

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Nancy Umphres (NU)

INTERVIEWER: David Todd (DT)

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TRANSCRIBERS: Jennifer Gumpertz, Robin Johnson

REELS: 2369 and 2370

DT: My name is David Todd, and I'm here for the Conservation History Association of Texas. It's February 24th, 2006. And we're in Zapata, Texas, and have the good fortune to be visiting with Nancy Umphres who has been a wildlife rehabilitator, and has taught environmental education, and has been involved in—in advocacy for conservation. And we're hoping that she can sort of fill us in on some of—of her life and interests. Thanks very much.

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NU: Welcome—well, thanks for coming.

DT: Right. I thought we might start by asking you about your childhood, and whether there might have been some early experiences that led to your interest in the outdoors, and wildlife conservation. Any of those kinds of themes.

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NU: Yeah. Well, my parents were both—my father had been in the military, of course during World War II, and when he came back to the States, I think he was a little bit upset by the situation, you know, that was—it—what was happening in the country. So they decided they'd kind of chuck in the working nine-to-five and travel. And what they

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did was they'd build homes and then sell them, and then we'd travel, camping, on the money that, you know, until it—we got low again. And then they'd stop and build another home. And so we traveled extensively in Mexico. Baja, Mexico, Central America, and then the Bahamas. And they ended up in the Bahamas on their dream boat. So it was—but we did it camping. You know, we were always out. Like the trips to Baja. In those days it would take, you know, two weeks to get down to a nice ocean-side

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camping spot. You might pass one car in ten days. So it was ten miles an hours, you know. Camper, haul your own water, haul your own gas. So it—I wa—was exposed very early to wildlife, camping, being out under the stars, that type of thing.

DT: Did you have any particular jobs that you were given by your family to take care of when you were out camping?

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NU: Yeah. We—everything that—I always said it was like being in the French Foreign Legion. I could've joined. I knew you had to be—you had your one cup of water in the morning you had to do everything with. And it was packing up the campsite, you know, just getting everything organized. Getting—my mother and I collected rocks. The truck used to go down further and further. It infuriated my father because we'd fill up the truck with all the different rocks we fo—found in different locations.

DT: Did—did you collect any animals or—other kinds of—of remains around the campsites?

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NU: Well, I always made friends with all the local dogs. My friends used to say I was like a dog

catcher. I always run with the, you know—make—feed the starving dogs, and that type of thing. And then at night you could watch the—you know, the rodents and the coyotes. You would listen to—the coyotes would come right up to the camp because they didn't—you know, they didn't see people in those days. Very few people traveled in that part of Mexico in those days. The first trip we did was by boat, and it was from San Diego. We were trying to make it to the tip of Baja. And that was—I was three. Of

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course, I got sick, so we had to cancel that trip. About half way down, they had to come back by—by truck. Truck the—first s—that's the first sailboat they built. And that was their—it was a small sailboat. And it was my sister and I and my parents.

DT: Well, I guess living out of a—a trailer, or out of boat...

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NU: Camper, yeah.

DT: ...would—would teach you how to live very simply, and without a lot of the usual gear and equipment that you might have if you were settled in a single home.

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NU: Yeah.

DT: Is that the case?

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NU: Yeah. It was very minimal, you know. You were allowed to s—just a certain amount of clothes, certain amount of toys, because I was a kid. And Baja, I think it was the first time I really saw what the effect of over-population, or over—let's say over-hunting, over-fishing. In those days, you used to go—when you come into the village you'd—and my sister—I was talking to my sister about it this morning, because they traveled when she was young also. She's eleven years older than me. She remembers that you could—you'd see a few turtle shells, but not miles and miles of them. And by the time I was probably six, seven, eight, you'd go for miles and miles before you'd get

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to the little villages, of just turtle shells. Just hundreds, thousands of turtle shells. You'd get into the village and they'd just be packed. You know, they were just hunting them without any—there was no control, no protection. And I think that's one of my earliest memories, is seeing all those turtles stacked, dying, you know, just—and passing the miles and miles of sh—empty shells.

DT: And were they capturing these turtles for—for food...

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NU: Yeah.

DT: ...or for shells?

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NU: For food. For food. The shells were just thrown. But the—it was just the food. It was a popular delicacy. And it—just uncontrolled hunting. Of course, they almost became extinct due to that. Now they're coming back with protection. Mexico is actually protecting the different egg sites and doing a lot of, you know, research to make sure they don't go. But you can see why they almost did. I mean it was just horrifying.

DT: Were these Green Turtles, or Riddleys, or what kind were they?

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NU: Yeah. Any kind they could get. It was just about everything.

DT: How would they catch them?

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NU: I don't even remember. I suppose it was the head fisherman going out all the time. Spears, a lot of them had the—the spears. Nets. You know, they were pretty prevalent then. You'd see them just—they'd get them while they were floating on the surface.

DT: You said that some of your early travels also exposed you to over-hunting, and over-population. Could you talk about that?

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NU: Well, one of the worst places I think I've seen is—is Haiti. My sister and I were teaching in the Dominican Republic, and we went for a—it was like a—you know, the teachers all got together and went for a trip to Haiti, and we saw the tourist side of Haiti. And we thought, God, this would be a wonderful place to live, because the art was incredible. The people are incredible. So we went back. You know, this was in 1976, because we got stuck there, with very little money, and we—because we couldn't get a flight back because it was during the bicentennial. And so we saw the true Haiti. And

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that just—you know, no—no controls. When you fly over it, all the lumber has been wiped out, you know, from different com—countries coming in. No—no protection on anything. And the poverty is just horrendous. I can't even imagine what it's like now. Of course, that's when it was under Baby Doc. And Papa Doc had—had passed away and it was under Baby Doc. But just seeing the uncontrolled lumber, very few wa—you know, nothing left in the wildlife, basically. And the—the poverty. It was just—it really opened your eyes. Because most people I think—that you meet around here, they're—

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you know, where th—where have they gone in their life? Probably Las Vegas and Disneyworld. I mean they just don't see what can happen in these countries that have no protection. And they don't understand why we have environmental laws. You know, the good ol' boy mentality, "I should be able to do with my land whatever I want." But you can see what happens when there's no controls.

DT: Can you talk about some of the—the—the population issues that you just touched on? You talked about the poverty and the overuse of the resources there, but I think you suggested that it might also be that some of the families are—are too large. The population rate (?).

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NU: Yeah. The population—over-population is one of the major concerns. I mean if we don't do something, it's—it's ultimately going to be our extinction. I think the only thing you—which of course you can't get this across, especially to the religious right, but you really should only be allowed to reproduce yourself. I had kids when I was teaching school that came from families of twenty-two, eighteen, fourteen. They're just average. These are the kids I had in ISS, you know, the In-School Suspension that were having, you know, problems with drugs, with their attitude. And it's just—it's be—the population has increased. I think Al Gore had a special on it the other day. And it—and if we don't do something it's just—you know, population control is the main—one of the main issues, other than, of course, global warming. But—the problem is no one's doing anything about it. I think Al Gore's one of the first politicians I've heard even mention it.

DT: Well I guess it's a sensitive issue because it brings up sort of xenophobic problems with immigration or interfering with people's reproductive rights. And...

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NU: Yeah. It's funny. They can do it with their drugs, but they can't do it with reality. I mean we've got to do something. That's why I got really involved in environmental issues, is because it's—it's just the survival of our species. I mean it's common sense. We can't handle the growth. I mean you guys came from Laredo this morning. They can't handle the growth from NAFTA. They can't handle the traffic. And the poverty level is in—is increasing rather than decreasing. Along the border, they can't handle the pollution. That's the base—you know, it just—what can you do?

DT: Well, one of the things that you've clearly tried to do is help some of the wildlife that have been affected by the growth in the human population, and I guess some of the conflicts with people. And I understand that your training was as—as a veterinary assistant at the McAllen Animal Hospital. Can you tell about how that might have introduced you to protecting and caring for animals?

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NU: This was in McAllen, yeah, in the early '70s. I've—I think I became interested—I wanted to be a—a veterinary technician. And—but because we were moving to Zapata, in those days, they didn't have a veterinarian in this area. I switched to education. But seeing the—when we first moved to the valley it was like California was in the early years when they still had the orange groves and all the good farming land. And we left because of the—the growth in that area too. You know, I mean they're putting up subdivisions in some of the most fertile farmland in the country. And it's the same thing

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with the wildlife. There's no habitat left. You've got the jaguarundi, the ocelot. It's a subtropical climate, so you've got all these unique animals that are only found in that part of this country, that people come—you know, birders come from all over the world. And there's so little natural area left. Now, a few fought people fought for it like you—we were talking about Cindy Chapman, trying to protect the little park areas that are there. But right now there's a whole thing on—to start gambling, and—on the island—on Padre Island. And casinos, getting rid of the wetlands. It's just—it's this lack of planning, and

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lack of respect for anything natural. It's just—it's the—I guess what you see is just the greed and not thinking of the future, and no planning. I mean you see that in Laredo. There was really no planning to their growth. They can't handle it. As we were talking about Nuevo Laredo. Right now it's—it's—it's anarchy. They can't control the violence. They can't control the corruption.

DT: Well, you know, given all the problems that are related to people's culture and civilization, and you know, the impact on the natural environment, how did you choose being interested in wildlife care, and being the veterinary assistant, or the...

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NU: I guess I always done it. You know, since a kid, I'd—was that type. I'd always brought everything injured home. And of course, we were traveling a lot, so you couldn't do much. But it was one of those things that you—I was always interested in. And I'd lived in—we lived for four years in the jungles of Belize when I was a teenager. And I did a lot of rehabilitation there.

DT: What sort of animals would you care for? What kind of injuries would you see?

