I think that's a real healthy thing, I think that's what the founding fathers intended for us to be. I think if we ever stop having arguments about it we're probably in deep trouble. But I think it's especially true of the people in this area, because we were the Johnny-come-latelys in terms of—I'll tell you something else I think it is too. I think it is, and I think this is true of Texas in general, but I think it's very true of this part of Texas. I think you—what you have over time is a natural distillation process. What I mean by that is people came to this area to settle, or in some cases were born here, you know, later, and you either adapt to it—the size, and the space, and the weather, and the colors, and the lifestyle and, you know all of that, or you don't. And I think what happens to the people who don't is they leave. And so what you're left with as the generations go by are those people and the descendants of those people who have found whatever those coping mechanisms are. And I think a kind of a natural result of that is some of these personality traits that people affix on us, and I think this is particularly true of Texans. “Oh yeah, Texans are, you know, bigger than life and their braggarts and they're—” on the other hand nobody has the kind of—or we like to think that nobody has the kind of fierce pride in their own history, and their own land, and their own culture, and I mean that to include all different kinds of cultures, as Texans. But I think that's very true, and think it is true because the people who settled this land either found a way to cope with it or they left. And the people who stayed were the people who found a way. I mean I've had people say that, and the two that I remember were people who came here from, I don't remember off the top of my head, people who came here from other parts of the country because the base, the air base. People who would say—you know friends that I met in college or whatever who would say, “How can you stand this? How can you—” and they didn't mean, in these two particular cases that kind of popped into my head they aren't even talking about, “Oh, it's ugly, it's flat, it's—” they were frightened. I mean every spring, every fall when tornado season came they were literally frightened of living here. They couldn't wait to move away. I guess everybody has their natural disaster of choice. I mean I don't see how anybody with half a brain, personally, would live in California. I mean, what's—

LD:

I don't want to be crushed to death in a building.

DB:

Well, you know what is the point of living in a place where even the experts don't say, “If California falls off in the ocean,” they say “When California falls off in the ocean.” Now I can't see a point in living in that place, but that's me. Californians, I guess you love what you're familiar with. But yeah, I have known people who were literally frightened of living in this

place. And they left the minute they had a chance. I had a friend in high school who was a foreign exchange student. And he was from Austria. He literally got on a plane in Salzburg and got off in Lubbock. Talk about culture shock.

LD:

I believe so.

DB:

But Georg was very interesting because he said after he had been here for a while he started to feel very claustrophobic, and by the time he had been here for, you know almost an entire year it was to the point where it really was a problem for him. And I remember at the time asking him, “Georg you in the middle of the wide open spaces, how could you possibly feel claustrophobic?” And the way it affected him was he felt like the sky was pressing down on him all the time. Because there wasn’t anything to break the horizon, there wasn’t anything to break up the skyline. I’m just the opposite, I couldn’t go into the eastern United States—and I’m good to go for a week, maybe two, and then—

LD:

“Where’s the sun?”

DB:

I can’t see out, you know I can’t—and if I can’t get to where I can see out I start to have real problems. You get to the top of this hill thinking, “Oh, this is going to be it,” and you get up there and there’s just more hills and more stupid trees, and so, you know. Yeah, so different people are different, but I really do think that that happens, I think it’s part of what explains Texans in general, and certainly part of what explains people in this area. And by extension there are—

LD:

Now some of these artists you hung out with, Terry Allen—

DB:

Yes, worked with Terry.

LD:

Did you work with him? Or I thought maybe you were one of those kind of—not necessarily a groupie kind of person, but would often hear him play.

DB:

No, not really, because Terry is enough older than I am that we were—even though we

interestingly enough grew up right down the street from each other, we grew up about—our houses were like two blocks apart. But Terry's enough older than I am that we were never in school at the same time, you know we didn't have the same friends. Where I really got to know Terry on a personal level, although I mean I certainly heard him play and knew who he was for a long time before that, was at the Arts Alliance when he designed the Stubb memorial for us and built it. And that was a wonderful artistic creative process, you know working with him and others to get that done. And that was really where I got to know Terry was through that process.

DB:

Then I'm thinking of someone else that turned out to be a pretty famous person, that you listened to him play.

DB:

Oh, well I mean when I was growing up, you have to understand when I was—boy you make me sound old and—

LD:

You're not that old, you have to stop this.

