

**Oral History Interview of  
Nathan and Angie Halie**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson  
November 2, 2018  
George West, Texas**

**Part of the:  
*George West Storyfest***

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## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Angie and Nathan Halie as they discuss Storyfest in George West, Texas. In this interview, Angie and Nathan describe why they started going to Storyfest, and their involvement with the festival.

**Length of Interview:** 01:22:44

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### Keywords

George West, Texas, Storyfest, Cowboy poetry and stories

**Andy Wilkinson (AW):**

You know, really, we save this stuff—and before I say anymore, I'm going to say this is the second of November, right?

**Nathan Haile (NH):**

Right.

**Angie Haile (AH):**

Yes.

AW:

Friday. Andy Wilkinson in George West, Texas with Angie and Nathan—

NH:

Haile.

AW:

Haile.

NH:

That's right.

AW:

But you spell it H-a-i—

NH:

L-e.

AW:

Okay.

NH:

So it's got them all in there.

AW:

Right. So we've been talking about when we last met, which has been a long time ago.

[Laughter] Like, twenty years or something.

NH:

Probably.

AW:

And talking about Archer City and sharing our McMurtry sightings, [laughter] and etcetera, etcetera. But we're going to be talking today about the Storytelling Festival, and anything else that strikes our fancy. And just—I like to say for the record that we are saving—we do this with the idea that—literally that someone a hundred years from now researching entertainment, and festivals in America in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century can read a transcript of this and listen to your actual voices talking about your lives and this particular event or whatever else we go. We don't—I don't have a list of questions, and we don't have a set of topics other than general topics. So feel free—

NH:

That's what I was going to ask you is that—before we turned it on was basically, you know, kind of what this is about. And it's really neat because you really don't think about it, but a hundred years from now somebody might be able to sit down and go, "Wow, that was really cool to listen to your interviews and the event."

AW:

Right. And you don't—the front page items will be easier to research for a long time, but the page two items are not so easy. And I learned this—we'd mentioned before when we were talking before we turned on the machine about Archer City and me doing—producing a play that I wrote about my distant uncle Charlie Goodnight. Well, he was a famous guy. There's a lot of information about him. But little details, there's none of that. There are no recordings of him. People weren't doing that really that early. You don't know what he sounded like. We knew that he would—after the very first trail drive, they would start off the beginning of the drive season with a herd they collected around the Cross Timbers. But he'd do three or four other herds that summer, through that season. But most of those—what'd he do is he'd ride back down the trail after he got his herd broke and on the way—he'd ride back down the trail and find people who had decided they wanted to be trail drivers, and realized it was more than they could handle. And he would buy the herds and then take it on himself, sometimes by himself, which is amazing. But what you don't know is what did he pay for those animals and what was he selling them for. What did he—you know. And when you read about the cowboys getting to wherever and getting a train ticket back so they could carry their saddle and go home to do it again, I guess. But you don't know what they got paid, you don't know what—

NH:

I've always wondered what those horses went for. Because when they got them, they were probably not broke and green, and they worked on them the whole way up there, and then when they got there, they had an asset. So, you know, what'd they sell those horses for where they were at the end of the trail?



AW:

Exactly. And what kind of horses were they? In today's world, you'd believe that every horse ever ridden was a gelding that was a bay. [Laughter] But I've seen photographs of trail drives around the turn of the century, not earlier—although there was a photograph made June of 1866, before Goodnight and Loving set out on the first drive—I've never seen it, and it's like the holy grail. I want to find that. It's reportedly—a collector in the Dallas area has it. But anyway, around 1900, you'd see they're getting ready to go out for a gather, and half of the horses would be light-colored. They weren't all bays. And a lot of them were jug-headed. They didn't like quarter horses. Goodnight himself rode a mare. And I have people argue with me to this day, "Well, you can't ride a mare, especially on a trail." I can't—I wouldn't do it, but Goodnight did. So the details like that are hard to come by, and these kinds of interviews are about collecting those kinds of details.

NH:

And on a great—on a great story of George West with the Storyfest. That's what's so cool. And these other events.

AW:

And the other thing is why in the world would there be one in George West? You'd say, "Well, it's not even actually on the interstate." You'd have to get off the interstate. Although, I saw a sign saying that it's about to be. [Laughter]

NH:

It's on 69, yeah.

AW:

So I need to get some—just some basic information, though, before we get too far into it so that people can know which Angie and Nathan. So it's A-n-g-i-e?

AH:

Yes.

AW:

And what is your maiden name?

AH:

Maiden name is Pawlik. P-a-w-l-i-k.

AW:

Yeah, the furniture store, right?

NH:

Hardware.

AH:

Hardware.

AW:

Hardware, right. It's right there on Houston Street.

AH:

Um-hm.

AH:

That's—my uncle has that. But yeah, there's been a number of Pawlik's that have lived here for years. We're having our—we're going to have our hundredth—my great—I mean, my grandfather—well, my great-grandfather brought him and his kids here, and settled here in George West a hundred years ago. So we're going to have our hundredth reunion gathering this year at my grand—the house that my grandmother grew up—I mean, had—that I remember growing up in.

AW:

Origin is—

AH:

It's Polish.

AW:

Polish?

AH:

Um-hm.

AW:

So were they part of that Polish contingents that came to Texas in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century?

NH:

Um-hm.

AH:

Yes. Because like Cestohowa and Kosciusko and Panna Maria. Some of that area there was part



of it was part of it. But my heritage is from—they came from the Yorktown area. And they moved from—my great-grandfather moved from Yorktown down to here, and moved out to what's called Block A. In the George West area back in the day it was called Block A out there. And there was a—

NH:  
West. Kind of west.

AH:  
Kind of west of George West.

AW:  
So it's a different Polish group than the ones who came actually to Texas by ocean?

NH:  
Indianola and through that way. I don't know.

AH:  
That's going back a little farther than what I know.

AW:  
I thought—I mean, this is—

NH:  
I bet so because they—

AW:  
—1840s or 1850s.

NH:  
I think in that deal that I saw the other day—

AW:  
Maybe even before that.

NH:  
—it was that they were in the Panna Maria group, which would've been them.

AH:  
Yes.

NH:

And then I think the Antone kind of struck off and went to Yorktown and ended up here in George West. So I think it's the same group. Or at least if not—think about it. If you're coming in from Poland and you know where the Polish group is, you went there anyway.

AW:

Yeah, I have a friend Allen Muchigamba who is—who lives in Fredericksburg. But Allen—his ancestry goes right back to that group that came. That's the only reason I know anything about it.

NH:

Well, it'd be fun to ask Mary Anne, too. Mary Anne probably—I think you know Mary Anne and Everest.

AW:

Yes.

NH:

You've interviewed Mary Anne before, I think.

AW:

I think. So, what's your date of birth?

AH:

Is August 14 of '74.

AW:

Okay. And, Nathan, were you born in Archer City?

NH:

I was born in Archer City in the hospital back before it shut down.

AW:

And what date?

NH:

8/18 of '75. See, I married an older woman. [AH laughs]

AW:

This is interesting. And you were born here?

AH:

Yes. I was born—actually Corpus, but yes. But raised here, yes.

AW:

Okay. Now—and we were talking also before we turned on the tape recorder about when you met and you went to a gathering and so and so. When did you meet and how? Because you're from different places.

NH:

Right. A good friend of mine from college was living in Austin working for Texas Department of Agriculture. Angie worked for the Water Development Board there. And I lived about sixty miles out working for USDA [**United States Department of Agriculture**] as a soil scientist in Lexington, Texas; Giddings area. And he said he was going over there for his birthday and wanted me to go along. I said, "I don't know." He was like, "I got a girl you need to meet." I was like, "Okay. We'll see."

AH:

Well, the backstory of that is I didn't know Charlie that well. I'd only met him—we spent a day project together. He was from TDA [**Texas Department of Agriculture**] and I was TWA [**Texas Wildlife Association**]. So we spent one day together. And he—I was a country girl living in Austin. Didn't know anybody. He was a country boy—

AW:

Were you with LCRA or?

AH:

No. I was with Texas Water Development Board.

AW:

Oh, Texas Water—with the Texas Development—

AH:

Right. I was an ag water conservation specialist for them.

AW:

Where did you go to college?

AH:

At A&M.

AW:  
A&M?

AH:  
Um-hm. College Station.

NH:  
Tarleton State University.

AH:  
Tarleton?

NH:  
Um-hm.

AW:  
Okay.

NH:  
The better half of the A&M system. [AH laughs] I like to say that.

AH:  
So anyway—so we were together one day, and at the end of that day I had just approached him. I said, “Charlie, I hope I’m not being too forward here, but I don’t know any—I haven’t been here that long. I don’t know anybody.” I said, “You seem like a good old country boy.” I said, “I’m trying to find some good old country people to hang out with.” I said, “I don’t know anybody in Austin.” I said, “Do you ever come to Austin and y’all go out partying and stuff sometimes?” He said, “Well, sometimes we do.” He said, “You want me to call you?” I said, “Yeah, call me sometime when you’re coming.” Two weeks later he calls me up and says, “Okay, we got a group of guys. It’s all going to be guys. We’ve got a group of guys going out if y’all want to join me.” I said, “Sure. I sure will.” So I met up with them.

