

**Oral History Interview of
Charlie and Suzanne Davis**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
July 6, 2011
near Sweetwater, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Wind Interviews***

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Interview Series Background:

In addition to interviews pertaining to the National Wind Institute, oral histories have been conducted with various individuals whose lives have been impacted by wind engineering in the Southwest. For example, interviewers have spoken with farmers and ranchers who witnessed the rise of wind turbines on their properties and adjacent lands, employees of electrical co-ops, and engineers who helped logistically create the large wind farms.

Transcript Overview:

Charlie and Suzie Davis discuss the impacts of wind turbines on their neighbors, community, and personal life. They examine how the turbines have altered the landscape and what future generations will think of

Length of Interview: 00:54:28

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Wind farm impacts on people, landscape	6	00:02:15
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Keywords

Wind turbines, wind industry, industrialization, rural life,

[guitar being tuned in background]

Andy Wilkinson (AW):

While you're tuning that, I'm going to say for the recorder, we've been talking, but it's Charlie Davis and do you prefer Suzie, or—? Yeah, and his wife Suzie, and me Andy Wilkinson. It's the seventh of July. In the afternoon at their home.

Suzanne "Suzie" Davis (SD):

It's the sixth.

AW:

Is it the sixth?

SD:

I think, yeah.

AW:

Maybe.

SD:

Monday was the fourth. When the holidays are in the week, it gets us confused.

AW:

There I am getting all confused. Yeah. Having a Monday holiday is confusing. For me at least. But I'm easily confused.

Charlie Davis (CD):

I have to look at the wall and see what day it is and all of that. In the summertime, they all run into each other.

AW:

That's why we carry these things. Yeah, the sixth. Very good.

CD:

Well how did your interview go with—?

AW:

Oh Greg?

CD:

Un huh.

AW:

We actually didn't do an interview; we discussed about doing interviews. He's got these interns that they've had at the wind clearing house for some time, and they work mainly in the summer, and they're in college and seniors in high school. He's interested in getting them educated as to how to do oral history interviews and then they can do a number of those. And we would archive them. So I'm going to come back down and do a training session for them. And that's what we were talking about.

CD:

Well that's interesting. I know his dad, Glen. You know, never really did know the boys that much, but have known the dad for a long time.

AW:

Yeah well, he's certainly enthusiastic about wind power.

CD:

Yeah and coal plants.

AW:

Yeah, and I guess that's quite a contentious topic, isn't it, in town.

CD:

It is.

AW:

I mean the coal plant, not so much wind. You don't find so many people in town against wind—

CD:

Tenaska.

AW:

Yeah, Tenaska Plant.

CD:

You know, the people that I think that the wind affects are the people that live in the country. Course, the people that have wind mills, it affects them monetarily. And their lives have changed. We've seen, with this Trent-Mesa coming in, it was novel. Now that was Buster

Welch's ranch over there. And he had about—

AW:

The whole of the mesa was his?

CD:

Not the whole of the mesa. But he had about, when he sold it, about 16,000 acres up there. And about 5,000 acres of it was on the mesa. And the guy that bought the ranch, Bob Atkins, ended up selling the 5,000 acres on top to AEP. And so they bought it.

AW:

Lease it, or they just bought it?

CD:

They just bought it. Yes. And with, I think, a stipulation that there wouldn't be any hunting on there. They just had it for the company, just for them to own the surface. And then the rest of the ranch is down in the bottom back here. But, I remember riding horses up there, gathering cattle and it was beautiful mesa that the Indians, you know, you could see sign of them up there on limestone ledges where they'd go up there and grind.

AW:

Uh huh. Like a *metate*.

CD:

A *metate* built into the sides there. A lot of burial places back up there and a lot of artifacts that we'd found. So it was kind of novel, but we knew. And then the construction was coming from Abilene, most of the traffic. And then they have water haulers on the road out there. And the people coming from Abilene that were working on the construction, they'd drive seventy or faster to get to work and be coming out in the early morning.

AW:

You mean on these county roads, they were going that fast? Oh goodness gracious.

