My name is Jeff Mundy. And I came to Houston Audubon in 1994. I believe started as a new birder. That'd be '92, '92-93, became a birder and volunteer after that at High Island. And then in the late nineties came on the board and was the president from 2001 to 2003 after Dwight Peake.

I've lived in Texas my whole life, and our family had a place in Rockport and would go there every weekend. And when I say every weekend, I mean Friday, schools out, pick us up from school. Take us to Rockport. I grew up there hunting, fishing, skiing, and was outdoors all the time since a little bitty boy could walk. And grew up in that hunting and fishing community and just enjoying the outdoors. In 1992, my stepmother gave me a book about Connie Hagar. And Connie Hagar was a famous amateur ornithologist. To call her a birder is an injustice. She was a serious amateur ornithologist back in the pre-World War II and post-World War II period.

And she lived in Rockport, and had moved down there during the World War II era. Because they'd visited, and just by happenstance, saw lots of birds, and she was big into birding. So, she somehow coaxed her husband into buying a motel there and that became their business. And she would take the hotel guests out birding with her, and word kind of spread. And back then, there was no Internet. There's no computers, no nothing. She would write notes to a publication back then where they would say, "Here's unusual bird sightings around the US." And people would read that and ornithologists would read it. And she was writing up these reports of just massive numbers of birds and unusual birds occurring around the Rockport area.

And so, it really was sticking out like a glowing red light about Rockport and that little central coastal area. And some of the "big name" ornithologists (Harry Oberholser and Ludlow Griscom) from the Northeast were reading this going, "Man, we're gonna go down there and straighten this lady out. Get her head on straight. Put an end to all this nonsense she mails us every month." And sure enough, one went down there and was like, he said, "Okay, I want you to take me out," I think it was Mountain Plover or something, "Show me some of these," or Buff-breasted sandpipers. She said, "Okay. Let's do it." Drove straight out there and showed him. He's like, "Wow. Well, how about this thing, you know, you wrote in." She went and showed him that. He's like, "Hmm. Huh," you know.

So, he ended up going birding with her about four or five days, and made a convert out of him. He's like, "You know what? She's right. She's absolutely right. It's a magical place." So, it kind of made Rockport a hotspot on the national level back in the days before birding was a thing. But, anyway, my stepmom knew of my interest in Rockport, and even as an adult, you know, we continued to go there. And so she thought, okay, you know, here's an interesting Christmas present, and gave it to me. And I was reading it, you know, just first looking at it towards the history of Rockport, but it's mentioning all these birds. And I'm thinking, man, I duck hunt out here all the time. What are these things? Great Egret? What the heck is a Great Egret or Roseate Spoonbill? What the heck is that?

So, I found a bird book somewhere. It turned out was Peterson's Birds of Texas. I started looking it up like, well, there is no way a thing like that lives in Texas. I just don't believe it. Next weekend we go down, and it's like, wow, it's just like somebody flipped a switch in my mind. Man, there's a Great Egret. There's a Snowy Egret. There's a Roseate Spoonbill. Of course, you

know, I'm seeing the big birds starting off. And I mean that was just the magic at that moment, and it literally is like somebody just flipped a switch. So really, it's due to Connie Hagar's biography.

Well, you know, this is back in the early nineties, and birding was kind of starting to get in the newspaper. And I can't remember if we saw in the Houston newspaper, but somehow read about, you know, this is literally like weeks after I had read this book. So it's like Christmas read the book, and then January, the end of January, something in the newspapers talk about High Island, or somewhere. And I'm like, I tell my wife, "Hey, I want to go on a bird watching trip." She's just like, "Okay. Whatever. Sure. How do we go bird watch?" I'm like, "I don't know. Let's get in the car and just find this place called High Island."

And, you know, I had binoculars from doing outdoor stuff. She said, "All right. Let's go." We had that Peterson's Birds of Texas, and we started driving to High Island. Well, first thing we know, we come over to the big bridge over the Trinity River, and you look over on the south side of the road, and there's a big rockery of all the egrets and spoonbills. I'm like, oh, that looks like a good place. Let's stop and look at birds. And we get out we see some of those, and pull a little farther down the road towards the river, and it's kind of a flooded timber area. And I can't remember which bird we saw first, but I remember vividly the two first ones we saw were a Carolina Wren and a Wilson's Warbler.

We saw that little Carolina Wren just looking through binoculars, and he's singing. And it was just like, wow, that bird. Just look at that. I mean we're both wowed by it. I mean we just thought this was amazing to watch this little teeny tiny bird just singing and singing, and going crazy. And we saw the Wilson's Warbler, you know, it was bright yellow bird. It was like, wow, look at this. This is amazing. This lives in Texas? What? How can this be? I mean you talk about the hook being set. So we're like, "Oh, birding is great." *[Laughter]* This is awesome. Let's do it. We said, "Oh, we gotta go to High Island. I read in this book, this is the thing. High Island, birds everywhere."

And we'd get over there. And back then, Houston Audubon didn't own Smith Oaks. And there's a place called Birders Haven, and it's a little bed and breakfast. So we parked at Birders Haven thinking, "Man, that's gotta be the place. Birders Haven. We're going there." We parked, and we're walking around, and it's like, "Hmm, we're not seeing anything. What's wrong? You know, the book says they're all over the place. I see nothing." You know, maybe a cardinal." I was like, well…

So we start rolling through what now is the parking area of Smith Oaks. And back then, it was, you know, had some oil tanks, and cattle, and cow patties. And we were walked around stepping in cow patties. It's like, man, what's this all about? You know, this isn't exactly what we were thinking. And Winnie Burkett happened to be there that day. And she walked up, and it's like, "Hey, what's going on?" It's like, "Well, we're looking for all the birds in the High Island. We read about it in this book, and where are they?" And she goes, "Okay. Let me explain how this works." And she's trying to explain migration to us. It's like, oh, okay. Well, that makes some sense. She's like, "Come back in April, and we'll show you around."

And so really, you know, Winnie's graciousness spending ten minutes with us that cold muddy day stepping in cow patties, you know, really, you know, kind of got us on the hook. And she said, "Come back here and I'll show you all where to go." And she showed us where the Boy Scout Woods was. And she said, "You come back here in April in this gate, and there will be people all over here. You check in with us and we'll get somebody to help show you around and help you out." And sure enough, we came back in April, and it was just a fantastic day. Just a wonderful, delightful day. And so that's how I got tied in with Houston Audubon. So we kept going visit and visit.

And finally somebody said, you know, let's come volunteer and help. They were always looking. Back then Houston Audubon was purely a volunteer group. It had a couple part-time staff, but it really was a volunteer-run group. And so they grab everybody they can get to be a volunteer. And I was like, yeah, let's do it. And so we started volunteering, and that's how we got involved.

