My name is Winnie Burkett and I was sanctuary manager for Houston Audubon as an employee for 14 years.

We moved back to Houston in 1991, in September. We had lived here before, and I was not happy about coming back. So, I knew I needed to immerse myself in things right away. So, in September, a week after we moved here, I went to a beach clean-up at Bolivar Flats, and met Gretchen Mueller, who was the sanctuary vice president then. You probably know that there were vice presidents in charge of things where we didn't have employees.

So, I saw Gretchen, again, at a State of the Bay meeting. They had just finished studying Galveston Bay to set up the Galveston Bay program. So, I told Gretchen, I said, "I'm here. I've got time. If you need help, just ask." She said, "I need help." They had just gotten a lease from the general land office for 550 acres of coastal property at Bolivar Flats. They needed to count the birds there ten times a year. So, she asked me to count birds. So, that was my introduction to Houston Audubon and to Bolivar Flats.

So, it's really interesting that in the 1980s – well, first, you need to understand that Bolivar Flats was formed from the building of the north jetty at the mouth of Galveston Bay. They were trying to stop sediments from filling up the channel. So, they built the jetty. The jetty stopped the longshore current, and the sediments dropped out to the east of the jetty. That formed salt marshes and beaches and all kinds of things. The philosophy, at that time, was that accreted land, land that grew adjacent to regular land – regular land, right – belonged to the state.

So, the state being the General Land Office, felt that they could lease us that land, lease Houston Audubon the land. The reason that we wanted to lease it was because cars drove everywhere, and they would drive through the huge flocks of birds that used it and they would drive through the Lease Tern colonies. We had a volunteer named Stennie Meadours, who started in the '80s, with Galveston County, trying to get that part of the beach closed that the birds used a lot. Eventually, in '86, she got it so we could put a vehicular barrier there, and it was mostly made out of landscape ties. It wasn't real good at stopping traffic, but it helped some. That was the only area on the whole Bolivar Peninsula that there couldn't be cars. So, it was really important to birds.

So, then they approached the land office about leasing the property. Once we had it under a lease, then we could make other improvements. So, I think it was in '92 or '93, we got the lease to 550 acres. We built a bigger, stronger vehicular barrier. Fish and Wildlife Service gave us a grant, and we built a vehicular barrier out of power poles that were donated by the power company *(power company was Entergy)*. We built an observation platform with signs so people could understand what the different parts of the sanctuary were.

So, not too many years after that, I got to be – in 1993, actually, I got to be sanctuary manager. In 1996, I think it was, that there was a for sale sign on land that was very close to the land we were leasing. First, I called the realtor and made an appointment to see what the property was. Low and behold, they were selling land that we were leasing from the state government. So, I called the GLO, and they said there had been a lawsuit that determined that if a property owner had not done anything to cause the accretion that the accreted land belonged to the property owner. So, that meant our leases were null and void. So, something else had to be done to protect this area.

So, we proposed to buy the 176 acres that was next to Rettilon Road from Don Suderman, who owned it. So, we had to do a fundraising campaign. It was interesting. We needed – was it $176,000? The first $100,000 came from GLO. They had a coastal management program, at the time, that gave grant money for purchases. So, they gave us $100,000. Then they have the Birding Classic, you know, where they have these teams that compete. One of the teams gave us their top prize. So, it wasn't too terribly hard to raise that $176,000 because a lot of people cared about Bolivar Flats.

About the same time, we had that closing, we had the closing on the piece of property across the street, on the left-hand side of Rettilon Road as you're going to the water. It was a guy named Lewis Tyra. He and Andrew Johnson, who was a Bolivar Peninsula person, were going to put Water World over there. The piece of land was like 550 acres around. The Corps of Engineers said 75 percent of it was wetlands and they couldn't build Water World. So, they needed to do something with the property. Lewis was old, and his family wanted him to diverse himself of a lot of things before he died. So, the family donated that four-sevenths undivided interest in that piece of property to us.