CD:

Oh yeah. And they wiped out lots of deer. And hogs.

AW:

Yeah I bet they did. How many of them do you think got wiped out?

CD:

I don't know. I mean, you could tell, and then when you'd see some of their vehicles, there'd be a fender or a front end or something that'd be crashed into.

SD:

And we said, "Welcome to the neighborhood." (laughs)

CD:

And we would talk to our county commissioner, talked to the DPS [Department of Public Safety] and the highway department and told them what was going on. Because that group, doing that, versus the group, the Florida Power & Light—they have the best supervised construction of any of the units. They have big ol' safety banners on the ranch fence gates, coming into their construction that said "lights on for safety," "Speed limit: fifteen miles an hour," and you know, hard-hats. And they enforced all this. So their group did the best out of all of them that I had seen. But you know, what was once a nice view all the way around us has turned into, you know, kind of at night, all of these red lights coming on. It can almost give you a spatial disorientation whenever you're—like from a distance when you're coming out, and it's a really dark night and here's these lights all coming. And it really throws you off.

AW:

Is it worse at night than it is during the daytime?

CD:

Yeah, I think. Because where there didn't used to be any lights, now there's, you know, thousands of red lights.

SD:

You know, and the red lights aren't glaring. They don't really disrupt your stargazing, particularly. But it's just unsettling to us.

CD:

Looks like the War of the Worlds to us, a little bit.

SD:

And they're timed, they kind of go together. On. Hundreds of them on. On. On. (laughs)

AW:

And there was, on part of the drive out here, I saw some of the large transmission towers too. But, not near you, so—

CD:

They were doing—this Florida Power & Light group took all of their power and headed down toward Lake Ivy with it. You know that was going to Gillespie County; so we didn't see any of that. Now supposedly, they had talked to some of our neighbors, and they were supposed to run a power line through Mountain Pass going south, which would have been through the Scott's—Leta and her husband. This Mountain Pass is where the buffalo used to come through.

AW:

Like Buffalo Gap. That kind of idea.

CD:

As you were coming out from the lake out there, you saw where they were cutting and putting those robots through there. There was one that they were—had been working on, that had the big arms, there before you in between town and the lake. But then after the lake, and you were coming up on this corner and there was a high-fenced game ranch there. Right before there, they're cutting another one that's coming from— and I don't know what that—

AW:

Do you know if that's part of what's called the CREZ line, The Competitive Renewable Energy Zone? Those are the big lines that are designed to carry power from wind energy developments to the whole grid.

CD:

Yes.

AW:

You think it's part of that system?

CD:

Yes. All that is, you know, kind of updating—that was the other thing about it, is that whenever they first came out here and there was a push to get this place built. And it's interesting that the heads on these on the AEP Trent-Mesa are ENRON heads. And that was pre-ENRON going turtle, and so that was interesting. Those were our first heads that we saw. And since then we've seen GE and Mitsubishi, you know, look like rocket ships. And the push to get all of these in and built before they had any transmission lines, because the government you know had all that money out there coming through.

AW:

Incentives, yeah.

CD:

And they said, "You know, you've got to get this done because it's going to be over with by—certain date." So they were really pushing to get that all done.

AW:

So, these two, the Trent-Mesa and, is this called Horse Hollow?

SD:

Part of it is Horse Hollow and then part of it is Buffalo Gap.

AW:

But Trent-Mesa was the first and this was—Buffalo Gap and Horse Hollow was the second. And that's been, what? Six or seven years ago?

SD:

The Trent-Mesa was maybe seven or eight. And this Horse Hollow and Buffalo Gap has been, four, five, I guess.

AW:

What differences have these wind farms made in life here at your place? I mean, wildlife, your cattle. You know the aesthetics we touched a bit on that. Because you're not getting a check from any of these. These are your neighbors'.

CD:

And we had turned down Florida Power & Light, you know, because we didn't want to mess with the construction, the travel, and then have somebody accessing your place. They sent us a letter and said, "We're in your area and would like to talk to you about leasing." So, we sent them a note back and said, "We're not interested in that." We would have had room on one mesa back here for one wind turbine, but, you know, we didn't want them right here, but we ended up with them.

