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Environmental Lands Acquisition and Protection Program (ELAPP)
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Emily Holbrook (EH): So today is Monday, February 24th, 2020. It's about 10:30. We're here at the USF Tampa campus library. My name is Emily Holbrook, and I'm here with Sally Thompson for her second oral history interview with the library. Also in attendance are Jane Duncan and Matt Barganier. So first, welcome, Sally. Thank you so much for sitting down with me. If you could first just say and spell your name so that we have that correct.

Sally Thompson (ST): Sally—S-a-l-l-y—Thompson—T-h-o-m-p-s-o-n.

EH: Perfect. Thank you so much. So from your previous interview that we do have online, we know a little bit about some of your early life. And I don't want to get into—

ST: May I ask you a question? What is the previous interview? I'm not sure when it was.

EH: I'm not quite sure of the year, but we have a hosted interview with you—a previous oral history done with you posted online, that we have.¹

ST: Okay.

EH: Sort of a—yeah, it gets it a little bit into, already sort of like your early life and your background, like where you grew up and those sorts of things. So I don't want to be too repetitive with that. But if you—

ST: Well, you—I don't think you're being repetitive, because I'm not sure I remember the interview. Do you know who interviewed me?

EH: I don't know, but I could look it up for you.

ST: Yeah, because I don't know whether some of this was through my father's collection and being interviewed by Andy, or—

JD: It may have been.

¹ Sally Thompson's first oral history was conducted by Joe J. Guidry on March 1st, 2017, and is available online at <https://digital.lib.usf.edu/ohpi/?doi=E21-00004&packageid=SFS0063477&doi=E21-00004&packageid=SFS0063477>.

EH: It may have been done with Andy, but the interview—they did talk about some of your work with Save Our Bay and those sorts of things, too. So that stuff is in there.

ST: Okay.

EH: Yeah. So I guess if you could tell us a little bit about yourself, your early life, sort of.

ST: Well, I moved to Tampa when I was 11, and I lived—we always lived about a block and a half away from Hillsborough Bay, so I was aware of water and bay and at that time, bay smell. Because Tampa Bay was very—it was somewhat polluted, but it also—I believe that storm—it had a stormwater issue because there was—in fact, I moved here at 11, and I went to St. John's School, which was a block off the Bayshore [Boulevard], and then I went to high school at the Academy of the Holy Names, which was on the Bayshore.

And when we would drive to school at Bay to Bay [Boulevard] and Bayshore, there would be this inversion and it would be really stinky. And this is pre-air conditioning throughout the school, so you could smell the stench, if you want to call it. It wasn't that strong three blocks away, but it still—Tampa Bay had some serious issues. And then I finished high school here, and I went away to college in Virginia, to Hollins University in Roanoke, Virginia, and spent four years there, and then moved up to New York City to find fame and fortune and the kinds of things that young people do.

EH: Okay, great. So you said you moved to Tampa when you were 11?

ST: Yes.

EH: Can you sort of describe what it was like to watch Tampa change over the years, like while you were going through middle school and high school?

ST: I'm not so sure I was paying that much attention. I was really more interested in going—there used to be a drive-in near Academy of the Holy Names called the Colonnade. I think I was more interested in going to the Colonnade than I was in seeing changes in Tampa. I don't know how much I—I was involved in school, in high school. I was in National Honor Society, but I wasn't—and I was a Girl Scout—but I wasn't really that engaged. I will say the first environmental thing that I can think of that I—there used to be a “I Am Not A Litterbug” campaign.² And I remember having an “I Am Not a Litterbug” sign. And, you know, thinking about those kinds of things, but not really being engaged in a way that would be activist.

EH: Okay. And you said you went to Rollins College?

ST: Hollins.

EH: Hollins College. Sorry about that. Hollins College. What did you study?

ST: I was an English major. My father was an English professor, and I think it was sort of a path of least resistance. I was pretty—I skipped a grade—I was pretty immature, and I really didn't do very much in college.

EH: Well, then how—

ST: Except pass.

² Throughout the '50s, '60s, and '70s, Girl Scouts helped conservation efforts by supporting anti-littering campaigns and handing out promotional leaflets, buttons, and garbage bags.

EH: There you go, that's important.

ST: But it was a beautiful location in the Blue Ridge Mountains, Roanoke Valley, so I would have an appreciation of the outdoors. We had a beach house in North Carolina, and then my grandfather had a beach house at Indian Rocks Beach, and so I learned to swim when I was very young. And I may have taken a lot of this for granted. I rode my bike in the neighborhood. But as far as any kind of organized anything, no.

EH: Okay. So then what got you interested in environmental efforts?

ST: In 1970, the first Earth Day, my—a friend of mine and I went and marched in Earth Day, except we were really more interested in boys than—or young men. But I—in fact, in New York, I both went to the first Earth Day, and then I went to the Women's March for Equal Rights Amendment in 1971.³ And that's an interesting situation, because a photograph was taken and it reappeared 35 years later—

EH: Wow.

ST: —in the *New York Times*, in the—was it 35 years later? Yeah, well, in the *New Yorker* magazine, in—and now if you Google it, you can find it online. And, in fact, there was a history of the '60s, and I don't remember what it was called, but it was at the Tampa Theater. And about three quarters through, there was my picture. I almost screamed because I was—

EH: Wow.

ST: And then there was a special on PBS, and a friend of mine texted me and said, “You're on TV.” So things have a way of appearing. But as far as environment, I didn't—I was really more interested in social issues at that point. I was—I worked—my first job was in advertising, and then I ended up working with drug addicts. And I worked with—for a drug—large drug rehab program for three and a half years. I thought about doing something like going to the Peace Corps, and I really didn't want to leave the country or didn't think I could, or whatever. And so I worked—it was a place called Phoenix House—I worked there for three and a half years. And then I kind of—I thought I was getting old and I was kind of getting fed up, and some of the things that they were doing, I didn't think were particularly ethical, so I decided to come back to Tampa. And that was 1974.

EH: Okay, 1974.

ST: I was pushing 30. I was—thought I was getting really old, you know.

EH: You don't mind if we circle back just real quick?

ST: Sure.

EH: You said you went to the very first Earth Day march in 1970?

ST: Yes.

EH: Could you describe that?

³ The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) is a proposed amendment that is designed to guarantee equal legal rights to all American citizens regardless of sex. In 1971, the ERA gained support and was approved by the House of Representatives in October of that year, and then in 1972 submitted to the Senate.

ST: It was, you know—it was a lot of people marching with signs and—April 22, 1970. In fact, when I finally finished my master's, and I ended up teaching, I ended up teaching environmental resource management. I had—we were doing some—I did some questions, and to see if the students knew when the first Earth Day was. A lot of them didn't.

EH: What were, if you recall, like, the environmental issues they were really pushing then?

ST: Well, water. I mean, this was a kind of a nascent movement at that point. I was—I mean, there had been things going on through the years, but that was the beginning of EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] and all of this national policy, and it was a kind of a convergence of people getting active, including marching.

EH: Great. So then you said you moved back to Tampa in 1974?

ST: Yes.

EH: Okay. What were you doing then, once you got back into Tampa?

ST: Well, when I got back to Tampa, one of the things I wanted to do was I wanted to buy a house. And I was single, and I thought, I can do it, because a couple of my girlfriends had done it. I also felt that New York was such a big city, it was really hard to—I mean, you're a little fish in a huge pool, and it's very difficult to do anything, or at least I felt that way. And I was very discouraged about the drug program I was working for.

