

**Oral History Interview of  
Julie Kaase**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson  
November 1, 2013  
George West, Texas**

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

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### Preferred Citation for this Document:

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### Recording Notes:

*Original Format:* Born Digital Audio

*Digitization Details:* N/A

*Audio Metadata:* 44.1k/ 16bit WAV file

*Further Access Restrictions:* N/A

### Transcription Notes:

*Interviewer:* Andy Wilkinson

*Audio Editor:* N/A

*Transcription:* Ian Fehl

*Editor(s):* Elizabeth Groening

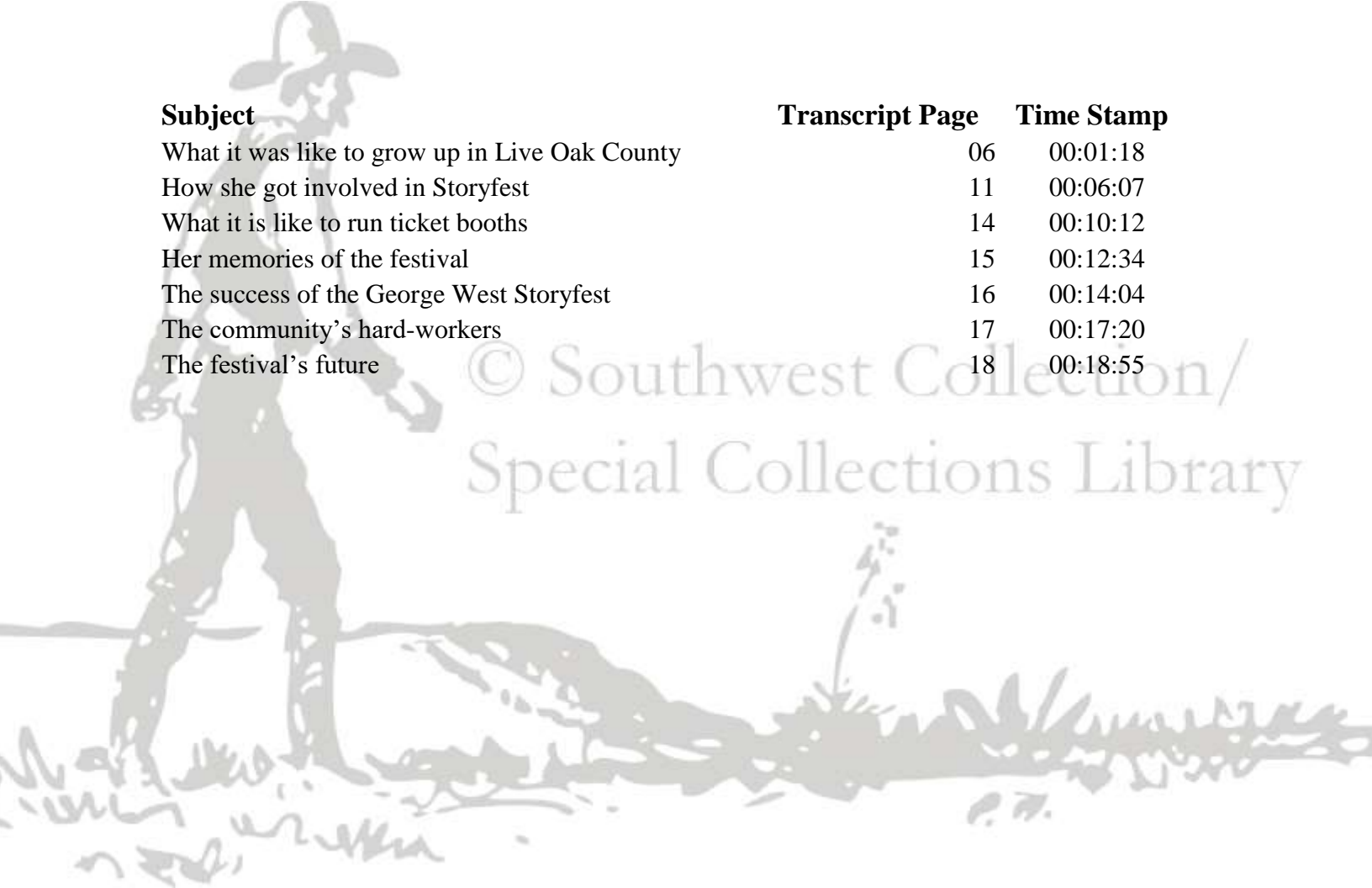
### Related Interviews:

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

## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Julie Kaase, who discusses growing up in Live Oak County, her memories and involvement in the George West Story Fest, and what she hopes for the festival's future.

**Length of Interview:** 0:21:52



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### Keywords

George West Storyfest

**Andy Wilkinson (AW):**

Andy Wilkinson, here, with Julie Kaase. That's K-a-a-s-e?

**Julie Kaase (JK):**

Um-hm.

AW:

And Julie, J-u-l-i-e?

JK:

Yes.

AW:

Okay. On the first of November, 2013, here in George West, where she is busy as a hunting dog, getting ready for the Storyfest, which is tomorrow. Well, actually, you were there last night.

JK

I was there last night.

AW:

I'm sure you'll be there tonight.

JK:

Yes, I will be selling beverages tonight.

AW:

Let me get your date of birth date so that we know which Julie—

JK

1/7/72.

AW:

Such a youngster. [JK laughs] And where were you born?

JK:

I was born in Beeville, Texas.

AW:

Okay, so very close.

JK

Just twenty-four miles down the road, and I'm raised, and stayed right here in Live Oak County. I moved across the fence from where I was raised. [Laughs]

AW:

Oh, did you? So you—

JK:

I married the neighbor.

AW:

So you grew up in Live Oak County, or in Bee—

JK:

Um-hm.

AW:

Okay.

JK:

I grew up in George West. Yeah, I was just born over there. That was the nearest hospital was.

AW:

Oh, okay. So you actually grew up here and—

JK:

Never left.

AW:

Have you—surely, you haven't always, for your whole life, worked at the bank?

JK:

[Laughs] Let's see. Almost all my adult life. I first worked—my first full-time job was at Live Oak County Appraisal District, right down the street, when I was in college. And then, I left there after four years and four months, and came to work at the bank, and ended up getting pregnant with twins, and had to go to bed.

AW:

Twins? Oh my goodness. How—my niece is going through this having to go to bed for—not twins, but how long did you have to—

JK:

Well, they were due in March the twenty-third, and I went to bed on January first, and they were born February twenty-third. They were a month early.

AW:

My goodness.

JK:

And so, I quit working on December thirty-first. I worked for about a year and four months—three months, and went to bed, had them, and came back to work when they were about two and a half. There just happened to be an opening at the bank in the same department I left in, loan operations, and I've been back there ever since.

AW:

And how long is that? How old are yours?

JK:

I've been here—let's see. Been back a total of thirteen years, but I have about fourteen and a half in with the bank.

AW:

Yeah. Do you have any more children, or was that enough for you? [Laughs]

JK:

I have a son that is eighteen, and then, the twins are fifteen, so all boys.

AW:

Okay. Oh my goodness. [JK laughs] I just can't imagine twins. What was your maiden name? I forgot to ask that.

JK:

P-u-g-h.

AW:

Pugh?

JK:

Um-hm.

AW:

And let me get a mailing address, too.

JK:

██████████, here, in George West.

AW:

Okay. ██████?

JK:

Yes.

AW:

And what does your husband do? What's his—

JK:

He's a farmer.

AW:

Farmer?

JK:

Um-hm.

AW:

Not too many farmers out here.

JK:

No, there's not. He's one of the few.

AW:

A lot of ranchers. What does he farm?

JK:

Well, let's see. We planted corn last year.

AW:

Are you irrigated?



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JK:

No. Non-irrigated.

AW:

Dryland corn?