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NU: One was a kinkajou. Somebody'd caught it. One of the hunters had caught it as a baby. We

raised it. It's a—like a honey bear. The—the big eyes, kind of—they look a little bit like a bush baby. There was squirrels, different animals that, you know, the hunters would either find orphaned, we'd raise. Lots of parrots. Lots of—they'd rob the nests. And that continued on into the Dominican Republic. Every time somebody would find an injured animal, they'd bring it to me. And we'd have owls—barn owls, and Great Blue Herons, and—you know, the house was always full of one—you know, the bathtub would have a Great Blue Heron in it. And we worked with the San Anton—Santo Domingo Zoo then, and we would release the—either release the ones that could be releasable, or we would donate the ones to the zoo that couldn't be released. And in Colombia I used to hit all the pet stores. And—and they were pretty ghastly. So I'd

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rescue—this was in Bogotá. My sister and I taught school there. And I would bring home monkeys, parrots, doves, things that were sick, you know, that I'd find in these awful pet stores.

DT: And so you were mostly caring for wild animals rather than domestic pets.

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NU: Purple Gallinule found in the middle of the city, you know, which is the birds with the big long toes. And then we'd try to get them re—release them out—take a trip out and release them out, or find zoos that they could go to. You know, a hand-raised monkey can't go back to the wild. And just different areas.

DT: And so you worked with both zoos and veterinarians? Is that the typical pattern?

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NU: Yeah. In—in Colombia it was mainly with different zoos. Some of the kids that we worked for would take on some of the—you know, that were staying when we left would take some of the animals. We actually brought my parrot—I had a parrot I brought back. I had her for years. But most of them we tried to place in zoos or released them. My sister collected street children because in Bo—Bogotá at the time—this was early '70s, and I can imagine what it's like now, but the children were just left to fend for themselves, so many of them in the streets. So her thing was trying to get these kids into

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orphanages. I mean they had a special vehicle that picked up dead children every morning. This was a—you know, a very e—I'm sure it's worse now. So we would take the kids in and then try to place them. Or she would. So our house was always full of street kids, and it was so—sort of like wild animals. But it—we had an orphanage we worked with around the corner also. You know, it's...

DT: Well, did you and your sister see a connection between the orphaned kids, the street kids, and these wild animals that had, for one reason or another, gotten abused or abandoned?

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NU: Yeah. It was just brought in or—like the children, they—mothers couldn't han—most of their mothers were prostitutes. And these kids would actually live on their own. I mean they would—three—they'd take care of their siblings, but they lived in the streets. And the animals were brought in from their—not unnatural habitat, and put up for sale, and neglected. You know, it was just sort of a mutual thing, I guess, with the—and then the extreme—there was extreme poverty, but there was also extreme wealth. We had—we taught at an American school. I—I did mostly tutoring, but she taught at an American school there. And some of these people had gold-plated piping. I mean, you know, and the kids ca—arrived in ch—with chauffeurs to come to the house to be tutored. It—it's just the two extremes again, which you're seeing more and more, especially with NAFTA.

DT: It seems like you've had episodes in your life in Mexico and Belize and Dominican Republic, but in the mid '70s you returned to the States. And you worked in McAllen Animal Hospital.

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NU: Yeah.

DT: And eventually, as I understand, settled here in Zapata?

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NU: My husband's from here. And he always wanted to come back and start his own oil and gas business. A gauging service. So that was his dream to come back and start a business. He liked the area, I like the area. And there was such a need for—the same thing happened when we came here. People started bringing me their injured animals. Word gets around. I worked with the local library doing programs, and art classes, and—and so it just started up again. And my sister said, well, there's a group in the valley called Bird Rescue, and it was established by Cindy Chapman. And she said you should join them and see if, you know, you could get—of course, you have to get a license, you have to be federally and state licensed. So that's how I kind of started it. My husband was interested in it. He was al—he's always been interested in wildlife, and especially the raptors, hawks, and owls. So I was trained by Cindy Chapman and Judy Bartells.

DT: What did they show you?

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NU: They—they gave me—you know, I'd call them when I had, you know, splinting, basics. We didn't have a veterinarian here then. We had to go to Laredo. And the very few veterinarians there would even, you know, at that time help you out. Now I've got a quite a good group, and we have our own veterinarian that works here in Zapata that volunteers all his time. But, yeah, they taught me just the basic rehabilitation, which I knew a lot of, but, you know, a lot more on medication. We had training sessions. We

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went to seminars. And I did this for about two years. And in '89—I kept getting mammals in, so I wanted to add mammals. But they didn't. They wanted to stick strictly to birds. It's about all they could handle. Now they'd get a thousand birds a—a year. And so I branched off, and we started the Zapata County Nature Conservation Society. And that was the park project, was one of our main interests that were going to do, is have a rehab center here, right next to the library here in Zapata. There's this very small

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park. I would say it's probably not even two acres. But it had a pond, it had a very nice, natural habitat. And we thought what a great place for a nature center. Education—we could do everything there. And then we—that's where we ran into problems.

DT: What—what sort of problems did you run into? And what time was this? What year was this?

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NU: This was the early '90s when we started. And it was—it was one of the few pap—places in the whole country where the White Collared Seed Eater, which is a very small little bird, nests. People come from all over the world to see this bird. It's only seen in very rare areas. The park in town was one of them. There's an—large area in San Ignacio also, the little town you came through on your way here. So I thought, perfect, this is just perfect. We got a group of people together. We started working with the local government preparing packets to show how beneficial environmental tourism is,

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the money it brings. We have it here. We had everything. It was there. All we had to do was protect it. First problem we had was with the water department, which is right next to the park. It was run by Adrian Ramirez. He still runs it. And he—he stepped in and said that we couldn't do this, but he couldn't really say why. There was really no reason to it. But he brought the water and cou—let's see, what was it—the Water Boundary Commissioner—into our rehab center, which was in our backyard at the time. And he

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came on without permission and told the Water and Boundary Commission man to open the cages and let the injured birds out, that I wasn't licensed. Well, he got a little suspicious. He thought something was going wrong. So he—he refused. And they left, and they ran into one of the game wardens—just luck. He was driving by this area. And he stopped him and asked if I was licensed. And he said, yeah, of course she's licensed.

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She's been licensed ever since she started here. And he called me later. He was w—out of Weslaco, I think it was, and said this man's got it in for you. I don't know why, but he—you know, that was our first problem we had. He went to the judge and he told the judge that we were—and that was Judge Flores at that time, very nice man, to the type that we're s—you know, has a ranch here, understands the environment. But he went to Judge Flores and told him we were in—only into this for personal gain, you know.

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And—and so—it's caused all sorts of problems. I demanded he go and explain to the judge that he—you know, that all this was something that he was making up. It's—it gets—it was very complicated, but he did go in, and then finally back off. But that was just the first problem we had. We had Earth Day celebration there, and they flooded the park the day we had the—we had a band there, we were celebrating Earth Day, and the Water Department chose that day to—to clean their filters, you know. Flooded the entire park. The band was being electrocuted by their equipment. You know, this type of thing.

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So we finally decided we'd back off from the park, even though we'd—we'd put up all the fences. We'd raised money for fencing. We had raised money—people in town were really for this. We'd raised money for plants. Plants were stolen, the fences were destroyed, usually by young men driving drunk. All our volunteers were harassed that were working there. And what we found out, the main problem was this park was used for drug dealing. And I think that was one problem. That's why our—our volunteers were harassed. And my husband finally said, you know, you just got to quit this. It's just

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not going to happen. It's just a—you're beating your head against a wall. And this has gone on ever since. They s—during—what was it, 1998, the—they had a birding group coming here from the valley. People from all over the world to see the White Collared Seed Eater. It was nesting season. And it was Earth Day also. Con—I get a call, and they're bulldozing. They—the Los Ebinos Golf Course, which was run by Rinato Ramirez, which is also a—one of the main bank managers in town, bulldozed the area in

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front of the birders during the height of the season. And it—it—it just—all it was was one little area that could be protected. I mean he just did—there's no common sense to that. And you

could say, okay, he didn't know any better, but he did know better. The—there were signs all over town, you know. “Welcome to Zapata, Home of the White Collared Seed Eater.”

DT: So what do you attribute it to? That—that kind of attitude, or...

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NU: I don't know. You know, my husband and I were talking about that. It—he knew better because I'd walked the same area with him a few years before and had said this is an area that needs protecting. Nothing has been done. They said they were bulldozing it for the golf course. Nothing's been done to this day. That was in 1998. It—of course they went in and re-dug the pond, and completely destroyed the habitat. So it never will come back now. I think he just felt like doing it that day, and didn't really care. I don't

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know if there was some vendetta to someone—to the judge that happened to be judge then, I don't really know the politics of it. It made no sense. That's the thing. And it—it got worldwide attention. And because of that, I think Zapata wasn't chosen for one of the birding centers of this part of the country. I think it would have been if it hadn't been for that. But it...

DT: Well, so after you ran into this dead end on trying to create a nature center and rehab center in the park, you decided to build a building where we are now?

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NU: Yeah. It just—it was—yeah. It—and many people have tried since to try and do something with that park, but it—I just felt it wasn't safe. If people are going to be—if it's—if it's a drug situation, you're going to get bad things done, you know, if you have animals there. So we—I just backed off and we became Zapata Wildlife Rescue. Which we bought this lot that we're on here, and we had a old mobile home, and we just went fundraising to build our cages here where we could protect it, and we didn't have to depend on anyone else.

DT: Well, maybe you can tell us a little bit about this core thing that you've been involved in for many years, I guess since—since childhood, really, but since the Wildlife Rescue was set up in '87, I believe. This wildlife rehabilitation work. Can you give us an idea of the number and kind of animals that you typically get in (?)...

(Break.)

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NU: ...know what's going in politics.

DT: Well, so I was asking before we went off tape that I was curious about the—the Zapata Wildlife Rescue operation. And that basically, maybe a place to start would be to find out what kind of animals you've been treating, and how many you might see in a typical year, and...

