

**TRANSCRIPT:**

**INTERVIEWEE:** Susan Hughes

**INTERVIEWER:** David Todd

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**REEL:** 2340

(misc.)

**DT:** My name is David Todd. I'm here for the Conservation History Association of Texas. It's February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2006. We're in San Antonio, Texas and we have the good fortune to be visiting with Susan Hughes, who has been active on just a number of fronts from population to urban planning to forests and has focused, though, on work at the Bexar County Audubon level, the Texas State level and at the national level. And as well has worked on many water issues through her role on the Edwards Aquifer Authority and with the South Central Texas Regional Water Planning Group. And there are many other things, I'm sure, we'll touch on today, but I thought that might give some sense of her role. I wanted to take this chance to thank you for spending time with us.

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**SH:** It's my pleasure.

**DT:** I thought we might start by talking about your childhood.

(misc.)

**DT:** Well let's resume. So I basically wanted to thank you for spending time with us and then maybe we could launch into this by asking about your childhood and whether there might've been early experiences that introduced you to the outdoors and to a concern about conservation?

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**SH:** Well, m y—my dad was an avid hunter and fisherman and he had a—a reverence for nature that I realize now is what probably mostly inspired me. He would take me out, you know, and—I mean, of course, he was a—he was a hunter and fisherman who—who likes to do this all year round, so, you know, he would—even if it wasn't hunting season, he was going out, you know, to the—his hunting lease and, you know, looking around and doing this and preparing that and cutting trails and ha—who knows what else, you know. But while we'd do that, you know, I mean, he'd point out things to me and

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it—it—it just—he made me aware, I guess, in—in many respects of all the components of—of nature. Although h—he, like so many people, you know, was—

he knew his game animals pretty well, you know, and of course, you know, the—the obvious ones, but he was not—he was not a birder or, you know, I mean, it was like—like I found most farmers and ranchers to be in the golden-cheeked warbler days. You know, these were little brown birds and—and, you know, and—and that was, you know, as far as it went. It didn't mean you didn't have appreciation for them but the recognition that something was this, that or the other, you know, is a—little birds and big birds and, you know,

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and—and quail and doves and, you know, that was—that was sort of—sort of it. But certainly instilled a reverence for nature that—that has carried me through. We'd—when he'd have hunting leases down in the Laredo area or out in the **prior** or something, you know, and he was wonderful at hunting for arrowheads and so forth and, you know, just had—had a sharp eye. So nothing really escaped him.

**DT:** And you went along on some of these hunting trips that (**inaudible**)

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**SH:** I—I went hunting with him up until the age I was—till I was twelve and then I started hunting myself. So that, you know, but always, you know, with—with him beside me. He'd take me hunting for the first few days of the season and I had a—had a lease out, which was—had been his lease, out where the Olympic subdivision—I think that's what—Olympia subdivision? Right out by the racetrack—that was my hunting lease. So seeing that now turned into a huge housing development, you know, it still really boggles

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my mind every time I drive by it because I think oh gosh, I remember walking along the trails there and scaring up turkeys and, you know, finding tiny little rattlesnakes and all sorts of things. And then, you know, so—so that's when I started hunting was about age twelve.

**DT:** And did you hunt with friends or relatives?

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**SH:** It—if my daddy wasn't here and my mother went with me and, you know, helped me. I remember the first time I went out and—and—and shot a deer without my dad around to help me, you know, dress it—field dress it. He had given me a little book from Texas Parks and Wildlife on how to dress—how to field dress a deer. And I had my pocket knife that he had given me and I had a flashlight and I had shot this deer in, you know, in the evening and my mother had gone off to get the car and, you know, which was ah, probably a mile away or so and—and come back. And when she got back, I was

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sitting there and I had this deer propped up with rocks and so forth and—and my little book was in the crook of one arm and the flashlight in the crook of the other and here I was. But I got really good reports on what I had done whenever we took it down to the cold locker at the brewery where my dad worked. And—and there

were good reports back to him about his Su—Susie sure did go—do a good job on cleaning that deer, so, you know. So I was very proud. But the—the most important thing that I remember is sitting, watching the sunrise and watching the shadows moving across and realizing how

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easy it is to mistake things for something that they're not and caution associated with that because it's a—as the sunbeams move through, you know, the shadows would change and you know you'd see—I mean, you could always see a deer popping its head through the brush. You know, I mean, it was always there, so I—I learned very early, caution—caution, caution. And respect, that you never wanted to injure an animal, that you wanted

**00:08:49 - 2340**

a clean shot and you wanted to make sure that that's, you know, that that's—that's what you did to respect the animal. So I have—I have a great respect for hunting. I no longer do hunting. For one reason, it's pretty darn expensive to do hunting these days, but I have a very good record. I have twelve deer for twelve bullets and I missed one once, so—so that's a—I also got two with one bullet, so that was my—the last hunting experience. I figured as long as I was even, I was ready to go, so.

