

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Andy Wilkinson (AW)

INTERVIEWER: David Todd (DT)

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DT: I'm David Todd and I'm here with the Conservation History Association of Texas. We're in Lubbock Texas at the Texas Tech campus, Southwest Collection. It's October 11th 2002, and we have the good fortune to be visiting with Andy Wilkinson who is a poet, a play write, a song writer, a singer, performer in—in—in many ways and has—has in much of his work shown a—a—a great knowledge and concern for the Llano Estacado and I wanted to thank you for taking the time to talk to us.

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AW: My pleasure.

DT: I thought we might start this interview by asking you about your early days and whether there might be a—a particular experience that might have first introduced you to interest and—and the love of the outdoors and this part of the world?

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AW: Well, I don't know that I could pinpoint a particular occurrence. But before we moved to town the year I started school we lived on a farm just east of here on the edge of the Yellow House Canyon. And living on a farm and being outdoors a lot is, of course, keeps a person in intimate contact with—with what we call nature. And then even after we moved into town I'd spend summers at the farm with my grandparents. And even beyond that my father worked in agro business. He worked for Anderson Clayton,

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a big oil mill here in town. So anything that we did in our family was intimately related to crops and the growing and the harvesting and—and the markets and all that sort of thing. So it's hard to grow up out here if you're paying attention and not be involved in the natural world. I mean even though you live in town it's—it's—it's so close to you.

DT: Could you describe your grandparent's farm and maybe the Yellow Canyon that you mentioned?

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AW: The Yellow House Canyon?

DT: Yes

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AW: Well, the Yellow House Canyon there—there a—a—about a dozen canyons I guess along the rim of the escar—the eastern escarpment of the Llano. The Yellow House is the next to the last one on the south end. It's the eastern portal of what the Spanish call, La Pista de be de agua, the Trail of Living Waters. It was—a—the western edge is a town that we call Portales, the other portal. In New Mexico and—and for as long as there have been people here, which is the end of the Pleistocene some 12,000 years ago, there've been people coming to this place because of the water in that canyon.

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So it's—it's very although it's a—a non—sort of non-descript canyon it's not nearly as spectacular as Palo Duro, for instance, one of the canyons to the north end of the Llano or Tule Canyon or Los Lingos Canyon. Those canyons that are really steep and—and colorful. Yellow House is sort of rounded and not so steep and what have you, but it's a place that for 12,000 years has had water. And so its history has been interesting. And we lived on a little farm just on the southern rim of that canyon. And it was a very little

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farm. It was like, you know, 15 acres or 10 acres something like that, but my granddad carried the star route in the morning for the post office. In the afternoon he would farm his little farm and he did it all by himself. He'd have hands in it in the fall when it's time to pick the cotton, but the rest of the time it was him. And of course the grandsons who would go out and help chop cotton and pull peanuts and cut candy or whatever it was that he decided to plant that year. So it was a very small outfit but in that sense it was a lot of fun for me because it was not so big, it was an onerous job, you know, so I had time to play and enjoy it.

DT: You mentioned that—that the Yellow House Canyon has been inhabited—visited for gosh, 11, 12,000 years. Can you give us some sort of sense of the—the course of—of human occupation in this part Texas?

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AW: Well, the—the Yellow House is known—is well known from the archeology. You know the—the archeology was—was begun in the 20's. A lot of it springs from the discovery of—of Folsom man by a black cowpuncher near Folsom, New Mexico in the 20's. But about that same time, work was begun at Lubbock Lake Landmark, which is part of the Yellow House Canyon, that same draw, the Yellow House Draw that is that trail that I mentioned before. So the archeology has been done for a long time. And—

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and with the analysis tools that they have of looking at pollen grains and camp fire sights and those sorts of things, have a very clear understanding of—of the kinds of occupation that went on here, which was a seasonal occupation, spring and fall, the times of the year that native peoples would—would—would leave where they were—what was more or less their permanent dwelling, which some people think was in Northern New Mexico. Other people think it was to the southeast of here. In any case, they came up through here

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in migrations in the spring and fall after animals most blackly or most often buffalo. But over different time periods a lot of different things that they would gather here; turtles, certain kinds of fish, other animals that would come to the water. It's particularly important during a period of time in about the middle of that 12,000-year period that was called the Alta Thermal. It was 2,000 and if you include the—the ramp up and ramp down, you know, from the heredity maybe as much as 4,000 years of—of really true

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desert conditions. The difference being that the Yellow House this—this draw had water during th—that time where a great deal of the Great Plains didn't have any. So this maintained its—its habitation over that time period. We only—I mean we know of peoples that were here; Clovis, Folsom, First View, Plain View, Archaic, the different groups of Archaic People and the Ceramic People, people that we just know from artifacts and names that the archeologists give them. The first people that we really know