And so when I came back, I remember, I called up—it was—first of all, it was a culture shock, because it's a lot more conservative here than it was in New York City. And I always considered myself a moderate, but somehow coming down here, you're almost a left-wing radical back then. And so NOW [National Organization for Women] was considered a—just very, very left-leaning organization. So I contacted the League of Women Voters, which was considered more mainstream, and I got in touch with the group and found out when they met. And I went to a meeting, and I had decided that I was interested in looking at the environment. I'd come back to Tampa, and Tampa was going through a lot of growth, and I was interested in the Equal Rights Amendment and women's issues.

So when I went to the League of Women Voters, I ended up getting on the committee that was working on the ERA. But I also—and I ended up getting on the board somehow. I didn't know how to say no back then, I guess. And then I met somebody there who was the president of Save Our Bay, and she said, "Come to our meeting." Because I told her I was interested in the bay, interested in those kinds of issues. And the next thing I knew, I was on the board, and I had no idea what I was doing. It was one of those things that sometimes you have to be real careful when you get involved. People will sort of pull you in. So anyway, I'm not—did I finish the answer to that?

EH: No, you're fine. Absolutely.

ST: Okay.

EH: So, what were really the key efforts of Save Our Bay?

ST: Well, Save Our Bay was looking at—was obviously looking at the bay, and it had started a few years before—more looking towards northwest, upper Tampa Bay, and the Bower tract and some development there. But when I got involved, it was looking at more Tampa Bay itself than sewage

going into the bay. And we got into harbor-deepening project and those kinds of things that I could get interested in and learn about. So it—for me, it was a lot of learning.

It turned out the organization was about to fall apart at that point. And it was—as a lot of local organizations do—if you're connected with a national organization like Sierra Club or Audubon, you can have lean years, and the national organization still exists. If you're a local organization, it's a little harder. And so we started looking at what could we do to expand or make our organization more relevant. The other problem, too, with a local organization, unless there's something that everybody wants to sue over or get involved in, it's just boring. People don't—quite often aren't real interested in just day-to-day things.

So we did some research and found out that there had been a Hillsborough County Environmental Coalition that had—I'm not sure if it had ever met, but it was in the books, and it had a bank account of something like \$27 in it, and it hadn't met in three or four years. And we thought, Hillsborough County Environmental Coalition, that makes sense because maybe we could get the different groups together and we can talk about more than just Tampa Bay. There were phosphate issues. There were air quality issues. There were land issues.

And so we—I got in touch with, I guess, the bank and got the—got them to reactivate the bank account, which they immediately sent to the Environmental Protection Commission, which we realized then that if we called it “Hillsborough County Environmental Coalition,” people might think it was government. So, we took the “county” out and made it Hillsborough Environmental Coalition and changed the name. And then we started meeting in our—we were working with—there was the harbor-deepening project that was being considered at that point. And the—I don't know how familiar you are with Tampa Bay, but there are some huge spoil islands, and those were being created to put the dredge material. So we were working on that. We also were—one of the problem or one of the challenges was the Port Authority in Tampa only deals with Hillsborough County, and Tampa Bay includes Pinellas and also includes Manatee [counties].

And the Port Authority environmental person didn't want us to look at the fact that—I'm a more holistic person, I look at a big picture, and you can't look at Tampa Bay without looking at the cities and counties that are surrounding Tampa Bay. So we started making an impact there. There was the challenge with phosphate mining, and what—Davis Island, and the concrete plant there was and the pollution from that. And then the pollution from the stacks of Tampa Electric.

Eventually, we were looking at land and land acquisition. And at that point, the state—this is about 19—I guess late '70s—the state had some programs, but—and local government. It was very political, and local government had to make contributions in order to get things ranked. And our first—there was a project that we were looking at, which was the Bower tract, which is—if you're familiar with Tampa, it's almost in Pinellas. We looked—we were looking at that. We were looking at something that's right near—well, it's where the Hyatt is now, near the airport. And also there was another parcel down where Tampa Electric owned property. And what we found was that unless we had contributions from our county commission, that we would never rank high enough to be able to purchase it.

So the first movement, I guess you'd call it, was that Hillsborough County decided to contribute to help purchase the Bower tract, which is upper Tampa Bay. And what I learned there was how political the situation would be with respect to ranking of—it was almost like a baptism by fire because I ended up speaking at a conference that was on Tampa Bay. And the head—the DEP, the Department of Environmental Protection, included Department of Natural Resources and Department of Environmental Regulation. They merged later on.

But the head of DNR, I met him at this event, and he—I couldn't figure out why our Bower tract parcel had gone from ranking at about 13 or 14 or 12 to 8, or whatever, to something like 28. And he said to me that the person at the other agency had voted against his project, so he voted against this guy's project. These are two state department heads, and I thought, Oh, my goodness. So I did a little research and found out that that had actually happened. And I realized that as citizen activists, sometimes we need to find out what's really going on to try to figure out why things are not being accomplished that we worked hard to try to accomplish.

A few years later, or around that time, Tampa Electric wanted to build a power plant down in south county, which is where Cockroach Bay is, or near Cockroach Bay. And they were trying to say that they wanted to build a—it's called combined-cycle plant, which isn't baseload, which would be probably okay, but they got the county to change the land-use category. And by changing the land-use category, they would be able to build this big power plant. But they weren't telling anybody that.

So I will never forget—there was a public meeting, and I asked the guy from TECO [Tampa Electric], I said, “Well, does that mean you can build a bladdy-blah power plant?” And he said, “Yes.” But then later on, I ended up getting appointed to—or asked to serve on the power plant siting committee for TECO, and we ended up recommending a parcel in Polk County, which is the Polk Power Station. And the parcel where they had wanted to build a plant is now a restoration site, 30 years later. And that's where you get into what can you accomplish eventually. And lots of times it takes many years, but it happens. And I've digressed, so I don't know whether I'm back on track—

EH: No, no, you're fine. So it's clear that you, as well as, like, Save Our Bay and the—

ST: Hillsborough Environmental.

EH: —and the Hillsborough Environmental Coalition have their hand—had their hands in a lot of different things. But as a board member, what was your specific role?

ST: Well, I became chair.

EH: Okay.

ST: And I will never—another thing I will never forget is I was at a meeting when we were working on developing ELAPP [Environment Lands Acquisition and Protection Program]. Because what we realized after we bought the Bower tract, and Jan Platt was instrumental in this, is that we needed our own land program in Hillsborough County, which is now ELAPP.⁴ And so three of us went over to—it was at Rollins [College]—to a workshop. And the first—the other thing that I learned, because I was working—or realized—I was working in personnel and HR [human resources] and—doing hiring and whatever—and relationships are really, really important. What's very important, if you're interviewing, is if you can show somebody—and things are probably a lot different now because everything seems to be done electronically, but if you can say something about yourself that somebody will remember, you have a better likelihood of being called back rather than—and so I went with these two people to this workshop. And it was in—Governor Graham—and Governor Graham was speaking.⁵

And he was talking about bicycling in Florida, and I ended up—I was sitting next to Marjorie Carr, who's the—founded Florida Defenders of the Environment, and another person. And after the—after his presentation, he walked out. And Bob Graham always used to have this little notebook that

⁴ Jan Platt ***

⁵ Bob Graham served as the 38th governor of Florida from 1979 to 1987.

he'd write around. You probably remember seeing it. But anyway. And the next thing I—oh, Marjorie introduces me to him, and I just told him, I said, "My parents came to Florida in 1941, and rode their bicycles around Florida." Here's something to get somebody to remember you about. Next thing I know, his—Ken Woodburn, who was his chief of staff or his chief environmental person, is doing like this [gestures]. And I walked over, and he said, "You've been invited to the Environmental Leader's Conference in Tallahassee next week, haven't you?"