If you worked for Winnie back then as a volunteer at High Island, job one, day one, was pulling tallow trees. And we're out there pulling those little bitty tallow trees like pulling weeds out of a garden. And I'm telling you if I pulled one, I pulled a thousand that day. I was like, man, to this day, tallow is my bitter enemy of mine. I just hate it. And after doing that for two or three times, I'm like, you know, there's gotta be a better way to deal with this than sitting out here pulling weeds, these little things. And they were everywhere back then. And so I'm thinking, okay, I'm gonna get some professional advice. And I don't know who I talked to, but somewhere found a professional arborist or tree person. You know, it might have been just somebody on the street. I can't remember, but I saw a professional tree person.

I said, "Hey, here's the problem. We're volunteering at this thing over at High Island. They have these tallow trees, and they have them everywhere." And then I told what we were doing. He said, "Okay. You're doing it backwards. The way you got to tackle this, find the biggest ones. You kill the biggest ones first. You work from biggest to the smallest. You keep on killing the big ones off, and you'll make some headway after a while." I said, "Okay. I'm gonna do it." And went out, and I bought a professional logging chainsaw. It's got a bar this big. It turns 12,000 RPMS like what you see on TV. And I've got Kevlar and a hardhat.

And I mean I showed up the next volunteer day, and I have a logging chainsaw and full on outfit. Winnie's eyes are like, "What the heck," I'm trying to be polite here, but very excited, said, "What are you up to?" I said, "I talked to somebody and I've got the way to deal with tallow trees. We're going to cut down the biggest ones right now." She's like, "What?" *[Laughter]* We had little words, and we kinds got it at. And she's like, "Well, you go in that far corner over there, and you know, if you're killing tallow trees so I'm okay with it. As long as you kill tallows and nothing else."

And I'm telling you, they were predominant plant, tree, whatever. I mean they outnumbered everything else by 50 percent. So we went out, found the biggest tallows we could find away from the buildings and got after them with our chainsaw. And my poor wife, God bless her soul, she was out there helping with a machete clearing work areas. But we were cutting tallow trees, no exaggeration, very literally, three and four feet in diameter. It looked like a TV logging show.

And people were starting to get upset, "Hey, you're cutting down some huge giant trees. You're killing where all the birds come."

And it's like, no, we're making way for the trees the birds need. They don't use the tallow trees that – the tallow trees are in the milkweed family gives a little sap. It actually kills and suppresses all the plants around it." And that's what the one from the tree professional, he's like, "Kill this stuff out. It'll go away and you'll get regrowth in behind it." So, you know, people that first year or two, when we're getting after it were getting upset about knocking down these really big trees. And what we found is High Island gets this huge amount of rain. But we would cut them and check the growth rings, we found the trees were growing one inch in girth per year. So you'd get a tree this big around. It's only a 20-year-old tree, but it's crowding out the ability of oaks, and hackberries, and other desirable trees to come in.

And so, you know, once Winnie kind of got on board with like, "Okay, you know, you all got a gameplan. I'll stay out of the way and you all do your thing. Don't give any other of my volunteers on your work crew a chainsaw, and I'll stay out of your way." And so we did, and we did that for several years, just hammering and hammering. I was living in Houston at the time, and I mean if we had a weekend, we'd just go over there and just chainsaw, and chainsaw, and chainsaw, and got after it. So that's really, you know, my first volunteering efforts on that front.

And after a while, I saw Winnie one day, and I said, "Winnie, I'd like to kind of do something else besides tallow trees. Is there something else I could get involved in?" And she was like, "I bet we can find some other things for you." And I didn't hear anything. And, you know, it's kind of probably going ahead of the story. But a little while later, got a call from – was out doing the Great Texas Birding Classic weeklong competition, and this is in the late nineties. Cellphone – people watching this today will never believe this, but cell phones weren't invented back then. But I was managing litigation for a large corporation managing all their litigation in eight states, and had had about a hundred outside lawyers that I was managing, and 80,000 cases at the time.

So I had a car phone. The company put a car phone, you know, which sounds neat at the time. Everybody is like, "Woo, you got a car phone." It's like, yeah, well, that way they've got a leash on me and I can't ever get away from them. *[Laughter]* But we were out doing the great Texas Birding Classic. You know, phone rings. It's like, "Hey, what's up," you know, thinking it's the client calling. And it's like, "Hey, this is Dwight Peake." And I've known Dwight from birding trips, especially from doing offshore pelagic trips.

And he was like, "Hey Jeff," you know, the president at that point was P.D. Hulce. It's like, "P.D.'s got some stuff going on, so I'm kind of having to take over and be president so I need some backup. Would you mind helping?" I'm like, "No, sure I'd be happy to help." And so we kind of had ahead of schedule transition. So I came in and started helping Dwight, and there's a lot more story behind that. But that's kind of the transition of how it went from stepping in the cow patties to five years later, all of a sudden, you know, on the path to being the president.

It was a small, but mighty force is the best way I would describe it. The group at that point was only 20-25 years old, but it was a very small group of very committed, very active, very

passionate people, that hardcore birding community, and I mean the hardest of the hardcore of the US was – this is ground zero for it. I mean there are very few places anywhere in the US that had such a group of really hardcore serious birders. And with that, they were committed to trying to protect their birding places and where they were seeing birds. And I'm sure you've talked and heard a lot of the names already, but you know, those people that are names on sanctuaries and plaques, I mean they're real people. And they're just ordinary working people, and they were birders. And they like "You know what? I'm not gonna sit here and watch this stuff just vanish in front of my eyes. I'm gonna do something." And they did it.

And, you know, I've always thought one of the great strengths of Houston Audubon, its strength, not one of them, the great strength of Houston Audubon and Houston is the people and their attitude. It's always been "can do. Let's make something happen." Don't sit there and just complain. Let's make it happen. You know, if you see something that needs doing, let's figure out a way to do it. And it had, I would say, you know, a few hundred people there were really passionate, actively-involved in this network of likeminded people. It was a volunteer group at that point. There were part-time staff. One helping with some fundraising periodically, and the one that was half volunteer birder, and half time run the administrative end of things.

