

**Oral History Interview of  
Glynis Holm Strause**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson  
October 31, 2013  
George West, Texas**

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

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### Related Interviews:

This interview was one of eight interviews conducted on October 31 and November 1, 2013 that discuss the Geroqe West Storyfest. Other interviews include: L.T. Davis, Ross Harris, Jim Huff, Julie Kaase, Jim McGee, Mary Ann Pawlik, and Pauline Word.

## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Glynis Strause, who discusses growing up in George West, Texas, working for Conoco Phillips, and the annual George West Storyfest.

**Length of Interview:** 0:56:58

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### Keywords

George West Storyfest, Conoco Phillips

**Andy Wilkinson (AW):**

Not that I have anything against the University of Texas. I'm recording here just in case something very interesting happens. And it's Andy Wilkinson, the thirty-first of October. Halloween 2013, with Glynis Strause?

**Glynis Holm Strause (GHS):**

Right.

AW:

Here, in George West, talking about George West Storyfest, and whatever else strikes our fancy. What we do in an archive is we're sort of—I like to explain it to people—we're sort of halfway between a library and a museum.

GHS:

Okay.

AW:

We have things that we don't let out. To use our stuff you have to come there and sit down, because it's like a museum, in that letters—

GHS:

There's only one of a kind?

AW:

Right. But like a library, it's aimed less at artifacts and more at things that are valuable for their information. So scholars use our archive to do research. We especially have an interest in things in our front page news. You know, we almost always find out the big stories. But it's the second page, and the third page, and the back page that that stuff disappears. So we're—

GHS:

It's the politics that never gets told.

AW:

Right. [GHS laughs] Some of that. But just things like if you wanted to know what a person paid for shoes in Kansas City when they got to the end of the trail drive in the 1870s, it's not that easy to figure out. You know? So, wouldn't we loved to have had some oral histories of people doing that, you know? So we try to do those things and we have a particular interest in a number of areas. We're interested in ranching. We're interested in, of course, the ordinary life of our part of Texas, up in the Panhandle.

GHS:

Are you going to be here Saturday?

AW:

Yes ma'am, um-hm. I'll be performing, actually.

GHS:

Oh okay. Well, I want to—I want you to finish your story, but I want to tell you about Bill Sawyers. Don't let me forget.

AW:

Okay. I'm going to write "Bill Sawyers" down. So we also have an interest in music and the arts. That's why I'm there, because I'm a musician, and so they brought me on board to develop our history, or our archives related to that. And that's how I met Mary Margaret some years ago. I came down to the festival and I was—as I was telling Jim McGee, I was Board President of our Arts Alliance in Lubbock that runs our arts festival. So seeing how your festival runs and how successful it's been for twenty-five years is very interesting.

GHS:

Right, right. Have you been here before?

AW:

Yes. I played here three years ago, maybe.

GHS:

I'll tell you what's sad is when you work Storyfest, you don't get to go to all that you want to go to. So I'm sorry I didn't hear you.

AW:

No, I know the exact feeling, because I do the same at our festivals. But George West is a small town. Lubbock's a big city. You've managed, in this smaller town, to keep this festival really vibrant for twenty-five years, and that's a big deal. So we thought—I talked to Mary Margaret about this, about coming down and doing some interviews with all of you to kind of get a sense of that. So that's what it's about. Now, when the interview's done, we'll archive it, but we make it available to people for research.

GHS:

Okay. Is it available online or just—



AW:

We—it probably will not be for the near future, but we would like sometime in the future.

GHS:

Now, that would be truly valuable. Worldwide.

AW:

Well, we're aiming at that. The problem for all of us archives is—like, our archive started in 1926 or seven with the first batch of ranching records we collected. So we've been collecting things for not a hundred years, but close to it. And the money and time to get all that online is—

GHS:

I understand.

AW:

—is very, very difficult.

GHS:

I went to work for Conoco Phillips. I was at Coastal Bend College. I started in 1978. And I taught speech for twenty years, and then I was the Director of Continuing Ed for thirteen years. And then I became—I was a Dean of Institutional Advancement for two years.

AW:

Oh, so you know what institutional and what money [GHS coughs] raising is about.

GHS:

Yeah, I know what money raising is about.

AW:

Where did you go to college?

GHS:

Well, my undergraduate degree is from Howard Payne.

AW:

Oh yeah. Great school.

GHS:

And I've got a degree in English, Speech, and Theater. I got a secondary teaching certificate, but I never taught high school, except dual credit in college. And then, I got my master's at the

University of Tennessee in Knoxville, up in the Smoky Mountains. And I did—I was there two years, and coached speech and debate, and traveled all over the United States with the team. So that was fun. And then I taught at Texas A&I for a year, and then I went to Coastal Bend College, or Bee County College at the time. And then, got married and went to work the same month.

AW:

So are you still doing that? Have you ever—

GHS:

No. I—my husband died in 2010, and then I was—and I became dean. He died in April. I became dean in August, and I worked myself into high blood pressure and high stress, and I was—and then, in March of 2012, I became eligible for full retirement because of my age and because of how many years I'd been there.

AW:

The rule of eighty?

GHS:

Well, I'm actually ORP [**Optional Retirement Program**], but, you know, you had to have so many years in. So I was eligible because of my age more than my—more than the rule of eighty. So I was fifty-nine and a half. And a month and a week later, a lady that I knew from Conoco Phillips came in and we were working on a grant for them. They just came in to visit with us. She said, "You know, we're opening up a job called Community Relations Advisor for the Eagle Ford." And I'm assuming you know what the Eagle Ford is.

AW:

Um-hm, yes. That's why it's hard to get a hotel room.