No. But—so I went back to our Hillsborough Environmental Coalition board, and they paid for me to go. We talked about whether it—and it seemed like it made a whole lot of sense. And the—what I was going to get to is they—there were about 25 of us sitting around a table, and we were supposed to talk—each of us was supposed to speak for a couple of minutes about what we were doing, and I was scared to death. Fortunately, my last name is Thompson, so I was one of the last speakers.

But what I had done ahead of time was I tried to look at how the Hillsborough Environmental Coalition was relevant to the rest of the state and related to the rest of the state, and what I was able to say is we were sort of a mini-microcosm, or a microcosm of the rest of the state, because we had bay, we had phosphate, we had land, we had air, we had all the kinds of things that—issues that the rest of the state had, but we had them all in the Hillsborough County area. So I was—I don't know if I was brilliant or not, but I was—I, you know, thought I made sense. So anyway, that's really sort of what got me on a state—to a state level.

But with the Hillsborough Environmental Coalition, we were focusing very much on the land and on the starting of ELAPP, and developing the criteria and all the things that—and the referendum—the first referendum. And then we were involved in—there were some issues with phosphate and phosphate—prilled sulfur versus liquid sulfur, and bringing stuff into Tampa Bay and what kind of effect that was going to have.

One of the things that we talked as a board about, what, was do we work with these people, or do we just protest? And my feeling has always been if you don't work with people, if you don't go and see their facilities—and then there was a debate about whether, well, if you go to their facility and they pay for you to go, are you compromised? And I think what our conclusion was [was], well, you don't just go to one, you go to all of them. And so one of the trips we went to was Vancouver to see prilled sulfur. That was interesting.

EH: Yeah, that sounds really interesting.

ST: And another one of our members went to California—went to Long Beach, California. And, you know, so we were trying to make an intelligent decision. One of the challenges with the Hillsborough Environmental Coalition then was the Sierra Club, which is a lot more strident, thought we were compromising, you know. So we ended up—the environmental groups end up fighting with each other, which is very discouraging, because it doesn't ultimately, in my opinion, accomplish what we're trying to do. But I'm more moderate, so I may be considered—I don't like to use the word "sellout," but I, you know—

EH: No, you're willing to work with the other groups in order to see your efforts come to fruition.

ST: And I think that's part of the reason I was appointed to the water-management district board, because I was considered a reasonable environmentalist, whatever that means.

EH: So what was it—like, clearly, the Hillsborough Environmental Coalition and Save Our Bay were successful in cleaning up the area and doing stuff with the land. What was it like seeing those efforts?

ST: Well, I think what I should indicate, though, is that at a certain point, we were trying to figure out what can we do to protect the bay? And we were—we went to the Regional Planning Council—the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council, and we were involved in a document that was put together, 40 issues, *The Future of Tampa Bay*. And it was—because when we did some research—and I did some research—it turned out that, well, what we're looking at, was there ever an organization that was trying to coordinate bay efforts? Because a group like Hillsborough Environmental Coalition can't do it on its own. It's got to have—and we found out that the legislature had actually established a Tampa Bay study—some kind of group in the '50s, and it never met.

And so, this is—some of this was research that we did when we—that the Regional Planning Council determined that we would have a committee that would study Tampa Bay. And we were—we met, and then we were legislatively approved that year to come up with a report. And the 40 issues—I will never forget, Rich Paul, who was that manager of Audubon sanctuaries then, said, "Economics is the most important thing." And the rest of us, environmentalists, are like, What are you talking about? And then we realized that economics was the thing that would pull all the different disparate groups together. And, really, you want a healthy bay for a healthy economy. And I think what I discovered—that environmental organizations at times in the past have not wanted to deal with the money stuff because—or the—because it's—we want to talk about the flora and the fauna. But it's not going to work if you can't get people engaged.

So we met, we came up with this report, and we had three recommendations, or three options: Do nothing; set up an authority; or set up an agency on bay management through the regional planning council, which was comparable to, or similar to, the area agency on aging. So it was a voluntary group, and we had members appointed from around the bay, and it was chaired by one of the appointees of—on the Regional Planning Council, which is through Tallahassee, gubernatorial appointment. And we met, and we've been meeting ever since.

And one of the—I would say one of the first big successes—and we had interesting debates about what to do, because we had come so far with Tampa Bay, but one of our first successes was Tampa as a SWIM [Surface Water Improvement Management] priority water body. When the legislature came up with the SWIM Act, we were right there saying, Here we are, Tampa Bay.⁶ And we are one of the most successful—if you look at some of the restoration—over 100 around. I don't know if you've come across or met Brandt Henningsen, but he was—

EH: Yeah.

ST: He and I worked a lot together when I was on the board. So when the Rock Ponds down at the—almost near county line, which is where TECO was going to build a plant, when they were dedicated about three years ago, Brandt and I are looking at each other and like, Look what's happened. Because who would have known that—and what Brandt was saying was, "I think there are 100—close to 100 sites." We're about one of the biggest successes in the country. And I feel real good because I was able to be involved in it.

EH: Yeah, that's incredible.

⁶ The SWIM (Surface Water Improvement and Management) Act of 1987 directed the state's water management districts to design and implement plans for the improvement and management of surface water.

ST: So anyway, and then in the late '80s, we were working on [the] National Estuary Program, and we had some really interesting debates, because I remember Robin Lewis, saying, "We don't need that. We don't need the feds." And I'm going, "Well, hey, guess what? They got money. Maybe we can do something with that to leverage what we have locally and everything." So we got designated—National Estuary Program—and somebody from—I think it was the EPA—came down to do the notice or the announcement at Earth Day in 1990, at Lowry Park, which I co-chaired. So we were able to—in fact, I co-chaired Earth Day in 1985, and then 1990, and then we did it again in 1995. It wasn't all that successful. And now it's being done some, but I'm not involved.

But—so—and part of the thing with the—in 1990—was some people were sort of cynical because they were thinking, Oh, well they're doing it so Bob Martinez can get reelected, or whatever.⁷ But the fact of the matter is we've had a couple of Republican governors, Bob Martinez and Jeb Bush, that the land programs were started under, and SWIM was Bob Martinez.⁸

EH: So you recall, like at the very beginning of your interview, when you were, like, 11, really noticing that smell off the bay, even from three blocks away and even, like—we've had other people describe being able to actually see sort of the pollution in the bay. Do you remember the first time you didn't smell the bay?

ST: I—well, I—sometimes you still smell it.

EH: Yeah.

ST: It's just not like it was. But I—but that triggered something. When I was working with the sulfur issue, the company that wanted to bring in the dry sulfur, hired a consultant to say that there never had been a haze on the horizon. And there was—I remember as a child, in Davis Island, there was from the port. And so that was an interesting thing to think, because I'm going, Wait a minute. And that—but it made me realize that consultants can prove anything or say anything, and when you have a community where you haven't had people living there for so long, or there's a lot of change, they get away with saying—and they prove it scientifically, supposedly, but I remember that haze on the horizon—that yellow haze on the horizon. So that's not there anymore. Air quality has been really bad in this community. When do I remember Tampa Bay getting better? It's hard to say because it's been a sort of gradual improvement over the years.

EH: Do you ever—do you recall like a moment where you're just like, Wow, this is nothing like when I was a kid.

ST: Well, I had that—my wow moment was more like at Rock Pond, saying, "Wow, look what I've been able to be involved with." My wow moment has been when I got appointed—I got appointed to the water-management district board for, sort of—I didn't go after it. I didn't—I just got a phone call from Tallahassee, from Charles Lee, who was vice president of Florida Audubon, saying, "Would you do us a favor?" And I said, "Sure." And thinking it was—because we were working on Cockroach Bay—he said, "Would you accept an appointment to the Southwest Florida Water-Management District board?"