NH:  
We had a good time.

AH:  
And then the backstory is he drug this one along here.

NH:  
“Drug.” Listen to that.

AH:

Yeah. From what I understand he did have to drag you.

NH:

So we met and just started going out in Austin together. And I guess that was probably in '99, late '99. And then in 2000—

AH:

Something like that.

NH:

—after several dates, I came to George West and I found out that they had the Storyfest going in November. I was just thinking today—I was like—

AW:

So y'all weren't even married yet when you first went to the Storyfest?

AH:

Oh yeah, no. [Laughs]

NH:

No. We were just dating.

AH:

Because we dated—what—three years?

NH:

Three years, yeah. So I went to two or three of them before—and then we got married in October of '03. And then that was our first one there in—I guess November of '03 would've been our first Storyfest married.

AW:

That's really interesting. What got you interested in ag water?

AH:

Well, I was—I wanted—I had an interest in environmental—as kind of in—when the push of a bunch of environmental safety and that kind of stuff was going on. I had a little interest in that and I was wanting to find something in agriculture. So it was just kind of one of those opportunities that the job was there. Unfortunately they changed—from the time I interviewed and got the job and actually started the job, they changed it a little bit. So that was kind of

deflating for me. But I thought I was going to be going out and doing water pivot irrigation system audits a lot more, but then they kind of changed my position in two weeks' time. I guess that's how the government works sometimes.

AW:

That or they never change. [Laughter]

AH:

And I get—yeah. Things never change, and when they do then it's immediate. But once I got in the position I wound up being in the office a lot more. So I was only there—what—a year and a half?

NH:

Probably, yeah.

AH:

But long enough that I met Charlie and met him. So I think it was all God's work, you know, putting me there where I needed to be for that year and a half so that way we—

AW:

Did you stay in water after that?

AH:

No I didn't. I did not—well, then we met.

NH:

You went into feed cells.

AH:

And then I went into—yeah, I went into the feed cells for the amount of time that we were—

AW:

As a rep for a manufacturer or mixer?

AH:

Livengood Feeds out of Luling.

NH:

Lockhart, wasn't it?



AH:

I mean Lockhart, yeah. Lockhart, right there by Luling. But right out of Lockhart. And then I worked for them so that way I moved out of Austin and moved closer to where Nathan was. And then whenever we got engaged and then he got a position where he moved to Robstown, so then we moved to George West and we lived here for five years before his job took us up north to Weatherford.

AW:

So how did you get interested—Angie said you were interested in being in RCS.

NH:

Yeah. My dad was an ag teacher in Archer City. Started the program in '69—'68 or '69. And so he had a lot of soil judging teams growing up through the years. And when I was, like, five years old, six years old, he'd take my brothers and I and throw us out there in the pits and we'd go around. I just enjoyed judging land, judging soil. So I had a little success in—

AW:

That's a pretty odd thing for a five year old.

NH:

It probably was. Everybody was like, "Look at these." But 4-H was fun. After we did a few ag deals with that, well, then we got a 4-H team going. So we had 4-H soil judging, and then FFA [**Future Farmers of America**] soil judging, then I went onto college and did a Plant and Soil Science Degree. I knew I had a good district conservationist in Archer City named Howard Barton. And Howard said, "Nathan, I see your name in the paper for soil. You ought to come work for the Soil and Water Conservation District." And I did a couple summers and I loved it. So I was just lucky enough to get hired. And been with them nearly twenty-five years.

AW:

That's great. I was also telling Angie before we got here that I've done a whole series of interviews with retired SCS [**Soil Conservation Service**] and RCS.

NH:

Have you really?

AW:

Yeah.

NH:

I'd like to know all of those because I bet I know a bunch of them.

AW:

Oh yeah. If you'd call their names I could nod yes. I'd have to get my list out.

NH:

Mostly in the Panhandle or all over the state?

AW:

Oh no. They were—I got to know some of them through people that were living and retired in Lubbock. But they invited me and I took a few of my colleagues, and we have gone for several years to the retiree reunion. They have it at—of all places—at Schlitterbahn [laughter] in the spring, which is—

AH:

You can dip a toe and that's about it. [Laughs]

AW:

Well, it's an odd thing because they meet in this—they have these big—if you've been there—they have these big, sort of open-air pavilions with a screen wire, and they have their meetings and food and all. But we—you can get a lot of folks in one spot at one time. And then the ones that you don't interview there, then I've traveled all over interviewing them.

NH:

I bet that's interesting, Andy. Because you think about the amount of things that people have seen.

AW:

Well, and the change in the program. Not right when it became NRCS [**Natural Resources Conservation Service**], but not long after. You know, those guys in the fifties were literally educators. They weren't program administrators. So mark and—hearing them mark the difference between—went from one thing to the other, which is kind of like what you're talking about.

NH:

You know what's interesting, though, is I have this feeling that we're—and I hope we're going back to that.

AW:

I think you are.

NH:

And we went through programs for a long time. And right now, we've got this soil health campaign. It's really bringing people back to understanding nature.

AW:

You probably know my friend Will Jewitt out at—

NH:

Oh I know of him, yeah.

AW:

Yeah. Out at Alpine and Marfa.

NH:

Um-hm. I've seen him quite a few times when we were out there for some—

AW:

Yeah, and he is—he is very much the old line. He's out—

NH:

It's about conservation and it's about knowledge and it's about nature.

AW:

And knowing the people and the land. And that's the thing that really impressed me about them.

NH:

I hope we're moving that direction, because if we could move that direction, we can change people's livelihoods, not just a stipend for something that they do on the land.

AW:

Right. No, I think that's true. But I also run into—particularly in Kansas. I do—another interest I have is in playa lakes. So I go to these workshops. The interesting thing to me was up—at least in Kansas and Eastern Colorado, that area. The role of the old—the SCS and the kind of people you were talking about—and you are and Will—is handled by the folks at Ducks Unlimited.

NH:

Oh yeah.

AW:

They are—it's really interesting that—because I listen to them talk and they sound exactly like those old retired—[laughter]

NH:

SCS. It's funny because we've gotten—and it's because our—just a whole lot of different things—but our farm program and our incentives and all this have changed the way our federal government works. And so there's a gap. And that gap—people like Ducks Unlimited, Texas Wildlife Association—

AW:

Quail Unlimited.

NH:

All these people are like, “No, we need to work on conservation,” so they try to—and we're partnered with them now. We have started going—a lot of technical specialist within RCS are started to move that direction and go.

AW:

Well, the other thing we're doing—we're doing interviews on a program I started called From the Grass Roots. What we're doing at Texas Tech is going out and doing video interviews of land operators, owners, conservationists about sustainable practices, and practices that they particularly use. Not everything they do but—

NH:

Just at least one or two that they—

AW:

If somebody's—like, we interviewed a young guy outside of Canadian who—his family for three generations has been doing controlled burns. That's a long time for that particular practice. And especially to hear the difference. This kid has a helicopter. I mean, he's serious about it. But his grandfather—he said—I said, “Well, what's your—what is your grandfather's method like?” He said, “Well, he'd throw a match out and then he'd go off to the golf course.” [Laughter]

NH:

Go golfing for an hour or two.

AW:

He said, "We don't do it like"—but the idea is that if academics—and for that matter government agents—talk about it, it's one thing. But if somebody who's out there doing it talks about it. So maybe you will know some people down here that I can come back down and we could—

NH:

Oh yeah, we could do that.

AW:

—we could do some—

NH:

There's a lot—her dad is a good example. A great land manager.

AW:

Well, I—you know, I got started on this because I was going to a Sustainable Rangeland Symposium that Texas Tech and New Mexico State hosted. And person after person would get up—academics mainly, but also industry people: packers, retailers, Beef Council people. And, of course, owners, operators who would get up and say, "We're doing all kinds of sustainable things and no one knows about it." And I was sitting there—you know, the songwriter in the group thinking, Well, it's because you're not telling anybody but each other.

NH:

That's it. And that's true, Andy.

AW:

You need to be able to tell people—

NH:

You've got to go to different venues and talk to people outside your core, because nobody's going to know about it.

AW:

Too many people literally believe that beef comes in a shrink wrapped, Styrofoam package.

NH:

Or milk comes in a carton. [AH laughs]

AW:

Right. So anyway, but we ought to think about that when we get done with this. But I'm dragging us way off the beat.

NH:

But it's all related. That's what's funny, Andy. It's all related. George West can come right back to it. The stories. That's what they are is stories that we're celebrating here this week, right?

[Laughs]

AW:

And as the poet Muriel Rukeyser said, "The universe is made of stories, not of atoms."

[Laughter] Which I think is really apropos. So you would've been here for the very first one then.

AH:

I was in—we were just talking about—I said, "Okay, '89"—did we ever figure it out? I was in junior high.