GHS:

Yes. [AW laughs] Oh yeah, a cheap one doesn't exist anymore. And I said, "Well, what is that going to be?" She said, "Well, it's like public relations with Bee, Live Oak, Karnes and DeWitt County." And I said—she said, "Do you know anybody?" And I said, "Yeah, I do, and I'm not telling anybody else, and I hope you don't either." [AW laughs] And she said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "I'll take it." She said, "Well, you have to apply first." And then, May first, Conoco Phillips and Phillips 66 split into two companies, and Conoco Phillips was the upstream from the hole to pipeline, and Phillips 66 is from the pipeline to the pump. And she said, "You know, we're going to have a ten-day blackout while the companies split. And then you need to have your application in." So then I went for an interview, like, on May the eleventh. And I started—got the job and I—the new president of the college had been there four days. And



I walked in and I said, “I’m resigning—I’m retiring.” She’s like, “What did I do?” [Laughter] I said, “Well, it’s what you can’t do. You can’t offer me what I just got offered.” And I love this job. You know, I have no budget. I have a credit card. I have no employees. I have no southern association. I do parties and give away money. [Phone rings] Oh gosh. And that’s what I do. You know, what’s not to like? [Laughs]

AW:

That sounds like good work.

GHS:

That’s right. And Conoco Phillips has been a sponsor of a 5k run, here at Storyfest, for three years. And then I came on last year, so I work on the 5k committee. And my jobs at Storyfest are to time the liars contest. Because they think I’m a speech teacher, I’m the only one that knows how to time a speech, which is hysterical to me. And then I put together Sacred Stories, which is on Sunday. And we go to different churches on that. And then with my job with Conoco, it’s kind of made that interesting, because I’ve kept those jobs, but as a sponsor with the 5k, I meet all year with the 5k committee. And then we have four booths over there by the R.D. Davis, on the other side of the courthouse. And we just give away stuff and talk to people. [Laughter] But Bill Sawyers is what I wanted to get into this conver—

AW:

Okay. Tell me about Bill Sawyers.

GHS:

Bill Sawyers is eighty-eight years old. And he works for a radio station called KRUP. It’s out of San Antonio. And he—we sponsor the old timers radio hour.

AW:

Oh really? That sounds interesting.

GHS:

I think you’re going to be real interested, because he has done probably two to three hundred interviews of old time ranchers. And it’s on this radio station. But I really want you to talk to him about getting it in your archive because he has them all digitally and you can get them—

AW:

Oh, they are digitally? Oh, that’s great.

GHS:

They’re on—it’s KLP—am I saying that right? KLUP-dot-com.

AW:  
KOUP?

GHS:  
K-L. *Klup*. [Laughs]

AW:  
KLUP.

GHS:  
Right. And he'll be there at our booth Saturday.

AW:  
I will visit with him.

GHS:  
But I think this is something that Tech is going to be very interested in, because I sat with him. And I'm lining up some interviews on Saturday.

AW:  
Great. Yeah, one of the other things that we do a lot of is—for people like that who have been doing interviews, especially if they're not digital, we can digitize them, if they're on—because tape is, as we speak, is all disappearing.

GHS:  
Well, he has something very similar to what you have. And then the radio station puts them on their website. You can listen to all of them, you know? And then they air two or three of them a week on Sunday afternoon at four. But this might be—because Bill's pretty old, you know? And he wants to leave a legacy. I don't know what his agreement is with the radio station. That's not my business. But we sponsor this. And he—you know, he's had a knee replacement. He's going to have another one replaced. But he's still, you know, out there, chomping at the bit. I've set up two interviews, and I hope a third one—hasn't called me back yet—for Saturday.

AW:  
Remind me of where I'll find him.

GHS:  
The courthouse is right here. It's on the far stage. Right in front of R.D. Davis. Galloways, you remember? It's right—it's—we're right in front of that tent. He's going to be in the Conoco Phillips tent. And we'll have a tent that says "Conoco Phillips." You'll be able to find us.

AW:

Yeah, I'm not sure where I'm playing Saturday, exactly, or the time. But I'll have time to come—

GHS:

But Bill should be there. I'm not sure what time he's coming, because he's waiting on me to tell him what time the interviews are. But he's lined up some old folks around here. And really, I missed the first Storyfest because I was an officer of a state organization that had a conference this week—that weekend. And I was furious.

AW:

So you missed the first one?

GHS:

And I've been working on the rest of them.

AW:

Do you live here in George West?

GHS:

Yes, I do. Yeah.

AW:

So you lived here while you were teaching?

GHS:

Right. I've driven to Beeville to work for thirty-five years. [Laughs]

AW:

How—it's not that close.

GHS:

Well, it's twenty-two miles to the Conoco office. It was twenty-five to the college.

AW:

Let me get a little background information, too, real quickly while we've got a break here. What's your date of birth?

GHS:

9/11/52.

AW:

And where were you born?

GHS:

McAllen. Then we moved to George West when I was eighteen months old.

AW:

Oh, so you've grown up here?

GHS:

Right.

AW:

Wow.

GHS:

But we were newcomers. I'm oil field trash. My daddy was a—[AW laughs]—my daddy was a tool pusher. They had lived here when I was just born. I mean, right after I was born, and then they moved back because, you know, we followed the rigs. And my older siblings moved—they thought a report card meant you had to go to a new school. [Laughter] Because every time, you know, they had tried to move—keep the rigs and the school because he had three kids, you know? They went to school all over the state. But then, when I was born—and my brother was—is eleven years older than me—then they moved to George West for—you know, so that he could play football, and, you know, the kids could be involved in sports. And I was just a baby.

