

**Oral History Interview of
Randy Willingham**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall
September 7, 2018
Amarillo, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Sports Interviews***

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The Sports History interviews encompass interviews conducted by members of the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library staff. They hope to document the evolution of sports and the role of sports in the social fabric of this region.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Randy Willingham as he discusses his interest and involvement with drag racing. In this interview, Randy describes how he got involved with racing cars and the new drag racing hall of fame in Amarillo.

Length of Interview: 01:12:15

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Daniel Sanchez (DS):

[Moves recorder] My name is Daniel Urbina Sanchez. Today's date is September 7, 2018, and I'm interviewing Randy Willingham in Amarillo, Texas. Randy, thank you for agreeing to sit down for this interview. And this interview's going to be part of our motorsports initiative. Could you please tell us your complete legal name?

Randy Willingham (RW):

It's Randall Wayne Willingham. I was born in Amarillo, Texas. November 19, 1944. My mother got—died when I was three. My grandparents raised me. I was raised with an older generation. Grew up on the north side of town. Went to [pause] the schools over there and graduated from Palo Duro High School in '63. My grandfather was a carpenter, so I kind of helped him on little jobs from the time I was ten or eleven years old, and always went to work with him. I didn't—kind of got into fast cars before I graduated from high school. Didn't figure out—couldn't really afford to go to college. Didn't have any grants or stuff much back then. But I did take a few courses at Amarillo College, but never—about the time I was getting serious with that I got drafted into the army in August of 1965. Spent two years in the Army. I was in the Air Defense Artillery in the Army and got out in '67. Funny thing. Anything else on the history?

DS:

Well, I was going to ask—I was going to ask on the Army. Did you serve overseas or were you state-side?

RW:

I went to Korea. I was over there from all of '66 and first part of '67. Thank goodness I didn't have to go to Vietnam.

DS:

I was going to say—because that was the—the period they were gearing up for Vietnam.

RW:

That's right. We—

DS:

What was going on in Korea during that time?

RW:

It was just occupational forces. It was still pretty hot then. There was some—we had a—we had a patrol jumped and they killed nine Americans while I was over there. But I was—I was about seventy-five miles south of the DMZ [**Demilitarized Zone**], so it was pretty safe.

DS:

Because people don't realize—some people—that if you have an occupational force there, there's still in danger.

RW:

Um-hm. In fact, there's—nothing's ever completely settled down, I don't think, over there.

DS:

Well, even nowadays we're having—

RW:

Even now.

DS:

Something new is popping up every day. Well—and so after that you came back. What were you doing?

RW:

Okay. I was—I went to work—back up a little bit. I was—got interested in mechanical work. In high school I had a paper route. One of the—one of my customers, they ran a supermodified, and they were just about two blocks from my house. I got to hanging around there and going to racetrack with him. In fact, they ended up moving to Lubbock and he raced. Johnny Mount. He raced there at Lubbock, him and his dad, J.W. But they got me—started helping them. Just getting deeper and deeper into it. Before I—before I got drafted, I got—after I helped him, I started helping Ernie Morton and Greg Lee. Sid Stout Ford car. Then I helped Jack Moss and the other Sid Stout Ford car. And then we got—when I got drafted, went off and spent my two years' time. During this—during the period of time of Greg Lee and Ernie Morton—which Ernie drove Greg's number three car. Ernie had mentioned to Greg, "When Randy gets out of the Army, if you'll build him a car, I'll teach him how to drive." But Ernie died about—he had a heart attack at the racetrack in May before I got out of the Army in August. But Greg held up his end of the bargain and we built a sprint car over the winter. Easter Sunday 1968 I started my career at the Albuquerque Raceway Park on a half-mile racetrack in a sprint car. We raced part of the year for him. Then Lyndon bought half the car and started driving. And I started driving another car for a gentleman, Neville Powell, which is also from the North side of town, which it seems like the Northsiders were the racecar guys back then. [Clears throat] Got my feet wet and learned more and more. This was in 1968.

DS:

You mentioned that very first race you had. How much prep did you have before the race to learn how to—I guess—I'm assuming you had to learn how to race and everything, right?