And I said, "I'm a Democrat, and I have no intention of switching parties." And he said, "Doesn't matter." Back then it didn't matter, I guess, in 1990. And I said, "I'll think about it." And I thought about it, prayed about it, decided I really wasn't interested in getting into something political like that. So the next day, I said, "Thanks, but no thanks." And then I get this, "Well, the governor really

⁷ Bob Martinez served as Florida's governor from 1987 to 1991.

⁸ John Ellis "Jeb" Bush served as Florida's governor from 1999 to 2007.

wants you.” Bob Martinez was governor then, and he—I worked for the City of Tampa, so I’d known him through—when he was mayor of the City of Tampa—and he knew that I was a reasonable environmentalist.

And so, in fact, another digression is when we were talking about Tampa Bay to him a few years earlier—Robin Lewis and I talked to Bob Martinez about Tampa Bay and what we were interested in. And Robin was talking about the flora and the fauna, and the mangroves and the this, and the mayor was kind of doing like that [makes tapping sound] because what they want as politicians, quite often, is to cut to the chase and talk about—not that he wasn’t concerned about the environment, but they want to know what they can do. And that’s where I felt that I could offer something, because I have that perspective as well. But getting back to—see, I keep digressing here.

EH: You’re okay.

ST: I got the call from Tallahassee. I said, “No,” and then I get this, “Well, the governor would really like you to be”—and I’m thinking, No, I don’t think so. And I was asked, I said, “Well, if Pete Hubbell, who is the executive director from ‘Swiftmud,’ gave you a call, would you talk to him?”⁹ Three minutes later, Pete Hubbell calls me, and I said, “Okay.” And it was so weird, because I was serving on this powerplant siting committee at that point, we’d just done Earth Day, and it was like—oh, and then I said, “Well, I’m not sure I can. I work for the City of Tampa. And so,” I said, “there may be a conflict of interest.” So Sandy Freedman, who was mayor then, was contacted, and she was all for me being on it.¹⁰ So, you know, and then, how was I going to take off, and, you know, whatever. So anyway, I went on the board, and Bob Martinez was not reelected. At that point, you have to be confirmed by the legislature in order to serve on this board, because it’s a gubernatorial appointment. So six months later, all of us got our pink slips.

EH: Wow.

ST: So—well, we hadn’t, you know—so then I—we had to either—we had to reapply, and I will never forget, one Saturday morning I pick up the Tampa paper and Joe Guidry—whom you’ve also interviewed—did environmental editorials, and said, “Sally Thompson should be reappointed.”

EH: Wow.

ST: I mean, that was really special, so—and I got all kinds of letters. People—I mean, people—from Republicans. I mean, it was really, really quite overwhelming. And I got reappointed. And what was really funny was—because I was the only one—the chair, the vice chair and I were the only ones who got reappointed. And one of the guys, who’s a real cynical newspaper guy, was absolutely convinced that I was some kind of political hack. But I had not worked on Chiles’ campaign.¹¹ One of the things that I felt was inappropriate to do was to work on a political campaign, and I didn’t. I stayed clear. So, I didn’t have—there wasn’t a track record of me doing, you know, working on Martinez or working on Chiles, or whatever.

So then I served for 11 and a half—for 11 years, almost. So I was reappointed twice. And the first thing I did was I went, Hmm, I want to serve on the land committee, because I wasn’t really sure what all the district did, but we had one of the biggest land-acquisition programs in the state. And so what I was able to figure out was how we could leverage—because we’d passed ELAPP—and how we could partner. And when we first passed ELAPP, the idea was kind of let’s buy land, and we’ll worry about how to take care of it afterwards. Well, that happens pretty quickly when you need to

⁹ “Swiftmud” is the nickname for the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD).

¹⁰ Sandra Warshaw Freedman was the first woman to serve as mayor of Tampa, from 1986 to 1995.

¹¹ Lawton Major Chiles Jr. served as the 41st governor of Florida from 1991 until his death in 1998.

manage the land. A lot of people don't understand that when you buy land, you have to manage it. We also looked at less-than-fee, which we were not able to do for a long time because Jan Platt was opposed to doing that. But there had been—one of the staff people had put together report on less-than-fee, which was kind of interesting, but, you know, whatever.

So anyway, I ended up serving on the land committee, and I also ended up chairing the Alafia River—at that point, we had basin boards in—the different board members were assigned to different basin boards. And I felt pretty strongly that the Hillsborough River Basin Board would appear to be a conflict because of working for the city, because of water issues and Hillsborough river issues and everything. So I ended up serving on the Alafia River Basin Board, which nobody else wanted to serve on at that point because it was a very low-take tax base.

It's been expanded now into Polk County, so there's more—but, at that point, it ended up in Hillsborough County. So in looking at the map, what does it include? It includes Tampa Bay. It includes the Alafia River. It includes the Little Manatee River, and it includes Egmont Key. So we could fund a SWIM project at Egmont Key through the basin board. So I've just always really seen—like leveraging things.

EH: Yeah, making all those connections.

ST: Yes.

EH: Yeah, absolutely. So you said a term that I'm not familiar with, and I just wanted to clarify. What's a less-than-fee?

ST: That's conservation easement.

EH: Okay, a conservation easement. Okay. I just wanted to clear that up because I wasn't sure what that was.

ST: When you don't pay the—you don't the full fee. And in fact, what happened—we worked on this at the water-management district. There were some legislators in Polk County that really wanted to do this. But unless you really know how to do it, it can be a real boondoggle. So the district—this was probably mid '90s—put together alternatives to land acquisition, and so we were able to use that when the legislature met to say, This is what you can do.

EH: Okay, great. Thank you. Just making we know what that was. So are you currently sitting on any boards or anything like that?

ST: Well, in the—I guess the other thing that happened when I was on the water-management district board was I—I guess it was two years in. We were working on greenways and got—1,000 Friends of Florida had gotten—hired somebody to do greenways for the state. And I remember, we—I met in my house with three people, and we started talking about the—this was a private thing at that point, and we were—I was involved in what they were developing, a greenways plan. And the Hillsborough River Greenways Task Force came out of that.

And so, I guess—and I guess what—I don't remember. It was maybe '93, '94, something. I get a phone call from Buddy Mackay, who's the lieutenant governor, appointing me to the Florida Greenways Commission. So I have served on the Florida Greenways Commission, then I was on the Florida Greenways Coordinating Council, representing local government. We did a report, then that came out, and then we ended up with Florida Greenways and Trails—Office of Greenways and Trails in Tallahassee, which was what ultimately—and one of the things that I had recommended

when we started meeting—and I ended up with a one-year term because I was representing the water-management districts. Because by that time, we'd become a lot more partisan, and I knew I would not be appointed to—but I was the water management—the five water-management districts had representatives, so I was for the first year, and I chaired the Florida Greenways Coordinating Council.

And I recommended that—because at that point I was doing grants with the city, and I saw where you need to have a “friends of,” or foundations or whatever, to be able to work with the public sector, because there were lots of things you can't do. And so I ended up being involved in starting the Florida Greenways—the Florida Greenways Foundation—_____ (??) Greenways and Trails Foundation. And I was on that board for a number of years. In fact, I still manage the Facebook page.

EH: Oh, okay.

ST: But in the meantime, in the mid '90s, when Ed Turanchik was in—was county commissioner, Hillsborough County looked at Hillsborough County having a greenways committee and a greenways report. And there were some—there was funds and support through the National Park Service to do—to develop plans. And so, the Hillsborough County Greenways plan was developed with assistance from the National Parks' Rivers, Trails, [and] Conservation Assistance Program. And so I suggested—because at that point, I was doing grants with the City of Tampa—and I said, “You know, we need to do the same thing.” So we applied, and we got a city—because the city was sort of the doughnut hole. A lot of people don't realize that some of the government activities that go on—I would see this when I was on the water-management district, seeing reports or whatever. You see Hillsborough County, and then Tampa's just gray because it's not part of the same government.

