

**TRANSCRIPT**

**INTERVIEWEE:** Lynn Marie Cuny

**INTERVIEWER:** David Todd

**DATE:** March 29, 2021

**LOCATION:** Kendalia, Texas, by telephone

**TRANSCRIBER:** Trint, David Todd

**SOURCE MEDIA:** Google Voice, MP3 audio file

**REEL:** 4050

**FILE:**

MountainLion\_CunyLynn\_KendaliaTexas\_29March2021\_Reel4050\_NoiseReduced&SignalBoosted.mp3

**Google Voice** [00:00:00] This call is now being recorded.

**David Todd** [00:00:03] Hello, Lynn.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:00:05] Yes.

**David Todd** [00:00:07] We meet again. You get the blue ribbon and gold star for patience and persistence with us. So thank you very much.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:00:17] Google will now try to connect you. Google for us, you know, I tell you, if the world was still a serious place for the right reason, just the very word and name, "Google" would have gotten nowhere.

**David Todd** [00:00:33] Yeah. Who made that up?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:00:37] Ay! It's all so funny. Anyway, so here we are, finally.

**David Todd** [00:00:44] Yeah. So, let me lay out what.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:00:50] (Because they're listening).

**David Todd** [00:00:52] Right. Yes. Yes. First, let's explain for our audience and for ourselves.

**David Todd** [00:00:58] So here's the thought I had, and I hope it's agreeable with you. Our thought was to record this interview for research and educational work on behalf of the Conservation History Association of Texas, and for a book and a website for Texas A&M University Press, and finally, for an archive that the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin. And of course, you would have all rights to use the recording as well. And that's that's what we had in mind. I want to make sure that's OK with you.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:01:36] Yes, that is fine with me.

**David Todd** [00:01:38] Well great. Well, let's dive into it. I'll try to just lay out what, what we might be doing today. And in the then maybe we can ask some questions and hear what's on your mind.

**David Todd** [00:01:54] It is March 29th, 2021. My name is David Todd. I'm representing the Conservation History Association of Texas. I'm in Austin and we are conducting interview with Lynn Cuny.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:02:05] Cooney.

**David Todd** [00:02:07] Lynn Marie Cuny, the founder and the president. I pronounced it wrong, I'm sorry.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:02:14] That's OK.

**David Todd** [00:02:18] So she is the leader of Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation and the author of "Through Animals' Eyes." Her facility, Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation, provides rescue and rehabilitation and release to orphaned and injured and displaced wildlife, including, in some cases, mountain lions. She is based in Kendalia. And this interview is being done by telephone.

**David Todd** [00:02:47] So with that sort of introduction, we usually start these interviews by just asking if there might have been some formative experiences from your childhood that might have led you to this strong interest you've had in wildlife, and its rescue and rehabilitation, in the years since.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:03:09] Well, yeah, I don't, I don't remember, I don't remember a time when I did not feel drawn to animals, and when you're a child, of course, you're small, you're close to the ground when you're moving around in the world. And for me, that meant being outdoors as much as possible, and finding tiny little beings and seeing them as just absolutely wonderful and, you know, pretty much falling in love with all of them.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:03:51] I used to rescue earthworms, as far as being proactive in something to do with animals, non-human animals. So I used to rescue earthworms, especially after a rainstorm, and they would be caught up in the water that was going down on the sides of the street. And of course, they drowned very easily. So I would just sit there and just capture all of them and then I would put them back on the grass.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:04:16] And then I used to see how my brothers would try to go fishing. I'd get to the little, a little bucket of earthworms before they left and take all the earthworms out. But then when they arrived at where they were going to be fishing, they would have no earthworms with which to fish.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:04:33] So, so that that might have been the start of it all, perhaps.

**David Todd** [00:04:39] Well, that's great, that's great.

**David Todd** [00:04:44] And some people that we visit with took a lot of inspiration or leadership from people they might have met in school, and I was curious if there might have been teachers or classmates or some experiences that you had during your education that might have affected your career.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:05:05] No. No, Nary a one.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:05:14] OK, well, I mean, I wasn't that keen on school to begin with, so it's not that surprising that that wasn't there wasn't a lot of influence going on there, not to say I didn't have some wonderful teachers. But, I just, no, no, I just wasn't really influenced by anybody that's, in that realm at all when I was growing up.

**David Todd** [00:05:34] Well, fair enough. So we can move forward. And in 1977, I understand you founded this nonprofit group, the Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation, to help wildlife, and I was hoping you could tell us what the origins of the group.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:05:58] Well, yeah, it's actually very simple, so born and raised in San Antonio, so that's, of course, you know, I stayed there for a while. I went out to California in the 60s and then came back. And when I came back, I worked for a brief period of time, about three years, at the San Antonio Zoo, and I saw all the horrors that that go on in zoos, and was very influenced by that, in as much as it was very clear to me that, that was the last place that animals belonged. And, obviously...