But it was largely a purely volunteer group, and it was very effective at tackling the projects that put its mind on it. It did advocacy. And a lot of things we see today, they're preserved. Lake Charlotte was about to vanish. And Houston Audubon stepped up to be one of the plaintiffs to fight. And Jim Blackburn led that fight. [1] And that would've been under water and would have been a water reservoir for Houston. It wouldn't have been much of a water reservoir. It was only gonna be five or six feet deep, I think, was the plan, but it was gonna wipe out the only nest of bald eagles in the area. Back then, bald eagles were incredibly rare. Widely rare. But there were some at Lake Charlotte, and so they fought to protect that. That's just one example. Or High Island. Or Bolivar. And these people were passionate about saving that. And then the prairies…

There are a handful of people that were absolutely critical, critical, and pivotable at this organization, its survival and what it became. The fact that it's even still here today, and not only just survived by thrived. And I always hesitate to mention people by name or a shortlist for fear of listing the importance of so many people. And I mean there are a ton of people that were

[1] The Wallisville Reservoir /Trinity Dam project was ongoing for many years. The litigation began in the early 1970s with attorney Stuart Henry leading the opposition. Around 1984 the lead attorney for the plaintiffs (HAS and others) was a lawyer named Ray Berry. Jim Blackburn began his initial envolvement with Wallisville as Second Chair to Ray Berry. Subsequently Jim Blackburn became lead attorney for the plaintiffs and was settled the litigation around 20XX. Proponents wished to dam the Trinity River around Wallisville so as to aid navigation from Dallas to Houston. Houston Audubon and others opposed the project for several reasons. Damning this free-flowing river would change the brackish waters of Galveston Bay with detrimental consequences for the aquatic life that thrived there (including shrimp). A dam would inundate a large land mass around it, thus destroying the existing bird friendly marsh there. The settlement included a saltwater barrier and in place of a reservoir there is a 25,000 acre nature preserve area thriving with Prothonotary Warbles each spring.

hugely important, again, as a volunteer group, but there's a couple that are just – it would – if we're trying to capture history of the group, the time I was active, they were absolutely critical key players… and allies and helping achieve what we were trying to do..

And again, in no particular order. So you know, and if somebody's name isn't on here, I just – it makes me cringe to not name everybody going back to two hours. And Winnie Burkett was critical, you know, the time I was around because she was the nexus into a lot of contact with a lot of volunteers. That's how I came to be involved in Houston Audubon. You know, Bolivar and High Island were kind of her areas, and she brought so many people into the group through her contact with volunteers. So you know, her. Dwight Peake. Got some of the history earlier. But Dwight brought me into the more formal board level. And the two of us really could not have done what either one of us did without the other one.

So I mean I really view him as a key partner. He had young children at the time, and really saw the vision of what the education program is now. And he found Mary Ann Weber, which has just been a godsend. You know, just can't emphasize the importance of that. It's not luck. He did something. You know, and Mary Anne is another person, just right person, right time, right place, to help put stabilization, professional training, the birds, and make that thing just catch and go at the right time, a key part of that three-prongs of the education. So you know, Dwight, Mary Ann, really give them credit for that education nexus.

Joy Hester, interesting just she's worn so many hats for this group. Key volunteers, you know, another one of my lawyer friends and colleagues. She came from working for an oil company. I think it was Baker Hughes if I remember right doing real estate. She stepped up and volunteered and kind of got sucked into the Houston Audubon vortex when we're doing all these land projects. First, you know, helping as a lawyer, and then came on and went on to the board. And was a critical, just absolutely critical ally in some of these efforts that we had. And then we're having a lot of trouble finding the right person to be executive director, and we went through a handful in pretty quick succession, Joy finally said, "You know, I'll step off the board and I'll do it for a little while," you know, just kind of as a stop gap. And you know how that goes. You know, you're there. Good. You're it.

And I mean she was the right magic, right person, right mindset, right skill set, right personality. And she stands out as absolutely pivotal in the transition from little bitty volunteer bird group into professional level staff, and helped create that framework of hiring people, the right people at the right time, right place to help it grow. She went on to go onto the National Audubon board. Some other things. But she was critical to that transitional phase of little group to bigger formal group. And that, I just cannot overstate the importance of her in that role.

Back when I came on, fundraising was pure volunteer-driven essentially. And there, a lot of people are important to it, but there really are a handful that were, they were there every single day treating it like a full-time job. And it is a hard job sometimes. You know, we help give them the message, which helped them do what they want to do. But they were there, day-in, day-out, and just it would be beyond a tragical mission if we didn't talk about. But Caroline Callery, been there day-in, day-out, bringing people in, helping them get tied in.

Sara Bettencourt, the other one, just a critical ally, and would help organize the galas, which were important for fundraising. They were important for community outreach and messaging. And she's been a constant force and a good solid foundation day-in, day-out. And later helped work with a professional development director that we brought in. But I just cannot emphasize the importance of that role that Sara played. Nancy Powell Moore had a little birding group. And there's a story, and it's important, again, going back to the point of every contact we have with volunteers, you don't know how that's going to turn out into something you don't foresee.

Nancy Powell Moore is another one of these women that had a critical role in fundraising through personal efforts with the foundation, but importantly through outreach and bringing people to it. And she had a deal with me, she said, "I've got a little group of friends. I'd love for you to take us birding for a day. If you'll do it, I'll make a donation to Houston Audubon." I was like, "I don't have to get paid to go birding. I'm always up for a good excuse to go birding. But yeah, let's do it." And she had a group of people, and we did it every year. And her birding group, just going out and having fun, turned out to be pivotal supporters again of the group. Jim Winn. So, Nancy Powell Moore would organize the field trips. She had the Winns. Jim and Betsy Winn. Jim, of course, went onto become president. Got turned into a volunteer and dragged into it.

And I mean we could not be where we are right now without those kinds of players. She also had Gene Graham. Gene Graham made one of the initial, not one of, she made the major initial gift of $500,000.00 that was a challenge grant to help put the spark. And Ann and Arthur Jones made another one, just totally out of the blue, $250,000. You know, they're people who had been on a bird trip and had binoculars. And I remember Ann called me one day and said, "Would you come over to my house? I need to talk to you about something." You know, "Sure. What's up?"

I get over there, and she and her husband made a $250,000.00 gift. You just don't know where these things are gonna come from. So, you know, I want those people captured in the history of this group because they were individuals that took this group from little-bitty bird club having bake sales literally in a once a year every other for three or four-year gala to put a financial foundation under to allow it to be what it is now. So I just want to make sure that they were captured in the history of this group. And there are so many more. Flo Hannah. God love her and God rest her soul. You know, she was one of my birding buddies. You know, Joy, and Sara Bettencourt, Flo and I used to all do that, on our Christmas count.

You know, Joy was the director, and I wanted to do prairie stuff, and Flo was looking for a job. I started going birding with her when she was doing a graduate degree on Henslow's sparrow. And chitchatting with her. And she's like, "I never actually seen one." I'm like, oh, come on. You have a degree and you haven't seen one? So I took her out and showed her Henslow's sparrows. And it's like, man, we need to figure out a way to get you in here and do something about prairies because that's a big thing for me about coastal prairies and the prairies in the panhandle, something tied to as a child. And I was like I want to get prairies on the agenda, and that's not – no one wants to do anything really. She's like, "Okay."

And so connected her with Joy and said, "Hey, let's go have lunch one day and we'll talk to Joy and see if we can get you hired." And so one thing led to another, and she and Joy hit it off. So that came to our – she was professionally trained to help do prairie conservation, and that sparked and grew into that. I'm sure people have told that history. So those are just some of the ones off the top of my head, and there's literally a thousand more important. But it would be just the glaring omission not to capture the history of those people and make sure they're preserved. So that's it.