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NU: It started out it was basically birds, because that's what we were licensed to do. Then I and—added mammals because we saw them more and more. Usually I would get, like, injured deer that came from the border. Injured fox. It was—I worked with a Fish and Wildlife officer that worked at the border. But you're—majority are songbirds during nesting season, storm-related orphans falling from nests. That type of thing. I've had just about every species I would say. Owls, hawks, hit by cars. Migration, we see a lot of birds. When I began, I would say I'd have—I started out with probably six—sixty birds, seventy birds a year. Then I started to take—most of the animals that went to the Gladys Porter Zoo, which is in Brownsville, that's when it got insane, because they would bring them up by the truckload. You know, if they got babies in, they'd bring them up here. Well, people don't understand, when you have baby birds they have to be

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re—fed every fifteen minutes from dawn to dusk. This is—you know, if you have owls, it's every two to four hours, a young owl, around the clock. So it got—got up to I—I think I was doing two hundred, maybe, a year, which doesn't sound like a lot, but when you get it all in—pretty much in an—in a springtime, it's—and it's around the clock, sometimes you don't sleep. It's—you know, it's seven days a week. You don't have a lot of volunteers up here.

DT: And tell me, you're feeding all these animals. Are you trying to simulate their wild diet, or...

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NU: Yeah.

DT: ... are there kind of stand-in food that you (inaudible)?

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NU: No. You have to raise mice, you have to have—everything. That's one of the problems. We see people bring in birds that have been given the wrong diet. Of course, it causes rickets, it causes all sorts of problems, bone problems. So you have to—you know, you may have seven different birds and seven different diets. You have to have mice. Baby owls have to have the fur and the bones, so you're pulverizing mice and feeding them mice. Cri—you know, you have the insectivores that eat crickets. You have the fruit eaters, the seed eaters. So yeah, it's a varied diet.

DT: And how would you get these different kinds of food and animals?

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NU: I've raised a lot of mice. I'd order crickets by the thou—five thousand at a time. You know, I've got a good place to order. I never can raise enough mice, so I'd be buying them frozen and have them sent in. When you have baby owls you can't—I mean if you've got thirteen baby barn owls, there's no way you can raise enough mice unless you've got a huge breeding facility going.

DT: Would you have to have a special diet for the young animals?

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NU: Milk. Yeah. The milk replacement, like deer. Some deer come in, they have problems. Or if they have to go on antibiotics, it sets off their system. And you have to get powdered goat milk. Fresh goat milk's better. I had neighbors that would save me fresh goat milk. Just different—you know, I go—I work with different ranch supplies that get me the milk. Sometimes people donate it. It's very expensive.

DT: Well, maybe you can tell us about your kind of support network, the folks that would help you with all these special foods that can provide, you know, in pretty bulk, too.

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NU: Yeah. Yeah, the—our feed stores are good. I do a lot of ordering. I've always—when we were in the height of doing so many animals I had a great volunteer system then of retired winter Texans that would help me. Like—if you have beavers in, they have to have certain willows. Well people would go down to the lake and cut willows for me. I'd—you know, when you're working around the clock, it's hard to make time to go down and—to the lake and cut some willows for the baby beavers. So it's—it's just a constant thing. (Inaudible)

DT: How would you find out what kinds of foods for the right ones?

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NU: Well, that's—all that is—is done through a wildlife network. Books. There's many—there's so many books written on wildlife rehabilitation now. And if you have any questions, you call the network, Internet—you know, the Wildlife Rehab, and they'll give you answers. Like if—you know, what's the baby formula for—for bats? I mean I got a bunch of bats in that needed

milk. Well, it has to have a special formula. I got Least Interior Terns, which are an endangered species, in once. They're a little water bird which are found in this area. No one knew what a diet would be for these. So you just kind of guesswork, blended up a bunch of crickets and minnows, and it worked. And vitamins, and you know, suggestions from zoos, and...

DT: So you would also supplement their foods with vitamins, minerals?

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NU: Well, yeah. Water birds especially. It's B-1 they lack, so you have to add B-1 to their diet. Pelicans. I'd call Gladys Porter Zoo, ask what the best worming would be for pelicans. They're always very helpful.

DT: Were there some kinds of—of injured animals that required special diets that are different from the conventional animals that might come in?

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NU: Well, we had—one of the most rare birds we had, which was only the second one to land in Texas, which was a—a Red Billed Tropicbird. And not only was the diet a problem, because they're a fish eater, and it was a young bird, but it was—what antibiotics can they tolerate? No one had ever had these birds in captivity before. So it was a lot gu—you do a lot of guesswork with some species.

DT: And then you mentioned antibiotics. What sort of medicines would you have to provide for these animals?

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NU: Well, that's where we're lucky. We have a—Dr. Sam Bottenfield, which is our local veterinarian, and he—he usually has his “good book.” He looks everything up for us. And you know, some antibiotics can't be tolerated. And like with deer, you have to supplement them with yogurt to get their system back after they've been on antibiotics. But he's volunteered for us, and been on our board for years. He and his wife, Danni—Diette Bottenfield. And they've helped a lot, and with the mediation, and surgery. He does all our surgery for free. You know, setting wings, adding pins, that type of thing.

DT: Well, why don't you talk to us a little bit about the kind of injuries that you might see that would require all your antibiotics, or other drugs, or possibly surgery.

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NU: Most common is hit by car. That would, I'd say, the most common. Or hitting a power line. Power lines are deadly to Great Horned Owls. Barbed wire does a lot of damage. When they get caught—when they're hunting they fly down and land, twist up in the barbed wire. A lot of times it's just tissue damage, but many times it's fractured bones, and you have to put a pin in. And of course, that takes an experienced veterinarian. A lot of times it's just a wrap. If it's a simple fracture, I'll do it. I'll—just a—you know, just a simple wrap. But most of the (?)...

DT: If it's compound? Or (?)...

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NU: Yeah. It's compound, it has to—yeah. If Sam's not here, I would take to veterinarians in Laredo who also help me. Dr. Kreamer—Phyllis Kreamer.

DT: And for the surgery, is there special anesthesia to (?)...

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NU: Yeah. It depends on the species. Yeah. It's—it's iffy. Water birds are terrible because half the time they—you know, if—if they're stressed—we try to build them up first, then, you know, for a few days, and then perform surgery if needed. And, you know, water birds are so delicate. So many of them don't make it through surgery. You—it's kind of like the last ditch effort when

you have to do surgery.

DT: Is there a kind of triage that you have to go through to figure which animals are strong enough to recuperate, and those that aren't?

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NU: Yeah, you kind of learn that from experience. We get a lot of concussions. That's another thing. We get a lot of birds that come in with concussions. Another thing we've used a lot of is— is reflexology. You know, where you massage and try to get—and—and a l—and a lot of vitamins. Like I've switched to Noni Juice. I don't know if you've heard of Tahitian Noni. It's a natural—it's from a—a berry. And—try—I found the more natural, the better. If you can go to sort of a homeopathic approach. I mean sometimes you can't, but that's worked out very well. The Noni juices helps build them up. Mammals, as well as birds.

DT: You mentioned that some of these animals come in with concussions and broken limbs. Do you see many animals that either have been shot, or perhaps have pollution-related problems?

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NU: Yeah. Elf Owls. I don't know if—many years ago I got two Elf Owls that came from the Rio Grande Valley. They're tiny little—I mean they look like a Great Horned, but full grown they're about the size of your finger. Cute little things. I've only had—seen those two. They were found on a nest—I think it was the Pan-American University Group found them. The parents—it was from pesticides—had died from pesticides. One of the siblings died before they came up here. But they thought this—this was when I was still working with the valley group. They thought they'd have a better chance being

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released up here because there's less pesticides in this area. And we kept them for about a month until they were old enough, and they were released.

DT: Well, how could you tell when an animal has been exposed to something? Did you see lesions, or...

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NU: See—well, a lot of them is seizures. I think they—they figured—these are insect eaters, so of course, the grasshoppers had been sprayed. They were fed to the young. And I think they'd done a autopsy and did—done tests on these, actually knew it was from pesticide poisoning. I have a lot of them come in, and I know it—even in the early days, there was a lot of birds in the valley being born with deformities. Legs facing the wrong way due to pesticide poisoning. Luckily, I haven't seen that in this area. I do see a lot of unexplained seizures. They come in and they're having seizures. And usually—

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sometimes they pull out of it, usually they don't, which it has to be some from some sort of poisoning.

DT: Do you see many animals that have been in an oil slick or had some kind of oil (?)?

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NU: I've had a few. We took a course in that. My—Robert and—my husband, and Sam and Danni, and I and my sister, in what to do in case there was one on the lake. We haven't had—I'd say in the nineteen years I've been doing this, we've had one, I think. Only one that—me—two, two that were in pits. But because there are the stricter laws now where the pits have to be covered with netting, we're not seeing that anymore. Or as often. Of course many of them probably don't get to us. They—but, you know, they have these—on the tanks now that hold oil, everything has to be covered with netting.

DT: And what would you do if an animal got covered with oil? What's the procedure for caring for...

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NU: It's—it's Dawn dishwashing liquid. It's just a lot of washing with Dawn. And keeping them warm, keeping them in just—keep—just a whole procedure of warming, washing, until they—you get it out of their feathers. And Dawn is the best thing that we've—I think most people have found.

DT: Do you see many animals that come in here because they—of some sort of natural phenomenon? A windstorm, or flood, or drought?

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NU: Yeah. Yeah. There was—floods, we see like bobcat kittens. When the flooding, it goes on the—you know, the arroyos, because the kit—the cats tend to nest—not nest, but have their little burrows in the sides of arroyos. And so we get them from flooding. Spring, whenever there's a storm, you just sort of shudder, because you know you're going to get inundated with baby birds blown out of the nest. People are pretty good about if the nest's still there, and I'll talk them into putting them back in the nest, or

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making a makeshift nest and putting it back up, because the parents will continue taking care of them. And it's a lot easier than raising them. And it's a lot better. There was one bobcat, it g—it's a nice story. Her name was Wren. She came from a local ranch right outside of town. And they found her after one of these fl—it was just a devastating flood

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that we had. It was a—and we'd had—we're not used to having that much rain. But they found her unconscious, and they rushed her—the whole family got together, rushed her to our vet. And he took care of her for about—it was about a week, she was out—she was unconscious. And when she came to, Danni was holding her, and she nailed her, bit her. So she said it's time to send her to Nancy. So I got her, and we raised her until she was, you know, release age, about nine months—eight—eight—nine months old. And the

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people wanted her back on their ranch. So we went. And the whole family came out, and grandma and everybody, to watch the release of—of putting her back on their ranch. That's why I like this area. I think in Texas, people around here tend to live on their a—ranch. If they don't live on the ranch, they spend their weekends on the ranch. So they're more attuned to it as a natural—you know, and they want it to stay like that for their—for their kids, their grandkids.

