

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: **Fred Dahmer** (FD)

INTERVIEWERS: David Todd (DT)

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Note: insertions refer to the audio tape copy of the interview.

[Tape 1 of 3, Side A.]

DT: This is David Todd, and it's June 7, 1997, and I'm here in Uncertain, Texas, with Fred Dahmer, and he's been nice enough to set aside some time to talk about conservation in Texas and his large part in understanding and teaching and helping protect Lake Caddo. And I wanted to first say thank you very much for being so kind to talk about these things.

FD: Thank you for listening.

DT: Well, it's a pleasure. It really is. I wanted to start with your parents, and if you could tell me a little bit about where you were raised and how—the way you were brought up might've contributed to your interest in Caddo and conservation in general.

FD: Well, I was born in Marshall, Texas, at 605A—it is now—West Rusk. And I was born on Pearl Harbor Day in the year that the Titanic sank, which translates to be December 7, 1912, and, I just grew kinda like a weed. In those days, the people in Marshall had no fears of anything or anyone, and there was no great traffic situation, so I was free at a young age to wander to any part of town and generally scolded for staying too long but I enjoyed life as a young child with a great deal of freedom. And I also had freedom to read the daily newspaper as it arrived at our home, and that's the way I learned to read. So at a rather young age, I was able to read the entire newspaper and tell my parents all that had happened in the world when they arrived home. I guess that that is one reason that I was able to read a lot of books and enjoy them as a small child and learn to love to read. So, does that answer your question?

DT: So that was—you learned how to educate yourself about the world around you.

FD: Oh, definitely. Yes.

DT: And I guess that would include all the natural parts of that world.

FD: Very true. And I was encouraged to use a dictionary myself, and I often read the dictionary just because it interested me, and I learned a lot of words, and 'course I learned a lot of things I didn't understand also. But nevertheless, I furnished my own entertainment. I stayed alone for a large part of the day and entertained myself with reading things. The family had books I considered old-fashioned when I got older, but nevertheless I enjoyed reading them and really got quite an education just from my own reading in the family's own bookcase and the daily newspaper. And I learned to appreciate the newspapers, and particularly the proofreaders for the newspapers, because in those days and in Marshall with our particular newspaper, the spelling was correct. That seems to be a lost art now. They're not able to print a paper nowadays without misspelling a large number of words, and I feel sorry for the young people today who read the newspaper for themselves. They get some misinformation on the way words are spelled, and that hurts me every time I read a misspelled word in the paper. If you want me to continue on in this line, as a result of that, I was an interscholastic speller for my school, which was West Marshall, and as a result I was

considered a pretty good speller, and I was finally defeated on spelling one day and I'll never forget it, nor will I forgive. The lady teacher well known to me who gave me a word to spell, she said—and pronounced it very carefully, as they did words at spelling contests in those days. She said, "Comma." And I said, "May I ask you to repeat it?" And she said, "Com-ma." And so I said, well, "Comma, C-O-M-M-A." She said, "Wrong, step down." And I—so she asked then the next person to spell, "Com-ma," and he spelled C-O-M-E." And so I felt real bad about having missed that. I simply did not know what she wanted me to spell. And she was exaggerating the correct spelling, I presume, in an effort to help me spell it. [Laughs.] Nevertheless, that ended my career as an interscholastic speller. [Laughs.]

DT: But you took more—and other routes to success. And, I'm curious, though. During your education, did you run into teachers who took you outdoors, took you on field trips, or, you know, had some sort of love of the outdoors, who—passed that on to you?

FD: David, that was totally neglected in my early days. I do not recall one bit of outdoor activity or education or interest in what would be environmental concern today. O.K., I got my outdoor education from listening to my father talk. My father was an avid hunter. Yeah, he hunted birds with a double-barrel L.C. Smith shotgun, and he hunted ducks with live decoys on a line, and I helped him prepare the snaps to go around the decoys' legs to keep them on the line.

DT: And how did you catch the ducks for this live line?

FD: Well, they were tame ducks, and they were called decoys. They were trained to be decoyed by Negro farmers in the area, and Dad had many friends among the blacks of our area. And he purchased his decoys and kept 'em in the back yard and fed them himself. I was not permitted to feed the decoys. I was encouraged to raise chickens for the family and feed the chickens. But I kept away from the decoys. He also kept bird dogs in the yard, which were totally worthless as far as I could see, except to hunt birds. And this was not really encouraged by my mother. [Laughs.] She didn't like any of these activities and forbade me to take part in 'em. I did have a great-uncle who asked my mother one day could he take little Freddie out to Caddo Lake with him to go fishing with him and my aunt Frances. And Mother very grudgingly gave permission, and boy, that was the big thing for me. I waited for those Sundays that I went to Caddo Lake with my uncle.

DT: Well, what was your first visit like and when was it?

FD: It was at a early age for me. And I'm not sure of that but I would suspect it was perhaps eight or nine. I was old enough to paddle the boat while he fished, I remember that. And it wasn't too many years later that I realized that perhaps that was the reason I was invited to go fishing was because he needed someone to paddle the boat, while he fished. He was one of their early fishermen who used a casting rod, and it was a very stiff bamboo rod, I remember, and he used enormous plugs that had four hooks dangling from 'em. I'm sure they scared every fish within half a mile when he threw the plug in the water. And, meanwhile, I paddled the boat. He did furnish me with a real paddle. Most boats were equipped with oars at that time for Caddo Lake. But he did furnish me with a light paddle, and I really took great pleasure in paddling the boat, not realizing that it was essential to the art of fishing with a casting rod. Nevertheless, I did learn the technique of casting for fish, since he was one of the very first fishermen in this area to use artificial bait. And, we really enjoyed our trips to the lake. If you'd like to hear more, I can tell you more about it.

DT: Well, I'd love to hear about early trips, and especially how the lake looked then, and how it looks now and what sort of differences there might be.

FD: The lake did—it was different. For one thing, the water level varied widely from what it is