**DT:** You also mentioned that your father was an avid fisherman. Would you go with him on fishing tours or...?

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**SH:** Oh, yes, you know, I—I went fishing with him all the time. We'd go—and I—there was a place up on the Guadalupe that belonged to a friend of his where there was a wonderful waterfall, quite a dramatic waterfall, and to the best of my knowledge, it was up around Spring Branch. For years I tried to find where that was and then finally it dawned on me that it's under Canyon Lake. So my, you know, I—I have a great fondness for the Guadalupe River because I did spend a lot of time there growing up and—and then later in life when Tatiana was little, we did a lot of whitewater rafting, so forth there, so good times on the Guadalupe. It's a remarkable and wonderful, special place. Very special place.

**DT:** Well, tell us more about trips there, whether it was for fishing or for rafting.

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**SH:** For rafting, it's kind of a bittersweet recollection because most of that was done with my ex-husband, who could be an interesting character as far as that was concerned. He didn't understand the concept of getting down in the boat when you're going through the rapids. So we—we had a number of mishaps there that were kind of interesting. But, you know, but still just, you know, the—the pleasure of being out on the river, you know, was—was wonderful. And swimming in the river, leeches and all, you know, that's one

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of my other fond memeran—remembrances of the Guadalupe was it had a lot of leeches in it back in those days. I don't know if it still does or not. Probably is too—

too cold below the—below Canyon Dam now for—for them. But maybe upstream they still—they still have such things. But it used to be a lot easier to go out and find wildlife under rocks and, you know, I remember turning up, you know, rocks with dozens of planaria and all sorts of wonderful, you know, things underneath them and, you know, I just miss those days in many respects. But, you know, it's—times change.

**DT:** You had mentioned a couple times now Canyon Dam and I was wondering if you remember the construction of the dam?

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**SH:** I do. In fact, my cousin was a county commissioner in Comal County when—when Canyon Dam was being built and I remember hearing Henry, you know, talking about this big project. And I still have one rock that's a little fossil, looks like a mushroom. It's pr—was probably something like a sea urch—urchin or something and some crystals and so forth that came from the excavation of an area around there, so. That's—I'd—you know, I had no understanding of what was really going on with the dam at that point in time or what, you know, what the real implications were of a big

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surface water facility. Don't know how old I would've been then, I can't remember exactly when Canyon Dam was built. It—but it's, you know, it certainly changed the landscape.

**DT:** Let's skip forward a few years, if you don't mind. You went to Trinity and then began a career, as I understand, in library science, taking care of libraries for corporations?

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**SH:** Right. I—well, I graduated as—with—with a drama degree from Trinity and my mother saw a little ad in the newspaper—I was going to go to Dallas Theatre Center and work on a masters in drama—and my mom saw an ad in the newspaper that there were fellowships available at UT Austin for people interested in library science, which—you know, and I pretty much got through my undergraduate degree without visiting libraries very much. I had no idea there were such things as indexes, for example. But—and so I applied for this fellowship at UT Austin and received one and so I moved to Austin and

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did my graduate degree there in a little—little over a year. Then my first job was actually directing the theatre at—through sp—with Special Services at Fort Sam Houston. So I have actually made money with my drama degree, which I think is commendable, you know, if not extraordinary. But then after that, I—I had my midlife crisis—or early life crisis, I should say—and moved off to Cleveland and met and married my first husband and moved to Lansing, Michigan and moved back to Texas then after about six months.

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So then my—and my job—the reason we moved back to Texas was because David Eddington had called—he was the director of the Houston Public Library—had called me and said I had been suggested to them for a position as Director of the Fine Arts Department at Houston Public. And—and so I was offered and accepted that job and—and spent some time very happily working as the Fine Arts librarian there. And then my daughter came along. We moved back to San Antonio. My husband finished his degree at Trinity and then went on to work on a graduate degree in environmental management

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at UTSA. So while he was doing that, I started taking some environmental management classes myself and I never finished my degree, but my—that second masters, but I did have the tutelage of a number of wonderful professors there. Leland Hepworth, who was a Professor of Ecology and—and also Ted McKinney, who was truly one of my great inspirations academically. And I felt, between the work that I did with him and Tom Hester, that I really did the first intellectually honest work that I had ever done in terms of you know, being original and—and completely—completely responsible in terms of

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recognizing my sources and, you know, and doing something that actually pulled information together and synthesized it in some way.