DB:

You know when I—you know, I'm really not. When I was in high school, and certainly in college, I mean the people who played in the bars and in the clubs in—were, you know were Joe Ely and Butch Hancock and Jimmie Dale Gilmore and Kevin Haywood and Mike Pritchard, and I mean those were all people that were playing in the corner bar. When I was in college, so were they, or the hand been or you know whatever. And so it wasn't—for a lot of those people the—I don't know if fame is the right word, but the notoriety that came later for a lot of those folks, certainly on any kind of broad scale—

LD:

Well what was it like hanging out these guys? The Joe Ely crowd and—

DB:

Well I was never a person—I think here again primarily because of the age difference. You know I mean these were not people who I hung out with, these were not friends of mine in that sense of the word. They were people that, you know we all knew and we'd go to hear play, and occasionally would end up having a beer with at the local bar or whatever, you know. Just because you were there, and they were there, and it was closing time or whatever. I wouldn't really say that any of those folks certainly were not personal friends of mine at that time. But also at that time that was pretty unremarkable. Let me think how to put into words what I'm trying to say. I have a feeling that it was probably like this with Buddy Holly too, that to most



people in Lubbock who grew up with Buddy Holly or, you know he was the son of one of their friends or he was cousin Ethel's nephew or whatever, he was just Buddy, you know he wasn't—and yeah he did and he'd play music, and wasn't that neat, and you know but it, it was not anything that you think it extraordinary or out of the ordinary at the time. And, in some respects I guess that's what I'm trying to say my experiences were with these guys, yeah everybody knew who they were and everybody knew they played music and you know and you would go and you'd listen to them, and after the set you might have a beer or whatever and, and a couple of them actually did become personal friends. I mean Kevin Haywood certainly was a personal friend of mine, you know and some others. But it was not anything remarkable or even much really to comment on because everybody was having the same experience. It was a very common kind of thing. So it wasn't really much to—even now, and the same is true really of some of the people we were talking about earlier in terms of theatre people who have gone to become very successful that I know. And certainly more of those people are what I would term personal friends than some of the musicians. But it's a little different, I mean it's—to me I—just for instance, you know to me my friend James Odom, who was a singer with lyric opera in Chicago, is not a famous person. To me he's my buddy and my friends and we've been best friends since we were like fifteen, and I call him Baby Jimmy, or I call him Jaime, which is what is mother calls him, or, you know and when we talk on the phone which—I just talked to him this weekend and we were talking about, actually, his mother, and the fact that he was painting his living room and, I mean stuff like that that is not—it's just a little different when they're people that you've known for a long, long time, or that you've worked with for a long, long time, you're thrilled for them, and you're happy for them, and you'll brag on them for anybody that will listen, but it's different from—you don't think of them as being famous. I mean you don't think of them as being—Randy Cordray, who is the producer of—one of the producers of “Dharma and Greg,” was here at Tech—well he was here last summer for the reunion, and he was here again well two or three months ago I guess, to talk to the kids in the theatre department. And of course all these kids are about to graduate from college. And they're still very much in the mode of, “Boy I'm going to go to New York,” or, “I'm going to go to LA,” or whatever, whatever. And they don't understand that a lot of them, that they can have careers and make very successful careers and make good livings, and they don't have to be in LA and they don't have to be in New York. Those things come later, they figure that out along the way. But, of course, to them Randy is a huge deal, and not that he's not to me, but Randy's my friend. I mean to them Randy represents someone who is hugely successful in a business that they are barely getting their feet wet in. He's someone who is a potential contact for them for jobs, for other contacts, you know in a business that is extremely cutthroat in some ways, and is based on in so many ways who you know. And that's not even—people sometimes think that's a bad thing, and it's not even that so much as it is, who do you know that can do this. I mean if I need a rigger who has experience on this kind of equipment, and I'm going to ask the people who are sitting in front of me and say, “Does anybody know somebody who can do this?” And sure enough somebody knows Joe down the street how can do—you know. And that's the way things tend to happen in all businesses but

certainly in the theatre. Theatre's a very small world in a lot of ways. And I made the comment to somebody that I was so glad that I wasn't interested in trying to get a job from Randy, or trying to break into Hollywood or whatever. Because that way when he was here I could be—you I could—I mean it was like “Hey Randy, how are you?” Rather than being all nervous and having an agenda, I guess is what I'm saying. So it is a little bit different, I guess, way of looking at folks, when they're just people you know, and just people.