It had in the nineties, mid-nineties, they had this passionate core group of people, and they were tackling certain little projects here and there, and raising the money as needed. And High Island, the first purchases over there, they created the concept of bonds. And basically what was, was people on the board just said, "Yeah, I'll take on the debt personally to help buy this place we all like to go birding." And so that's always been there. The scale of it though and really grew during the time Dwight was president, and I was working with Dwight and I became president. And it was 50 percent, you know, vision of where we wanted to go with things, and the other half was sheer survival due to external events.

And so that period of the late nineties into the early 2000s was a critical period where it transitioned from purely volunteer, and then what I worked on and Dwight worked on was trying to put the framework in place to have a solid sustainable framework of professional staff and infrastructure with volunteers supporting that. And the reason for that, there's many reasons, but Terry Hershey, when I first started really getting involved, you know, just a tremendous wonderful human being. She was this down-to-earth and as good person as I've ever met. And I've met a bunch, and they're all damn good.

But Terry said, you know, when I first came on the board, she sat down with me one day and had a cup of coffee. And she's like, "Look, here's the deal. An organization's life and its mission is good for about three cycles of a board. That's it." And so, you know, Houston Audubon, it does good." And going back, I think it was formed in '69. There would be periods of where it's real active and doing stuff, then periods where it's kind of hanging on by the fingernails because it's kind of – it had been in flowing as the volunteers would come and go. And she's just like, you know, she knew what we were trying to do, and she's like, "You gotta figure out a way to make this thing self-sustaining."

And we had external conflicts coming from funding. I went back to some of my newsletters, and there's a whole story and you may want to set up a separate question for this. It's a long discussion. But back then the primary funding for Houston Audubon was what was called "Dues Share" from National Audubon. And I went back and checked the notes. National Audubon would pay Houston Audubon or any chapter $3.00 for each member. And so, if you had 1,000 members on your newsletter list, they would mail you $3,000. And that check would come every month, and it'd ebb and flow. And they were always wanting you to do member drives to get people. But that was the primary day-in, day-out budget of Houston Audubon was that $3.00 a head of people on the newsletter list. And we were wanting to tackle projects and education.

It's like, man, these things don't fit, and we're one or two cycles away of volunteers getting transfer job-wise, moving away. And so, I'm like, okay, we gotta figure out another way to get at

this problem. And basically, came up – and I really credit Dwight, you know, two of us really sat down and worked out a game plan. But three major prongs, which is advocacy, education, and land protection. Dwight had small children at the time. He was living in Galveston. He was a doctor in Galveston. He had young children. He said, "Man, we gotta have education as a key component of this, and it fits with the other two. It's like we can save this land, that land, whatever, but what we have to change is the mindset of the community. We can't be the first aid crew running in at the last second to save something. We gotta change the values of the community."

And that really, we got to deal with that when kids are children, you know, get them to appreciate the outdoors. Like I was saying, I grew up outside hunting and fishing. They get that connection. And back then, I remember we'd meet some young kids growing up in Houston, they've never been outside the city limits. And they would be afraid to come in Edith L. Moore because they'd watch TV and see, you know, lions and tigers, and they're afraid there's a lion or tiger in the woods here at Edith L. Moore. It's like, no, that's not how it works.

So, Dwight took on responsibility for really making education a focal point at that time. And I don't know how he found her, but somehow, he found Mary Ann Weber. And she was just the perfect person, perfect time. She had the birds. You know, I was a lawyer so advocacy was an easy fit for me to take on. And the way we both looked at it and what we brought to the board was saying, look, here's where we want to go. Get the kids, the education programs, and really scale it up. The Docent Guild was doing some things. And stuff that they were doing was good, but it wasn't conveying the real conservation ethic the message that we wanted to drive home.

And so, it was like we got to have some control over the messaging and it's all about conservation. And you know, it's a subtle shift of birding is a gateway, it's a portal into the broader topic of conservation. And that's were particularly I, coming from the hunting community, it's a major factor in the hunting ethos is conservation of the resource. And the birding groups back then, it was about competitive birding and listing. You know, and that's an important role to have that, but I was like we gotta repackage this and make the message about conservation. And we get people into conservation through birding. Birding, itself, is not the end game. It's the means to the conservation ethic.

And then land acquisition was, okay, if everything else fails, and this thing's about to go away and no one else is going to protect it, we'll step up and step in. And Houston back then was a big city for sure, no doubt about it. But in the post-seventies, there's a big wave of growth in the Houston/Galveston area, and then it kind of quieted down. But by the nineties, it's starting to pick up again. And we could see things starting to vanish. And it's like, okay, what are we gonna do. And I've grown up and spent a lot of time in the Texas panhandle of prairies. Well, coastal prairies were the most imperiled of all types of ecosystems, and it's like we've got to make this a priority for conservation. But wetlands, but forest, you know, people see a forest cut down, they go, "Wow, they just cut down a forest."

Well, you go out here and watch somebody plow up a native prairie, it's like, they just plowed up a grass field. So what? But to save, if you want to save Long-billed Curlews, or Meadowlarks, or Henslow's Sparrows, you have to save the grasslands. It's like so instead of saying I want to

save Henslow's Sparrows, it's like I've got to save what they need to survive, and everything. That's why things that are dependent on that grass land community are the most imperiled of all species, whether it's plants, flowers, birds, amphibians. So that was kind of my thing. I was like prairies gotta be on the agenda. And then we're like you know what, there's a side story about conflicts with National Audubon, but you know, where is Houston Audubon's core strength? Where's its focal/emotional energy?

And it was clearly centered around the Galveston High Island nexus. And I'm like, okay, let's just make Bolivar our focal point for conservation. You know, there's a thousand fights we could pick anywhere, but like let's put our energy and focus on that. People like it. We're connected to it. But there's a lot of stuff vanishing over there really fast, very fast. So, Dwight is like, "Yeah, I live in Galveston. Let's do this." So we said, okay. I think it was '97-98, somebody will have to fact check me on the precise dates. Let me take one step backwards. If people go to Bolivar Flats today, they think, wow, this must have been protected forever. When I started birding, it was not protected by any means.

The only thing that was really, quote, "protected" was in the eighties Houston Audubon had worked an agreement with the General Land Office, Texas General Land Office to create the bollards, the big poles to create a vehicle barrier to going into the most critical part where you have the mud flats. And that was it in the eighties and into the nineties.[2]

And then the first piece of land that Houston Audubon actually protected, I wanna say, and again someone can check me on the dates '97-ish, plus or minus a year either side that, '97-98. Acres came up, like 150-160 acres came up.[3] And they said, "Okay, let's do this." It's like, okay, well, damn, there's more development going on around here. What are we going to do?