DT: And speaking of people and their attitudes, what sort of people bring in animals, and what's their attitude about finding them and then giving them to you, and seeing them get restored?

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NU: I get everybody—I mean I've gotten so many different—I remember one guy, just tough low-rider guy. He drove all the way from—from Weslaco with baby possums, and he was so upset. You know, long hair, big tough guy, tattoos. And he brought—he was so upset. He brought this whole nest of baby possums. And, oh, I thought, well, there is hope when people will go to that much trouble. And—and I get it from, you know, kids, adults, of course, the game wardens, but it's just a—you know, a wide variety of people. Or they'll call me and ask what to do before they bring them here.

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And they'll take—you know, if it's in Laredo and I can't leave, or they can—they'll make the

trip here. I've had people, you know, as far as the valley, you know, that will drive several hundred miles to bring something in that needs help.

DT: And do you talk to some of these people before they come in about trying to care for it themselves?

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NU: Yeah. I discourage it because I—I'll explain, well, you've got to pulverize, you know, a baby mouse. Do you want to—you've got to cut up mice. Usually, that does it, you know, with—when you have a baby. People want—you know, they have a baby owl, they think it's so cute, or a hawk. And I say, well, you—also, it's against the law and you can get a hefty fine, you know, if you're caught with it. And that's one of the main problems, is people trying to raise them without knowing the right diet.

DT: On the other side, you've got folks who, I guess, are maybe not as interested in these animals. And I'm curious if you could reach some of these folks that maybe hit these animals with their car, or shoot them carelessly, what will be the message to try and bring them into the fold and explain to them why these animals deserve more respect or care?

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NU: Well, they're important. I mean I—example. You—everyone in—and the good ol' boy mentality, just to kill all the coyotes, you know, that you come across. Well, in some parts of Texas, Animal Damage Control has wiped them out. They've wiped out the coyote population. Suddenly they have Bubonic Plague. I mean, you know, they're showing up with a problem with Bubonic Plague because wh—there's nothing to eat the rodents. You know, this—it's—this is a natural process again, which I say, you know, you've—you have a rodent—there was a—a perfect example, was a game warden told me about a rancher down in the Rio Grande City area. He'd shot all the hawks on his

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ranch. He went out and just—you know, because he thought they were getting his chickens, so they were all chicken hawks. So he'd—he'd hired people, which is against the law. I mean he could have gotten a hefty fine. But he'd done this for years. Well, he had such a—an outbreak of rodent population. And of course, all his chicken feed was—and he had—the eggs, everything was being eaten by rats and mice. So he had—called the game warden, begged him to have—to bring in owls and hawks, if they could release—because he realized what he'd done, what—you know, how detrimental it'd been. So they started releasing, you know, hawks and owls in that area to try and build up the population.

DT: Well, are there many cases like that where you've had people that have a kind of epiphany and they realize that there's a different attitude, different kind of understanding that they could have?

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NU: It happens more often than you think, I guess. Yeah. Like, you know, people running over the Texas Tortoise, which is an endangered species. I've always heard and seen—a few times people go out of the way to run them over, but majority of the time I've seen pem—people avoid them, you know. So I think it—people are getting the message, it's just slow. And education, of course, is the main thing. I took—one time I had a class at the library, and we were doing wildlife art. And I had a grackle I was raising at the time. You know, everyone hates the grackle, but I took him in. I thought,

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well, I'll bring him in. And he—he helped me with the pro—he went around and he picked up

their pencils. And the kids had never see—really looked at a grackle that way. He ran around and played with their pencils and their crayons. And he went up and took the American flag off the thing and ran around with the American flag. But it—you know, it's like they'd never thought of them having a personality. He was released and he had—for years he raised his young in this area too.

DT: Well, do you see a difference between animals that are cute and attractive, and other animals that are considered pests or invaders are more common?

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NU: Well, superstition too. Superstition is a problem. Everyone around here thinks barn owls are witches, you know. That's another problem. So they shoot them. Of course, in many cultures, owls are considered either, you know, a witch, or something to do with death. Like the Navajo culture, if you see an owl, it means someone in your family is going to die. And trying to get—I've had—actually had kids be afraid when I've taken—you know, like my education owl that we had for so many years. When they realize it's just an animal, and, you know, a beautiful wild animal, it changes their

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whole perspective. And nobody's dying, and it's—didn't turn into a witch, you know. But it's very common that—kind of that outlook. And especially, you know, these kids that—but once—you know, they're easy to get through. Kids are the ones you really want to hit. They're a lot more susceptible to (?).

DT: What about thinks like snakes, that I think a lot of people have a frightened reaction to. There examples like that, where as they get to know them better, it's maybe s...

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NU: They won't even try. I've had—that's the worst problem I've had, with snakes. I once—I was taking an animal to release. I th—I think I was going out to feed one of them at one of our release sites. And this guy in front of us, back road, middle of nowhere, there was a rattlesnake going across the—the road. He stopped and got his gun. And I mean was shooting in every direction. You know, we were dodging bullets. We were in the vehicle behind him. Just terror over this harmless snake out in the middle of nowhere. I mean that attitude. A lot of—I notice—people ask me, especially men, do

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you do snakes, do you rehab snakes? And they want you to have that reaction, you know, of terror. And I said, well, if an injured one comes in, I'll rehabilitate them. But—my father, when I was three, I remember—it's one of my earliest memories. We found a snake. We were walking. We were in—living in California at the time. And I was af—I f—showed fear, and he picked it up, and it was a little gopher snake. And he had me carry it home to see that it wasn't dangerous. And he let me keep it for about a day or

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two, and realized—and the he said, well, you're going to have to feed it frogs. Of course, I liked frogs, so it was released. But I mean that—you—you know, the fear, getting over the fear.

DT: Well, how do you deal with the situation where you have to kill one animal to have another live?

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NU: That's hard. I've never gotten used to that. I know—the rehabilitators in the valley used to raise rats. Well, I've always had pet rats, so couldn't—I couldn't raise a rat. Mice, I have a gas chamber. I don't have to, you know—I mean I will if I have to, bop them on the head, because I

look at the owls, and I look at the mice, and I know there's a lot less owls than there are mice. But now I have a gas chamber I can gas them in, and they can be fed that way. The—it's—it's hard. I've never got used to it.

DT: Let's talk a little bit about some of the restorations, some of the recoveries that you've seen, and been involved with some of these animals that have gotten rehabilitated. Some of the success stories.

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NU: The—I always think of the one which I had pictures of, was the perfect—you mean like the perfect rescue and rehabilitation? That type?

DT: Well, some that—that were successful, some that were not.

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NU: Yeah. Perfect one I can think of is the White Pelican, which was just a few years ago. He had got—he was a young bird. And I got a call from Beacon Lodge, I think it was. No, it wasn't Beacon. It was the Sunset Villa. Some birders were walking along the lake, and out—quite—offshore quite a ways, probably about thirty feet, there was a pelican with a hook in its leg attached to the—a branch out in the middle of the water. And he'd been there, they thought, for about two days. And they called us. And it was—

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it was February, and it was very cold. It was probably about thirty degrees that day. So we rushed over there, Robert and I. And we looked out, and I thought, oh, my God, it's—it—he was pulling on it, and the more he pulled, the more damage was done to his leg. So we went out—we thought, well, we can get a boat, but it's going to take longer. I'm a good swimmer, so I swam out and got him, and got the hook off and got him in, took pliers, and...

DT: How did you approach the bird? And (?) powerful (?) birds...

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NU: He was—he was exhausted. If we'd waited any longer—it was that type of thing, if we'd waited until the point to get a boat down there, and even though it was cold, and I'm a—you know, I—I could swim it and do it, he was—he was so exhausted he didn't fight me much. So—and I'd taken lifesaving, so it was just like sav—you know, you take him in like you do anyone that's been—that's drow—drowning. And I got him to shore. And Robert ran him up to the—to the truck, because it was quite a ruckus. He's a runner. I'm a swimmer, he's a runner. We got him back to the center. He got the hook

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out, called the vet and his wife, Sam and Danni. They got over here immediately, and we got, you know, antibiotics, got him going. Then there was the problem of feeding him while he healed, because they eat quite bit of fish a day. You know, a White Pelican. So the game wardens worked with us. When they got the illegal nets in, they'd call us no

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matter what time, and we'd go, we'd get all the fish out of the nets. And he was here about—a—just over a month, and he finally was released back. Ro took him right back, and the people that had, you know, reported it came down, and he was released back in that area. And it's hard because you get very attached. He was young, and I had to force feed him for the first couple of weeks. And—but he did real well.

DT: Well, I imagine you do build up a real bond with some of...

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NU: Yeah.

DT: ...animals that you bring back from the brink. And how do you, physically and emotionally, do a successful release?

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NU: It's—that was—that was difficult. I mean because I usually go—if you—you take over the mother role, this bird was young enough that it reverted back to being an infant, which was good, because that made the medications and the bandage changing a lot easier. It's difficult, but you know they're going back to where they should be. I'm sure it was having trouble finding enough fish, so it was like, thank God he's going back at that point. I mean I was driving to Laredo—if we couldn't get enough fish here, I'd have to drive to HEB and, you know, and buy fish there. And it—it's a—it's hard because it's—a bird like that on your—your budget is—practically kills you, you know. It becomes quite an expense.

DT: Well, are there some animals that you know that will be just so expensive to rehabilitate that you have to dispatch them?

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NU: I've never done that yet. No. We've always taken it on. Yeah. I mean I wouldn't take on—I've turned down animals because I don't have the facilities. Like I couldn't take a mountain lion. I'm not set up for a mountain lion. Black bears, I'm not really, you know, set up for something that big. But I've never turned one down because of the financial. We just struggle through, kind of.