now because at present, of course, the level of water in the lake is controlled by the dam at the end of Caddo Lake and also by the gates in the Lake of the Pines dam, which controlled the amount of water permitted into Caddo Lake. So the water level is more constant. At that time it varied considerably, from both lower and higher than the present level. My uncle had an old Evanrood outboard motor that he used on his boat. It was the type that had a rudder behind a propeller which steered the outboard motor, and it had two ropes attached to a yoke on the rudder, and he stood up in the rear of the boat, facing forward, and held a rope in each hand and directed the steering by pulling on the correct rope. And, he looked a little bit like Napoleon to me in my young eyes standing in the rear of the boat, and sturdily holding these ropes and steering the boat. I understand—I think the motor must've been around two horsepower, and with that rudder hanging on behind the propeller, I'm sure we didn't move very fast and made considerable noise as we went. But we started at Dallas Caddo Club. He kept his boat in the boathouse there. He had a membership in Dallas Caddo Club. And we went up the government ditch usually to the head of the second ditch. And at that point—at that place, there was a point of land which generally was well above the water level. So we would stop there and eat our picnic lunch which had been prepared by my Aunt Frances in a basket with white linen napkin over the top of the basket. And she would open that with some show of presenting a delicious lunch, and it was with fried chicken, which I didn't like except when I was with Uncle Jesse. I hate fried chicken—otherwise I don't eat fried chicken. That becomes—that's a natural effect of my raising chickens as a young boy and having to clean the hen house every Saturday when the other boys were playing. I'm off the subject. This point of land is at the head of the second ditch, just near Uncertain, Texas, and, many years after that time, that land was named Hamburger Point. And that's another story, but probably the modern listeners who are listening can identify the place where we ate our picnic lunch by Hamburger point. Another place we went to was Mossy Break, just above the location of my present home on Caddo. And at Mossy Break we went into what at one time in my life we called the first hole of Mossy Break, and we thought then that Mossy Break consisted of five areas now as you entered Mossy Break, and the first hole we called the art gallery. And my aunt Frances was an amateur artist and she loved to sit in the boat and sketch or paint in water color pictures of Caddo Lake. So, for—Uncle Jesse fished, and I paddled gently and quietly, my—Sis—that was Aunt Frances, we called her Sis—would sit in the front of the boat and sketch, and she would ooh and aaah at various scenes and point out to me various things that she considered beautiful and that—things that were worthy to note and to picture, and tell me something about the difference of their appearance in various times of the year. So, I looked forward to my days on Caddo Lake, and perhaps during the—each year as I grew up, I spent at least 25 days of the year on the lake with Uncle Jesse and Aunt Frances. Uncle Jesse, incidentally, was the president of a bank and a very serious man and dignified, and he usually fished with a long-sleeved white shirt on and a rather high, starched-appearing collar, which in the summertime he sometimes loosened. But in the wintertime he kept his collar buttoned and carried out the traditional appearance of a bank president. Now, his bank was the smallest bank in Marshall, which had four banks. And so, it was a well-known bank, and one of the few banks when, at a much later time, Delano Roosevelt was President and declared a banking holiday, which would close the banks temporarily. And my uncle very strongly did not want to close his bank, and—but the other banks were having runs on the banks and Roosevelt of course had to stop banks where the depositors were simply withdrawing all of their money, and my uncle said there was no need of him closing. He would give everybody back their entire deposit, their entire account, any time they wanted it, that the—it was during banking hours if he

had plenty of money. So he didn't want to close. If his customers wanted their money back, he was ready. [Laughs.] The truth...

DT: Well, you know, it's interesting. You're talking about your uncle Jesse, who seemed to enjoy the lake for fishing, and I guess the sportsman-like uses of the lake, and then your aunt—Frances, is that her name?

FD: Right.

DT: ...enjoyed it for the more, I guess, aesthetic and—side of the lake. You know, understanding what—how the light might hit that tree and, you know, make the color appear more bright and make it look better in the painting and...

FD: Very true.

DT: So you have different sort of routes to appreciating the lake.

FD: True. Very, very true. I should add that always in this picnic basket that had the linen on top and was full of fried fish and cake and cookies and stuffed eggs and that type of thing, was a can of sardines, invariably. And, during about the middle of the afternoon, my uncle would say, "Fred, are we ready for sardines?" And I would always eagerly say, "Yes, sir," and we'd open the can of sardines. It was almost a ritual, and we'd usually eat a cold biscuit from the linen-covered basket and a sardine on it, and they were fancy sardines. They were very small, and they had little bits of pimento and pepper, green and red bits shaped in—star-shaped and moon-shaped—crescent-shaped I should say—and circles and squares and—real fancy. So that was the part of the lunch that I thoroughly enjoyed far more than the fried chicken, which I really disliked but ate on Caddo Lake when I wouldn't eat it at home.

DT: You know, it interests me when you said you were out on Caddo you went to places like Hamburger Point and Government Ditch and Mossy Break and Art Gallery. Can you tell about some of these different parts of the lake and how they got their names?

FD: Well, I truly think that my aunt named the art gallery, and I think perhaps that the name caught on with later visitors to the lake, and they knew it later as the Art Gallery. The more sports-minded people—and I guess I was one of them—usually just said the first hole in Mossy Break and we knew what we were talking about. But my aunt and uncle always called it the Art gallery and I knew what they were talking about, and that name eventually caught on. I should remark that right along the side of the art gallery but separated by a line of trees was another place that was known to my crowd when I was young as Jackfish Alley, and everyone knew where Jackfish Alley was. It was a sort of a path through the grove of large cypress trees that definitely formed a channel, and everyone used Jackfish Alley. Later on, when I bought my present house or lot on Caddo Lake, it was next door to Dummy's Camp, and there was an old, elderly lady by the name of Mrs. Spivey who told me many things about the early days on Caddo Lake—of her life on the lake—and she told me that Jackfish Alley may be the name that I call that place, but she called it Lovers Lane. And I said, "Why was that, Ms. Spivey?" And she says, "Well, because J.D."—that was her husband's name—'courted me there.'" So, I—sometimes I called Jackfish Alley Lovers' Lane. But they're the same place and—incidentally, Mrs. Spivey gave me a diary of her life on the lake that she had kept, and I have it now—one of my prized collections.

DT: And, when did she first get to the lake?

FD: I don't know. Mrs. Spivey was older than I, I know that, and she was raised by Dummy, who was one of the first fishermen on the lake. And Dummy, of course, was a nickname. The man was actually deaf and dumb, and I mention him in my book on Caddo Laws, if you don't mind mentioning that. And Dummy was also a well-known character on the lake.

DT: Can you tell a little bit about Dummy?

FD: Well, Dummy was apparently a well educated and very fine man. And for some reason he came to Caddo Lake and decided to leave civilization and spend his time as a commercial fisherman on Caddo Lake. He was a man who had many deep thoughts and he would—he expressed them in some poetry that he wrote. And, on the other hand, he liked his whiskey and he patronized the bootleggers a little bit too much and he was usually inebriated. In fact, I often wondered if he didn't make some of his homemade whiskey himself. But he was well educated and did think in a philosophical way, which you would not expect of a man in his situation.

DT: Um-hmm.

FD: I have some pictures of his family in my book, too, incidentally. Dummy was a character, and Mrs. Spivey was one who was totally opposed to whiskey, and her husband, J.D., was a fishing guide and they lived next door. And they were very close neighbors—Mrs. Spivey particularly. They had very little money, because J.D. spent most of his fish guiding money for whiskey. But Mrs. Spivey was really a wonderful character, and she taught me a great deal about Caddo. She knew more than J.D. did, I think, and J.D. was a guide. [Laughs.]

DT: What sort of things did she teach you?

FD: About the lake and the times of the year and the different—and a difference in appearance of the lake at different times of the year, and things that happened that she looked for. She said the lake turns over in the winter, and by that she meant that the bottom of the lake rises to the surface, and eventually figured out that by that, she meant that the roots of the spatterdock float to the surface. They're—normally lie right at the bottom of the lake, and when the lake turns over, the stalks of the root rise to the surface and they cover the surface of the lake. I don't know just why she—she thought that was significant but she did, particularly the date on which that occurred—when the stalks of the spatterdock would rise to the surface. Now the stalks of the spatterdock reminded me of the banana stalks that bananas grow on. It has that appearance and it is about that size, and it floats on the surface of the water. And eventually of course it rots or is carried away by the currents in the lake.

DT: When would it usually float up in the lake,...

FD: In the winter.

DT: ...turn over in a sense?

FD: In the winter, and I—it seems to me, as I recall, that at least on one winter it was in December—early December. But I think it has occurred in November, and perhaps in January. I don't recall any in January. But she marked it on her calendar, every year. And I really could not get a direct answer from her as to what that signified, but it would—made an important date to her, I don't know why. But ...

[Tape 1 of 3, Side B.]