And a tract came up, and it was in a bankruptcy proceeding, I believe Joy can check this, but it's became the 615-acre block west of Rettilon Road and along Rettilon Road ran through it.[4]

And it's like, man. Dwight is like, "We like we gotta do this." And I was like, "I totally agree. We gotta do this." We had this little tiny group that's having a bake sale to pay the electric bill, and that's not much of an exaggeration literally. You know, and we'd have an annual gala. But I mean budgets were itty-bitty back then. You know, our whole annual budget was maybe $80,000-$100,000 for stuff. And, you know, with two part-time staff and newsletters. You know,

[2] In 1984 – Stennie Meadours went before the Galveston County Commissioner's Court to get an order restricting vehicular traffic on Bolivar Flats. In about 1988 the order was issued. But the county had no authority to enforce it. It applied to Texas State property. In 1990, HAS (at Stennie's request) applied with the Texas General Land Office for a long-term lease of 1.27 areas on what was being called Bolivar Flats. In 1992, when Gary Woods was President and Sandi Hoover was Executive Director, the GLO issued the requested 99-year lease to HAS for the Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary

[3] The 178-acre Suderman Tract of the Bolivar Flats Sanctuary acquired in 1997

[4] The 615-acre Burkett Tract of the Bolivar Flats Sanctuary acquired in 2001 through the Bankruptcy Court. Funded by NFW Foundation, Houston Endowment, Shell Marine and hundreds of individual donors.

here we're gonna go out and raise a couple hundred thousand dollars? It's like – Dwight and I are like, "We just gotta do this. I'm sorry."

So, we both were on board. We come to the board meeting, it's like, "Hey, here's what we're gonna do. We gonna do this." About half the board, you know, we kind of prepped and got them ready. And their like, "Yeah, we gotta do this." The other half is like, "Are you crazy? You're nuts, you know. This is so beyond us." And it was – I'm not gonna say it was a contentious meeting because there was not really conflict, but it was high energy of like, you know, this is just like so wildly beyond anything we've ever done.

You know, Boy Scout Woods when they bought that was seven to eight acres, or seven or eight acres, you know, less than ten acres. That was a big project. And we're talking about taking on 615-acres and all that goes with that, and maintenance. You know, so there's a whole lot of people could come with a whole lot of reasons to say no. But you know, the board was kind of, "Eh, you know, you're right. This whole message about conservation and protect the habitat. If we want to protect birds, yeah, we gotta do that." But there were some people that were like, "Eh, this is too much for us. Too big a buy. You know, let's stick with doing our birding field trips."

And it's like, "no, it's us or it's nobody. If we don't do this, it will be a beach house development," and we're all gonna go, "Oh, why didn't we save that?" It's like you know what, I'd rather try and fail than just fail by not trying. And there was a staff member who I'll leave unnamed for reasons that are obvious, but she stood up on literally right in this boardroom, she stood up on this chair or probably one just like this, stood up just shouting, "You're gonna be the death of this organization. You all are going to take us down with this crazy idea. What are you doing?" But we're just like, "Sit down." *[Laughter]* You know, come on.

And that led us to revamp our staff after that. We had two part-timers that was doing the fundraising. He heard what we were up to. He's like, "I'm quitting right now. You don't even have to fire me. I quit. I'm out of here." And so a board meeting later, our staff is wiped out. And now people going, "Okay, what are you two clowns doing? You know, you're really putting us in a fix." And there was a lot of controversy around that, but it was something. And what I told Dwight and my view of it, and Dwight concurred, and what I told the board, people support financially groups that do the thing that they want to support. It's that darn simple. You can't say, "Give me money because I'm a good group." Why are you a good group? What are you doing?

And it's like you know what? People around this group want to save birds. Our message should be: "Save birds." We're not here to save the world. We're not here to save the whale. We're not here to save a redwood tree. We're about birds. That's what we're about. Let's put it in a narrow lane. We're gonna be about bird conservation. We're not doing the whole state. We're going to do right over here. This is our little area.

We started doing hard core advocacy. Started doing some hardcore land protection and hardcore education. And kept a very narrow focus on that about bird conservation. Conservation messaging was the central theme of it and the focus. And people, it's a – I would

say it this way. More people are more committed about something that's a clearly defined view and vision of where they want this group to go, and people support that as opposed to a very general wide thing of, well, we want to help the environment. Okay. Well, there's 1,000 groups competing in that space. There aren't that many people saying, "I want to protect birds and bird habitat." So, okay, maybe can get 10,000 people to send you $10.00 to save the environment.

Our situation back then was, okay, let's get 100 hardcore donors and hardcore leaders to say, "We're gonna protect this area around Houston, Galveston, Bolivar, High Island, and that's what we're going to stay focused on." So did the organization grow? Yes. The financial support came faster and easier than I think any of us envisioned. And it was reassuring, but it was a reaction to a very clearly-stated message of this is who we are. This is what we are about. And it was really crystal-clear. There was no ambiguity in it. We are going to save Bolivar Flats. Period. You got that? We're on board, and people like that.

And you don't need 10,000 members to do that if you get a handful that are saying, "This is it," and that's the message. Conservation advocacy groups, and this is a constant problem with all conservation groups across the board, these are inherently advocacy groups. We are here to say, "This is why we are here, to protect this thing." Whether it's to protect birds, protect whales, protect children, whatever it is. But we have to lead with the message: "This is why we are here. We want this thing protected. Here's how we do it." And then bring people to that message and that goal, as opposed to: "Tell us what you want us to be." Well, if you say, "Tell us what you want to be you're gonna be, you're gonna be a whole lot of things to a whole lot of people, and none of them very successful. And so we really crystallized very crisply: "Here's what our message is and what we wanna do, and we laid a vision out."

I don't know how structured. Now back then, the way the board was structured, the organization, it wasn't just the board, but there was a commitment if you came on as a president is two years as president-elect, two years as president, two years as past president. But keep in mind back then, again, it was a little volunteer group, so having succession in that position was critical to make sure there would still be somebody willing to step up. And that is where other Audubon groups have had real problems with that succession of who's going to come in when this president gets tired, or burns out, or quits. And it's, I can tell you back then, it was a full-time job for the president. You know, I was doing my law practice all day, and then doing this a lot of the time. But it was the incredibly full-time job managing an organization of fundraising, and advocacy, and a lot of things going on.

So anyway, I came on, like I said, I think Dwight, somebody will have to check the dates, but Dwight took over. He was president-elect when P.D. Hulce was president. P.D. was some things, and you know, kind of had to step out of the picture way ahead of schedule. And so Dwight stepped up as president-elect was kind of running things. And then he called me and says, "Hey man, I need some help." It's like let's do it. And so I kind of came in ahead of schedule, you know, off the books helping Dwight. And then I think formally came on the board, it had to be in 1999 officially as president-elect. And then back then, the boards with transition. At the end of May, they ran on a school year. Meetings would be September to May. And so at the end of the May is when the old board will go out, new board would come in. They had the summer off, no meetings, no nothing, and then kick up again in September. So that's when I officially came on

the board. It had to be May of '99. You know, been helping Dwight doing stuff before then though.