NH:

Probably eighth grade or ninth grade.

AH:

Yeah.

AW:

Well, this is the thirtieth year, right? So it would've been—

AH:

What did I say? Did I say thirty? Yeah.

NH:

Yeah.

AW:

So it would've been '88.

AH:

So it would—'89—okay. Well, we asked Mary Margaret—



NH:

Mary Margaret and I just talked about it, and it was '89.

AH:

—she said '89.

NH:

So it is 2019. No, it's 2018.

AH:

I still remember they've always had it in the fall.

NH:

They would've had it the nineteenth—the fall of '89. And you count that one, and then you go all the way to this one. This would be—

AW:

So this is—

NH:

—number thirty. Yeah, I had to figure my—Tarleton math. I'm a Tarleton man—TSU [**Tarleton State University**]. We can do some range judging, we can do some soil stuff, but math wasn't—

AH:

But I'm thinking I was in junior high. I know I couldn't drive yet. And they were having Storyfest and it was kind of—it was kind of a—I remember it being a big talk because it was something new going on. And back in that—you know, that long ago—now you have a lot of festivals everywhere. But you kind of had your big ones. You like had the Folk Life Festival in San Antonio, and you had—

AW:

Texas Folklore. Yeah. Folklore Festival, yeah.

AH:

Yes. And so you had these big ones, but you didn't really necessarily hear a lot about small town or just little to-go-to things.

AW:

In fact, in Texas you would've had Kerrville, which started in '72. You had Texas Folk life, which was probably closer to George—

NH:

Eighty.

AW:

Yeah. George West. There really weren't many other things.

AH:

So I remember being at a talk and different ones. I remember kind of—everybody was interested as to, "What is this? What's this going to be like?" Well, for some reason, I don't—we're always—I'm always game to do anything. I'm like, "Okay, let's go check out something new. Let's go find it." So I remember going that first year. And I guess I'd probably been—we were talking—Nathan was asking me—I said, "I've missed a handful of them, but maybe three."

NH:

Yeah, I don't know if you've missed—

AH:

So over the thirty years I think I probably haven't made it to three. And part of that's whenever we might have been—

NH:

Just had kids and gone.

AH:

Yeah. You know, young kids.

NH:

It's only been since you and I have been married. You made every one of them before that. I know because I remember when we got married you were like, "I've never missed one of these." I think when we moved—

AH:

Maybe in college. Maybe I might've missed one in college or something.

NH:

But to go back to what you're saying, though—

AH:

But I remember going. And there was—there were people there. You know, kind of some of the city people—you know, town people showed up and stuff. But, of course, it's nothing like what

it is today, because you had all that backing. But it was just fun. I just enjoyed it. And they didn't have—you know, now they have kind of the bigger stages with the tents and all that. And back then—

AW:

And more music in. Probably they didn't have any music then?

AH:

They had—

NH:

Yeah. What was it? Was there cowboy poetry and stuff then, too?

AH:

Yeah, there was—because I was—I always had an interest in—cowboys are kind of sweet and dear to my heart, so I always had an interest in cowboy stuff. And I had a—I liked folky type stuff. So they had a lot of—you know, it'd be more like—kind of—I say a lot. I'm trying to think. I know they had at least two stages, but I don't—they might've had three. I don't remember for sure. But they had kind of some folky type—because, you know, your banjos and that kind of—and then they had a lot of storytelling, and they had some cowboy stuff.

AW:

Yeah. Because Elko—the big—the first cowboy poetry gathering had been in '85 in Nevada.

NH:

Elko, Nevada?

AW:

And Alpine started the year after. So those cowboy poetry gatherings—and those were the two—first ones. So you were right on the heels of that.

AH:

Of that. And they didn't have a lot, but it was enough sprinkled in. But like I said, I was in—I was in junior high. So I had—Mom took me up there. We all went to go check it out. So we went up there together and they had—they didn't have the big stages and tents and stuff. So they had just more like backdrops, like bi-fold backdrops is what they had kind of decorated. And then they had—I don't know—maybe ten rows of bells kind of in a pie shape. You know, lined out. And that was it. [Phone rings] That's what you had.

NH:

The grounds guys this morning were telling me that they had an old porch that they had found somewhere. And three or four of them went together and put it all together—

AH:

And that's what it was. That's what it looked like.

NH:

—in the main. And he said, "Then we just had trailers of hay that we'd pull in there and unload.

AH:

Yeah. And they'd just lay them on the grass. And some, of course, without the tent. You just kind—like, they had that on the courthouse. So then they had shade from courthouse or shade from the bank or, you know, whatever your tall buildings are around. But that first year we went—and Mom and Dad had—Dad didn't. Dad was working. He was working all the time. So Dad was working Saturday morning. But Mom and I went. And we hung out for a while. And there's some things she needed to do. She said, "Are you ready to go?" I said, "No. I like this. This is fun." So, my grandmother's house is now—just down the street from where they have the festival—is now the headquarters for Storyfest.

AW:

Oh really?

AH:

So my grandmother lived there for years. And so it was just walking distance. So she was like, "Well, okay. If you need anything, you know, just go to Granny's house." I said, "All right. That sounds good." So I got left there because—and there was enough people milling around. So I was hooked after that first year. So I would go—and I went and I stayed all day. I didn't go with friends. You know, I'd gone with my mom and we'd—I saw friends there. People would come and go. And we'd visit some and listen to a lot of stories stuff. But I remember staying the whole day. And then they did—I can't remember if they did sacred stories that early or not. Not sacred stories. The spooky stories. But I don't remember if they did it that first year. I think they did. So I ended up staying through the night. Mom came back and checked on me every once in a while. [Laughter] And then—it was after that every year—it was just—I looked forward to it. It was just a lot of fun.

AW:

So what—you say you got hooked on it. Why did it hook you?

AH:

I think it's because I just—I loved the folk. That was something we didn't have access to. I mean, we couldn't find folk music on the radio. I mean, you could—KKYX, you know, that did classic country. But that's as close to folky type music as you really, you know, could find, I guess. Of course, without the internet and all that—now you can find whatever you want in the drop of a hat. But we just—and I didn't have a lot of knowledge in that, but I always knew I kind of liked that of stuff. And I don't know. I don't know if enough kids actually slowed down and listened to really get the full impact of it. But I found—and I started knowing that I was going to go and park myself for the day.

NH:

She's known now as the person with chair on her shoulder. She just hauls it wherever she goes. Sits down in her chair.

AH:

Before that when they had the hay bales, before I was smart enough to pack my own chair—then for a couple years, I just would look at the schedule, figure out where I was going to be, and then I would not sit on the hay bales like—

NH:

You still do that today. [Laughs]

AH:

But, I mean, before I had my—before I got smart and took my chair. So I would look at the schedule, see where I wanted to be, and instead of sitting on the hay bale, like most people do on top of their hay bale with their feet on the ground, I'd get about the second row back and I would—I would rest my—sit on the ground, rest my back and kick my feet up on—that was like, "That's my spot for however long I'm going to be here."

AW:

So did you come from a family background where people told stories?

AH:

Not—not really. I think it's probably all family. I guess they—but not sit down, like, formally like—

NH:

It was just sitting around a table where y'all told stories all the time.



AH:

I mean, it was like visiting. You know, more of a visiting—it wasn't like—you know, sometimes—like, you said your grandma would sit down and actually gather the kids up and they would tell a story. And we didn't do that, but we spent a—we spent—our family spends a lot of time sitting around the dinner table, you know, either prepping or whatever. And we're together a lot and visit a lot. So didn't really say tell stories, but we would always—through just a process of visiting—they'd be like, "Oh, remember that time?" Or, "When this happened?" Or, "Did I ever tell you about this?" So real informally.

AW:

The reason I was asking is that my grandparents were rural. And we lived on a farm for a short time when I was a little kid. But we were around rural people our whole life. My dad was in the cotton seed oil business. So we were around rural people all the time. They told stories all the time, but it wasn't a formal thing.

NH:

"Remember one time so-and-so did that?" And that's the way it's done.

AW:

Or with my grandmother you'd drive by a thing or a place—[AH laughs] and the sad—well, not the sad thing. Because it's—we actually learned it. But every time you'd drive by it—[laughter]

NH:

You could tell that story then because you knew it so well.

AW:

Yeah, you knew it. But that's good because otherwise it went in one ear and out the other. So how fast did the festival grow to be what it's like now? Because this is a pretty successful festival.

AH:

It is. And I would say it took a few years. Because I remember there being years where there would be people milling. But you would tend to maybe—if you didn't know them personally, you'd recognize most faces that you would see. And, of course, being a kid like that, you know, some of that stuff I didn't pay attention to that much. It was like, "Hey, here's what I'm doing today. But I don't—I really don't think—maybe several—five years or so, and there was—and then it seemed like it was getting bigger. It wasn't too long into it that they went ahead and starting doing, you know, the bigger stages. I say that. It was a while. But they started doing the bigger stages with the tents, and then actually, you know, folding chairs and stuff, and got away from the more primitive with the hay bales and that kind of stuff.