RW:

I just—not much. It just—in fact, the first race I drove was the Saturday before we got—we got married in one—exactly one week after my first drag. And still married to the same woman. [DS laughs] Fifty years in April.

DS:

So what was that first race like for you?

RW:

It was—I don't think I had enough sense to be scared. It was—you could definitely tell I was getting more comfortable. The second day—it was a two-day show over there. The second day was a lot more comfortable than the first day. And you just—I think a person either has a knack for it or doesn't. It's kind of like—kind of like riding a bicycle. Either—and once—if you ever start, you don't ever lose it.

DS:

How long was it before you were winning or being competitive?

RW:

A couple of years. I won a feature in my second year and then one more this third year. Then you have down years once in a while where nothing gets quite put together.

DS:

I guess we can talk about that. What's it like when everything's clicking and when you can't get anything to click? The two different aspects of that?

RW:

When what?

DS:

When every—what's it like when everything is working well? And then conversely what's it like when everything is hard to mesh?

RW:

Just—it's so easy when everything's clicking. I mean, if your luck goes—and really I found out—and it took me a long time to figure it out—is you make your own luck. Just like NASCAR. Harvick and Bush and Truex are kind of showing everybody else how to get there. But the harder you work the luckier you get. So, in other words, the more prepared you are, the luckier you are. Just like football or anything. If you're prepared, your luck goes a lot further, it seems like.

DS:

So how much were you earning—were you still being a mechanic—doing mechanical work also at the same time when you first started racing?

RW:

Yes. I was—we—[clears throat] I worked at a shop at—in fact, right out of high—right out of high school Marvin Clarke—which he's in the Hall of Fame—he hired me. I was working at a wrecking yard out east of town. He hired me to be a line mechanic for him. And then I've been around a drag racer, been around him and Jack Moss and stuff. And Jack Moss kind of took me under his wing, and I learned a whole lot from him, and Marvin also. Just being around the good racers like—and all the ones that would come in for the Texas-California meets at the drag races. They'd always come to Jack's shop. Got to meet a lot of famous drag racers that way. After—after that first—in fact, it was very interesting at first—went to Albuquerque to race in that sprint car Greg built. And then went to Lubbock a couple of times. And then play night, or tryout night, out here at Amarillo. Hot-lapping. I flipped a car. [Laughter] I got my flip over with real quick. I think my wife thought she was going to be a widow real quick in our married life. I drove about fifteen, sixteen years. I think I missed two days of work because of an injury. So I was pretty lucky. In 1969, the track promoter decided to go to a B-class supermodified, which is what these turned—turned into. We were—all over Oklahoma they were running hundred-inch cars with 305-inch motors, full transmissions and carburations [sic] and everything. Then got in with Greg again. My partner in the car came to me the winter of—winter of '68, '69 when I found out they was going to start this new class. They called them B-modifieds. They also ran a sprint class. Him and a friend was going to build a car, and the friend got pretty—had too much on his plate. So he had to find somebody else to team up with Jerry Wise, which he came from the Levelland-Morton area. [Coughs] So we met in probably January or February of '69. Made me an offer to—if I get the racecar put together, I'd be half-owner in it and I could drive it. Here's Greg. He'd come in again and—Greg helped me get the car together. We raced and we won a feature that year. I think finished in the top five or six points. Then the next year the combined the sprint cars and the supermodifieds. We got a—Harrell's Meat Market started sponsoring me that year, or sponsoring us. We were pretty competitive that year. We won a couple of features and ended up in top five of points. That was 1970. And in '71, got to really the break we needed. We didn't actually have a sponsor. I got to beating the bushes between Jerry and I. Out of—just on a fluke I went to see Jack beat Kelley. He talked—I talked to him about sponsoring a car. First thing he asked me, he said, “Did GWL send you out here,” and I said, “No, sir. I just—I knew you had sponsored a car in the past. I thought you might sponsor me.” So he sponsored us. That got us better equipment, better motors. It really helped us. That was in '71. That was one of them years where nothing worked and every time you turned around, you was in trouble, something was breaking. That's kind of where you learned—where I learned it. The more prepared you are the better your luck is. And as the season wound down, I kept—I got to doing a little better and a little better. Then '72—which that was the first year Jack helped us with a motor. Had a little bit