JK:

Um-hm. It's a challenge.

AW:

Yeah, last year was a real challenge.

JK:

We did—let's see. We've done—did we do cotton one year? I believe—yes, we did cotton one year. That was the year nothing came up. We've done sesame once, and then, we've done maize.

AW:

Where around here do you get to process sesame?

JK:

Oh, we have to haul it. And I can't remember the year where we took it. I think we—I don't know if we took it to San Patricio County, maybe, and had it hauled down there.

AW:

I remember people up in our part of the world were talking about sesame, also, because it is a pretty good dryland—

JK:

When it's a bad year, that's what you want to plant, because you don't even plant it until late. Like, you could have crop failure because you plant in February and it doesn't come up and doesn't come up. And June first, you can plant sesame. So you could have one fail and then pick up—

AW:

We do the same with milo up in our country. How in the world do you harvest sesame? Is it—?

JK:

It's a combine—with a combine that you can use for maize, but you have to put tiny, tiny filters in so that it doesn't—

AW:

I would think. Yeah, because—

JK:

You'll lose it all. [Laughs]

AW:

Yeah.

JK:

And before, it was what they called a non-insurable crop here. Like, the government didn't recognize it, at that time. The southern counties had—they had finally approved it down there. And I believe, now, we are here, too. It just took a little while for it to hit this area.

AW:

Yeah. But so, year in, year out, it's mostly corn?

JK:

It's mostly corn. That's what we've done the last two straight years was corn.

AW:

And I would guess it's feed corn and not table corn.

JK:

Right.

AW:

Because of the lack of water. Well, that's amazing. Is his family been farmers all along?

JK:

His grandparents farmed. His dad is into construction. He builds homes here in—around. But Tony had a cousin that farmed for years, and he did all the planting, and the combining, and all that. And then, he—he wasn't sure if he wanted to pick it up, because it was, like, twelve hundred acres that his cousin was letting go. Well, we didn't take it on then, but we took some on later. And he bales hay for a living, so we have all the hay equipment. That's what we do majority of right now. They're all out in the field. All our boys working it. Two of them love it. They have dirt in their veins. [AW laughs] They promise, "I'm not leaving home because I'm going to farm with Dad," you know? So they love it. They'll be out there until late at night in the fields with him.

AW:

Yeah, well, it's one of those things that you love or you don't.

JK:

Yeah. I got one that he could take it or leave it. "Eh." But the other two, they really enjoy it.

AW:

Well, I lived on a farm when I was little, and I've chopped plenty of cotton, and pulled it, and all that sort of thing. But I'll tell you. I love living on a farm. I don't love working on one quite so well. [laughter] If you could live on one.

JK:

There's no way we could live in town after living—we only live four miles out. But after living out in the country and being raised on a farm, yeah, my kids can't live in town. [Laughs]

AW:

Yeah, I know it's quite different. How did you get involved in Storyfest?

JK:

[sighs] They had the first one, I guess, my junior year in high school. Melissa Nance and I were talking about this last night, because she said the first one was her senior year. Well, that would've been my junior year. And I worked at Schneider & McWilliams with Rob Schneider.

AW:

Oh, okay.

JK:

And so he was getting it all together.

AW:

And he was the one who came up with the idea.

JK:

Um-hm, and he was getting it all together. I helped in the library after school, and their law library, and did odd jobs with them, whatever they needed done. I ran to mail or whatever. And so, I remember him, you know, hectically getting stuff together for the first one. Then I went to college and kind of laid out of it a couple years while I was—

AW:

Where did you go to college?

JK:

I just went to Beeville. So I really wasn't over here involved in it as much when I was in college. Then when I came to work at the bank—the bank has always done—manned the ticket booths. You know, you have to buy tickets for food or for children's games. So since it dealt with cash and all that, the bank offered to man the ticket booth. We took care of the tickets and, you know, bringing the money in and handling all of that for them. And we've done that, as far as I know, ever since the beginning. So when I came to work for the bank in '96, that was my first year to be in the ticket booth, and just been a part of it ever since. Then, one of the ladies here at the bank was involved in it. And Ross was on the board. And when Ross got off the board, he nominated me to be on the board.