FD: But she said the lake's bottom turned over, meaning that the bottom rose to the surface of the lake. I suspect it had to do with the flushing out of the lake which occurs in the winter. In the old days, when the water cleared, the vegetation died in the lake and was flushed out by fresh water from the rains—the winter rains that occurred, and the rises that occur in Spring. It flushes the lake and renews the lake, so to speak—or it did in the old days. Now, since the lake of the Pines Dam, the water level is controlled, and so we don't have the lake flushed out as it was formerly naturally flushed out each winter.

DT: I see.

FD: As a result, we get more and more vegetation in the lake. And...

DT: Well, what—you know, we've talked about a number of people who've been important in

your life. Your aunt and your uncle and your father and I guess one of your old neighbors, Mrs. Spivey and ...

FD: Yes.

DT: ...Dummy and so on? I was wondering if you could tell me what role your wife, Lucille, has played in your interest in the lake and protecting it.

FD: Well, long before I knew Lucille, she was brought to the lake by her father, and he had a share in a T&P—that's Texas and Pacific Railroad—had a club house on the big lake, which is quite a few miles from Dallas Caddo Club where I used to come with my uncle. She would go to the big lake T&P Club Camp with her father and learned to fish, you know, with her father. At that point of course we didn't know each other. Incidentally, she is five years younger, so—when I first started coming to the lake, why, she would have been extremely young, one or two years old. So, after we were married, I came to the lake—to their club house at the lake several times, but since it was quite a few miles from my stomping ground, so to speak, on Caddo, and I was not familiar especially with her part of Caddo Lake, why, we started coming to my part and brought Lucille to my part. But we did occasionally go down to visit the T&P Club. It was on the shores of Big Lake. And, at that time, the best-known camp near it was Haners Camp, and most of the old-timers recall Haner's Camp, or Big Lake Camp.

DT: Well, does Lucille share a lot of the same interests, then, in the lake and fishing and...

MT: I think so. She was interested and goes with me. She thinks more of fishing than I do. I always had more things to do on the lake than fish, although I'll admit it is the more popular attraction, and she liked to fish. I think she did still fishing. I had learned to cat fish, by that time, and I had—I'm sorry, I did not mean cat fish. I had learned to cast fish, and so I fished with rod and reel and taught Lucille to fish with rod and reel, and as a matter of fact, after we had been married just one or two years perhaps, I made her a casting rod out of an automobile antenna rod, made by Motorola, and it made a wonderful casting rod. I put a handle on the antenna rod and mounted the reel, and the antenna was tempered just right for a dandy little casting rod. I put guides on the rod and bought a reel and presented it to Lucille and I was so proud of it and her, and she was proud of it, that we went to Bridge Gap, and the white bass were schooling, we called it, at that time. And that's when the white bass travel in schools, and they—one or two will surface at any given instant. And we were in our boat and got in the midst of 'em, and I said, "Honey, the white bass are schooling," and she said, "Oh, boy, let me at 'em." And she made the first cast of her rod with a Johnson spoon I think it was called on the end, which was a killer on white bass when they schooled—and it was a perfect cast. It—I mean, the—that bait going out and I saw a white bass make a lurch at it. And then I looked down at her and she didn't have any rod in her hand. She had thrown the casting rod—[laughs]—out along with the—after the bait, she was so excited.

DT: I see.

FD: So she threw the rod in the lake as she threw the bait in the lake. [Laughs.] And we were never able to recover the rod.

DT: Oh.

FD: Yeah, often when a testing rod is inadvertently thrown after the bait, it—the line is strung out in the water and you can snag it and pull it up with another casting rod. But we couldn't recover hers, so we never retrieved the rod or reel or any of it. But it worked once beautifully. [Laughs.]

DT: I hear that she's quite a fisherman. You were telling me a story once about her encounter with a large fish.

FD: Oh. Oh, yes.

DT: She didn't always throw a rod in the water.

FD: [Laughs.] Well, this time, we were at a boat stall in front of one of the beer boats—our favorite beer boat—to stop and have a cold beer on a hot summer day. And we had been fishing in my—our boat, which we called the AnnPat, and that name is for our first two girls, the oldest two girls. One was named Kathryn Ann and the other was named Patricia, so we named the boat the AnnPat, all one word. Lucille and I were stopped—without the daughters. We'd been fishing, and she was fishing with a cane pole and a worm, and we were fishing for a brim, actually. But she just kind of propped the pole on the side of the boat while we were drinking our bottle of beer—long-neck bottles in those days, they never heard of canned back then, in that early day. And—you just let the bait dangle in the water, and suddenly, something started off with her fishing rod. So she grabbed the end of the fishing rod and played the fish—and we could tell it was a large fish, we didn't know what kind it was. And she gradually got the fish closer to the boat and then she flopped her rod, and the fish went in the boat and it was a big catfish and it was flopping around on the bottom of the boat. And we were well aware that catfish fins will cut you like a sharp knife. If you don't pick up a catfish the correct way, his fins will tear you up. And so we neither one cared to jump on the catfish with our arms but she took out for the front of the boat and I took out for the back of the boat. And finally, there was a raincoat in the bottom of the boat and I got the raincoat and threw it over the catfish and we were able to subdue it that way and get it off the hooks. But anyway, by that time, there were quite a few boats of course with several people in each boat, drinking beer in the stalls around the beer boat, and that was a kind of a floating tavern. And they were all—joined in the sport while we landed Lucille's catfish.

DT: And how big was it?

FD: Well, you know, you—you see, you've got me. I claim to be a historian, and you're asking me a fisherman's question and it's sort of loaded. To tell the truth, I doubt that it was more than perhaps a—maybe two-pound catfish, which in those days was not anything to get excited about. But it was so unexpected, and...

DT: Well, the thrill of the chase.

FD: The thrill of the chase, right. It...

DT: [Pause.] Well, I enjoy learning a little bit about your parents and your early schooling, and some of the people that—important in your life, and I wanted to ask you a little bit about your career here in East Texas, and especially how your work might've contributed to all your environmental work. If you could tell me a little bit about that I'd appreciate it.

FD: Well, as far as my work in East Texas goes, I started out as—a very early age, I became interested not only in Caddo Lake but in radio. I told you previously that as a young boy I read the newspaper thoroughly. It was an evening paper and I read it before the—my parents came home from their work. Among the things published in the newspaper were periodically articles on how to build a radio set. These were crystal radios and they worked—or they used headphones, and they were built with generally oatmeal boxes, or sometimes the core of a toilet paper roll, and they were used to run wire around and make a coil, and the coil was connected with condensers and the headphones. And—with the use of a large aerial and crystal detector and much, much patience, if you were lucky, we could sometimes faintly hear the Shreveport KWKH station, owned by W.K. Henderson, at that time, who was a character, if there ever was one, on the air. Nevertheless, after reading about that for several years, I decided I just had to build a radio set, and so I bought a few pounds of the cotton-covered wire that we wound coils on, and I built a radio set. And—by straining and with money I earned by raising the chickens and

