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**Joe J. Guidry (JG):** Okay this is Joe Guidry on August 5th, interviewing Fred Webb at his home in Lutz. Fred, I'd like to start with when and where you born and raised?

**Fred Webb (FW):** Oh dear. I was born in Talara, Peru, South America. My dad worked for a Canadian oil company down there. For 27 years he was down there. And I happened along. And then we moved back to Canada. I was about seven I guess, and kind of grew up in Canada, in London, Ontario. And I guess I was around 13 or so when Dad couldn't take the cold anymore. He was used to Peru. Mum didn't either, so we moved down to Florida. [I] went to high school in Florida and college.

JG: Where in Florida?

FW: The beautiful metropolis of Port Charlotte/Punta Gorda area.

JG: So that was actually in a time when Port Charlotte was fairly undeveloped and—

FW: It was very small. Of course Punta Gorda was considered even smaller at that time. Although it seems to have grown up quite nicely now. But the whole state, I mean the whole state when we moved down, I think there was slightly over 6 million people in the state at that time. Well that certainly compare and contrast with what we have today.

JG: More than three times as much.

FW: Yeah.

JG: Well, what brought you to Hillsborough County?

FW: USF. I graduated from high school. Made application to USF. Was going to be an aspiring engineer. Started at USF and that brought us to Tampa.

JG: And then um, so you went to USF. You got your degree in—

FW: Got my degree in business.

JG: In business?

FW: Yeah. I had to have a year of chemistry and my God, I couldn't imagine that, so I switched over to business. Graduated in business. Married Alice. We moved to Canada for a couple of years. And I decided, I knew there was something wrong when I was working it that I'm at work both for Gulf Oil Canada and Bristol Myers Canada. And I was at a meeting in Bristol Myers, looked down on my page and I wasn't taking any notes at all but I was drawing pictures of fish, and sharks, and things like that. I said, "I can't do this for the rest of my life."

So almost on the spot, when I went home, went to Alice and said, "What do you think if I go back to school?" And she said—she exploded. She was great. She wanted to go back home. So we made a quick decision. Made quick plans. Made quick application to USF. And in spite of the fact that I had to go back and pick up two years of undergraduate courses in biology, because I had wanted to go into grad school. In spite of that fact and in spite of having to have two and a half years of chemistry versus one, I went back. I completed all that and it was well worth it. It was where I needed to be and do.

JG: Wow. But boy you really went about in a—

FW: Yeah, it took a little while, but (FW laughs)

JG: Well, while you were going to school, did you work?

FW: Yeah, I worked. I don't know if you remember the First National Bank downtown.

JG: Mm-hmm. Very well.

FW: Processing checks from about six o'clock to midnight and then had to get up for eight o'clock classes. And also, fortunately when I got into grad school, I got a teaching assistantship, so that was a lot better than coming in at midnight or one o'clock and then getting up for eight o'clock classes. Not quite as bad hours. (FW laughs) More relevant to what I was doing too.

JG: Well when you went on and got your degree, your master's degree.

FW: Got master's in zoology.

JG: Zoology.

FW: Yeah. And then went to work for Hillsborough Community College. In 1975, they had gotten a grant. Was it a bicentennial grant? For 20, I think it was 20 or 22 thousand dollars, and it was to last two years and that included my salary.

JG: And so that was—the grant was for teaching.

FW: It was to develop the Environmental Studies Center<sup>1</sup> down at Cockroach Bay. And I don't know if you remember a group called Save Our Bay<sup>2</sup>? Save Our Bay, and the Tampa Audubon<sup>3</sup>, and a couple of other groups had gotten the Tampa Electric Company to donate about 20—20 or 25 acres of land on Cockroach Bay<sup>4</sup>, mostly wetlands. And it

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<sup>1</sup>An educational entity designed for the study and understanding of Florida's ecology, biology, and ecosystems.

<sup>2</sup>An environmental coalition formed by Betty Castor and her first husband Don. After successfully effecting conservation and environmental protection for the Tampa Bay waters, the group broadened its scope and became the Hillsborough Environmental Coalition.