So, we wound up with like three – we did what's called petitioning, and that means that you get your four-sevenths and they got their three-sevenths. Fortunately, the fellow that was working with the Johnson family was Sid Bouse, who I had met previously. He was a surveyor on the Bolivar Peninsula. Before he was a surveyor, he did heavy equipment work. So, he said, "Ms. Winnie, I know what part of that property you want. You just leave it to me. I'll draw the lines with the family." He did. He knew what parts we wanted. So, we got the wetlands and the salt marsh and the outflow of Beacon Bayou. The family got the uplands that had pasture for cows. So, that worked out very well.

So, we thought, "We're okay now." But then, several years later, another sign went up saying that land was for sale. So, I went to that realtor's office. It turned out that Boyd Realty, which had subdivided Port Bolivar in the 1800s was going into bankruptcy. They had 3,000 acres they wanted to sell. Part of that was the other part of Bolivar Flats. They didn't, at that time, want to divide the property up. So, I just told them, when you're ready, if you are ever ready, we want it. We want this piece.

So, it wasn't too long before they called and said well, they would sell us that side of the road. That was $750,000 we needed to raise. I didn't know quite how we were going to raise that. Houston Audubon has gone back and forth about having development people. Sometimes we've had development people that couldn't do grant writing. Fortunately, we had Caroline Callery. Caroline took me by the hand, practically. First thing she did was take me to a classical radio station in Houston that was owned by Mike Stude of the Brown Foundation. So, we sat and talked to Mike. He said, "Well, he said, "I'll tell you what. You write us a request for $200,000."

Next, we talked to Ann Hamilton at Houston Endowment. She said, "Well you write us a request for $100,000." That money made it so we could get matching grants. We got a grant from Fish and Wildlife Service and – oh, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. We got other grants for habitat stuff from the Fish and Wildlife Service. But it didn't take too long, really, to raise that $700 and – actually we raised $800,000 because we were trying to raise a management fund, also, because you really shouldn't get land without that management money. We've learned

that the hard way. So, we were able to purchase that piece, and we built the vehicular barrier that goes parallel to the beach. There was only the vehicular barrier at the end of the beach, but now we could keep cars out of the backside of it which was very good because people used to bring their old roofs and leave them there and stuff.

So, when we were in the middle of that, I timed out of my being on the board. So, I told them they needed to hire me. So, they hired me. [Laughter] We got all that sorted out, kind of. The bankruptcy court said, "Don't you want to buy more of this land?" Because they owned another 600 acres across the highway from Bolivar Flats, and that was Horseshoe Marsh, what we call Horseshoe Marsh. There was Horseshoe Lagoon, which was almost totally surrounded by salt marsh. It's a beautiful piece of property, but complicated because it had been platted for development. It's 4,000 lots. Some of the lots already had houses on it because there were undivided interests sold. The bankruptcy court would own like ten percent undivided interest in a piece of property and there would be a house on it. So, the bankruptcy judge can make it so that the bankruptcy court can sell everything.

So, we decided – Joy Hester and I were working on that project. We decided we couldn't take all they had left, which they wanted us to do, but they allowed us to do what's called cherry picking. We said, "We want this, and we don't want this, and we want this, and we don't want this," and we tried to keep it contiguous so we didn't have pieces off here and there. So, we were able to get a really good chunk of land. Also, we were able to use the donations for the Bolivar Flats purchase that we hadn't already used for matching to match a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant for $450,000. So, it's going to cause us headaches forever because there's little inholdings and there's road right-of-ways. But we essentially were able to put aside a tremendous amount of land at the end of the Bolivar Peninsula. With the property growth the way it's going now, it's just amazing.

When they did the partitioning of the Tyra tract, they took the beachfront and they made that one piece that they cut into one – one four-sevenths and one three-sevenths. So, we got our four-sevenths. The three-sevenths piece, now, is for sale for $5 million.

Well, they thought they had it sold to a developer right before Hurricane Ike. We wrote a really long comment to the Corps of Engineers about waterflow and impact to wetlands. The developer pulled out, but I don't know if it was our letter that did that. I think it was Ike, too.

When the jetty stops the longshore current, and the longshore current is full of sediments, and those sediments are full of nutrients, and the nutrients feed invertebrates. So, we have really yucky mud that's full of food. Right now, today, right now down there, there's probably 6,000 avocets. I know there's at least 500 white pelicans, and there's probably a couple thousand other shore birds. That's because there's so much food there.