AW:

What was your maiden name?

GHS:

Holm. H-o-l-m. So Axel's protégé is Axel Holm, H-o-l-m. And they were—my grandparents were Swedish immigrants and came over in 1910 and '11.

AW:

Came to Galveston?

GHS:

No, came through Ellis Island, and then went to Maynard, up in Austin, and were indentured servants for several years, and then they went down to Karnes County, and started farming down there, and had seven kids. My oldest uncle taught them all how to speak English. And, you know, he came to the manifest, on the ship that he came in, there were—this is really intriguing,

to me, because it tells you what was going on in Sweden. My older uncle had come the year before, and his manifest is just about the same. But on pa's manifest, there were fifteen boys with no other person on the ship of their last name under eighteen years old. And my grandfather told me, you know—well, his parents had died. His older brother had died. So he was left in Sweden by himself when his older brother came over. So John came over and found a place to work, then Axel came with him—came, you know, the next year. He said they were starving, and they were going to have to go into the service because Sweden has universal—

AW:

Compulsory.

GHS:

Right, compulsory whatever it is. So I guess he was a draft dodger. [Laughter] If you want to look at it that way. But he, you know, came over and raised seven kids in Karnes County. He went back to Sweden. My grandmother died and he—that's a whole other story. He went back to Sweden in 1964. She had been dead ten years. And he sold that land, which is right in the sweet spot of the Eagle Ford. [Laughter] It'd been nice if we could've owned it, but we don't own it.

AW:

Yeah. It's funny how those things happen.

GHS:

Right. Right. So, from the college, I had—you know, I had worked these counties forever, because I did speech tournaments and taught these kids. I probably taught about seven thousand students. You know? And so I know a lot of people in these counties. I told my boss—I said, "Look, I've lived in Live Oak County all my life, so I know those people. I've worked in Live Oak—in Bee County for thirty-five years. My family's from Karnes County. So DeWitt's the only one I get to know. It's the only county I don't really know." And I have to tell you, this was crazy. Talk about storytelling? It's so important because it shows you how you're connected to people. Okay? I'd just gone to work in July of 2012 for Conoco Phillips, and one of cohorts from Houston was taking me around and introducing me to people. Well, we walk into the Yoakum Chamber of Commerce. The director comes out and, you know, we're visiting. Harmony says, "And this is Glynis Holm Strause. This is Bill Lopez. Bill, Glynis grew up in the oil field." And he said, "Oh, really? How did—how did—how—why do you say that?" I said, "Well, my daddy was a tool pusher, and my brothers and sisters moved around forever, and then we moved to George West. And he went, "Who was your daddy?" I said, "Buck Holm." And Bill's about seventy-five. Tears just started rolling down his face. And I was like, "What did my daddy do to you?" That was all I could think, because my daddy was a real big joker, you know, and loved practical jokes. And I was like, Oh my god, what did he do? And I said, "Did you know Buck?" And he said, "Let me tell you." This man with tears rolling down his face saying, "When I was a



kid”—it was in probably—I don’t know what year it was. Probably in the fifties. He said, “You know, it was the drought. I needed a job. Everybody was, you know, needing work. I went to Edna, Texas and I asked a man—I said, ‘I need a job.’ And he said, ‘You go to the hardware store and get you some steel-toed boots and a hard hat and some gloves, and you show up at that rig that’s at this certain place at ten o’clock tonight, and you go to work on evening towers, or morning towers.’” So he said, “That’s what I did. You know, I went up on the floor and everybody laughed at me because I had the wrong gloves and I didn’t have a coat.” He said, “At three o’clock in the morning, a Blue Norther blew in, and I was freezing to death because I just had on a cotton shirt.” He said, “Finally, the driller said, ‘Son, you see that trailer house down there? You go down there and you be quiet as a mouse, and you clean it up. You clean that kitchen. You clean the bathroom. You clean the living room. Don’t open the bedroom door. The tool pusher’s asleep and he’s tired. And when it’s six-thirty in the morning, you knock on the door and offer him a cup of coffee.’” He said, “Yes sir.” He said, “I was so cold I’d lick the floor clean.” He said, “So that’s what I did. And your daddy opened the door and he had on his boots and his boxer shorts.” [Laughter] He said, you know, “Who are you?” He said, “Well, I just came to work here.” He said, “Glynis, what I want to tell you is that I’ve owned four oil companies in my lifetime, and your daddy taught me everything I needed to know about the oil business. And I loved him to death. And how’s Vera?” You know? And I said—and I didn’t think I knew a soul in DeWitt County. [Laughs]

AW:

Are you familiar with a quote from the poet and the writer, Muriel Rukeyser, who said, “The universe is made of stories, not atoms”?

GHS:

I completely believe that. It’s so funny. The lady that took me to Bill to introduce me said, “I think we need to leave. They’re having a moment.” And, you know, along that—that’s a great quote, because one of the things that has made this—me successful and really happy doing my job with—for Conoco Phillips—which sometimes I wonder why I’m getting paid to have fun, but my boss says it’s a job so she’ll pay me for it. [AW coughs] She says, “For everybody in the world, there’s six degrees of separation, except for Glynis and the Eagle Ford, and there’s two.” And that has been really true, because I’ve taught so many students, and I’m kin to a lot of people, and I’ve been around so long that it doesn’t take long to figure out who you know that they know. You know? And that’s where the story starts happening. You know? “Oh, you’re so-and-so’s so-and-so.”

AW:

I traveled—in another life, I traveled for an investment banking firm out in New York. When I—and I had, like, thirteen states I covered. And I traveled to New York a lot for the company. But I



made this observation. Often times, I would come to a place and I would be the only person that knew both people that worked were going to lunch with me, kind of like you probably do, too.