better motor and ended up running pretty good, and ended up—we won the mid-season championship that year. Again, we ended up top five or six in points. And then also that was the year NCRA [**National Championship Racing Association**] started. We got—we got to going more to Oklahoma and Kansas. Seems like the more you race—the better your competition is the better you get. Jerry and I figured out that—[clears throat] you know, “We’ve gone about as far as we can with this car. We need a professionally built car.” And we talked Jack into letting us—letting us get one built. Dale Parson in Oklahoma City built it—built the car that we have restored. In that first year it was—I know—started out like gangbusters. I think the first night here at Amarillo I set fastest time and had about a quarter—half a lap lead in the feature and the clutch came apart. And that’s kind of how the year went. But as the year progressed and got toward the end—Southwestern Championship we did, and we started—started—started at the back but ending up finishing fourth. So I passed a lot of cars. And then we went to Albuquerque and went to the Hutch Nationals and the Hutch Fair. And we ended up—the year—running real well. That kind of got us over the hump, and we figured out—said, “Hey, we can run with these guys.” It was kind of funny because Kenny Steadman [?] [0:19:41] in this one car and me in my six car. We were the only two Fords here at Amarillo. [Clears throat] And usually when we went out of town there would be—back then there’d be seventy-five cars show up at a show. But we would end up being the only two Fords in the whole deal. But when it was all said and done, they knew we were there. We were part of it. But ’74 we had a great year. I think we won six or seven features. Ended up runner-up—runner-up in season points, runner-up in season championship. Then we won the Southwestern championship. Won both nights of it. I was running against some—in fact, Jim Michael Reece Boyd was—he was one I was running against, then a fast bunch out of Kansas. That kind of proved that we were—we were in—we were in the elite bunch. And also that year was—finished in top ten NCRA points, which that’s the NCRA circuit. And we—’74, ’75, ’76. We were right—both of those years we were right out of—finished in tenth—tenth, eleventh or twelfth in points. Just right out of the top ten. We were traveling a lot. In fact, in 1974, we ran seventy-four nights of racing and did not miss a day’s work. So put lot of miles on the tow vehicle.

DS:

What was the typical distance you had to travel for a race?

RW:

We ran Wichita Falls, Dallas, Lawton, [pause] Wichita, Kansas, Hutchinson, Kansas, Albuquerque. We ran Phoenix some. Mostly Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico.

DS:

So the furthest one would’ve been that Phoenix race when that came around?

RW:

Yeah. Funny. That Phoenix deal was kind of—that kind of got us over the top. Keith Hall—they had a four-day—four-day showing in June of '73. He called and said, "We're going to race two days at Phoenix and two days in Tuscan. We'll pay you tow money if you'll come out there." So we went out there and we did well. I think ran third at Tuscan in the feature and had a flat in Phoenix. We had a good weekend. From then on we started running a lot better. Kind of got us out of our comfort zone and showed us we could go with the big boys. And a bunch of the ones we was racing against there in Phoenix were either CRA racers or turned out to be World Outlaw racers, like Ronnie Shuman and Tiger Rob Williams. I can't think of this other kid. But they were—they were all started by the time I did. Then '77 we—I got transferred—I worked for—I started to work Santa Fe Trail in '70. They transferred me to Emporia, Kansas. It started in '77. So we went up there and started running weekly shows at 81 Speedway. We learned real quick how—why they would come down here and outrun us so bad. [DS laughs] I ended up winning a couple of features up there. Ended up—I think ended up sixth in points. Also running NCRA circuit. That was the second year that I finished in top ten in NCRA. I finished—I think my car number was six and it seems like I was stuck on sixth, because I finished sixth in points in NCRA. This is against a bunch of guys that started racing back in the fifties.

DS:

So you were doing pretty good.

RW:

But 81 Speedway was a very—a learning experience for me.