**David Todd** [00:06:38] Can you give us some examples of what sort of revulsed you about the zoo?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:06:43] Well, first of all, perfectly healthy animals being held captive for the sake of entertaining the public. And then in those days, they didn't call it education, but of course, they were trying to say, even then, they were trying to start the image of no, we're really educating the public, when it came down to nothing but entertainment. And when they got money, large amounts of money were given, they would they would spend it on, on picnic grounds for the people and the animals would continue to languish on cement slab, behind bars, you know, cages.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:07:11] The diets they were given were bland, boring, completely uninteresting. For primates, there was never anything for them to do but sit on these cement slabs all day. There were some, there were some shelves and things, but never any limbs, no branches, nothing real, nothing real, nothing from nature coming into their world, when they come from a world of nothing but, and no one but, nature. Animals who weren't, quote unquote, good exhibit animals were kept behind the screen where the public could see, though, in buildings and held in very tiny little cages.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:07:48] It was just a horror because that's, you know, I mean, that's, that's, that's what we, the whole premise of the zoo was bring animals in from the wild and let people see them. Well, what could be more horrible if you're a wild animal and we, as very limited species that humans are, in very constricted in our styles of life that we live and lead, can't even begin to imagine the wonders that wild animals experience every day being out among the trees and grass and boulders and one another, and stripped of all of that and stuck somewhere on cement behind bars. So the, so the public, the very, the very species you are doing everything to stay away from, can parade past and look at you and often jeer and throw things at you. I, you know, I mean, yes, there are things worse, they're called laboratories, but I'm particularly fine saying it's pretty bad. So I saw all of that firsthand and became a whistleblower there and then resigned.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:08:49] And the day after I resigned, I started Wildlife Rescue. And I just decided, if you want to do something right, you damn well better do it yourself. And so I started Wildlife Rescue.

**David Todd** [00:09:03] And you started it out of your home, if that right?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:09:07] Yes, yeah, I just had a little rent house in San Antonio that I was renting and I started taking in animals. I had a paper, I got a paper route that I could run from two to

six in the morning, seven days a week. And that supported me and the organization. I had some small business cards printed up, and I went around everywhere - fire stations, police departments, garbage collection, chimneysweeps, just, you know, people that worked in, you know, landscaping, anything, everything, veterinarians that I could think of. And I simply gave them my business card and said, if you find it, if you find an animal in trouble, then please don't call the police. Call me because what would happen was people would call the police, and the animals would simply be killed, or they'd call animal control, and the animals would tend to be killed. So I said, just call me, and I'll come and get them or help them or talk to you about them and so that's what I started doing and the calls.

**David Todd** [00:10:14] So there was nothing like that. You had no rivals and competitors in the wildlife rescue business.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:10:20] No, no, no, not quite. No, there was nobody else interested in doing this, and there certainly are a great many naysayers and very many people who said what, what's the point? Why, why bother? And plus, you're a single woman and you can't do this and you know, you can get hurt. And then again, why bother - squirrels and skunks and sparrows? Who cares?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:10:44] So it was not well received, except by the people who needed help because they found an animal and they did not want him hurt, because they had an animal, you know, like raccoons, such as raccoons, who had decided to take up residence in their, you know, their attic or perhaps under, under a shed in the backyard. And they didn't want them there, but they didn't want to hurt them. To their credit, they didn't want to hurt them. Those people thought, well, great, there's somebody else I can call that's not going to come out and put poison and, you know, traps and whatever.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:11:20] So very well, the concept was very well received by the people who needed the service. It's just not, not particularly well received by people who didn't understand the importance of the work, or agree with the premise that wild animals should be protected, left alone, helped when they're in trouble, and then, again, left the hell alone.

**David Todd** [00:11:49] Well do you think of the attitude towards your operation has changed over the years, as you've changed, and society, maybe, has evolved a little bit.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:12:00] It has changed dramatically, and I like to think that there are a lot of reasons for that. I like to think that one of the small reasons is because we've been here for right at 45 years and our message has been a very consistent one. For everyone we've spoken with, whether they've had an animal who they've found, whether they had an animal they were calling about to complain about him or her, or whether they just wanted some information about wildlife, to every one of those people, we have said the same thing for 45 years, which is every single solitary one of these animals deserves protection and respect and the right to a life that he or she wants. And that has been a very consistent message. And people, you know, I do believe people have heard it and responded to it.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:12:55] I did in the early days, it was pretty commonplace that the calls were, "there's a nasty, dirty, ugly 'possum in my backyard to get this thing out of here, or I'll kill him." And, and it's, we hardly ever get that anymore. It's much more, what is a 'possum? Should I be concerned? He's getting my garbage up, that kind of thing? That bothers me. But should I be concerned? I don't really like the way he looks. Should I be concerned, as opposed to just an automatic, I hate him, get him out of here. It's nice to see that, it's nice to hear that.

**David Todd** [00:13:28] Well, you mentioned 'possums, you said earlier sparrows, and can you give us some idea of the sort of range of animals that you've cared for over the years?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:13:40] Well, so all native species of birds, mammals and reptiles. All of them, everyone, including hermit crabs and butterflies and caterpillars and lizards and snakes, to hawks and mountain lions and skunks and ringtail cats and coyotes and foxes, bobcat, mockingbird, grackles, pigeons. Everybody. Really, everybody.