GHS:

A lot.

AW:

So in Texas, by the time lunch was—before you could get down to any business, [coughs] the two people—I had to pick out who they knew in common.

GHS:

Exactly.

AW:

In Louisiana, they had to figure out how they were kin. And in New York, they figured out what part of town they lived in so they would know how much the other one made.

GHS:

Oh, that's interesting.

AW:

But everywhere that I went, the story—the stories were critical to establishing the relationship before you could actually do any business.

GHS:

It absolutely is. It's a way to establish credibility, you know?

AW:

How are we connected?

GHS:

How are we connected? Who do you know? What do you know? And how did you get to know it? That's what a story is.

AW:

Yeah. When—so you had a natural interest in the Storyfest?

GHS:

Right, because of my degree in communication. And there's a lot about oral history. The

Chautauqua Movement—you probably are familiar with that—it was a lot about capturing stories and performance, and I love to perform.

AW:

Teaching through entertainment.

GHS:

Exactly. And, you know, we did—we opened the Dobie West Theater, and I'm on the board of that.

AW:

Really? I noticed it on my walk this morning. I walked by it.

GHS:

Right. Well, it's really cool. When I first—it'll be open Saturday. You may be performing in there. There's a set that's in there and ghost stories is in there.

AW:

Yeah, I'll look. I'll go in and see it.

GHS:

When I walk in there the first time, the attorney next door was—he's not there now. There was an attorney's office there. And he called me and he said, "I want you to see something." And he took me in—he had gotten the key from the people that owned the theater. And, see, the last movie I saw there—I was in third grade, and it was *Zorro*. [AW laughs] You know? And they closed. And that was in, like, '63, and they shut it down. And I walked in there and they had put—the front part where they—you know, the ticket office and the concession stand was, they had put that phone dial. And the roof was leaking, which is why the lawyer wanted me to look at it, because it was leaking into his building, because the roof was gone. He said, "Glynis, what—do you think this could be preserved?" I walked in, that tile is on the floor, it's squishy, and it has black mold on it. You know, I'm crying in seconds. And, you know, I hadn't been in the back of that theater since I was, you know, seven, eight, probably nine years old. So I went through it and I went, "Well, I don't know." So we started thinking about getting a board and how we could get it—the people who owned it—of course, it was just a liability—actually gave it to Storyfest. And then we started a 501(c)(3) separately from that. [Phone rings] So we started the board and started writing grants. And Mary Ann Pawlik, you know—what my wisdom to pass on is, is if you're going to do something like that, you need to make sure that the board president is a benevolent dictator. You don't need to hire somebody who's interested in democracy. Because—I mean, in Beeville, they have a Rialto, and they have so many opinions that—I wrote a grant for them in 1994. And that theater is still stripped. They still haven't done a—you know, they

haven't made any progress because they have—they have all of these ideas on how to raise money, but they have no worker bees. And they don't have anybody that says, "We're going to do this," you know, and go for it because they have fourteen other people saying, "Well, let's discuss it." You know, Mary Ann says, "This is what it needs to work. We're going to get it done," and we do it. And we fall in line and say, "Yes ma'am." You know, we have a performing theater now, and it works. And the acoustics are unbelievable in there.

AW:

Yeah, those old theaters were designed for that.

GHS:

Right.

AW:

How long has it been back in—

GHS:

It opened in '46.

AW:

No, how long has it been back in [GHS coughs] use?

GHS:

Two years.

AW:

Two years?

GHS:

Um-hm.

AW:

That's great. Because I think when I was here and performed last, it was not.

GHS:

Right. Well, the first performance we had in there, it was nineteen degrees, and there was a hole in the back wall and the performer was about—there was—and, you know, there was electricity, but there was no heating and air conditioning. And we just had some temporary lights on the stage, but that was our first fundraiser. And the community came out. We told them, "Bring your

blankets.” And everybody was, you know, freezing to death, but we had a great time. It’s really supported by the community.

AW:

That’s a good segue, as we like to say, into a question that I have, which is how does a community of this size manage to support this, the theater and the Storyfest? That seems like a great story in and of itself.

GHS:

Well, if you want it bad enough, you can do whatever you want to do. I’m going to tell you some more things they’ve supported. We just—tomorrow at four, I hope you will come, because there are going to be some stories. Bring your micro—bring your recorder. We’re dedicating a sixty-thousand dollar gateway to the cemetery that started out as an idea. And I was looking—I’m the cemetery president, and I looked at them and it said, “19”—I joined the cemetery board—I’m going to have to remember what year it was, ’82, or something like that. There was a discussion about getting a gate there. You know, putting a new gateway. I’m going to sneeze. Just a minute. [Sniffles] Getting a gateway—[sneezes]—excuse me—to the cemetery instead of just the, you know, chain-link fence gate. So, you know—so the cemetery board has changed. And then, Unified to Beautify came along, which is another group you probably need to talk to. Grace Wilson. So Grace said, “Well, we could put stone—you know, stones around the edges.” So that was a good idea. “Yeah, we’ll do that.” And then some people called Bill and Beverly Meider, who will be at the dedication, said, “Well, we’ll put some money behind it, because both of our parents are buried out there.” Well, because they have means, they were able to put quite a lot of money behind there. And this actually—talking about the gateway started when my husband passed away, because people said, “What do you want to—you know, what—do you have something we could give money to?” I said, “Yeah, well, I want a gateway to that cemetery.” So that was the first donors—went in his name. And then, Mildred Sanders and Leola Wilson were sister-in-laws, and that family wanted that to happen, so they named that when those two ladies passed away. So it started to become memorials. And then the Meider’s kicked in, and other people, you know, either provided in kind, or their machines, or whatever it was. So you ask me, “How does a community do this?” If they want it, they figure it out. [Laughs] And there’s—

AW:

Yeah, but it also seems like there’s a lot of shared want that—

GHS:

Well, you share the story. Why do you want—why do we want a gateway to the cemetery? Because the chain-link fence gate does not honor our—the people that I—the way I say it: the people who live in our memory in the cemetery. You know? And one of the things—talk about storytelling. We’re going to do this once the gateway is done, because we’ve had too many

projects in this town. The Buck West—the Buck West house was a community project. And I know you've been there.