DS:

What was it about that track?

RW:

It was just—it was a little bit longer than here at Amarillo. It got dry-slick real quick. They would come down here Labor Day weekend, which naturally it's dry-slick on Labor Day, and they just smoke us.

DS:

Because they were already used to it, huh?

RW:

They were used to it. Like I said, you know, you get to where you could—if you could get a hold of 81 Speedway, you could race anywhere.

DS:

How long did it take before you felt comfortable on that track?

RW:

Actually, I had ran it a time or two before we moved. And really it was real—real easy to get comfortable on. You just had to be fast. I think I'd raced on it four or five times before we moved up there, so it wasn't a—it wasn't a total—

DS:

A surprise or learning curve?

RW:

—total surprise. I raced up there in '77, '78. Santa Fe Trail moved me back to Amarillo to be terminal manager down here. That was kind of different. I'd worked with these [clears throat] guys on a dock, and all of a sudden I was their boss. [DS laughs] Some of them didn't take that very well. When we moved back, I sold a car to Jean Buchanan, and then I drove the car for him in the NCRA races that year. Being the terminal manager, I didn't—knew I had to slow down my racing a bit. I got lucky because an acquaintance that I knew—that I got acquainted—a person I got acquainted with in Wichita had—Isaac Trucking. He was old. Had an awesome car. In '80—last part of '79 or '80, he called me and wanted me to come up to Dodge City and drive his car then go to Hutchinson and drive his car. So I started driving the Dodge City car—and it was also number six—in the last part of '79. And I drove it through '82. And we had some pretty good success. We ran second in three or four big races. Never did get—get into the—never did win one. Came very close. Second's—you know, people say second's the first loser. But you run second against thirty cars, it's not—there's twenty eight more that'd wish they'd run where you did. We had a good time. About that time, Santa Fe Trail shut down a bunch of terminals. They didn't have any place to send me. So my district manager back then, he said, "We're going to keep the intermodal part open. Since you don't have any place to go, we'll help you—I'll help you bid on—bid on this intermodal operation and see if you get it." And sure enough I got it. That was in—in fact, that was the last part of '81. I kept driving Isaac's car for the rest of that year into first of '82. And I figured out that I couldn't run a business and drive a racecar and make either one of them successful, so I hung my helmet up in '82. Our thirty—my thirty-day contract—thirty-day cancellation contract ended up lasting forty years.

DS:

Wow. So you made a success out of that business?

RW:

Huh?

DS:

You made a success out of the business?

RW:

Yeah. It worked well for us. Made us a good living. Anything else?

DS:

Well, let's talk about some of the people that you met along the way that—you know, like mentors or people that helped you or inspired you, or people you liked racing against, people you didn't like racing against.

RW:

Most of the—like—probably the most inspiration I got was from Ernie Morton and Greg Lee. We've become—Ernie—like I said, Ernie died of a heart attack before I got out of the Army. But Greg was a very big part of our life up until he died. As I mentioned, Jack Moss. He kind of—he kind of took me under his wing, along with Marvin Clarke, and taught me a bunch of mechanical skills, bunch of manufacturing skills. And, of course, Jack B. Kelley. And he was—he was quite an entrepreneur. And I'm still very close to his family, [pause] his daughter, his daughter's family that have the city machine out north—east—west of town. They helped a lot in the restoration of the car, [pause] and they were very good friends. And the whole bunch that I raced against in Wichita. We were—we got to be great friends. Even the ones that were hard on the racetrack were—turned out to be very good friends. I don't know if I'm easy to like, but they kind of—they all kind of took me under their wing up there and helped me a lot and taught me a lot. There's Walt McWhorter, Frankie Lease [0:34:27], Dale Reid, Edward Isaac. C. Ray Hall. He helped—him and G.W. Elkins were the go-getters that actually formed the NCRA circuit. It went—it went well. And upon retiring, I was—I was in the top—I think I was in eighth place in lifetime points. And then we had some good friends here in Amarillo. In fact, I'd went to—went through grade school and high school with Bob Cody. He was a friend, but he was—he was a hard racer. He's like a different person on the racetrack than he was off the racetrack. But we got along well. And actually, Tom McLellan and Sid Stout at the Ford place, they were very helpful since we was running Fords. They were quite the mentors. And my wife hanging with me through all this, which—I was—it seemed like I was more interested in the racecar than I was in the family. Had kind of a rocky—rocky few years in there. And something that happened in '82, right after—right after I quit racing. It was—the Lord came into my life. That made a big difference. So the first fifteen years of our marriage was a little rocky, but the last twenty-five with the Lord in control of my life, it just made it a whole lot smoother. And how he blessed us through the business and through our family. I have a son that's—he was born in '69, so he will be forty-nine this year, and my daughter will be forty-five. About seven grandkids. My son has two and my daughter has five. And our oldest granddaughter got married about three weeks ago.