AW:

Anyway.

SD:

On our neighbor. Yeah. Our neighbor, Louis Brooks Junior, has 180 of them on this east ranch, right next to us. But they were very respectful. And there's this mesa, up over here, we call Black Mountain, that there were three Indian graves on top of that. Suzie and I, that was one of the first places we visited, when we lived out here for Buster. They had been dug, but the mounds were still there. And it was a very, to me, historic site; and a—kind of a holy—

SD:

A spiritual place.

CD:

Yeah. Spiritual place, always has been. And we wrote Louis Junior because he didn't acquire this pasture until later, but told him about the significance of it, and you know, they respected that. I think it was too small to put one on anyways. But the construction, nobody came upon it and kind of left it. But, you know, we've got them right back on our back fence that are looming and the noise of it, when the wind is out of the south and you've got 180 of these large—these are the big units—you know, you have this [makes woosh air sounds]. So, not only the visual effect of having them on the horizon but the noise that they make.

AW:

You can hear it.

CD:

Yes, you can very—

SD:

I liken it to an interstate or a freeway—

CD:

That you can hear—

SD:

If you're ten blocks away from a freeway in a busy city, it's just that constant drone.

AW:

As the crow flies, how far are you from that first line of these turbines?

CD:

I'd say two miles to the closest one. Because it's seven-eighths of a mile to your mothers—

SD:

That one that's closest to her house.

CD:

So the one that's closest to her house, would be I'd say, you know under two miles.

AW:

Yeah. That's still a fair distance away to be able to hear them.

CD:

Uh huh. But the wind is out of the south, so we're going to hear them. You know, this place used to be really nice, peace and quiet, and we didn't have the sounds like that. And then of course, the horizon has changed forever. I ride my bicycle out to the county road and then go back this way and this pasture was called the Caldwell, and Louis Brook's dad, old cowboy, when he bought it, he cleaned it all up. He wanted to put it back the way it was when the Indians were here. That was his conservation, and they've always been good at conserving their grass, and so he did, and it was just beautiful. And it had a spring—Weaver Springs, and all kinds of permanent encampments that went back through there, and I go back out there on the highway, and I stop and stretch a little bit and pray and try to look at the little things. And then you look at the horizon, and it's changed forever with all these windmills; so it will never be the same. The people who come after us won't know what it used to be like. This is the northern most extension of the Edwards Plateau. And this Mulberry Canyon was—in Taylor County and Nolan County—historical area where the Indians lived and the last free-roaming herd of buffalo wintered in between this Black Mountain and Weaver Springs in 1879 in Nolan County with 800 cows and calves. That's documented in the Nolan County history. And then they didn't last long.

AW:

No, I imagine not. Have you seen any effects on your livestock or wildlife?

CD:

You know, they talked about bird strikes. And we have, on some of that country back there, Buster's—this rancher had a hunting program where he would have some people from Dallas that would come out. And the deer that were normally up there seemed to migrate during the construction period away from there and go down into the canyon. And as far as their movement goes, they're kind of real adaptive. Now birds were another thing. They talked about the bird strikes that would happen. We'd get some migrating hawks through here and I think, you know, there have been birds that we've seen that have been killed by flying into them, but probably as many have been killed by flying into the highline. But we're going to have more of those too.

AW:

What about your cattle?