DT: Tell us about some other recoveries that you've had. You know, some—maybe with smaller animals, something larger than the pelican.

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NU: Bobcat kittens. I had one recently that had been a—just horrible case of abuse, I'd say. It was—ranch hands had found him when he was young. There were two. They'd found the two kittens and took—kept them in a cage. But, you know, for some reason they'd cut the tufts off of his ears. I have no idea why. And they were—the one kitten had died because of neglect. And the ranch owner just happened to find them. Furious. I mean he was furious at what they were doing—brought the one straight to me.

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He could barley move. It was a month of intensive care. I never thought he'd make it. He couldn't walk. And it—this was during a time when my father was very sick, and it was like I'd—running between hospitals, and—and—and taking care of this bobcat. But we got another one in, healthy kitten, that had been bull—the bulldozer had killed the mother. And he just c—turnaround, a complete turnaround because he thought his sibling was back, I think. And just a complete recovery. And it just—very touching the way he changed when he got, what he thought was his sibling I think had returned.

DT: Well, are there many cases like that where the recoveries are keyed more to not the medicine necessarily, but to something that's emotional?

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NU: Fostering. Foster care. Yeah, foster care, we had a—Nova, our Great Horned Owl, who we just—passed away a few months ago. She would raise all the young Great Horned Owls that came in. So they wouldn't imprint on us. She even hatched a few eggs. One year she raised—I—almost fifteen, I think, Great Horned Owls. And she'd just take them over. They'd come—and she was already broody that time of year. She was a permanently injured owl. She had—was missing the tip to her beak. So I got permission to keep her for education and—and for fostering.

And she'd raise all the young that came in for me, and then they wouldn't imprint, which, you know, if they imprint on you, they're like the dove in the other room. They think they're a person and they won't—when they—mating season comes around they'll go looking for a person

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rather than an owl. So that worked out perfectly. We had a—a—also had a javelina, a Collared Peccary, and he—even though he was a male, he raised every young one that came in. He'd lie down and I'd put the bottles over, and they'd nurse. And they'd nurse on him even when the bottles weren't there. But then they would imprint on him rather than me. It's very important to have a—foster parents in a rehabilitation center.

DT: Is it a natural and common thing to find a mature animal that will act as a foster parent? Or is it an unusual, rare thing?

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NU: Well, usually it's one that's been raised in captivity, because you have to work with them. Like with Nova, she came as a young owl. She was released but then she came back with the injury. She hit a power line and lost her beak. And—it had a little tiny growth underneath it. But she knew us, so she worked out beautifully because she trusted us. And the javelina was the same way. He'd been hand-raised. Because you have to feed them so they can feed the babies.

DT: You mentioned a trust that you build up. Can you talk a little bit about this link between you as a human and these wild animals? And then how you establish that trust?

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NU: Well, it's a—it's hard to explain. I guess you—a lot of it is visualization, which it sounds—it's nothing psychic about it, it's just animals respond more—well, if you—you make the same sounds they make, maybe the—the mother will make to them. You send them visualizations. They're visual—it—it—it's—I've taken a whole course on it. It's to build a trust, especially with an older animal, a wild older. And it does work. It's tiring, but you try to send pictures of calm—you know, your whole demeanor has to be calm. And I've found it's worked really well for older animals.

DT: Well, what's the story about the raccoon that you (?)...

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NU: And that was—yeah. That was one I'd—I hadn't really tired it. And I say it's nothing psychic about it, it's just the way animals communicate. He'd fallen into the—the library, and he'd fallen into the computer room from the roof. And he'd destroyed—I mean just destroyed every comp—every—every key was removed. I mean it was like something out of a Disney movie. Everything was flashing. And he was sitting in the corner like this. A full grown raccoon like this in the corner. And they'd—they couldn't get anyone to come because the Health Department has put a ban on us

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taking care of raccoons at that time. Another whole story. So I had to go because they said, well, we're going to close for the weekend, he'll be here all weekend. He'll starve to death. They couldn't get the Animal Control in town to come, and I didn't know what to do. I had the cage there, I tried a little bread, and he just—so I—I did—I just finished that course, so I tried the—where you visualize—I visualized—I tried to send him this

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vision getting into the cage and being released at the lake. Just a picture. Just a thought. And it worked. I mean it just worked like—he stopped, he gath—he went into the cage, and—and I locked the cage. I mean—no—an adult raccoon can be dangerous. I took him down to the lake

and released him. And it...

DT: Is he—is it a—a one-way communication, or—to...

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NU: One way. I'm sure some people could do, but just did it the one way. Yeah.

[End of Reel 2369]

DT: We were talking earlier about this link between people and animals. And in, you know, some levels it seems like there's a kind of an odd situation of people living with wild animals. You know, you've got civilized people live in houses, that have jobs, and you've got these wildlife that have a very different experience of the world, you know, of being in wild habitat. So I was just hoping you could talk more about this connection that you feel, and how you found that link, and how you explore it. I mean this communication and telepathy you were talking about before, maybe as an example.

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NU: Yeah. I—well, I think we're getting furth—the further we get from nature, the further we get from understanding nature, the closer we're going to get to our extinction, which is just common sense because we're—you know, we're destroying our air, we're destroying our water. And you're seeing that at such a rapid pace here on the border, because we're getting everything with uncontrolled—from Mexico. Well, U.S. companies in Mexico. And you see this affecting the wildlife. Or you see the—the encroachment, like you say, of people moving out to these isolated areas, but they can't

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understand why there's a coyote, and of course they want to kill it, in the backyard. They're threatened. It's because they don't understand. If you're educated to—a little bit to what—how important the wildlife is, how important a balanced structure is. You know, you just see these people that come in, or why do they move to areas, to the areas where these animals have lived for—well, like the fisherman on Falcon Lake. There was a big stink about, oh, the pe—the cormorants and pelicans are eating all the fish. Well, the cormorants and pelicans have been here for millions of years. Suddenly they're thinking they're eating all their fish. Well, you get right down to it, the cormorants have

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rookeries, which their dung help support the fish population, which increases the breeding of fish. And what they usually eat are the trash fish. But you get the fisherman fighting against—when what they should be fighting against is this uncontrolled netting that we have from Mexico, which they are. It's a—the game wardens are—are—I know they're short staffed, you know, but they are working now the ri—the lake and the rivers, because we have the commercial fishermen from Mexico with their gill nets, which is

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devastating. I mean it gets birds, it gets everything. And these—they don't pick them up. Now it's wrecking the—the fishermen's boats, so now people are really—you know, the engines are getting caught up in all these nets. There was just a article in the paper about it—yesterday's paper. People complaining. But it's just that whole—you know, always trying to blame the natural world, when it isn't—that's not the problem. It's what we're doing.

DT: Do you find that it's—it's more difficult to make this link between people and animals if people are from an urban background and—rather than a rural? I mean it being maybe a developer (?).

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NU: Yeah. The...

DT: Instead of a rancher? Is that...

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NU: In this area you see a lot of the clear-cutting. Just—you come into an area—I mean even in our own neighborhood. We had a winter Texan come, bought the land down the way from us. It was Arbor Day, and he—he cleared every tree right on—and it wasn't even on his land, it was on federal land. Bulldozed down every tree. You know, and this—this was a beautiful little spot. My mother sat and cried the whole day. And—and he said he had permission from the Boundary Commission. But this sort of attitude. Why? Why would you do that? All it did was cause more allergies for everyone with the

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dust. You know, the—it caused more erosion into the lake. But they do this constantly, this type of mentality of just cut everything down. It's not just here. I mean this guy was from the Midwest. Our local church cleared a lot the other day. Left one little tree. Just cleared everything. There's no point in that. We need shade, we need trees. I mean what do—what do trees produce? Oxygen. It's just common sense, and I just don't understand that—that mentality. The bulldozing of everything. You did s—mention some of the am—I am getting a lot more animals brought in by bulldozing. You know,

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where they bulldoze areas where they get their—their little habitats. It's just a blatant disregard for anything natural. And of course, it's just money. It's—nobody thinks about the future.

DT: You talked a little bit about the—what people's relationship is with animals, and, you know, difference maybe between some of the city dwellers that moved in, and the developers that might be clearing land. How about the other side of the equation? You've got in some cases wild animals, and in other cases you've got domestic pets. Do you find that there's—that people have a different connection with dogs and cats, and you know, the sort of—animals they've been with, or—or livestock perhaps, that's distinct from how they connect with the wild animals?

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NU: We have a lot of problem with cruelty in this area to domestic also. I mean it's a big problem. Not taking care of their, you know, their animals. Our group did a big vicuna, where we did rabies vaccinations. We'd paid for it and did free rabies vaccinations. Dr. Sam Bottenfield did because they were blaming the wildlife on the rabies problem in this area. Well, it wasn't—you have to have the buffer. You've got to inoculate your pets, which nobody was doing, so that the—the rabies doesn't spread. And at that time they would go out and kill coyotes. They had aerial shooting, Animal

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Damage Control, they put out poisons, they put out strangulation nets, traps, when most countries were using—dropped, aerial inoculation for rabies, where they eat it. It's a preventative. It's a little pellet that smells good. It's u—used everywhere else. But the good ol' boy mentality in this area, and all over the United States, the United States wasn't using it. Europe had used it for years very successfully. That's where rehabilitators got together all over the country and fought it, and now they're using it. We hardly have any rabies now. But we try to educate the people. You have to have the

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buffer. You have to take care of your pets. We get in a lot of domestic cats and dogs that are dumped, neglected, that we have to place—try to place. So I'm seeing it in not just wildlife, but

in domestic. It's a real problem here. The animal cruelty is really a problem. Horses, neglected cows. And there's really no Humane Society in this area to—to cover it. If you call them, they're n—there isn't one in this area to help you. And then the sheriff's department won't—I mean there are laws against this, but it's hard to get them to do anything about it. So I mean you're not even going to take care of your

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domestic, how are you going to understand the wildlife, you know, and be sympathetic to their needs? It's just education. I mean it just really needs—like the Humane Society in these areas.