<sup>3</sup>A chapter of the National Audubon Society established in the 1940s to conserve and restore Tampa's ecosystem with an emphasis on birds, wildlife, and their habitats.

<sup>4</sup>A series of islands in the south eastern region of Tampa Bay located in the mouth of the Little Manatee River and extending southward along the shore of Tampa Bay.

was my task to develop that into an environmental center and get some programming started at that site. And get paid for that all on 22 thousand dollars (FW laughs) for two years.

JG: You must have thought you were heaven. That was just the kind of thing you wanted to do.

FW: Absolutely. And I was fortunate enough to have some, at that time it was small but it was a very cohesive environmental community. And the county school system—met a couple of people in there like Mike Mullins and that, Nancy Marsh. Of course at the college Robin Lewis<sup>5</sup> was working there at the time, so there was a good, strong, cooperative group of people at that time in the environmental community. And gosh, I don't know what I got—how I got started, things without, you know, their cooperation, and their help, and so on.

JG: Can you tell me a little bit about getting that started and what you did and how you made it?

FW: Yeah. Well, uh we just had the site. And I remember the first time I took my boss down there. He said—he was astounded. “What are you going to do way out here? It's all woods.” And I said, “Yeah, that's the point.” (JG laughs) It's all mangroves and so.

It was first thing, since, you know when you're in grad school you're kind of pushed along a research bent. And this was more outreach and community education, student education. So I had to do a quick brushing up on that.

And learn a little bit about what should go into an environmental center. Then we formed an advisory committee of citizenry, and uh they were a tremendous help in providing suggestions. There were some who had the outdoor and environmental bent. And others that had, like Jim Jennewein, Fred Wolf, and so on that were more business people that could help find out sources that we could get other kinds of assistance, like getting a well drilled out there and that kind of stuff.

So it was just a matter of piecing things together and working with people that had that interest. Ramming things through the college because this was a new adventure, you know, it's not always easy to get something going that's your—folks aren't used to so—

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<sup>5</sup>Roy “Robin” Lewis III is an environmental activist/researcher who earned his master's in zoology from USF in 1968. His research on mangrove and seagrass populations showed the connection between seagrass and mangrove habitat and fisheries management.

JG: And the students? How many students would go to—how did you—

FW: Eventually, and we took—we concentrated on our own community college students of course. Um but we also worked closely with the county school system and took students from the county school system. But we did not want to forget that there's an adult community out there, and at that time, there was an interest in education being lifelong. So once you got out of school, that didn't mean you stopped learning. And so we did adult educational programs as well. And fortunately at that time, the State of Florida had a pot of funding called community instructional services<sup>6</sup> funding.

And we were able to tap some of that funding. They had seven different areas of which they concentrated on and for programs directed toward the community, the adult community. And one of those categories was the environment. So we were able to draw upon some of those funds to help us with the development of programs and some of the facilities like boardwalks and things like that and donations for that type of thing.

JG: Now those programs still ongoing now?

FW: Let me put it this way. They did, they were, when I retired. Still ongoing but given the recession, given changes in what the mission or the potential mission was, as determined by the state, for instance, the community instructional services was defunded. It went from I think 8 million dollars one year to zero the next year. (JG exclaims) So priorities changed. And right now, as I understand it, a lot of the programs that were started up at that time are kind of being discontinued.

JG: Even now they're being dis—

FW: Yeah.

JG: Now it's still—the center still exists. They still are serving the publ—students.

FW: Uh. Somewhat yeah. To somewhat of a degree. It's focused more on getting students versus the general public. Unfortunately, funding is harder to come by, and most of the

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<sup>6</sup>The state provided support for noncredit community-oriented activities. This type of support ended in 1976. Funds are now awarded to colleges on a project basis.

concentration has gone into educational programs that are more job-skill related. So as I understand it, and I'm not there, I haven't been there for ten years. I've been retired. It's been reduced in its scope and function.

JG: Well uh, in your job, and you're obviously down there on the Bay, Cockroach Bay so you saw changes there and in Hillsborough County. Can you describe some of the changes to natural areas that you saw and experienced?