selling the eggs and the fryers to my mother, I was able to accumulate enough money to buy the parts to build this radio, and with much patience, got it to work, and thus began an interest in radio. Later on, vacuum tubes were invented, and some of the richer people in Marshall were able to buy a vacuum tube radio, which was an enormous thing, but still you had to use earphones to listen to it. Nevertheless I became more and more interested and I did learn to build larger sets and sets with one or two tubes in 'em. And meanwhile, sales of radio receivers in Marshall had improved, and I had enough receivers so that some of 'em occasionally would fail to work. And some of the people who knew that I was the—as a young boy, loved to work on radios, they thought perhaps I could fix their radio and they would trust me sufficiently to repair their radio, and I gradually drifted into the business of repairing radios. And I guess that was the first job I had, except that during this period, and parallel with it, my aunt worked at a wholesale grocery company in Marshall, and they sold bananas. They were shipped in from South America, I think, on ships to New Orleans and brought by the T&P Railroad to Marshall, where the wholesale grocery company kept 'em and sold 'em to the grocery stores in Marshall and surrounding area. However, the bananas were—at that time, lacking the methods that we have to preserve and embalm fresh bananas now, the bananas had to be sold. When they got ripe at the wholesale house, they had to be sold immediately. So the wholesale house made a deal with Web Rogers grocery store, which was on the Square in Marshall, to sell the ripe bananas at a dime a dozen. Now the bananas were the best, really. They were completely ripe, they were just right to eat. And they—my aunt said, “They’ve got to be peddled off of the Square, where there are lots of people.” Saturday was a big day in Marshall. Every—all the farmers came to Marshall in their wagons and they parked on the west side of the Square, and that was the location of Rogers Grocery Store. So Rogers gave me a part of his storefront, which was the old cast-iron posts and all—fancy storefronts of the day. So in this opening in the building, I yelled at the top of my voice, “Bananas, bananas! Dime a dozen, ten cents a dozen!” And they flocked to the store and—the people and just bought sack after sack of bananas. I counted the bananas out and filled the sacks with bananas and collected the dimes and made change. I was a very young boy, and I won’t say small because I was kinda tall for my age. But that was a Saturday job that I got and I made a dollar by my—and I could have all the bananas I wanted to eat. And believe it or not, I learned to love bananas at that time, and that’s been a long-lasting love. I still like bananas—love bananas but I like 'em when they’re perfectly ripe. I don’t like 'em green. That was my first job. My aunt also thought of another job that I could do for them, and that was paint signs. My dad made wooden benches. He put 'em on the Square—the courthouse Square—so that the people who came to town would have a place to sit down and rest. On the backs of these chairs were printed signs for the—advertising signs for the various stores in Marshall who furnished the chairs, and I got selected for the job, in some instances, of painting the advertising sign on the chair. And I was a methodical sort of a person and I studied typography and did the best I could with paintings and some—at least readable, and reasonably attractive signs on the backs of these chairs, and I painted many chairs [signs] for this produce company to put on the chair so that—the bench so that people who came shopping to Marshall on Saturday would have a place to sit and rest. They did serve a very useful purpose. So eventually I learned to be a sign painter, among other things, as well as a banana hawker, [laughs], and a radio repairman. Anything to earn a nickel. And that’s about the wage I got. Nevertheless, it contributed to my education. I got—I raised the chickens also for my family. This I didn’t do very willingly but they did pay me. I got a dime a dozen for raising chickens that laid eggs, Rhode Island reds. And I also raised white leathers for frying chickens, and then I raised some Plymouth Rock hens for the hens that

they wanted to bake. And Mother usually invited the preacher home for Sunday dinner, and I raised the product which he ate. [Laughs.] I wasn't allowed to eat any of the product because we had to save it—the drumstick and the breast and the more delicate parts of the chicken for the preacher. And I was warned that I should not take any of those parts, that I should take the back, which had very little meat on it, or the neck, which had practically no meat at all on it—and that's how I've come to a life-long hatred for chickens. I don't like to eat chickens. I discourage it at all points, especially since I had to clean the hen house every week to keep it even moderately clean, and my mother was pretty particular about keeping it as close to spotless as possible. I—and anyway, I knew all the bad habits of a chicken, and none of its good habits—[laughs]—none of the good qualities of the chicken. And so, I was a busy man. I was also interested in—World War II was in progress in my earliest days, and I learned to read during the early days and I read, I remember, Popular Mechanics Magazine, and Practical Electrics Magazine, and Radio News Magazine. I subscribed to these. That's the way I spent my money that I made on—selling bananas and all. I spent it on magazine subscriptions. And, that was my education. And, I built model airplanes which I found in magazines, and I built one model airplane with a wing spread of about seven feet. It was a little over six feet. It was a kind of a large model airplane and made out of bamboo, which was popular for model airplane building in those days, and of course it was too large for the rubber motor—for the propeller which went in smaller model airplanes that I built. This was to be a large glider. And I carried it to the roof of our garage at home by climbing up to the roof of the garage, and it took both hands to hold this monster glider. I launched it in the air, and it occasionally made fairly successful landings, mid-landing itself. But one day a friend of mine, a boy about twice as big as I was, wanted to see my model plane fly, and I showed him very proudly how it would fly, and he said he wanted to go up on top of the garage and launch the plane and—I took a dim view of that but he was twice as big as I was. So I protested mightily and he said he was going anyway, and he got up there and he got astride of this—[laughs]—this bamboo strip glider I had, which was larger than he was and larger than I was. And he got astride of it and jumped off of the barn or the—he was no longer my friend, and it was mutual. He didn't like my airplane, and I didn't like the wreckage that he had left of my airplane. It was hardly more than a mass of strips on the ground, naturally. So anyway, I decided I'd—maybe I could do something more interesting than the model airplane building. That was the last of my model airplane experience. And I can—I don't know what to...

DT: Well, you carried on a—I guess a life-long interest in electronics from your early days in working with radio, on through working through munitions plant? Is that right?

FD: Yes. Yes, that's right. I carried on in electronics. I got interested in the electronic amplification of sound, which was just being realized when I was getting into electronics. In those days we just called it radio. I was interested in the—specifically in the amplification and distribution of sound. And, I was among the first, I guess, to use amplified sound in this area and I built my own equipment, and I went into the theory of it deep enough to design my own circuitry and made my own sound amplifiers using my own circuitry, and sold a few and rented my equipment, and that became my main vocation. In fact, when I went to the University of Texas, I was very anxious to go there, much—to study under Professor Boner, who was the head of the Physics Department at that time, and my mother said I was too young to go to any school when I graduated from high school, because I was just over 16. And she said if I went to Austin to school, I would have to go first a year to the college at Marshall, which was the junior college. It's now East Texas Baptist University but—I went a year to the college of Marshall under protest because it had no science courses whatever. But it had an English course, and I said, "I'll

take English,” and I took several other things that—Bible—that did not interest me at that time, and—spent my year there, but it was not wasted because they allowed me to double in English and an Engineering Degree from the University of Texas only required one year of English. So I doubled English under a lady whose name was Sally Duncan, and she taught English as well as was the Dean of Women at the college of Marshall. And that is really the extent of my English but it was the—she was the greatest teacher that I have ever had, and greatly influenced my life and taught me to love the English language, and English literature, and it was a totally unexpected development in my career. But it has affected my life more perhaps than any teacher I ever had.

[Tape 2 of 3, Side A.]

DT: Did you think of her when you were writing Caddo Was?

FD: Every day and every word.

DT: Was she looking over your shoulder, in a sense?