LD:

That's what people really all boil down to in the long run.

DB:

Yeah, I think so, I think so. But I think particularly maybe that's important for artists, because they do spend so much of their lives in the public view in one way or another. I would think the same thing would be very true of politicians and sports figures probably, is that it must be a real relief to be around people who know you the person as opposed to you the fill in the blank, second baseman for the New York Yankees or painter or whoever.

LD:

“Oh wow, can you teach me to throw like that? Can I have your autograph?”

DB:

Oh sure, yeah. But that's part of it, and if you don't enjoy that kind of thing—

LD:

Then you're in the wrong business.

DB:

Then you're in the wrong business. I mean even, even on the local level you can't—I mean I was, to be perfectly frank, a bit taken aback and a bit embarrassed when I left the Arts Alliance. I mean I hardly thought that the fact that I was leaving my job was front page news. You know, I mean to me that just seemed a little odd. On the other hand I guess in some respect I was, because of my job—

LD:

A celebrity.

DB:

A public pers—well I wouldn't put the “C” word on it, but a public person to some extent. And you know that's just part of doing your job and doing what you want to do.

LD:

Well then, I mean it's so good of you to say it because the next question I had for you was, how could you do that? How did you make that run so well? Tell me what your week's like, tell me what your day's like? Do you have any time to yourself?

DB:

Well thank you for the compliment I—well I mean nonprofit organizations—any business, for profit or nonprofit, all have their quirks, and kinks, and uniquenesses. I'm sure I just made up a word there. But a lot of it is organization. I think in any business is being able to identify what needs to be done and how do you do it, and what do you need to do it, whether that's people, or money, or space or supplies, or—you know what do you need and where do you find what you need. Yeah and there were a lot of long days. I mean the Arts Alliance is a very small organization from a staff standpoint. I mean we had—there were times when I was there that we had two full-time people, one part-time person, there were times when we only had two full-time people. And we were doing, of course the Arts Festival, which typically we work on an Arts Festival for about fifteen months, is what it would take to do an Arts Festival. Not constantly of course, I mean different things have to happen at different times. But from the very beginning to the very end was usually somewhere between fifteen and eighteen months for a single event. We did a concert series in the summertime, we would do shows in the gallery every month, as you all know, children's theatre presentations. And so a lot of it is organization, how do you make all that happen. But a lot of it too was an awful lot of good will from an awful lot of people who really wanted to be a part of the things that we were doing, whether it was people who showed up and took tickets and sold T-shirts at the Arts Festival just because it was fun, or whether it was artists who wanted to display their work in the gallery, the musicians—oh god, a lot of them, so many of whom were so generous about coming down and playing on the courthouse lawn in the middle of the week at lunchtime, for high noon. When basically all we could pay them to do that for was essentially lunch money kind of thing. It was an awful lot of good will from an awful lot of people who wanted to pitch in and help. It was a kind of a, I think in retrospect, can't really know now, but my suspicion is that it will be kind of a, in a historical perspective, kind of a transitional time for the Arts Alliance. The Arts Alliance is over thirty years old as an organization. The Arts Festival itself they just did the twenty-fourth Arts Festival, so that's a—that's pretty—any time you're dealing with an organization that is that old and that established, it has to continue to grow, and change, and reexamine itself periodically to stay relevant and to stay current, and to retain the support of the community. And I think we were in that process during the time that I spent at the Arts Alliance, and I think they're still are in it, I think they still will be for a while. So that's interesting.

LD:

How did you keep yourself revitalized, motivated?

DB:

In terms of the work? You mean in terms of what needed to be done?

LD:

Um-hm. Because when it's that much it becomes overwhelming even if you're very good at organizing and, "Okay here's this task, we're going to get this done today," but still, after a while that kind of wears on you.