**DT:** What was that project?

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**SH:** Well, I was working on a Pleistocene extinctions. That was my—my topic and, you know, and I just was so fascinated by that entire area of—of research. I really spent some good time working on—working on that project or those—I had actually continued over several semesters. But it was—and in some respects, I think that might have—that might really have triggered some of my interests in endangered species and looking at overall ecological conditions that contribute to peril for certain, you know, certain species of animals, plants, so forth. So anyway, then I—I had to quit school there

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and—and I went on, got a job as a—as the Technical Librarian for the Department of Aviation in Houston, so I moved back to Houston again and then went to work for McKenzie and Company up in Dallas. So that gave me a good grounding in, basically, as the librarian for a McKenzie office, your job is to make the consultants smart overnight. I would get—one of the guys would come in and say, you know, I've got an ap—appointment tomorrow in Chicago with a shoe manufacturer. You know, find me everything you know about shoes, you know, or everything anybody knows about shoes or the aerospace industry or dredging. You know, that—that is how I came upon one of

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my favorite titles, *Dredging World*. You know, so there—there really is—you know, there's a magazine for everything, you know. *Dredging World*. But the McKenzie experience was—was pretty interesting for me because it—it was so broad based

and far reaching and really epitomized the knowing less and less about more and more until you know nothing about everything situation. But it was—it—it was very interesting. And then we moved to—I moved back to Houston. I had divorced and married Bruce and—who was at—had been at Rice for many years and so Tatiana and I moved to Houston,

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started working for Mobil and then we moved to San Antonio when Bruce was employed by DataPoint. And then I came on DataPoint, too, as their tech—as their corporate information resource something or other—manager, I guess it was. But—so that’s kind of been my professional history. And once I quit working for DataPoint, I was doing a lot of consultant—consulting work even before that for Richardson Gill, who had—was a very ec—eclectic—a man of great eclectic interests and who has recently written a book on Mayan climatological impacts, I guess you would say, and the—the fall of the Mayan

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Empire and how it related to climatology, so—and—and which I kind of did a little edit for him as well right at the end. So he’s—he’s introduced me to lots of topics again of—it was kind of like working for a one man McKenzie, you know. But—and then I started—you know, my family really said that, you know, I was—since I was doing the, you know, some consulting work and I really was not inclined to go back to work in corporate America again, it’s having been a pretty traumatic experience, all in all. And

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draining—I just really wore myself out at it and so they said well, you know, if you want to get involved in environmental issues, do that. You know, because that’s really where I kept leaning. I kept thinking, you know, gee, there’s something—something that I can do, something that I can contribute, you know, to—to making the world a better place in a way. So that’s kind of what I’ve done since then. I’ve really tried hard to—to do that in—in everything that I’ve—that I’ve done. I always try to, you know, remember that message. Course, having, you know, having a child, you know, makes a great difference,

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I think, in terms of your perspective. You suddenly realize that the consequences of your decision reach much further than your day-to-day experience and that, you know, the responsibilities of next generations is—is a grave and serious one that should be taken with a great deal of—of gravity, really. But still, that there’s so much joy in seeing the—the results that can happen from—from actually concentrating on making a difference, you know, in a positive way. Thinking about the choices that you make and that’s not to say that you, you know, become, you know, completely, you know, wearing cardboard

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shoes or, you know, whatever but—but that you at least think about the upstream and downstream consequences of the decisions that you make. And I suppose that’s my—has been—become my mantra. We all make choices every day that have significant impacts, whether it’s just driving a car to the grocery store or, you know, choosing to turn on the air conditioning or a—planting a plant in your yard that, you

know, it doesn't have any particular ecological benefit to—to your little ecosystem. But if you at least think about

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the fact that there are upstream and downstream consequences of your choices, then maybe you'll combine that trip with something else or maybe you will raise the thermostat one degree or maybe you'll choose a native plant versus something that's purely ornamental, you know. I mean, I have—I have ornamentals in—in my yard. There are some things that I just really like. I love my geraniums. I have lovely irises and so forth. But the preponderance of the plants in my yard are, indeed, plants that are good for—for birds and butterflies and bees and beneficial insects and lizards and, you

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know, I'm not real crazy about slugs but, you know, there's a—but nevertheless, there's plenty of things for them to eat out there, too. So it's just—just a matter of making—making choices and being aware of—of what you do. So that's my—that's my philosophy.

**DT:** Well, maybe this might be a good opportunity to talk a little bit about your role as a master gardener and maybe elaborate a little bit about this whole issue of planting natives, planting materials that are favorable to the local wildlife, plants that are drought tolerant. Maybe you could touch on some of these.

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**SH:** Sure. When I was living out on the northwest side of town, off of Interstate 10, we had—it was just a tract home, but it had a—a great hillside in the back, which was just, you know, a limestone, you know, slope. But nevertheless provided me plenty of opportunity to plant natives and—and—and I just—I had a wonderful, wonderful native garden there and probably 100 species of, you know, trees and bushes and so forth up on my hill. And wildflowers in—it was, you know, it was—it was a great place to be. I'm—I—that's the one thing I miss about living in suburbia was my yard. But a friend of