AW:

Audience. I take it for granted because I go to all kinds of festivals. There'll be more people not local than local at most festivals.

AH:

Yes.

AW:

Is that—it sounds like at the beginning that was not the case here, but maybe it grew to be that way?

AH:

I think so. I mean, that's what I see. And I still see a lot of people. We go—

NH:

Yeah, there's a lot of townspeople there. It's just that you see—because what's George West? Two thousand? Twenty-five hundred people?

AH:

Twenty-five hundred-ish.

NH:

And there'd be eight or ten thousand people there. So, I mean, the majority is somewhere else.

AW:

Well, you're located between two large population centers, as we just talked.

AH:

And so I—I still see a lot of people—but, of course, a lot of them are there volunteering. So a lot of them that you do see are the faces that you see—because if you're involved in the community, they're involved in the community, and then those are the ones—so a lot of times when you might see them even out and about, they're just—they're going maybe from—they either just got off their shift or they're going to their shift, or maybe they're in between shifts or something like that. But there's—luckily it seems like there's still a fair amount of local participation. But tremendously grown to pulling people in from other areas.

AW:

Well, you mentioned participating. You know, city of two thousand, and you have this big event. It takes a lot of volunteering to put something like that on. And from someone—right from junior high and being here—and you not too long after—how—it's one of the real problems—I

know—in most festivals is how do you maintain that energy on the part of the local contingency who organized it and helped raise the money and staff, booths, and all that kind of stuff. How has that happened—

NH:

I was driving over here thinking, you know, before now—eighteen years' worth—we came and we enjoyed it. Now, when you did the community breakfast in '03 or '04—

AH:

It was right before—right before Nathan—

NH:

She was the co-chair.

AH:

Yeah. Right before Nathan got his job up in Weatherford and then we moved for about twelve years and been gone.

NH:

Angie went around and got all the donations for the food and all the stuff lined up. The Buck West House was where it was going to be.

AH:

But, of course, I was on foot tails of—coattails of people before me, so I was just able to step in and kind of—so they had already kind of made those connections, and then I just kind of ran with it.

NH:

The guys came out and they cooked, and we rolled tacos, and we had—so I knew that was something. But then the next time you just go and here's the—I remember helping Brent and them set up the vendor booth that one morning.

AH:

Yes, yes.

NH:

But what got me, Andy, was we came and it was like, "Okay, the festivals are going on." And I thought, Okay, there's Mary Margaret and there's five or ten other people that are—and then now this year Mary Margaret that I would help be a stage manager. And I walked in this and I was like, "Whoa. It is absolutely amazing what these people as a group have done." And now I

say “they.” They’re like, You’re not “they” anymore. [Laughter] “We.” But basically have put together a systematic approach to where things get done. And it’s just, like—

AW:

It’s a well-oiled machine now, right?

NH:

And it’s constantly—it’s like this morning. I can already tell you there’s going to be things that are discussed at the after meeting. They’ll say, Well, we’re going to change the way that is because, you know, we ran out of tacos—which was great—at eight o’clock. But, you know, how do we need to—how do we need to make that happen? I just think that’s the key that the volunteers are serious about the event. And there is many of them that are doing it. And I’m hoping we can enlist more.

AW:

So is this like the big thing that the community does in George West, or do you have other things that—

AH:

You know, I would say that it used to be the big thing. I mean, there was a couple. Like, there was—you know, there are other—but as far as really having to book people and have people—you know, multiple—not just a band where you have a fundraiser with, like, a dinner, dance, you know, drink type thing; gathering. It was the event where you really had an all-day activity—trying to coordinate and bring new talent in and that kind of stuff. And still is in that respect. But, I mean, they’ve—like any other community, they’ve grown a little more. They have, like, a Winter Fest now that’s kind of an all-weekend thing. So they branched out and they have more. But I still think this is probably one of the biggest—

NH:

This and the fair. This and the fair. Those two things to me—

AW:

You have a county fair—

NH:

In March. February-March.

AH:

We have the county fair, like, your TV iconic county fair. [Laughs] I didn’t realize this until I moved away. Growing up here you think they’re all the same.

AW:

Yeah, we have a big fair in Lubbock, the Panhandle South Plains Fair, and I didn't realize until just this year that it's the second largest fair in the state.

NH:

Oh wow.

AH:

Well, and you don't—because you're there.

AW:

I grew up going to that thing. I had no idea. But it—but it—our fair has gotten big enough that it's a commercial endeavor. And they're really—the community participation is the AMBUCS will have a hamburger stand. Of course, they'll make their whole budget, you know, that year. But it's not in the sense of, like, this event or other events that we have in our town that are really driven by the community 100 percent. Is your fair, like, 100 percent community-driven?

AH:

Yes. I mean, I would say—the only thing that's—

NH:

I would say the Midway comes in.

AH:

The only thing that's branched out from that is the cook-off. So our fair—and I didn't know this. Like I said, until I went to college and probably was not even out of college that we started—and I was talking to Nathan. He was like, "Well, no, we didn't do that." I was like, "I mean, I saw the fairs on TV, and our fair is like the fair on TV." I was like, "I thought every fair—county fair is like that." But we got the prospect show for the kids, which is the big driver. I mean, that's where everybody participates. I say everybody. I mean, you know, any and everybody that wants to.

AW:

Dance recital is there and the kid's talent contest and things like that?

AH:

They do, you know, all the 4-H activities. So cooking, arts and crafts, all of that. Then the prospect show there is—the Midway comes, so we have the Midway. Then they have a cook off. There used to be—I think it's a cabrito [goat] cook off. But I think now they've changed to a steak—

NH:

It's everything now.

AH:

Yeah. Some steak something. So they have a big cook-off. They had the PCRA [sic] **[Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association]** rodeo that usually falls in line with the—

AW:

Same thing.

AH:

Sometimes—they've moved the fair recently, so sometimes it doesn't. But it used to—growing up—

AW:

Is that the—I came in through Three Rivers yesterday. Is that—

NH:

It's all there.

AH:

That's it, um-hm. So they have a—they had a PRCA rodeo. And then they would have—Saturday nights they'd have the fair dance. So it really was all these things in about—starting Wednesday you'd start turning stuff in, and then you'd start showing on Friday. Now Thursday. They actually start showing on Thursday now because it's grown. But it was just—you had all these activities over a weekend. And when I say this town shuts down—about 50 percent of the businesses will post—like, locally owned. They're closed because of the fair, because they have kids involved in stuff out there, and then they also go out—and they sell it—like, the baked goods they sell. The animals they sell in the auction and stuff. So, so many people are highly involved out there that a lot of small business just—they know—you know they're going to be closed. Or at least to a minimal—a minimal staff, if nothing else.

NH:

From an outsider—I guess I would say that was—for George West, that was the two big events for me.

AH:

Yes.

NH:

The fair was in the spring and then the Storyfest in the fall.

AW:

So, is—are these two things—let's just settle on these two—are they symptoms of the underlying community spirit, or are they things that help drive community spirit? I mean—and the reason I'm saying that is you go to some communities and they don't have anything. And somebody tries to start something and sometimes it occurs. I think in the case of Elko, Nevada—actually that festival began in Salt Lake City, but they want to get some place where it was a little more cowboy, so they went to Elko, which was a pretty cowboy place. Although it's also a pretty—a mining town, too.

NH:

Um-hm, yeah.

AH:

Yes. Yes.

AW:

But it's—in the case of Elko, I—although, they also have a fair. Maybe I'm talking myself out of my idea. But I think it was that—the success of that Cowboy Poetry Festival seemed to spark more community participation. But it sounds to me like you may have had the community participation idea going here already.

AH:

With the fair it's a lot of volunteers at the fair, too. And that's—

AW:

That's been going on probably a long time.

AH:

I mean, that was—from what I—I started showing when I was in first grade, because they had a young feeders program here in 4-H. So when I was in first—not kinder. I think I was first grade—was the first year, and then Duff showed kinder. So we started—when we started school, we started out there. And it was already just a big event, as far as the fair goes.

NH:

You know, it's interesting because what you—you're asking is interesting. I've lived in a lot of different towns and cities and even the one I grew up in Archer. There'll be a fest that'll start,



and for some reason it'll take off. We had May Fest when I was growing up, and it did really well.

AH:

It finally just kind of—

NH:

And then all of a sudden it just fell out. Well, then here in the last two or three years, they've tried to start heritage days because—just like George West and Archer City were all on the Western Trail—Great Western Trail. So that whole deal they were like, We're trying to get back and show our roots and do western heritage. It was a great festival setup with all kinds of reenactments and music and all that stuff. And it just had very poor turnout. One of them was weather-related, but last year was good. So I don't understand why one will go and one won't. And then down here one that's been going on for thirty years with Storyfest.

AH:

But you had to have good success in the beginning, otherwise—like that—it would've maybe fizzled out.