So anyway, we developed a greenways plan, and I ended up chairing—eventually chairing the city greenways committee until about three years ago, when we sort of disbanded, because one of the problems was having a city and a county committee. We were very active at first, and then, again, after a while it becomes—we started meeting together because a lot of the same people were involved. And then we deactivated the city committee. I was still on the county committee, and I'm now on the Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee, which is more dealing with some of the stuff that we were doing in the city with the greenways committee. And I'm also on the Hillsborough Greenways Committee, which got—which also lost staff and got new staff about a year ago. And the person who was chairing it was insisting that he was going to go off the board, and I got elected chair a couple of months ago. So I chaired the county greenways committee.

EH: Wow.

ST: And we've got a—another thing that we were working on in the '90s was—some people—with ELAPP, some people are not interested in working with government. And groups like the Nature Conservancy are interested in big swaths of land, not little bits of land. So we started the Tampa Bay Conservancy. We started meeting in the early '90s. I think we incorporated in the—around the turn of the century. And I'm on the board of that.

EH: Okay. Currently you're still on the board of that?

ST: Yeah.

EH: Okay. And then what do you do as, like, a board member for those different things now? Do you have a specific responsibility, like community outreach, or is it something—

ST: That's hard—that's sort of hard to say.

EH: Okay.

ST: Because as chair, you kind of—I mean, right now what we're going through is organizing the committee and getting—like the last meeting was my first meeting as a chair, which went on too long, unfortunately. But part of the situation was to educate the committee, and this, I think, is partly why I was elected, because I am familiar with all these different greenways efforts. And we have people getting up and saying, Why aren't you doing this? Or, Why aren't you doing that? We had somebody come—the meeting before—telling us what the Hillsborough Greenways Committee was supposed to be doing, and had read the report from 1995, saying, Well, you're not doing this. You're not doing that.

And I was getting kind of annoyed, but you know—because I went back and looked at it, and I'm on—I was on the committee. But so I called the county—the person at the county, and I said, “You know, the first meeting we need to have is we need to educate: What does the county do?” Because county parks and county—county parks and parks and recreation—they're two separate things, but recreation manages a bunch of parks as well. So you have that, and then we got the person from Office of Greenways and Trails to show what the state does. And just so that would give these people an education. And then we had several people in the audience that were interested in serving on the committees, so we're about ready to get that fully staffed because we were having trouble having a quorum. We were having trouble having—so my—I'm, at this point—with chairing that committee, I'm more interested in getting us active again.

EH: Okay. So—

ST: As far as the conservancy, it really depends. I'm on the land committee, but we have to have land proposed and I—turns out I ran into somebody recently who was interested in something, and he just sent a nice—I talked him to him, and he sent me a description, so I emailed the board, just putting it on the agenda for next week—so our next meeting.

EH: Okay, great. So throughout this, you've called yourself a “citizen activist.” What does that mean to you?

ST: Well, it's not what I do for a living, although I've been able to incorporate it into what I do or did for a living. It's not what I do for education, which is sort of—because I never really—I never—it took me 20 years to get my master's, because I was working in this and that. But—and when I was working on my master's, trying to do some—take environmental—in fact, the worst grade I got was on an environmental course. I couldn't believe it. But it was more statistics and I—that was not my strength. But, you know, like I said, I did League of Conservation Voters as a report. But as a result of finally finishing my master's, I was asked to teach out here—environmental resource management, which I did as an adjunct for seven years. So I say “citizen activist” because I don't really know what else to call myself, because I don't do it for a living. I guess it's my passion.

EH: Yeah.

ST: Does that answer?

EH: Yeah. No, I was just—you're the first person who we've—at least that I've interviewed, with any of this environmental stuff, that's called themselves a “citizen activist,” specifically.

ST: Because they were—but I'm not—but I'm more than a citizen activist, because it's—I'm not just doing—I guess I say citizen rather than environmental activist, because I—because I'm doing something through my work and through my teaching.

EH: Yeah. Okay. And I sort of—

ST: If you can think of another name—

EH: No, it was great. It was great. So that sort of gets me into my next question. You work, obviously, as a citizen—you are a citizen on these boards, and that's sort of who you are, but you also worked for the Tampa Bay, or the Tampa city government—

ST: Yes.

EH: —for a long time, while you were doing all this work. So, what was it like being on both sides of the table?

ST: Well, that was—it was—I mean, it was really interesting when I got on the “Swiftmud” board. But one of the things—early on, I was—when I was working in HR, we did—we were setting up a classification pay plan for the city, so we had to go out and interview—jobs, people. And I said, “I want to be assigned to sewer, water.” I got myself assigned to the departments that were environmental—I don't know if “environmental” is the right word, but that would be interacting with the environment. And that was an easy assignment, because most of the professionals wanted to be in planning or budget or not, you know—but I got to see—I got to go out to the sewage treatment plant, Hookers Point, the advanced wastewater treatment plant and see it being built from the beginning. I got to go out to what was then the incinerator and hear the superintendent talk about these crazy environmentalists.

So I was able to—I guess you could say, I was able to see what—a lot of things that a lot of other people don't see, and a lot of it was my interest. And I don't think it was—it wasn't conflict, because I was truly interested in what the people were doing. I mean, I remember me going out to Hookers Point when they were interviewing the laborer who worked in the grit building, and he's—I remember one guy filling out a questionnaire saying what he did: “Jack of all trades, master of none.” You never _____(??).

But I didn't—I keep the two things separate. I certainly kept the two—until—and that's why I needed the ruling when I went to be on the board of the water-management district. That was interesting. And I—it really—I didn't ever have a situation where I had to recuse myself, which is interesting, because there were some city issues. I did get razzed by one of the board members at one point because I'd served on the power plant siting committee, and he thought I had a conflict of interest, serving on the power plant siting committee, to vote on the permit that was coming in front of the district. It helped. It—I wasn't in—I really wasn't, like, I really was not in a conflict kind of thing, although it was challenging at times. If that—I mean, that's not really answering very well.

EH: Well—no, I think you answered. I mean, you said, like, it sort of gave you a different perspective than I think a lot of people approaching the issues. You saw it from this sort of activist side, but then you also knew what it was, being an employee, working for the city government. That you sort of had—you're able to see both sides of the picture.

ST: Well, another thing, too, is when I ended up teaching environmental resource management, I did a lot of getting—because of my connections, I was able to get a lot of people to come and talk to class. And I thought it was really important for the students to understand that studying environment

doesn't mean going out and playing with the birds and bees and that, you know, there are careers and there are all kinds of things. So I feel like I was able to offer something that maybe somebody else wouldn't. And one of my funniest experiences was when I had the executive director from the water-management district come and talk, and we were—water restrictions and whatever, and USF's water started going. Wrong hour, but you could look out the window and the sprinkler system had come on, so that didn't help—bad timing.

EH: Yeah, bad timing.

ST: Well, have you ever dealt with Kathy Betancourt? Remember Kathy Betancourt? She was the—anyway, she—I think—she was working here as a lobbyist at that point. And she worked for the city, but either she or—anyway, the proper people were spoken to. And that was—it was sort of embarrassing, you know, in a way.

EH: Yeah. That's great.

ST: One of those funny things.

EH: Yeah, so you said that a lot of—how you started to get involved with these things were because you were much more interested in social issues?