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mine, whom I had first met at DataPoint and I continued to be friends, and I had subsequently, you know, done a—a—done a master gardener program and—and I had, you know, I had all these—these natives, which is not necessarily the focus of master gardeners, but you know, was—was what I was really interested in, so. She was over at my house one day and we were talking about, you know, my—my garden and she said I want to do this in my garden, too. So—so we started, you know, talking about how she could convert her yard to a wildscape. And, well, we didn't have a name, you know,

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back then, but—and so as—as she got to working, we started thinking that, you know, wouldn't it be nice if this were not the exception, but rather, you know, the—a commonplace thing in our community to have, you know, these wonderful natives because, I mean, there's nothing more beautiful than a flowering garden of native plants, you know, certainly versus a barren scape of Saint Augustine grass, which is

certainly the norm out in—still is the norm out in suburbia. So—so she got her yard done and then she noticed that, you know, somebody down the street thought well, maybe they'd like to do, you know, their yard that way and so we started this little program where we kind of

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looking to see what was going on in the way of any kind of native gardening. We talked with DeeDee Armintraud, up—up at Audubon, the southwest region in—in Austin and she had been kind of thinking along these lines, too. And so we—we looked at—at what she had in mind and then we went and talked with the folks at Texas Parks and Wildlife and found that they had just been working on this wildscape program. Na—National Wildlife Federation was doing some backyard habitat things already so we decided we

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would start something in San Antonio. We picked up on the wildscape program of Texas Parks and Wildlife and we got together a group comprising Calvin Finch, who was the horticultural agent here in—in Bexar County at that time, someone from San Antonio Water System. We had somebody from Native Plants Society. We had, you know, a couple of people from Audubon who were interested in this. And, you know, you know, just a few interested folks here and there. Patty Pastor and Debbie Reed and, you know, they were—Susan Rust, you know, we're all, you know, part of this early planning group.

**DT:** And when was this?

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**SH:** Hmm. Well, isn't that a good question? Let's see.

**DT:** 1990's.

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**SH:** This was in the 90's. Yeah, it had to be in the 90's because I really started getting active in about 1991 was when I responded to the newsletter item at the Bexar Audubon newsletter to—for a newsletter editor. And I—you know, that was my first plun—total plunge into—into this. So it was—it was in the mid-90's, I guess, the—before, you know, I'd gotten involved in the—in the water issues, but. So anyway, th—this—we started doing classes, teaching people about, you know, using the—you know, about backyard habitat or—or some of our cases, front yard habitat. And how to select plants

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and, you know, how to, you know, how good it was in terms of both water usage, which was already a—obviously, you know, has always been an issue in Central Texas. And also that, you know, that you can provide some, you know, some habitat for birds and butterflies and—and—and urban wildlife. It is amazing, even, you know, on a long, long stretch of road or street where there's one yard that has some wildlife food, it's alive. You know, or it—the—they find you. You know, you build it,



they will come, you know. And it's a little—really, your yard is a little oasis for, you know, just anything you

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could possibly want to, you know, to—to bring in. Added—added beauty. Living beauty in your yard, so. So we got this started and—and then I guess it was Debbie Reed and Susan Rust and Riva Stephens and Judy Gallen or Judy Green were probably the—the particular leaders in deciding that, you know, that they would develop a curriculum based on the master gardener model that would be available and that we would, you know, train

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and certify people as master naturalists. This is—this—a program that we had started was called Natural Initiatives. So they—they started this program of master naturalists through the extension service and city, I guess Parks and Rec, had a hand in it through Debbie Reed. So there we were. We had this wonderful program. Very quickly, it was picked up by Austin, I think, was the next area, then Houston, and now it's international. You know, and it started in my yard. So that's one of the—the great things of which I am—am proud, even though you talk to master naturalists today and

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they don't know where it started or even that Bexar Audubon had anything to do with it. But it started out as a Bexar Audubon program and it started out in my yard. So—so there. For the record.

(misc.)

**DT:** You're talking about the master gardener program and I was wondering if you can describe your yard and some of the wildlife that you've seen passing through it? Or maybe they're taking up roost there?

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**SH:** Well, it's—it's—it's quite different from my yard out in the northwest side of town. One of the things that happened when we moved down into the King William area was, as you know, San Antonio is right at the juncture of—of what, six or seven different physiographic areas within a—within a—an hour's drive. So up north, you've got this hill country soil, mostly calichi and hard red clay. Down here, we're right on the San Antonio River, so we have, you know, alluvial soils and the black clay. You know, it's—it's way different. And the—the climatic difference between the northwest side of

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San Antonio and downtown is remarkable. Plus we have a microclimate here; right on the river so it's even warmer, you know, by a degree or two, under most circumstances than it is in the surrounding area. So I had to make some adjustments in terms of what I could, you know, plant and what I could expect to grow. And for one thing, I had planted an—an Anacahuista, the—the Mexican olives up in the northwest side and they would get to be about shrub size and would freeze

back every year and I would hope and pray that they would come back up again, which they—they usually did, but it was touch and