DS:

Soon you'll be a great-grandfather, huh?

RW:

Yeah, hopefully.

DS:

[laughs] Well, let's go back. In '82 is when you made the decision to go—go into business. Do you still keep tabs on the racing?

RW:

Yes.

DS:

Keep up with all those guys?

RW:

Yeah. We'd go out there some. It was—it was evolving so much back then. They were changing. We've got—our good promoters sold the racetrack. The new promoter seemed like he would change the rules every week, so he kind of messed with everybody's back pocket. So I got out at a pretty good time.

DS:

I was going to say you got out at the right time.

RW:

Back then we could—if you didn't get a tire cut off, you could run the whole season on two tires. And when I stopped—in fact, Firestone was furnishing me tires for the big races. And we would—we'd go through three tires in a big race, three new tires. And that kind of just kept getting them—making the money go up. But we kept pretty close ties with the racing bunch through those years.

DS:

And what did the business entail?

RW:

I did the intermodal: loaded the containers and trailers on the railroad for being—originally for Santa Fe, and then for BNSF [**Burlington Northern Santa Fe**] after they merged. All these containers and trailer you see on the railroad, I've loaded a bunch of them. [DS laughs] In forty years I loaded a bunch of them.

DS:

And the railway's one—one industry that's had a lot of regulations and changes over the years, too.

RW:

When I started—when I started, it was all trailers. The containers we got were—they were on chassis, so you loaded them like trailers. And then before the contract came to an end, it was all containers. They figured out that you keep—you keep the wheels at the stations and you could—you didn't have to worry about the flats. You knew they would get fixed. So it was really a lot smoother. It's turned into—all the trailers you see on the—on the trains today are owned by the companies, like J.B. Hunt and Snider and FedEx and Yellow Freight Roadway. So it evolves like everything else.

DS:

Well, you mentioned you retired and ran a business. When did y'all start getting together again and coming with up the Hall of Fame and all of that? How did that come about?

RW:

G.W. Elkins' son—we'd kicked it around and said, "We need to get together and start having meetings or start getting together for lunch." And it just never did happen. It would—it'd be splintered groups here and there. Two or three of you'd get together and go out and eat or go have a beer or something. Pete, G.W.'s son, he wanted to get the Southwestern Championship started back, because it kind of fell away. Wasn't near as important as it used to be. In fact, it faded away with the different promotors. But when the elite sprint car group started with the 305 Motors like we started with with NCRA in '71, they came up with the wingless sprint car group. And Pete got with him. In fact, he was—one of his—his dad and Greg Lee were real good friends. I can't think of his first name, but Moore is his last name. But Pete got with him and they scheduled a meetup here and started the Southwestern Championship again. That was—that was the start of it. It started at the Southwestern Championship Weekend here in the last part of July of every year. [Clears throat] It's turned into a vintage meet, along with Southwestern Championship. Funny thing. The first year they had it, there was a bunch of rain delays on previous meets. The car count was down a little bit, and I think they had—ended up—brought in eighteen or nineteen cars. And we had our vintage car out there. They asked me, "If you'll tag the field, we'll give you five hundred dollars," in my car. So I tagged the field, and that means starts at the back. Passed two or three of those sprint cars before I blew a motor. [Laughter] They kid me every year about if I'm going to tag the field. But it was fun. I think it showed a bunch of them young punks that an old man can still drive a racecar. [Laughs]

DS:

What made you want to create that vintage car?