Well, I think as I mentioned earlier, the short answer is yes. And it was a combination of Dwight and I both formulating kind of this three-pronged approach to help solidify Houston Audubon, stabilize it, energize it, and then accomplish what we both saw as the threats they were imminent to the places we loved for birding in Bolivar and Highland area, particularly in some coastal prairie stuff west town. So anyway, we had the three-pronged approach, which some of it kind of been there, and off and on a little bit, but it's education, advocacy, and land protection. And Houston Audubon had done those kinds of things in fits and spurts, but we tried to really formalize and build the infrastructure to support those three prongs.

And then create a professional staff that would be a framework that would be a constant, you know, that would allow some consistency over time so you don't have just a board of volunteers changing half the group every other year, and lose a vision, and lose energy and passion. So, the idea was put that professional staff in place to bring expertise to it on the education front, on conservation front, on the fundraising front. You know, this is a whole separate question, but we had really a handful of key women that were the primary drivers in the financial support of this organization, now, I mean we would not be here today without. Literally, I can count on one hand, that took it on as a full-time job, all day, every day, bringing the money to the table to keep things happening.

And we said, okay, we gotta get them some help because, you know, every year like, okay, we're tired we're out. It's like, you know, it's like, okay, well, thanks, but you can't quit quite yet. One more week. Do one more thing, you know. And I just can't emphasize that enough. But anyway, so we did this period of the late nineties and early 2000s was a massive transition for this organization of trying to put that structural framework in place with the staff, stabilize it, make it a self-supporting, self-sustaining business.

I want to say '97 was the first acquisition at Bolivar. There were four sanctuaries at High Island already there. That was done, I want to say 70s-80s period. Bolivar in the eighties had just these bollards put up, and that was the only thing that was protected at Bolivar. So we looked at – and Dwight was living in Galveston at the time, so he was really tuned into what the local plans were for development in that area. And it was right by the fairy, and people wanted to build beach houses and businesses. So Dwight's like, man, we've got problems developing over here. And it's like, yeah, it looks like it.

And so anyway, that's when the real push, I want to say it was '97. It could be '98 is when the first piece of Bolivar was actually purchased outright by Houston Audubon, about 150-160 acres. Right on the heels of that, Mr. Tyra, I can't remember his first name. Lewis Tyra called up and said, "Look, I've got an undivided interest in this property. And I'll donate it. I'll give you all this." It was a majority interest in it, in the property, and it was like 1,100 acres or so. My numbers could be off. But it was a substantial block of holding there. And so he said, "I'll do that." And a developer had a piece of it, and it was kind of a complicated thing. It took years. And Joy Hester

worked on that a lot with Winnie trying to work through that situation. And that's when we took on, really, the first major fundraising effort to buy about 600 acres of Bolivar.

That was a pivotal meeting where the board's like, "Yeah, we're going to do this," and the staff essentially saying, "We're out. We're done." *[Laughter]* We saw thought, you know, we just gotta do it. It's just gotta be done. And so that started then, the same kind of development threat was there. Port Bolivar, which is the other side of the road by the ferry wanted to have a big marina and beach house kind of development. And so they had to do wetland mitigation. And there was a beautiful piece of pristine marsh on the intercoastal side down close to rollover pass. And so we were talking with them about, "Hey, how about this over here?" And they're like, "Okay. Well, we'll buy that long as you take it and hold it. We're not gonna hold it." It's like okay.
And the same kind of thing, the board is like, "We're taking on more land?" It's like, hey, it didn't cost us anything this time. It's good. You know, and people are like we're building up all these sanctuaries, and there's a lot of costs that go with running that, and taking care of it. And it was like, yeah, but look at this prairie. I remember Winnie's like, "We don't need anymore. I can't run anymore." Winnie was volunteer back then, and we're talking about, yeah, we gotta help her get subsidized. And so we made her a paid staff member. You know, a subsidized volunteer is about what it amounted to.

But Winnie was like, "Man, we're taking on too much. I gotta manage all this." And it was like, "Okay, Winnie, but let's just go look at this. Take a look at it. It looks pretty good." And she went and looked at it, and she came back, "Okay. You're right. I can't stand it. We gotta do this." And so she kind of got on board with it, and then the board got on board with it. So that was donated. We didn't pay for that. And then more pieces of Bolivar. Once the kind of word got out in the community that, "Hey, we're trying to do this," well, people got behind it and they're supporting. So kind of one thing led to another thing, and it's like, well, here's an opportunity for you, and there's an opportunity.

And at the time, I was officing – lived in Austin, another side story, but anyway, I live in Austin coming down here and running the Houston Audubon. But few floors below me where I officed downtown Congress was the Texas Nature Conservancy office. So I got to know all the people in that office, and talking with them about what their game plan was. And they had a model of, you know, land has to be a certain size and certain characteristics. And then we'd say, you know, we need to get with TPWD, and Fish and Wildlife, and let's all also coordinate who's doing what because we're all not competing for funds for the same kinds of properties.

And so we worked out an informal gentleman's agreement where huge scale projects, Fish and Wildlife ultimately would try and take those. Either they'd get the funding to buy them outright, big blocks like you see in the Brazoria Complex. Next step down, the low thousands of acres, the Nature Conservancy would try and tackle those. We committed to stuff that was in the hundreds of acres in the Galveston-ish/Bolivar area. We'd tackle those. And then things below that, you know, we try and find somebody else to get them to take it. And so we kind had this informal working agreement, but everybody was in agreement that there is a lot of development pressure in that area. So we all kind of, just through the serendipity of me officing a few floors above them, you know, worked out this agreement and kind of made that a focal

point. And it worked great. And because we're all trying to protect stuff in the general area, but we're not competing for the same funds for the same projects, and it worked real well.

I think you're asking about GCBO and the Katy Prairie Conservancy. GCBO, or Gulf Coast Bird Observatory originally was an idea, I don't know who first thought it up, but the idea was going to be it was modeled after the Point Reyes Bird Observatory in California where you have a permanent scientific station manned around the clock with true bona fide professional scientists. And they would study bird migration, you know, in that area. I mean clearly, you know, High Island is a critical, to protect the coast is critical to bird migration, bird conservation area. And so the idea is well, we'll do like Point Reyes as bird observatory, and we'll make the Houston Audubon Bird Observatory.