FW: Well, the big one, population. And with population, you have to accommodate them, so you have to put in more housing, more construction, so there's been a lot of pressure on natural areas of land, which is one reason ELAPP has been so terribly important. There have been some positive changes though.

When that new advanced wastewater treatment plant was put in in the later part of or the mid part of the '70s. That helped clean up the Bay quite a bit and there was a concentration on—for instance, we got the National Estuary Program<sup>7</sup>, the Agency on Bay Management<sup>8</sup> started in the early '80s, mid '80s. All of those have helped clean our gulf.

JG: And you were involved in all of those?

FW: Yeah. I was fortunate enough to be a member of the Agency on Bay Management. I served on one of the committees for the National Estuary Program for a number of years. So like I said, the environmental community was very positive, very strong, and very active.

JG: Yeah, well you were one of the ones in the forefront of that. The environmental community did have great success in cleaning up Tampa Bay or bringing attention to its problems. Not that everything was—but could you talk a little bit about your involvement in that and some of the other people you worked with on that.

FW: Yeah. Uh actually, one of our first people that we started working with at that time, the—I'm trying to think what the name was at that time, Hillsborough County Parks and Recreation Departments I think that's what it was called. They started building, I think it

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<sup>7</sup>Established by congress in 1987 to restore and protect estuaries of national significance. Florida has four National Estuary Programs.

<sup>8</sup>A natural resources committee of the Tampa Bay Regional Council. It focuses on protection and management of the Tampa Bay estuary.

was, seven regional parks around Hillsborough. And one of the ones that they were developing was the park at upper Tampa Bay. And we got approached by Joel Jackson<sup>9</sup> who worked for them at the time. And we started working together. He was asking for some assistance on how they ought to do things in facilities, and structures, and some of the programming that they might do at upper Tampa Bay park. And Joel was great to work with. We had a lot of fun doing this.

And so we struck an agreement with the county parks department that we would use our uh environmental center programming and adapt some of it for upper Tampa Bay park and do some of the programming up there. And uh, that was really nice because it was good comparison and contrast. Both were on Tampa Bay, but one was in South Tampa Bay and had a lot more in the way of larger mangroves. It didn't have much in the way of marsh grass communities. It did have great seagrass communities. And upper Tampa Bay park was sort of on the northern extreme, at least at that time, of the mangroves. There were mangroves out there, but you could see when we get cold fronts the mangroves would be cold damaged. And they had a lot more in the way of marsh grasses, so what might appear as subtle difference to the average citizen was a great teaching tool showing the effects of the environment on the biological communities and the effects of the biological communities on the environment. So everything along that line can be a lesson. And it shows.

And one of our themes at the time was "To Show." These are all systems, and all the systems not only are impacted by what's around them, but they also impact other areas and themselves. And they are intricate, and they are complex. And just because you might damage one portion of it, you don't—unless you study it and unless you know about it—you can't just willy-nilly go in and disrupt that system thinking it won't do any damage because they're very interconnected. And even a damage on one part of one system might damage something else down the road, you know.

For instance, if you're doing it upstream that might damage something downstream. So those two contrasts did very, very well. And while I was at the college, the HCC foundation worked with a gentleman called Mr. Levin who offered to donate some land out on the eastern portion of Hillsborough County at English Creek<sup>10</sup>. So we were fortunate enough to uh get that donation. He donated some land to the foundation, and the foundation had to buy, I think, ten extra acres that they had to purchase to complete that. And then the foundation of course signed that over to Hillsborough Community College. And that became our English Creek environmental center.

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<sup>9</sup>A Tampa city planner hired by Ed Radice to help with the development of the parks, recreation and athletic centers in Hillsborough County.

<sup>10</sup>The north prong of the Alafia River.

And fortunately, I wrote a grant that went to the Department of Education when they were interested in outreach activities like this and supplemental educational activities. And we were able to get a grant that allowed us to build the boardwalks, and building, and the facilities out there.

JG: But you established that environmental—you came up with the programming and the center out there as well as the one at Cockroach Bay.

FW: Cockroach Bay. And we did the programming for upper Tampa Bay park, yeah.