It has one of the highest density of shore birds in the Texas coast. So, that's why it's so important. The combination of the marshes there, it supports not just the shore birds but we have a lot of herons and egrets and spoonbills and white ibis are in there in good numbers. So, that's why it was so important to protect it, and to protect it in perpetuity. The neat thing is because it's growing and because of the way our deed is written, and we know accreting land belongs to the adjacent property owner, our land is growing.

It's growing exponentially right now because they're doing beach renourishment at the McFadden Wildlife Refuge to try to protect the freshwater wetlands from the salt water there because the beach has eroded so much. When they do beach renourishment, a lot of sediment gets into the water. So, the water is going down the coast and it gets to Bolivar Flats, the jetty, and it becomes part of Bolivar Flats so that it's accreting a lot. Our deed was written so that we own to mean high tide. There's not a line that says, "We own to here." We own to where the tide comes to. So, that means, if you go down there a lot, which we do because we live near there, you can see our property growing.

It always does. We lost our signs in Hurricane Ike, and they haven't been replaced. We don't have much signage down there. Fishermen certainly understand the value of it. There's a lot of wade fishermen that use that area. There's a lot of people that fish on the jetty. They use that area. So, there's a lot of people that know about it that way. We have a webcam, a bird cam that operates down there. So, a lot more local people are learning about it.

That's been one of my missions is to try to help Bolivar Peninsula people understand the special parts of the peninsula. So, the bird cam has really helped a lot. But yes, there's always a need to expose people to the importance of these places. Because, you know, people get – they get irate about the Corps of Engineers protecting all the salt marshes, and yet the same people like to eat shrimp, and they don't ever put the two together. If you don't have good salt marshes for a shrimp nursery, you don't have shrimp. So, there's a lot to teach people.

Well, it is important, but there are a lot of businesspeople in the Bolivar Peninsula that understand. COVID years aside, the restaurants on the Bolivar Peninsula say that, in April, the only reason they make money are because of bird watchers, and those are the bird watchers coming to High Island, which also go to Bolivar Flats. But they recognize that. We've tried in the last – I don't know – ten years to have a very visible day pass. We used to have stickers that went on people's clothes, but then people wear so much polyester now that stickers don't stick. Now, we have wristbands. But a lot of – so that when they go into businesses, they know, "Oh, those are people that are down here for the bird sanctuaries." So, there are restaurant people particularly who know that it's a big input.

But right now, tourism on the coast is phenomenal. Building on the coast is phenomenal. It mostly goes back to COVID because when everything shut down, people started renting beach houses at a time of year they usually don't because it was a way to get out of town in a comfortable place where you could work down there, because everybody's got pretty good internet access. We have our challenges with changing around people all the time, but we keep trying.

When I started volunteering in '91, the next thing I did was go to High Island in '92. I worked one of the workdays with Laura Singleton who's – they have an award named after Laura. She was a character. Laura always had a beer at lunch. She was just this graceful woman, but she always had a beer at lunch. I thought that was fascinating. But we had a workday, and it came lunchtime, and she went over to the motel and bought hamburgers for everybody. We didn't have – now we have Houston Sliger who cooks lunch, and we got – before Houston did hamburgers, we used to have sandwiches or chili or something. But Laura would just go over to the Gulfway Motel restaurant pull out her wallet and go buy everybody lunch which was great.

But there was this core of older volunteers. Laura Singleton and Ellen Red were two of them. Then there was Bessie Cornelius. Have you heard about Bessie? People have told you about Bessie? Well, Bessie was something else. I tried volunteering with her for a little while, but Bessie didn't feel you were qualified to do much anything for a couple of years. The first year you could hand people the pencil to sign the visitor's book. You might be able to hand out brochures. You could do that. Then, eventually, she might let you hand them the day passes or a patch, maybe. But she only handled the money.

So, she would have four or five people sitting there doing almost nothing, which I'm not a sitting-doing-nothing person. So, I wound up – I always carried a pair of clippers around and clipped trails and stuff. Then, when I became sanctuary manager, Sanctuary Vice President, I made everybody unhappy by cutting out the number of trails because everything was honeycombed with trails which meant there weren't really places for birds to feed and get away from people. So, we did that.