CD:

Not any effect that we can tell. They're pretty oblivious to any traffic or sounds. Very wary animals. You don't know how wary cattle are until you study them and see them. And like

they'll be at a distance, two or three hundred yards away and you might walk out, not making a sound, and they'll pick you up with their eye-sight and stare at you. I just kind of have noticed cattle doing that. We can't tell any effect other than on humans, you know. It's made our neighbors upset; we've had some of our friends that lived in Buffalo Gap and in between here and Coronado's camp, they had a class lawsuit against the Buffalo Gap and the Horse Hollow. That's over there where Rankin lived. Bob Rankin. And you know, those ranches, they declined to have any because they love the land. And they didn't want it to change. But then their neighbors wouldn't do it; so it ended up kind of a tossup, neighbor against neighbor. And another interesting story is, the older people here in the canyon that own the land and got it back in the—you know, inherited it—twenties or thirties. And then they had their children, well they would give the land out. Okay, you get the three hundred acres of cultivation and then since that land up on top the mountain is not worth anything, well we're going to give your sister a thousand acres of that, because it's worth like twenty five dollars an acre. So those people, you know, got the windmills. And it was hard for them to turn it down because it was like they didn't have a pot to pee in to begin with.

SD:

My mother has some friends from church—

CD:

This is a good one here.

SD:

Who had nothing. They had just hard-scrabble life. They got twelve windmills; I forget how many acres they had, but they were going to have twelve windmills. And on Sundays after church now, they go to Dairy Queen for lunch. It's like the good life.

CD:

That's splurging.

SD:

The good life.

AW:

It wouldn't strike me that there's much farmland on top these mesas. I mean, it's pretty remote ranch country right?

SD:

Well there is at Nolan. The little town of Nolan community.

CD:

And that's where, you know, we didn't see like there around Roscoe, those farmers; it didn't seem like some of what I call the locations you know, were interfering with the farming.

AW:

No, I think these wind farm developers understand they can't be in the way of a pivot. They've got to site their—and on the flat land, I think they have a lot more leeway as to where they site their towers. Whereas, in broken country like this, the wind is going to do a lot of things, and on the flat land it pretty much blows. But that's the first thing you hear them talk about at these conferences. "We put them at the corners, you know, section corners." Although there are a lot more than section corners in Roscoe. There's a whole bunch. They're thick. But they are cognizant of what the farmers—and the farmers, you know, plow right up to them and around them. I guess they're just used to that.

CD:

I don't think the locations are as big on the farms as they are for these.

AW:

Well Roscoe right now is the largest wind farm on the planet; so they got a lot of turbines. And they're getting ready to build a bigger one in Parmer County by Friona in terms of numbers of turbines. So it is interesting. But also, there are a lot more people living in the midst of those in farming country then there would be out here. So your mother's house is less than a mile from the turbine.

SD:

Maybe. Yep.

AW:

Is it more of a bother to her?

CD:

She just doesn't like to look at them. She's just got the nicest screened-in front porch. And we try to, anymore, if we're doing some clearing or developing something, a view. We tried to pick an area where you don't have to look at them. And you know, try to block them out. They have a certain—Suzie likes to look at them when she can tell which way the wind's blowing. Because they turn with the wind. But—

SD:

I could do that with a flag. (laughs)

AW:

Yeah. Maybe put a windsock up.

CD:

Or an old windmill, we used to have. The oil—makes you appreciate these oil producers anymore. Because, you know we don't complain about having an old pump jack sitting there because it's hidden until you drive up on it. But these structures are way up. I thought there might be some electrical interference with it. This is something with the television and our Doppler radar, when we first were getting the weather reports, well they realized that this effect of all these was showing up—

SD:

There's a reflectivity on the Doppler radar.

CD:

A reflectivity on the Doppler radar; so they could not pinpoint whether we had a hook in the storm or had a storm on top of us. They had to figure it out through another way.

AW:

So have they solved the problem since? Or is it still—?

SD:

I don't know. Sometimes—

CD:

You still see the reflectivity on some of the radar. I think they have that program now that they can zero in on it and pull it up. And then they can get a little bit more of a read out of it. But it was kind of frightening for us, there would be a storm coming and we'd look up, be watching the radar on TV, and you couldn't see. It was just the windmills. And they'd say, "No this is not rain; it's just the windmills up there." West of town. Yeah, right where we live. So that was kind of weird.

SD:

But we're still here.

AW:

When I'm headed out, I brought my camera. I was going to shoot some photos if you don't mind.

CD:

Have you been up to one? The base of one? You've seen them up close?