AW:

Um-hm.

GHS:

Where the Chamber office is.

AW:

Yes.

GHS:

That house was one of the first—belonged to Buck West, and one of the first judges in Live Oak County lived there. And it was moved over across the tracks, where there was no water or sewage, and it was falling down. And so some people said, "What can we use that for?" So we got the city to give us the land. They cut the roof off of it, moved it under the power lines. You know? And it happened because Mary Ann is benevolent dictator. You know? And she was head of that project. A lot of us did little things. But if everybody does a little, you get a lot out of it. That's how little towns do it. Because we don't have anybody else to do it for us, you know? But I help Mary Ann write grants and do advertising. That's kind of what I do. Somebody else does the painting. Somebody else does the weed eating. I mean, everybody does that they can do.

AW:

Right, but my point, Glynis, is there are a lot of little towns that don't do anything. How—why is it different here?

GHS:

Well, there's a friend—I'll tell you why. I'll tell you exactly why. There's a friend of mine who worked for Texas AgriLife Extension, Greg Clary. He had the Texas Center for Rural Entrepreneurship. And I went all over the state and I had a couple of grants with him through Coastal Bend College. I've heard him say this many times, and it is absolutely the truth: "Some towns deserve to die." Because they wish it. You know? If you have—if you have cavemen, people—you know, citizens against virtually everything, who don't get on board, who are only interested in their almighty dollar. Don't get me started on who that is. You know, if that's who that town is made of, of cavemen, the town's going to die. But if you have people who say, "That's a good idea. What can I do?" You know, whether it's Betty McGee making a hat for Axel so that she has a hat for every occasion—wait till you see this—or it's, you know—



AW:

Actually, I've got to tell, for the recorder, Axel is a gnome whose picture I just saw.

GHS:

Yeah. Named after my Swedish immigrant grandfather.

AW:

And you're right, they do look alike.

GHS:

Absolutely. When my friend Cathy Moore, who was here with R.D. Davis for six—they lived in the Best Western for three years, doing leases for Conoco. But she gave me that gnome, and now he's taken on kind of a life of his own. But cities, you know, have other resources. Towns, we only have each other, you know? And when you see a group of people who meet every Monday night for months to get Storyfest together—and you look at that and there is—the agenda is a whole page of people's committees, and they're doing one thing. And that's how you do it. One person does the red wagon. I can't say it. The "wed wagon pawade." [Laughs] And one person does sacred stories. And one person—you know. And you get enough one person's, and they're not—what they're doing is they know how to do it well. They know what's going to work and what's not going to work. They know who to ask and who not to ask. And after a while, it's not hard. You're just doing what you know how to do, and coming together, it makes a festival. Now, Mary Margaret, and Ronda, and Becky, who have been our three executive directors, they work hard all year long because they're getting, you know, funding; they're getting vendors lined up; they're getting all of these things. And so they're coordinating all these little ants who are marching to their own, you know, thing that they're doing. So that's how you do it in little towns. And you've got to have a town that loves its town. You know, there's a lot of history here. My family just came in 1954. We're newcomers. My husband's grandfather came to this town and lived in a tent and built the courthouse, and the hotel, and the school for George West in 1919. You know, 1914, 1914. So there's—the Strause roots are deep. You know, the home roots were just oil field trash that stuck. [Laughter] And you've got to love the place. And a lot of people say, "Why didn't you ever move to Beeville? You've worked there all your life." Well, I like George West, you know? And I know both towns. I know a lot of people in both towns.

AW:

Why do you like George West? What would be the difference?

GHS:

Well, because people make things happen. Because I know all of these towns in the Eagle Ford, I know which towns deserve to live and which deserve to die. And with the Eagle Ford, some of them have been forced to extend their lifetime, but if they don't get a grip on sustainable



development, they're not going to live past this. And it's going to be a long play. It's not a—it's not a five-year play; it's a hundred-year play.

AW:

Oh really?

GHS:

Oh yeah. You know, because we'll have wells that are going to be producing for fifty years, but we're going to be drilling new wells over a long time, too. So it's going to—you know, there's going to be oil and there's going to be development around here. But some towns don't know what to do with it. And that's why I've been on the Eagle Ford Shale Consortium for a long time, and the Railroad Commission's taskforce on the Eagle Ford, because, you know—holy cow, when this stuff hits, we don't know what to do with it. Or where are the resources? And where to go? And how do you deal with four hundred man camps? And how do you deal with the traffic? And who do you go to? Who's representing you to these people?

AW:

And what do you build that you're not going to be sorry you built later?