AW:

The Board of Storyfest?

JK:

The Board of Storyfest. So that's when I really got involved even more. I can't even remember what year that was. It's been—

AW:

[Laughs] All a blur?

JK:

I'm thinking about five years ago is about when I ended up on the board. But before that, we always still handled the tickets and got the people here to sign up for the shifts.

AW:

Is that hard, getting people to volunteer for the shifts?

JK:

We usually have all the shifts filled in. It's usually not a problem. Because we have enough people, so if this year some can't do it, the others can. And usually, everybody takes, like, a two-hour shift.

AW:

Oh, that's not so bad.

JK:

Uhn-uh. Uhn-uh. And we have the two tickets booths, so—and one opens really early and the other one's only open during the heavy part of the day. But we have it starting—I think they start the booth at ten o'clock, and then they go—the one booth stays open until midnight, until the

dance is over, because we're still selling tickets for drinks. And then, we do also do the dance fee.

AW:

Yeah, the ten bucks.

JK:

Um-hm. And then a couple of years ago, when they started Dobie Dichos, I got involved and she asked me if I would help out there, so.

AW:

Now, at that—is there an audience for that, or is it just the storytellers telling stories to each other?

JK:

We sold 150 tickets, and we sold out. And you bring your own chair and show up, and have a bowl of chili and pan de campo, and listen to the storytellers. They're usually—they're reading from J. Frank Dobie's readings.

AW:

Right, right.

JK:

And there's usually—I think it ranges somewhere between, like, six or eight storytellers get up there, or something like that, and read different excerpts from his books.

AW:

Yeah, and that's only been going a short while, right?

JK:

I think this is the third year.

AW:

Yeah, because I don't think that happened the last time I was here to perform.

JK:

Right. The first year, we—it was a pretty—for the first time, we thought, you know, we did really well. We had ran out of food, and so, the next year, we planned better, which was last year. We had plenty of food. And I believe we sold out last year, too. And then we—she told us the other day we had sold out again, so.

AW:

Is the—running the ticket booths, is that a difficult job? Is it just a lot of odds and ends kind of job? You don't have to, like, haul the booths out there and set them up or anything, right?

JK:

No. This morning, all the gentleman that showed up to do the setup and help move chairs, or tables, or stuff, they brought all the ticket booths over. And, in fact, Storyfest puts them in their storage. They wash them down, and bring them out, and set them up for us. And then, we just have to show up with the tickets, and boxes, and money trays. We get the starting cash to start the day. Then, throughout the day, you just have to make sure they have plenty of tickets. And the vendors turn their tickets in, so then, during the day, I've got to get those tickets, and bring them back in, and secure them.

AW:

So you've got a lot of accounting.

JK:

It's accounting, yes. So we bring those tickets in and lock them up, because they're going to be converted to cash as soon as they sit down and count them all.

AW:

So then, you have to balance your books, ins and outs, and make sure the cash is all there, and all that sort of thing.

JK:

Yeah, so.

AW:

And tickets—in my small experience with dealing with tickets in this way, they're a little harder to deal with than money. They're small.

JK:

Well, and then you have to—you have people that come up and, you know, they say, "I want ten.", "Do you want ten tickets or do you want ten dollars' worth of tickets?" So, it's a little mind game when you first get on your shift to think, Okay, how are—what are they talking? You know? You get to visit with a lot of people. You know, I see people when I'm in that ticket booth that I haven't seen in years. So a lot of it is visiting, too, while you're, you know, out there. The ticket booths, in the beginning—I think they were even open on top, and so, they got to where they put a tarp over them, you know, because a couple years it was raining. And then a couple years back, they redid them completely. Now, they're, like, a little bitty shed. And so, they're

completely covered, so it's not that bad. You know, you're not out in the heat. And they put a mat down for you. So we just kind of hang out and visit with everybody that walks by.