AW:

Yeah, I've seen them up close. Yeah, I've done that several times. I had the offer to get to climb up the tower of one, and I thought—I declined. It looked like a lot of work.

SD:

I want to do it.

AW:

Do you?

SD:

Uh huh.

AW:

Well if you come to Lubbock, the Wind Power Center's got one. I think Coy [Harris] would let you.

SD:

My youngest brother is an instructor at TSTC [Texas State Technological College] in the Wind Energy program. So he does it all the time, and I told him I wanted to go. But I haven't been yet.

AW:

If I didn't have to climb all the way up and down, I'd love to be able to walk out on one and have the view. But I don't know that I want to do all the work to get up there. It looks like a lot to me. (laughs) and it's noisy inside those towers, too.

CD:

Well they have those units at the base of them too and there's a hum from them. Those boxes, I guess, what are those called? Some type of generator.

SD:

Transformer.

AW:

Inverter or transformer. Well the part that really surprised me, I had never thought about this much, but you know, they're turning all the time and that cable that comes down that holds the turbine gets twisted and every so often that turbine stops and it untwists. And when it starts untwisting, it's the loudest clanging and banging. It was kind of shocking.

SD:

Well, I've noticed if you head back to town and you kind of start climbing up out of the canyon, they'll be some fairly close on your left side and one of them especially, the upright, the tower, is—I don't know if a fluid has leaked out, but it's rusted, you know.

AW:

Well, one of the issues with the wind farms is who's going to maintain them, and how are they going to be maintained. There are already some wind farms old enough in Hawaii for instance that are starting to reach the end of their productive life mechanically. And one or two have just been abandoned and there are these things sticking out of the ground, rusting away, you know. That's a real issue. It's one thing to look at these which are functioning and maintained. But if they were all relics—

SD:

And for a while, it seemed like if you saw one like that, it would get cleaned up. But they're kind of getting a little lax.

CD:

That's quite a cleaning job. I think that's like they have a sealed bearing up there and then that bearing blows out and then the oil that's in the head—it's kind of just like a windmill.

AW:

Yeah, and they change the oil periodically to get rid of—just like you do in your old time transmission. You remove all the metal shavings—

CD:

I used to have to do that job; we had sixteen windmills on Buster's place.

AW:

You were the windmill man?

CD:

You know, because I was the younger guy.

SD:

He was the kid. (laughs)

AW:

It's like when you go to a branding, you always gotta flank. (laughs)

CD:

They made me climb up there. And even when your brake was busted and you had a runaway, then you had to rope the tail and then pull it in to the head, and here I was doing all that stuff. With a couple of old, old guys. And one of them—

AW:

They probably laughed as much as they gave advice. Right?

CD:

Oh they did. One guy was so busted up that he couldn't climb. But he was corps of engineers and used to work on the lines in World War Two. Or World War One. I learned to—he would throw tools up to me. Wrenches. Like if you needed something, here they were. So we learned to do stuff like that. But they were a hoot.

AW:

To grab them without falling off the platform.

SD:

It was a special skill.

CD:

Some of those, like on an eight footer or even a bigger one, you had to, you know, climb and then take that nut off the hood and then, you know, drain it. Crap getting everywhere. Just old oil. Run some kerosene through there, you know, and wash it out and clean it out and then refill it. Put it all back in there. It was nasty. But, you know, then we'd ride horseback and those big old concrete tanks they'd put in—you could stop and go swimming. It was pretty fun. So we enjoyed having water and windmills whenever they were making all their noise and stuff. The clanking.

AW:

Oh yeah. The sucker rod is music to me.

CD:

(makes windmill noise) You know making that little—check flapping in there and that ball, you can hear it. Good cold water. We'd drink right out of the windmill. Good water. Which we do have good water in this area. Not gyp. We've enjoyed that. And it concerned us that they were using so much water in the construction of all these. But then, once that was done, all the concrete that they poured. They don't use any water, I reckon. Not as much as the coal plant.

AW:

Coal plant will forever use water. Did they get most of the water for the concrete for these towers—did they get it out of the ground here or do they bring it from the trucks?