FD: She was looking over my shoulder and she had a very caustic way of speaking. And, [laughs], I knew she didn't mean it, and I knew she really loved me. But she gave me down the river for not doing my best in her class, and—she made me do my best, and learn to love it, and gave me an appreciation of the English language, and really has been a—I would say probably the strongest influence of any other person in my life. I'll never forget Sally Duncan. Oh, she was a hard sister. She was an old maid and she was really a sharp-tongued and—[laughs]. But I knew, inside me, that she really meant to—for me to do better. And I tried to do better and she brought out the best in me, and has influenced my life probably more than any other one person. Nevertheless, while I was in her class, I sat next to a girl that I decided was quite attractive, and her name—maybe I shouldn't say it but I've never seen her since and I have nothing bad to say. Her name was Olivia Nan Davis. And she was a nice person, and she was—quite compatible with my attitude at that time, which was a fun-loving type of attitude. We passed notes back and forth in English class and—well, the teacher would get on her, and—on us and—anyway, we really misbehaved in her class but we got more out of her class I think than any class that I've ever taken. And I won't forget the young girl that sat next door...

DT: \*\*\*.

FD: ...that I wrote notes to and she wrote notes to me. And her home was Dallas.

DT: I see. Well now, eventually I guess, you had to take off and go to Austin. Is that right?

FD: Yes. Yes. In the summer after I had spent the year, against my will, at the College of Marshall, we made plans for—go to Austin to school. And, I wrote to find the requirements and so on, and get my credits, which as I said would be all of the required English courses for a[n] engineering degree, which—my mother insisted that I get a degree in electrical engineering. And I insisted my preference would be a degree in physics in the Arts and Science School, but she persisted I would have to go to—for an electrical engineering degree, which was at the Engineering School, of course. So—dean was T.U. Taylor—I remember Dean Taylor well, \*\*\* University. And, I got a job, I think I previously told you. I went to the early—a week early—for the fall session at the University, and that would've been '31—was—I graduated from high school in '29. I spent the first year at the college of Marshall—it'd be '30. So '31 would be the—when I went to the University of Texas. I've tried hard to remember this far back. And—I went a week early to the University. They told me if I went to the YMCA, they ran an employment service, and I probably could find a job of—at the—around—near the University campus. So I went a week early and I went to the YMCA and told them I needed a job to go to school, and they had a

list of jobs. And as the office person read down the list of jobs which was available, he named radio repairman, and that of course was what I knew best. And I said, "That's the one I'd like to have and I can do." And he said, "Well, in a way you're lucky. They are extremely anxious, and as—I've got 'Urgent' written by it, they want you to come down and go to work today." And I said, "Well, I just got here and I haven't found my boarding house to stay at yet." And he said, "We'll help you find that." And I said, "Well, I know where I want to go," because I had been taken there a year previously by an attorney friend from Marshall for a test in physics. Nevertheless, I went to work immediately for the Texas book store, which was next door to the University Co-op on the—what we call the Drag, at the University of Texas. It was the—I guess the Drag is still there. It's the line of stores—and maybe the Texas Book Store is still there, and maybe the University Co-op is still there. Maybe the YMCA is still on the corner of that block. And in any event, I went to work there, and—I had problems. I wanted to see Dr. Bona. Well, of course, that was not possible. There was no way I could get a class under Dr. Bona, who was head of the Physics Department. And I had not even had physics in high school, because it was not offered. I had my choice of Chemistry or Physics, except Physics wasn't offered. So, I chose Chemistry. And I never did get to even meet Dr. Bona, but I did enter the University Engineering School. Among the courses I entered there that interested me was mechanical drawing and plane geometry. And I took that under a instructor named McFarlane, and again, he was the teacher who greatly impressed me, and I did great in his class and made nearly all A's and nearly all 100's, in both courses. And the other classes that they said that I should have to take to meet requirements weren't very interesting to me, and I found time to work at the Texas Book Store, and eventually was making good money for the times, and that was Depression times. With my sound work, which I carried on down in Austin also, and with my radio repair, I actually was making more money per day than the people who graduated from the University of Texas, and who were mainly getting jobs at filling stations putting gas in the automobiles. So, I just neglected to finish at the University of Texas, and I should have but I simply didn't have the incentive to do it.

DT: Well, what brought you back to Marshall and to uncertain...

FD: Well, of course, Marshall was my home—my family home, and Lucille, my wife, who I married in 1933—her home also was in Marshall. And—so I came back to Marshall and I had friends in Marshall. I was able to enter the sound business and the radio repair business and the sign painting business, and—made money that way. And of course my uncle, who had brought me to Caddo Lake, wasn't really taking me to paddle his fishing boat anymore, because I had grown enough to realize that I—[laughs]—he just needed someone to paddle his fishing boat while he cast. Nevertheless, he was president of the bank, and he liked me and I liked him. And he decided that what I needed was a good steady job instead of fooling around with my toys—sound equipment and radios—so he gave me a job in his bank as a vacation relief clerk, so every summer I worked in his bank for several years. I had been doing that every summer for several years and continued to do that, and I took the place of each person in turn. In other words, when the bookkeeper had a vacation I worked as a bookkeeper. When a teller took a vacation I worked as a teller. When the assistant cashier took a vacation I worked as the assistant cashier. There was two jobs that he would not let me take, and one was the cashier's job and one was the president's job, which was his. But every other job I took and learned to take, and apparently passed pretty strict guidelines on that. For one thing, the bank had to balance every day the cash, and my uncle was strict about that. You balanced or you stayed there, and we stayed there sometimes till night. And thank the Lord, a mistake was never found on my part. It was on

somebody else's part. But I knew I'd make my great-uncle ashamed of me if I made a mistake in the bank. But I did learn all there is to know about banking, and so this summer—this final summer, after I had married, he said—he asked me—if I would like a job in his bank he would give me a regular job, and—doing—since I was trained at all the jobs except the cashier and the president's job. And he even offered some encouragement that I might get training for cashier or president's jobs if I persisted. And I agreed to take the job with one provision—that I would be allowed to continue my sound equipment job, which I could handle outside the bank job and outside banking hours. And so we agreed to that, until the Banking Holiday came along, imposed by President Roosevelt, you know, and he forced the bank to close, and my uncle was forced to close, or else they threatened to put him in the Federal pen. And he said he guessed he would have to close, and if we closed, why, I would have to be laid off. But fortunately I was still able to fix radios and still had my sound equipment, and continued with that.

DT: Well, let me jump ahead a little bit. We're gonna talk to you a little bit about some of the issues you've probably seen come and go at Caddo while you were being a jack-of-all-trades and worked in the banking business and the sign painting industry and the—over at Lone Star and, you know, so on. I'm curious if you could maybe tell us a little bit about Lake Caddo. One of the things I wanted to start with, if you don't mind, was the origins of Lake Caddo. I've read different accounts. I've read that it was created by a lograft. And other people say no, it was an earthquake, the new Madrid earthquake of 1811, that created voids, you know, pockets that the lake occupied, and I was curious what you think formed the lake.