DB:

It can, yeah, sure it can, and that's in part why I decided that it was time for me to do something different. You know I had actually been in the Arts Alliance for about five and a half years. I started there in 1996 and as we do this interview it's just been a couple of months I guess since I've been gone. But then there are also rewards within the job itself that they get you pumped up. Just about the time you're burnt to a crisp, you're burned out, something very wonderful and unexpected will happen, or somebody will tell you how something they saw or heard, because of a program that you did, touched them or made a difference in their lives or whatever, that makes you think that okay, what you do is worth it, that people do notice. And the fun thing about the Arts Alliance was, in terms of just a calendar year, as it were, is that there always was something new to work on. In the spring, just about the time you were threatening to tear your hair out if you ever heard the words Lubbock Arts Festival again, it was time to go on and do the summer concert series. And then just by the end of the summer when you were really ready to quit hauling everything down to the courthouse every week it was over, and it's time to do children's theatre or it's time to do another exhibit in the gallery or whatever, so that helps. I think that in any job, if you can vary it, if there are things that—where you can shift your focus or shift your attention, that helps. But that certainly was the case at the Arts Alliance.

LD:

What about—I know so many projects like that a year. I know that you've been very successful there. But what do you think is your most exciting project that you did during your time there?

DB:

Oh gosh. Certainly building the Stubb memorial. Which was not my project, certainly. I was very lucky to be at the Arts Alliance when that happened and in on it. But it was really a project that was done with love and with dedication by Deborah Milosevich. As it turned out she left the Arts Alliance at the beginning of May of 1999, which was right before we started the actual—

[Pause in recording]



DB:

But Deborah still was a part of that process even though she no longer worked at the Arts Alliance. That was a wonderful experience, that was an interesting and challenging experience to be a part of. From all different kinds of angles, I mean from artistic angles as well as just getting up and going to work in the morning. I mean I remember telling somebody that summer that, “Oh yeah, you know what I really wanted to be when I grew was a general contractor.” Because you get into a project like that and you have to deal with all kinds of things that you never really considered. I mean I’m an arts administrator, I’m an arts promotor, that’s my background, and all of a sudden here I was standing in the middle of a vacant lot looking at the guy from the water department on the one hand and the contractor on the other, saying “What do you mean the water line isn’t where it says on the city’s map, that the water line is supposed to be,” and things like that that just are really fascinating, really interesting. But very mundane, I mean that doesn’t sound terribly artistic, worrying about why the water line is not where somebody said it was, but that’s part of the process. So it was a very interesting process to kind of ride herd on and try and get it all—you know try and make sure that the guys who were building the walls had those done by the time the truck got here with the bronze by the time the sprinkler guys came in and put the sprinkler system in before the tree guys came and planted the trees. I mean it was—so that was a really interesting process. And probably the other thing that we did while I was at the Arts Alliance that I thought was really important and was very proud of was when we started doing the children’s theatre productions, where we would bring in the Dallas Children’s Theatre touring group to do a performance in the Civic Center Theatre. Once a year we were doing that. One of which got actually cancelled because of weather, but that’s an area that wasn’t specifically being addressed in the city at large. There’s certainly lots of theatre in Lubbock, but at that particular time very little of it was specifically targeted at children. Which is very different—the requirements of theatre for children are different from the requirements of theatre for adults, and not that there aren’t theatrical productions certainly here at the University or at the Community Theatre or whatever that are suitable for any age of person, I don’t mean that, but no one was specifically doing productions for children. And the other thing that made it terribly interesting is it was really a joint project between the Lubbock Arts Alliance and the Children’s Advocacy Center, which is a social service agency that works with abused children. And what the Children’s Advocacy Center does is they bring in—they’re sort of made up of, or have representatives of all, or many of the social service agencies—the police department, the children’s protective services, lots of the other different departments, MHMR, who deal in that area and they’ve brought them all under one roof literally into and formed the Children’s Advocacy Center. And the whole reason for doing that is to make it the whole legal process, and in some cases medical process, as stress free and as non-intimidating for a child as they possibly can. And so it was a very unique partnership and it was—it was a fundraising tactic for both of us. I mean we both hoped to raise money by doing it and support the missions of our various—you know of our two agencies. But also because we’re both very concerned with children and doing something for children. So that was interesting, it was interesting the reactions that we got.

We wrote several grants to help support that series and to a person, the granting agencies loved it. They thought it was so unique and so interesting to have an arts agency and a social service agency working together like that. So that was another unique, and exciting, and interesting experience.

LD:

What sort of productions did they do?