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go. Well, here I have a, you know, a glorious native olive—I mean, a—a Mexican olive in my front yard and, you know, and—and like the one—kind of like the one in front of the Alamo. It blooms all summer long. You know, this is right in it—the northern edge of its range. You know, we have a jacaranda tree right by the—the—the fence, you know, which is just really not—I mean, it’s an Argentinean tree, you know, common in the rainforest and, you know, easy to see in Mexico, but not too many of them up in this—in this area. So the—you know, I have poinsettias that make it through the, you know, through the year. You know, you wouldn’t see this in northwest San Antonio. In

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fact, when—when Parks and Wildlife sends out their wildscape kits to people in this area, they do it based on zip code and they have different plant lists, so forth, based on what your zip code is here in the San Antonio area because it—it varies so—so greatly. So what I have now is—is quite a different variety from what I—from what I used to have. And I do miss some of the things that I used to have—Mexican plums and, you know, some of those—those—the—the cherries and things like that that I had in my—in my old

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yard. But I’m very pleased with—with what I have now. I’m—we just really try to keep a good mix of—of—of plants here, things that will attract enough—enough aphids to keep our ladybugs happy, enough berry producing plants like beauty berry and so forth that the mockingbirds, you know, just go crazy over and I—I don’t do feeders anymore. I did for—for a long time, but keeping feeders out is a—is a big responsibility because of the—the requirement, really, to keep them very clean. There’s so much disease that’s been spread by people who don’t keep their feeders, you know, really clean. And of

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course, you know, for hummingbirds, I—you know, I have lots of hummingbird plants in my garden, so—and I’m sure that, you know, I—I know that there are plenty of people around here that provide supplemental feeding, so I’ve—I’ve given that up in favor of just trying to provide as much, you know, native plant material as I can that will provide nectar sources for them. Butterflies absolutely abound. You know, I have—have a good stand of passion flower vine and—and, you know, it—any number of other things that—that are attractive to butterflies, so yeah, we do okay.

**DT:** You mentioned some of the wildlife that visit your yard. What are people’s reactions that drive by or stroll by?

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**SH:** Oh, people stop at this house all the time. We just get lots of compliments on the yard and people coming in and being interested in what’s this or what’s that and,

you know, can I have a cutting of this? Can I have—you know, so it's, you know, it—it's—it's well accepted in the neighborhood, yeah.

**DT:** You said that the master naturalist program grew out of the master gardening program and I'm curious if that master naturalist program is about trying to enhance nature through plantings like what you've done through the master gardener program? Or is it more about study and appreciation and teaching and understanding of nature?

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**SH:** Well, I think it's all of those things and it—it didn't necessarily grow out of master gardeners so much as it was modeled upon the master gardener program. Fifty hours of classroom work and then with a requirement that you volunteer 50 hours a year. You know, that—that sort of model. The master naturalists study, you know, everything from, you know, the local wildlife and wor—local plants. They're certainly dedicated to in—to promoting the use of native plant materials and so forth. There's also a big educational component, they work with schools for, you know, developing school

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gardens, you know, teaching. Doing all kinds of volunteer work, like out at Mitchell Lake planting, you know, the gardens or clearing the trails or, you know, there's a—there's just a—a—a broad spectrum of activities that the master naturalists do participate in. So it's mostly the model that followed master gardeners rather than the content. But it's a, you know, it's a great—it's a great program. And they just—they get a little bit of our theology, they get a little bit of, you know, all the natural history. I mean, it's—it's a very broad based program that they have, so.

**DT:** You told us a little bit about your garden and I was also intrigued by the fact that you had lived in the suburbs and then moved downtown to this, the Baja portion of the King William district, very close to downtown. I was wondering if there was an environmental aspect to that decision to move closer into the center of the city.

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**SH:** Well, worked both ways in some respects. While—when we decided we needed to move from where we were, the question, of course, was do we move out further or do we move in? And there's a lot of (?), I—I was the most resistant one in my family, saying oh, you know, you move downtown, you know, what—and everything's all inconvenient and out in the suburbs, everything's, you know, right there for you and—but as—as we made the move, I have realized that everything I need is right here. And I don't have to deal on a daily basis with looking at the carnage that's going on out in the suburbs. So in terms of my mental health, this was probably one of the best things we

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could've done. Furthermore, right after we moved here, I had seen a little—I mean, I had been active with Audubon, you know, in master naturalists and all this sort of

thing before. And I say active with master naturalists, I have never become a certified master naturalist. I just never have done that. But when we moved here, I saw a little ad in the newspaper that the—the Mission Trails Committee was just getting started. And one of the things that had attracted us to this location was the fact that—that the city and county were involved in this Mission Trails project and it was just getting off the ground and it

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was something very interesting to me because it was going to go right in our backyard. So—so I quickly called my city councilperson and said hey, I'm really interested in this and it—I think it was going to council that very same day or the next day, you know. And I said couldn't I, you know, be appointed to this committee, because I was a real newcomer down here. And so I was—I was appointed. In fact, I was the only person by name in the ordinance who was appointed to the committee. Everybody else was—was there as a representative of some group or—or other, but so—so here I was and that was