GHS:

Well, you know, you can build so many man camps, but that's not going to put people with children in the schools. And what we really need, which is the next step of—is, you know, we did the leasing, which is the first step in the oil field play. We lease the land, then we started, you know, exploration: drilling the holes. And now, we're producing it. You're going to see a lot more tank batteries put up, and a lot more processing plants, which are, I guess, in a way, in layman's terms, are mini refineries because they're taking the crude, or the gas, and separating it into three different products. You know, into wastewater, which we're recycling. And then into oil, which goes into, you know, the refineries, and then into gas, which goes into a gas pipeline. And that goes into compressed or liquid natural gas. We're going to be energy independent. And Eagle Ford and the Klein and the Permian—Texas is going to be the reason why. And Saudi Arabia can kiss my oil well. [Laughter]

AW:

I heard—the summer before last, I heard T. Boone Pickens talk up in Amarillo about water, but he wound up talking about natural gas and it was really interesting to hear him talk about that.

GHS:

Well, you know, we're using water, but we're learning to do things more efficiently, too, and recycling and making—we're not using potable water in our wells anymore and the water we're using, we're cleaning it up and reusing.

AW:

Well, his point about the natural gas was that—you know, that our resources are so great and it's underutilized.

GHS:

Well, that's the next step is—you know, we're the supply side, but we need more users. And I was just at the facility in Corpus for their bus system, which is all compressed natural gas; the whole system.

AW:

And aren't there a number of over-the-road haulers that are looking at using—

GHS:

And, you know, the whole city fleet in Corpus is that. San Antonio's and Houston's need to get that. Because if we can get, you know, big users—but I heard one guy with—in the port industries in Corpus Christi industries with their mass transit saying that they save enough. It's twenty-five thousand dollars extra to get a CNG [**Compressed Natural Gas**] bus. And they pay for it in reduced fuel costs in three years because of the difference in what it costs for diesel and what compressed natural gas is.

AW:

What is the industry thought about the possibility of export? I've been listening and reading about some of the import terminals are now being restructured.

GHS:

Exactly. That's the Port of Corpus Christi. It's really interesting, because they had this map of the United States, and it talked about—you know, had all the arrows going from the Gulf north, because we were importing. And now, those arrows have turned south. It's really interesting, because we will be. Right now, we're probably at 80 percent. Well, Harry Wright, who's the head of Valero, spoke at the Eagle Ford Symposium in last April. And he said about five years ago, Valero was importing 90 percent of all their crude for refinery from foreign countries. Today, they're importing 10 percent, and 90 percent of it Eagle Ford. It's not a big step to say they're not going to need import oil. And with us putting on—not just us, but the operators in this area—you know, putting these wells that we've dug already on line, and with the midstream partners, like, you know, Kinder Morgan and New Star, putting all these pipelines in, we're not going to need them.

AW:

One of the things that happened in Middle Eastern countries when they began to export huge volumes was that it, of course, it drove up the price of the product locally. So all those

governments have subsidized, like gasoline and things, for locals to, you know, make sure everybody's happy. Is that something in the future for the U.S., if you export enough?

GHS:

Well, that's public policy, and that's pretty deep sledding. I don't know about that. I only know that the Valero station in Three Rivers has the highest gas in the Eagle Ford, and it's right across from the plant. [Laughs]

AW:

Well, I noticed it when I drive from Lubbock to Midland, gas goes up thirty cents in Midland.

GHS:

I can't—it's inexplicable. Can't tell you about that.

AW:

But what I mean—is it going to—you know, I've done a bunch of interviews about wind energy and one of the issues about wind energy now is that with natural gas so cheap, the economics for building a turbine farm are pretty dicey, and they rely a lot on subsidies, at the moment. But is gas going to go up because of exports?

GHS:

I can't answer that question. That's an economics question, and I don't know. But I'll tell you. I was sitting at the Solomon Ortiz Center, watching them offloading windmill blades. So it hadn't stopped.

AW:

Well, they're—no, they're still building them. But, you know, when you talk to developers, [phone vibrates] there's still a lot of discussion about, you know, natural gases. Do you need to get that?

GHS:

No. I just—I was—no. This is what I want to—this is—you know, a lot of people say, "You work for big oil. You think that's the only thing there is." And that is not true, because I'm telling you, we use solar energy. You know, if it was expedient and we needed to put a windmill up somewhere—right now, what you're saying—they cost too much, but we use solar power panels on all of our tank battery plants because we have satellites and electricity that have to be generated, and there's no power lines out there, so we're using solar power. You know, we're very interested in recycling water. So big oil companies are some of your best bets at nature conservancy, and using diverse sources of energy. You know, it's not just one is the only way.

AW:

Yeah, well, it's certainly true that they're energy companies, and have been for quite some time, and not just oil.

GHS:

That's right. But, you know, when you think of a Conoco Phillips, or a Shell, or an Exxon, a lot of people only think of gasoline.

AW:

Yeah, the pump.

GHS:

Yeah, and that's all that we're interested in. But the way that's getting produced, we're using other sources of energy, you know? Because it's the right thing to do and it's the best thing to do. We're not stupid. And I'll tell you, where I sit in my office, I listen to people who are operators, and instrumentation technicians, and all of these people. Every Monday morning, they have an evaluation of what happened the week before. You know, how did we—how can we do this better? What went wrong? Why did it get wrong? What actions do we need to take to make it go right the next time? And it's a dynamic industry right now, because this Shale play—you know, we've been fracking since the forties, but this is in a magnitude that just makes everything just a little bit different.

AW:

Yeah. Right, right. Well, how is all this affecting the Storyfest?

GHS:

Well, we've gotten, I think—

AW:

The economics and the growth and the number of people? What's going to be the future of this kind of event in George West?

GHS:

Well, I'll tell you, Conoco Phillips loves Storyfest, because we get to be in the community. Our philosophy of stakeholder relations is that we don't just send money; we send people. And I'm hoping that some of the other operators will get on board with that because this is where you meet the people, you know? We can meet our landowners whenever we want to, but we can't meet our non-landowners, because who are they? But they come to our booth, "Why are you here?", "Well, we want to talk to you about who we are." And so I think it's, you know, because

we've got a good model. I know sometimes festivals go ten, fifteen years, and then—because they've relied on one entity that's been pulling the wagon.