NH:

And one of the key things I think is that it's hard to get people to volunteer. I don't know if they're afraid that it's so much work it's consuming, when really it—

AW:

Anybody who's volunteered will realize that's a healthy fear. [Laughter]

NH:

The problem is not that—and what happens—we were talking about that earlier—is that you get stuck with it, and then you're it.

AW:

And nobody comes to help you.

NH:

And if more—and that's what we're hoping. I think Storyfest has got thirty more years left. I think it can continue—

AW:

Because that's—the community—I can think of one community that's had a dance that was

started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, then it disappeared and came back and disappeared and came back. And then two groups—

NH:

Anson?

AW:

Yeah. [laughter] And they fight one another. They're two groups there. And it's—it's a really odd—and it's a little, tiny town to be divided up in camps.

NH:

Can't. [Laughs]

AW:

And then Mineral Wells—I know this because I got hired to write an outdoor drama for the town because they wanted to do something about the beginnings of the cattle drive industry, which started, you know, right in that area. Not in Mineral Wells, per say.

NH:

Oran.

AW:

Oran and Black Springs.

NH:

All that where Loving and Goodnight—

AW:

That's exactly it.

NH:

—put them down in that hole and brought them out.

AW:

Yeah. But their—the community itself had a very large poor population, a very tiny rich population, and not much—

NH:

In the middle.

AW:

In the middle. And I think it's the shop owners and the local shop owners and the people in the middle, particularly teachers, professionals—doctors, lawyers—NRCA, all those people—that kind of seems to be where you draw your folks who will sit on the board and will do this. And they didn't—Mineral Wells didn't have that. And it never—the thing never did quite connect. So I wonder if this says as much about George West as it does about the festival. I guess that's kind of my question.

NH:

A lot of people in the middle. [AH laughs] Just good old country people that just don't mind getting their hands dirty.

AH:

Well, and I think in the—probably in the early forefront of it, you probably had this core little group of people that had been here for years and had a lot of friends and had a lot of family, and they were very passionate about it. So they came together and they started it, and then—it was one of those deals where you twist your arm. It's like, "Well, can you volunteer?" Well, they had a little pool; so then they used their little stick and got people involved.

NH:

You're talking about your Aunt Mary Anne Pawlik that didn't mind twisting everybody's arm [AH laughs] for the J. Frank Dobie Center. "Come on."

AW:

Yeah, you can't hide in a smaller town. Lubbock's big enough now that if—like, I just dropped off the board of one thing—it's big enough that I can say, "I'm doing something over here." Because it's a little big bigger community than it was when I was growing up there. In a small town, you really can't get away from it.

NH:

I'll tell you something else that I've noticed as I've moved around. And George West is right there, just kind of like we moved from Hamilton, Texas, up 281. And if you're within ten miles of a pretty good metropolitan area, I don't see you doing a whole lot because you're a part of that. When you're thirty to forty-five minutes, and in this case an hour from a metropolitan area, you depend on your own, in your own village. You take care of your own and you—and there's businesses and there's things that—and you've got to support, and then you've got to get support. Because if you don't support, they're probably won't give you support back. So it's kind of like this community—which it is—a community of things that are working with each other. And so that middle piece that you're talking about, those are the people that say, "Well, I want a good thing for my family to be able to go do. And there's not a better event this weekend then

George West than Storyfest to go and just have some good fun, see things, learn things, enjoy the fair, the food and the fair that are there. It's just like—

AH:

Well, and it is a lot of community involvement. Not just volunteers, but it's the way that—and I don't—I don't know anything about any other festivals. I've never been involved with any other ones other than participating and just going and enjoying what's being offered to us as spectators. Like I said, I don't know how the other ones work, but the way they have it setup here with the booths and stuff—now, your retail booths, that's just for anybody that wants to come in. But on the food booth side, it is strictly limited to non-profit organizations. So it's your school groups—

NH:

Bands and your athletics.

AH:

Your school groups, your church groups, your—you know, like, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, those kind of things. And then that helps—it's a big fundraiser for them.

AW:

Oh yeah. I was just mentioning our fair in Lubbock. The food—once you get on the Midway, that's commercial.

AH:

Yes.

AW:

Everything outside—which is the bulk of it for food—is all the non-profits. And I think—when you think about it—when you think about the participation, it's all there.

AH:

Yes.

NH:

This is where it gets me—

AH:

The kids area, too. That's it, too. I mean, a lot of times there's different school groups that all the kids activities are also non-profit. Other than—now H-E-B's come in and they sponsor, but they don't really necessarily—you know, they kind of—

AW:

Does H-E-B even have a store here?

AH:

No.

AW:

That's interesting.

AH:

The closest one's in Beeville. But there's Beeville, Mathis and Pleasanton. But they know they get plenty of business in George West. [Laughs]

NH:

You know, I think what's interesting too is the way the founders—and the way they continue to do they—here I go, “they”—the way we now—the way this group has put it together is I bet from the outside looking in people don't realize that this morning there are eighteen campuses—seventeen school campuses and one nursing home—that have a teller there telling stories and getting education out to kids. I know my little first grader came home last night and was just throwing, “We got a storyteller coming tomorrow.” They just couldn't wait. And I think people don't realize the fundraising food activities, the education and entertainment given to so many around the area.

AH:

And the kicker is—

NH:

I'm still learning more, as I'm the volunteer group now. I'm like, “I didn't know we did that.” So I think it's—

AW:

Yeah, well, you wouldn't—tomorrow you wouldn't see what's going on today—

AH:

Yes.

AW:

—to most people.

NH:

That's right.

AH:

And most people don't—unless you happen to read it in the paper, you don't know. But the kicker of it all is it's a free event.

AW:

Yeah.

AH:

I mean, that's still very unusual for it to be a free event, so therefore—when you start talking community involvement for those who do come and spend their time or planning, doing a booth or something like that to raise money for the organization, people are not already discouraged to come because it's free. So they can come and the feel maybe more free to spend money on the food and that kind of thing that the fifteen, twenty, thirty dollars it would've cost them to get in is going towards those organizations.

AW:

On the other hand, that's the two-edged sword for those of you who run it. [Coughs] One edge is [coughs] you've got to raise money.

NH:

How do you make it budget-wise?

AW:

But the other edge is it's a lot simpler. The first time you try to charge—and you've got to figure out, "Where do I put the fence? How do—how do I"—and it's a tough thing on a festival.

NH:

It is because then it's just that much more for people to pay. And then they're like, Well, by the time I go get food and a t-shirt and get this, well, then I don't have enough to get in the door. It's all those things. But I think that—[AW coughs] and so far the founders and Mary Margaret and before—Becky Allen and all the directors that are working on these things—to keep fresh talent to draw a different—because it's not just a cowboy gathering. I mean, it's got a stage over there and it's got a portion of that. I mean, there's always the Liars Contest and there's the—and of course, this year the [clears throat] street dance—I sure hope it goes well because they've got Brady Bowen. I mean, west—



AW:

Who's playing?

NH:

Brady Bowen. I mean, western swing. I'm just like—

AW:

And the other—I know having served on several committees for a variety of kinds of festivals striking the balance between bringing back favorites and bringing in new stuff is a tough job.

NH:

Um-hm.

AH:

And there are some that I've—I know—I guess I've been to nearly every one of them. And there's been some storytellers—maybe not in the very, very front end—because it took a while to find, you know, some of the ones that really come back every year. But, you know, there's a handful of them that have been here a large majority of the years that the Fest has been going on.

AW:

My cousin—actually, I guess she's my cousin-in-law—Donna Ingham, has been here.

AH:

Oh, years and years and years.

AW:

And she—she is really accomplished, and goes to a lot of these things. And this is one of her favorites. So before I ever came to do a part here, I knew about it from her. So I know at least since she's been here this festival has had the cache among storytellers as being one of the destinations.

NH:

Well, and I told the group the other night when I was—the first time I went to the board meeting or the steering committee meeting—I said, “You know, I don't know that—I hope y'all know that Storyfest is known statewide. Not just by that but”—

AW:

It's known around the nation.

NH:

Archer City is like, “Oh, you’re going to George West? That’s where they have that Storyfest.” Because anybody that has any type of knowledge of folk and stories and cowboys and stuff, they’re like, “Oh, that’s that big festival where they tell”—I mean—and that’s—and I didn’t nationwide. So it’s even—

AW:

Yeah. Well, because there’s the storyteller community, like the cowboy poetry community, like the folk music community, they are pretty close. So if—you know, if you’re doing a house concert—Timbuktu—you learn about house concerts everywhere else, and they know where the other events are. So it’s—I mean—

NH:

Pretty cool.

AW:

Yeah. This place has a really good reputation outside the community.

AH:

Well, and I was going say—that’s why I was going to say kudos to—one thing I thought earlier when were discussing—I thought some point it would come up. But kudos to those who researched and knew how to organize it, and do it well in order to keep good talent coming back and wanting to come back and participate. Because, you know, over the years, we’ve talked to a number of either different performers that were maybe here just for one year, and they said, “Man, we’ve heard this about this, but we didn’t have any idea how great it was.” And then other ones that had been here. But their comment always is, “We’ve been to many, many festivals, and this is one of the best organized, well-oiled machine festivals we’ve ever been to.” I mean, that says a lot for people—I mean, this is early, you know—I say fairly early on. I’d say whenever—

NH:

We were starting.