It was gonna be in Smith Oaks in the Palm Palace, and it was gonna be all renovated and turned into a place for them to live and have scientific research. Except the problem was no one to live in High Island with mosquitos all through the summer year-round. So that idea didn't really kind of get off the ground. It's like, okay, well, that didn't work. Now what? And so the idea was like, well, let's just start some programs and do some research, and it was volunteer research at the time because we didn't have scientists. And so then I was like, you know what, we've got enough things going on. And this is predating me a little bit, but it's like there's enough irons in the fire out here.

Let's just take the idea, you know, the word "Gulf Coast Bird Observatory" and make its own thing. It can be its own standalone group, work on its own fundraising, and then it can pursue and evolve with its on board about its own mission about scientific research. And so that was a spin-off of an idea of Houston Audubon trying to do it at High Island, but it didn't happen. But Dow Chemical, who've been very gracious supporter of Houston Audubon, and then the Damuth Foundation, Malcolm C. Damuth was a major supporter of Houston Audubon when he was alive, and his son Craig. And so they became one of the key founders/donors to give the GCBO financial footing to start off.

There's a piece at the end, don't let me forget, somebody remind me, talk about Malcolm Damuth because I want to tell his story before we get off the tape. But Katy Prairie Conservancy, same kind of thing. I was talking about – we were about the threats to the habitat on Bolivar, coastal prairies are the single most imperiled of all types of habitats, period. There's less than one percent approximately of original native prairies left. That's it, you know, whereas if you look at pristine wetlands, about 20 percent remain. Original forests, 50 percent. And I said earlier, people say, you know, you see a tree cut down, people react. Wetlands, people kind of tuned into, hey, that's important, but that's 20 percent. Coastal Prairies is one percent. But there are a lot of birds they depend on that. Water quality depends on it.

And Fred Collins, who was the president at Houston Audubon lived out on the Katy Prairie. And so he was like, "Man, we gotta do this." They were messaging and do a lot of advocacy back in particularly the nineties. This is an important area. We got to do something about this. Bob Honig, Bob and Maggie Honig, they were two others. They were really drivers. And Fred Collins, Bob and Maggie Honig, they were there. Bob Behrstock's another. But, you know, they were

wired into this is a good thing out here. It's where I saw my first bald eagles out there. But Fred was just like, "Man, we gotta do something."

And so same kind of thing, you know, it's like, okay, well, Houston Audubon's got a lot of things cooking. And we're kind of focused on Bolivar. And it's like, look, let that just be its own thing where it focuses every bit of energy it's got on protecting that prairie. And so that's where the Katy Prairie Conservancy came from. You know, again, a core of people who were – that inner hard energized core of Houston Audubon people, but that was the ecosystem they were saying, you know, "I'm passionate about this. I want to save it." And so those folks planted that seed, that took off.

Yeah. I think there's a good story, and I think it's important to capture this piece of history, both for the man recognized, and the concept, and the message and lessons learned from it. But Malcolm C. Damuth was one of the absolute key steady donors year-in, year-out. You know, just a bedrock go-to person that was always there to help Houston Audubon. Malcolm had made, early on, made his life's way and done very well for himself through exploitation of the East Texas forest and wetlands through timber, logging, oil. You know, but things, at the time, the way they were down were very exploitative.

And he grew up and saw that vanishing in front of his eyes and kind of had a real change of how he viewed things. Not that he was anti-logging or anti-oil, but he was just like we need to do these things differently. And then he became very passionate about conservation of those East Texas habitats. And so he donated some of the crown jewels of his holdings, which are now the Damuth Sanctuary, and the East Texas habitats with the bog plants, and the forest, and Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. But that was a, it was just a change, not of heart, but a change of how to handle that habitat. And then he put money into conservation, and conservation advocacy for that. And then his sone, he ingrained that his son.

And when Malcolm passed, his son Craig Damuth set up a foundation in his father's name, the Malcolm C. Damuth Foundation. I was one of the founding board members of that, and it was to be broader than just bird grants and conservation, but it was, you know, clearly in the time I was on that, the board was set up, bird conservation was a major driving component of it. But it was really focused on, again, ecosystem habitat preservation and conservation. So the message and lesson I would tell people to keep in mind about that, don't demonize people. You know, don't – I can't emphasize this enough.

Every person we come into contact with in our daily life, whether we're wearing a Houston Audubon hat, or just our normal daily life, every person out there is critical to the success of conservation. We're not going to make a sustainable ecosystem by buying it up an acre at a time. We're only going to really save ecosystems when we have it as a community value. And that's important to keep in mind. We have to have oil and gas. We have to have pipelines. We have to have lumber. You know, it's a sustainable resource. Don't demonize those people. They care. Some of them do. Some of them don't. And I fight some of the bad ones every day for a living now.

But the key is to get them to look at things differently so that we can help them do their business and serve their goals, but also think about how can we change that model so that they can do logging. They can do oil and gas extraction in a way that is protective of the environment. You know, today, this isn't a criticism. It's just an observation. But today, we hear climate change relentlessly on the TV. Well, that's important for sure. I am beyond concerned though, that is sucking all the air out of the room to a whole lot of really important conservation issues that are now getting lost in the dialogue. Everything thinks, well, if we fix climate change, everything's fixed. That's not so.

Let me tell you, in the state of Texas, water is the – it is the issue. If you say here's the ten most hot button priorities for conservation, the first five are gonna be about water. And that's falling off the table. So, you know, don't put the blinders on, oh, climate change, we say fix that. Everything is fixed. It's not. Endangered species are still critical. When I would do a lot of work for Houston Audubon, and taking people out, I took some very wealthy people from Europe birding around Texas. They're called – there may be another piece of history you want to capture about Donal O'Brien and Gerry Bertrand. But anyway, Donal and Gerry were friends with a man named Tasso Leventis, one of the richest people in the world. His family-owned Coca Cola in 37 countries, and Greek shipping lines. I mean wildly wealthy, but very low profile.

Tasso, kind of like Malcolm, grew up in a family that made their wealth through exploitation of resources, but kind of like Malcolm had the vision of, wait, this stuff around me is vanishing. He grew up in West Africa, and saw it vanishing in front of his eyes. Same kind of epiphany. Tasso Leventis was like, "I gotta do things differently here. I gotta change the way my family is doing things." And he changed that. And he was a hardcore birder. That was his passion, bird photography. Gerry Bertrand connected, you know, was the one asking me to taking Tasso birding around Texas. And Gerry Bertrand, who was on Houston Audubon Board of Advisors literally help fight the Endangered Species Act. I mean that generation, this stuff hadn't been around forever. It's in our lifetime, this stuff's happening. But those kinds of things are still critical that we gotta preserve these other environmental issues, keep them as part of the dialogue.

It was really when I started doing volunteer work for Houston Audubon. I was doing endangered species issues for Houston Audubon related to some of their sanctuaries, and then also they would ask, "Hey, we need to make public comments on this or that." But I remember, for example, one of the East Texas sanctuaries had an oil company come in and bulldoze some trees. And so we got involved. And so I was doing that pro bono since the nineties. But in 2011, Jim Blackburn had a case going in federal court against the state of Texas, and several river authorities related to the deaths of Whooping Cranes at the Aransas Refuge. And he asked me to come help him with that trial weeks. And we were in trial for two weeks.