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about in terms of identifying were what most people would call Plains Apache, which is to differentiate them from the—the various Apache tribes that are now left from the destruction of the Plains Apache by the Comanche. And we are fairly sure that they came here around the middle of the 15th century because there was another group of peoples up in the Canadian River Valley called the Antelope Creek Peoples who built permanent dwellings up on the Canadian and they were—those dwelling were abandoned

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in the middle of that century. And most scholars think it was because of the—the movement south of these Apa—Apachian People. Those are the people that Coronado came in contact with in 1541 when he came through here with his thousand strong people and horses and what have you. In fact, they came—they came back through La Pista de be de agua when they left the place that they stayed that summer, the Big Troop, which

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was the next canyon north, Blanco Canyon, the place that the natives called Kona. Any case, these people were—were probably the Apache. There are also a people that may have come up here, although the book is still open on that, people called the Jumanos. We know

that Jumanos lived south of here—a good deal south of here. But the very first Europeans who were likely to have seen this area were before Coronado. That was Cabeza de Vaca and his black companion Estebad who came up after their nine year

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ordeal being ship wrecked on the Florida Coast. And—and they got as far—some scholars believe at the Southern end of the Llano. And they were the guest of what we think were the Jumanos. Any case, middle of the 16th Century Coronado comes across the—these Apacian People. There were a number of other entradas into the plains by the Spanish over the years. But it was kind of ignored for a time because the Spaniards as we know—well know bit off a lot more than they could chew burea—bureaucratically and

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financially. And so they had a tough time trying to maintain their toehold. The next big change out here was in about 1700 after the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, when—which is when most people think that Native Americans on the plains got the horse. I mean the—it was the time that the Spanish were forced out of Northern New Mexico. They were gone for a full decade before they w—were—to fight their way back in, but by this time horses and horse technology was being spread across the tribes. By the end of b—b—by

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20 years later, by about 1700, tribes all the way to the Sabine in Texas had the horse and knew how to use it. It's astonishing. By 1750, so within 70 years, mounted natives were seen as far as north of the Canadian Rockies. It's an incredible disbursement of technology. What is important for us out here is that around 1700, a small group of Utes, an offshoot of the Utes called the snake people who live in the southern part of central Wyoming, Northern Colorado, got the horse. And we—they became known as the

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Comanche from the Ute word Komats, which means those who are always against us. They were, I guess, were scrappy from the start. But they unlike most tribes and most people in fact who used the horse up to that time in north America, the horse was a—a way to transport you to a place to do whatever you were going to do. The Comanche rethought that the horse was what they were, what they lived. And so they—they were—they were in every sense of the word nomads. They lived on the horse. They moved

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south. They became very wealthy in their own way of thinking of wealth in terms of having horses and having buffalo because now they could hunt buffalo in ways that they never could before. And their numbers grew and they—they moved onto the Llano in about 1700 and within—by 1750 there were no more Apaches here. It was an incredible change.

Three hundred years of Apacharia now becomes something else entirely. It also—the Comanche had a big impact on the history of the west besides our history. But

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what they mainly did was keep this area isolated because they were so difficult. They were very war like. There—there was no such thing as a Comanche raiding party, for instance, all Comanche parties were raiding parties because they lived on their horses. You know they the—the tr—the—the—the tribal group moved with their horses and so they were always ready to fight, ready to hunt, it didn't make any difference. It kept it—it really kept the Spanish from solidifying their hold on the Llano and it drove a wedge into their holdings in the west. You know New Mexico over here, the south part of Texas

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over here. Then when English Anglos moved in they faced the same thing. Although they were a little bit different because they were individuals and not governmental entities moving in they had a more success, but still very difficult thing. So you had the Llano, which is a place where no one lived year round, you know, for these 12,000 years. And even the Comanche had various name for it. Dan Forrest, one of his collections of essays is called the Horizontal Yellow, which is one word that the Comanche had for it

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because of the—course the color of our grass. I—I for one was about 14 before I realized grass was supposed to be green. You know that—I thought it was always yellow. They also called it the place where no one lives, the Llano. So that you had this essentially untouched—place that was untouched except for little periods in the spring and the fall. And those hunts tended to be more toward the canyons and off the edge of it then up on top of it. So it's—it's—it's a very interesting history to me. A history of—of a place

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where nothing every really happened except this enormous litany of routine daily life until the Comanche were defeated. And when Ranald Mackenzie—and actually they—they weren't defeated in the sense of a battle. Mackenzie never did whip Quanta Parker in a Quahati band of the Comanche who were the ones who lived up here. But after he took their horses and mules in the battle of Palo Duro Canyon in the winter of 1874, killed all the horses and mules just south of there at Tule Canyon the next day. This was

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a time when the Buffalo hunters were actually beginning to really step up their killings of the herd. Here this most warlock of the Comanche tribes was without transportation. Mackenzie also burned a lot of their tee-pees, destroyed much of the food they had their in their camp and killed their horses and mules. So it was the next summer that they turned

themselves into the reservation. And from that time forward people began to move into the—to the Llano. The first permanent settlements in the Yellow House

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Canyon, for instance, were settlement by George Causey, the Buffalo hunter in the winter of 1877. And by a couple of shepherd's, White Anglo shepherd's, who built stone corals in the—in the eastern edge of the Llano so that same year. So it's—it's this long, long history of nomadic people but very constant traversing of the area. So sort of a—a—I—I like to think of it as a—an epic of the ordinary. You know this ordinary life that goes—has been going on here for such a long time.