Then, when they had the High Island Initiative and they got the grant money for improvements, we had – there was a lot of stuff that had to be done. They did, in the early '90s, like '92 or '93, they built the boardwalks and the kiosk and bleachers at Boy Scout Woods. But then when they did the High Island Initiative, about '95 it was, we had a big Texas Parks and Wildlife grant that was really National Fish and Wildlife Foundation money. So, I had to get 19,000 feet of barbed wire fence up because there was an old fellow that had been in the community forever that had cows on the property. We didn't want them in sensitive wetlands or the woodlands. So, also, we wanted to cut down the number of cows he had. So, we gave him a year to cut down the number of cows, and we built fences.

So, when we got the money, at first, Texas Parks and Wildlife wanted us to have three bids on projects. Eventually, we realized you're lucky if you can get anybody to High Island to do things. Also, the board had told me I really needed to spend as much money as possible on the Bolivar Peninsula because that's really how you impact the community that people know you're doing things. So, someone had recommended a local fellow that could get the job done. His price came in about the same as the ones from out of town that could get the job done. So, I hired him. That was very interesting because it turned out he subcontracted it out.

Now, in those days, the Gulfway Motel was a very busy place. They had the restaurant there, and everybody went for lunch. They had steam table lunches. I'm sure they talked about us a lot because, about halfway into this fencing, I came regularly and watched what the guys were doing. Somebody said, "Hey, Ms. Winnie, you know you hired poachers." I said, "What?" Said, "Oh, yeah, yeah, Fred, over there, he's been in prison for poaching." "Oh, okay." So, it turned out this local guy had contracted these other guys. They were poachers. But they did a good job on the fence.

But they didn't do wooden fence. By the parking lot in Smith Oaks is a wooden fence. I had learned that you don't pay everything upfront. You pay materials upfront, and midway through, you pay some so they've got salaries. But I held up quite a bit at the end. They didn't do wooden fences. The guy that I had hired didn't much like doing fences either. But one weekend I came over and there's his wife standing, leaning on a tree, watching him build the fence. So, I bet she was the one that had to worry about where the money was coming from. So, that was pretty interesting.

But in '95, we did a tremendous amount of stuff. We planted a lot of trees. Almost every cypress tree in Smith Oaks was planted by volunteers. They're mostly planted as bare-root plants. When you look at the size of some of them now, they're really good size. We planted 1,000 trees. Most of the ones we got were for free, but we did have some that we purchased because we had grant money for it. We had four that were planted at the High Island schools. The maintenance people killed three of them. We had some that were planted around the parking lot at Boy Scout Woods. There's nice, big oak trees now. But that was interesting.

Texas Parks and Wildlife wanted a video of the planting trees around the parking lot. They didn't want us planting little trees. They wanted good-sized trees because it makes a better picture. So, I had to get the trees down to the coast. I found trees. I rented a U-Haul truck. We got the trees, took them down to High Island, brought the U-Haul truck back because you can get them for $19.95 for a day.

That weekend, we were supposed to do the video, or that Friday we were supposed to do the video, and it rained all day. Texas Parks and Wildlife never came, never did the video. But we had gotten the trees down there. We got them planted with volunteers. But that was pretty much fun. When you look now at the sanctuaries, Gast Woods particularly, and you look at the trees, it's hard to believe that in '95 they were all planted mostly as gallon containers.

I think probably there were no trees when the first European contact came because the Bolivar Peninsula was pretty much – the early records say that it was prairie and there were few copses of trees. When people got shipwrecked, the shipwreck records, they would go towards the trees thinking there must be a house there, but there wasn't. The soil records show that it used to burn about every five to seven years. A lot of prairies in Texas do. They burn in the summer because of lightning strikes. The whole peninsula used to burn. When you think about how would trees get to High Island, the animals don't carry acorns that far. Birds might carry hackberries, but probably not many. So, probably all the trees were planted.

In 2005, we had Rita, and that hit High Island and broke a lot of tree branches. We didn't get a lot of rain, but we got a lot of wind. In 2007, we had Humberto. We had had a lot of rain before that. Humberto was a strange one in that it developed right on the coast and it came – it wasn't a hurricane when we went to bed, but it was a hurricane that had already hit with 80-mile-an-hour winds when we got up. Because there had been so much rain, a lot of trees were blown over which I hadn't – you learn all these things. So, it wound up with tree companies, both Humberto and Rita. We ultimately had to get tree companies because there's widowmakers that you don't like to leave hanging. Volunteers can do a tremendous amount, and did, as far as cleaning up branches, but the tough stuff we hired people for.