DT: There's been a lot of discussion over the years, and for hundreds of years, about what the difference is or maybe the similarities between people and the rest of the animal kingdom. And, you know, if I remember this right—some people said, well, humans have got the ability to communicate, or they have the ability to think abstractly, or plan, and that that makes for a big difference. And then other people I think have said, well we all share, you know, things like the ability to suffer pain, and very fundamental connections. How do you sort out that difference or similarity of between people and wildlife?

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NU: When you work with wildlife—yeah. When you work with—with animals, when you work with wildlife, it's—the—the pain, the—like you said, the abstra—I've got a perfect example. I've got two examples. One was Luna, bobcat, brought to us imprint—a Fish and Wildlife officer brought her to us. Raised her. She was imprinted. He said, I'm sorry, Nancy. I hate to bring you a permanent. She's been a foster mother for years. She—we still—she's still with us. She—we raised her, and she was, you know, very tuned to us. We got a—a dog that was dumped in. Little dog that somebody had

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dumped right out in the road. And we'd kept her in a cage because, you know, it was right during rabies epidemic. We wanted to keep her in until we could her inoculated, and this sort of thing. Well, the p—she screamed all night. She kept screaming and screaming. She was in the center, and Luna was in the center then. She was young. And she had a little chick that she'd been raised with that peeped. She had to have it with her all the time. She went in and got her chick and took it over to the cage where the puppy was, and pushed it in, and then went back to bed. I mean she was—what thought is that?

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What kind of thought is that that took her? She realized that comforted her as a kitten. She'd given it to the puppy to try and comfort the puppy. I mean that type of thing, you just think, oh my God, you know. You see that all the time, and people don't—I guess because they're not around it, they don't see it, they don't understand it. And it makes it harder when you see things like that. I had it with a tortoise, a Texas tortoise. My mother raised and rehabilitated a lot of Texas tortoises over the years. She'd—when the she—they come in with a shell broken, she'd, you know, take care of them, epoxy them, and then release them. Well, I'd released a lot of them out near Chihuahua, which our

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site is. One day I was going out to feed some hawks out there. And I opened the gate, and this tortoise came up to me. It was as if he was heading, I mean just purposely heading straight towards me. So I stood there and I watched. Came up to my foot and stopped. And he had a sticker sticking in his head, a big mesquite thorn. So I pulled it out—I picked him up and pulled it out. It had to be one I'd released there. Put him down, and he left. He just walked right off. I

mean it just—amazing things like this that I don't think people see. Maybe they don't want to see. But unless you've worked with

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animals, you don't see it. I know people have with their domestic animals, but these are wild animals. This is something completely different.

DT: And reptiles and mammals and...

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NU: Reptiles.

DT: ...small and large.

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NU: Yeah. I mean I'd never thought of it happening with a reptile. But I mean he obviously knew he could come for help, and headed back out. I've had a hawk bring in another hawk—hawk that was injured. One that I'd raised. Legless. I don't know if you read the article about him, but he had a bad leg. He was a mistake release. He was a “oops.” He got out when we were trying to decide what to do about his leg. It had set wrong. He lived around here for ten years. And he brought in another hawk that was old, an elderly hawk, because he knew he—we could feed them. You know, I would

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supplement feed him. And he brought is buddy back to be fed here because he knew he would have food. And it was just obviously what it—what he was doing, you know. Found the hawk a few weeks later dead, because he—he was just an old, sickly hawk. But, you know, he'd brought him over. And the understanding. Especially Harris Hawks. Harris Hawks are very unique to their—to this area, and they—they are more like a—a pack. They hunt in a pack, they're very family oriented. They—the young care for the new—you know, the next batch. They stay together as a family unit. They hunt

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as a family unit. And I think if—if more people knew about these things, or understood, and could see what—that's why I write. That's why I try to write these stories, to let people, you know, see what the feeling, the—you know, that everything's related, and...

DT: Could you give us some examples, a few more maybe, of—of this connection, the relatedness that you mentioned you've written about?

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NU: Oh, I think the Harris Hawks, probably the most. Coyotes, I've raised coyotes. That was—they're a little harder on each other. Then it's definitely survival with them because when they have—in a coyote, this is another thing why you don't destroy and go out and hunt or poison coyotes. When they're together in a—a group, a family unit, only the alpha female breeds, so they keep their population down. Well, you go out putting bait, poisons—of course the alpha female is going to eat that poison, and she's going to be killed. She's going to die. So the—the other are left, all breeding, indiscriminate

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breeding. There's—you're—you're killing that, you know, control. I raised, yeah, a bunch of—also, it was bulldozed coyote pups. One had been injured when he came—when he came in. He had a rectal injury. And the others, there was the survival. You know, they're—finally, when we released him, they ran him off. He couldn't make it. We had to bring him back and finally put him to sleep. But, you know, they had to get the weak one out. That—it shows you in the hierarchy. So when you go into an area and

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you disrupt the coyote pack, you just—messing everything up. These are, you know—this is what we finally got across to Animal Damage Control, I hope, you know. And in this area.

DT: Maybe you can tell that story of how you got Animal Damage Control to back off.

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NU: That wasn't just—that was all rehabilitators. And I think it was writing articles to make them be—and—and actually taking their written literature and looking through it, and finding the most ridiculous things you'd ever imagine that they'd say. They had a—you know, they'd have ducks that were destructive, that killed this or that. I mean just ridiculous. I have the book somewhere. But you could look through it. I mean, irresponsible, made up, falsehoods about animals, and the way they were, you know, blaming them for things that they had nothing to do with. Seed eating birds, you know,

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had destroyed the so-and-so of—you know, it just—it just—I wish I had the facts. When I read the book—that—they have—it's all in print. But the thing is, rehabilitators got hold of it and made them accountable. So they had to back off. (?) they've changed their name now, too, but they used to go into areas and just poison and trap and shoot and kill everything. (?)

DT: And you've been successful in—in getting them to close down their operations in Zapata County?

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NU: Well, that was one—they had a man that was paid ten thousand dollars a year to go out and poison, trap, and kill coyotes, basically. A friend of mine and I went up to the—to the group in town to a commissioner's court meeting and showed that it was a waste of money, and it was detrimental because all it did was kill off the alpha female. So they did finally get rid of that position. But they kept thinking I wanted the ten thousand dollars. It was—that was the hardest thing we had to get across was I don't

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want the money, I just want you to stop doing this ridiculous, useless, detrimental thing that you're doing. Because they'd put poison out, they're killing hawks and owls also. It's not just coyotes. And they finally—we got the point across that I didn't want the money, I just didn't want them to be hurting the environment. It—and it was very hard to get across. Everyone thinks that the dollar—they can't think somebody would go off and—and spend that much time just to pro—protect a species.

DT: It sounds as if a good deal of your time is spent caring for animals, but another good portion of your time has been spent trying to educate people about the needs of wildlife and the importance of taking care of them. And I—I was hoping that you could tell about your experience. I think it was from '86 to '91, of trying to educate kids about environmental matters, and using art to do that, the public library.

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NU: Yeah. Well, I used to volunteer the summer program. And we would work on different—mainly understanding—you know, most kids say, oh, do you have lions and tigers? You say, no, it's native wildlife. They know very little about native wildlife. The other day I was at a—it was an art show. It was—actually it was a f—a craft show. And I had all the pictures out of the animals. And there was a little girl that came up, probably junior high age. And she said, I didn't know we had these here, and these here. And all I've ever seen are mosquitoes. I mean she—that what annoyed here, so that's—she was a city girl that had moved here. But they—they don't

realize what's arou—

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nobody knew we had beavers here. Very few people know that we have beavers in this area. And they—you know, they just don't see them mostly. They've never seen Screech Owls, or—or Elf Owls.

DT: How do you open their eyes that they do live here, and they coexist with us to some (?)?

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NU: Well, photo displays help, but it really help to have a live animal. Bring in people like John Carker, we did in the early '90s, to fundraise. And then he went to the schools. And he—of course he has the—the Bird of Prey Center in San Antonio, which is the Last Chance Forever, and he does an incredible program. I mean he f—he flies the hawks and the—and the vultures over the kids' heads. He didn't tell the principals this was going to happen, we just went in and did it because they would have said, no, probably. But just—and the kids were just enthralled. I mean I wish we could do this every year.

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Yeah. His program is very education. If you can get professional people in, that—you know, I don't have the time for it. I m—would take my Great Horned Owl. She did a lot. We would go to the Zapata County Fair and have a booth, and she really enjoyed it at that point. She was younger. When she got older, I didn't want to put her through it. But kids just relate to her. People would relate seeing a live Great Horned Owl. They just were amazed at the beauty, you know, the—it—it—it makes an impression that kids never forget. I don't think they ever forget.

DT: Well, maybe you can talk a little bit about this use of wild animals to teach, because I know some people think that it's demeaning somehow to the animal to be put on display like that, and used as an object lesson. And others say, well, no this is a way of connecting with kids and has a big impact.

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NU: Yeah.

DT: Where do you fall in that?

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NU: I—I definitely say you have to have a live animal. I mean they—we've had a lot of problem, and I know they're—they've tried to ban it, you know, with Parks and Wildlife, Fish and Wildlife think you—what's a stuffed animal going to teach? I mean, geez. They used to think Nova was stuffed because, oh, she's stuffed, she's not real, and then she'd blink, you know, and they'd—they'd never seen any—it was just—it's a completely different reaction to see a live animal than something stuffed. And you're—I can see Par—Parks and Wildlife, and Fish and Wildlife, they want you to have a permanently injured animal. And there are a lot of these birds—we—otherwise they'd be euthanized. We had a Harris Hawk for years. He had done programs in the valley I think for ten years before he came here. And he did another ten years here. And people would

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come up and say, is that the hawk I saw back in—I saw that hawk—he was named Harry, the Harris Hawk—way back. And they'd remember it. When I was a kid I saw that hawk. And he—you know, he loved to perform. He loved to go to programs. He really enjoyed it. And he'd done it all his life. Somebody had hand-raised him. He was an imprint. He couldn't be released. And otherwise, what would have happened to him? He would have been euthanized. So, you know, there is a place for these animals that can't be released.