DT: Can you tell me if the Native Americans that occupied this area had any significant kinds of ways of altering the landscape? I understood in some portions they—they burned...

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AW: Well I...

DT: Is that the case here?

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AW: I think that the—I think the contemporary view of Native Americans and their connection with the great plains, generally, and would include the southern end of the plains here, is that they—they burned fairly often as a way of driving buffalo and antelope and other game in a way that they that could capture them, especially before they had the horse. So that is, I'm sure, that had some impact here, just the—their impact on the buffalo. Flores, for instance, and several others are convinced that the Comanche

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pressure on Buffalo numbers was such that even without the White hunters, at some point, that increased ability to take the buffalo both because of their—they were now mounted and they also had arrows that were tipped with metal now instead of flint, which were easier to reuse and they were—they were cheaper; a lot of things that made them more useful. That—and also because of buffalo is—is a unique species and it doesn't have a self-regulating birth control like a lot of animal groups do. Bison numbers are

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governed by how many bison there are and—and do they die before they have—have more bison. You know, what—what's the—what's the food like and—and we know that out that out here they—even during that period of time you can say we—we have this trend of dry temperate climate. But within that trend we have enormous var—variations out here on the—because of the altitude and because of the dryness. You know that little changes have—have big impact in a place like this. So buffalo numbers were always sort

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of in a sense sort of critical, you know. If in a year or a time of four or five year's worth of drought, which we know is a very difficult circumstance here, and numbers are down and hunters come in and take the best reproductive parts of that group, then you have a group of animals that are always on the edge of not necessarily extinction, but certainly on the edge of having a serious problem in—in keeping their numbers up. So Comanche—they were such good hunters and—and they were growing in number that

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they had made a huge impact on the buffalo themselves. As to the Llano itself, because there was so little permanent—well, there were no permanent occupiers of it, I—I think we probably had a better idea of the Llano as it was for the last, oh, at least 10 or 12,000 years that we know people have been since the ice age has probably been very much the same. You know it hasn't changed a whole lot.

DT: Do you have any idea of—of what the impression of this area was when—when western settlers first came?

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AW: Scared them to death.

DT: What was it that was so pervading about this area?

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AW: Well, there are no trees. There's nothing but sky and ground and the wind blows and—and gosh, to read Castaneda's journals and journals of others from Coronado is—is to see men who were—were—is nothing like they'd ever seen before, you know. Castaneda said we can—we can march through the grass and the grass springs up behind us in our—even our—it even swallows up our footprints. We can sit down and we look around and all we see is a bowl of earth and sky. W—w—we have no idea where were

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going how we got there, how we get there. And so it was—it was—and plus you're on a place with no water. I mean you do have if you know where to find it on La Pista de be de agua you can find water. But the rest of the Llano you don't find anything. Seasonal playa lakes, but that water becomes undrinkable very quickly because animals tromp through it. It evaporates, becomes bracky, sometimes very salty. So its—its—it's a dangerous place if you don't have—if you don't know where to go to get water. There

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was a rock I think, yeah, it was a rock that was found near Yellow House Lake, which is up by present day Little Field the Yellow Houses formation there. And the rock allegedly had

written on it nine miles to water, three miles to hell. That was the—that was the way people thought about it and really there weren't people who were very interested in this land until after the Comanche. And then of course cattle went—the first group to actually come through here were the Pastories, from Northern New Mexico. Without the threat of the Comanche they—they could move their herds of sheep down along here but it—but they were—it was a—they had a system called the Transumante System of—of moving sheep from one pasture to another depending on the season of the year. So they weren't permanent settlers here either. They built stone corals, places to put their sheep, but they—they would also take them back out. Cattlemen moved in—in the 1870's like they did all over the western part of Texas. But on the Llano even the cattlemen saw right

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away that this land was a little bit different because it had much better soil. There weren't any trees, there were no stumps to plow, no rocks to pick up and they looked at it and said this is farming country. And in fact the very first farms out here—among those first farms were ranchers who were beginning to break out the land and experiments. The—the diff—the ranches in this end of the Llano were among the first to experiment with—with crops in the—in the 1880's 1870's.

DT: What were some of the early crops that they tried?