AH:

When we were dating, you know, kind of. But that’s—I mean, that [phone rings] says a lot for a small community like that.

AW:

Yeah, it does. And the people that put it together, you know, because they got it started on the right foot.

AH:

Exactly. That's right. And like I said, then—because once you get that—if you come a couple times and you—and it didn't go well, you know, well, of course, that's going to get around a lot quicker even than it does—

AW:

Oh yeah. Well, the other thing that makes—spreads the reputation among the performers is—this is one of those festivals like a few of the others I could mention, like Elko and Alpine, that they really go all out to take care of their performers. And I don't mean necessarily in terms of money, but they treat them well. Like last night there was a dinner out at Oakville. They'll be—they'll have the hospitality spot. When you show up as a performer you go, "Oh, they really do care to have you here." And you don't measure that by looking at the check.

AH:

It's your experience, too. Because it's an experience for you as well as it is for us.

NH:

Early in my career I didn't get a lot of—I spoke a few places here and there. But now my position, I probably speak at—I don't know—ten, twelve, fifteen events a year.

AW:

A lot of banquets, right? [Laughs]

NH:

And it's—it'll be like workshops, or it will be conferences, or it will be providing education. And I'm—you know, back before I put them on myself, I didn't really think much about it. but now that I put them on—because I'm usually the director of, like, a two-day event, and I'll have to call people to get them to come speak. Those people are going to be well taken care of because they're going out of their way to come, and that's what's bringing other people in.

NH:

So now I'm the biggest critic. When I go to these workshops I'm like, "I ain't coming back to this one." And it has nothing to do with what they paid you. It has nothing to do with—it has to do with, "We appreciate you being here. Is there anything we can do for you?"

AW:

I bring people into Texas Tech all the time to do workshops and residencies and concerts and things. And I'm always having to argue with the bean counters about, you know—we have to have a budget to take people out to dinner, and we have to put them up in the nicest hotel in town. That is a miniscule amount of our budget. But it is huge. [Laughter]

NH:

I'm the same way. I'm like—everybody's like, "You're paying them a lot to come speak." I'm like, "Um-hm. And all those hundreds of people that are coming, they wouldn't come if he wasn't on the agenda."

AW:

Yeah. And that person wouldn't come if they weren't treated right.

NH:

And I'm like, "Yeah." They're like, "Well, do we need to put him up for two nights?" I said, "We can put him up for five nights. That's nothing compared to the—that's nothing in cost compared to what"—

AW:

In fact, the more nights you put them up, you're actually leveraging your fee because you get more work out of him.

NH:

You get a lot. And that's what—

AW:

I have trouble convincing them of that, too.

AH:

Well, and it's just like with Storyfest, you know, being able to incorporate them to go to these schools. Because some of these kids—some of these kids, that might be their only exposure. Although it is a free event—

NH:

Yeah, they may not show up tomorrow.

AH:

—there's people in town that aren't going to have any interest in coming whatsoever, and they're going to stay at home, and that means the kids aren't coming. So this is the only—so it's great that they even have that to incorporate. And like you said, again, that's bringing them in. A lot of these storytellers, they're getting another night somewhere. They're, you know, being—they're having to be accommodated for that day, but it's so worth it.

NH:

Well, I guess—you know, to be honest, I'd never been to a cowboy gathering until we came to

Storyfest. And we sat over there and listened. I don't remember. I guess Dennis was here that year.

AW:

Dennis Gaines?

AH:

Gaines.

NH:

Dennis Gaines.

AW:

You know, Dennis is—

NH:

Not doing well right now.

AW:

No. He's in hospice.

NH:

And the other ones there this year—you may know him—is Mel Reilly [?] [0:56:35]. Riley?

AH:

Reilly [?], I think.

AW:

Reilly. I don't him that well.

NH:

So, Mel died. He passed away. But he was here that year. And I remember two guys—the entertainer Dennis. I mean, he was garbed up and he entertained. And then there was the punchy cowboy with the Carhartt that just got off the horse that morning, put everything back in the stall and came up here and told his life story. And it was just—

AH:

Through poets—yeah, the poets. The poetry here, it was—

NH:

It was just like—I remember sitting there going, “I got in here for free?” I mean—and I saw Dennis many times since then. And then I got to see Mel several times, and actually got some of his poems from him. Then he passed away and I still got those. But I didn’t know anything about cowboy poetry until George West. And now I write a few. I’ve written—I wrote one.

AW:

Good for you.

NH:

I opened up the Johnny Campbell gathering two years ago, wasn’t it?

AH:

Think so.

NH:

With the poem that I wrote to attribute to him called *Tocayo*. His middle name is Nathan, and my name’s Nathan. So he called me *Tocayo* for years. I mean, that’s just—you’re opening up and exposing people to things they would’ve never known about.

AH:

See, and I think that probably for me when I was first going, I think that’s—that was it, too. We didn’t—I mean, we—my mom and dad have their own business here in town. And my dad worked morning till night.

NH:

All the time.

AH:

All the time. I mean, for us, we would go on a two-week vacation in the summer. And then, of course, we would do maybe little, little, little things, but we didn’t—we didn’t go—like, some families now it’s like, “Okay, let’s go off to San Antonio and go do this for this weekend.” Or, “Let’s go to this festival.” I mean, the most we ever did was maybe—I remember—younger—Mom and I might go to the Country Peddlers Show or something. But that was, like—that was an outing. So for that it was—for me it was an event that I was able to go to that was right here in town. And like I said, I could get dropped off. Before I was driving I could get dropped off and then I’d go walk down and visit my grandmother for a little, go to the bathroom, grab, you know, a drink or something and then head back to festival and hangout in the hay bales again. It was—like you said, I think that might’ve been probably my first—I always—like I said, always was near and dear. Anything cowboy or cowboy related I was drawn to. But I’m thinking that was



probably my very first exposure to cowboy poetry and entertainment of any kind. Of course, and they had—

NH:

I didn't realize what you said, Andy, that really Elko was the first one in the—

AW:

It was the very first one.

NH:

—in eighty—

AW:

Eighty-five.

NH:

So you're in '89. So you're four years down the road. That's—like you were saying, it was just on the—

AW:

And it was only the next year that Alpine started. And that was the second—so that's the second oldest one. And it was several years—but then a whole bunch of them started three or four years afterwards. The thing that—and I always—in fact, I almost wrote out “cowboy” on my poetry—cowboy poetry badge because the thing that's impressive to me about storytelling and cowboy poetry is it's really just poetry and stories by people. They happen to be cowboys, but they could be plumbers. [Laughter]

NH:

Some of them are. [AH laughs]

AW:

Well, in fact, any more at the cowboy gathering—the more costumes they have on the less likely are—[AH laughs]

NH:

That's exactly right.

AH:

Well, that's where Mel—

AW:

With the exception of Dennis.

AH:

Yeah, yeah. And that's where Mel came in. Because he was—I mean, you could just tell. It was on his face. I mean, there was nothing—when I say “nothing entertaining,” there was nothing flashy, nothing—but my gosh, those poems that he wrote were just—they're from his heart. I mean, it's his livelihood. You could just tell.

NH:

One year Dennis had on those cuffs, you know.

AW:

Yeah, he always wore those cuffs.

NH:

So Mel was there and they were back-to-back. Dennis got finished and then he came off. And I didn't know their—I didn't know their personal relationship. I think they both respected their abilities. So Mel went over and got two Styrofoam cups and cut them up [laughter] and put both the Styrofoam cups—he waltzes up there and he does his poems. And everybody's just laughing. I was like, “This is”—I mean, it's entertainment. And it was just great.

AW:

We were always—my friend—my late friend Buck Ramsey was one of the first people to defend Dennis, because there were a lot of people like Mel who would—thought because he was so flashy that he couldn't be the real deal. But Dennis drew wages. It wasn't—he wasn't just—

NH:

He wasn't playing—I mean, he could play both parts. He could go do what he needed to do, and then he could really—

AH:

In his respect, some of them—they wouldn't feel comfortable doing that. They could tell their poems. Dennis could get up there and he could just—he could just let it go with no inhibition whatsoever.

AW:

I grew up in a country where the only—there were two kinds of coverings for boots. It was either cowhide or duct tape. [Laughter] And if anybody had a stampede string it was the shoelaces from their kids' tennis shoes. So it was real plain. I'd hear those cowboys up there talk about going out

to Elko and see the buckaroos. And one of them said, “By the time they get their horses dressed, I could gather a whole pasture.” That was—it was like the Styrofoam cups. Yet they were all—they were still working. Just a very different—but, you know. You travel around. You know you can look at a guy—the crease on the hat and tell where they’re from.