JG: All of which are still there. I mean—

FW: Yeah, they're uh—

JG: They're still—

FW: Upper—the programming has been reduced somewhat and some changes are going on at Cockroach Bay. I'm not sure what those are, but the college still is in possession of English Creek. And again, those three were great contrasts.

Again, a lot of people come to Florida and say Florida is just flat. It's not interesting. But the great thing about Florida is that you can go up six inches in elevation and that will create a whole different biological community. So we had the southern mangrove extremes. They are communities in the southern part of Tampa Bay. We had upper Tampa Bay that had more marsh grass communities, smaller mangroves. And now we have a freshwater riverine system out in the eastern part of the county that is completely different but somewhat associated because all that water flows into Tampa Bay. So great comparisons.

JG: So most days, at least part of the day, you were out in the wilds so to speak.

FW: In beginning.

JG: And then you took on more classroom time?

FW: Well no, not more classroom stuff. [I] became a dean, or director and then a dean. So we had—I had other programs for which I had responsibilities like, on our campus, computer programs. We had a great working arrangement with the United Association of Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters, local 123. And that was all apprenticeship training program. We had a horticulture program. We developed a veterinary technology program and other programs such as that. So those all fell under my responsibility.

JG: So you had the great privilege of working on protecting the environment and creating jobs.

FW: And creating jobs. And as we used to say with our environmental technology program, which was a two-year AS degree program that transfer over to USE, BAS—BSAS program, the environment is a great field in which to get a job because you can do well, that is you get paid nicely. And you can do good at the same time. (FW laughs)

JG: Well how did you get involved with ELAPP?

FW: Well actually ELAPP came about because of our relationship with the Hillsborough County Parks and Rec department and also, you know, Joel and I were working very closely. And of course, we knew other people like Robin and Sally Thompson<sup>11</sup> and other people that were really interested in getting something like this started. And I remember we used to meet and discuss what we might do. [We] became aware of other programs that have happened elsewhere around the country.

At that time, we were looking at one that Manatee County was developing. We talked to Ernie Estevez with Mote Marine<sup>12</sup> down there and he was somewhat familiar with it. And we came up with the idea of the land acquisition program or the land protection program, because it's not only purchasing the land but it was also—if you get by some other means, or if you could get it held—the owner could hold on to the property. You would just give them some kind of real estate category where they would agree not to disturb that, and then had an option at the end that they could go to the county. So there were multiple means that we used to protect, that we thought of that could be used to protect those lands.

And um, so the idea was well, okay now what. We have this wonderful idea. That's when we needed someone to help us champion it. And we approached the parks departments

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<sup>11</sup>An interview of Sally Thompson is available as part of the ELAPP Oral History Project collection.

<sup>12</sup>Mote Marine Laboratory is an independent, not-for-profit marine research organization.

since that seemed like a rational place to go and talked to Ed Radice<sup>13</sup>, who was director at the time. And he was willing, little bit reluctant because it was something new and that's always hard. But we needed a champion and that's when we found the person for whom the program is named now and that was Jan Platt<sup>14</sup>. And boy she was a champion. She went to work and she loved the idea. And that is the force that helped us get it accepted by the county.

And then we had to do certain things like figure out where the funding was coming from. So with Jan's help and some other help of staff and people like Jan then a referendum was sent out. We asked the citizens of Hillsborough County to vote to see if they would tax themselves. I think it was a quarter mil tax at the time. And the county population overwhelmingly approved it as they did about ten years later or so when it had to come up for renewal. It passed like 75 percent or something like that approval from citizens of the county, so obviously our citizens in Hillsborough County are very informed and educated and aware of the environment.

JG: Did that vote surprise you given that Hillsborough had been such a high development county and fairly pro-development and its—

FW: It did. It surprised me. I don't know about the rest of the team, but it did surprise me because the county was very pro-development. The real estate market was booming, and yet we did something wise like start the ELAPP program. So that was—it was a surprise and a very pleasant surprise too.

JG: What actually persuaded you to believe that we needed a program that buys the land rather than just, you know, regulation and preserve it, we need to buy the land. Was there any telling incident or anything that made you think, that—

FW: No, it's just that the college for several years ran a conference called the Annual Conference on Ecosystems Restoration and Creation. And that was all about either building new areas from scratch or going back and restoring areas that have been disturbed. And it—with the environmental area, the environmental site can only lose one time in court and then the bulldozers move in, and the houses go up and it's gone. So you can only lose once. The developer's side can lose multiple times because they can always appeal and the land was still as it was.