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AW: Sorghum, they—they tried cotton early on. Cotton yo—you could imagine cotton, cotton and tobacco would have been probably the principal cash crops in America then. Most others crops would have been geared toward consumption in local areas. But cotton and—and tobacco would be the kinds of crops you could grow and sell for money. You know because they—there was an international trade in that right from the start. So they were not slow in picking up the—the potential of a place like this that had you know

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soil that built up over a million years of—of time. The Llano is geo—geologically unchanged for at least a million years. You know, it's not been subject to the same—to the volcanism and the uplifting that say the Rockies and the Sangre de Cristos have. Once the Pecos River cut off the watershed of the—the Proto Brazos, you know, the Brazos that used to run across this land. Now it has it has its headwaters here, but it used to run

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across this land. The Pecos River cut off that source of water and so when it did it left this 150-mile long, 140-mile wide chunk of flat land sticking up by itself. So what was there to alter it, you know, not much. So it—but the wind in particular built up soil on top of the Yano. And so it—it had this great layer of soil unlike a lot of the land out here in—in Texas. I mean you look at Texas ranch land and it's mostly marked by things that

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live in places with no soil like greasewood and mesquite and it's chock full of rocks and it's damn difficult to grow anything. Well here, you know, it was this paradise for farmers. You know, put a plow in it, there's nothing to stop it. You know, so it very quickly, the southern end especially of the Llano became—became farming country.

DT: How did the landscape change as—as farmers came to cultivate the land?

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AW: Well, gosh you know, the grass disappeared. And where there was grass because we—once we move into a place we don't like it to burn, you know. So the grass winds up being replaced by mesquite and other things because the—the grass of course is—is benefited by fire and not—not harmed by it. It—the grass really lives below the ground, you know we just see part of it sticking up. And fire does away with shrubbery, woody

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shrubs and trees, but the grass comes back. And not only that a lot of what was in the grass st—stays now in the ash and is—comes back in the soil to be used again. So fire and also we know now from studies of ruminants like buffalo, in particular, a lot of this is—forms a basis for holistic resource management techniques and managing rangeland. We know that the—the buffalo and other grazing animals did thi—sort of the same thing is they fire by eating the grass to the ground and then moving on and trampling, keeping the ground porous and their...

DT: Hoof action?

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AW: Hoof action and then by fertilizing it with they're own solid waste. So the grass and—and the buffalo, the ruminants, the grass, and the fire, all those things were symbiotic. So once we move in here, especially to live in here, you know full time, we plow up the grass then everything changes. Erosion and soil erosion now where we had hardly any erosion, I mean this place is flat. What happen when water falls out here?

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Well, it puddles up and we call them playa lakes. They're just big puddles, you know, across this flat expanse. The few rivers—I mean the—the Colorado, the—Brazos and—and the Red all have headwater sources on the Llano, but they don't impact the Llano as a whole. They're just the canyons along the edge. So you have this big flat place not likely to have any soil erosion to speak of, unless you take away the cover and now you

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have soil erosion. So we've been changing the Llano by letting the soil disappear. We've been changing it by taking away one of the other great resources, which is something that was discovered early on. That is that while there may not be any rain or surface water to speak of, there's a whole lot of water underground because this is the southern end of that huge aquifer called the Ogallala that goes up all the way up into Nebraska. Ours isn't as shallow as it is in Nebraska, for instance, particularly in the sand

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hills, you know, where you can stick a shovel in the ground and watch it fill up with water. You know we have to drill a ways but its still—there's still a lot of water down there. And once we began tapping into that and irrigating, of course, then we've—we've changed not only the surface of the Llano, but we've changed what's underneath as well. Because we're using up what essentially is fossil water, you know, water that was—that found its way to that aquifer over a long period of time and beginning a long time ago.

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Surface recharge, we're now finding is a little faster than people thought in the 50's, you know. By now, 2002, we were supposed to have run out of water in the Ogallala. It hasn't been as quick as we thought, although, it's still—it's inevitable at—at the rates of consumption because were growing things like cotton and milo and corn, things that use enormous amounts of water. They require incredible amounts of water. And there's only one place to get that. That's to dig it up, you know.

DT: You mentioned earlier that—that since cultivation started we've had a good deal of soil erosion in this area and—and I suppose that gets aspirated when there's—when there's a drought. I was wondering if you could tell anything about the—the dust bowl days here that you might have heard from your parents or grandparents who...

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AW: Well...

DT: lived through it?

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AW: You know everybody that—who has grandparents of that age hears the stories about it. There's some—plus there's some great books about it. First hand relations of what happened in Black Sunday, for instance, and what—what these black northers look like when they roll through. But from first hand experience we had a drought in the early 50's, about 1952, 51 or 52 through 1956 or 7 depending on where you were when it started. That was worst than the drought of the 30's. It was a dust bowl. The—the

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big difference was that farmers knew now a lot more about how to take care of the land than they did in the 30's. You know we had a real spike in population in the 20's. There was this idea that rain followed the plow. That once people moved in it—it rained more in an area. People, you know, they—they could file on 40 acres, which in Iowa would support you but out here, you know, four sections may not support you much less 40 acres. And so we had this enormous influx of people in the 20's who over planted, over