**David Todd** [00:14:10] And what are the, sort of, most common circumstances that bring them to you?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:14:17] Well, it's interesting, the, the most common circumstances have changed somewhat over the years, and of course, that's because, you know, San Antonio, like every other city, is just becoming this huge place full of people and buildings and asphalt. None of those, none, of those elements being good for wildlife, none of them. So that means the circumstances that wild animals find themselves in, and that the sort of circumstances that are forced on them, will then have changed.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:14:45] Where it used to be, and it's not to say that there's not a lot of the same circumstances, there certainly are a great many. But it used to be the set - cat, dog, car, gun, poison, trap has, you know, harmed, fill-in-the-blank, someone of the aforementioned species. And that was kind of the early days.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:15:11] And then from there it went, "Well, I, and kind of alongside there, not so much from there, it went to, kind of alongside that, Well, I have, I have mountain lion, as a, you know, they called it a pet, bobcat pet, coyote pet." We do still get a totally ridiculous number of thos. But that was, those are kind of the two scenarios all the time, all the time, all the time.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:15:34] What's changed somewhat now is those still exist all the time. Absolutely. The number of orphaned wild animals who we take in now has increased. The sheer number we take in now, about 12,000 a year, that's grown. And then also, just as an organization, our scope has changed. It hasn't changed, because it was, it was the plan from the beginning, from day one. But we've been able to have a broader scope because we've had, because we have land, and we have had land for a very many years now. So the sanctuary of what we do has really grown. So in that regard, the number of, the number of calls regarding and concerning those animals has definitely increased.

**David Todd** [00:16:20] The larger animals?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:16:23] Yeah, larger and.

**David Todd** [00:16:23] Non-released animals?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:16:24] Yeah, non-native and then non-releasable natives.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:16:29] And you hear two of them in the background, probably, because we have a situation where someone drops, and we get a lot of, we rescue a lot of non-natives now, and a big group of those are parrots and a lot of primates. So who you hear in the background right now are two parrots who were dropped off because there was someone who could no

longer keep them because of her situation at home had become dangerous. And so on her way to fleeing, she dropped them off here, which is great. They will, they will be much better off. Now they'll be fine. But they're also nervous and a little upset and needing to be indoors and still see a person for a while before they start remembering their wild heritage and consequently, you're hearing them in the background.

**David Todd** [00:17:26] That's, that's quite all right. It's nice to hear.

**David Todd** [00:17:29] So what what happens when somebody comes in and drops off an animal of different size and species? How do you care for them? Maybe you can give us some examples.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:17:41] Well, so depending on who they are, and depending on where they come from, then that is really what dictates what we do, what we need to do, what their needs are and how we go about helping them.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:18:04] Native species - so for a long time, it was just all the rage to have a large wild species - feline - as a so-called pet. Jaguars, mountain lions, tigers, lions, leopards. And it was really horrendous. There were so many, so many animals that were victimized like that. So we did take in a great many mountain lions in our early years. And jaguars, those were really the two who we saw the most of.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:18:45] And depending on how far back you want to go in answer to the question, what do you do when someone brings you someone like that? Well, obviously in the early days, that was a little bit more challenging. But as time has progressed and as we have grown, what we do now is because we have a two hundred and twelve acre sanctuary and because we have acreage, enclosed acreage, for the animals, we take them in and we do our best to introduce them to their own kind who are already living here in sanctuary. And then depending on how all of that goes, which it generally does go well, then they say this is where they live from now on.

**David Todd** [00:19:42] And I guess you need to figure out how to acclimate them and feed them and bring them veterinary care. It sounds complicated.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:19:52] Well, what's what's wonderful about animals and particularly, particularly about wild animals, is they already know how to do everything. They and, and if you respect that knowledge, if you do not see them as some kind of little helpless child, helpless victim, helpless, you know, fill in the blank, if you don't see them that way, because that's not who they are, then you're not going to do a bunch of stupid things that, that is trying to be protective of them.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:20:26] So when we started rescuing, and I'll just continue to use mountain lions for now, as, you know, the example, when we first started rescue mountain lions, we did, we'd moved out of my backyard where we had been able, thanks to a donor who gave us a very large gift. At that time, it was large. It wouldn't be large now. Anyway, we were able to buy four acres. Well, four acres is not much. But it was, it's not much now. It wasn't much then, but it was a whole lot more than a backyard. So I immediately built a one and a half, kind of, about one and a half acre enclosure because, because we're getting these calls of mountain lions and jaguars. And, let them live in something that was more akin to the kind of life they would have in the wild, not the same, obviously, but they'd no longer be in a garage. They would no longer be in a cage that, you know, a "cage" cage, meaning a ten-by-ten. They would