When we got done with Humberto, I said, "I'm never, ever doing another hurricane. I'm never." Then, exactly one year after Humberto, Ike struck. It's just appalling. At High Island, it was tree damaged. Our sanctuaries are high enough there that we didn't – we got some saltwater inundation in Smith Pond in Smith Oaks. Claybottom Pond, the high one where the rookery is, it didn't get salt water. That was really interesting because alligators can smell fresh water. One day, I was walking – I was there a lot afterwards. I looked, and there were alligators everywhere, and I counted 75. But I hadn't gone out to count alligators. I just counted. They were huge

alligators. They weren't our regular six-to ten-foot ones. They were huge alligators. They left eventually.

I talk to people because Smith Pond not only got inundated with – like three feet of saltwater came over it. It also got a lot of petroleum products because there were all the tanks and the wells and everything around High Island. So, there were petroleum products everywhere. So, I called some people about, "What do we do? Do we use surfactants? Do we do what?" The guy said that, in the soil, there's enough bacteria that can breakdown petroleum products that they didn't think we wanted to use them, that it would do more damage.

So, we drained Smith Pond. Smith Pond used to be the community water supply. So, there's a valve and you can turn the valve and drain the pond. So, we drained the pond and turned – closed the valve, and then it filled up with rainwater. Then we got a grant from Ducks Unlimited, and we bought several thousand dollars' worth of fish and we put fish back in the pond because they'd all died from the saltwater. Don't you know, two years later, we had a drought and that pond dried up again. [Laughter]

But the damage in Port Bolivar, in Horseshoe Marsh in Bolivar Flats was just amazing. Amazing. I mean we had stuff in Mundy Marsh, too. We had a lot of vehicles. I didn't know what to do with those. But we figured it out eventually. Because what happened was the storm surge came before they expected it, and a lot of people were driving to get off and they couldn't because the water got too deep. So, they abandoned their vehicles. The storm surge pushed them inland. So, we wound up with them in that sanctuary.

Horseshoe Marsh wound up with houses, houses that weren't attached to their pilings well, or pieces of houses. We were cleaning up there one day and this lady came up to me and said, "Ms. Winnie," she said, "Can I go get the clothes out of my closet," because her house was out there. I said, "You can take the whole house." She said she couldn't do that *[laughs]*. But it was amazing.

Bolivar Flats was interesting because the natural processes happened. We had – oh, gosh, I don't know how many feet of – like 100 feet out. The sand was picked up and pushed inland into the marshes which changed the marshes. They weren't low marshes anymore. They were high marshes. It moved a lot of things around, and it brought us things. We had two containers from the Port of Houston. They were stainless steel refrigerator containers that were empty. We got bales of cotton.

We got these little wooden things that were like this, pieces of wood with a little angle here. Hundreds of them. What they are is when they have festivals and things in Galveston and they close parking, they put those everywhere and they have little signs stapled on them. The water had come in – it came in over the Bolivar Peninsula, and it came out the mouth of the bay and over Galveston Island. So, that's why we got stuff that was on the docks in Galveston.

It took down the vehicular barriers, and the observation platform. Our observation tower wound up in Horseshoe Marsh. It took down all the fences, as you can imagine. One of the things that was really neat was when we did the fundraising for Bolivar Flats, we had about $100,000 that we put into a management fund. The agriculture department had a grant program where we could get 75 percent of fencing money back, but we had to have the fencing

done first and it was a reimbursement program. Almost nobody could take advantage of it because most people don't have enough money to get it done and get reimbursed. But we had that money, and we used it that way. So, that worked out really well. The other 25 percent we got done with a grant from ConocoPhillips.

It was amazing. One of the things that I loved was the boardwalk. I don't know. Have you been – you've been to High Island? Okay, so this observation platform behind Boy Scout Woods that looks out over the wetlands, the created wetlands project that we did with the school, so that boardwalk was picked up and stacked together like a stack of cards, one piece on top of the other. Well, the guy that works for us, Houston Sliger – used to work for us – a common-sense kind of guy. He got the tractor out and he just took the pieces and put them back and fastened them better. So, there was all kinds of funny things.