AW:

But for you, you have to oversee the—[JK laughs]—all of that accounting and all that.

JK:

Thanks goodness at the end of the day, I don't have to count it. I just have to put it in a box, and Storyfest will come in and count it all, and sort it all. Um-hm. There's certain members of Storyfest Board that will come in and sit down with it. I just have to lock it up as it comes in.

AW:

Tell me this. Do you remember—since you were in high school—when this started? Did it seem like an odd idea to have a story festival?

JK:

Well, you know, we hadn't had a festival that I could recall. I was about seventeen years old. I don't recall us having a big event like that before. This was, like, the first big event, I guess, during my lifetime. I mean, we didn't have, like, those peddler shows, or any of that kind of stuff. So it was kind of neat, because, okay, now we're going to try to draw a crowd here. You know, you'd heard of market days and stuff, like, in Beeville. They'd had that for years, where they had little vendor's booths and stuff set up. So it was kind of neat to think, Okay, well, let's see what we can do here. I think it's drawing, you know, a lot bigger crowd over the years. I don't recall the crowd at the first one. All I do remember of the first one is that my husband had donated the use of his trailers to set up as the stage in front of the bank. They didn't have real stages, so they borrowed Gooseneck Trailers and backed them up in there, side by side, to use as a stage.

AW:

Yeah, JT Davis was telling me about that, about the—

JK:

Oh yes. LT is my uncle. [Laughs]

AW:

Not JT, LT.

JK:

Yeah. He and Ross are the ones that nominated me for the board when they both got off. They

left at the same time. And, so, yeah, they both nominated me to be on there. But yeah, that was—that was the first year, and that was my husband's trailer that was volunteered to be put out there.

AW:

So it's certainly a family event. [JK laughs] Is it apparent to you that this is a success? I mean—

JK:

Oh, I think so. You know, even if you don't even want to sit down and listen to a story, there's so much more than that, you know? And I guess that's the point we try to get across to everybody. It's more than sitting—in the beginning, it was sitting on a bale of hay to listen to a story. I mean, there's live music. They even get the children involved. A lot of times, there's the little dancer teams that come up there and they get to dance in front of the audience. You know? And every grandparent in town comes to see their grandkid on the stage. We have an open mic where they have the local people that want to get up and tell a story. The booths that come in for the vendors, those are non-profit organizations that do the food booths and do the children's games. Some of them, that's their only fundraiser for the year, and so, that's a big thing to them, you know? This is their event that helps fund their projects. So, to me, it's a big thing. It helps them. And what it is—and most of those things are dealing with kids. Lots of church groups. There's some different teams that are out there. I think one was a baseball team that had a booth. You know? There's some Catholic Church groups that are out there. There's some PTO organizations that are out there. So I think there's a lot of benefit there to them, in addition to what is spent in the community. I mean, on that day, if you were out and about in town—because I go to church, usually, that Saturday night of Storyfest, and go over there, and that's my hour to go sit down and rest.

AW:

Get away from—[laughs]

JK:

And, I mean, church is busy. You see people in there that you've seen at Storyfest during the day. You can go to the restaurants and see people in town. The hotels are all full. I mean, I don't know how anybody could say anything negative about it.

AW:

Well, and judging from what I've heard the last couple of days, not very many people do say anything negative. I mean, we were talking before the tape was turned on that there's at least one person that objects to it. But that's—and that's not even an important objection. What I'm interested in is how a community this small has been able to mount a festival as large as this is for so long, without having fights and [JK laughs] running out of volunteers. I mean, that's a really unique thing.



JK:

It is. And, you know, Rob started the first one. I don't even know how long Becky was in charge. I can't even tell you. For years, you know, before Mary Margaret came on. Because when I came onto the board, Becky was still in charge. And then, Mary Margaret was shadowing her that year. And so, I mean, I think that is a big plus that you have had people in charge that last.

AW:

Some continuity.