I had very heavy trial experience, and that's kind of been my niche through the years was actually, you know, really trying cases. A lot of people talk about being lawyers, but you know, it's kind of like there's lots of doctors. There aren't a whole lot of real surgeons. The same kind of thing about really people go to trial. So that's what I've always done is really try cases. So Jim said, "Hey, this thing's going to trial, and I'm gonna some help." And he was up against some pretty nasty players on the other side of a law firm that defended the tobacco companies. And I

kept telling him, “Jim, these guys are dirty. They’re gonna play rough with you.” And he’s like, “We got this.”

The first deposition just blew up. He called me the next day and he’s like, “Okay, you were right. These guys are dirty. Really.” And he’s like, “Well, come help me try this.” So we were in trial for two weeks. He had a wonderful team of lawyers, and so I was really very lucky to help with that group of super talented lawyers. Five lawyers in the courtroom. Jim was the lead on it. And that really became kind of just like, okay, this is my passion. That was in 2011. You know, I’ve been involved with Houston Audubon. I’ve been involved with conservation. But it was a way to meld the passion of conservation, take the tools and experience I had from the legal universe, and kind of bring them together.

And then about five-six years ago, there was a real flurry of pipeline activity through South Texas. Some of my ranching friends, all of a sudden, really the next pivotal moment was a man 30 days from trial. He had an oil and gas lawyer. He’s like, “Man, we’re going to trial in 30 days. We’re getting killed. Would you help me?” I’m like, “Thirty days out from trial, I don’t know if I can really do much, but sure, I’ll help you.” And sure enough, make a long story short, we mobilized some biologists, and went out, found ocelots on his land. And I’d known they were there from prior work with him, but we found them. Fish and Wildlife Service was like, “Holy cow, this guy’s got ocelots.” And it’s like yeah. Stop the pipeline. And man, that one call from that rancher after Jim’s work, I mean it just snowballed after that.

So, he kind of came to me, and I’m like I really – I love this. And, you know, I’ve been fortunate to have some tremendous, wonderful ranchers. And again, that’s where I go back, don’t demonize these people. The bulk of this land in this state is owned by private landholders. They are the keys to success. We can save thousands of acres on Bolivar. What we need is the millions landscape scale stuff, the ethics of those ranchers to think, “I gotta care of .” I’m telling you, most of the ranches I deal with, tremendous stewards of their wildlife and their lands. Incredible. And I’ve been very fortunate work for the King Ranch, the O’Connor’s, and many others, and some small ranches. And they are passionate. So, you know, don’t wall those people off. They are keys to success.

I would just like to add one extra bit of history because it was not well known—there were two gentlemen on the board of advisors of Houston Audubon for many years – Donal O’Brien and Gerry Bertrand. And people say who are these people and where do they come from. Donal lived in the Houston area out in Sugarland and Gerry lives in Massachusetts. How are these two guys connected to Houston Audubon.

But Donal O’Brien was the chairman of National Audubon in 2001-2002 at the time I was president. Gerry was the vice chair. They were hardcore birders, I mean as hardcore as anybody that walks the planet. They are all about birds. They love watching them. They travel. They chase them. And they’re hardcore about bird conservation. The two of them started, they were the key sparks that started the American Bird Conservancy because they were angry that the National Audubon wasn’t hardcore bird enough. An so they said we’re gonna start ABC, you

know, to be about birds when they couldn't get National Audubon to do enough about birds. So I mean they're serious about bird stuff. Bird conservation is why they wake up every day.

Donal was, I don't know his title, but he was a very senior officer of Phillips Petroleum at the time. Phillips had been historically a good supporter of Houston Audubon. Gerry had been a staff lawyer for Richard Nixon on his White House staff as a lawyer. He was a trained professional. He's a biologist, and then went back to law school and became a lawyer. But literally helped write portions of the Endangered Species Act. And people today think, "Oh, this law's been around forever." No, it hasn't. It's been here since 1973. Of all people, Richard Nixon was the president when the Endangered Species Act got signed and put into law. But Gerry helped write part of it.

So how did they get connected to Houston Audubon? In 2002, National Audubon had a meeting in Houston in March, and I looked it up and got the little card from the thing. But they had a national board meeting in Houston, and they were now seemed to all of us, invited us to go, that they were going to open up a whole bunch of centers here and kind of take things over and take our donors. And we could help them of course, but they would gladly take our sanctuaries and our donors. Like, yeah – no. Well, they had a bus tour, birding trip the day before their formal board meeting. And they had us set up a tour to take them birdwatching. You know, big like Greyhound bus kind of thing. And they filled it up.

And Donal and Gerry wanted to go see some birds. And they brought some staff and some board members, people that were into birds. And I got a little spiel that would make the tour loop to Houston, go out I-10 east to our first bird over the Trinity River in High Island. Come back through Bolivar, and finish in Galveston, and come back to Houston. So we did that little loop that day. Told them all the things Houston Audubon was involved in. That was in the middle of the Bolivar campaign. And they were like, "Man, this is what we want National Audubon to do. You guys are kicking it – you're just right on. Man, this is exactly what we want you all to do."

And John Flicker (President of National Audubon at the time) was like, "We're gonna take you all over and do all this and stuff." And so Donal and Gerry, Donal is the chairman of the board. Gerry is the vice-chair. They're like, "Hands off. You leave these guys alone. We're putting a protective wall around them to." I hate to use "wall" these days, but you know, "We're putting them, they're off limits. Leave them alone. They're doing exactly what we want done. So Flicker, you stay away from them. You leave their donors alone. Don't cause problems." And so Gerry, "Would you mind being on our board of advisors?" He said, "I'd be proud to be on your board." "Donal, how about you?" "I'm on. Let's do it." I'm all about birds. You do it."

And so that's how they came to be on our board of advisors and remained there for many, many years. And Donal passed away several years ago. Gerry is still alive. But Gerry, I talk to every week, and he still asks about Houston Audubon, and he's very committed. So that's the short story of those two gentlemen and how they came to be connected to Houston Audubon.

Well, I'll say about Houston Audubon, what I would say for every group in the conservation community. It's not specific to Houston Audubon. It's for all of them. Don't become stagnant. Don't become just the place you show up for work every day to make a paycheck. Status quo

isn't good enough. That ain't gonna cut it. Be passionate about your work. Be an advocate. We are here to try and make a difference. And the real way we make a difference from the conservation community is through creating a culture in a mindset of conservation. And that's true for every group across the board from the littlest to the very biggest. So don't stagnate and rest on your backside. Get out there and be an advocate every day.

[End of audio]