RW:

We had a friend in Oklahoma—in fact, what actually pricked my imagination is [pause] they restored that Parnelli Jones' dirt champ car. It was in an open-wheel. I said, "You know, we could do that." And then a friend—an acquaintance in Oklahoma, he restored a couple of cars that I raced against in the seventies. "You know what? If we can find my car"—I'd spotted it at a wrecking yard east of—in the north part of Amarillo. I knew it was my frame because it would erase something five or six years, every weld on it just about. In fact, we found the car, and I'll show you some pictures of it in a minute, after a while. My son spent—that was in 2000 or 2001. And we wanted to put it back like it was in '74, because that car—that was a very successful year for us. We wanted all period-correct parts on it. We spent about five years gathering up parts. We got the—and we got it back on the racetrack the last part of 2007. We went to a Keith Hall memorial at Wichita, Kansas. It was a lot of fun. And that's kind of—created a lot of interest. Dale Parson, the one that built my car—in fact, that was the first car that Dale built for anybody other than himself. Turned out to be a good business for him and his son. In fact, his son donated the frame on that—built the frame for that car.

DS:

This one right here?

RW:

Yeah. Yeah, I got my Parson car in '73. And that car—Kenny got his in '75. Cody got his in '73. There ended up being ten or eleven Parson cars here in Amarillo. And also at the end of the '74 season, they had a—there were going to have a race on the asphalt track out there by the airport. Neil DeBoer [?] [0:48:57]—which he still races—[clears throat] he was a teacher at Amarillo High, but he was part owner of the racetrack. He calls me and says, "Why don't some of y'all bring your supers out here and we'll race against these sprint cars?" So we did. Come to find out, when it was all said and done, I won the feature [laughter] against the sprint cars. And we did—we did very well against the sprint cars. In fact, that's one of the reasons I wanted this—wanted to build a shop was I knew we had that car and needed a spot to put it together. And it really taught my son a lot. Like, when we started building it he said, "Where are we going to get all these brackets?" I said, "See this—see that pipe and those flat—that flat metal laying on the ground? There they are."

DS:

So your son has been involved in mechanical work before that or was it just something totally new?

RW:

He'd done a little bit.

DS:

But never made his own parts?

RW:

No. So it was a good time for us, for me and him.

DS:

Because I think that was something unique to your era that you guys would design it and build it.

RW:

Um-hm. Any more—you can open up a parts book and order every part on it. The cars don't have any personality. They're painted different, but as far as the cars, they're all exactly the same. Back then—back in the NCRA days, you'd have Fords and you'd have—Fords and Chevrolets, but not very many Fords. It was—and you'd go to shows—NCRA shows and there'd be eighty or ninety cars. There'd be home-built cars that went fast, there'd be—that's the way old racers—they see a factory built car and in not too long you can have it copied. [Laughs] But like you said, it was—those cars back then had personality.

DS:

Did you come up with any innovations that made your cars a little faster or last better?

RW:

[Coughs] I can't take—really take credit for any of that. I had a good motor builder. Which I built Lone Motors up until '77. And my motors always lived a long time. In fact, in '77, we—James Gibson built a motor that year. We ran the whole season at Wichita and Hutch and came to Amarillo quite a bit, and the engine lasted all year. Had him freshen it up that winter, and it lasted about two-thirds of the next season before it-- before it, before it bled up. [Pause] So the longevity of my engines—which I don't think I turned them quite as tight as some of the Chevrolet's did. Ford is—Ford—Fords are known to have more torque than a Chevrolet anyway. You don't really have to gear them as low as they do Chevrolet.

DS:

We were talking about, you know, you got your car restored and were showing it. So how'd the talk of the Hall of Fame—when did that gear up?