ST: Well, I was—oh, that's another thing. When I came back to Tampa, and I had, you know, marched for the Equal Rights Amendment, I ended up getting on the board of the League of Women Voters. It's like, back then, I didn't know how to say no. Now, I do know, although it may not seem like it. And I worked—we worked on getting the ERA passed, and we were defeated by one vote in Tallahassee because Senator Spicola changed his mind at the last minute.¹² And it was devastating, but it helped me understand how the wheeling and dealing and how women were really not particularly taken seriously.

I got kind of discouraged, and I got kind of—and I was trying—I'm not—I don't want to be a confrontational person, and it seemed like the environment was something that everybody could support. It's a lot more confrontational now, but it wasn't in the '70s. And that was something that I could learn more about and be involved with. And it wasn't that I wasn't interested in women's issues, but it wasn't going to happen in Tallahassee. Now, in the '70s, in Florida, also, even though the legislature was Democratic—there were Democrats and Republicans. They were working together, and that's when the growth management, the water management, _____(??)—all this legislation was passed to help make ourselves a better state. And one of the kinds of—one thing that was very exciting about Florida was our land program was tops in the nation. So even though our schools might be, you know, even though we might rank low in areas, we were really doing well.

EH: Were there any other maybe, like, not environmental efforts that you got involved in as an activist? Or maybe not specifically environmental, but connected in something?

ST: Connected with the—well, I've been involved in my church through mission work in the Dominican Republic. And that started in—I chaired the outreach and evangelism committee, and so that was—we were funding different things. And we started going to the Dominican Republic in 1999, where we're building schools and churches, not really proselytizing, more working with people and communities and churches. And I've been doing that ever since. I'm on the board of the Dominican Development Group, which is the Episcopal Church.¹³ Our diocese, which is Southwest

¹² Guy William Spicola served as a member of the Florida Senate from 1975 to 1979.

¹³ The Dominican Development Group (DDG) is a non-profit organization within the Episcopal Church that assists the Episcopal Diocese of the Dominican Republic with project planning, program development, construction, and

Florida, is a companion diocese to the Dominican Republic. There are about eight of them in the country. And we, you know, we're—what I've seen happen over the past 20 years is the—through the Internet, through Facebook, through webs, there's a lot more communication. Anyway, I work with that. I was just—I was in the Dominican Republic earlier this month, a DDG, Dominican Development Group, board meeting.

EH: Okay, great.

ST: So, is that sort of what—

EH: Yeah. I was just interested if there's any other sort of social issues that you were involved in.

ST: And I, again, I was thinking of the—a few years ago when the earthquake hit Haiti, we had people saying, Well, why are we funding the Dominican Republic when they need the money in Haiti?¹⁴ Same island.

EH: Yep.

ST: And so, I called my DD—my Dominican people, to find out what was going on. And I found out that the church was taking stuff overland to Haiti, and there were a lot of problems in planes landing and whatever. And so put an—did—put together an article to show how the Dominican Episcopal Church was helping the Haitians. And my response is—a couple of responses is, “Go where your heart is.” Because some people will say, Well, why are you doing this when the United States needs help? Or why are you doing this? And what I find lots of times, and this isn't always true, but a lot of people that are hollering the most don't do anything. They just say—and the other thing I try to say is, “Just do a little. Conserve water.” You know, if everybody just did a little, think of the better place we'd be. And this—a couple of weeks ago, I was at a meeting that was at—I don't know if you've heard of the Portico, but it's a—you have?¹⁵

EH: Yeah.

ST: Anyway, this was about the—who said—what's the name of the lawyer of the Innocence Project? There's a movie. It just came out—

EH: Yeah.

Matthew Bargarner (MB): Barry Scheck.

ST: Hm?

MB: Barry Scheck.

ST: No, no, no, no. It's African-American. I want to say Washington, but it's not. It's—anyway, there's a movie out and there had been an HBO special, and the Portico was showing the HBO special.¹⁶ And we were sitting around at tables and there were some discussion questions afterwards, and a person had invited me, and I was sitting with her and another person. And we're

fundraising.

¹⁴ On January 12th, 2010, a 7.0-magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, destroying infrastructure, displacing a million people from their homes, and resulting in more than 300,000 deaths.

¹⁵ The Portico is an event venue in downtown Tampa.

¹⁶ Thompson is referring to the HBO documentary *True Justice: Bryan Stevenson's Fight for Equality*, which focuses on the Equal Justice Initiative, founded by Bryan Stevenson, and the struggle to eradicate racial discrimination in the criminal justice system.

sitting around, “Well, what can you do,” and whatever, and I said, “Well, at a minimum, what you could do is contribute to the Salvation Army or, you know, give stuff.” Well, this person next to me just started attacking me, saying, “That's not enough. That's not enough.” And I thought—and then she had to leave to pick up her daughter or whatever, and the people next to me said, That was rude.

The point being that sometimes people are so overwhelmed with the idea of two things: They may be so overwhelmed with what needs to be done that they don't do anything, or they attack people that are just doing a little. And that's why I say, if everybody just did a little, the world would be a better place. And we were trying to do that with Earth Day—get the word out. And one of the things with the water-management district is some of our funding—when we had the active basin board—is we'd fund—we'd be funding projects in schools. And that's where kids learn about water-saving and about whatever, and then they go home to their parents, and they say, Mommy, Daddy, why are you running the water so much? And if you can get it at a young age, then, hopefully, you can make changes.

EH: Yeah, definitely. So I'd like to talk a little bit about the future of some of the environmental efforts in the area. So we know that there has just been a lot of work that's been done, and that the bay has improved a lot. This area has improved a lot environmentally. But what do you think are the most pressing environmental issues in the area now?

ST: Well, to me, and Florida and the world, is climate change. I mean, and—I found it rather appalling in Florida—at least this governor recognizes it—that we would be in denial about sea-level rise and those kind—I mean, especially in a state like Florida, that's surrounded by water. I would say, somehow, we really need to get back on track about the environment and conservation not being a bad word. I'm—I don't know if “shocked” is the right word, but I'm appalled that there's so much negativity.

Tampa Bay, however, it's bipartisan. It's business. It's—and maybe the future is local if you—it has to be—I mean, think global, act local. That's—but my hope is that a lot of the progress that's been made doesn't get undone, and Washington's trying to undo it, so—and then my hope would be that what's done locally isn't overturned by—I mean, our legislature right now is—it always used to be local. And Tallahassee, for example, this year, sort of overturned all of our tree ordinances. So we—a tree ordinance that we've had for years. Some people say it's better, some it's not. Local governments can't have tree ordinances anymore, or they can have a certified arborist, whatever that means, and it may not be—say, “Oh, yeah, you can cut down the tree.”

And, you know, it's just—so I think the whole idea of the private sector can do it right, and do away with regulation. One of—in Public Administration 101, it's—public and private have to work together. And the examples sort of being, you take a solid-waste department, and you contract everything out and you get a really good price, and then four years later when the contract gets renegotiated, they take you to the cleaners. What you need to do is get the government working better, more efficiently, more like a business, and the business working more like a government, if that's—and then you get them working together.

EH: Okay. So do you think that that public-private partnership is the best way to address environmental issues?

ST: Well, I think you have to have people screaming and yelling to make things happen. But in the long run, I think we all need to be working together. And that sounds like kumbaya or whatever, but if we're not working together, it's not going to get done. And the irony of one of the things is some of this stuff—some of the big companies that are pushing to do away with regulation, they have their contingency plan if they have regulations. So they're hedging their bets both ways. And they

can you know, they're going to—they'll manage either way. But, I mean, even recently, somehow—I'd like to think what we're going through right now is kind of an aberration. But, I mean, the idea—I mean, I think about solar, I think about alternative fuels, I think about the fact that our country is able to be so creative. And we have an administration that doesn't seem to understand all of that. So that, you know, that's a challenge, and I don't watch cable TV anymore.