We wound up having to get debris out of the woods because the 20-foot – it was about – the storm surge was about 20 feet at High Island and brought a lot of trash up into the woods. Volunteers. Honestly, we had phenomenal volunteer days. We really get a good turnout for volunteers if you have things that they know they're really needed for, and they knew they were needed. We had a lot of volunteer days at High Island and at Bolivar Flats because so much, boards and things, were back in the marsh. It's very nice to see so many people want to help.

So, Houston Audubon is one of the undivided interest owners in North Deer Island. North Deer Island used to be the most productive water bird island in the state. It was eroding away really rapidly. People had brought out bags of cement and stuff, but that's not enough. So, North Deer – so I said we own an undivided interest. We own more now than we used to because we just donated a nice chunk of the undivided interest. I was working for Houston Audubon and Audubon Texas, the two main owners of the island. We would go out to North Deer. North Deer was – I used to keep a list of things I needed to get done and North Deer was always at the top. It was really hard because I couldn't find anybody who felt like they could do anything.

So, I went to this meeting in South Padre Island. I don't remember who was land commissioner then. Jerry Patterson, maybe. But they had started this new initiative, this erosion initiative. So, I thought, "Aha." I wrote a letter to the General Land Office and said, "This is the most productive island in the state. We know that it's eroding rapidly. There's good records of the erosion. We need somebody to do something." I got a call from Texas Parks and Wildlife. They had been assigned to partner with us to get this done.

So, they raised $3 million – no, $3 million or $7 million? I don't know. Many millions of dollars, more than five, and got engineering work done, and they did shoreline protection and they built jetties out there. They did all kinds of stuff which has almost stopped the erosion of the island. It was wonderful. What we did was they got money that they could get, but there was some money that they couldn't get because it had to go to a non-profit. So, I got that money, wrote those grants.

One of them was $250,000 to a NFWF program, I think it was. But they had – we could use their money to match it because it was the same project. So, it went very well, and it went – one of the things that happens in conservation is you don't know who can do something. Somebody's got to do something. We knew we couldn't do it because we didn't know where to start, but Texas Parks and Wildlife did, and they did it. It was just wonderful.

It was barge ways. Also, subsidence because North Deer isn't really all that far as the pelican flies from Texas City. There's a big subsidence area radiating out from Texas City because they use so much ground water in the refineries. So, it was mostly that the subsidence and the barge way, because there really were quite a few islands in Galveston Bay, and almost all of them are gone. North Deer is one of the last natural islands. Most of the islands that exist now were islands that were created with dredge material.

It's interesting. Galveston Bay, itself, has subsided so much that it now holds two-thirds more water than it did at European contact. It has to do with subsidence and also – they used a tremendous amount of fossil oyster shell to do roads. So, at European contact, Galveston Bay was a clear bay with a hard bottom. They mined all the hard bottom, which was the oyster shell, for roads.

Well, if you go up to Baytown, there was a whole subdivision there that was inundated. So, they tore it down, and that's where the Baytown Nature Center is.

It was funny because we're working with Fish and Wildlife Service on Little Pelican Island which is just adjacent to Pelican Island in Galveston. That was the – in 19 – about '90 or '91, the first three- or four-pelican pairs nested there that was the first time since the '50s that they nested in Galveston Bay. So, we were keeping an eye on it because I was working with the warden. With my position with Houston Audubon, I tried to get to know the wardens, the Audubon wardens in Galveston Bay because they usually are the ones that keep track of colonial water birds. My father was a warden in Florida. So, they're always interesting people.

So, we were keeping an eye and we counted that island for the yearly water bird census. They were going great guns, just amazing. The breeding started to drop off. We found coyote tracks. Coyotes are terrible ground-nesting bird predators particularly. So, we worked with the Fish and Wildlife Service, and we managed to remove coyotes, but then it was pigs and then it was coons. It wasn't very far just from across the intercoastal from Pelican Island. With more activity on Pelican Island, more things were moving out.