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kind of sort of my being thrown into a—a very interesting group of—of midtown and—and south town activists—South San Antonio activists, you know, that I really hadn't had any contact with before, so that was—that was really interesting. Plus once I had moved down here, there beca—there came to be an opening or—or there was an election to be held for the—for the Edwards Underground Water District. And there were two spots that were being contested. My friend, Walter Barfield, who was at the time, I think,

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president of Bexar Audubon and I was someplace on the board, we were both living in—in the two areas that were up for—for election. And so **Denile Milam** convinced us that we should run for these seats and both of us were—I mean, you know, we had the—you know, an inkling of what was going on in the—in the water bidness, but we certainly weren't, you know, deeply en—ensconced in that water culture here. But Bexar Audubon had written some position papers and so forth on water quality issues and aquifer protection and so forth. So we fancied ourselves as having some vague notion of

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what was going on. Anyway, we ran for this and we were both elected, but there was—the va—that was when the MALDEF filed an appeal to the Justice Department and so that all, you know, got involved and—and we ended up never being seated. So it was a better part of a year that we were going back and forth on this, you know, we could be seated, not seated. Petitioning to be seated, being told no, you know, but so finally, I think we just—we just kind of gave up and—but then the Edwards Aquifer Authority came into being. Of course, it had all been in litigation for several years with the

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Barshop case and so when it—when that finally got resolved and the Edwards Aquifer Authority came into existence with an appointed board, then they had to have an—have an election for—for the board. So I ran again and was elected. So that was ten years ago.

**DT:** Was that part of what appealed to you and, I guess, is a nice part of your life now, that by living in the center city that you feel like you're more involved in sort of civic organizations?

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**SH:** That's ab—absolutely is what happened. When I was out in the suburbs, I was, you know, hundred percent Audubon. Anything that wasn't Audubon, I wasn't involved in. Once I got down here, I got involved in Mission Trails, you know, I got involved in the water, you know, stuff and, you know, that's sort of been my downfall from there. But being—being right here in the center of the city has really heightened my overall awareness and my connections with—with all parts of the city. And I think that if being raised on, you know, as a—as a north side kid and always living on the north side was

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—really gave me a sense of sort of tunnel vision. Although going to Keystone was—was—as a—as high school was—certainly exposed me to kids all over San Antonio because, you know, the people—people at Keystone were either there because they could afford to pay the tuition or because, at that time, which was immediately post-Sputnik, there was scholarship money. And so on a competitive basis, kids from all over San Antonio were able to attend Keystone. And so those of us who came there as scholarship kids, you know, were—were from north side, south side, you know, everywhere. And it

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was strictly based on—on your capabilities rather than anything else, though that, too, sort of started getting me a—a little bit more aware, but still it's—the fact is that, in many respects, San Antonio starts at Hildebrand, you know. If you look at the city today, you know, it's—it's moving further and further north and that north side mentality—and I—

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you know, I don't mean that disparagingly, but really there—there's an awful lot of people in San Antonio who've never been south of Commerce Street. You know, oh, maybe Market, you know. But—but really there's—there's no real awareness of the rich cultural history of San Antonio. All of—everything that makes San Antonio what it is today, or made San Antonio what it is today is associated with this river and the missions and the other kinds of cultural components that grew up around those natural resources. And the river starts at Hildebrand.

**DT:** Maybe this would be a good chance to just talk about any overlap you see between environmental conservation and historic conservation. Maybe looking at Mission Trails and how that introduced to the trail itself and the missions and then the fact that there's some conservation involved with the trail's development, I suppose.

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**SH:** Well, it—it was—it was a real pleasure to be on that—on that committee. There really—I—I guess I was the most environmentally conscious advocate for, you know, a—for doing this remediation work in the—in a way that, you know, made a lot of sense for the environment as well as just for, you know, the—the tourist element, you know. A—a lot of times we are driven by—strictly by perceived economic values and not realizing that there are some—a lot of underlying economic values that oftentimes are—are overlooked and—and I'd like to talk about that a little bit later, you know, as—in looking at some of the challenges that—that have faced us in terms of environmental

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protection. There's the economics of the Mission Trails project. We're strictly focused on, you know, how do we bring more tourist dollars? How do we increase business opportunities and so forth by, you know, improving this portion of the river recognizing that, you know, back in the sixties was when the Corps of Engineers came in and—and—and channelized all of this area, you know, turning what was a—a lovely riparian area into a drainage ditch, you know, as was happening all over the country. Probably all over the world any—anywhere the—the Corps, you know, put a—put its thumbprint.