NH:

West Texas or North Texas. It was so funny because when I moved down here in '02 Angie said, “I think you’re going to have to drop that crease a little bit. [AH laughs] You live in South Texas now.” I’m like, “What? I can’t do that.” You see, here it is. [AH laughs] You can see it over there.

AH:

It was quite taco’d.

AW:

And that—and North Texas and New Mexico, boy, they really get the taco. And it has to be black. When I was growing up, if it wasn’t Silver Belly, it was—there was something wrong.

NH:

I have a black hat, but I very seldom—I’m a Silver Belly, and I like browns. I really got into—

AW:

Yeah, no, I have a black one for when you have to get dressed up. I saw this—I went to the JA reunion one year and a kid had on a hat that—there’s a style in the north part of the Panhandle where it comes down so far in the front, the back goes out—

NH:

Bunkhouse roll, yeah.

AW:

And I said, “That—you know, I see this up here all the time in this part of the country. Where does that crease come from?” And this kid—he was twenty-one or two. He was just young and he had two kids already. His wife was there. He said, “Well, sir, up here we don’t get much rain. I roll my hat this way so I can watch every damn drop.” [Laughter]

NH:

Had something to do with the rain, but I didn’t get—“I wanted to see every last drop.”

AW:

The best rolled crease story I’ve ever heard.

NH:

But really, I mean, Storyfest has just been a—I mean, thinking about—thinking back on it, it's just—a lot of people put a lot of thought into it. And it's a really good festival. I just—

AH:

Well, I know—

AW:

You control a lot of labor. But if you don't throw some brainpower with it, it's not going to work very well.

NH:

And there's been a lot. Mary Margaret has really worked hard. I want to give her some—

AW:

What are y'all gonna do when she retires? This is her last one, right?

NH:

She keeps saying that. Everybody keeps pointing at me and I keep going, "I got an eight-year-old and a six-year-old. I can't do what Mary Margaret's done. I promise."

AH:

He's got an eight-year-old, six-year-old and a job that he never knows what night he'll be home. So it's kind of hard to take on something like that whenever you—

AW:

Well—and I say that not just about Mary Margaret. But is your leadership in this developing—in other words, do you have people coming along that are going to fill the spots?

NH:

I think we're going to try. I mean, that's—

AW:

Because you mentioned another thirty years.

NH:

As I came in and looked around, I was like, you know, everybody here knows exactly what they're doing. They've been doing it for many years as chairmans of these different parts. I can tell most of them are, like, "If we could find somebody to come in behind us, we'd"—so I really want to visit with Mary Margaret and the rest of the group and say, "Do we have a shadowing

program? Do we have somebody that we can find in the community to come in for a year or two and work with you, and then be the chairman to be able"—because—I mean, it's like somebody said, "Well, Nathan, you could do it." I was like, "Well, yeah, sure, I could because y'all have got it lined out exactly what you do when you do it down to the"—and it is. All you've got to do is read. Read and then ask, and you can make it happen. But it needs more than that. It needs somebody with the same type of drive Mary Margaret had, and I'm sure Becky before that that says, "We need to go get new talent. We need to be able to bring in some different things because things change."

AH:

You have to be available to go to the different festivals and, you know, meet people personally. I mean, you can have the names of people who come before, but you need to make those personal relationships.

AW:

Yeah. In fact, I think I met Mary Margaret. She—

NH:

Up there somewhere, I'm sure, in Denton.

AW:

Yeah, she saw me at another festival somewhere, and that's how we got to—

NH:

You really have to also—and this is hard because—I mean, I know when I've put conferences on when I do things, I'm like, "I know what works. I know what works." Well, no, I know what did work for me. And I know—so if I continue doing that, after a while it's not new. After a while it's like, "Well, there's another one of those conferences he does. We know exactly how it's going to go down." So you've got to have some new blood come in. And somebody at that level has to be able to sit back and go, "Well, it's not for me, but that doesn't mean it won't work." Having an open enough mind. I think as long as you continue with those type of people in this system, shoot, I think it'll continue. It's a good festival.

AW:

Yeah, it is. I was just looking at the time to make sure—

NH:

Where are we?

AW:

We're doing good.

NH:

Mary Margaret will get on me if I'm not back over there. [AH laughs]

AW:

Yeah. Well, let me do something real quick. Another bit of data that I didn't get. I need a mailing address for you folks.

NH:

██████████.

AW:

Is that—

NH:

Here in George West, America.

AW:

George West. And the zip is?

NH:

██████████

AW:

And for you, can you give me an email so that we can talk about those—

NH:

Sure. ██████████. And then also—[clears throat] that's my personal one. But I think it'd be really cool—██████████—

AW:

H-a-i-l-e.

NH:

Uh-huh. At ██████████. So email both of them, because that way—I check my government one every day, but my other one will be three or four days.



AW:

Well—and if we're talking about—

NH:

Yeah, it'll be all about land management stuff and roots.

AW:

Yeah, and I'll send it on my Texas Tech email so it'll come along—instead of my personal email. Oh, if you've got that card, let me put my cell phone on there too. I didn't have it on there because it's a little easier to—

NH:

Yeah, that is super. I like hearing about those old—like, you know—so I was thinking—I'm sure we were here in 2000, so this would be my eighteenth one. And know I maybe missed one or two through there. But to think back about before they had these stages put up and where they were located and how—I mean, how much—and then food vendors and all that. I bet just watching it grow has been pretty interesting.

AH:

You know, and of course—like, on weekends like this where you're going to have great weather—I mean, just the number of people that are on the courthouse grounds is—you know, it's quite a bit.

NH:

Well, and the kids area. When did they add that kids—that hadn't been that long ago.

AH:

No. Well, because I was old enough I didn't—I wasn't interested. Like I said, I parked myself on hay bale somewhere and [laughs] that's where I would be. They've had the kids thing for a while, I think. At best I remember. Of course, I didn't have a strong interest in that until—I mean, I knew that they had it—

NH:

Till our kiddos came along.

AH:

—till our kids, and then it was—

NH:

Well, I remember it was rain or shine. I know with Angie it was always, "We're going to the"—

AH:

Oh yeah. You either—

NH:

It didn't matter if it was raining straight down, we had slickers, or we had—

AH:

[laughs] We were always—and then what was funny is we became the lawn fixture.

NH:

Yeah, we're the ones sitting over on the left side of the lawn over at the TCA stage.

AH:

We'd be there for a while. And we could—that was—and again, that was—they had the tent with the chairs, but I just—personally I just—I think it must go back from when I was going as a kid. I liked being out in the sun. I either wanted to be out—out from underneath the tent. I didn't want to be sitting underneath. There might be a shade tree, for sure. I just liked being out. So it just got to be a thing where we would take our lawn chairs and we would set up just outside the tent on the little hill, and then you could see over everybody and hear them just fine.

NH:

It's going to be a tough year because this year I'm the stage manager for the TCA stage, so I won't be sitting over there in my lawn chair underneath the shade.

AW:

You can haul it up by the stage. [NH laughs]

AH:

Well, and different people—if they ever wanted to find us they said, “Well, we knew exactly where to find y'all.” They said, “It was like you were the fixture.” And then the couple of years that—I guess—that we did miss—I think we—we had to have missed one year because people—next year, “Where were y'all last year? We looked over here and y'all weren't over here.” So we had our little spot.

AW:

At Kerrville, they started with the camps, and people would throw up their tent or park their—

NH:

RV.

AW:

—RV at the same spot. And those have developed over the years into, “This is Camp Wisdom, this is Camp Broken Tree, this is camp”—and they get little names. Anyone who’s in the know does not dare—

NH:

Park there.

AW:

—park.

NH:

“That is so-and-so’s.”

AW:

Because it’s just developed and it’s really kind of an interesting thing. Well, before we get done, let me tell you we’re also—and we’ve been working on this with Mary Margaret for some time. We’re archiving the records of the festival at our archive at Texas Tech. So we’re going to be collecting, and that’s something for you—thinking about going forward. And we’ve done that for—like, we—speaking of Kerrville, we have the—we’re the official repository for the records of the Kerrville Folk Festival and for a number of other of these kind of events. Anson Cowboy Dance. We archive that. So the—we’d like to maintain that relationship as you go forward that when you get a new year’s stuff after it’s—you know, you have to it a while to refer to. But it’s a good thing to keep that so that the very things that you’re talking about—here are photos of what it was like in ’88 and ’89, and here’s what it’s like now. And those kinds of things are—you know, speaking of Anson, there’s been a really nice book that’s come out, *Dancin’ in Anson*. Scholarly history of the event. That kind of thing will happen with George West, too. So having maintained—doing this kind of this but also—

NH:

Will help so much.

AW:

Oh yeah.

NH:

And the [Albany] Fandangle. I’m sure—have you been around the Fandangle?

AW:

Yeah, a little bit. In fact, I'm having breakfast next week with a guy named Jesse White who grew up, kind of like y'all, going to that as a kid. That was a really interesting story.

AH:

I bet.

NH:

Oh I'm sure.

AW:

*Texas*. At Palo Duro.

NH:

It was after it, yeah. I never knew that. I went to *Texas* long before I went to the fandango. And then finding out, oh, that's what *Texas* came from.