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grazed, and then when the—the dust bowl—when the drought really came in, the land was completely vulnerable to the action of—of the wind, and—and—and the—and the dry weather. It wasn't as bad in the 50's, but we still had lots of sand. I remember as a child on this same farm, the dust storms would come in. You could see them coming. You'd go—your mom would take you in the house and say lets play cowboys and Indians or cowboys and bank robbers and that was a—a her excuse to wet a cup towel and tie it around your face, you know, in a little bandana sort of thing to keep the—the

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dirt out of your nose and mouth. And even into the 60's when I was a sack boy at the Piggly Wiggly Store here in Lubbock, we had a dust storm so bad that dust the blew around the corner and piled up on the automatic door opener and you couldn't get the door to shut because the dirt was piled up on it. We had to shovel the dirt off to be able to get the doors to shut. So it's a—it's not been all that long ago that we—we still had a lot of sand, lot of dust storm problem out here. And we always will have some. I mean

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there's plenty of land around here that the dust will kick up. And if you think about the alta-thermal, you know, some 4,000 years ago when—when you had 2,000 years worth of drought you can't imagine that over that length of time that—that the land wouldn't change or at least be affected by that. We just sped it up a little bit by taking the grass off.

DT: Maybe you could bring us up to modern day times and—and talk a little bit about what's happened in the last 20 years ecologically around here. I understand that—that some of the cotton fields have gone back towards grass. I've...

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AW: Yeah.

DT: mentioned earlier changes that you've seen.

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AW: Yeah.

DT: Can you talk about some of that those...

AW: Well...

DT: changes?

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AW: They have. I mean people are developing, you know, farmers—farmers and ranchers aren't interested in debilitating their land, their ranges. I mean they want to do the right thing. But you got to remember that ranching, for instance, as an industry is scarcely 130 years. I mean we've had husbandry and the raising of animals for, you know, since we domesticated them thousands of years ago, but the—the notion of ranching as—as we think of it began after the Civil War. You know there weren't

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ranches before that. There were stock farms and there were people who raised animals, but we didn't have the idea that we have now of ranching and the whole way of managing a ranch. And how do you deal with getting enough cattle on a place o—o—on a pretty fragile ecosystem especially as—goes to grass and water. How do you manage that effectively so that you can make a living and you don't ruin your land? Well, it took a lot of educating; it took a lot of learning. So there's a curve that's still going on for

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farmers and ranchers so you see some benefits of the—the—the recent years. The difference is I think or the problems we have are less so much of a lack of science or knowledge as they are of a lack of understanding of political process. For instance, we have—if you want to think about it corn i—is—is—is grown not for consumers, but for corporations because corn is used as feed for animals that are later sold or it's used to create sugar. And we—we live in a country that's—that runs on sugar, you know.

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It's—it's sad but it's the case and so we're growing and we're growing a cotton out here that—that really no one wants. We're growing a cotton that's a short staple cotton. It's used in denim and velvet and was used in bomb making during the Vietnam War. But China who used to be a big customer of cotton from this area now is a net exporter of cotton. We finish every year cot—every cotton season that we finish wh—whatever we've ginned and bailed up we have that much left on the floor as they stay in storage.

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So we always have about a years worth of supply, tough to keep prices up. And the whole issue of how you manage something like agricultural production where you—you—you know there's a—especially in a—in a free enterprise society like ours where we expect people to make their own decisions. Yet you know that if everybody plants cotton this year, price is going to go to hell in a hand basket, you know. How do you let farmers know

that well, maybe you shouldn't plant quite so much cotton? So you have different programs. Programs now govern a lot of what happens—the government

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programs. The CRP, The Conservation Reserve Program, which put land—less productive land back in the grass, has been a great thing, I think, because its taken marginal land out of production and putting it back to some kind of grass, which is—is least it—it may not fix what's broken, but it quits breaking it more. You know, it—it at least puts a halt to—to the kinds of usage. The other thing is that we're—we're we use a lot more chemical today then we've ever used. We use chemicals before we plant, we

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use chemicals after we plant, we use chemical while the—while the plant is growing to either make it grow better or to kill things that are harming it. And then we use chemicals to get it ready, especially in the case of cotton, to get it ready to harvest. You know it's a—it's a wonder to me that a farmer even with government help can make any kind of money, you know, when you look at the—the cost of—of doing business. The seed is expensive. They—now we have depending among which sabre-rattling is going

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on where the price of the—the petroleum, which petroleum creates a whole lot of these chemicals. I mean it's the base for a lot of the chemicals. It also drives the tractors and the airplanes that spray the chemicals and so—so you have all these things that are happening that are part of and parcel of our society, generally speaking, but that have a very specific impact on rural areas, on agricultural areas. So those things are—we don't know what the affect of those things is yet. I mean we—we—we expect that it's not good, we think that it's not good, but we—we don't have much experience with it when

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you get right down to it. The other thing is water. We're using up water and now we have people like Boone Pickens who want to buy the water and sell it. So—and—and we don't reuse water. We have very little water recycling that's done out here. There's great opportunities. We—w—w—we understand the science for recycling and being able to use that water more and more times than one, but we don't do it. You know it's been

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cheap and easy up to now. So that's—that's a change. We're really seeing a—a difference. We—where as before I would hear people talk about the potential. Now I hear farmers say, I've lost wells. I mean I have wells now that aren't productive. I can't use them. And I've never heard that before until the last, you know 3 or 4, 5 years. So you know we're making changes. I mean we're having an impact on it but exactly what they are it's—it's hard to say.