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Fortunately, they have had a—a—a renaissance in—in their thinking and so the Corps is now looking at—or at least, sections of the Corps—you know, has been very actively over the past five or six years particularly, I guess, looking at ways that they can come back in and fix some of the problems that they created. You know, realizing that, you know, the—the way to handle flooding and water problems and so forth is not just to rush the water down to the next county and hope that they'll deal with it. You know, that's—if that—really, you know, there's a—there's a reason why rivers meander, you know.

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There's a reason why, you know, there are shoals and banks, you know, there's—it's not just a—it's not just because it's pretty, you know. There's a real fluvial, geomorphological reason for that. On the Mission Trails project itself, one of the things that—that I can feel responsible for is as we were looking, for example, at revegetation issues, you know, I really focused on making sure that the consultants understood the importance of using natives. You know, that you don't want to come in here with a

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bunch of crepe myrtles. I mean, as lovely as they are, you know, they have their place, but on the river is probably not it. You know, if you want to have something that looks like a crepe myrtle, you know, use a—what are those? Bloom pink in the spring. Yeah, anyway. But, you know, I mean, there's—there's a wide variety of—of—of plants that, you know, that you can use that are perfectly beautiful, well adapted, aren't going to require a lot of upkeep and, you know, also provide some food and shelter for wildlife. I

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mean, that's—you know, we'll never restore the riparian area that existed. I mean, it's—y—you—you don't restore ecosystems like that. I mean, it's just, you know, it's

a—to think of—even to—to think of trying it is—is pretty much folly, especially, you know, in an urban area where you’ve got lots of competing interests, you know. There’s a lot of, you know—you could, perhaps, do that but you’d have so many, you know—it’s—it’s a—it’s hard enough just to get the neighbors to—to let you not keep the grass mowed, you know. So we’re coming in with, you know, varieties of native grasses and so forth

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and so on in, you know, but we’re going to maintain them in such a way that there’s, you know, there’s some compromise associated with that. Keep—you know, to keep all the neighbors happy, but will still accomplish some of our major goals, which is to, you know, to restore the system to something that is at least more sustainable. Yeah, and also attractive at the same time. So there’s, you know, lots of tradeoffs associated with any kind of work like this. But—and, you know, other things were, you know, in specking light fixtures for the—for the Mission Trails project. You know, I insisted that they

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spec light fixtures that shielded, you know, the—the—the light so that—this is one of the few places in San Antonio where you can still go out at night and see the stars, you know, the further—further south you go. So, you know, going down there and putting in a bunch of light fixtures that are just going to throw light up into the sky really, you know, is not the kind of thing that you want to do. So we have very nice light fixtures specked for it and very well shielded and, you know, so we’ve kind of conserved that element.

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I’ve tried to help them look at, you know, what, you know, what the native wildlife is around here. You know, what kind of birds we have, what kind of other critters, you know, are—like to live there and what we could maybe draw back into the—into the community over time if we, you know, if we do things properly. So I mean, you know, there’s a lot of just nudges and suggestions and persistence and, you know, I’ve—I never—I never tried to make a huge deal out of things, but rather to—it’s—it’s my style to convince and to educate and to, you know, provide information and make a good case

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for whatever it is I’m supporting and try to, you know, get people on board with what I think is important, you know. And then share the—share the glory for the good decisions.

**DT:** Well, we’ve talked about some of the issues with living downtown, whether it was the garden or the house or the flood issues down on the San Antonio River and some of the mission development related projects. While all this is going on, you were also very active with Audubon society and at different levels. The local chapter, it’s called Bexar Audubon, and I was hoping that you could talk about some of the local services that you had there, I think, starting in 1992, is that right, on the board of Bexar Audubon?

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**SH:** Right. Yeah, I started editing the newsletter in '91 and then came on the board in '92. I thought as the newsletter editor, I should go to the board meetings so I would know what was going on. And of course, if you go—if you go to the meetings, you will very quickly be absorbed into the—into the infrastructure of the organization. So I—I started serving on the board and then, you know, it wasn't too long before I was in the—in the leadership position there. Susan Rust was—was one of my initial sponges, I guess, with—with Bexar Audubon and—and in fact, I had—had met her several years before I

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actually got back involved with Audubon. She was—when she was first trying to start up the San Antonio Environmental Forum, I guess is what it was called, and she had in—talked to a number of different people around and had brought them together for some meetings from the various environmental organizations here in San Antonio—Sierra Club and, I mean, that, you know, some neighborhood groups. I mean, it's a—it's a wide variety of—of, you know, of organizations like the Bexar Grotto and so forth. So I had been tagged as somebody who was interested in bat conservation, which was true and is enough—yet another story. But—so I had gone to some of these meetings, but it—things didn't really just completely gel at that point and—and I was overwhelmed, you know,

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with my professional life and so I, you know, it just didn't—I didn't—didn't follow through. But then, during our annual planning meeting for Bexar Audubon, after I had become the newsletter editor, our—that first meeting was at the—at the zoo's education building and I walked into—to the room for the meeting and Susan Rust was there and we were—you know, some people that—that I knew. And as we were going around, introducing ourselves as is typical. I said well, I was Susan Hughes and Susan Rust said ah, you're my Susan Hughes. She said I thought that might've been you, so—so I have

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ever—ever since been Susan's Susan Hughes and—and she kind of made sure that I, you know, got completely involved in things and, I guess in some respects, passed some of her mantle onto me as she moved onto other—other places and we still miss her very much. So—and we'll see her tomorrow since she's visiting here, so.