RW:

Well, in '15, they installed three drivers. One: Carroll Caudle, was the drag racer. Then Dale

Parson and Bobby Ward, which they were—I think they had originally planned to put—they wanted to put Southwest Championship winners in at first since it was tied to Southwestern Championship. So Bobby Ward had—he had won it three times, so he was the first inductee. And then the next year we put in—in '16 we put in thirty new inductees. I think in '17 we put in thirty-two inductees. In '18 we put in eighteen. And then this year we're going to put in sixteen. We'll put in sixteen a year. The eighteen, they got—I mean thirty-two just got made the program way too long. People got antsy.

DS:

Four or five hours, huh?

RW:

Yeah. But it's amazing that first banquet in '16 went from a thought to a reality in a little over two months. We had 650 people show up at our banquet, and it's—and it's amazing. So it—so it—the idea was in '15, and it's grown at a very fast rate. Getting more and more people involved. Getting people that thought they were forgotten: motorcycle racers, drag racers, and both asphalt and dirt track racers. We always try to get one of the good sponsors inducted every year, one that really helped our—helped our cause out through the years. Because it was a bunch of—we didn't really—the ones that was racing back then—there wasn't a lot of money backing us, so we were very dependent upon a sponsor. They really came through and helped us. Like I'd mentioned, Jack Kelly, he really helped us get to where we were going.

DS:

And also you mentioned that this car that's in your shop here took eight months to go from idea to done? And yours took seven years to get all the parts together?

RW:

Yeah. We were—there was a bunch of good volunteer help on that car. People donated—in fact, Kenny Stead's [?] [0:57:41] son—which it probably wouldn't have happened if Kenny hadn't died because he would—the idea was going around for a Hall of Fame then, but Kenny wouldn't have—he wouldn't have spent the money building a car as a tribute to his. But his son donated a lot of money. And Billy Krause of Krause Landscape helped immensely on my own and on this one. And Billy used to—he used—he started pitting for me when he was seventeen years old. So he was one of the kids that has done well. He's got a great landscaping business.

DS:

You were that kid at one point yourself too, weren't you?

RW:

Yeah. [DS laughs] All of us are snout-nosed kids.

DS:

You just popped your head in that garage and said, "Can I watch?"

RW:

Yeah. That's kind of like Billy was. When we went to Phoenix he went with us. He talked to his dad. He was a senior in high school. He went with us. He was our pit clown. He does the MC'ing for us at the—at the banquets every year. In fact, this part Southwestern Championship in the last part of—last part of July—he's a pretty good sized boy, so I had to take all the upholstery out of the seat. I told him, "You're going to drive that car." You couldn't have slapped the grin off of his face when he got out of that car. So he got to hot lap the car. Like I told him, I said, "It's way overdue." [Pause] But some of the people we met. And you've got to give Pete Elkins the "hoorays" or the "attaboys" for finally get us started. Like I said, we had—we had talked about it, some of us here and there, and just never did get all together. We have grown quite a bit in the last three years. Got our 501c3. [Coughs] So we're a non-profit organization. We conduct our meetings monthly and do all the right things according to the—keep the IRS happy and keep the state happy with all the regulations that you have to have.

DS:

And plus if you're trying to get donors, they're more apt to donate to a 5013c [sic].

RW:

[Clears throat] We have come a long way real quick.

DS:

How are we doing on time?

RW:

Hm?

DS:

How are we doing on time there?

RW:

Eleven-thirty. [Recorder moves] Anything else?

DS:

Well, I was going to ask, I stumbled across the Hall of Fame through the vintage racecar site, the Eastern New Mexico/West Texas Vintage Racers. Are you involved with that?

RW:

We show up—was a member of the Kansas Antique Racers Association. That kind of—that kind of kicked us off. I'd went to a couple of their meets before we had the car done. And that's one of the first meets that I went to after the car was done. There was a bunch of good guys in it. See a bunch of neat cars from back in the—back in the fifties, the non-cage cars, bunch of the midgets, first one thing or the other, a bunch of neat guys that I got acquainted with through that organization. And they're more and more of them popping up. Kansas Antique Racers has kind of been in—they've been in existence longer than any of them. And there's—in this Southwest area, there's four or five now that's popped up. Got the Red River and got one in Wichita Falls called Texoma. That kind of gave us—Texoma Racers Reunion kind of got us kicked off. And I think—I forgot what year it was, but they inducted six of us from the Amarillo area, because we always raced a lot in Wichita Falls. They inducted us into their Hall of Fame. I think that really helped—helped kick our deal off. “Well, if they can do that”—

DS:

If they're recognizing y'all.