DT: Well you've given us a wonderful history and explanation of—of some of the cultural and ecological history of—of the Llano Estacado. I—I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about how you came to be a—a creative artist and—and tell us some of these stories not just in pros as you have done so far with us, but as a poet or as a singer or as a play write. How did you get into this business?

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AW: Well, it's an odd journey. But I've wanted to write and write music in particular since I can remember, you know, four or five years old. And it would have seemed that someone going to high school in the 60's, you know, would have been the ideal time with all that was happening culturally in America and really in the world at that—in those years with regard to music especially. But it was—it was never a thing that people advanced as a way to make a living, you know. Sure you can play the guitar or sure you

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can write that's nice. Now what are you going to do for a day job? And I happen to just by accident fall into police work. I was dating a girl that I later married and still my wife. Her father was police chief. I was working at the grocery store and going to Texas Tech and I think I was making a \$1.15 an hour. And these jobs opened up on the police department where I could be—work in the jail or operate the radio, some things like that and I would be making like almost \$4.00 an hour and I could work at night and still go to

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school. It was like, oh, this is cool. So I took the job. And remember distinctly telling my wife on a date, I hope your dad didn't expect me to be a cop, you know. Remember this is the 60's. But white boy from the middle class part of town gets plunged into the world of whores and pimps and burglars and murders and armed robbers and wife beaters and winos and—and all this incredibly interesting flotsam and jetsam of—of—of the

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culture and it was—it was—it was—it just took you over with the excitement of learning something new. And before I knew it I'd quit majoring in English Literature and I was now a Sociology Major and I became a policeman. And I—I did that for 12 years. I left here after I got my degree and went to Lakewood, Colorado, which had this wonderfully

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progressive police department. I moved up through the ranks so when I got out of it I was a lieutenant, which wa—in that department was an upper level management position. It was real interesting work it a—a—and I think very much related to art in the sense that the artist is always this schizophrenic combination of insider and outsider. You have to be an insider to understand that about what you're doing your art. But you have to be an

outsider in that you're willing to step up and say what you think and what you see. It's
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the same issue in police work, which is why people, generally speaking, don't really like policemen very much and they don't really like artists very much. They admire artists, they admire policemen, but people are always a bit nervous about you as an artist. You know if—if I'd talk to you and tell you what I think you're likely to write a story or a song about that. Or I'll see my words pop up in some dialogue somewhere. So I think it was sort of a—a good—a good training when you look at it. Plus living on the street

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learning to listen to people if—if you're any good at—at a job like that you develop a very good ear. And that—that has been a lot of help to me. And you also learn to listen. The way that you get people to talk to you if you're a policemen if you want them to tell you whether they did something or not; how they did it; where to find the other people, all that sort of stuff. The way you are successful is by being a sympathetic listener because human—human beings want to talk. No one wants to keep a secret. People hate secrets, you know, it kills them. Crooks are the same way. They want to tell you what they did. Most of the time they're proud of it or they're ashamed of it. They want to get

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it off their system. But if you're a good listener then you're a good cop. If you're a good listener you're a good writer. You know, when I write in a women's voice or write in the voice of a Comanche or the voice of a soldier or cavalryman or the voice of a rancher or cowpuncher or somebody, I have to be able to—to listen to what those people are saying or were saying at some time and be able to use that. It's—it's the same sort of technique.

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So I don't think they were so far apart. Now the problem was that I got out of police work because I wanted to write. And—but I didn't have the guts to just quit and do it. So I went to work with my father brokering agricultural commodities and then I moved from that into financial instruments. I wound up being a Regional Vice President for a big investment banking firm out of Manhattan. And after the Stock Market crash of '87 they fired our whole division. Then I—I on my resume it says I was a consultant that

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Means of course you're out of work, you're looking for something to do. But I wound up being—going to work in the telecommunications industry. And—and when I finally quit and said to hell with it and got rid of the three piece suits and decided that I—if I was ever going to do art for a living I had to do it now. I'd just turned 42 about to turn 43

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I guess and I was a Chief Financial Officer of this small company in the telecommunications business, a job that I hated. An industry that was where all the tin siding salesmen had moved, you know, after deregulation. It was a—it was awful. It was the kind of thing you didn't want to admit to as a job at a cocktail party. You know, and I got tired of—for my whole working life saying, well, I'm a policeman, but I write, I'm—I'm a—work for an investment bank, but I write, you know. So it was high time to do that and fortunately I was in such a desperate position that—that I was able to. It wasn't courage, you know, it was desperation that led me to it.