no longer be in a bedroom in someone's apartment. They would no longer be thrown in the back seat of a car and driven around to be shown off.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:21:33] So, to me, it always made absolutely perfect sense that my yardstick for what these animals need, needs to be nature. Where would they be? What would they be doing if nobody ever messed with them? And that's a, that's as simple as anything. They, they would be out there in the grass and sticks and trees and rocks. So let's give them some slice of that here in a, sadly in a captive setting. And they don't need anything else. You know, they need to be free.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:22:06] They could not be free because somebody had de-clawed them and often de-fanged them. They had also been habituated to human company because they'd been stolen away from their mother, because that's what breeders do on large cats or any wild animal, of course, they steal them away from their mother when they're very young, stick them on a bottle, and then sell them to somebody saying, "well, just bottle feed him and he'll be your pet and he'll be lovely and wonderful," which is all utter nonsense, and a lie. So when these animals, being wild animals, have at least some modicum of nature back in their world, which is that they're out-of-doors. Again, grass and sticks and rocks and trees underfoot and overhead, and raw red meat. What what else, what else is there? I mean, yes, of course you need to make sure they're healthy, and you keep up with that kind of thing.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:22:57] But less is best with them because they don't want to be around us in the first place, even when they have been habituated to humans, even though they've been hand-raised by some person. They are clearly confused about who they are because you can see when they're trying to relate, when you watch them trying to relate to someone of their own species. But when they start to be becoming who they were in the first place, when they're back out in that setting, that has nature all around them, the idea that a person is somebody they want to be around starts to go away.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:23:38] And yes, every individual is different, and it takes some individuals longer, be they parrot or primate or mountain lion or bobcat or coyote, some of it takes longer. For the most part, every one of them does make that that switch back. Some of them don't. But for the most part, they become who they were before people intervened and screwed up their lives.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:23:59] So what better than to just put them in a setting, sadly, having to be captive because they can no longer defend themselves or find, you know, catch, in this case their own food, but other than that, leaving them the hell alone, just letting them be who they are.

**David Todd** [00:24:20] Okay, can you back up just a little bit? I think you touched on this before about how these animals and let's just use mountain lions as an example, you know, came to be affiliated with some human and then were de-fanged and de-clawed and so on. I mean, this, this whole kind of interaction between people and, you know, alpha predator just seems pretty unusual. And, and I guess the trade and the training - it is new to me. And if you could give us a little bit of background of what happens before you might see a mountain lion at your facility.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:25:04] Well, so as we all know, we know it better now in 2021 than we knew it back in '77, '78, '79. People will do damn near anything for money. That is a profound and fundamental flaw, flaw in our system, and it is a deadly flaw to other beings. So in the end, it's

still going on. The, the trade in wild animals as so-called pets is still going on. The species change. But the trade is out there. It is real. It is big. It is a billion-dollar business. And it is in this country. It's in other countries as well. But people have always figured out it's going on in other countries. No, no. It's in this country. And it's big business. So somewhere along the line, somebody saw that, OK, you know, wouldn't it be cool or wouldn't people think it was cool to have a "pet" (and I use that word in quotes) mountain lion or jaguar?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:25:59] And by golly, you know, and of course, you're in Texas and you're dealing with a species that has no protection at all in this state, obviously. You can get a male, get a female, let them mate. They have a cub or two. Pull the cub. What, what can they do? The animals are stuck. The babies can do nothing. The parents can do nothing. And you make, you know, a couple of thousand bucks. One cat just made you a couple thousand dollars, and if you are a greedy, heartless, soulless individual who thinks it's cool to do this and get the big image of how great you are with big cats, and aren't you special? Then believe me, you're going to do nothing but work really hard to increase your bottom line on the backs of these animals, and that's all it is. That's all it's ever been. That's all it ever will be.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:26:58] People, people consider it a novelty. They think that their friends are going to think they're cool or they think it's really going to be fun, or whatever the hell they think. And there's always going to be somebody out there who's perfectly willing to have animals suffer so they can make money.

**David Todd** [00:27:20] And so a lot of these animals, I think you (mountain lions, let's continue), that they, you find them in 10-by-10 cages and bedrooms and backs of cars and what's key, maybe give us some circumstances for where you had to pick one up, or ones been given to you?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:27:40] Well, yeah. Gosh. And again, more the early days than now, because thank goodness cougars are not being subjected to that so much more. Plenty of other animals but not cougars. So the police department would often call me and they had been called in because there were some strange sounds coming from - fill-in-the-blank - apartment building, or inside someone's garage, or abandoned house. And they didn't want to go in there because they weren't sure who was in there. The neighbors weren't going to go in there, and the police didn't want the neighbors going in there. So they would call me and say, we think there's an animal. We don't know who.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:28:20] And I would go in and there would be a cougar, sometimes a young cougar, sometimes an older cougar, in a dark garage, in a boarded-up building, chained to a tree in a backyard where the people had moved out of the rent house. And I had to catch him. I had to catch him to get him in a big, big carrying crate and get him out to the sanctuary.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:28:49] So that was done in different ways, depending on, on how either hungry the cougar was, how frightened the cougar was or how easy I could manipulate him to get into something I could move him out of the situation and how or how difficult it was in the case of the one who was chained to a tree in the backyard, I had to get a veterinarian to help me anesthetize him. And she hadn't done much of that type of work herself. And of course, this cougar, who's on the end of a chain, he figures out very quickly how far he can go if you're threatening, and he is trying to get to you to defend himself, and then he also figures out how he can manage to get away from you. He's on the end of a chain, so his options are limited. But it was a matter of getting a dart in him and then getting him in the, in the crate. And the ones who were in buildings, it was a matter of getting the food into the crate. Most of the time they



were really pretty hungry. They had not been fed in a long time and then getting them to go into the crate and manipulating the door in such a way that I could close it before they came back out.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:30:01] And those were a little tricky.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:30:06] But that was, that was kind of what it came down to, was just getting them contained so we could move them and get them out to the sanctuary.