They just swim. Even pigs can swim. They have those little skinny feet and they can swim. So, the pelicans moved to North Deer. They moved in with a vengeance. It was just amazing how many pairs. I don't know how many pairs are there now because I'm not involved in that part of things anymore, but when I was still doing censuses, we would get at least 1,000 pairs. That's a lot of pelicans. As soon as pelicans started to nest in Galveston Bay again, the population exploded, which is very encouraging. It's very encouraging.

One of the things I wanted to mention as, in the early '90s, it became very obvious bird numbers were going down because we would see fewer and fewer migrants. Then – I've forgotten what year it was. Oh, I know. In 2007, two fellows sat down next to me on the bleachers at High Island. They said that they – how would we feel about having permanent bird guides in the spring. I said, "That would be fine." A lot of people propose things to me. I don't get too excited in until I know it might actually be something real. They said that they had decided that they would buy the house across the street and, in the spring, that they would house bird guides there and that they would lead field trips every day.

So, they did. It was Tropical Birding. The wonderful thing was – we knew the numbers of birds were going down. We could almost get sad about it because some days we really didn't have much, but we had all these excited young people who came in and did bird walks and had great following, were enthusiastic. I can remember Scott Watson coming back one morning. I said, "How was the walk this morning." Scott goes, "Oh, boy, we saw the best cardinals we've seen in ages." *[Laughs]* But it did a lot for us to have these professional bird guides, and that was a really wonderful program that we did cooperatively with Tropical Birding.

I think for Houston Audubon if it continues to go at the rate they're going. Basically, have stuck to sanctuary staff on the coast. I don't know a lot of the new people, but it certainly looks, from what we see on the webpage and Facebook and stuff that they have a lot of interesting programs going on and they're diversifying in programming and in the places they're having programs. I think that we're all of an age where we know that this next generation has to be approached differently. I think by getting more of the next generation on staff that they're able more to address it.

I don't know environmentally. We don't, as a society yet, or I don't know if we ever will, have enough appreciation for the importance. Everything tells you, if you want to feel better, if you want to do this, you should spend more time in nature, but yet everybody's getting rid of nature. So, I don't know what we are with that. The only way that we can protect it is to have people appreciate it. So, by having more programs that might reach different kinds of people, that's important.

The gal that was the second in – next to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior came. Now, that was a funny thing. So, we were having that thing downtown somewhere and some – I don't remember – in the art museum or something in the auditorium, some place like that. Anyway, so we were supposed to take these people out birdwatching. We couldn't take them to North Deer because it wouldn't look like anything. It was like November. So, they decided to take them to Bolivar Flats. Well, don't you know, we've got these high mucky-bucks in the Department of the Interior. It's raining, and it's raining. We had purchased our house at Bolivar Flats. This was not long after Ike. It was like in 2009.

So, we had this house. We hadn't fixed it up or anything yet. But I got folding chairs. We sat by my windows. I mean this is the Assistant Deputy Director and all these people from Fish and Wildlife Service. We watched a great blue heron eating a huge catfish. We watched all kinds of bird activity just sitting there in my not-very-nice-looking house. But they all had a great time. Then we had to come back in and have this presentation. The nice thing is they had done – The Audubon wardens are just amazing guys. Most of them are fishermen or hunters, and they're really attached to the natural world. Some of them do amazing outreach. There was this guy, Chester Smith, in Port O'Connor. Every year, he would have somebody kill a rattlesnake because all the islands, a lot of them, are full of rattlesnakes. Then he'd hold it up and have a picture taken. In the local paper it would say, "Another huge rattlesnake killed on Sundown Island." Well, that kept people off the island if they thought there were huge rattlesnakes. *[Laughs]* Right? He had a big family, like six kids and a gazillion grandkids. He was so strong about hunting and fishing regulations.

But anyway, that's Chester. Here, we had Bob Galloway, who I worked with. He was another person that, you know, after he'd be out in a boat, he'd be going over to Gilhooley's and having

a beer and talking to the guys, and he'd make sure that all the latest colonial water bird brochures were in all the bars. Think what a good outreach that is because that's the fishermen that have just come in and maybe have walked on the islands who shouldn't have. So, they did just a wonderful – Texas Parks and Wildlife did a wonderful video about Bob, which was great. I've gotten to meet a lot of really neat people doing this, just amazing people who really care a lot about the environment and some of them do phenomenal things for protecting it.

[End of Audio]