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<sup>13</sup>Ed Radice grew the number of parks in Hillsborough County from 75 to 205 during his 28-year stewardship.

<sup>14</sup>An interview of Jan Platt is available as part of the ELAPP Oral History Project collection.

So that convinced a number of us that you need something a little bit more permanent than just saying, okay we'll pass an ordinance or something that says this land can't be built on. But you know, that can always go back later and that ordinance can be changed. When it's an ownership, it just makes it a little bit more difficult. So it was our intent that these were to be purchased and maintained as long as possibly could be. And through the purchase of these lands, that would be the best way of doing it and would serve the county better. And I don't know if you read that recent report that came out from the Department of Land Management. If you haven't, I'm sure you could get one from Forrest. He could provide you with that.

But while I've been retired, I've done a little reading on the ecological economists, environmental economists and the idea of putting values on land. And I know a lot of the environmental community says you can't put a value on these areas. They do too many things. They're too valuable. You can't lose them. But we do live in a capitalist society and putting a dollar value on things is kind of how we operate. So I think as far as just being a tool, not a total determiner but at least a tool in considerations, that putting such a value on what these land areas do for us and what that value is worth is a good idea.

And the county has done a similar type of study, trying to evaluate not only the natural lands but specific—this was for the ELAPP plans. And they found, you know, there were hundreds of thousands of dollars per year of value that these lands were doing this. You know, such as flood attenuation, cleaning up pollution, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So again, by taking these lands and making sure that they're doing the job that they have been doing for thousands of years and doing these favors for us, free. You leave them alone, they do it free of charge.

JG: You're saving tax dollars.

FW: You're saving tax dollars, exactly. And that's something that people that perhaps are not as well informed on how environmental systems work. It's something that they can use to help them measure the value of those areas. Shouldn't be the only determiner. It should be part of that determination.

JG: Well you've been involved with ELAPP from the very start. You serve on the land selection committee.

FW: Well, I do now. Yeah, I started off and there was a general committee and then once we got how the system was supposed to work, the nomination process and different committees in evaluating what should go on and be classified as a level of purchase. One of the ones was called the site assessment committee, where you go out on the land and

evaluate what resources are there. Make up a report that can be used by the site selection committee and their determination of what rank it goes, should have. So I served on that site assessment team for, I don't know, a few years, couple three, four years.

And I found it would be better for me to transfer over to the site selection. I was asked to serve on the site selection committee because my duties at HCC grew such that I couldn't just run out and go out with the team to evaluate these lands. But my nights were somewhat freed up. (JG and FW laugh) Mostly we would meet in the late afternoon or in the evenings. We had to do public hearings to hear from the public. And if can say one thing, talking about the public and the process. That—it—to me was one of the really insightful things about ELAPP, that it has been, from the very beginning, a citizen-driven process.

The general committee is made up of citizenry. And really all you need to do is express an interest in attending the meetings and providing your input. There are citizens that serve in each one of the committees, site selection, assessment, and selection committees. It is the citizens, and there are representatives from the general community not just people who are environmentally related or legally related or whatever.

I mean, it has been a process that citizen input is taken. It is used in determining what lands should be selected and then that goes to the county commission, and the county commission uses that to make their determinations. So it really is a great example of a citizen-driven process or at least as much as we can in this government. And that to me [is] of immense value.

JG: So you've been pleased by how it's—ELAPP has performed through the years. Do you think it's done exactly what it was intended?

FW: Pretty much, yeah. I mean it's gotten lands. It's gotten important lands. One of the first things we considered when we started purchasing lands is a consideration in determining the status for purchase, is we have to consider mobile critters. You know, trees don't get up and move around but there are other critters up there that get up and move around. And you want to try and keep the genetic pools as viable as possible, which means you want to get more different groups and populations interacting.