DB:

The three that they did, while I was there, when we were working with them, the first one that we brought in was *Young King Arthur*, which is a retelling of the early part of the legends of Arthur Pendragon, not the Disney version, but based on the books. Then the second one that is actually the one that got cancelled by the snow storm, an ice storm, that was the weekend that we had like four inches of ice on the roadways and stuff, was *Heidi*, and then the one that we just did before I left the Arts Alliance, well did in the fall of 2001 was called *The Three Sillies*, which is based on a child—a current children's book, a current very popular children's book by a living author. And actually Dallas Children's Theatre has adapted more than one of his works to the stage. They're a wonderful company, they do some amazing work. Wonderful production values in terms of sets, and costumes, and lights, you know. And so that was a really interesting project to be a part of, and interesting because this past year for *The Three Sillies*, the performance of *The Three Sillies* the day that we brought them in and did all of that, which had been planned months and months and months in advance, was on September the thirtieth, and coming so soon on, after the events of September the eleventh, we were kind of unsure what to do at that point. And ultimately we made the decision that because this was something specifically for children, and that because, as had everybody else in the country, children were traumatized by what had happened, but probably didn't have the coping mechanisms that the rest of us did, that perhaps this sort of sense of normalcy. And at that time President Bush and everyone else were urging all of us to get back to what we—to our arms and, and to be vigilant and yet at the same time to get back to our lives. And so we decided to go ahead with it. We decided that perhaps it would be helpful, actually, to go ahead with it, because of what it was and who the target audience was. And so it was very gratifying to me after the production to hear feedback from people in the community, and specifically from parents who had been there with their children saying, "We're so glad that you did this, we thank you so much for doing this. Our children needed the opportunity to get away in their minds and in their imaginations." That was an interesting experience, it was one of those things that you just have to make the best judgement that you can and hope that it's the right one in terms of what you do in a situation like that. But at the same time we were the local arts council, you know we're the people with the bumper sticker that says, "Art Saves Lives." So if we as the local arts council truly believe in the value of the arts as a part of our, not only social and cultural lives, but spiritual lives as well, then that drive those kinds of decisions too.

LD:

Now I can just imagine a person like you who likes to visit with people, who genuinely likes people, what do you miss the most about not being at the Arts Alliance?

DB:

Oh golly. Well certainly there are people that I used to see on a fairly regular basis that I haven't seen much over the last couple of months. I miss that, I miss those kinds of contacts of knowing you just saw that person or are going to see them shortly. But that'll all sort itself out. If you ask me that question in six months or in a year from now I would probably answer it differently, but at this point, having only been gone for really, I don't know what, ten, twelve weeks, and I've been in and out of town in that time, and I've been digging my flower beds, and cleaning out my closets, and reading books that I had put to the side. Having had the time finally to do some of those things that I hadn't done and had put off in some cases for years, and had had the opportunity to really pick up some other projects and some other interests that were kind of on a back burner. At this point I'd have to truthfully tell you that I really don't miss it at all. But like I say, if you ask me that question in six months or a year I'm sure my answer would be different. It's just all still very, pretty new. And so I'm still real excited about working on the possibility of establishing Texas Music Trails, which is a project that folks all over the state are talking about, that I talked to the Gillette Brothers in East Texas about, that's one of the things that has kind of filled in that void as well doing things like this, and some writing projects that were definitely on the back burner that I need to get finished up, and some research that I want to do. Not to mention the fact that I actually planted a garden for the first time in six years.

LD:

Oh, that's great.

DB:

Yes, it is.

LD:

Now—

DB:

First time I've had a chance to do that in a long time.

LD:

I also know that we've taken up several hours of your time, and I'm grateful to you for all of that, and I wanted to know if there's anything that I've missed that you feel is very important that and we should talk about.

DB:

Oh my. Well, as you and I talked when we first started this, this was kind of a wide open, wide ranging discussion, that you really didn't have an agenda in terms of certain facts or figures or whatever. So no, I don't guess so. I mean it's a little bit of this and a little bit of that and, and I'm not sure that it will ever be terribly helpful to anyone but—not that I can think of, no.

LD:

Okay. Other people I should talk to in the arts? No, I have a list from you, so I can't do that to you. And I'll have a list of what—three hundred now?

DB:

Right, right. We have lists and lists, and yeah. Because there are definitely people to talk to.

LD:

Okay. Well, thank you very much.

DB:

Oh, thank you Leslie.

***End of Recording***

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