CD:

They got it out of the ground here. Yeah. Bitter Creek. And they had wells that were drilled down there, and then Lake Sweetwater. And direct out of the line from Bitter Creek, which they were paying for it, but money is no object to them. Lots of money.

AW:

Someday I'd like to be in the position where somebody says, "Money is no object to that guy." (laughs)

CD:

Yeah. Do what you want. Cart blanche. Well that's what they were doing. And our tax dollars was what was paying for it.

AW:

It's hard to figure out what's, that's such a convoluted business. You never know where your tax dollars are showing up, that's the scary thing.

CD:

And then the guys—it had jobs. They said it was going to bring certain amount of growth to the area, but it really—they came and went. So now, you know, all of the RV parks that had sparked up from those guys living in trailers, you know, they're unoccupied now and as these construction crews have moved on. And some of the local people worked for a while, and now they're back to being whatever they were before.

AW:

Those maintenance jobs, there are some of those, though. Right?

CD:

Yeah, there are. And they seem to be, you know, that GE Wind contracts their services out and a lot of those technicians will work the various places now. So they seem to be one of the largest sub-contractor, whatever, providing maintenance; so they have certain people. But I don't know how many—like Florida Power & Light people, you know, are really employed here to watch over there stuff. It'd be the people that maintain their part on the grid, I guess, in some type of office where they can check what's running, and what's transmitting, and if something happens, I don't think they can do their own maintenance on it anymore.

AW:

It seems like the industry plan, at a certain point, they sub out all the maintenance to local crews, so there should be some—but that's still not very many jobs in comparison to the number of jobs that occur when they're building.

CD:

Her brother, who was you know an electronics guy and had a lot of experience in industry, went to work for Mitsubishi thinking, you know, because he had kind of semi-retired from the Gypsum plant, and he used to run all of their robotic engineering for their plant. So he took this job with Mitsubishi to be a technician, thinking that, you know, well man, we're going to work with all of this new technology and he says he was just a grease-monkey. They would come up, they'd get all their tools, and by the time they drove out there are be on location and then transfer it all and get everything up to the top up there and then take their break and then have lunch and then do whatever they needed to do, grease fittings, change oil, and then lower everything down, they could do maybe one, maybe possibly two, in a day. But yeah. And you know, that didn't last long for him. It was novel to begin with, but then not what he thought it was going to be. It's just like you say, a grease monkey job, not an electronics technician.

Because that stuff, I think, this other guy that was doing that—is they have these modular components. So they go up there, and if something fails, they know it's this, this, or this. So they take that modular unit out and replace it. And then somebody else—and a lot of that stuff, they weren't sending back to the manufacturer. It was like a one-time shot, like those gel batteries that they were using up there.

AW:

That once it was gone, it was gone.

CD:

It was gone. And then, people—they were confiscating some of these—or the employees were taking the gel cell batteries to use in their deer blinds.

AW:

Because they still work?

CD:

Yeah. But not enough for the specs on the mills.

AW:

What other kinds of changes do you see around here? The thing you mentioned about the neighbors not getting along, or more tension—that's really interesting. Is that still an ongoing thing? Has it changed the culture some, enough to be noticeable?

CD:

When it was going on, they had, of course, press from the *Abilene Reporter News*, and they would talk about this class action, this going on and who was instigating it. And it sort of reminded me of when Buster on his Double Mountain Ranch up there was fighting the Air Force. The B-1 bombers, because they were streaking over his ranch, and he said it ruins the aesthetics, it spooks the cattle, and you know, life is not the same, so can't they go out some other place and do this besides over here? And it reminded me of that little journey, and you knew that these people weren't going to win. Even though they were respected people who had big ranches, and you just can't fight city hall or progress. And those companies weren't going to change. They were going to build their units and then the neighbors were going to put them up because they wanted the money, so that's what it all boiled down to. But, the people that have gotten the money have been able to put the money back into the land, like maybe they have a new building or a new barn they can build. So, that has stimulated some of the local—

SD:

My other brother is a carpenter. And he stays busy building barns and hunting cabins and remodeling projects for people who have wind money now, you know.