DT: Well, you've told us a little bit about teaching in person and with animals along. Maybe you can talk about some of your other educational efforts through the writing that you've done, both for the Zapata Weekly Express and then for the monthly, LareDOS.

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NU: La—LareDOS. Yeah. I used to write a monthly article. And I'll probably get back to doing it again. I had to take a little hiatus because of my parents' illness. But, you know, both their illnesses. But it was—you know, I do a “what do you do when you find a deer.” Clip and save article every spring on what to do if you find certain baby birds. You know, the steps you can take, because that first twenty-four hours is so crucial to their survival. And a lot of people would call and ask because they'd see the articles. There are a lot of people—time people would bring deer in when they shouldn't have. They should have left them there. And I've actually had people—well—they'd stay. They'll stay all day and—and wait and watch. And if mother didn't come back, then

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they'd bring them in. But they'd take that time. And the more you educate, the more programs I do. You know, in the last couple years I haven't because of family, you know, problems, but it's—it—you really reach the people. And I say if you have a live animal. But the articles have helped too. I have a lot of people that read them faithfully, and they spread the word.

DT: Can you give some examples of the articles that you've written over the years?

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NU: I did—would keep basically a—an updated on what's going on at the rehab center. You know, our fundraisers, what animals are in, what we're doing, the successes, you know, the—the failures. It was almost like a diary of what goes on with, you know, the rescues. How we went about it, why the animals came in. Some of the stories I've told you have been—that had to be put—had to be written down.

DT: And did you also have a fictional account that you and...

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NU: My sister and I.

DT: ...your sister were developing?

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NU: Yeah. She had one called—that was when Maria Eugenia Guerra had the newspaper here in Zapata. And we did a—a monthly article on Lupita. And it was an environmental. It was geared to kids. She wrote it, I illustrated it. And it was Lupita's experiences, on the river, living on the lake. Environmental issues.

DT: And Lupita is a girl? I'm...

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NU: A fic—a fictional girl about eleven years old that likes to read, that has been brought up in this area, and sees the problems, and loves nature. And it was—it was pretty—the kids enjoyed it. And it was a—my sister had started it because she was a teacher for years. And she—it was a—you know, I wish we could put it together in a—a story form. But it was kind of the environment, things that were happening. You know, like the coyote situation. She'd—she would tell about the coyotes. Why you—you'd—you don't want to disert—disturb the hierarchy. And then she'd explain it in her own words, type thing.

DT: You mentioned that you illustrated these stories. Maybe you can talk about some of the art that you've used to illustrate some of the things you're concerned about, and particularly some of the wildlife (?)?

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NU: I'm just getting back into it. I've done a lot of photography. And I think wildlife art is—it's very popular in some areas, but I think if you try and do it to show what's happening, that's what I'd like to get into. My sister's doing the same thing. Like she's working with the sea turtles, paintings of sea turtles caught in nets and this type of thing where you're trying to tell something also. That's something we're both kind of getting into. We're starting to, you know, put our work in more shows, and—and maybe to give a message that way too. Plus, painting is a wonderful release—tension release and stress reliever. People are getting so much away from it. Kids don't get art in school, and they

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love it. And when I taught that year, it was just incredible. And these were junior high kids. They—you know, everything is so geared for testing. The TAKS test. All these different tests. That they had that forty-five minutes of just doing something completely creative and—and spiritual. And it—you have to have that. If—you know, nature and art go hand in hand. It's feeds your spiritual side, and these kids aren't getting enough of that. They really—it's—you know, it's just—all it is is testing.

DT: Can you explain a little more about what you mean by this connection between nature and art?

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NU: Well, it opens your eyes. You see things differently. Just like that little girl that had only noticed mosquitoes, you know. She—suddenly she sees, well, there's other things. And—well, this area is loaded with birds. I have people that have lived here all their life, and they suddenly call up and say, well, there's this green bird that looks like a

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jay. They've just noticed it. You know, they're just starting to maybe take—maybe they're retired and they're just having the time to notice. And a lot of people that have just—retired people mostly, children, you just got to take the time. Like the s—stop and smell the flowers. And in this area, it's just—the wildlife is incredible. I mean you can hear the birds outside when you came up. It's a—it's a wonderful area. It's my favorite part of Texas because it is still natural. One of the reasons it's so hot in the summer, and

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many people don't want to live here, but—and there are these large ranches, and there is more—you know, more areas unprotect—I mean protected areas that haven't been touched.

DT: Well, so the connection between art and nature that you're talking about is in a sense, you know, smell the flowers, but also look at the flowers (talking over each other).

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NU: Yeah. Stop and notice. I mean has anyone—stop and—I can stop and spend ten minutes looking at the dew on a—on a spider web. But I was brought up that way. I mean we never—I was brought up you never killed anything. My mother's from England. My grandmother taught her, you know, you never kill a spider. It's—it's important. It has an important—you know, everything's carefully moved. You never killed a lizard. And I see these people that just kill everything that moves. They kill the geckos that come on the screens at night. The geckos eat mosquitoes. Why would you—

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you know, people don't see the beauty in them, I think. I think you get more into art and you seeing the beauty in everything, if you have more art in your life. And these kids that—I would

take the animals—I was very lucky. I had a principal that encouraged me to take the animals, which I had to anyway because usually I was feeding them. I took them to class. I mean I'd be bottle feeding a javelina while the kids pi—drew the javelina. So they got hands on. And then just incredible drawings. I—you can see some of the work they've done. They started out not being able to draw at all, and they were just doing these fantastic wildlife art by the time the semester was over.

DT: You mentioned passing this attitude about the geckos, about killing things. And then that was foreign to the way you were brought up. Here in south Texas, and a lot of parts of Texas, hunting is a big part of the culture. And I'm curious what your attitude is about hunting. And then parts of hunting, you know, some people hunt for trophies, some people hunt for meat.

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NU: Yeah.

DT: What do you feel about it?

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NU: Deer have to be cont—controlled. I mean we don't have the mountain lions to hunt the deer anymore because we've gotten rid of the mountain lions. And they—when they get out of control, they starve to death. But, you know, I—I see a problem when only the rich are the ones that are hunting. The people that really need the meat aren't the ones that are hunting. That bothers me. If it was the people that needed the food that were doing the hunting, it wouldn't bother me as much. Trophy hunting I find obscene. I mean just obscene. It's disgusting. I can't understand it. I have someone in my family

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that did it. I just—it horrifies me. And my husband's family, it just—it—we should be beyond that. I mean we should have learned. I—I just—I can see hunting for food, because I've—I've known, you know, hunger. I've lived in places where I can see why you—you know. But it's—it becomes such a insanity in this area. In the valley, White Wing season became lethal. I mean you couldn't go outside. These idiots would come down and they didn't even know what a White Wing looked like. They'd just shoot everything. And you see that here. We had a—a—out at our release site, two owls were

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killed during hunting season. They shoot everything that moves. That's the problem. It's—it's like a—you know, they just become uncontrolled. I've met some wonderful hunters that would never do that, on releases and things. You know, that teaching their children to respect, and would never think of—of shooting anything but what they're, you know, out to go for, and their limit. But so many people just drive around. I've had people drive by here and try and shoot the owl—the hawks sitting on the—on the wire while we were sitting here, during hunting season.

DT: Is poaching very common down here?

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NU: Oh, yeah. It's—yeah. It's a real problem. So it's hard—I just released two deer two days ago. But it's on a ranch that's overseen by a retired game warden. So I feel a bit better. You know, I mean they know he's overseeing it, so there'll probably be less poaching there. But it's—yeah. It's a real problem. And it's not just the poaching, it's shooting everything that moves, protected species. I mean you know, hawks, owls, all so—they're protected. We need more game wardens to—to find these people, to catch them.

DT: Well, what's the—what do you think the motive is behind the poachers?

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NU: A lot of the poachers, some of the poachers, might be food, I would say. But most of it is, just “you’re not going to tell me where I can hunt or when I can hunt” attitude. That kind of attitude. “You’re not going to tell me what I can hunt, or when I can hunt.” And the—you know, the—like the—the recent quail hunting incident. You know, I don’t know for sure, but I mean a lot of it’s canned hunting. I mean, Texas...

DT: Can you explain what canned hunting involves?

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NU: It’s when you raise the animals and you release them before the big-wigs show up so that they don’t have to do a lot of walking or do any real hunting. It’s just like feeders. I mean the feeders are put—I’ve had people come from other states, can’t believe that that’s how they hunt here. You know, you’ve got your—your deer blind in a feeder. What’s sporting about it? It’s just nothing sporting involved.

DT: And what—the feeder contains corn usually?

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NU: Yeah. Food that attracts there. Or you have the areas, like for the exotic game up in the Hill Country, where they’re practically tame. And people come in and blow them away for three thousand dollars. I d—I don’t understand that. I just—that’s not sportsmanship, that’s not—there’s nothing sporting about that. What is it, shooting fish in a barrel? You know, I mean it’s—there’s just nothing—I can’t understand that mentality.

DT: You know, while we’re talking about mentalities and attitudes, I think you had written an article about fur as fashion. Can you talk a little bit more about your feelings there?

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NU: Yeah. Isn’t it typical that the highest fur sales in Texas were—you know, we have the hottest climate. It’s one of the highest fur sales. I remember we went to a conference in Austin once. A rehab conference. I think it was in ‘88. I’m not sure. It was—and they—it was rehabilitators, and then it was, I think, horse racing. And they all were wearing fur. It was like, aaagh. You know, you just—all these women in with these big fur coats, and they had all those rehabilitators horrified. We have enough—you know, I can see if you’re an Eskimo, and you hunt it and you wear it to keep warm. But

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wearing fur—and—and at one time it was looked down upon. And now it’s going back the other way again. Where you see the—the movie stars wearing the fur coats. Remember a few years ago it was frowned upon. But it’s all changing again.

DT: Why do you think there’s a change in the attitude?