So you keep a good, viable genetic pool, keep it healthy and that type of thing. So our idea was, let's purchase lands and place them at a higher value where we can use wildlife corridors<sup>15</sup>. Like the river systems or other natural areas of land that haven't been

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<sup>15</sup>A natural, continuous swath of lands or waters that allows wildlife to travel to different habitats needed

disturbed too much. So one of our priorities [is]—and I think we’ve done an excellent job on that and the county staff has done an excellent job on that—in getting these corridors developed so that there could be movement back and forth between various biological communities and similar biological communities. That’s a great value of keeping healthy populations, really great value.

JG: Um, do you think there’s anything the public doesn’t understand about ELAPP?

FW: Well, they can always know more. I think they, Florida until the recession, had—you know, University of Florida did uh evaluation of public concerns. In Florida, for several years running, the environment always ranked amongst, you know, like the top five or top three as a concern. It’s dropped somewhat now when the recession hit because people were worried about jobs and how they were going to pay for things. But I think there still is a pretty good understanding in general of the importance of the environment. However, priorities change, interests change, and we have a lot of influx of people from other places. And things in Florida don’t work exactly like they do in up-state New York, or Michigan, or California. They work a little bit differently, as biologically functioning and physically functioning. So citizens always need to be encouraged and informed as to the values of these areas, what these areas are doing and the fact that they can go to some of these areas and enjoy them.

And there are all kinds of values. I mean not just the physical ones like flood attenuation and that kind of thing. But, um, I know some people won’t go outside, but those that have gone outside realize that there is a qualitative factor that’s hard to measure that helps with certain things like stress and appreciation. And you know, if someone goes out and paints a picture of a shoreline or some landscape, we might pay, you know, a lot of money for a picture like that. But we need to be equally as encouraged to—or willing to encourage the protection of those areas of which artists are making pictures. There is an aesthetic value, there is a qualitative value, and there is a functional value. And all three need to be promoted.

JG: Do you have a favorite ELAPP site by chance?

FW: Well, do I have a favorite ELAPP site?

I like them all but I’m more familiar with Lettuce Lake Park, Cockroach Bay, upper Tampa Bay Park because [I] did a lot of work there. So familiarity would be I guess the factor that would place them up at the top. But I appreciate others. You know, like some

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during their lifecycle.

of the regional parks too, like Alderman's Ford and (inaudible). There all great and they're wonderful to get out in and not hear traffic, not hear crowds, not hear telephones. Can't hardly beat that. (FW laughs)

JG: Well is there anything that I should have asked you that I didn't about ELAPP or the environment that you like talk about?

FW: One thing that's very important. (FW coughs) excuse me. And it came up one time when I was chairing the committee. It's one thing to purchase the land, but the land has to be maintained. For instance, in certain types of biological communities like pine forests and so on, if you just let it go, then eventually through time, you'll notice that little trees start growing up, shrubs start growing up. And it will through time change from like a pine community to more of a woodland community or oak community or something like that. Naturally, every five to seven years, that kind of area would have experienced a fire because of lightning or some other natural cause. And that fire would rush through that area. The pine trees did great because they have that nice thick corky bark. That would protect them against the flames and the growing portion would be way up high.

The other shrubs, like the small shrubs and the small trees, would get burned off and that would maintain that particular community as that community, which is great because that's what happens. That is what has evolved over thousands of years, and that's what works in Florida. But if you have that land and fire isn't starting on regular five, to seven, to eight-year basis then you need to go in there and burn it. You need to put up fencing around those areas to keep trash dumpers and all that kind of stuff out. So that land has to be maintained. Staff have to be educated on how to do these prescribed burns in areas. They have to be told to how to work with neighbors around that land and with the public that's coming into the area. So it's very important that funding be provided so that you can do the maintenance and public relations for those natural areas. And that's one that kind of worries me. I worry a lot, but that's one of the ones that bubbles up and is important. It's important to get the land, but you have to maintain it; otherwise, it loses its value, and its worth to us.

JG: Well, very good Fred. Was there anything else that you think?

FW: Probably but I should be quiet. (FW and JG laugh)

JG: Well, no this is—if there's anything that we should be covering I don't want to leave anything out.

FW: No that's good.

***End of Interview***