AW:

Or one set of ideas.

GHS:

One set of ideas. And so they go away when those people get tired of it. But when you've got twenty-five—I think it's around twenty-five—I haven't counted it—twenty-five committee chairs, and they're two or three deep in that committee, you know, then that can rotate, and one—the committee chair is teaching their replacement how to do it. That's how you perpetrate a festival, you know? You've got to have people on the bench [laughs] who know what's going on.

AW:

So what got you interested in speech, being an oil field as you said—

GHS:

You haven't noticed I like to talk yet? [Laughs]

AW:

Well, I have noticed that, but still, you could've been a preacher. You could've been a lot of things.

GHS:

Well, I went to a Baptist school. I'm a Methodist now, largely because I went to a Baptist school. I probably shouldn't say that.

AW:

I grew up Methodist, too.

GHS:

Well, I went and I was—you know, I didn't know if I was going—I was going to be an -ology major. I didn't know if it was sociology, or psychology, or political science. And I had done UIL [**University Interscholastic League**] and done speaking events in college. A guy named Roy Ambrester, you know, he went over all the college—the freshman class. And I guess he went over our SAT scores or—I don't know. He just looked at all of our things, and he sent me a letter and said, "Come to this meeting for debate." Truth is, I helped the boys write their debate cases in college—I mean, in high school. The girls didn't get to debate, you know, back in the "dark ages." So I wanted to do that. So he invited me and we connected. So from then, on I was on a speech scholarship. And what I figured out is that communication is sociology, and is



psychology, and is political science, and it's all of those things in one because rhetoric is rhetoric, and interpersonal communication could be psychology, or relationships, or whatever else it is, so it included everything. I found what I was looking for in one degree instead of, you know, just a little niche of a degree.

AW:

Cool. What should I have asked you that I haven't?

GHS:

Well, you asked me why I liked George West, and Storyfest is one of the reasons. And I go to a lot of festivals, and I see that a festival with a reason is going to, you know—and a reason is not to have a food booth or to have a craft vendor. And a lot of them, that's what it is. You've got to have a reason for having the festival, because it's a way to perpetuate your culture. If you tell stories about George West in—when is it? In March, we're going to do stories that were told about this area by J. Frank Dobie and by George West, or stories about George West that tell the story of this area. So we're going to do a reader's theater of that. And then, in—

AW:

I guess you'll do it in your theater?

GHS:

In our theater. And then in August, I'm going to direct *Dividing the Estate* by Horton Foote. And I don't know if you've ever read that play.

AW:

No, but I love Horton Foote. I can just imagine *Dividing the Estate*.

GHS:

I mean, what—is this story—you know, family that's had a lot of land for a long time, and some of them have moved. You know, Horton was from Warton, Texas. Horton from Warton. [AW laughs] He had moved to Houston in—this is in—I think it was in the eighties, when everything went bust in Texas, right? Or just coming out of the eighties. Mid-eighties. So the family in Houston has lost everything to real estate. You know, all the grandkids think that they're going to, you know—that grandpa is going to pay for everything forever, because he has, because he could. And suddenly, things aren't looking too good. And so they start talking about, how are they going to divide up the estate? How are they going to get money for the estate so everybody gets a little of it? And I love this story because, you know, we've been through that in Live Oak County. People had to start selling off land because they couldn't pay the taxes and because the kids weren't getting along. And that story's all about that stuff. And then somebody heard that there was a lease man in town, and so oil becomes the be all and end all in the salvation of the



family and the estate. Well, you don't know what happens to them in the end. They just—you know, they heard tale that oil was in town. It's a great story for George West and for Live Oak County because it kind of punches a lot of buttons of things that you'll hear at the Dairy Queen, things that people are talking about.

AW:

I write plays, and I have a friend that—for whom I wrote a play, a guy named Barry Corbin, who is an actor—movie and television—but he started off theater. But he wrote a play during the eighties bust called *The Wildcatters*, about two guys that sound just like Bill and your father. One winds up in Houston and the other one stays out on the rig. Through a series of events, they come back together.

GHS:

I know what you can ask me. Ask me what was the last movie and book I just read.

AW:

All right.

GHS:

I don't know how I missed this, but I have never seen *Giant* and I never read the book.

AW:

Really?

GHS:

And Ross had the book. We got to talking about it because it was so funny. You know, Geronimo is the steer in front of the Live Oak County courthouse.

AW:

I didn't know the name, but I've—

GHS:

Well, that's Geronimo. That was George West's pet steer that led his cattle drives.

AW:

Lead steer?

GHS:

And Geronimo was his lead steer on all of his drives. And the last—when George knew he wasn't going to do any more drives, he left him in Kansas City. A year later, Geronimo showed

up at the West Ranch unassisted. He walked home by himself. So, you know, Ross came—we're having a hundred-year celebration of George West next year, and we have a committee, just like Storyfest is, and all of these people are sitting around a table. Ross has his *Giant* there and he reads this. And Edna Ferber apparently had been through George West because she describes the cage—the bricked air-conditioned cage in front of the courthouse where there is a longhorn steer, you know, that was some rancher's pet. I mean, she describes that in the book. And then—and also—and I've got to tell Ross this—she describes that story—I didn't—I had never read it, and I just finished watching the movie this morning. And I can't believe I'd never seen it, but I just had never seen it. And there's a—

AW:

I'm embarrassed to tell you I saw it in the theaters. I was small.