**DT:** What were some of the major concerns, projects for Bexar Audubon during the 90's and into the (?)

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**SH:** Well, you know, Bexar Audubon actually got its start as a spin-off from San Antonio Audubon, which was principally a—a—more of a birding club. Susan Rust and Patty and—and some others were very interested in being engaged more in some of the policy issues and—and that was really not something that the leadership in San Antonio Audubon wanted to do. So they decided that they would spin-off and create Bexar

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Audubon. That's—there was a big rift, you know, when that actually happened, even though they continued to have a good deal of crossover membership, but—but still there were a lot of people who weren't talking to a lot of people for a long time. We've, thank goodness, gotten over that and work together now very closely and—and...

**DT:** Can you explain a little bit about the, not so much the personal conflicts, but just this interesting kind of aspect of—I think both Sierra and Audubon have often those who are interested in outings and the social aspects of learning about the environment and going out and enjoying it, and then those who are more advocacy oriented and policy oriented. They want to engage government, engage other citizens and persuade people to change policies and stuff.

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**SH:** Well, there's, you know, it—it's—it's odd to me that there is this discrepancy because, in truth, unless you—well, something I—I guess I learned pretty much early on in the—in my environmental activism is that—that that's how decisions get made. You know, I mean, I was apolitical—I mean, I—I voted, but, you know, I didn't really want anything to do with politics or politicians or anything else for most of my—most of my life. And one day I woke up and realized that, you know, that's how things get done. You know, like it or not, that's the way it happens. And the people who are particularly interested in outings and, you know, soaking in the out of doors and going birding and so forth, but aren't worried about the policy issues or advocacy are denying the fact that it

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ain't going to be there if there's not somebody out there advocating for its protection. By the same token, introducing people to nature and to—to the out of doors and giving them some experience like that is the one thing that can make them aware of the fact that advocacy is a necessary part of protecting the things that they—that they love and enjoy. It's one of the reasons, if I can backtrack a little bit, why I think the master naturalist program and the whole backyard gardening and wildscaping concept is so vitally important in terms of creating a new culture of conservation, which of course is the

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Audubon term. But whatever you—whenever you don't have a very close communication with nature and it's an abstract thing out there, you have a tendency not to give it much mind and—but for me, the idea that—that you have a plant in your yard that you've put there because it a—is going to attract a butterfly which is going to lay an egg, which you can go out and look at and you can watch as it hatches into a caterpillar. It strips all the leaves off of your plant, you know, when you might ot—you know, you might be inclined to go out and say ah, it's killed that, you know, because here it is

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stripping the, you know, stripping all the leaves. But you realize that you planted that plant because it's a food plant for that particular species of caterpillar, hence butterfly. And then you watch it as it crawls off and goes and pupates someplace

and, you know, the next thing you know, the pupas opened and there's a butterfly. And it's—it is—somehow it's your butterfly then and your relationship with that butterfly and the relationship that you had with the caterpillar and so forth leads you to be anxious for the

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next time—and eager for the next time that butterfly comes and lays an egg on that plant that you have nurtured for its benefit. You know, it's that kind of connection and—and the really palpable relationship that you can develop with something that is not, you know, of a household cat or dog or whatever, that a lot of people think is, you know, perhaps a little bit weird, but you know. But it makes all the difference in the world, in my opinion and, you know, kids who can watch a—a spider spin a web and take it down in the morning and spin it the next night and take it down in the morning, I mean, this

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whole cycle is so amazing and it does, you know, provide such a great sense of wonder and awe that I think it's absolutely elemental to creating advocates and activists that we have this kind of outdoor relationship. I mean, if I hadn't been exposed to being out in the outdoors with my dad, you know, would I ever have paid that much attention? I mean, I can—my dad had a—a real eagle eye. I mean, he could spot wildlife, you know, at, you know, ten miles away practically. And I—I— or—inherited a little bit of that, so I mean, I—I am very ob—observant, typically, of things like that now. Course, I can't

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fight my way out of a computer problem in spite of the fact that, you know, it should be obvious to me, according to my computer programmer husband, that, you know, that you just did these steps and, you know, you should know—should know what you just did. I don't know. But I can tell you that, you know, this was moved in the garden, you know, or that that—boy, that wasn't there yesterday or, you know, look at that bud. You know, all those I'm very aware of so it, you know, we each—we each have our own special set of skills, but...

(misc.)

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