**David Todd** [00:30:15] And so you mentioned that all these animals are left behind in, in backyards and abandoned rooms of buildings. When they're being cared for, you know, using that term kind of lightly, what, what are people doing with these animals? I mean, I think you mentioned some of them are considered pets. I think once I saw you referred they'd been used as guard animals. But what's sort of, what's the scope of people's use for these animals?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:30:51] Well, you know, it varies. And again, you know, because we've been around for so long, it's changed over the years, what you see. So, so when people had cougars, it really was this, this, you know, I've got control of this big, powerful predator, usually with men who have them, almost always it was men who had them. And in the '70s and early '80s, it was the guys with the shirt, you know, opened up to the navel and big gold chains, and there was just a type, there just was, there was just a type. You, you just, you just knew what you were going to find. You knew the people who had them. And it was, it was just this macho thing where I've got him and I could do, he does what I tell him.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:31:29] And, you know, it was horrible. It was absolutely horrible. A sick relationship, because this cat did not do what this creature told him. This cat was beaten, they were hungry, they were scared, and sometimes, every once in a while, the cat would nail the person. And that was usually when they didn't want them around anymore. They often called to have them killed and thank goodness the police instead called Wildlife Rescue.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:32:02] So it was this power thing, this control over this wild beast thing, you know, and sometimes it was just this novelty. "Come look in my garage. Look what I've got in there!" And it was always, "what" did you find? "What." As if they're things. You know, and, and that's, that's, to me, that is the fundamental problem, is how our species sees other species.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:32:34] Hold on a minute. Excuse me. I have to cough.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:32:45] We see them as objects. We see them as these, these things, these beings who are here, either for us to do research on because we have a disease, and by golly, we're going to do all the research on these, these over here, because maybe we'll find a cure for us, the almighty species. You know. But it's never a good, healthy relationship in these situations, as you can imagine. It couldn't be.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:33:17] And it was, for the most part, a power trip, if you want to call it that. It was to be more special when you didn't feel particularly special yourself. It was because you were different than all your friends that you had this animal - reasons that, you know, that normal, sane, well-adjusted people probably couldn't ever understand. And would never do, and would never, and would never feel comfortable doing.

**David Todd** [00:33:50] Yeah, it, it sounds really strange. So when these mountain lions would come into your sanctuary, and I gather some of them really were not releasable and they'd be in your care for, or years, maybe for the balance of their lives. What did you learn about their behavior? You know, you're probably closer to them than, than most people ever could be.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:34:23] Well, and the, the sad thing about any wild animal in captivity is all the rules change as far as, behaviorally. So everybody knows mountain lions are, you know, essentially solitary beings in the wild. They're not in captivity. We had as many as 17 on about five acres at any given time. And that was the highest number we've reach of having them all at once. Some of them are very, very elderly by then. Some of them were still coming in, so they were younger. They would sleep in a big pile. They were constantly in each other's company and not just because they couldn't get away, because they would seek each other out.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:35:16] And that that, to me, was really interesting to see that, that whole rule of being solitary in the wild changed when they were in captivity. And they, you know, observations being what they are, because we can't know what they're thinking and feeling, so as far as observations go, I would say they very much enjoyed each other's company. They would groom each other and like I say, they'd sleep on a big pile. They would eat together, side by side.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:35:48] And. Other than that, they would be somewhat reclusive from from us as far as who, you know, took care of them, provided the food and all. We didn't, we didn't do much more than that. We would never name them or try to interact with them or anything at all like that.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:36:09] But that was a very, very I think, very distinct and, you know, behavioral change. Again, it's just they, they seemed to turn to each other when their freedom was taken away from them.

**David Todd** [00:36:27] Yeah, do you think that they were in some kind of, sort of PTSD or shock, or can you speculate about why they were behaving that way.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:36:34] I think there's absolutely no way to know that. There is no way. There's just no. If I've learned anything in all these years of being around wild animals, it's what I knew at the very beginning, and that is that there is absolutely, positively no way in the world, you know, what's going on with them. And I, I get so, I'm just so outraged by the things we continue to do to them, be they, you know, cougars in the wild to get that those collars put on so we could track them and see where they're going and what they're doing, or anything, whatever the hell it is that we persist at doing to them because we want to understand them better. When all we should be doing to them is protecting habitat and leaving them the hell alone. We don't have to understand them better. We might want to, but if our quote unquote "understanding them better", which I doubt we ever really do. Since it always inflicts something on them, then we should just stop, just stop it. We won't, of course, but we should.

**David Todd** [00:37:48] So best to leave them alone, maybe.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:37:52] Yes.

**David Todd** [00:37:52] Not study and intervene and interfere, but just give them the space to roam and live their lives.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:38:00] Well, yeah, protect that, protect that habitat. I mean, if we spend as much money and time and effort on protecting habitat as we do on trying to get in there and see what they're doing, there probably would be some habitat left.