DT: Did you have any teachers or mentors that helped the segue happen?

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AW: I wish to hell I had of. I sure wish I had. It's—it's not a—you can have role models and you can have people that you admire and those are the things that are really important, but there—there ain't no yellow brick road for the arts. You know you—every person, every artist has a unique story. And you start learning all these unique stories and you realize I, you know, I can't follow any one of those. My story is going to have to unfold on its own, but by focusing on people who had thought about their art and

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about their progress in the arts. I mean, for instance, every artist should read Rilke's, Letters to a Young Poet. Every artist should read Louis Hides book, The Gift. There are a number of things like that that let you understand the ethic and the—the general function of creativity. Jacques Maritain book, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry, wonderful description of how cre—creativity works. And if you—if you—if you do pay attention to those things, at least gives you a little bit of ability to see what's happening with you and then it gives you the courage to let your art find its own way. I mean when

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I started doing this I was singing the songs that I'd written, making records, trying to sell records of the music and hoping to get a big hit, you know, somebody to cut a record and so you could live—live on easy street. But I wind up writing a play by accident and I liked it. I liked seeing my words come alive on stage with somebody else doing them. And I especially liked writing it and someone else having to remember it. That was a really good thing, but what—what a great medium, what a great way to tell a story. A

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play is a whole other thing. So I started doing that and then I wound up writing a musical about this same Yellow House Canyon. I'm getting ready to sign an agreement to write another musical for our new amphitheater in Mineral Wells. I—who would of thunk it, you know, especially plays. I had never in my wildest imagination thought of writing a play. I was never in—I mean I love watching them, but I was never wanting to be an actor. I don't have any interest in that. Why would I write a play? Well, because that's 00:47:54 - 2237

the way my yellow brick road wound up going. So you have to, you know, just have to be able to be open to that and know what it is that you want to do, which in my case is I want to say something about the world. I want to talk about the history of this place and this people and let people see the lessons that they can get from that from what's happened to us.

DT: I'd like to hear.

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AW: Okay.

DT: Is—is there...

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AW: After all this talk?

DT: ...poetry that you would like to read or would you like to read us...

AW: Well uh...

DT: ...playscript?

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AW: Let me do a song and then I'll read a poem. This is a song about—about the Llano and about the farming and about how it came it be that, so.

(He is playing his guitar)

El Llano Estacado stands a mountain high and dry.

It turns away the lesser man who fears the open sky and all who thrive on greenery.

It drives the best insane.

El Llano is a certainty of promises of rain.

Storms they build up over us.

They clatter all around.

But the rain falls east of us when crops are in the ground.

There is no balm in Gilead,

But on the staked plains God anoints the farmers head with promises of rain.

My granddad saw a Goshen land.

No tress, no rocks to clear.

He bent his back and scraped his hands and

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got by year by year until the dustbowl broke his heart
but stubborn he remained practicing the farmer's art of promises of rain.
Storms they built up over him.
They clattered all around.
But the rain fell east of him when crops were in the ground.
There is no balm in Gilead,
but on the staked plains God anointed granddads head with promises of rain.
So daddy did it differently.
He modernized his yields with chemicals and subsidies and irrigated fields.
Politics drove up the cost,
drove prices down the drain

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till mired in debt my daddy lost his promises of rain.
Storms they built up over him.
They clattered all around.
But the rain fell east of him when crops were in the ground.
There is no balm in Gilead,
but on the staked plains God anointed daddy's head with promises of rain.
This land was made for buffalo, for cactus and blue stem.
It was not made for planted rows or banks or governments.
But I'm a farmer by my lot
next year runs in my veins
born to plow the prairie side with promises of rain.
Storms they build up over me.

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They clatter all around.
But the rain falls east of me when crops are in the ground.

There is no balm in Gilead,
but on the staked plains God anoints the farmers head with promises of rain.
God anoints the farmers head with promises of rain.

DT: Thank you.

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AW: So there's a song about how odd it is to be a farmer out here. It's sort of natural and sort of not. But any case it's the—it's the water that makes the difference, the water and the soil. So this is a piece that I wrote—I think I told you earlier when we were talking ahead of the—before we got started that—that was—it's actually—was published as a magazine article about the crisis of water here on the Llano. It's called, Mining the Mother Lode.

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We are the tribe of the mother lode aquifer.
Twelve hundred centuries, nomads have traveled here
making their camps in the spring and the fall
seeking shelter in canyons and washes and swales,
building hearths of caliche and hunting and gathering
life that collected where water empowered it.
Even when drought plagued the prairie atop of it,
water welled up from the sweet Ogallala Lake
all along Yellow House Draw to the Canyon land
nourishing passers-by, nomad and animal
nourishing all who tread lightly and carefully.

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Here in the land of the mother lode aquifer
rains unpredictable even in good seasons.
Never enough but for grasses and buffalo
never enough but for seasonal wonderers.
Never enough for the dwellings of permanence
needed for farming and ranching and industry.