GHS:

Oh really? Well, I don't think I had ever seen it, because I didn't remember any of it. But there's also a part where the—what is his name? Angel, who was the first—you know, Liz Taylor goes into the *barrio* [neighborhood] and that baby's sick. Well, that baby goes to war and is dead. And in the book, it talks about what happened in Three Rivers, where a Mexican soldier was killed and it's a big controversy, but they wouldn't bury him in the cemetery, and so he's buried in Arlington. And that story is in *Giant*. So she took a lot of these little myths, and legends, and real things, and put them into that book about myths about Texas or, you know, stories about Texas. And those are, you know, by themselves, are dynamic, stand-alone stories, but she wove them into that book, and I didn't realize that before.

AW:

It's a good book. And it's one of those rare combinations where you'll enjoy the book and you'll enjoy the movie.

GHS:

Well, you know—

AW:

That doesn't always happen.

GHS:

No. I was wondering that, because I read—I made myself finish the book before I watched the movie.

AW:

Yeah. Well, and it's—I mean, there are other examples. I think McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* and

Bill Wittliff's screenplay of *Lonesome Dove* are—they're equally good. And most of the time when you know the book, you go to the movie, and you're disappointed.

GHS:

Well, we think that probably George West is the role model. Forget Mr. Whatever-his-name up in North Texas. What is the—what is it?

AW:

Are you talking about my uncle Charlie Goodnight?

GHS:

Yes, the Goodnight Trail. No, that's really about George West. It's really not about Goodnight.

AW:

Well, the—McMurtry's drawing on Goodnight had to do—having—knowing the Goodnight story intimately, having heard it my whole life growing up from my grandmother and great-grandmother who knew him when they were little girls. I think that McMurtry just used him because of the Bose Ikard, the black cowboy story, because his relationship to Oliver Loving was completely different than Gus and Call from the book. They're co-equals. Goodnight looked up to Loving as a father figure. Very different kind of thing. And then, the other thing was that Goodnight was a teetotaler and he didn't fit into the thing. Plus, the Goodnight-Loving Trail started in the Palo Pinto area and went down and around and back up. Completely different trail than what the *Lonesome Dove*—

GHS:

Than what he took, right.

AW:

Yeah. So I don't think there'd be—

GHS:

See, you know, George was the trail boss, and his brothers were also trail bosses. In fact, there's a great story that I'm going to use in the—

AW:

Where is that written up, a story about the brothers?

GHS:

Well, there's some stuff in our library. I have a stack about a foot tall now that I have been gathering.

AW:

But there's no one book?

GHS:

No, there's no one book.

AW:

Too bad.

GHS:

There's supposed to be a book coming out, but I haven't seen it yet, so I can't recommend it to you, but it was written by West Ayer. But there's a story about—and I think it was Sal that George—that Sal wanted to, you know, do what his big brother had done. So George said, "Okay. I'll give you the cattle and we'll split it. When you get back, we'll split it fifty-fifty—the profits fifty-fifty." And, I mean, he ran—there's—he ran into an ice storm [coughs] and lost all the horses. He just had—it was just a wreck of a trail drive. And he finally got back down here and showed him all of the receipts and, you know, all the cash. They each made five dollars.

[Laughter]

AW:

McMurtry's—I think his charm [GHS coughs] in writing that book is the same as Edna Ferber's, is that he took a lot of stories [GHS coughs] and put them together and to say it's one story or another is just not the case.

GHS:

And that's one of the reasons I love George West, because it's a unique history, you know? And we haven't forgotten it. Because where did people tell stories? Around the campfire, which is what Dobie Dichos is about.

AW:

Which is also, you know, when we didn't have to pry people away from the computer screen or the television.

GHS:

Or the damn telephone. But, I mean, it's really perpetrating the storytelling that started around the campfires. And that's one thing—and J. Frank Dobie's from here, and who was a greater teller of southwestern stories than J. Frank Dobie?

AW:

Yeah. That's exactly right.

GHS:

So that's why I like George West, and that's the latest thing I read. And I don't know if you got what you want, but you need to meet Bill Sawyers tomorrow.

AW:

I'm going to do that. I'm going to make sure—he'll be here tomorrow or—

GHS:

Saturday. Saturday.

AW:

Saturday, okay. I'll be sure to meet him. I'd love to, and I look forward to it.

GHS:

And I just think—and I don't know where Bill is with this—with, you know, his stories or any of the legalities of that, but I think this might be a really nice place for, you know, in perpetuity, these stories to be kept. Because after he's there, I doubt that the radio station is going to—

AW:

No, I can promise you they won't. We've tried to track down unique things at radio and television stations, and they're just not sentimental.

GHS:

Well, it's all about money. [Phone vibrates]

AW:

That's right. They reuse things.

GHS:

That's what it's about, so. Excuse me, I'm trying to figure out how many phone calls I missed. So that's what I have to say.

AW:

All right. Thank you.

GHS:

I hope you stay around Sunday and come to Sacred Stories.

AW:

I can't, and the reason is my partner, Andy Hedges, who's coming down tomorrow, we're also doing a charity benefit concert in Seguin on Sunday.

GHS:

Oh okay. See, Bill's up from—where does he live? San Marcos? Somewhere—

AW:

Really?

GHS:

Yeah. You need to ask him about that.

AW:

Yeah, I will. There's a group there in Seguin called El Teatro, a Spanish theater company. And I'm looking forward to it for the fact that I'm getting to play with Santiago Jimenez Jr., which will be big fun.

GHS:

Cool. Well, I look forward to—

AW:

I need to—I'm going to stop this and say thank you again.

***End of Recording***