**David Todd** [00:38:17] So have you sort of looked into their, their life in the wild in Texas? Has that been an interest of yours, or are you mostly focused on the animals that come to you at the sanctuary?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:38:31] Oh, I'm, I'm just in awe of their life in the wild. I mean, I, you know, for people who have who have written about them and not so much studied them and by means, you know, intrusive, intrusive studies, but who've just, for observations and things, just, I mean, to me, to me, the most wonderful thing about living on this planet is the fact that there are non-humans here, and the trees and all, every, every element that is nature. To me, that is what is absolutely the most wonderful, wonderful thing about being here. And, ironically, tragically, it is all of that that we are destroying.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:39:26] So any, anything we know about wild animals in the wild and their behavior there, I'm constantly fascinated by the fact that there are even any of them left standing. Because from the tiny baby bird to, who even under their parents' care, not, not to mention those who fall out of the nest, or a cat gets them, and yet they still survive when we intervene then. That these beings, these incredible beings, throughout this entire planet, they're out there in the storms, they're out there during the droughts. They're out there in the floods. They're out there when snow is knee-deep.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:40:12] And they're just doing what they do. And they're having their young and, and living in troops, or in flocks, or in single lives, whatever it happens to be, and underground and above ground, or in the treetops. It's just, how astounding they all are. That every day, every day, every moment, every minute of every day, they're doing that. And they're doing it with grace, and with calm, and with quiet, and with incredible dignity. Whether they're a predator or whether they're someone who's eaten, whether they can fly or crawl or swim, to me, is that, why is that ever not just enough for our species to know they're there, to see that they're there, to say, oh, my God, let's leave them, what is their world? And take smaller chunks for ourselves and not have so many of us. Because you just stop and think who these animals are, what they do, what they are capable of. To me, you know, that, that was just, put you into a place where you could do nothing but respect them and want to just, you know, hope that you get a glimpse of them occasionally and other than that, just be thrilled that they're around.

**David Todd** [00:41:31] Yeah. So resilient. I have been struck by how spring has sprung and birds are twittering despite the freeze we had a month ago. Amazing.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:41:43] And they are having babies.

**David Todd** [00:41:44] Well, you know...

**Lynn Cuny** [00:41:44] They're having no trouble nesting, having tiny little, you know, translucent-skinned babies who have no feathers on them, and they're still alive and will be in two weeks. They'll be flying in for weeks.

**David Todd** [00:41:57] It's phenomenal.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:41:58] It is.

**David Todd** [00:41:59] Well, and I think it's remarkable when you think about, me going back to this, sort of example of the mountain lion, not only do they survive, you know, as you said, the storms and floods and snows and droughts and so on, but they have been actively, you know, harassed and killed. And, you know, I was wondering if that's something that you've studied over the years, you know, the predator control of the non-game status in Texas.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:42:30] You know, I've been so frustrated and angered by that for all these years that we refused to protect that species. We continue to be swayed by the people who persist at seeing them as the devil incarnate because they're a predator and that, you know, as a state, we will not protect them. It just, and trying to kill them. I mean, everything from the wildlife killing contests where the more predators you kill, the more money or gold watches you're going to win, which is becoming more and more popular in this state, to just the fact that, no, we're not going to protect them. No, no, the lobby's too big, or whatever that stupid reason is. If, you know, those are the types of things that you have to constantly speak out against, but if you dwell and dwell and dwell, they will make you so angry and limit you in your abilities to help, that you just have to do what you can to fight it, to advocate on behalf of the animals, for the animals, and try to tell the world that things need to change.

**David Todd** [00:43:45] Do you, do you see change? So it seems like with, what little I know of the, as the livestock industry has declined out in West Texas at least, I guess, goat and sheep operations being less common, that there seems to be less support among landowners for predator control. I don't know about the hunting, but it seems like the, the bounty and trapping seems to have declined. Is that a fair thing to say or not?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:44:17] No, I think it has declined. I'm not sure that people feel differently about the species. But I think if you, if you're, if you're proactive in trying to kill cougars because you have goats and you no longer have goats, then maybe your behavior is going to change. But I don't know that the feelings have changed.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:44:38] I still, I mean, I, in some years ago, I sat in meetings, you know, it was a lot of west Texas ranchers and people were talking about, again, quote unquote, "elevating the cougar to game status". And what I, I was just astounded by the attitude towards mountain lions by these people. And these people, these are people who do live out in nature more than most. They certainly don't live in a city out in west Texas, they're very, you know, the human population is sparse. You would think that they, living closer to nature, would have a more profound respect for nature and love of nature.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:45:25] You would be wrong, really wrong. And their attitude towards predators was almost like this competition. These are my goats and not their goats. Well, Ok. I mean, well just, what do you mean, they're not "their", of course they're not their goats. But can you not just be reasonable and think that if you put somebody out there who they'd normally would see as someone to eat, if they're going to do that, it's not malicious, it's not because they're competing with you. They're just trying to stay alive and you've given them someone to eat.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:46:04] But it could never, they couldn't, anyone, the ones I talked, to could never seem to just, "Well, yeah, I guess that makes sense." It was never that it was, "no, no, they're not their goats", you know. You know, it was just, it was absurd. And I, so I don't know

if those people's attitudes toward the species have changed, like I say, even if they don't have the same motivation for killing them. I don't know. I, I would be surprised. I would be surprised if they had a gun, saw a cougar, and didn't shoot even though they didn't have goats. I might be wrong. I hope I'm wrong, but I, I would be surprised if they didn't try to kill that cougar.