RW:

Yeah. And it really—we've kind of blown them out of the water. They couldn't believe how quick we got ours going. And their deal is coming up the thirteenth of October. They're inducting the new Hall of Fame members. [Pause] I'm about to run out of words.

DS:

[laughs] They're in there somewhere.

RW:

[Pause] And also my car was—after I got it restored, I talked to the Knoxville Hall of Fame Museum and they wanted to—they mentioned to me that they'd like to have our car up there in it. It spent two years at the Knoxville Sprint Car Hall of Fame. [Clears throat] There's sprint cars now that when it—when Knoxville started, it was more supermodifieds. And there's a lot of supermodifieds on display up there. So it was pretty—it was a big honor to have the car up there for a couple of years. [Clears throat]

DS:

Let me ask you—you know, you mentioned restoring that car and you'd seen the frame at a salvage yard. What shape was it in when you first brought it in?

RW:

I got a picture of it in there if you want to see it. It was pretty—pretty sad. In fact, the guy was fixing to make a dune buggy out of it. He said he just never got around to it. [Clears throat] And

then luckily I had a—I talked to Dale Parson's that built the car, and he still had a picture of the frame on the jig when he built it. So he sent those pictures to me. They were Polaroids. Greg Husband [?] [1:07:20] out at City Machine—I said, "Can we take these pictures and scale them—scale them down and figure out how to get his frame back the way it was?" He said, "Sure." So he had it six, eight months. We got the frame back like it's supposed to be and started from there. But it sat out—it sat there at work in a little, old storage building for three or four years while my son was gathering up parts. And my son was really the instigator. If he hadn't been the—been pushing, it probably never would've happened.

DS:

Did he tell you why he wanted it so bad? Did he tell you why he wanted it so bad?

RW:

Well, he remembered it when he was a kid, because he was—he kind of grew up around the racetrack. I'd been racing a year when he was born, so he spent his first fifteen years of his life at the racetrack every weekend. I don't know if that's good or bad.

DS:

Did he race at all himself?

RW:

He drag raced a little bit. In fact, he—we had his first car sitting over in a corner. It was a '70 Camaro and we were going to restore it. Ended up—it was going to cost more money than he thought it was going to. He thought I was going to restore it and furnish all the money. Figured out that wasn't going to happen. And when he got a divorce, he had—he sold the car to help pay for his divorce, because divorces aren't cheap.

DS:

No they're not. Not that I know of, but from what I've read. Well, Randy, I think we've pretty much exhausted my lines of questions. Do you have anything you want to make sure we get on the record?

RW:

It's something that's—the old-time racers are just—they're a breed—like you said, they're a breed apart because it came from—it evolved from going to a wrecking yard and buying an old frame and getting an old motor and putting it all together to very sophisticated operations, very sophisticated pieces of machinery. Not much wrecking yard stuff anymore.

DS:

I think it might've been James that mentioned in the drag race area he went from—he carried a

few—you could take a few engines with you because they didn't cost that much, not like now where you've just got to basically tear down the same engine and rebuild it every—between races.

RW:

In the seventies, I ran that engine all year, and I think they run an engine about four or five weeks and have to refresh it. But they're—back then, we were probably running three hundred horse—three hundred—three to four hundred horsepower motors, and now they're eight and nine hundred horsepower.

DS:

There's even street legal cars that have that much horsepower now.

RW:

Yeah. You can buy a car like my son's—my son had a Mustang. I think he had had it right at four hundred horsepower. You had to work hard to get four hundred horsepower out of a car when we was racing.

DS:

I guess I'm going to thank you for your hospitality. And look at those—

RW:

Okay.

DS:

Let me—

End of Recording

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