AW:

Well, and you're both educators, one of the things that's discussed a lot in wind development is the improvement in the tax-base and putting money back in the schools. I know when I drive down I-20, I see that the Trent Gorillas have a new building.

SD:

Hermleigh has a new school.

AW:

And Blackwell.

SD:

But Sweetwater doesn't, and I don't understand what happened.

CD:

And it was those abatements. The way I looked at it is, and this old guy, Bob Atkins, who bought that ranch from Buster. He's an oil man, and he's been broke a bunch a times. And he said that about these wind guys coming out, and as far as the tax abatements, and Sweetwater was just so oh man, we're going to be the world's biggest, this is going to be, you know, we'll give it to you for free, just come in and stimulate the economy. We want no taxes at all, or we'll put them off, you know. So, Sweetwater got screwed, the school district got screwed. And Bob, he said, "If you tell one of those guys, you know, no tax incentive, he said there'd be another one behind

them, and there'd be another one." And see he was a smart businessman and he knew that they were going to come out here and do business, you know. So whether they got a tax abatement or not, those first ones, they gave it to them, and I think that's why Sweetwater does not get any of it hardly. It goes to those little, small districts. And, in a ways, they've improved their lot, but you know, like Blackwell has a new school and they've got less than three hundred students.

AW:

So how do they keep it open?

CD:

They can't pay the teachers that much more, but they can spend it for technology, so you know, here's all these country kids who want to be farmers and ranchers and wildlife people, hunt and fish and ride horses. And then they've got all these new computers.

SD:

Personal laptops, iPods.

CD:

I mean, we work for nine school districts out here. So we work for Sweetwater, Blackwell, Roscoe, Highland, Ira, Colorado City, Loraine, and Westbrook. Nine different school districts that we've been working with for ten years, and we've seen all of this stuff happen. And my opinion is that Sweetwater said, "Come in," and that's why Sweetwater schools are hurting now and having to make changes because they don't have any money. But the other, smaller schools around. And then they've drawn students from Sweetwater.¹

AW:

Because they have the new, better facilities.

CD:

I call it a build-it-and-they-will-come syndrome.

AW:

Well, what else about these wind turbines? What have I not asked you about?

CD:

Suzie'll come up with something. You know, you get used to them. It's just like anything else. If they would have put a railroad through here, we would eventually—

¹ While checking the transcript for errors, Charlie Davis added this note: "Big deal! Over 100 students = \$400,000 lost revenue to SISD".

SD:

I sometimes wonder if our grandparents felt the same way about the rural electrification lines. They thought, "It's ruining our area." But they wanted electricity. And I don't really know how much electricity we're getting from this. I feel like they make people feel better.

AW:

Oh, you don't. The electricity goes somewhere else.

CD:

To Dallas or Fort Worth. See, that's another thing that pisses me off—is they come out here, and they jack-in with our lifestyle just so they can leave their lights on, and let the water drip, and the air conditioners down to 67 in town. And they have no concept, you know, of what we're doing out here to protect the environment, to conserve. I mean, like farmers and ranchers are the original environmentalists. I mean, we've had to live with—the only utility we have is electricity out here. We get our own water, take care of our own trash, we recycle, we catch our wash-water and water our plants. And we've been doing this forever. And because we like to. We've treated the land good, and it's treated us good. So those people are using our aesthetics. They've chumped those. And then the ones who do come out here from the metroplex, they want to come out here and kill our deer, and then leave their feed sacks on the highway. So I wish they'd stay there.

AW:

Well, there is some discussion about the industrialization of rural America and wind farms are an example. And of course oil fields are also examples of you know—I had one fellow tell me in an interview that what shocked him was seeing it from the air, not from the ground, but from the air. And looking down and seeing all those paths and the roads going up to them. And realizing, wait a minute, this is like a big industrial manufacturing machine that's just been spread out over a lot of acres of land. We're putting it where we can to the benefit of people in the cities. Where they have the votes and the money.