**David Todd** [00:46:42] Well, I guess that that bleeds over, so to speak, into attitudes about hunting, I guess the, my understanding is that Texas has got this non-game status, which has persisted for years after lots of other states have given them some sort of protection against hunting. Do you, can you give us a little insight about what's going on there?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:47:07] About the hunting of the cougar in particular, on predators in particular, you mean?

**David Todd** [00:47:11] Yeah, I mean, if you don't have sheep or goats at stake, but you just want a trophy?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:47:17] You just want them dead? I don't know, I mean, I have, I had lengthy discussions about that very topic with all manner of people, and it's come down to everything from competition, to a macho thing, to, to wanting to kill the feminine in nature. To, I mean, truly, I don't know. I don't know if the people who feel that way, understand it themselves. I know what they say about how they feel, but what they say doesn't make any sense. I think it comes down to something purely emotional, I think it comes down to something in their gut. I think that probably they're, they, you know, because some of these people, when I had some of these meetings years ago, their sons were there and I was thinking, well, maybe there's some hope here. Well, they'd already polluted their sons to believing what they believe, which is the old, "only good predator is a dead predator".

**Lynn Cuny** [00:48:14] But when you try to get down to the, "But, why? Why is that?" Because we even, we were even able to establish a fund where we said to them, "OK." And I know other states have done this. "OK, you've lost three goats to mountain lions and you show us that it is definitely mountain lions, you will not lose a penny. There is a fund, you will get your money back. OK, now you don't have to kill the mountain lions." "No, no, no, no, no. Uh uh. We're going to kill them anyway." OK, so it's not about the goats, and it's not about your money. I mean, there's just this, I don't know, this innate hatred of them, and I certainly don't understand it and I really, I really have to say I don't think they do either. I really don't think they do.

**David Todd** [00:48:59] Sort of instinctive or just inherited?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:49:01] Well, inherited and and never thought through.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:49:08] I mean, you look at prejudice against, against, you know, people having prejudices against, you know, other people, you know, someone who has a darker skin than you, someone who has a different look than you do, speaks a different language than you do, perhaps dresses a little differently than you do. What the hell is that? I mean, where does any of that come from? Does anybody really understand that? Surely if we have a true understanding of it, could we have wiped it out by now?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:49:34] I mean, what, is it a similar, I think, feeling with certain animals? I mean, you look at someone who's afraid of snakes. Well, a snake obviously is poisonous. He

could hurt you. He's probably not going to because he wants to get the hell away from you. But just a snake, a garter snake, and people go screaming for the, running to the hoe. Now, what is that? What is that? That snake could no more hurt you than he could fly to the moon, but you're kill him, instead of stopping and asking yourself, wait a minute, now, wait a minute, what's going on here? Why am I why am I having this reaction?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:50:16] That's the, I mean, I have to say, that's what I, that's what I've all come down to, for me, after all these years. It's our species. We are so screwed up. We are so lost. We are so detached from the oneness and from nature, that we don't we don't know who we are anymore. We've never known who the animals are. And we do not have the ability to just let them be and let nature be and, and respect nature, and protect nature, and appreciate nature and animals. We just can't do it as a species, as individuals and not as a species.

**David Todd** [00:51:00] So it sounds like part of what you do, as an individual and as a nonprofit, is not only take care of animals, but also try to teach the public about the place of animals and protect them. I think you all have a speakers bureau as well? Talk a little about what sort of public education or ethos you try to instill in people?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:51:31] We are constantly saying to everybody who will listen, whether that's in our educational outreach plan, we have a program for our children and for adults, whether it's somebody calling us on the phone or whether it's in our social media or whatever it is, they're constantly, constantly saying to people:

**Lynn Cuny** [00:51:49] "Just appreciate them. Try to look at animals as equal beings, not lesser beings. Try to understand if you see them in your backyard that you have taken over their home. Try to understand that every time another shopping center or apartment complex is built, they have lost their homes, as if someone came in, you left in the morning and you came home and your home was gone, your house was gone, your yard was gone. They are experiencing that every day. Try to be empathic, try to be sympathetic, try to see something through their eyes to some of their experience and have some compassion for them. Have some understanding, have some tolerance, at least."

**Lynn Cuny** [00:52:43] And we just we just say it and we say it, and we say it, and we say it. And I've had people say, "you know, I never thought of it like that. You're right. That, that makes some sense. I'll certainly try." And we have people, you know, say, "OK, I'm going to leave that 'possum in my backyard alone. I'm not going to sic my dog on him. I'm not going to put out poison. You know, OK, the snake. OK, got it. The snake's not going to hurt me. OK, I'll leave them alone."