JK:

Right. And that can carry it forward and learn from the year before. You know, Mary—Becky, too. I mean, they were both real good about being able to ask people and get people to commit to do things.

AW:

Was there something about the community, though, just the culture of this community that makes it workable?

JK:

You know, there are so many hardworking people in the community, and so many good people in the community. And I think they truly see, you know, what it does for everyone involved; all the organizations, all the people involved. You know, we go to Storyfest every year, and you see busy people. You know? Like this morning out there, I mean, people just—I don't know if it's a small town community kind of thing, you know?

AW:

Not all small towns are like this. [JK laughs] I'll just tell you right now.

JK:

Only living here, it's hard to compare it to somewhere else. You know? Because, I mean, Three Rivers is just right up the road and they started off with a festival. They were doing the Salsa Festival. I read in the paper where they're not going to do it anymore because they don't have enough volunteers, and somebody that wants to be in charge of it and take that on. It's a big task. Oh my gosh. I don't know how Mary Margaret even sleeps at night because it is so involved.

AW:

She doesn't strike me as a person that needs a lot of sleep.

JK:

[Laughs] She better not.

AW:

And how big is Three Rivers' size compared to—

JK:

It's probably just a little bit smaller than George West. George West, the city, has, like, twenty-five hundred people. They're probably—I would say probably right around two thousand. I mean, they're not—

AW:

Yeah, so, very similar.

JK:

Very similar.

AW:

Yeah.

JK:

Lots of people over there work over here. Some work over there. We have a lot of ties with them.

AW:

What do you see as the future of the festival?

JK:

I see it getting bigger. I mean, the publicity we—

AW:

Really? Where would you put people?

JK:

That's the only problem. What are we going to do, shut down another street? You know? Because it's amazing, you know, how many places you see it advertised, or people say they heard it, you know, on the radio, on the TV. I didn't even realize until one year we were going out of town. We were at a Texas State, I guess, like, a road stop, you know, where they have the—what do they call them? Where they have all the displays of different things, and you could find pamphlets for this and pamphlets for that. And we were at the border, I guess.

AW:

Like a tourist center?

JK:

Yes sir. There you go. Tourist center. And we walked in and we were just looking around at the different things they had, and right there, was a Storyfest brochure on the counter. And we were, like, way West Texas. And my kids are like, "Mom. Mom, look. They even know about it over here," you know? And I didn't even realize that they were sending things out, you know, that far. Larry Thompson is one of the storytellers, and he is the editor for—I think it's called the *Texas Teller*. It's a paper that storytellers write letters and they make—they publicize it. And he did a really nice write-up in there about Storyfest. Of course, he's been coming here for a number of years. So, I mean, there was more advertisement. You just don't know how many people it reaches. San Anton had a nice write-up in the paper about it. So, I mean, we have people that drive a good ways to come here.

AW:

Has *Texas Highways* ever done a story on Storyfest?

JK:

Not that I'm aware of.

AW:

That should be done. I know the guy that's one of their editors there. I'll talk to him.

JK:

We have people that—we have an acquaintance that we met that has a ranch here in Live Oak County, and he said—they live in San Anton—"I know it's the first Saturday of every November. We will not miss it. We will not miss it." And everybody knows them because they're the ones that always bring their large poodles to Storyfest and walk around with their poodles. Yes. He said, "I'll be there again this year." So it's—there's some that are dedicated to coming every year. And his—when he talks to me about it, it's like, "You just don't see this." You know, because he's living in San Anton. "You don't see this relaxed atmosphere, enjoy yourself, kick your feet up, listen to music." He goes, "It's just nice community involvement." I said, "Yes it is."

AW:

Yeah. Well, it really is. And that's a great thing. It's a great thing. What should I have asked you about Storyfest that I have not?

JK:

I don't know. [laughs] I think I've kind of summed it up pretty good. [Laughs]

AW:

Okay. I think you're right and with that, would be a good place to end this. Thanks. [JK laughs]  
Thank you so much.

JK:

Thank you.

*End of Recording*



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