CD:

That's basically what it is. We thought at some time or the other, you know, what is it doing to the weather? You got a thousand of these things up here, flipping the air around in the breeze and moving air and creating all of these ions, electrical negatives and positives circling—and they are spectacular when they get hit by lighting. We've seen those.

AW:

Oh really? What happens?

CD:

They melt.

AW:

The tower does?

CD:

The blades do. A blade will get hit and it will just—a molten bam (explosion noise), you know. An explosion of just melted fiberglass coming off of it.

SD:

It's amazing that we don't see it more often.

CD:

It's taken half a blade off there. It's just—and Suzie and I have both seen them happen when they get hit. And it's spectacular against a gray, dark background. And then that cloud-to-ground and you'll see one and they'll go (exploding sound). And you go, "Oh my god that was—." And now I've driven back there and seen them.

AW:

Bet they look pretty ragged.

CD:

They're messed up. They have to change a blade for sure.

AW:

Well there's been some concern, I don't know if there's been any testing done to demonstrate the effect, but there's been some concern that the wind farm creates what they call a rain shadow, where downwind of the farm, you know, yeah, so the wind's coming into the farm, the other side of it, those prevailing winds, that side of the farm gets less moisture than in front of it. Now, I have not seen a study that proves that, but there's discussion that that may be one impact.

CD:

That would be us, wouldn't it?

SD:

Could be.

AW:

Because the southwest—

CD:

Yeah, the wind's coming in from the Southwest and all of that project that's right there, you know it's got the air before we get it. So it's kind of like your "There is no balm in Gilead." And that farmer sees the rain falling East of his place out there.

AW:

So they've only been out here a short time for you to really tell if there's a different. Plus we've had—who can know if we've made a difference this year or not.

CD:

One of our neighbors, old Mabel Scott, she told me and she was a real, you know those old stern West Texas people and just not real friendly, but she was a nice lady. You go to try and talk to those old timers and you know, you say, "Well, golly, sure would be nice to get rain." Or, "How much rain did you get?" And she'd just look at me, and she'd say, "You know the only people that talk about rain around here is fools and newcomers." And it kind of shut me up. And I've always remembered that—fools and newcomers.

AW:

Yeah we say that up on the flatlands—the only two kind of people of people who predict the weather out here.

CD:

Yeah, fools and newcomers. You're about right.

AW:

I know in our part of the country, every time a discussion begins about weather—said, "Well we've had an unusual year," but it's that way every year. What's a usual year?

SD:

Of course I had a Texas history course in college. In West Texas weather, abnormal is normal. That's what I learned.

CD:

Abnormal is normal.

SD:

Abnormal is normal.

CD:

I get a lot of what I pick up out of that *Livestock Weekly* out of San Angelo, and I followed them

because of the conferences that they'll go to and what the attorneys are telling people to do about leasing and about, you know, what's happening now, these people coming through.

SD:

So they deal with energy issues in Livestock Weekly?

CD:

Well anything that would affect a farmer or rancher, as far as leasing your land. Used to be a mineral lease, but now—you know these people, they're getting paid for the wind that blows across their land. And that sounds weird, but they can, as a real estate person, they'll say, "Well you can—I'm selling my land, and I'm going to keep the minerals, but the wind rights go with it."

AW:

Yeah, and in fact there's a big question as to whether or not you can—wind rights are—

CD:

Conveyable.

AW:

Yeah. Like, oil. Like minerals because there's no statutory law, and no case law yet to say yes or no. Plus the other wrinkle is some people are saying "Well I'll lease you the wind rights, Florida Power & Light up to 1500 feet, and, above that, I keep it."

SD:

Oh you mean in height?

AW:

Vertical. Because there's some discussion also out there that in China they've developed a kite that'll fly up very high and generate power. So whose square mile? It's a really odd thing.

SD:

So it would be directional drilling?

CD:

I'm going to make myself a cup of coffee, would you like one too?

AW:

I'd take a cup of coffee; I sure would. I'm going to stop the tape if you don't mind.

[end recording]