Never enough for the chambers of commerce.
Rain can't be entrusted to God and the elements
not by the tribe of the mother load aquifer.

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Deep in the earth
through the rocks that encumbers it,
down to the water sand,
down to the water peg,
dig down with drilling rigs,
lay in the well casing,
thrust in the sucker rod,
pull it out, let it come
drawing the water up,
drive it with wind power,
drive it with gasoline,
drive it electrically,
pumping and pumping and pumping
till water runs shining in furrows
and sparkling on summer lawns,
spewing through towers for cooling
the gas flaring coal smoking power plants.

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Making more energy, pumping more water,
more water all over the land of the mother lode aquifer.
Here are no headwaters.
Little replenishing what we are draining.
So little restraining how much we are using and how we are using it.
Here the great lake of the plains subterranean dwindles each season,

each turn of the faucet, each flick of the switch
starting up the submersibles, dwindling down ditches through siphon tubes,
dwindling down side rolls and pivots and gated pipe,
dwindling down water gaps, water mains, water taps,
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water drains dwindling down every new housing development.

Dwindling until there are farms metamorphosing
once irrigated to dry land and grass pasture.

Letting their silos stand empty as metaphor
testament future shock here in the present tense
frail to either fragile the mother lode aquifer.

Ample enough is this waste of our own making.

Here where we once believed rain followed plow,
believed boosters, promoters and huckster developers.

hitched up our wagons, to forty small acres

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plowed fence row to fence row with cash crops on bank notes.

Built churches, raised children and sent them to colleges.

Sent them to wars, sent them out of the hinterlands,
sent them to places that never relinquished them.

Here from the land of the mother lode aquifer

people are leaving for jobs in the popular cities

or leaving as victims of bottom line corporate discounters

driving off businesses started by yours and my mom and pop grand parents.

Corporate farmers replacing the family's,

swashbucklers slashing and cutting

efficiency chanted as mantra while nobody is answering,

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who will take care of the mother lode aquifer?

Fear lines our pocketbooks.

Fear comes in quarter inch 4x8 plywood sheets nailed over windowpanes.

Fear grows in weeds in the sidewalks of vacancies.

Fear breeds a desperate bargaining.

Jobs. Bring us jobs. Bring us jobs.

Bring us jobs. Bring us anything.

Bring us the worst of your waste

and your prisoner radioactive and toxic,

the detritus social and otherwise flushed from the gutter pipes

laid from the centers of power and influence.

Aimed at the weak, at the people of choicelessness.

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Stumbling around in the waste not their own making,

waste that will poison the mother lode aquifer.

Ample enough is this come-hither begging

pleading abasing ourselves with our appetites.

Worse still, the mother lode aquifers guardians shockingly favoring

selling our water rights, falling to pitches from old fashioned renegades.

Now a days using computers for running errands.

Now a days using their lawyers for wire cutters.

Now a days throwing out sound bites for lariats.

Bullying water boards into considering

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selling our life blood, low bid, not worrying

selling tomorrow to pay for today.

Selling every last drop of the mother lode aquifer.

What will become of us when we are waterless,

we of the tribe of the mother lode aquifer,
nomads and wanderers rooted by water wells.
Cities and homesteads and farmlands and cattle spreads,
everything other than short grass and buffalo
wholly dependent on mining the mother lode.
Far away, far away where rain is plentiful
year end and year out and always predictable.
Learned professors have studied the exodus made by our people,

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our water, our resources, calling our depopulation a certainty
saying, why fight it?

Lets recognize lost causes when they are lost causes.

Let's give the prairie back, back to the ruminants, back to the grasses.

Let's give us a home where the buffalo roam.

Where the skies are not cloudy all day,
after day, after day, after day
where the antelope seldom are heard
for there's no one to hear the discouraging word
when the commons belong to the buffalo.

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Crazy, say chambers of commerce,
but who's crazy now as we drink up our mother lode aquifer,
now as we poison our mother lode aquifer,
now as we sell off our mother lode aquifer.

Poets and dreamers, the only true realists, live in the future.

They do not imagine it.

Seeing tomorrow with yesterday sorrowings,
seeing tomorrow was here and now is borrowings.

Seeing the present as futures own history.

Poets and dreamers, the only true realists,

know that the gift is the ultimate mystery.

Knowing a gift not in motion is powerless.

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Knowing no gift can be taken for profiting.

Knowing no gift can be subject to ownership.

Poets and dreamers who live on El Llano

know what is the gift but the mother lode aquifer.

What will we do with this gift of the mother lode?

Pray that the poets and dreamers remember it.

Pray that its guardians hold it in stewardship.

Pray that we honor it.

Pray that we husband it.

Pray for the tribe of the mother lode aquifer.

Pray for the water,

the sweet Ogallala Lake

nourishing all who tread lightly and carefully,

lightly and carefully, lightly and carefully.

DT: Thank you.

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AW: You're welcome.

DT: That's very nice.

[End of Reel 2237]