EH: Yeah. How do you think the everyday citizen should get involved in environmental efforts?

ST: Well, first of all, do—you know, recycle, use—don't use plastic. I use plastic for my kitty litter, but other than that—be—learn what you can and be intentional, as far as understanding. One of the things that—when we were dealing with some of our water-conservation measures, I think it's really important that people understand that they can raise the temperature a little, use a little water, and have just as comfortable a lifestyle. There seems to be a thought: Sometimes, you have to suffer. And you don't have to suffer to do the right thing. And also, we have limited resources. They need to understand that we have limited resources. So I'm not sure if that's answering your question—

EH: Yeah.

ST: —but educate yourself.

EH: Why should Tampa residents or Floridians be concerned about the environment here?

ST: Well, if you look at our state and how it's growing, if you look at the fact that we have a very bad transportation system, that our—I mean, that's one of the biggest environmental issues as far as I'm concerned. In fact, when Mayor Pam Iorio was mayor—she had it for a while—she had an environmental panel.¹⁷ And she asked everybody at the table what they thought the most important environmental issue, and I said, “Transportation.” Everybody sort of looked at me, because they were saying “water” or what—you know.

And, yeah, it is. But if you're polluting—and got cars polluting and you don't have a way for people to get around—but—and in fact, when we first were doing greenways, Jim Murley, who was head of 1,000 Friends of Florida, called it an “interstate highway of green,” which I thought was kind of an interesting—but I think we need to be educated. We need to work together. We need to look at working together, look at what our commonalities are because we all want a better way of living. And I think, you know, if we look at what we've done with Tampa Bay, that's a—there's still issues. There are things—developers are wont to do this or that. And I'm not opposed to developers, but, you know, I have to keep aware and active and understand that—I think one of the things people need to understand is things don't happen right away, necessarily.

You're going to fight battles. You're going to think you've won them and then five years later, something else is going to happen. Just the—looking at the Cockroach Bay land, that was number one on our priority list in 1987, when we first started, and TECO said, No way. And now look what we've got. So I'm more of a—I can be impulsive, I can be impatient, but I also kind of think we have to look at the long picture.

EH: Yeah. So this oral history is going to be hosted by the library online. So it will be accessible by any USF student who's really looking for information like this. So, what advice do you have for students who are interested in environmentalism or different environmental efforts?

ST: You know, it's interesting, when I taught environmental resource management, one of the questions was looking at something, and it was kind of exciting to have somebody come back and

¹⁷ Pamela Dorothy Iorio served as mayor of Tampa from 2003 to 2011.

talk about the fact that they've discovered that ELAPP website. Or, you know, you don't know—get—just get a—I mean, there is so much information out there, and try to make sure that you look at all sides of the picture. I mean, there may not—there may be some sides that aren't—there aren't really sides of—but be discerning as you study. And I forgot to mention the other thing, and I am a master gardener, so I got—

EH: So, what does it mean when you're a master gardener?

ST: That means you take a course, and you put in volunteer hours and help out. And you learn right—years ago, the expression or the word—the term that was used was “xeriscape.” And it became very unpopular in Florida because they were thinking—people would be thinking of gravel in the West, Southwest. Why are you laughing?

Jane Duncan (JD): I always laugh at those gravel yards.

ST: And so, I think it was some time—at some point, an intentional change was made in Florida. Call it Florida-Friendly.¹⁸ And as far as educate—I mean, the Cooperative Extension Service has all kinds of information that people can look up and learn about how to plant plants and whatever. And it's free. It's all through the University of Florida. And a lot of people don't know. There's a lot of information out there. There's information overload. How do people educate themselves? Well, as students, they need to be discerning, and they need to just not—because I remember one paper somebody submitted, they used references from a series of *Tampa Bay Times* articles. And I look up references, and I was not impressed. Or they use Wikipedia without fact-checking it. So fact-checking is very important.

EH: Are there certain groups or organizations that you think are great for students who are trying to sort of get their foot in the door?

ST: I don't know whether USF has an environmental club at this point. They have in the past. And they ought to look at, kind of, what are they interested in? Are they interested in outdoor recreation? Are they interested in, you know, rolling up their sleeves and working? I mean, there's everything from—you know, Sierra Club has outings or Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful has stuff. I've been on the board of Keep Tampa Bay Beautiful. I'm emeritus now, so I don't have to do anything. The—you can, you know, look at what ELAPP, or greenways, or—I don't know that there's a clearinghouse anywhere to see that—which makes it a challenge, but—

EH: Do your research and find a place?

ST: But I've always—I've been frustrated at times, that some of the websites connected with some of the organizations aren't good enough for people to be able to look for—

EH: Yeah, look for different ways to get involved, things like that. Yeah.

ST: But there's plenty of stuff out there.

EH: So my next question strays away from our environmental topic, but we did want to ask you about it.

ST: Okay.

¹⁸ The Florida-Friendly Program was designed to help residents and business owners create and maintain their yards using research-based, environmentally sustainable landscaping practices.

EH: So the library now has a collection that came from your father, Francis Thompson. Can you just describe his collection, talk a little bit about it?

ST: This is interesting. When my mom—when my mother was getting older and she needed to move out of her house—my father had passed away by then—he—she—we had something like 7,000 books in our house. And my father had—when he retired from the University of Tampa—had contributed some books to the University of Tampa, but they didn't have the wherewithal to do anything. In fact, he was of the impression that they were just in the general collection and blah, you know. So I was trying to figure out what to do with mother's stuff. And I was serving on the board then, and at that point I think I was talking to Mary Figg, who served on the board for a while, and also Mary Lou Harkness, who was executive director here, to see if USF might be interested. And I don't remember who suggested that maybe Special Collections at USF might. So anyway, long story short, ended up contacting USF and the person who was over Special Collections then, who's retired. He was a Mormon, because there's a Mormon library across town.

EH: Yeah.

ST: Which I didn't know. He came to mom's house, and looked at the stuff, and said, "Yes." And he also was interested in my father's papers, which is something that I didn't have any idea that might happen. So then we had to hire an appraiser to see what it was worth, and then I contacted my brother, who was living in Hong Kong, who was more interested in my father's stuff than I was. And I said, "John, you better get over here right away." So he came for the weekend from Hong Kong. But, you know, because I knew there were certain things he might want or whatever. And so, then USF came out, boxed and carted all this stuff.

And it kind of lay dormant, in a way, for maybe a couple of years because there was a—they did a photo of my parents on their bicycles, but there was not a whole lot that was being done with respect to inventory, that I am aware of, until Matt [Knight] was hired. There was something, but you didn't have—weren't fully staffed, I believe. And so when Matt was hired, I—or transferred or whatever—somehow we got in touch, or he got in touch with me. And I came out here and it was really interesting because he, you know, as an Irish scholar, he was just—died and gone to heaven. He thought it was so wonderful. And he was saying, "Well, have you ever heard of William Butler Yeats? Have you ever heard of James Joyce?" And, I'm like, "Honey, I grew up with this." Doesn't mean I read everything, but I—yes.

And he was very excited about the books and everything and started inventorying it. And I told him about the University of Tampa, and he contacted—and I contacted—and I was assured by the library and them that, no, indeed it hadn't gone into—they just didn't have the resources, that it was separate. And so then he started working on trying to get it. I think there was some communication with the Internet, that you could access information, but he was hoping to eventually get all that stuff over here. And I guess when he was on sabbatical last year, I got a call from Marion Yongue from—

JD: Planned Giving?