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NU: I just think it’s just getting further away from being a steward to the planet. I just—it’s like people just are becoming so decadent. It’s a—it’s like the beginning of the fall of the Roman Empire. I mean they become more and more decadent. They’ve just stopped thinking about anything environmental. Our whole government is based on a good ol’ boy attitude, you know, under this administration. And it’s—it’s horrifying what’s going on. I mean if you really listen to the radio, which XM radio has helped a lot, putting out, you know, the word because in this area, all you could ever get was Right Wing, Rush Limbaugh. Now we have XM and we can at least hear two sides to the issue. But, you know, what’s going on with this administration, it’s completely anti-

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environment. They say they’re for family, and it’s completely the opposite. You know, it’s

supposed to be all family oriented, and it's—everything is the opposite of what they say it is—in this government, and this administration.

DT: I'm curious if you can talk a little bit about this problem of people talking honestly about wildlife, or the environment, or politics, especially in a small community like where you live.
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NU: In this area, it's not as bad as some areas, because people—people in this area—I mean you're not as afraid, I don't think. I mean look Maria Eugenia Guerra with her paper. She—she's been threatened, but the threats aren't as bad as some areas. I don't think people are quite—although I've backed off on things because I realized my family could be at—in danger. And I have—plus the stress of it, I think of fighting these issues. But you realize these people are capable of pretty much anything. Some people. Most of the people are very good people in this area. And they have the old Mexican mentality,
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which is, you know, family and—and living with their—you know, in—respecting their ranch. And I like that—that's why I like this area. It's just some of the people in charge that are the problems, that get away from that. The greed, power. Power corrupts. The drug dealing is a big—you know, a—a big problem in this area.

DT: One of the things you mentioned about your attitude, and sort of the powers that be in this area, and maybe elsewhere, is that they didn't understand that you might do things for altruistic reasons that I think they expect that there must be some sort of...
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NU: Ulterior motive, yeah.

DT: Ulterior motive, some kind of gain that you would recognize. And I was—I've noticed that so much of what you've done, either in working for the Wildlife Rehabilitation, or for your education at the library, are done as a volunteer. And I was hoping that you might be able to talk about what drives you to volunteer.
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NU: You have to. I mean you have to do something. It's that—I had a friend who volunteered with me. And even though she wasn't really environmental, but she had to—it's—it's the need to do something. I mean I think—even in your own little way. I mean I don't do as many animals as I used to. But it's like that saying, "It's a chance to give back from a little that all—all we take." You know, we take so much from this planet. You have to—if everybody would do something, somewhere, it would be a better world. And I guess it's—you know, it's discouraging. But like Virginia would go on rescues with me. She was going to volunteer to help re—teach reading at the schools. People that, you know, work with AIDS babies. It—you have to do a—I think it's our—it—to

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teach empathy. Like my son said once. He—he—thought the most important thing I ever taught him was empathy. And, you know, you just have to do something, I think, to be a—a good citizen, or a good person on the planet. And I think that's why most people do it. You've got to volunteer, do something to help.

DT: You've mentioned this notion about—about the empathy. And I'm wondering if your fate is a DES daughter has helped have compassion for wildlife and for those that, you know, have got health problems or need help in some way.
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NU: I think—yeah. I think it's just like DDT, it's the same sort of thing. I mean I was—my

mother was given a drug she told was safe. They knew it wasn't safe for twenty years before—you know, it had been proven not safe. It was supposed to prevent miscarriage. And what it did was damage fetuses. It damaged reproductive, it damaged immune system, it damaged skeletal, depending how long they took it, how—how much they took. And now it's going on to a third generation. And I think it's a lot of reason

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my parents left the country, because they wanted me to get in a healthier maybe environment, from California at the time. And it did help probably, because they also put DES, or diethylstilbestrol, which is a synthetic estrogen, in meat at the time. Well, I didn't eat red meat. So probably I'm a little better off than some because I already had it in me. And then they were putting it in chicken and beef, and—and it—the whole food

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ch—you know, food chain. And now there's a new study that there were some areas in Europe where it was very heavy in the meat, and they're seeing these same problems through, you know, not from a mother taking a pill, but just from eating these meats that were tainted with this synthetic estrogen. That's just something that absolutely—just came out on—on—the DES Action listserve, which is a—a support group I belong to, and we keep in touch with all of the—you know, every DES daughter all over the country keeps in touch that belongs to this group. And—and, you know, it's the same

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thing as DDT making the eggs weak. And I think, because I have to fight so hard to stay healthy. And that's helped in a lot of ways. I think some days I feel so bad I don't want to get up, but you got to go out and feed the baby birds. I mean, you know, it pushes you to keep going. There are times when my health is really compromised. And I think otherwise, you get into a “poor me”, you know, sort of attitude. And I think this Wildlife Rehabilitation has helped me keep more focused on other things other than health, even though it is a constant battle when you do.

DT: It seems that one of the ways your compassion plays out is this interest in kids, and teaching them. And actually teaching, you know, some of the grown up politicians as well. Could you maybe tell us if there's a way that can boil down a message to future generations about why you care about wildlife, and about the natural environment? Public health for that matter as well, when you talk of the DES situation? Is there a message that you want to pass on?

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NU: Well, it was kind of like what I said at the EPA hearings when we were going against NAFTA. I mean my first twenty years of life, I h—I didn't even know anyone who died of cancer or had cancer. My second twenty years of life, I can't even count how many people that I know from, not just elderly, from children up, that have died of cancer. I mean the—there's something wrong. The—the—you know, and we're destroying the air, we're destroying our water, we're destroying our environment, which is—everything is balanced out. If we don't do something, we're going to be—we're

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going to go extinct. And we've got the global warming that they have pushed on the back burner for—and made fun of, for years, and now it's really becoming—I mean you're seeing all these problems. With the hurricanes. You're seeing all these environmental issues. If you really looked into the health conditions along the border, which have been pretty much quietened down, but used to be brought up all the time. You know, I have a son I was lucky enough to have. I have nieces and nephews. I want to see something left for them. I just—the way it's going, I just don't

even want to know

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what's going to happen if we don't do something now. I mean it's—it's—it's dire. It may be too late for some things. Some scientists are worried it's too late for global warming. These areas may not be livable.

DT: What would you recommend to young people who may not know what to do about these problems? And, you know, you've got a lot of experience in trying to understand them, and try to engage some way in (?).

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NU: I would say join—yeah. Take a group that you can work with. We've supported Green Peace for over twenty years. Groups that you think—or the National Resource Defense Council, we've just started supporting them also. But then they will send you—they'll e-mail you different issues. I mean like the Alaska drilling. They're keeping up with these issues. You need to get with a group that's on the ball, like the National—is it National Defense Resource Council, that are really working—I think it helps. That's where the Internet has helped, that's where XM radio has helped, to get the message out.

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Find something you can support, and do your little bit in your area. You know, try to protect some of these—you know, you feel like tying yourself to some of the trees that they're going to (?) and cut down. I mean it just—they had a tree in front of the courthouse here in town. They built a new courthouse. It didn't need to be cut down. Huge, beautiful tree. Just—you know, ju—fight in your little area, in your own community. There's plenty of places that need volunteers.

DT: You mentioned caring for your particular area or community. Is there a—a place that you like to visit that reminds you why you work so hard to care for these animals?

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NU: We used to go scuba diving. You mean on vacation type things?

DT: Wherever. It could be right here in your backyard.

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NU: Here. At the lake. I've—I go kayaking. My husband and I go kayaking. Walking along the lake. It's—it's incredible. I mean you can—you go spend a couple hours kayaking and you come back refreshed, because there's the wildlife, the birds, the water.

DT: What do you see?

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NU: Pelicans. You mean in wil—pelicans, and every species of bird imaginable. And ducks. At this time of year, it's migration, so you see all sorts of different birds. But, you know, I could list it for the next half an hour, the different species you see in one little kayak trip. Ospreys hunting for fish. You know, it's just in—and you can land and take a little walk. And it's really—this area is I think my favorite area of Texas. I know that was one of your questions, and I was thinking, gosh, you know, I'd really—it's awful hot in the summer, but you know, that kind of makes it less popular. So it's nice and empty in the summer too. So you really can do a lot more bird watching, and—we used to go scuba diving, but we'd leave the country for that.

DT: Well, tell us about scuba diving trips that you've taken. What it looks like under water for those who haven't...

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NU: Well, we wou—we'd go to the Bay Island—B—Bay Islands off of Honduras. And they were very—one thing that they were doing there was they were protecting their reefs, because so

many reefs have been destroyed. And that's one of the best scuba diving in the world. And they—they watch you closely. If a reef looks like it's beginning to be damaged, they close it completely. You know, a lot of people complained. I said that's great. You know, the people in our group would say, well, why didn't—they have to. You know, they're protecting it. They're doing the right thing.

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That's their livelihood. Just like the Seed Eaters would have been a wonderful livelihood for Zapata. I liked to go to Eur—I'd like—we've only made one trip to Europe. But I like that—we went to England, and I liked seeing the humane treatment of—of domestic animals, you know. And you don't see the dead animals along the road. We traveled all ov—all over England, Scotland and Wales. See why—I think we saw one partridge in Scotland dead on the side of the road. And you drive to Laredo, oh, my—you know, the dogs and cats and wildlife. It's, you know, devastating.

DT: Well, I think that's probably all that I had to ask you. But I was wondering if you have any things you'd like to add after all the questions I've gotten task.

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NU: I just think that the main thing is the—the further we get from nature, the further we get from understanding nature, and working with it, like some of our ancestors did, you know, the American Indians, the Celts, the Druids, you know, the—the older religions, the closer we're going to—if we don't do that, we're—extinction. I mean we are going to become extinct. And I—I just think it's really important. I just—I hate to feel like it's hopeless, and there's sometimes that you do. But I think with these different organizations, and with getting the word—like you trying to bring out, or maybe even

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keep it for future generations, to teach the empathy, which my son said was the most important thing he'd learned. To teach empathy.

DT: I think that we could work and end on that. That's a wonderful message. Thank you.

End of reel 2370

End of interview with Nancy Umphres