**Lynn Cuny** [00:53:11] And I you know, I mean, I like to think that there are people out there who, even if they have not made a complete, profound change in how they view animals, at least are not harming them, not completely terrified of them, not wishing them ill. I'd like to think that. I hope I'm right.

**David Todd** [00:53:38] Well, I think you said, since, I guess, you started working on earthworms that some of these attitudes are slowly changing. What, what do you foresee, you know, attitudes and circumstances for wildlife going forward, you know, in the future?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:54:00] It is increasingly a more difficult world for them to live in. The only ones who are going to survive are the ones who have adapted to being around us. The only ones who are going to survive are the ones that can have large enough litters for all of them to

get killed on the highways and by dogs and cars and poisons, that there will be members of their family that survive. Those who can't manage to adapt to everything we're throwing at them every day, we will lose them. We will continue to lose species. We will probably lose most species, I think, probably.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:54:39] There will be that handful of survivors. They're, you know, again, the ones who've become urbanized and are making it, will be the more common, more large in number.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:54:56] The ones who are more fragile, whose needs are more specialized and have nothing to do with, you know, what we bring into their world. They won't make it. We will lose them. I mean, the world will lose and they will be lost to themselves and to each other.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:55:12] And, and it is just unconscionable on behalf of our species what we're doing, we. We I don't know, you know, it is, it is remarkable to me that nature has not gotten rid of us. And She should have a long time ago, because there are so many more beings here who are so much more wonderful, valuable, harmless and precious and important than we are, that we should have gone a long time ago and the planet would be just fine right now, but we didn't. It's been getting worse. We're not getting better. I think we've learned from some of our mistakes, but we're not, I mean, climate change says it all. And we're taking everybody down with us. And it's going to get worse and then I don't know what the planet is going to do. I won't be here to see it. I don't know what the animals are going to do. Again, I think most of them will go. Those who make it, will make it. And it's really sad. It's just tragic and positively immoral.

**David Todd** [00:56:23] So what keeps you going? I mean, it's a, it's a bleak thing that you deal with every day, you know, with the parrot's that's in your office or, you know, the mountain lion that you can see at your sanctuary. For a lot of us, it's pretty abstract. We read about it, but it's not a constant reminder. What keeps your chin up?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:56:53] Well, what keeps me going is the fact that every time an animal is brought to our doors, then we help him or her. We have probably, oh, several hundred animals in our care right now who had they been left out on a sidewalk or left out during the freeze, or they'd not been pulled away from that cat or dog or the B-Bs hadn't been pulled out of their gut, or whatever. They'd be dead

**Lynn Cuny** [00:57:20] But they're not dead. They're not dead because they're here. They're not dead because we care enough. It doesn't matter who they are. We care enough. And I say, "we", I mean, everybody in this organization and even the people that brought them to us, and the people who support this organization care enough to say that little 'possum, by golly, he can be fixed, that leg can be mended and he can be sent back out into the world where he wants to be, because we're here to do it.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:57:51] And every little possum and squirrel and skunk and bird and, and the primates we get out of laboratories who now have a decent life where they can climb up trees and sit there and feel the sunshine on their face and they're not in a lab cage anymore. Every iguana we get out of an aquarium in someone's backyard or bedroom now is out of doors, sitting in the sunshine, climbing on a tree limb.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:58:15] That's what keeps me going. We are helping every one of the individuals we help, we are helping them, every animal, every farmed animal rescue. We've got donkeys who are destined to be sent to the kill trucks to be slaughtered in Mexico and used for food. They're not. They're here now roaming 212 acres without a care in the world. That's what keeps me going.

**David Todd** [00:58:38] Well, I'm glad you have the ability to keep on going, and it's nice of you to tell us about what you've learned and what you've done, and what you foresee.

**David Todd** [00:58:51] Is there anything you'd like to add?

**Lynn Cuny** [00:58:57] Well, just that, you know, we all need to look in the mirror every day and ask ourselves, "how can I do something better today, better for somebody else? How can I put myself aside, not care so much about how I look, or how much money I have, or whatever it is that's going on with me, but how can I go out there this very day?"

**Lynn Cuny** [00:59:18] Every day I could help do something to help somebody else, whoever that somebody else is, whether they are human or non-human or a tree, or a piece of nature. How can I do that? And you will find that there are many ways you can do that. And you will find it is totally up to you to do that, and you'll find that if you do that, you will feel a lot better about yourself and you will maybe make a difference in the world.

**Lynn Cuny** [00:59:42] And to me, that's what we must all do. We all must make a positive difference in the world because for every little tiny bit of difference it makes it a positive. For all that horrible negative news out there, at least it gets in the way of that for a moment and maybe for longer.

**David Todd** [01:00:01] That sounds like a good therapy for people, as much as for the animals that you care for. Good idea.

**David Todd** [01:00:13] Well, Lynn, it has been really nice to visit with you. Thank you for your time participating in this little project. We really appreciate it.

**Lynn Cuny** [01:00:23] It's been my pleasure as well. Thank you.

**David Todd** [01:00:26] All right. Well, let's keep in touch. Great to reconnect.

**Lynn Cuny** [01:00:29] I would love to.

**David Todd** [01:00:31] All right, talk to you soon.