FD: I've been very interested in that and neglected to state that that was probably my main avocation. I do have thoughts about the formation of Caddo Lake. First of all, there was a friend named P.E. Knife, K-N-I—I guess it's pronounced “knife” or “ka-nife,” K-N-I-F-E—who visited the Caddo Lake State Park and stayed there, when he was in this area, and he was editor of a magazine on the petroleum business, and the geological situation in this area. And I discussed with him many geologic factors, and the possibility of an earthquake having been in the area of Caddo Lake, and he said definitely there was no indication of any earthquake in historical times. Now in prehistoric times, of course, the entire earth was subject to earthquakes and meteors, or meteorite strikes and such as that. But not Caddo Lake, and I'm sure that it was not caused by an earthquake. Now I recently had a visit from a professor at the University of Tennessee who later sent me a book on Reelfoot Lake in Tennessee, and they say that Reelfoot Lake in Tennessee was formed at the same time as Caddo Lake, and I think that there is some error in his correlation of those two events. I think Caddo Lake was formed by excessive flood waters in the Red River. And it caused a break in the riverbed of the Red River, and it overflowed into the area of the Cypress River, and that occurred over a period of a number of years. It was a huge flood, and I guess more or less like is happening in the United States today, it's a hundred—well, it was a hundred-year flood, but it was more than that. Maybe you want to call it a thousand-year flood or something. But there was a horrendous flood in this part of the world, and I think that did form Caddo Lake, by breaking down the banks of the Red River, which is often—and still often changes course. And so late as this week, there's been things on the TV about—they're trying to settle the boundaries in Shreveport of the Red River, as it affects the Caddo Parish and the Bozier Parish.

DT: Well, can you tell a little bit about the aftermath? I understand that there were a number of efforts to clear this lograft that was created I guess by the floods you're mentioning. Mr. Shreve and his work—can you explain a little bit about what he did?

FD: Henry Shreve is one of my favorite characters in all time. I think Henry Shreve was a smart

man. I think that he developed the steamboat that was used in the Mississippi River and on Caddo Lake, and I think that that was quite an invention. Henry Shreve was responsible—so far as I know—I'm able to determine, he invented the steamboat. Henry Shreve was an engineer, I think without a formal education as an engineer. As a result, his engineering many times was faulty, but many times it was correct. And so we have to remember that some of his engineering worked and some didn't. One that didn't was the break through the walls of the Red River to make a shortcut from the Red River into the Mississippi. He carefully dug with his dredge a canal from the Red River—near the mouth of the Red River into the Mississippi River. And imagine his surprise when the Red River did not flow into the Mississippi River. The Mississippi River flowed into the Red River. And it created a situation at the mouth of the Red River which to this day has not been permanently corrected and probably never will be permanently corrected. And the error he made endangers New Orleans and probably will be the end of New Orleans eventually, unless the Federal Government gets enough money to keep pouring it down the drain there. On the other end, he did clear the logjam which created the flooding situation which created Caddo Lake. I guess the logjam had to be cleared because it was causing flooding all up and down the Red River, all the way to the Mississippi River, and not just Caddo Lake. But of course when the raft was removed, it corrected the flooding conditions on the Red River, but it also meant that Caddo Lake would eventually subside back into base banks and no longer be a lake but just be the Cypress River. So, I have mixed...

DT: How did he manage to remove the lograft? Was it with explosives or a dredge or...

FD: Well, that was one of the first big projects that were undertaken, I think, with dynamite, and they dynamited the lografts. And it blew 'em apart, and they would form a dam because the rafts would interlock with each other, and jam up. And that would form a dam then, which—the space between the logs would be filled with debris, or smaller logs and branches of trees, and then the weeds would take root, and then the—in the jam and it would form a real dam across the Red River. And he would break up these jams of logs, and as they broke up, he would remove the logs with his special snag boat and carry them generally into tributaries of the Red River, and snare them there. So he was really just—he didn't remove the logs. He just moved the logs into new locations in—where they would continue to cause jams. Eventually all that has been cleared out, but it was not as clean a solution—it was not a clear or perfect solution to the clearing of the lografts. It did drain a lot of the flooded area, and of course we no longer have the chain of blank lakes in this area.

DT: Do you think that Henry Shreve or the Army Corps of Engineers that commissioned him, anticipated that the —Caddo was gonna drain, when the raft was removed?

FD: Did he anticipate ...

DT: ...that the lake levels would subside as dramatically as they did? I read someplace that it dropped by 18 feet.

FD: It dropped tremendously. Yes, it did. And I assume that he knew that it would drop. I feel like—had I been in his position I would've known, and I feel sure he knew. I feel sure that he took a rather short-sighted view of the situation. He was paid to remove the logs and he removed the logs. That's what he was paid for, and the consequences of that were not his problem.

DT: Well, I would expect that the Army Corps of Engineers might've been lynched if they came to a town like Jefferson that had depended on the lakes being quite high and having the trade and navigation that used the lake. Can you explain what you knew about the politics of the time and...

FD: Yeah, I think I can. When I reviewed—for Defenders of Wildlife several years ago—I did

reviews of books for them, and they gave me the book—that's—I read—reviewed a book written by a member of the Corps of Engineers called Beyond The Fourth Generation. That was the name of the book—title of the book. And that was about the situation in the Everglades in Florida and the effects of channelizing and canaling and draining the Everglades, which they now are desperately trying to fill up again, and of course it won't be the same. And, I think the same thing nearly occurred on the Red River. Now, am I deviating from your question?

DT: No, let's go on. Go ahead, go ahead.

FD: I think the same thing—and this may be a new subject to you. The same thing will occur to—in Caddo Lake and is occurring in this—in the last stages, actually, due to—not the Corps of Engineers at this time. I don't know just who's responsible, unless it's the Cypress Valley Navigation District—cutting a shortcut, which they called Carney Canal, into Clinton Break, and a shortcut which they called Bradley Canal, into my favorite part of Caddo Lake. And in fact, they have such a problem now that the next step will mean that they will have to—and there's no doubt—the sand and silt from their mistaken canals will fill in Mossy Break, and that's the area I was talking to you about that we so enjoyed, when I was a smaller boy, and which is just above my house here, and if it continues—maybe not this year but within the next very few years, it will continue until it fills the Caddo Lake in front of my home. Unless something is done.

DT: [Pause.] I read once that the—Caddo Lake used to have a sandy bottom.

FD: Yes.

DT: Do you think that's so, and then...

FD: Well, that's—that's what you get. That's what Bradley Canal is depositing in Broad Lake is sand, and it's removing that sand from the Bradley Canal, which they cut through the banks of the big Cypress River into Mossy Break. And so, that sand is coming from where they cut through into Mossy Break, and as the currents continue to flow, they're cutting into the bottom of Mossy Break, and producing sand, which they deposit down river. It continually walks down the river. It's eating its way—the water currents are eating their way down river, and that sand that they're eating out and depositing down below the—what they cut out. Each year they cut out a deposit of sand. When the flood waters...

[Tape 2 of 3, Side B.]

FD: Each year they cut out a deposit of sand. When the flood waters come, the currents cut the bottom out of the lake, which is sandy, and deposit it down below the cut. And so it more or less walks its way downstream, and in the case of Bradley Canal, it's walked its way down to—now it's at Mossy Break's Jackfish Alley.

DT: Well, do you find that the silt—sand that's coming into the lake and I guess raising the level of—base of the lake, is that changing the kind of vegetation that you see in the lake?

FD: Oh, yeah, it's changing the vegetation and the fishing habits and the fish habitat, so to speak, because at the time of my youth and young manhood, Mossy Break I called the fish hatchery of Caddo Lake. I mean, many fish spawned, and their spawn found the suitable environment, you know, to evade being eaten by larger fish. In the five lakes of Mossy Break that I'm telling you about, there were five connected pond-shaped parts of the lake, and if you were in a canoe or a boat, you could paddle from one pond to the next. You would eventually come to a very narrow wall between Mossy Break and Big Cypress, and I have often portaged my canoe. If I wanted to go up Big Cypress, it was easier in the canoe to go through Mossy Break and portage maybe a hundred feet over this wall of the plant and put into Big Cypress up there, than it would be if I went all the way around through the ditches and through Devil's Elbow and so on. It'd be much shorter and much quicker to just portage the canoe over this little wall. Now they've dug the

canal through that little wall. They've released the water pressure to flow through Mossy Break. And that's what's eating its way downstream.