AW:

Yeah. You know, I don't think I'm speaking out of turn, but Fandangle's a better show.

NH:

I'll agree 100 percent. First time I saw it I was like—

AW:

The history's at least kind of real. Texas is really—

NH:

What's really neat is too find out that you have to be part of the community or family in order to be in the Fandangle.

AH:

That's what I was going to say. It's that heritage that goes along with it. It's the story that goes with the event.

NH:

It's such a fun event to go to.

AW:

They tried to create a replica Fandangle in Crosbyton, and didn't quite—

NH:

Didn't quite work.

AW:

Well, Crosbyton—it's not any smaller, I don't think.

NH:

Uhn-uh. But it's—

AW:

They just didn't have—

NH:

They interviewed some kids there in Albany not too long ago. I don't remember if it was—it was maybe *Texas Country Reporter* or one of those. And in interviewing them, you know, the kids—it was really funny because the little kids were like, "Yes, I've got to be in the Fandangle," or whatever. But then they went up to the next one and they—his mom, and his mom said, "Yeah, I was just like you, but now I'm in it and I'm proud to be in it." And then the grandpa is there. Yeah, you have to do it. But then after a while it's like, "Oh, this is heritage. I've got to do this." So that's why it continued—

AH:

And then you figure out—you figure out how unique it is. I mean, it's really—you know, it's one of those—

NH:

Different.

AH:

Yeah. It's like, "Well, this is—not everybody gets to do this."

NH:

And I think that's what—I think that's what it is, kind of, with George West on the Storyfest. I think as they keep going further—I mean, we're at thirty years.

AW:

That's impressive.

NH:

It's huge. And I'm just like, "Man, I just don't know if people realize how important that is."

AW:

All right, one last question. What did I not ask that I should have? [Laughter]

NH:

That's a good one. I don't know.

AW:

Well, if you think of something we can—we'll follow it up, because I'll be back. But we can also do things over the phone or if you have questions call me. I'm going to ask you to sign—and I made it to out "Angie and Nathan Haile" if that's okay.

NH:

That's fine.

AW:

Just get you to each sign this line. And I'm leaving a copy so you know what you signed. [AH laughs] All this is is it allows us to let people listen to the recording. And it also says that if you had quoted lines from poem you wrote—

NH:

It was covered.

AW:

Well, that the intellectual property stays with you and not with the state of Texas. When I first started doing this work they were claiming intellectual property ownership, and I said—

NH:

"Hold on a minute."

AW:

Yeah. I wouldn't sign that. [Laughs] And nobody I know would sign.

NH:

Me neither.

AW:

So we changed it so that it protects you in case you broke into song or something. [AH laughs]



NH:

And speaking of that. It's going to be neat, I guess. Have you heard what—"Cousin" Jerry King is coming this year.

AW:

Oh really?

NH:

Do you know who—KKYX "Cousin" Jerry King was a DJ. For the last twenty-nine years—I think even last year—I don't remember him being here. Of course, we got here that evening. He was always on the front steps of the Buck West House at the community breakfast. And he would—

AH:

And they would—they would broadcast there from—

NH:

They would air from right there.

AH:

Yeah.

NH:

And he would say, "Come on down to the Storyfest," yadda, yadda, yadda. Well, he retired.

AW:

Uh oh. [Laughs]

NH:

And so he retired from KKYX. Well, Mary Margaret went to him and said, "Jerry, you've been here all these years. Why don't come this time and just go to the"—because he always had to work. So as soon as he got finished broadcasting, they rode up and they roll. So he said, "Sure, I'd love to come to the festival." She said, "Well, would you do me one better? Would you just emcee the first couple of Texas cowboy poets over at the Johnny Campbell gathering?" He goes, "Only if you'll play the "The Little Purple Bag" for us. [AW laughs] So Jerry King—I'm going to introduce Jerry King, and then he's going to emcee, and then we're going to play Johnny Campbell's "The Little Purple Bag" poem. That's my favorite poem he does. So Jerry's going to be there. And that's going to be a fun—

AW:

I hope they're replacing him at the radio station with someone doing that—you know that's bound to bring people in.

NH:

See, I'm going to visit with Mary Margaret and see kind of what they did. This year I think there's several people—I think there's several individuals, like, in Corpus at KK—Channel 3 or Channel 6. I can't remember which ones do it. You've got to get advertisement out, otherwise you just can't pull them in.

AW:

Yeah. People don't know about it, they're not going to come. That's just all there is to it.

NH:

I like the way they've done a lot of stuff with the—you know which weekend it is. It's not a day. It's a weekend. Whatever day it is, it is. And that way people know and can remember it's the first weekend in November.

AW:

That's smart, because people get in the habit.

NH:

Yes. And that's what—that's what you want. You want them to come enjoy it.

AW:

Yeah. Good. All right. Thanks. Appreciate you taking your time.

AH:

Thank you.

NH:

Thank you, Andy, for doing this. This is going to be a great thing.

AW:

This is fun.

NH:

How many—so I'm asking this question to you. How many—you talked about the Grass Roots and you talked about, you know, you're doing these for festivals. I mean, what all interview—are you—

AW:

Well, they brought me on to do this, because of my work in music and plays and poems and such, to build our archive of musicians. So we have—I've been doing that. That's really the main thing I do. For instance, we have the archive of Michael Martin Murphy, and we have the archive of a great songwriter named Chuck Pyle. We just brought in the archive of Terry and Jo Harvey Allen. Visual artists, musicians, playwrights, actress. A whole stack of other—

NH:

Entertainers.

AW:

Yeah. Musicians mainly. But also painters and novelists. One of my favorite collections is one that I brought in from Max Evans, who grew up in Ropes, Texas.

NH:

Ropes. Where's that?

AW:

It's right outside of—well, we used to—I mean, it's just outside of Lubbock.

NH:

Okay, so it's up there.

AW:

About twenty miles; thirty. But he wrote—he was a cowboy and a painter, and then a novelist. And he wrote the *Hi Lo Country* and the *Rounders*, among other things. He's ninety-four, but he's been writing his whole life with a best friend. He and his wife were best friends Sam Peckinpah and his wife. Now, if you can imagine being best friends with the craziest director in Hollywood. [NH laughs] So we have a lot of different collections. Among writers we have a thing called the Sowell Collection. Jim Sowell family collection. Writers on the natural world: Barry Lopez, Rick Bass, Gretel Ehrlich, Annick Smith, William Kittredge. A ton—well, over two dozen of the best writers in that category in the world. I mean, it's just a remarkable collection. So we have a variety of things. And I'm particularly interested in creative work, creative process. In fact, I'm also director of a thing called the Commons Center of the Studies of Creative Process. But to me creative process is not just writers and musicians, but it's also scientists, and it's range managers and festival organizers. There's a creativity involved in that that is essential. We're more alike in creative work than we are different.

NH:

Sure. No matter what the—

AW:

A lot of people try to make a big deal out of, "Well, you're in this or you're in that."

NH:

It's the same process.

AW:

Exactly. That's my thinking anyway. So that's what we do.

NH:

You got any on Ranger—Texas Ranger writers or history or something like that?

AW:

We don't have much, no. They've got the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame, and they've collected a fair amount of stuff of that.

AH:

They kind of had that cinched up, you know, in a designated place.

AW:

And we don't try—you know, there's so much to be collected out there. If a few archives are out there wrestling over one thing, they're fifty things not getting collected. So we try to—

NH:

And I'm sure the Cowboy Hall of Fame, you know, got a ton of stuff on it.

AW:

They have a great—they have a great research collection in the Cowboy Hall of Fame. If you ever get a chance to go down in the basement and look at all the stuff, it's pretty impressive.

NH:

It's pretty cool.

AW:

Yeah. So they're a little more of a museum than they are an archive. We're more of an archive than we are a museum.

NH:

Which I think the stories—it's really neat because it—

AW:

We will have some archival—I mean, some artifact kind of things, you know. But mainly it's documents and photographs and interviews.

NH:

I've been wanting to take the girls out to the Ranching Museum.

AW:

Heritage Center?

NH:

Heritage Center, yeah.

AW:

Yeah, we work real closely with them, too.

NH:

Because, I mean, that's a really—that's a—

AW:

Well, if you get up there to that, you've got to come see us in the Southwest Collection. We'll give you the Cook's tour and show you all that.

NH:

Our girls are going to—they—we love travel. Angie and I love traveling, so our girls are just going to have to get on board.

AW:

When you get there—my daughter was a curator of education there for some time, and now she's the Director of Public Art for the Texas Tech system, all of the campuses. We have an extraordinary public art collection. One of the top ten in the nation. Your kids would love it. They're some really interesting stuff. And I'll get you a personal—I'll get her to give you a personal tour.

NH:

That'd be cool. That'd be really neat.

AW:

She loves showing it off. Well, I'm going to say thank you.

NH:

Well, thank you very much.

AH:

Yes, thank you.

AW:

All right.

***End of Recording***



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