ST: —Planned Giving. And I know Marion from when he was at WEDU. And he said, "I got good news for you. You'll be really happy." And the person from UT was retiring, and all the stuff was coming over here. Matt had finally accomplished this. So that's how it got here. And it's very interesting for me, because my father and I had sort of a rocky relationship, but now I'm sort of the keeper of the flame.

EH: So—and who was your dad?

ST: Well, my father was an English professor at the University of Tampa. When he retired, he taught Shakespeare at Tampa Prep for 10 years. He got his degrees at Columbia and NYU—his PhD. His PhD dissertation was *Fenianism and the Celtic Renaissance*, which [makes sound]—no wonder Matt Knight was interested. He did a presentation—his dissertation is something like 1,200 pages, which is not something that is done now. And it's—we paid to have it transcribed. Is that the right word? Or scanned? So it's online now. And Matt did this presentation right about three or four years ago, and it was really interesting because my father was pretty interesting. I just, you know, I think sometimes as children, we don't appreciate what our parents—

EH: Yeah. So the collection has things like diary, journal entries, correspondence, all of that?

ST: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

EH: What type of information can people find in there?

ST: Well, I know Matt is using it for—not Dad's journals, but he's using—he has indicated to me that this is a resource that he would—because he's teaching an Irish history—I bet this is a resource that he can use for students, which I think is very exciting. And I think he also said it's about the second largest one in the Southeast or some—there's one in Texas that's—but I think my father would be very happy to know that his—because he was a frustrated writer. He wrote several books, only one was published, and the publisher died, I think, three weeks after it, so it never was distributed.

EH: Oh, wow. So a lot in there about Irish immigration, history, things like that?

ST: It was really more the writers from the late 19th, early 20th century.

EH: Okay.

ST: And in fact, I went to Ireland for the first time in September, and that was pretty interesting because we were—went to—looked at some history, and I had Dad's dissertation on my iPad. But—and I looked at it a little bit, but I wasn't really quite sure what the Celtic renaissance was. And his—he stopped sort of before the—when the—1917, 1918. So it's sort of pre—the first troubles, or revolutionary.

EH: So we're approaching the end, like, with all the questions that I have. So do you have any final thoughts to add, or was there anything that I didn't ask you about that you really wanted to talk about?

ST: Well, I'll probably think about it when we leave. When I was in preparation—a little—I kind of—I looked at my résumé and a couple of other things to try to make sure that I remembered stuff. I was looking at the list of people that were interviewed on the bay thing. And I think I said before we started that I've worked with every single one of them, except the last person who was in the—I think did Jimmy Youngman. I didn't really know him. He was more—but it's kind of bought back some memories of a lot of people that I had worked with over the years. Let me see. I don't think—let me see. I don't—I mean, there were some other committees I was on, but—and I never expected to be teaching at USF, that was interesting. Although, I did look up one time—you know, they can rate you?

EH: Yeah. Yeah.

ST: And I looked at one, one time, and it was like, “The worst teacher I've ever had.” I was almost in tears. And then I realized that anybody can say anything. I didn't look at it again. Yeah, I think I covered everything.

EH: Okay. So, what advice or message, or anything, do you want to leave with the listeners as your final thoughts?

ST: Don't give up. Understand that things may not happen right away, that there will be lots of disappointments. I can look at that with some of the greenways work we're doing right now, where you'll end up with—thinking you're going to have this trail somewhere and you get your funding for it, and then somebody decides it shouldn't be there and they're going to sue, and it's not going to happen. And my response would be, just use the road or the sidewalk until that. Because, eventually, it'll—something will break. And just like I had said before, with the TECO property, with, you know—and the other thing, too, that was fascinating, and I remember meeting in Brandt Henningsen's office one time and we were looking at—now with computers and GIS [geographic information system], you could—we could see how things were linking together because when we first did ELAPP, we were just looking at 26 parcels. You didn't realize how they would—could connect.

And one of—when—as I said, when I was on the Alafia River Basin Board, and I was working real closely with a person named Fritz Musselman, who was over at land resources, and at one meeting he would say—they were going to do the plan for the next year. And I said, “Well, what's it going to be?” He wouldn't tell me. He said, “I'm going to surprise you.” And that's when they came up—the staff had come up with the Alafia River quarter, Little Manatee River quarter, Tampa Bay estuary and ecosystem, which was land—and we were able to leverage. The district took the lead on the Little Manatee, ELAPP took the lead on Alafia so they could work together. I'm not quite answering your question, I don't think.

EH: No, you're good.

ST: But—and then another thing that happened when I was on the greenways commission, the head of parks for the state of Florida then approached me, because I'm, you know, I think about this stuff, and she said, “We have some land in Hillsborough County that we can't buy in our program. And I don't know whether the water-management district or—whether ‘Swiftmud’ or Hillsborough County or something could help us with?” It's now the Alafia River State Park.

EH: Wow.

ST: That's kind of exciting.

EH: Yeah, that's amazing.

ST: And I remember going to the opening and couple—a county commissioner says, “Didn't think this would ever happen.” But then also, you have to be—you have to not get your feelings hurt too much, because every so often things can happen. And there was a project in the Myakka River, where the county—where Sarasota County needed to build a new landfill, or—yeah. And they were going to put it on—I think it was 24 acres—2,400 acres of land which was on the Manatee River, but where their landfill would be was not anywhere near. I mean, it was a large parcel of land. And so, I was able to get the permit approval extended, you know, for us to review and the county wanted—and this is where I realized, also, the land resources people and the permitting people don't always work together.

So anyway, they were—Sarasota County called us down to meet, and I said, “I want to meet with your land resources person,” and we went and looked. And I realized that it was not going to—it was not going to affect the Little Manatee—excuse me—the Myakka River. In fact, if anything, there would be all this buffer, which would be in protection. Anyway, I voted in favor after reviewing, and I got a letter from a local environmental attorney telling me that my name was mud, that I wasn't an environmentalist. And before I got on the board—I just thought about this—there was a—I was on the board back then of Florida Defenders of the Environment, and there was a county commissioner from Citrus County who was an environmental person, and I was like, “What happens if I have to vote on something I don't want to vote on?” And he said, “Well, just vote your conscience.” What a concept.

And then the other thing, too, that people don't realize sometimes is when you're on a board like a water-management district board, you're governed by Chapter 373, Florida statute.¹⁹ You can't vote for something because you can, but I won't vote for something because I don't like it. If this is what—I can push. I can try to help influence. But if it's within the law, you can't just—it's irresponsible to not—so we didn't have that many challenges but did have some.

EH: But I like that. Don't give up. A lot of things happen.

ST: Well, I mean things—yeah, and it's hard. It's really hard. And you get mad, and you get upset, and people are very disappointing, but it's going to happen. And then you end up with a different county commissioner, or you end up with a different mayor, or you end up with a different governor or you end up, you know.

JD: Start all over again?

ST: Start all over again. Yeah, I have this theory that we can only live to be a certain age because history starts repeating itself and it gets a little—because, like, I look at history repeating itself right now with what's happening with environment and what's happening with women's issues. It's shocking, but you know. But, again, my advice then, read historical novels, learn your history. And then you realize that this is our truth, but, I mean, if you look at our history and our country, an awful lot of bad stuff has happened. And good stuff, too, interesting stuff.

EH: Yeah. Great. Well, that was great. Thank you so much for sitting down with us.

ST: Sure. You're welcome.

EH: It was really wonderful.

ST: Thank you.

End of interview.

¹⁹ Chapter 373 is the Florida Water Resources Act, which declares that Florida's water is held in public trust for the benefit of its citizens and provides for the establishment of water reservations to protect fish and wildlife.