DT: So I guess the—there was old sort of natural levees, in a sense, that surrounded these spawning beds that protected the young from the larger fish so they couldn't manage to get in there?

FD: Right. Right.

DT: I see, and then they broke through.

FD: They broke through.

DT: And now the fish—the larger predators can get in and so...

FD: Well, they—yeah, they certainly can do that, yes.

DT: But, you know, I'd been talking to—I think it was Dwight Shelvin, and he was saying that he's often wondered about why alligator gar have not been seen as much, and he said that he's had an ongoing discussion with you about spawning beds and—can you tell a little bit about that?

FD: Yes, I can. Alligator gar were my favorite fish. Of course, I didn't fish for them and I certainly didn't eat them but I—they were magnificent specimens of what Caddo Lake had. Alligator Gar attained lengths of 12 feet or more. There were a lot of 'em in Caddo Lake that were at least 12 feet, and I well remember one instance when I was in the AnnPat boat that I mentioned before, and was alone. And I remember we were going there—down the stretch of Alligator Bayou, when a large gar surfaced right next to the boat. I could've reached out from the boat. Now I had the motor running and was just idling along—slightly more than idling, but running very slow—and this broad back came up right beside me. I could've put my hand on the back of this large alligator gar. The alligator's nose was a big, broad nose, and it looked like it reached almost to the front of the boat—the point of the boat—and the tail looked like it reached back really behind the motor a little bit of my boat. So, that gar's length would've been comparable—I won't say it was 15 feet, but it was comparable to the length of my boat of 15 feet. That would've been an extremely large alligator gar, but—I saw it. And I had something solid to compare it to, and I feel sure it was comparable to 15 feet. I won't say it was 15 feet, but maybe it was 14 and a half. On the other hand, maybe it was 15 and a half.

DT: Bigger than a bread box.

FD: Yes, it was larger in length, and I'm sure in weight, too. God, it really weighed more than my boat, I think. In any event, that was the largest I've ever seen, but I also saw the death of Alligator gars in Caddo Lake. And, I told you about my neighbor, J.D. Spivey, who lived next door. And he had a friend, who was also a friend of mine, and I don't know if I told you about the spawning of the alligator gar at the head of the government ditch, near my house. But the alligator gar—apparently all of 'em in Caddo Lake, so far as I knew—and I say apparently, all of 'em gathered at that point at a certain time in the spring and—the time was very close to—near the same calendar date but not exactly. The alligator gar congregated in this one group and so occupied the narrow though deep channel at the head of this upper ditch that they actually made passage of a boat impossible. You had to force your way through alligator gars, they were so close together. They were thickly packed in there, and they were squirming and jumping and splashing and that was—it was quite a sight. And it happened each year in the spring, and I'm sure it was spawning rites. Now I don't know that it was the actual act of spawning. I doubt that that was taking place. It was a rite, I think. At least that's my impressions.

DT: Some sort of courtship maybe or ...

FD: A courtship rite, ...

DT: Yeah.

FD: Exactly, and they were packed. Used—I've heard the expression, "packed like sardines," and I—hard to compare these gar to sardines, they were far from sardines. They were huge, but they were putting on a demonstration that was remarkable. And, at least, it was a perfect situation for the work which J.D. Spivey and this other man to perform, and they had been hired, they told me, by the state of Texas, to net the—all of the alligator gars in Caddo Lake, that the state of Texas wished to get 'em out of the way, that they ate the game fish. And because the alligator gars ate the game fish and the fishermen loved to catch the game fish, why, they were gonna improve Caddo Lake by eliminating the gars. They were detrimental to the game fish. So they had great big hoop nets, and at that time I had a camera with me and I photographed them in position with their hoop nets at the head of the ditch where the Gars held their annual mating ritual. I think they did this on two seasons, and I think I have more than one picture of it. And, sure enough, they got 'em all, so far as I'm able to tell. I can't find anybody that claims to've seen one. So as I understand, any race, when it's reduced below a certain point, that it then goes on to extinction, like passenger pigeons.

DT: When do you think that was?

FD: Well, I've owned several cameras in my life, and so I would be able to tell by the camera film, if I could locate that—about the date, but I think that that—World War II is a landmark in my personal calendar. And I think that that was after World War II, so it must've been about—between, say, '47 and '50, so it must've been about '48 or '49.

DT: Well, tell me about another fish I think has changed over the years a lot—the paddle fish. I understood that they used to harvest the roe, sell 'em for caviar? Is that right?

FD: That's right, and many ...

DT: Can you tell a little about that market and what's happened to the paddle fish over the years?

FD: Well, I'm a—first of all, I've got to state that I did not witness any of this, but it was common knowledge and undisputed when I was young—no one claimed that wasn't so. Paddle fish were marketable fish, mainly for their roe, which was sold as caviar in the markets in the north. Now, according to my information, their favorite place for the market buyers to meet the fishermen was on Taylor Island. That's where we are right now. And they met right down—maybe two or 300 yards below the pier was the old-time meeting place for boats, and so they must've met right there.

[TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE: Phone rings.]

FD: Uh-oh. 'Scuse me. I forgot. The roe were shipped up north. Now at that time, Carnack was the nearest settlement, and the railroad tracks ran through Carnack and they had daily trains through here, several each day. And so they had refrigerated car service from here to New York and the places up there, and so the fish were sold for the roe. Generally it was eliminated, you know, and the fish was discarded and the roe was packed in ice and shipped up to the New York markets. The Spoonbill cat is—occasionally a specimen is caught in Caddo that I have heard of.

DT: That's another name for paddle fish is Spoonbill cat?

FD: Yeah, that's—yes. That's a local name is Spoonbill catfish but they're partly paddle fish, and most of the natives call 'em Spoonbill catfish. The fish itself was not particularly edible, and—but the roe was considered a delicacy, and certainly a rarity, and so now these Spoonbill cat are near extinction. I think they're not quite extinct, and in fact I think the state of Texas is hatchery-raising this Spoonbill cat to replace it.

DT: I want to talk to you a little bit about some of the vegetation in the lake. And one thing I was curious about, I remember reading in your book that there's duckweed in the lake, but there

always was duckweed in history. I was curious if you can tell how it came and what sort of effect it's had on the lake.

FD: Yes. The duckweed is not native to Caddo Lake. At least when I was young I never saw any duckweed. But I think the same group of people—whom I don't name because I cannot be certain of any one exact name, and I hesitate to try—was eliminated—with the Spoonbill cat, the alligator gar were eliminated. Next they decided that they could improve Caddo Lake's duck hunting by planting a plant known as duckweed in the lake. Now, at the time, I thought that the only reason it was called duckweed was to sell it, because the sportsmen club that planted the duckweed said that it was food for ducks, and that it would draw great quantities of ducks, and since the duck-hunting take had been declining on Caddo for many years, that planting duckweed would attract ducks—more ducks and we could shoot more ducks. So they hired the same two men that they hired to net the gar—they hired them to distribute duckweed's seed around the lake and it was very successful. They've got duckweed all over the surface of the lake. I cannot find that the duckweed are especially harmful to anything in the lake. Neither do I think they attract great numbers of duck, which they were supposed to do. Actually I haven't seen any duckweed eaten by any ducks that I can observe through my window by my desk, right at the side of the lake. But I'm told that some ducks—not all ducks but some ducks—do eat duckweed. I still have not, with my own eyes, observed this. I have observed numerous ducks, more or less standing in the water and flapping their wings—I'm sure you've seen them do that—trying to get the duckweed out of their feathers, which seems to bother 'em when their feathers get entangled with the duckweed. Nevertheless, it is not particularly harmful. It gets in our outboard motor sometimes and stops up the water intake in outboard motors and is—I just don't like duckweed and—but, I confess to being prejudiced.

DT: Well, speaking of ducks, was there much of a market-hunting effort at Caddo for water fowl?

FD: This—the duck hunting—when I was a small boy and helping my dad with his decoy lines, my dad would go hunting and people would come back with tales of the ducks they had killed. My dad's uncle, which was the house that he—where he went duck hunting from—would be covered on the outside—they would hang ducks in the old days. They would draw their entrails and hang the ducks by their necks outdoors so that the interior cavity of the duck could drain, and cool off, and preserve the flesh as long as possible without refrigeration. So the two-story log house owned by my uncle—one of my uncles—not the same one that brought me fishing but another uncle—would be covered with the ducks they had shot. I don't think—and I never heard of and I don't know—and I knew a lot of people who hunted ducks then and now. And I think the duck-hunting limits as to how many to shoot were celebrated more in the—breaking the limits than in keeping the limits, and I don't know of but one of 'em that didn't kill the limit of ducks when he was able to and bring them in, and go back and get another limit in the same day. They were just—absolutely I don't know of one duck hunter, among my friends, that did not hunt the ducks illegally. And I'm not gonna gain friends by saying that, by—and possibly there were. I just say that I don't know of them. They—it's shameful, really, to kill in excess, but it's been done every season that I know of—since I've known Caddo Lake and I've known it from a young child.

DT: Well, this is I guess sort of a detour. I've meant to ask you, I guess, a few more things about the vegetation. So maybe if you don't mind, I could go back?

FD: Sure.

DT: I've heard that Route 43, for some reason, is—what some people think is the western-most

boundary of Spanish moss, at least in Caddo Lake. Do you think that's subtle and do you have any idea why, if that is true?

FD: Well, no, I don't have any idea of why. I doubt that it's an exact limit but it is an approximate limit, and I don't know why. I've read books, and the books say that Spanish moss needs sunshine, air and water, and that's all it needs to grow. And I know on—Spanish moss having grown on wire fences, so it does not apparently depend upon being in the tree, nor does it take any food from the tree. Now I don't—I really can't answer that.

DT: Well, I guess it's one of those mysteries.

FD: Yeah.

DT: Something that may've been more clear. Do you remember much logging around here and—of the cypress or the pines?

FD: No, I don't. I do know that there's a lot of illegal logging done. I had an experience in my family where a prominent man had cut all the logs on her land. He—it was a prominent lawyer, in fact, who had had my aunt's property logged, and when I faced him with it and let him know that I knew what the law—the penalty in law was, then he left the trees lying on her land. And so he cut all the trees on my aunt's land and then didn't haul them off. [Laughs.] Nevertheless, I have personal knowledge of that. Also my brother had some land in the county, and they cut all the trees on it, and that was a fairly recent \*\*\*, you know, in the Fort Cavil-Fort Caddo Road that goes into Marshall. It was a historic location. On Caddo Lake, I know of a man who decided he should cut all the cypress trees off of the islands in the lake, and to that end he built a barge that was run by an automobile engine, and it had a paddle wheel on the back. And the barge—it was a metal barge and was large enough to carry his pickup truck to an island in the lake, and he decided to cut all these trees and haul them out of the lake, move 'em with his truck to his barge and barge 'em out of the lake and then move 'em with his truck to his broomstick factory and make broomsticks out of 'em. But the state of Texas fortunately caught him, confiscated his barge and they tied it up right down here near the end of Taylor Island, and I think the hulk of it is still underwater there probably. At least it was there for many years until it finally sank. So they stopped it. I incidentally also made Kodachrome slides of the barge which passed in front of my house at this corner right here. And, so...

DT: Well, good riddance. Indeed.

FD: Good riddance, yes.

DT: Oh.

FD: Occasionally we get people that—like that.

DT: I heard you talk a lot about different parts of Caddo, and I imagine you've been many other places, and I often try and ask people, when they talk to me, about—what is their favorite spot, and how—what makes it so special to them.

FD: Well, I have a favorite spot? Is that what you're asking me?

DT: If you do, I'd...

FD: Yes, I do have a favorite spot. In fact, I've got a lot of 'em. My favorite one right now I call the cathedral, and it's just up here. And it's a little opening in the big trees—a little spot of open water, rather oval-shaped, with one entrance, although there may be two openings at this one entrance, and you can go in there. You're really not out of sight. But, nevertheless, you feel like you're in a cathedral. You feel like the huge cypress tree trunks are the buttresses of the old cathedrals and the branches touch overhead—far overhead. Then you have the feeling you're inside a high-roofed domed cathedral with flying buttresses around you, and the filtered sunlight through the green leaves is—has a greenish hue as if it were coming through stained glass, and

you have a feeling of awe. And, you—I'm not alone in that, because after I had worshipped—if you call it by that word—in the cathedral for some time, you see, a matter of years—one day I noticed there was a little square plaque on one of the trunks way high up, facing outwards towards the channel, which is used—well, it's the plaque—and I've forgotten right now, but it had a saying about—a quotation from the Bible. So someone other than I must've felt—been influenced by the same factors that I was, and that's very close here.

DT: Well, it's interesting that you mention the plaque, because oftentimes I try and ask people that—to look at this little tape that we're doing...

FD: Um-hmm.

DT: ...as a sort of message in a bottle or a sign on a road that...

FD: Um-hmm.

DT: ...other people will read, and I'm curious when somebody might pick this up and listen to it or see it, what sort of message you'd like to pass on to other people who might \*\*\*.

FD: Well, I think the message is to acknowledge that we have to believe that there is something greater than ourselves that is directing the earth and the people on the earth. I think this is the necessity. I'm a product of the—although I didn't graduate—of the University of Texas, and it was at the University that I more or less was in an atheistic attitude that was new to me because I had been attending the college of Marshall, which was a Baptist institution, and their great subject was the Bible. Nevertheless, there had been—the great-uncle that brought me first to the lake was an atheist. My family really had been Baptists and I had not—I've had problems with the Baptist faith. And so I joined the Lutheran Church ...

[Tape 3 of 3, Side A.]

FD: ...I had not—I've had problems with the Baptist faith. And so I joined the Lutheran Church, and I found that I had problems there eventually. So I—but I—the cathedral on Caddo Lake is my retreat where I try to resolve the mystery of life, and I feel there must be some direction from a outside Force greater than mankind, and that's my belief, and you need to—every man needs to retreat to a place where he can commune with whatever God he believes in, or whatever Force he feels is directing the earth, because I feel there must be a direction. We're not here, surely, to be wasted.

DT: Well said. Well said. I see we're just about out of tape, so I just wanted to thank you, take this chance to say how much I enjoyed the...

FD: Well, I doubt that you have anything—yeah, I see the light blinking. I doubt that we have anything that will—is usable, so...

DT: Oh. You're too modest.

End of tape

End of interview with Fred Dahmer